An Assessment of Training Needs of Arabic School Teachers in Lagos State: Implication for Planning Training and Retraining Programmes

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Abstract

The study identified the training needs of teachers in the Arabic schools in Lagos State. The study involved Head Teachers in 42 selected Arabic schools operating in Akoka, Bariga and Somolu areas in the Lagos metropolis. The subjects were given a list of six possible teaching competencies and asked to appraise their level of competence in each, and also indicate their willingness to attend a short refresher course on pedagogy. The study revealed that the respondents are deficient in varying degrees in communicative English – both oral and written, preparation of scheme of work and lesson plan, including formulation of behavioural objectives and evaluation of teaching – learning outcomes. Additionally, majority of the respondents showed positive attitude towards remedying their areas of deficiency. It was concluded that education faculties, education and training consultants and operators of Arabic schools in the State have an important role to play in utilizing the findings of the study to plan and implement appropriate training and retraining programmes for teachers.

Keywords: Arabic Schools; Teaching Competencies; Retraining Programmes

Introduction

Inspite of its long history, teaching in the non-formal Arabic schools in Nigeria appears to be haphazardly done. Arabic schools called *Ile kewu* in Western Nigeria and *Makarantar Allo* in Northern Nigeria are manned by *Alfas* or *Mallams* who are graduates of Arabic colleges where Western education, which has assumed a dominant role in the Nigerian education system, is accorded negligible or no recognition at all. The schools are usually located within the precincts of a mosque or adjacent to the residence of teachers. Learners of diverse ages and cognitive attainments in Qur'anic studies squat on the ground within a single space and

are instructed to read aloud Arabic letters or verses of the Qur'an of varying lengths finely inscribed on wooden slates. At a higher stage, students may be allowed to read from loose sheets of the Qur'an. *Surahs* of the Qur'an designated for memorization are sometimes chanted in a sing-song manner. The maximization of the learning potentials of students using the sing-song teaching-learning approach is highly suspect. Al- Afendi (1980:19) submits that:

> spoon-feeding and memorization are not the best means of fostering education in the minds of the young. Application and not merely theoretical knowledge is indispensable.

Ability to read the Qur'an at a particular time for a specific purpose must be distinguished from the mastery of the mechanism of Qur'anic recitation. In the former case, the student may be unable to recall and implement the rules of reading because he has acquired knowledge of Qur'anic recitation through the chorus teacher-dependent approach. However, mastery of the mechanism of the rules of reading is not time-bound. Once the learner has mastered the rules governing the reading of Arabic texts, which unconsciously enables him to discern the phonetic and phonological properties of sound units, he can accurately read the Qur'an and indeed any vocalized Arabic text. One of the tasks before the teacher, therefore, is to ensure that learning not only takes place but also remains permanent.

Background

Teachers play a key role in any education programme. The professional background of the teacher is crucial in determining the quality and success of instruction (Ayodele and Adegbile: 2003:). The effective use of relevant methods, therefore, constitute a major determinant of effective teaching. The scope of Islamic studies as presently offered by Arabic schools is a body of diversified knowledge requiring a variety of approaches of presentation. For instance, while the teaching of *salat* (formal prayer) would require demonstration techniques, the teaching of Qur'anic recitation in a non-Arabic speaking setting would require a measure of familiarity with second language acquisition since the target language, Arabic, will ultimately be learnt in the context of the first language habits (Banjo, 1987:103). This situation makes the reciter susceptible to committing a lot of language interference related errors. Problems related to the appropriateness of methodology should logically be traced to the content and quality of pedagogical training of the Qur'anic teachers and the availability and adequacy of the curriculum, which should guide instruction. The highest educational qualification of most of the Arabic teachers is either the '*I`dadi* (Junior Secondary equivalent) or *Thanawi* (Senior Secondary equivalent) certificates obtained from Arabic colleges. At present, the Arabic colleges are concerned with provision of Junior Secondary education ('*I`dadi*) and Senior Secondary education (T*hanawi*), not the pedagogical training of Arabic teachers. Thus, for graduates of the Arabic colleges to be able to teach effectively, they certainly need further training in the application of pedagogical principles.

