

Imperatives of Developing Arabic Language as a second Language at the Pre-Primary school Level in Nigeria

Adeyemi, K. A.

Department of Religious Studies

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

E-mail: aadeleke57@gmail.com, yemikamil@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to establish the relationship between Arabic Language and Literacy at the pre-primary school level in Nigeria. It focuses on how the goal of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria will be achieved through literacy in Arabic language. There are many evidences on the need to learn Arabic as a second language. Apart from being an international language, it is important for Nigerians to learn it along side English language since the two major religions in Nigeria use English and Arabic languages respectively. It will also enable Nigerian diplomats in the Arabic nations as well as Arab embassies in Nigeria to competently represent the interests of both Nigeria and the Arab world especially to correct the misconceptions between Nigeria and the Arab world in the local media. This can be carried out by training the children on how to read, write and understand Arabic language during pre-primary school period.

Keywords: *Arabic language, foreign language, Education, pre-school*

INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria recognizes education as a tool for acquiring skills, abilities and competencies that enable the individual to live on and contribute to the development of the Nigerian Society. When the National Policy on Education was introduced in 1977, the Government planned literacy throughout the Federation (Adeyemi, 2006). The teaching of Arabic language in non-Arabic speaking countries has always been associated with Islam. Ogunbiyi (2005) rightly states, mass education in Arabic language is to show that it has only twenty-nine consonant phonemes, three short and three long vowels, is likely to lead to improved mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslim mates who would now have insight into the language that plays such a unique role in the religious life of the Muslims.

There are places for qualified translators and secretaries with competence in Arabic and English languages. Nigerian diplomatic mission in the Arab world as well as Arab embassies in Nigeria have places for competent Arabists and represent the interests of Nigeria especially when unsubstantiated news about this country is spread by the local news media (Ogunbiyi, 2005). Efforts have been made at institutional and individual levels to develop Arabic language education and integrate it into the main stream of Nigerian educational system because of its value. The status of this language as the first foreign language in Nigeria is still confined to a single area of its operation, that is, making it a school subject only (Abdulraheem, 2008). Based on this view, this study looks into the possibilities of imparting knowledge on the ability to read Arabic books in the minds of our

children before they start their primary school. Some teachers are opposed to parents who teach their pre-primary school children to read Arabic books at home. Their argument is that many parents are not trained on how to teach reading. Others claim that parents who want their children to learn Arabic language before they are admitted to primary schools will not be harmed much for this lack of professional training in the field of reading Arabic. On this point, if pre-primary school reading instruction is proved to be desirable, then, it will be the responsibility of the school to provide parents useful information on the subject. Kwekowe (1991) investigates children who learnt to read before entering school, asked questions about names of streets, signs and automobiles as well as words in books that they have read. The result of Kwekowe (1991) study suggests that some pre-school and kindergarten children want to learn to read sooner than many of their age-peers who are not exposed to early reading activities. By implication, if a child can be taught how to read Arabic as a second language, he or she will definitely reach the target goal in reading.

How to Prepare the Children for Reading Arabic Language: Arabic, like other second languages is one of the most difficult in human skills development. Therefore, it requires special attention. In learning how to read Arabic as a second language for a child, there are external stimulants that could shape the child. Among these are home, environment and parental involvement. Parental involvement seems the strongest. According to Kwekowe (1991), the general aim of pre-school reading activities is to establish and to re-enforce the child's understanding of the relationship between the printed pages and spoken words as well as to make him aware of the task of reading before him. As the child observes his parents on the act of reading for example, he becomes involved with initiative and identification behaviour.

JUSTIFICATION FOR ORAL ARABIC INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN

In all language groups, it is found that the way children speak is different from the way adults speak and there is a developmental sequence of acquisition. Therefore, semantic and grammatical complexity determine the child's order of acquisition of language. This order is developmental rather than initiative. Children's speech have certain universal features. These show that language development continues to the age of seven or eight years, which means before seven or eight, children's speech have special features in Arabic language. On the other hand, Adeyemi (1996) laments the misconception of many people on what is called rote-learning to be a bad thing. Quranic schools are frequently criticized as places where children merely repeat various texts like parrots.

This misconception emanates from their inability to distinguish between two distinct types of memorization. The memorization of isolated facts and scraps of information, which A.N. Whitehead, the famous Mathematician and Philosopher calls inert knowledge. It is a sort of information which has no capacity for growth. It is taken in by the student and then later coughed out almost solely for examination purposes. On the other hand, the memorization of information which is alive has the capacity for growth. It generates-in the mind, new hypotheses, associations and combination of many ideas. What is memorized here has a life of its own. However, how we learn language is still much of a mystery, but

clearly much of the processes are imitative. There is no evidence at all that lends credence to the fact that any harm is done to students by making them memorize passages from great works of literature or any language. Adeyemi (1996) explains further that there is a great deal of evidence that our reasoning capacity and our sensitivity have been constantly improved by imitation of the great masters of language in their various forms. The respect which Muslim scholars give to oral instruction in learning by imitation and repetition has a sound basis in human experience and in human psychology.

EFFORT REQUIRED AND BENEFITS OF LEARNING ARABIC LANGUAGE

Islamic scholars and teachers have always been insistent that learning is an activity which must be pursued with vigour and controlled by discipline. Adeyemi (2010) asserts that learning by doing is not a modern invention. The leaders of Islamic thoughts from al-Ghazzali and Ibn-Khaldun onwards, have never considered harshness as necessary for successful teaching. Success in reading Arabic can be achieved by the student's own effort through constant guidance and stimulation from his parents before he starts the primary school. Arabic language can be studied for many purposes beyond its religious association. It is admitted that Arabic is the third or fourth language to be learnt in Nigeria, still, it has its difficulties and problems as a language as well as its attractions. It is a language that exists in both spoken and written form. The attractions and needs outweigh the difficulties.

