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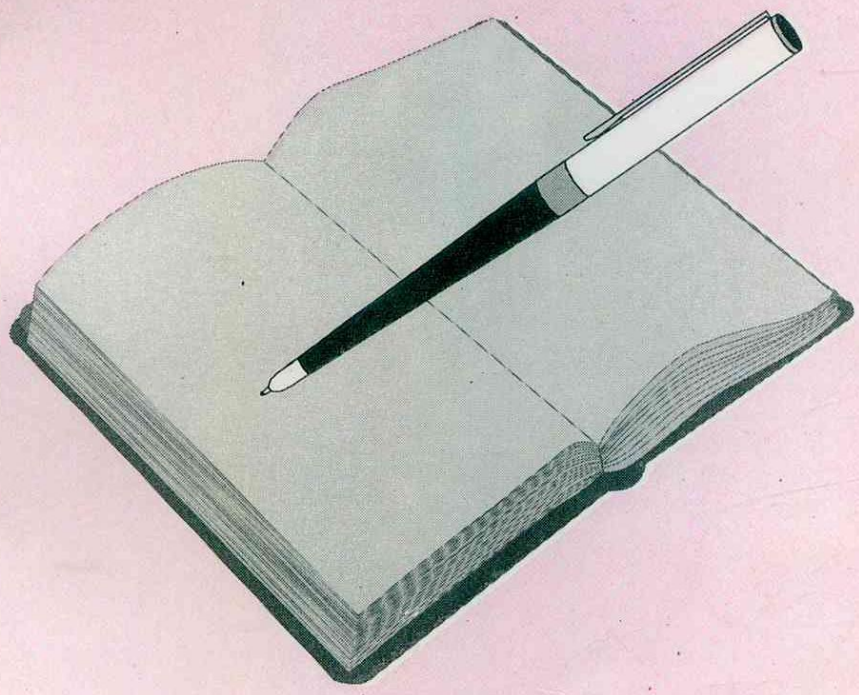

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Arabic Education in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: The Challenges of Female Enrolment

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Abstract

Education is the bedrock for development of nations and societies at all times. It is also regarded as the best legacy parents can bequeath their children with. Arabic as a language is being studied in various institutions in Nigeria and many students had graduated and obtained various degrees, but little has been seen from the female gender in this field. This study shades light on the challenges facing Girl-Child Education in the area of Arabic Language in Nigeria tertiary institutions and the way forward.

Introduction

Education is defined as development of character or mental powers or a systematic instruction (Hornby, 2003). World Book Encyclopaedia (1987) defines it as a process by which people acquire knowledge, skills, habits, values or attitudes.

Educationists categorize education into formal and informal education. Formal education begins with early childhood and continues through elementary, secondary and higher education. Western education was introduced in Nigeria by the colonialists through the southern part of the country in 1884 by the missionaries before independence. After independence, the federal government of Nigeria took full charge of the sector by formulating policies and strategies that would enhance educational development.

This paper discusses the importance of knowledge to the development of human beings both spiritually and materially and critically shades light on the poor participation of females in the area of Arabic education in tertiary institutions.

Arabic Language in Nigeria

Arabic is the language of the Arabs who live in the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East and in Northern Africa. It is one of the international languages for education and is spoken by over 200 million people around the world and it is one of the official languages of the United Nations, African Union and ECOWAS. It is also one of the tribes in Borno State in Nigeria.

Galadanci (1993) explained that Arabic Language in Kanem and Sokoto Empires was used as a cultural and administrative language in which signboards, government documents, files, personal and official letters were written. It is also used as a tool for communication and a medium for creative expression.