The lack of a specific time-frame within which learners complete their study in the local Arabic schools suggests the nonexistence of a curriculum or some kind of organized teaching-

learning scheme. Learners in the Qur'anic school system remain in school indefinitely until the teacher is satisfied that they have attained a satisfactory level of competence and is therefore qualified for graduation.

Most learners in the Arabic schools, especially in Western Nigeria, are also students of the Western education system. They attend the regular schools in the morning and Arabic schools in the evening, including weekends. The Arabic teacher, due to the lack of pedagogical training is not aware of and unable to utilize the literacy skills of his students, which they acquired through the formal education system. Government has repeatedly but fruitlessly advocated for integration of the Arabic school system into the Western education school system. This need is expressed in the National Policy on Education(2004) that "efforts shall be made by state governments to integrate suitable Koranic schools and Islamiyyah Schools within the formal education system "

There is high probability that both teachers and pupils in the Arabic Schools are working at cross purposes and this partly explains the long period of studentship in the Arabic schools. Apparently, pupils in the Arabic schools who have acquired literacy in English cannot be presumed to be learning Arabic within a linguistic vacuum. Normally, one would expect, for instance, that literacy in English should greatly enhance literacy in Arabic. The local *Malam* or *Alfa* seems to lack this competence, and therefore, he is unable to offer any assistance in this respect. The kind of stagnation which the Arabic schools have experienced is neither in the interest of the pupils nor that of the teachers.

Within the context of an ever-changing world, the Arabic school teacher should be presented an opportunity to pinpoint his major challenges as a teacher and the strategies he considers suitable to overcome his instructional inadequacies. The teacher's self-evaluation would juxtapose data obtained from within and outside the Arabic school system thus facilitating the process of verification of findings and locating appropriate remediation measures. The process of remediation however begins with a clear determination of what constitutes the major challenge of the Arabic schools.

Islamic Education: Concept and Challenges
Islamic education is a process of developing righteous individuals who will live fruitful lives in the present world and achieve a life of unending spiritual bliss in the hereafter. Islam recognizes knowledge as a basic instrument for realizing this interwoven objective. For this reason, the religion makes knowledge acquisition and dissemination mandatory. Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah are unequivocal in stressing the indispensability of knowledge in confronting life challenges. The initial Qur'anic revelation (Qur'an 96:1-6) makes clear the imperative to read, write and teach. Muhammad (PBUH) in a tradition declares: "to seek knowledge is mandatory on every Muslim male or female". Islam views knowledge as being essentially composed of two complimentary rudiments: the spiritual and the mundane. The Qur'an is a repository of both. The statement "Nothing have We omitted from the Book" (Qur'an 6:38) is quite affirmative. Epistemology in Islam considers the availability of spiritual and material

knowledge in a balanced proportion as capable of producing beneficial knowledge, which, is essential in building the righteous individual. The attempt to prefer one to the other inevitably results in crises. This state of disequilibrium between spiritual and material forms of knowledge is held to be the chief cause of contemporary world crises. According to Alwani (1999:9)

> nothing will begin to go right unless and until the equilibrium has been re-established and the only way to restore it is by a balanced and complementary reading of the two (spiritual and secular knowledge)

Muslims in the contemporary world are faced with the challenge of rectifying the lopsidedness in education, which is disproportionately tilted in favour of secular schooling. This has hastened the process and progression of de-Islamization now pervading the *Ummah*. Adverse cultural influences have, no doubt, made Muslims to abandon the norms and ideals of their religion. The adoption of Euro-centric ideas antithetical to the Islamic values has been traced to the preponderance of the western-secularist system of education largely imposed on Muslims during the colonial era.