The problems can be ameliorated if the various hands and authorities concerned such as parents and teachers with the teaching can cooperate to generate interest and encouragement (Abdul 1983). Ogunbiyi (2005) notes that a number of Nigerian languages particularly Kanuri, Fulfude, Hausa and Yoruba were being written in Arabic script before the incursion of European colonialists with their languages imposed on Nigerians. These areas have enjoyed a long tradition of literacy in Arabic and the indigenous languages by virtue of their long contact with Islam. Writing in local languages using the Arabic script known as *Ajami* are still available in the libraries and archives. Ogunbiyi (2005) quotes Samuel Johnson that Arabic script was one of the options considered by Bishop Ajayi Crowther and his team of Bible translators in devising a suitable orthography for the Yoruba language in the 1840s because Arabic was already known to Muslim Yoruba. Therefore, a good Arabic education enhances fluency in the language and a more meaningful utilization of Arabic in religious worship for those who are Muslims.

STRATEGY AS THE WAY FORWARD

Parents who want their children to be Arabic literate should be made aware of the fact that among the ways they can encourage their children to become readers is to be readers of Arabic themselves. Children who have pleasant experiences with reading at home will want to read anything they see. As they see other people reading Arabic books, it becomes natural that they will also imitate them. Adeyemi (2006) suggests that there should be reading specialists in Arabic language in each of our nursery schools. The reading specialists should draw up a programme to be given to the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and in meetings of women's organizations because of their intimacy with children and informal

education they receive from their parents. Such avenue would provide an ideal forum for sharing the following suggestions with parents.

1. To encourage children to make things out of discarded materials such as wire and empty cartons and name them in Arabic. This creative activities develop language since children love to talk about things they are making.
2. To tell the children the Arabic names of what they see.
3. To read Arabic story books to the children regularly. This will help listening comprehension and help them to learn what they can get as a pleasure from Arabic books.
4. To set aside one corner of a room at home as reading corner. This should be a special place where children can look at Arabic books without disturbance from the television or family members.
5. The importance of parents and teachers working hand-in-hand to develop children's pre-reading skills must be recognized.

CONCLUSION

Arabic as a language has influenced much of the everyday language of communication of Nigerians, Muslims and non-Muslims. Among the foundation to learn this language is to teach our children how to read it at pre-primary school level. This will foster their interest in learning it to any level. Parents should help their children to develop interest in reading by showing them pictures and illustrations. Pictures should be of items interesting to the child according to his level of maturity. Identification of pictures and illustrations should form the beginning of reading for every child. To create an enabling environment for the child, the parent should set aside a family reading time. It could be during recreational hours. Read Arabic poetry to them and let them see you enjoy the music. In contribution to this issue, Aboki (1991) laments some parents' thinking that educating their children is solely the responsibility of teachers because they pay teachers to educate their children. He concludes that a very valuable action parents can take is to develop a keen interest in reading to their children. That helps enormously to develop positive attitudes toward reading Arabic books for children. Another important factor is to develop cordial relationship between teachers, parents and the community. This helps the individual child and also brings over all educational development to wipe out illiteracy in the community.

REFERENCES

- Abdul, M. O. A.** (1983). The Teaching of Arabic in Nigerian Universities: Problems and Prospects. *Journal of Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)*, 2 (2), 42-53.
- Abdulraheem, H. I.** (2008). *Arabic as an Alternative Medium of Education in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges*. In Z. I. Oseni (ed) *Fluorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria*. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers.

- Aboki, F. A.** (1987). Reading Difficulties: How Parents Can Help Children Overcome Them. A Paper presented at the Pre-Conference workshop of the Reading Association of Nigeria, Jos. 14th - 15th September.
- Aboki, F. A.** (1991). *Developing Pre-reading Skills in children: Parents and Teachers can be Partners in Progress*. In Oyetunde T.O., Aliyu J.S. and Aboderin Y. (eds) Literacy and Reading in Nigeria Vol. 5. Lagos: The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in association with the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) pp 31-37 .
- Adeyemi, K. A.** (1996). Influence of Western Education on Arabic/Islamic System of Education in Ayedaade. L.G.A of Osun State. An Unpublished. P.G.D.E. Thesis submitted to University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Adeyemi, K.A.** (2006). Arabic language and Government Recognition in Nigeria. *AL-LISAN: Journal of the Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic in College of Education and Allied Institutions*. (NATACEDAI) Fourth Edition. pp.8-18.
- Adeyemi, K.A.** (2010). The Role of Arabic Grammar. In Y.A. Babatunde (ed) Readings in Language and Literature. Bariga, Lagos: Al-Bash Publishers & Coy.
- Kwekove, N.C.** (1991). Laying a strong foundation for Reading in Pre-School Kids. In Oyetunde T.O., Aliyu J.S. and Aboderin Y. (eds) Literacy and Reading in Nigeria Vol. 5. Lagos: The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in association with the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN), pp. 25-29.
- Ogunbiyi, I.A.** (2005). The Whys and Wheefores of Arabic language in Nigeria. *Anyigba Journal Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 2 (1), 1-30.