

REFORMS IN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA AND PLACE OF ARABIC STUDIES

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Abstract: 'Reform in education' is the center point of this paper it discusses the literal and technical concept of the word "REFORM" in relation to education. It went memory lane on the reforms in education in Nigeria since pre-colonial era till the present time. Historically, Arabic was the first official medium of communication and lingual-fracas during the Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) and later suffered a neglect and unjust treatment due to different reforms in the education sector in the country during the colonial era and even after the independence. The paper aims at studying how these reforms affected Arabic Studies in term of development or otherwise and various contributing factors. The main methodology used for data collection are interviews, questionnaires circulated to a number of Arabic experts and education reform specialists in addition to some other methods benefited from. The paper discovers that Arabic was the first international language that brought Nigerians out of illiteracy; Thus, became the most beloved language among them being the language of their religion. And that the language was negatively affected by various education reforms that caused its some set back. and that later became one of the recognized courses in the Nigerian system of education. Various recommendations were made some which is that Arabic must be one of the core causes in the national curriculum. And that private Arabic schools should receive more attention from Government for their development.

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Introduction

The first system of formal education known in Nigeria came through the medium of Arabic language several centuries before the advent of Europeans in. The language was the major language of Literacy, education, intellectual pursuit, administration and diplomacy, this was being attested to by many scholars; including (Dike,1965:32.), (Abubakar,1972:10). and (Al-Ilori, 1991:5-7). The teaching of the language in its early days was aimed only at understanding the Qur'an and other sources of Islamic studies carried out by mu'alimun (teachers) who, more often than not, used their homes, shades of trees, mosques, etc., as schools.

Main while, Love of change and reform are innate phenomenon in human being. Education, being an important part of human life, has witnessed different views, theories and approaches since the time immemorial. Plato (427-347 BD) John Locke, (1632-1704) John Descartes, (1803-1860) and others brought one idea or another in developing and reforming education in their respective times. Thus, education reform is the name given to the goal of changing public education. (Wikipedia, 2019)

In Nigeria many efforts have been geared toward better the lot of education before the colonial era, during and after the independence. The efforts led to the introduction of different reforms in education to make it suitable for the need of the society and appropriate to demands and aspiration of the communities.

Nigeria education system has witnessed several educational reforms since the colonial era when many Nigerian educational agitators started to agitate for self-rule and self determined system of education that led the British colonial rulers to change the educational system that was in operation in 1954 from 8-6-2-3 system which is 8year primary, 6year secondary, 2year higher school certificate and 3year university to a new system 6-5-2-3 that is 6year primary, 5year secondary, 2year higher school certificate and 3year university. The change

resulted in reducing the number of years at the primary and secondary school levels. Nigerians then were more concerned about education. It is viewed as a patriotic struggle to effect a change in the educational structure for the general good of the country. (Guasau, 2008:3)

The educational reforms in Nigeria continued to gather momentum after the independence. For example, in September 1969 there was a National curriculum conference held in Lagos. Participants at the conference were eager to see Nigeria chart a new course in its educational system. Such a system they reasoned will empower the country towards the path of scientific and technological development. They criticized colonial education system as lacking in vitality and relevance. In short, the conference recommended changes in the system, from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 system; that is 6year primary, 3year junior secondary, 3year senior secondary and 4year university education. The recommended new system is simply American system of education which Japan ably copied after 1945 and succeeded. (Gasau, 2008:4)

The participants produced at the end of the conference a document which was suitable especially to a country that is hungry for development. But when the political authority picked up the document and shown interest in it, they interpreted it differently, they failed to realize that the document is a proposal produced by academics and interest groups. To put proposal into practice needs a careful planning. This was not done; the far reaching proposal was implemented with a military dispatch which later backfired. The intended result of this beautiful proposal was muddled up and so was never achieved (Gusau,2008:4)

Arabic, being the first languages of literacy in Nigeria, has its own share in any changes or reforms introduced to education in the country. It is the aim of this paper to

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examine different reforms in education in Nigeria and see how they affect negatively or otherwise the teaching and learning of Arabic, and make necessary way out to any imbalance noticed.