It must be noted however that Islam does not deny the merits of secular knowledge nor is it oblivious of its accomplishments. The Prophet endorsed the seeking of knowledge in China, a country hitherto populated by non-Muslims. The emphasis in Islamic education is founded on three essentials. The first is the recognition that the source of both revealed and empirical knowledge is divine and transcendental. The responsibility of bestowing knowledge is ascribed to God alone who "teaches man that which he knows not".(Qur'an 96:5). The second is that knowledge is related to action and as such beneficial knowledge produces righteous deeds; the reason why faith in the Qur'an is often accompanied with mention of good deeds. The third of course is that knowledge should be able to conscientize man to discharge his duties to God by fulfilling his vicegerency on earth. Knowledge should be geared towards achieving felicity in this world and salvation in the hereafter. In other words, knowledge ought to be acquired for its intrinsic values and not for the prospects of material gains alone.

In the Nigerian society, the dichotomisation of education into secular and religious types has inevitably produced two main types of educated elites namely: the secular elite and the professional in Islamic studies who has gained little or no western education. The two elites operate from two extremes and are thus disadvantaged to maximally contribute to societal development taking account of the Islamic concept of a balanced education. The western educated elite is an expert in a secular discipline but deficient in and disoriented towards spiritual knowledge and therefore unable to exemplify the ideals of Islamic culture in many of its facets. On the other axis is the *Alfa* or *Malam* versed in Islamic jurisprudence but not grounded in western form of education often viewed to be an important driving force of modern civilization. He is therefore unable to comprehend fully the dynamics and functioning of the legal, economic and political aspects of public life; his contribution in these areas is seriously limited. This, by implication, calls to question the effectiveness of the performance of his duties as a teacher and a preacher.

The implication of the foregoing is that ideal Islamic education may be lacking in the two types of elites. The need for urgent reform cannot, therefore, be overemphasized. Unfortunately, concern for reform has either been lacking, feeble or misconceived. All efforts so far made have been restricted to the domain of theoretical discourse. Scholars such as al-Ilori (1978) Galadanci (1982) and Doi (1984:307-313) focused on the description of the nature of Arabic-Islamic education in Nigeria. Fafunwa in proposing a way out submits that "the most effective solution would be for all Nigerian schools to become secular and citizenship oriented". This secularization option proposed by Fafunwa (1974:69) looks hasty and simplistic. Considering the subjugation of Islamic Studies under the framework of the western system, secularization should be approached on a cautious note. The Arabic school system cannot afford to loose its focus. The critical point is to establish the needs of the schools through an empirical investigation. The present state of Islamic education calls for a well-informed action plan. Baloch (1980:12) contends that what the issue requires is "not merely making eloquent statements but acceptable operative pronouncements of a programme of action.

The Problem
Arabic schools presently benefit from substantial patronage by Muslims who regard such schools as a conventional setting where basic Islamic education can be acquired. Basic literacy skills and Islamic education, in this part of the world, entails ability to recite the Qur'an fluently and knowledge of the fundamentals of Islam. Since education is a critical aspect of a Muslim's upbringing, it is imperative that the moral and spiritual constituents of such education is systematically taught and learnt. The Arabic school tutor is both a cleric and a teacher. The degree of the knowledge and application of pedagogical principles is a crucial factor determining the effectiveness of instruction. The problem with which this study is concerned, therefore, is to ascertain the extent to which Arabic school teachers in Lagos State effectively perform their instructional tasks and what their training needs are.

The Research Questions
The following research questions were raised for the study:
1. What are the demographic characteristics of the Arabic school teachers?
2. What are perceived further education and training needs of the Arabic school teachers?

Methodology
Study Location and Population
In Lagos state, it is common to find Arabic schools operating in the Mosques, in the private apartments/buildings of Alfas, under the sheds and in uncompleted buildings. This study covered the infinite population of Arabic schools operating in selected Central and *Ratibi* Mosques in the 20 local government areas in Lagos State, South-west of Nigeria. The decision to use Arabic schools in the Central and Subsidiary (*Ratibi*) mosques was informed by the fact that Central mosques in Muslim locales can be easily located. There are a number of *Ratibi* mosques associated with each Central mosque. Thus, from the Central mosque, it was possible to obtain information regarding the location of *Ratibi* mosques in a

particular area. The decision to exclude other Arabic schools operating outside the mosques was on the basis of the amorphous nature of this category of Arabic schools, which hitherto would make collection of data difficult to accomplish.