Arabic education was championed in the pre- colonial era by Islamic scholars and had the support of the traditional rulers. Mosques and private houses were used as venues for teaching and learning in the region until when the first modern Arabic schools were established in Kano and Sokoto between 1930 and 1934. The main objective of the schools was to train students in Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence in accordance with Maliki school of thought, and the one in Kano was regarded to be the first of its kind in the whole of West Africa (Galadanci, 1993)

Arabic in post primary education

Arabic language has witnessed remarkable boost since independence when various governments intervened in organizing it with support from different stakeholders locally and internationally. Many individuals, most especially Islamic scholars, have also contributed immensely in promoting the language by establishing schools that specialize in Arabic language and by sponsoring students to further their education in some Arab countries like Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Morocco.

Both male and female students were encouraged by parents and relatives to attend Arabic schools like Higher Islamic Colleges in Northern Nigeria which were affiliated to Institute of Education of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. These schools graduated many students who had obtained Senior Secondary Certificates in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Board that regulates the examinations was established by law no 10 of the then Northern Nigeria in 1960. Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto initiated it, and the board was granted full recognition on its

57th meeting held February, 2011 at Sokoto by National Council on Education to be an examination board that will focus on Arabic and Islamic Studies. Presently, the board has officially registered more than 337 schools and colleges at both junior and senior secondary levels (NBAIS).

Beside these Arabic schools, some efforts were made to bring some 'secular' subjects into the Arabic setting (Abdulrahim, 2008). Some Arabic scholars believed in conventional Arabic schools without introducing any western subject, while some introduced schools that combined the two and both achieved a lot in this regard.

It was also observed that female students constitute a large number in these schools but despite the huge numbers, very little progress to acquire education in Arabic in the universities even though some of them do obtain diploma certificates from Colleges of Arabic and Legal Studies and from Colleges of Education.

Girl-Child Education in Islam

Attention has been given to girl child education since the early days of Islam. The Prophet of Islam has explained categorically, that the quest for knowledge is mandatory on every Muslim and that includes women.

Islam has provided females with high regards and esteem, and recognizes the role of women in a family and because of its strategic importance to the society; Islam holds family formation through marriage as a religious duty not only for the parties involved but also for the society (Yusuf, 2009). This has addressed the issue of family ties and the respect for every member of the family and the role each member can play to protect and sustain the family, unlike the situation in the Jahiliyya period (pre Islam era) where Allah for instance mentioned in the Holy Quran that: "And when the female (infant) buried alive (as the pagan Arabs used to do) is questioned: for what sin was she killed" Q81:8&9.

This shows that in many communities such as the Arab pagan communities, women did not have any right but were used as commodity to be sold and to be inherited and in some cases were seen as a cause therefore they were often buried alive as it was mentioned in the Quran. Islam restored dignity to women and gave them equal right as is mentioned in the following verse: Verily, the Muslims (those who submit to Allah in Islam) men and women, the believers men and women (who believe in Islamic monotheism), Q33:35

As such what is therefore applicable to male is equally applicable to female in terms of reward and punishment in the hereafter.Q3:195 "So their lord accepted of them their supplication and answered them), Never will I allow to be lost the work of any one of you, be he male or female. And also Q16:97 "Whoever works righteousness whether – male or female – while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islamic monotheism) verily; to him we will give a good life (this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision)". And When Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) established the Islamic state in Madina women were treated in a most proper way, for instance, Islam allows women to inherit and not to be inherited and encouraged women to learn and contribute to the development of their families and communities, this was eminent in the wife of the Prophet Khadija who used to be a famous entrepreneur and had supported the Prophet to propagate Islam. Also his wife Aisha who was very knowledgeable and had taught some companions many Hadith of the prophet, Muslims are aware of her immense contributions to the spread of Islamic knowledge. She is considered to be among the seven muftun of the companions. Umm Salama, another mother of the faithfuls, is considered to be one of the thirteen muftun after the premier seven. She is classed amongst Abubakar, Abu Huraira and Uthman (Makinde, 2007). More so, the likes of Rabi'atul Adawiyya can not be overlooked because of her involvement in spreading knowledge during her life time. Islamic scholars have explained the importance of searching for knowledge indiscriminately. Asmau the daughter of Sheikh Usman bin Fodio the famous jihadist, was said to have been very vast in Arabic and Islamic studies and was also considered to be 'Al Khansa'a a famous Arab female poet of Nigeria, she had some collection of elegy poems (Abubakar, 1972). Therefore, it is not correct to talk about educating or ignoring a particular gender, it should be noted that educating a girl child is a powerful force towards development, especially in a developing country like Nigeria.

