

Women and Arabic Education in Nigeria

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to assess the role of women in Arabic education in Nigeria: the journey so far. The number of female in this field is far low from that of male counterpart is about 30 to 70 percentage. Though, it is compulsory upon individual male or female to seek for knowledge even as far as China in accordance with one of the teachings of Prophet (SAW). The method employed to carry out this research is simple survey/historical methods. However, findings show that despite that the low population of female in the field compare to their male counterpart, they still contribute towards the development of Arabic education in Nigeria to some extent in terms of pedagogy, authoring and proprietorship. The paper is mainly classified in to three different categories; Women and acquisition of Arabic Education, Problems and Prospects and Contribution of Women to Arabic Education in Nigeria, apart from Introduction and Conclusion.

Keywords: Women, Arabic, Education, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Arabic Education has been introduced to Nigerian People, since the advent of Islam. The religion of Islam cannot do without Arabic Language, because it is used by every Muslim to perform religious activities such as daily prayers (Salawatul-Khams), Fasting (Sawmur-Ramadan), pilgrimage (Hajju baytul-Lahi) and other religious acts. It is mandatory upon every Muslim young and old to learn the Qur'an and they need to understand some other Islamic religious books written in Arabic. Most especially the children of Scholars, they used to further in the Arabic Education, so that they would also become Mallams (Scholars) even the female ones are not excluded.

Arabic was the official language before the coming of the British Colonial Master. Most especially in the Northern part of Nigeria where the Sokoto Caliphate was extended to, under the leadership of Uthman Dan Fodio. Many of their scripts were written with Arabic letters and also their own native languages like, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe and Yoruba were written in Arabic (script) language. For example, the word "Aso" in Yoruba language that means "Clothe" written with Arabic letter as (اشو), "Ara" which means "Thunder" written as (الرّع) with Arabic alphabets, "Okan" which mean "Hearth" is written with Arabic Letter as (اوكن) ¹ e.t.c.

This was how they used to correspond with one another before the English Letters was introduced by The Colonial Masters who replaced the official language with their English language and made it compulsory for every one to learn it.

2. Women and Acquisition of Arabic Education

Indeed, we cannot compare male with female in term of acquisition of Arabic knowledge in Nigeria, because it was the general belief in this part of the world that male gender is better than female, until around 19th century when a renown scholar Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio began his religious campaign in Degel and its environs, it was during this period that women started having the opportunity to listen to admonition and also attend programmes organised by other Mallams which were meant for house wives and their daughters. Those women transferred knowledge they acquired to others and so on².

A good example of women who really acquired Arabic education is the daughters of Shaykh Dan Fodio himself such as; Khadijat (1782), Asma'u (1793), Maryam (1810) and others. It was well recorded that Khadijat translated many of her father's works and that of her uncle Abdullah Dan Fodio's write ups into

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¹ Al-Ilori A.A., (1962), Mu'jazu-Tarikh Najiriyyat, Wahbbah Publisher, Cairo p.140

² Galanchi S. A., (1971), Journal of Islam, Education of Women in Islam with Reference to Nigeria. Vol. 1, No: 2, p. 9

Fulani and Hausa languages. Likewise, Maryam also had her own poems written in Arabic, as well as Asma'u that was known for her vast knowledge. She wrote many Arabic studies books like; Tanbi'u l-Gafilin and Tabshirl-Ikhwan.³ Above all, she had other poems in Arabic on different topics, but her famous poems were Elegiac poem on which she composed a number of poems for her friend Aishat as written below:

و سلوة أجزاني و أنسا لوحشتي	أعيني جودا وا بكيا لحبيبيتي
أعز أحابي وأوفي صديقتي	فجودا بسكب الدمع من فقد عائشة
و دين و أخلاق حسان رافئة	و أثنى عليها بالشجاعة والحياء
قراءة قرآن فنعم حبيبيتي	و ذكر و أورد و صبر و عفة

Later on formal Arabic schools began to emerge in different parts of Nigeria such as; School of Arabic Studies, Kano emerged in 1934, Centre For Arabic and Islamic Studies, Agege, Lagos founded in 1952, Muhyideen College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Kulende, Ilorin founded in 1962, Darul-'ulum came in to existence in 1963, Darul- Hijrah for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Kano established in 1992. These schools are still in existence and operating up to the present time.

From the evidence at our disposal, male are advances in Arabic language in Nigeria reverse is the case in term of female counter parts, women are few in number who study Arabic education, this could be due to the fact that, women seem to be ignorant of the need for Arabic education and for this reason or the other, many females dropped from Arabic Schools at the Junior Secondary stage, while some female completed the Senior Secondary education but refused to further their Arabic education in Tertiary Institutions. The motive behind the low performance of females could be understood through the following factors.