Sample and Sampling

Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) constituted the study sample. The two LGAs were randomly selected using the ballot technique. Mainland and Shomolu LGAs were selected for the study. Forty-two head-teachers were selected from 42 Arabic schools operating in Bariga, Akoka and Shomolu. In this study, the head-teacher is regarded as both an administrator and classroom teacher. The rationale for limiting the study to the head-teachers is on the basis of the fact that

1.   head-teachers are in the best position to provide the kind of information and data required for the study; and

2.   once the head-teachers are trained they can go back to their schools to train their teachers.

Three research assistants were recruited and trained to administer the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

A researcher made questionnaire named: Arabic School Teachers Profile (ASTP) was developed and used for data collection. The questionnaire contains 12 items dealing with teachers' demography, training background, attitude to training and six teaching skills. The subjects were asked to assess their own level of competence in each.

Findings of the Study

Demography of Arabic School Teachers

The demographic data of teachers in the Arabic schools in Lagos State are presented in Table 1 overleaf, followed by a discussion emanating from analysis of the data.

Arabic teachers are aged between 20 years or less and 45 years and above. Approximately 17.0 per cent of them are young adults aged between 20 and 29 years, while 81.0 per cent of them are in the older age group, ranging between 35 and 45 years or more.

All the (42) Arabic teachers are men; 88.0 per cent of them are married. Their basic educational background ranges from primary school to secondary school. Forty-five per cent of them have completed the senior secondary education, while 31.0 per cent are university undergraduates and holders of post secondary Arabic School Diplomas. However, none of the Arabic teachers claimed that they possess a certificate in Education. The subjects' Islamic & Arabic educational background also varies greatly from '*Ibtidai* (Primary School equivalent) to '*I`dadi* (Junior Secondary equivalent) and T*hanawi* (Senior Secondary equivalent).

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Arabic School Teachers

Demographic Characteristics	Number	Percent
1. Age Group (In Years)		
Below 20	1	2.3
20-24	1	2.3
30-34	16	14.2
35-39	17	40.4
40-44	11	26.1
45 and above	1	2.3
	5	11.9
2. Gender		
Male	42	100.0
Female	-	-
3. Marital Status		
Married	37	88.0
Single	5	11.0
4. Level of Education		
Primary	10	23.8
Secondary	19	45.2
Post-secondary	13	30.9
'Idtida`i	1	2.3
'I`dadi	9	21.4
Thanawi	32	76.1
5.Teaching Experience (In Years)		
1-5	5	11.9
6-10	11	26.1
11-15	14	33.3
16-20	6	14.2
20 and above	6	14.2

Interestingly, 76.1 per cent of the teachers possess the *Thanawi* certificate and the majority (88.0 per cent) of them have had long years of teaching experiences, ranging from 6-20 years or even more. Putting Arabic school teacher demographics together one can see that the Arabic teachers are a diverse adult population; they differ a great deal in age, level of education attainment and years of teaching experience. As working adults, the Arabic teachers (like any other socially responsible adults in the society) are time-bound due to inevitable work schedules, family obligations, personal and community commitments (http//www.col.org/resources/ startup/introlearning.htm)

It must be appreciated that performance of adult roles in the society places a great deal of demand on adult time, mental and physical well-being. Thus, when Arabic teachers - as adults decide to engage in voluntary or mandatory learning, they certainly do so at the expense of their leisure time and other important socio-cultural engagements. Education practitioners

should become increasingly aware of the potential barriers posed to education participation by the adult learners' sociological characteristics. Such awareness, it must be emphasized, is useful in understanding who is likely to participate and why others would not. Additionally, knowing how adult learner demographics affect participation in educational activities is a critical step towards planning flexible education and training platforms that best suit the diverse individual and group circumstances of would-be adult learners.