Girl Child Education in Nigeria

The issue of female education is a global concern of various stakeholders, and it has been the priority of governmental and non-governmental agencies. According to Kearney (1996), 66% of the worlds illiterates are women; only 33% of women compared to men enroll in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa .

In Nigeria, the situation varies from one region to the other, in the south for instance where western education is predominately occupying majority of the families and also receiving maximum support of the Christian Missionaries, the situation is not the same in the North where two streams of education exist, the Islamic education and the western education, and it is evident that female participation in the two streams is said to have been poor.

It is observed by (Umar) that, the level of illiteracy remains high in the North and in this regard he lamented that this was as a result of the deep illiteracy in the societies in the Northern Nigeria and also believing that there are no challenges facing the Muslim Ummah coupled with poor understanding of the role of women in the society that we relegated women and monopolized them at homes by not allowing them to further their studies in order to be relevant in the society and contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

Problems Facing Girl Child Education

There are lots of challenges militating against female education in Nigeria generally and in the North particularly. These can be attributed to social, cultural, religious and economic factors which have impeded the development of women to compete with their male counter-parts effectively.

Economic Factor

Almost 70% of the Nigerian populations is living below poverty line and according to FG/UNICEFF (2001) poverty has played a vital role in crippling female education in Nigeria. Most often in the Northern part of this country; girls are seen roaming the streets selling various items to assist in providing means of livelihood for their families at the detriment of their education. And sometimes, they contribute money to educate the boys because there is belief that boys have more rights to education and need it more than the girls (Mackenzie, 1992).

Cultural Factor

Culture in every society is considered to be the heritage and pride of every member, but at times some cultural doctrines play a negative role on the people and that may affect their development and progress. In some African societies male are seen as naturally superior to women and

have the major decision making power in a community (Mackenzie, 1992). The status of women in Islam constitutes no problem because Islam subscribes to the fact that a woman is as vital to life as a man himself, and that she is not inferior to him (Makinde, 2007).

Religious Factor

Many parents in Northern Nigeria are of the opinion that female education is not compulsory as long as they educate the male and, in some cases, some people see it as a sin. This is contrary to the teachings of Islam or may be linked to how colonialists were perceived and how they championed and propagated Christianity, even though missionary schools were all over the place and were patronized by only a few. So, because of the fear of converting their wards to other religions or affect their moralities; many people avoided all sorts of western schools, but presently with this awareness, the issue still exists in some areas and that might be linked to the corruption in the education system and, someone who attends 'Boko' (western Education) will be corrupted most especially females who marry early at the expense of formal schooling (Idriss and Ekpo, 2010).

Social Factor

The success of female child in the society has been interpreted wrongly by many families. Many of such families believe that only male children can attain success and therefore shift their focus from educating female children, and in some communities less effort is spent to educate female children because of the believe that she will be married to someone outside the family and so her education brings no fortune to them so why spending on her.

Meanwhile, the field of Arabic education in tertiary institution in respect to female education is not getting to where it should have been due to the reasons mentioned and other reasons that include:

A: Lack of female lecturers in many tertiary institutions, as it is believed that female students need to have a role model that will motivate them in pursuing their higher education. This according to Kearney (1996) will enable them become leaders in society and allow them to become role model for younger girls. While higher education is considered to be a key factor in capacity building for each nation, has special responsibility for

human's ability to attain the goals of sustainable development and peace (UBEC (2005).

