**‘PRAGMATISING’ THE APPROACH TO TEACHING OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES: A 21ST CENTURY REQUIREMENT FOR EFFECTIVE DELIVERY**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

Previous studies have dwelled extensively on the problems facing Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria. Such problems as documented by literature include lack of unified syllabus, inadequate qualified teachers, unavailability of relevant textbooks and Government’s negative disposition to the subjects. As apt as these problems are, it is axiomatic to note that that a wrong approach to teaching the subjects is a fundamentally great impediment to effective and result-oriented delivery as far as the teaching of the subjects is concerned. This is premised on the fact that irrespective of provisions made to address major problems militating against the survival of Arabic and Islamic Studies among other teaching subjects at all levels, the tendency for the subjects to remain backward and be treated with inferiority will still be there if a proper and pragmatic approach to teaching them are not institutionalized. It is on this note that this paper set out to examine the best approach to teaching the two subjects in the 21st Century. This study therefore espoused some wrong approaches employed in teaching the subjects with a view to ensuring a paradigm shift in order to achieve a better result from the teacher-student relationships otherwise known as education. The paper, as a matter of background, made a deliberate attempt to exhume the history of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the educational sojourn of Nigeria. In the process, the travail as well as the fortune that characterised the emergence of the twin subjects was revealed. In our assessment of the situation, it could be adjudged as a natural birth from “grass” and growth to “grace” as the subjects stand today. New approaches were consequently suggested as a way to “right” the “wrong” in terms of teaching methodologies and hence pragmatising the old techniques as suggested by the topic of the paper. Though the study focused majorly on Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Secondary School Level, its thrust is of universal application across subjects and levels of education in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Arabic, Islamic Studies, pragmatic-approach, paradigm-shift

**Introduction**

Recent discovery as a test developer and test administrator has revealed that there is a great difference between **teaching** and **delivery** in teaching. As teaching connotes an act of giving instructions to pupils or students in a class-room setting, delivery simply refers to a result-oriented outcome of the teaching. In other words, when teaching is effective, it is result-oriented but yields no positive result when it is ineffective. By implication, it is not every teacher that delivers but delivery in a class-room setting describes who a competent teacher is! The degree of delivery and effectiveness in teaching is measured and determined by the extent of students’ performances. This, of course, varies from teacher to teacher and from class to class. It is based on the imperative need to differentiate teaching from “cheating” and teachers from “cheaters” that this paper sets out to narrow pragmatic teaching down on the twin subjects of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

**Definition and Conceptualization of Teaching as a Major Terminology in Education**

Teaching has been defined and conceptualised in different ways by different people, depending on different angles from which the concept is perceived. Before considering some of the definitions given of the concept, it must be noted that a lot of time has been devoted to “what” of teaching- what areas should we, what resources do we need and cover and so on. The “how” of teaching also gets a great deal of space, which is how to structure a lesson, manage classes, assess for learning and so on. According to Parker (2007), the “why” of teaching is also an ‘askable’ question-for what purposes and to what end do we teach? But seldom, if ever, he continues: do we ask the “who” question- who is the self that teaches?

Teaching, according to Bruner (1966), is to instruct someone…….. is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge. We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself, to consider matters as an historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting knowing is a process not a product.

From another perspective, teaching is the concerted sharing of knowledge and experience which is usually organized within a discipline and more generally, the provision of stimulus to the psychological and intellectual growth of a person by another person or artefact. According to the same source, teaching is described as discharging accessible resources for effective learning and performance-based assessment ([www.igi-global.com](about:blank)). According to Gage (1977), teaching is a form of interpersonal influence aimed at changing the behavioural potential of another person. Edmund Amidon (1967) defines teaching as an interactive process primarily involving class-room talk which takes place between the teacher and the pupil and occurs during a certain definable activity. Going by the perception of Brubacher (1987), teaching is an arrangement and manipulation of a situation in which an individual will seek to overcome and from which he will learn in the course of doing so. Going by the definition of Collins, teaching is the work that a teacher does in helping students to learn. In the language of Oxford, to teach is to impart knowledge to or instruct someone as to how to do something. To sum it up, K. Mohan sees teaching as an acronym spelt out as follows:

***T-****Transferring the knowledge;* ***E****-Enlightening with the present living conditions* ***A****- Aligning with portion and real life;* ***C-*** *Character building;* ***H-*** *Healing touch offer;* ***I****- Involvement with the students in study* ***N*** *- Nurturing the thoughts into reality;* ***G*** *- Giving a final shape (www.indiastudychannel.com).*