On the whole, the finding that the Arabic teachers have no certificate in education suggests that they may lack the basic teaching skills, including for instance, such critical teaching skills as effective classroom communication and management, preparation of scheme of work, writing good behavioural objectives, preparation of instructional materials and evaluation, e.t.c.

Arabic Teachers' Training Background
The teachers were asked to indicate if they had attended a training programme on teaching methodology in the past, and if so, when the training took place.

Fifty-two per cent of them did not attend any organized training programme on teaching methods in the preceding five or more years. The remaining 48 per cent claimed that they have been attending training programmes on occasional basis.

Attitudes to Pedagogical Training
The Arabic teachers were asked if they would like to take part in a short teacher training course. An overwhelming majority (38 or 90.4 per cent) of the subjects indicated that they were willing; the remaining (4 or 9.5 per cent) were undecided.

Training Needs of Arabic School Teachers
The subjects were given a listing of six possible teaching skills and asked to appraise their level of competence in each, using the following percentage ranges as parameters:
Less than 50 per cent   –   Below Average
50- 59 per cent   -   Average
60-69 per cent   -   Above Average
70 per cent   -   High

The response obtained is presented as shown in Table 2 Overleaf

Table 2: Distribution Showing the Arabic School Teachers' Own Performance Rating on Six Teaching Skills

Teaching Skills	Below Average		Average		Above Average		High	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Spoken English	24	57.0	11	26.0	7	16.0	-	-
Written English	22	52.0	12	28.0	8	19.5	-	-
Preparing Scheme of Work	19	45.0	7	16.0	7	16.0	9	21.0
Formulating Behavioural objectives	20	47.0	7	16.0	10	23.0	5	11.0
Preparing institutional materials	19	45.0	7	16.0	7	16.0	9	21.0
Evaluating teaching/learning outcomes	23	54.0	3	7.0	13	30.0	3	7.0

From the data in Table 2, it will be noted that a large number of Arabic School teachers claim that they are currently performing below average in all the six teaching skills. However, the degree of deficiency in the performance of the teachers varies greatly from one teaching skill to the other. Evidence from the table shows that spoken English ranked highest among areas of deficiency for 57.0 per cent of the teachers; this is followed by evaluation (54.0 per cent), written English (52.0 per cent), formulation of behavioural objectives (47.0 per cent) and preparation of scheme of work (35.0).

In a nutshell, one can say that going by these unfolding statistics, there appears to be a yeaning gap in virtually all the six teaching skills as currently performed by Arabic School teachers in Lagos State.

Implication for Planning Training and Retraining Programmes
The study revealed that the Arabic School teachers are deficient in varying degrees in communicative English, formulation of behavioural objectives, preparation of instructional materials, evaluation of teaching/learning outcomes and preparation of scheme of work.

The need for the existing corps of Arabic instructors in Nigeria to remain continually competent is accentuated by the significance already assumed by the Arabic Schools and the fact that the society keeps demanding value for money, as evident in the continuing global agitation for quality education. This global millennium development goal (MDG) can be met, for example, if Arabic teachers are encouraged to undertake professional teacher education programmes on a continuing basis, so that their position on the competence continuum advances steadily and in a positive direction. It must be pointed out that there are there are no 100 per cent competent practitioners; no one expects any individual to be so, either. Some practitioners are, however, more competent than others.

Education practitioners have a crucial role to play in planning flexible platforms for training and retraining Arabic school teachers. This study has delineated some teaching tasks in

which Arabic teachers lack appropriate skills. The study has also provided an insight into the demographic characteristics of Arabic teachers as adults and the potential barriers posed by adult characteristics to education participation.

Conclusion

Success at attracting Arabic School teachers to participate in training and retraining programmes in teaching methodology will depend on the ability of organizers, to involve would-be participants in the decision regarding when to learn, where to learn and how to learn. Participatory teaching/learning methods such as workshop, seminar, demonstration, role-play, practicum, audiovisual presentation, stimulation, discussion groups and so on, are particularly suggested.

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