Education Reforms Definitions and Objectives

The term "Reform" literally means to improve a system, law, organization etc. by making a lot of changes in it, so that it operate in a fair or more effective way (Longman Dictionary, 2018:1378). Its primary meanings are: changes for improvement in order to remove abuse and injustice, bring, lead, or force to abandon a wrong or evil course of life, conduct, and adopt a right one. It equally means to improve by alteration or correction of errors or defects and put into a better condition. (Vocabulary.Com). Wikipedia refers its origin to a Latin word: *reforma* which means the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, unsatisfactory etc. the use of the word in this way emerges in the late 18th century and is believed to originated from Christopher Wyvill's Association movement which identified "Parliamentary Reform" its primary aim. (Wikipedia, 2019) The word when it is used in the field of education refers to changing in educational policies, structures, procedures, technicalities, and management. (Bello 2007). This segment can be concluded by saying that when education is the transmission of values, traditions, skills, and expertise from one generation to another and that such transmission follows method and structure that change from time to time based on changes in values, traditions, skills etc, education therefore, is liable to changes, these changes are what is referred to as reform. And the reform itself cannot be advocated for if there are no reasons and objectives that necessitate and justify it. Some of these objectives are discussed in the following:

- Modification, or adjustment of the existing system of education to suit new discoveries and newly invented in the school curriculum.
- Rectification or removal of anomaly discovered with the system in operation. This is because human grows day by day what he discovered as the best solution to a problem today may not be ideas and theories from time to time.
- Renewing and streamlining the curriculum offering at all levels of education so that product can profit maximally to be able to compete favourably in the World work.

Based on the above, many reforms in education were carried out in Nigeria some of which were partial while some were complete and total. Each of the reform affects the teaching and learning of Arabic in one way or the other.

Reform in Education during the Sokoto Caliphate

The first attempt of reforming education in Nigeria dated back to the pre-colonial era. During the Sokoto caliphate (1804-1903) when the leader and founder of the caliphate Shaikh Uthman bn Fodio called for overhauling the system of education. (Maiwada, 2005) reported that: "Education reform activities in Nigeria started with the

jihad of Shaikh Usman Dan Fodio towards the end of the 18th century A.D. When the sheikh had commenced preaching a return to correct practices of Islam"

The educational system, that time, was well organized and centers of learning were in all states under the caliphate. As a consequence to this reform a standard Islamic caliphate was established and Arabic language was adopted as the official language. The enormous literature produced, that time were clear testimony of the great success recorded in education reform of the shaikh. Another important achievement of that reform is that many non-native languages (such as Hausa, fulfude and Yoruba) were rendered to writing for the first time. Shaikh Fodio himself was known as a great literary writer. (Khani, 1985) reported that that the bulk of literature in Arabic scripts; this is in addition to his many works in Arabic.

The positive effects of this reform on Arabic can be clearly seen. The language that time was at its peak and the government too encouraged its teaching because, Arabic speaking individuals were the first citizen (i.e. Emirs, Ministers, Judges, Administrators etc)

Reform in Education during Colonial Era

The colonial era brought into the country a new type of education which focused on producing educated people who were English in tongue, Western in outlook and Christian in the minds as (Okeke in Ikejiani: 1971) observes that the kind of education brought by missionaries aimed primarily at religious education and Nigeria Education in its early stages was interwoven with Christian evangelism. As a result of this Muslims were initially skeptical about western education and were reluctant to send their children to such schools for fear of converting them to Christianity because, as (Fafunwa in UKEJE et al: 1985) states that the primary objectives of earlier Christian missionary was to convert the benighted Africa to Christianity via education.

The colonial government, realizing this fact, thought of reforming or refining their system of education and planned to establish an educational institution and planned to establish an educational institution in the Muslim dominated areas. To get this done, Hann Vischer, one of the colonial administration officials was assigned to travel to some countries governed by British colonial government such as Egypt, Sudan and others to study their system of education and find out how Arabic/Islamic education were concurrently being run with western education. (Galadanci, 1993:43). Result of this journey was manifested in the first colonial government school in Northern Nigeria opened at Nasarawa, Kano in 1909 (Ozigi, 1981:43). Before this time the first non-Christian primary school had been established in Lagos in 1899, (Fafunwa, 1972:72).