The following table shows statistics of lecturers in Arabic Departments in some Universities according to gender:

Table 1: Gender of Lecturers in Selected Arabic Departments

S/No	Name of Institution	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
1	University of Maiduguri	30	88.24	4	11.76
2	IBBU Lapai		100	0	0.00
3	UDU Sokoto	20	100	0	0.00
4	University of Ilorin		87.5	1	12.50
5	LASU Lagos	13	92.85	1	7.15
6	Ado Ekiti State University		100	0	0.00
7	University of Ibadan	12	100	0	0.00
8	BUK Kano	23	100	0	0.00
9	University of Abuja		100	0	0.00
10	Al Hikma University , Ilorin		100	0	0.00
11	Nasarawa State University	12	92.30	1	7.70
12	Umaru Musa Yar'adua University , Katsina State		88.88	1	11.12
13	University of Jos		100	0	0.00
14	Bukar Abba Ibrahim Univ. Yobe	10	100	0	0.00
	Total	**168**	**95.45**	**8**	**4.55**

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

The above figures indicate low academic staff members in Arabic departments, therefore, for these and other reasons already listed female students are reluctant to continue with their Arabic education despite the facts that very large number of them attend up to secondary level.

B: Women are important part of every human society; the history of Nigeria has shown how many great women have contributed to the emancipation and development of the society. Their contributions cut across all facets of human life. Even in Arabic education, some women have played some important roles. Its believed that in societies where women's efforts are not being recognized, they tend to be discouraged, and therefore That society should not expect any meaningful contribution. Even as many states in Northern Nigeria such as Kano, Gombe, Bauchi, Niger and Yobe also made commendable efforts at making education available to female children in their respective domains, (*Leadership* newspaper, 2001) more effort is still needed in this regard.

The Way Forward

In order to encourage full participation of female students in furthering their higher education and later make their contributions towards developing the field, the following are some recommendations and solutions:

1. Government and other non-governmental agencies should encourage and financially sponsor females to pursue their Arabic education.
2. The need to sensitize female students on the importance of Arabic education and its relevance to the upbringing of their children through Islamic teachings and tenets generally, but at the same time religious knowledge is not a thing that can be received anywhere easily and diligently. In spite of the fact that many people and families in Northern Nigeria have genuine quest for Islamic religious education, it's not readily available in some of the cities and towns, or the preference of a particular place because of its famous scholars. Hence many families often resolve to send their children outside their states as 'ALMAJIRI' to achieve the goal. Nevertheless, these students often end up being beggars and consequently do not achieve the religious goals.
3. Early marriage should not be used as an excuse to terminate female education; it should be used as a way to safeguard the dignity of the women and to protect her from some bad elements in the system and the community at large. Females should be educated properly on family planning Programme for smooth performance of their education.
4. More female lecturers should be employed in various institutions to serve as role model.
5. Discourage all harmful acts such discriminating against them and underrating their ability and other practices that may impede girl child education.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the importance of Arabic Language globally and in Nigeria as well, and has discussed the progress of female education in the field of Arabic education. Some problems were highlighted which

have contributed immensely to their backwardness in tertiary institutions, the paper observed how girl child education is still lagging behind in Nigeria and therefore the researcher suggested that there is need for cooperation of all the stakeholders to enhance and support female education generally and Arabic education in particular for the purposes of peace and national development in the face of the present national and global challenges.

In order to achieve this, there is need also for wide and intensive sensitization of parents, schools authorities, religious leaders and girls themselves.

2011 Field Work Sources

Fieldwork sources include Office of the Heads of Arabic Departments of the listed institutions in Table 1. The following lecturers also assisted in compiling the data

1. Fatima Shariff Ramadan
2. Musa Yahaya Dutsu
3. Prof. Sani Umar Musa
4. Prof. Z.I. Oseni
5. Dr Ibrahim Ishaq Olayiwola
6. Prof. Muhammad Tahir Sayyid
7. Dr Umar Ndagi
8. Dr Al imam
9. Dr Abdussalam
10. Malan Ali Abubakar
11. Prof. M.T.Yahaya
12. Malan Muhammad Ibrahim Yakub

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