2.1. Problems and Prospects

Some of the factors that hinder women from Arabic Education in Nigeria include these:

- Seeing Arabic Language as a language of religion alone: It has been observed that many of Nigerian women thought that, this language is only meant for religious affairs and those who study it can just be Imam of a Mosque, or be a priest in the society which Islam does not allow Muslim women to be.
- Marital Obstacle: Some women misconceive marriage as an obstacle that will disrupt their Arabic Education, because Islam encourages early marriage. Thus, once they get married, that will be the end of their educational goals.
- Forbidden women from travelling alone: On this aspect, some women believe that, Islam does not allow woman to embark on any trip that is more than three days without her husband or any other relative. Therefore, once there is no school within their domain, they refused to acquire Arabic knowledge.⁴

Meanwhile, the solutions below are suggested.

- Nigerian women should be enlightened that though Arabic language is not detachable from Islam the two are interrelated. Yet those who study Arabic can be relevant as job seekers, in all field of endeavours most especially in this era of globalization.
- They should be orientated that, marriage is not to be seen as an obstacle to acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, after marriage, they can still further their education.
- They must see travelling as part of education. And the parents or husbands should be aware that; prophet of Islam even laid more emphasis in one of his traditions on travelling to seek knowledge he says: "seek for knowledge even as far as China".

³ Abdulkareem ,Thalith, (2009), " Dawru Banati Ibn Faodio fi Nashril- Lughatul Arabiyyat wath-Thaqafatul- Islamiyyat fi Najjeriyya" in I.O. Yahaya (Eds.) Al- idaratul- 'amatu wat- Tknawlogiyyal- I' ilamiyyah fi Mindhard- Dirasatl- 'Arabiyyat wal- Islamiyyah: p. 196

⁴A bubakar H.F., (2002), Factors Hindering Women From Learning Arabic In YorubaL and, A project submitted to the Department of Religions to obtain B. A. in Arabic; p. 79 – 81.

3. Contribution of Women to Arabic Education in Nigeria

However, women are also contributing in one way or the other towards the development of Arabic Education in Nigeria in terms of Teaching, Authoring and Proprietorship.

3.1. Teaching

Many women are found in teaching Arabic without any remuneration; take for instance, Alhaja Salamat Apaokagi (d.1997) who was renowned as (Iya Kewu) teaching pupils both males and females Qur'anic Education which is the first step of learning Arabic and Islamic Education. Many pupils graduated from her school, among who are Alhaji AbdulRazaq Isa, Alhaji Saheed Ire and Alhaja Khadjet Salihu⁵ and many others. While some other learned Muslim women are teaching at various levels of education such as primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. For example, Mrs Hafsat Salihu is an Arabic lecturer at the Federal College of Education, Zaria, Hajia Rahmat Shehu lectures at Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna, Alhaja Sakinat Arimiyau at LASU, Lagos, Mrs. Balikis Tahir and Mrs. Aminat Abdullahi both at Bayero University, Kano, Mrs Amal Abdullah and Mrs. Fatimah Sherif Ramadan at University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Mrs. Rawdat Ahmad at Nasarawa State University, Nasarawa and many others. These women mentioned are still impacting Arabic knowledge to the people.

3.2. Authoring

Writing of Arabic texts is mostly common among the male scholars in Nigeria. But today, some female scholars have joined the race in writing different textbooks written in Arabic Language. There is a lady of 22 years of age Rukayat Saheed Olawumi who wrote a book titled: أيتها المؤمنات (Oh! True Believing Women). Apart from her many women of Arabic Education had contributed to the authoring through writing of Articles in Journals or Magazines like Rahmat Uthman who wrote الصوم جنة (Fasting is a shelter), in a Magazine called Ramadan Offer. While some contributed their quota through composition of Arabic poems such as Hafsat Muhammad Jami'u who composed a poem during the demise of her Mentor, Abdul-Latif Mai Kabara she says:

أعيني جودا ولا تبـخلا	على الليث جودا, و بحر العلوم
برىء من الزيغ ماوى الشباب	كثير الدراية , فصيح الكلام
فسيح الفؤاد , لطيف الجوار	خطيب أديب إمام حساب
عصير المداد , كثير الخطوط	قوي اللسان شديد قوام ⁶

3.3. Proprietorship

Some women also contributed to the development of Arabic Education through establishing Arabic and Islamic schools. Among such women are; Alhaja Fadilat Titilope, the Proprietress of 'Ibadur-Rahmanil-Arabiyyatill-Hadanat, Iwo, Osun State⁷. Then Alhaja Khadijat Muhammad Ahmad, the founder of Darus-Salam For Arabic Girls' School, Bida, Niger State, Hajia Fatimah Al-mawahib Arabic Nusery and Primary School, Ilorin, Kwara State and many more.

4. Conclusion

Conclusively, this paper has clearly explained that women are not relenting in impacting and acquiring Arabic Education in Nigeria. Since before the establishment of modern Arabic school, although, we may not compare their population with that of their male counterparts, due to those factors mentioned above.

⁵ Ibid. P. 46.

⁶ Muhammad Jami'u H., (2008), A poem presented at Funeral Ceremony of Late Abdul-Latif Mai Kabara.

⁷ A bubakar H.F., (2002), Ibid. p. 48.

More over, their under population in this field does not bring much difference in contributing to Arabic Education. In fact, their contribution towards development of Arabic Education cannot be over emphasised in terms of teaching, Authoring as well as establishing Arabic and Islamic schools.

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