The effect of the colonial education reforms on Arabic can be seen as not positive, because Arabic, before their arrival, was the only medium of teaching and learning, which played a prominent role in the education system and was the official language then, in the north and only language of literacy in the south west.

The colonialists were aware of this fact and they were very careful initially about the issues that concern Arabic and Islamic Studies. Therefore, they employed systematic approaches to demote Arabic language to second position to achieve this, some steps were taken:

1. Discouraging writing native languages with Arabic scripts by introducing Latin letters in its place
 2. Setting up a translation bureau to translate officials records in Arabic into native languages and finally into English language
 3. When the (colonialists) were forced to include Arabic in their system of education, no standard syllabus nor proper scheme of work provided
 4. No any training center was established and no workshop or refresher course was organized for Arabic teachers as was done to others area of specialization
- With these strategies Arabic was reduced to mere religious studies.

Reform in Education after Independence

The education system operated during the British rule in Nigeria was not relevant to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians. The official instructional language was English and the entire system was fashioned along the Western culture, (Fafunwa in Ukeje et al: 1986) observes that "even after five years of Nigeria independence the educational system of the country was not only colonial but more British than the British themselves. This practice has given rise to the problematic situation whereby Nigerians are still searching for relevance in Nigeria education, (Ezeali, 2004:79). It is in the light of the above that scholars and other concerned individuals and groups persistently called for reforms and overhauling the entire system of education.

The major step taken to reform the system of education in Nigeria after independence was the National curriculum conference organized in 1969. The conference which brought together the widest possible spectrum of the Nigeria people, reviewed the curriculum content of each level of the National educational system with a view to making it more meaningful in the society. What emerged from the conference is the famous document entitled a philosophy for Nigeria Education. It was one of the conference recommendation that National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) be established to carry out the major approved decisions of the conference. The (NERDC) then organized seminars and workshop that led to the production of the first National policy on Education Published in 1977

Study of the National policy on education shows that it placed Arabic Languages among non-vocational electives courses at both juniors and senior secondary schools. The 1981 revised edition of the policy clearly defined electives courses as "the non-compulsory subjects which the pupils can drop in the last year of the senior school course" (NPE 2004 revised). The subsequent review of the policy did not change the status of Arabic Language.

The Education Reform of in recent time

The academic incompetence, examination malpractices, cultism, juvenile delinquency e.t.c. that characterize the current Nigeria education system have become a great source of worry for many stakeholders in education sector, consequently they called for critical review of educational policy in the country.

Efforts were made by the Obasanjo regime (1999-2007) to elevate the position of Nigeria among the committee of Nations and proposed a general reform programme that would make Nigeria one of the world's top 20 economies. Tagged "vision 2020". The reform agenda covers all economic, political, educational and social sectors. Education sector in particular, according to (Bello, 2007), was viewed to experience a total overhauling to enable it shoulder the responsibility of producing appropriate, relevant and needed manpower". The regime education reform agenda, according to the former Minister of education, in the Obasanjo regime, Mrs Obiegeli Ezekwesili, as reported by (Abdullah: 2007), aims at restructuring the three tiers of education in Nigeria i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This is to establish an enabling and sustainable development objective. Its mission was to reform and restructure the education sector to empower and develop the citizenry to acquire skills and knowledge that would prepare them for the world of work.

Challenges of Arabic Studies in Nigeria System of Education

Arabic, despite its antecedent reputation and contributions to Nigeria development in the areas of education, history, culture etc the language is still suffering from neglect, hatred, and negative treatment from policy makers since the time of colonial education reform till the current reform.

The effort of concerned Nigerians to better the lot of Arabic in the Western education system continued to gain more grounds particularly when the political movement started in the early fifties. As the political leaders required the colonial government to improve the standard of western education to suit the purpose of Nigerians, they left no stone unturned to make sure that Arabic and Islamic education were given similar attention. After the Independence, a lot of innovations were introduced in the teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigeria. The Northern government appointed a supervisor from the ministry of Education for Arabic/Islamic studies. A committee was also set up to see the problem of Islamic schools. Institutions of higher learning also started to contribute to the development of Arabic and Islamic studies. In 1962, an intensive one-year course entitled "The University Certificate in Arabic" was introduced, at the same time Ahmadu Bello University was established in Zaria, with a branch in Kano, laying special emphasis on Arabic studies. The Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife also established, within the institute of African studies, a section for research work on Arabic documents, (Abdul, 1981-48). These are the fruits of the efforts made by Nigerians to

find a place for Arabic in the education system. One can easily say today that Arabic, despite problems here and there, has managed to flourish in the Nigerian education system; many universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other colleges run courses and award degree, certificates and diplomas in Arabic studies. These are in addition to Arabic subject in conventional secondary schools and secondary schools of Arabic and Islamic studies owned by several state governments in Nigeria.

The carefully study of different efforts to mould and remold education in Nigeria shows the pathetic place of the language in the national system of education. Inference could be drawn that the compounding problems inherited from the colonial administration in Nigeria are still militating against the language. The place of Arabic language in Nigeria school curriculum is not impressive, where the language is grouped under the humanities courses. This is because considering its indigenous background and potentialities for preserving and transmitting all sorts of human knowledge Nigeria needs, Arabic should have been grouped among the core - courses at primary and secondary levels of education, particularly in the Muslim dominated states of the federation.

The factors militating against ranking Arabic among the core courses should partly be attributed to the negative attitude of some learned Arabists who try to dominate the language at the detriment of the teeming population of the Muslims and some other non-Muslims who want to learn the language. These particular scholars consider Arabic as a pure Islamic language and they felt that it is desecrate if Arabic scripts were to be used in any non-religious contexts. This view that wishes to monopolize the language coincided with the colonial and neo-colonial movement which wants to destroy any alternative literacy of English language and western culture.

The language is considered by some uncivilized and ignorant individual as primitive which made them to call for its removal from Nigeria curricular as reported by (Bello, 2007:8) that “a proposal to drop Arabic from the Nigeria curricular was presented. But glory to Allah, the idea was vehemently rejected and hopelessly dropped”. Despite the fact that Arabic is like any other international languages a vehicle or medium through which all scientific and technological disciplines could be taught, and that it is also a language that Nigeria could be used to enhance diplomatic relations with many Arab countries, despite all these facts the language still remains as a Non-vocational elective course in our national curriculum, while French language, another colonial language has been elevated to the compulsory status and to the rank of second official language in Nigeria. The section 10b of the 2004-revised edition of National policy on education reads:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French, ‘Accordingly French shall be the second official

language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary school, but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary schools.

The above statement clearly indicates the unjust policy and blind emphasis on the western culture at the detriment of the very vital role played by Arabic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of reform in any type of education can never be overemphasized. Every society realizes that it cannot flourish without constant and periodical reform in its education, because education is a successful transmission of values, norms, traditions, skills, attitudes, and culture from a generation to another and all these changes as the society grows thus, there is need for change in education itself, as result people agitate for change and reform in education. Nigeria education has passed through a number of reforms starting from the education reform of Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio to colonial type of reform, post colonial and till moment there are agitations in education.

Arabic, being one of the media of transmitting education has enjoyed golden days in the education reform during the Sokoto caliphate and suffered and still suffering a lot of neglect and misplacement in the colonial and post colonial era. The language is supposed to be one of the core subjects in our educational system but neglected and placed under the elective courses.

The writer is of the opinion that the language is so important to Nigerians therefore its teaching and learning should be promoted and its status should be elevated. To improve the status of the language the following recommendations are hereby suggested.

1. Arabic should be grouped among the core courses at primary and secondary levels of education particularly in the Muslim dominated states of the federation.
2. The need to review the place of Arabic language in Nigeria curricular is highly essential even for diplomatic purpose. Nigeria is a nation among the committee of nations that maintains the diplomatic relations with Arabic speaking countries.
3. Government should put in serious effect to make the language more attractive and to encourage its teaching and learning in our institutions.
4. Arabic scholars should make learning of the language more simple and easier by providing language theories and modified methodology, which can help a learner to grasp the language without tears.
5. Arabic teacher in various levels of education should conduct conferences, seminars and refresher courses to discuss various problems facing the teaching and learning of the language.

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