**Brief History of Arabic and Islamic Education in Nigeria**

History of Arabic and Islamic education cannot be discussed without a primary reference to Islam. This is as a result of high premium placed by the Qur’ān on education and intellectualism. Knowledge, learning and education with its importance occupy a significant position in Islam as expressed in over 800 portions in the Qur’ān ([https://education.stateuniversity.com](about:blank), p. 1). Thus, the influence of the Qur’ān makes Arabic and Islamic education uniquely different from other types of educational theory and practice. Basically, reading and writing for the purpose of maximizing the full blessings of the Qur’ān motivate Muslims to learn the art of reading and writing in Arabic and as such Arabic and Islamic education derives its origin from a symbiotic relationship with religious instructions. (([https://education.stateuniversity.com](about:blank), p. 1)

Coming to replicate the above in Nigeria, Fafunwa (1995:pp.50-72) traces the evolution of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria to the early fourteenth century’s Mali traders and scholars, who in the course of their migration to northern states such as Kano, came with some books on Islamic Theology and Jurisprudence. Not only that, he also notes that during the reign of Yaqub (1452C.E. – 1463C.E.), some Muslim scholars from Timbuktu came to Kano to teach and preach Islam. This development, according to him, later witnessed the movement of the famous scholar known as al-Maghili to Katsina, a citadel of Arabic and Islamic learning during the fifteenth century, from which many scholars emerged (Adeyemi 2016:197). Thus, borrowing the language of Davidson (1990: 61), the history of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria is as old as the history of the spread of Islam to the region.

Going by the above, two types of Qur’ānic schools identified as tablet-school and higher- school came into existence in Nigeria. As the former is for beginners, the latter embraces all aspects of Arabic and Islamic Studies and thus makes it accessible to advanced students. At the embryonic stage of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria, Alikali (1967:p.11) notes that its teachers basically depended on charity for their living. These teachers were from the Northern part of the Country where the teaching and learning of the Qur’ān and Arabic Language started. This poor standard of their living, according to Alkali, reduced their status to that of a mere beggar occupying a socially low status. As time went on, the system became improved upon with proliferation of Qur’ānic schools in or outside the mosque as it was done in the oldest Muslim University of Al-Azhar in Cairo. This development culminated in thousands of Qur’ānic and Arabic schools located either in mosques, private houses or premises specially built for this purpose in Northern and Southern Nigeria.

It becomes necessary to state here that the introduction of Western oriented education by Christian missionaries served as a wake-up call to Muslim elites who as a result, agitated for establishment of Muslim schools where Western education alongside Arabic and Islamic Studies were/are taught. Notable Muslim missionary organizations rose to that challenge by building numerous primary and secondary schools to actualise their aim of not losing Muslim children to Christianity in their quest for Western education. (NTI: 1983). This heralded the beginning of a new dawn for Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria, and today the condition of the twin subjects of Arabic and Islamic Studies has changed as evident in the products of the subjects working in different parastatals apart from the educational sector in the Country.

**Teaching and Learning of Arabic/Islamic Studies Under Religious Education**

The provision for teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies is enshrined in the National Curricula for religious education. The curricula, as it were, evolved/evolve overtime as a reflection of needs, perceptions and historical development for societies concerned. The syllabus for religious education under which Arabic and Islamic Studies are categorised was drawn up by the State and the Federal Ministries of education as far back as 1950’s. As at that time, the syllabus was being used to prepare students for the West African School Certificate Examinations, specifically in Islamic and Christian Religious Knowledge. Arabic, as at then, was being indirectly taught in Islamic Religious Knowledge, by a way of engaging traditional *Mallams* who passed through Arabic Teachers Colleges to translate available Arabic materials into English for teaching Islamic Religious Knowledge. This was the situation of the twin subjects of Arabic and Islamic Studies between 1968 and 1970 to be precise (Aisha Lemu: 2002). With the production of enough English resource materials in Islamic Religious Knowledge, the Subject became much easier to teach and also gained acceptability and availability at post-secondary level of education. With this development, the Arabic traditional *Mallams* being used to teach Islamic Religious Knowledge were gradually faced out and replaced by their English-speaking counterparts who were young teachers and basically products of the mainstream educational system (Fafunwa 1995).

Outside of schools established by Muslim organizations such as the Ansarud-Deen Society Ahmadiyyah Movement, Jama’atul Islamiyyah and Zumratul Islamiyyah where Arabic was taught as far backas 1937, Arabic as a teaching subject became recognized in the Nigerian Teaching Curriculum under the National Policy on Language Education (Aisha Lemu: 2002). From 1970’s onwards, government began to take official interest in, and make policy pronouncement on the Policy on Education (NERDC: National Policy on Education (1988). In that document, the Federal Government for the first time laid it down as a policy for the whole Country that in primary school which lasts six years, each child must study two languages which are his mother tongue if available for study or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile and English. In the Junior Secondary School, the child, going by the dictate of the document, must study three languages which are his mother tongue or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile, English Language and just any one of the three major indigenous languages in the country namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In the Senior Secondary School as well, the child was compelled to study two languages which are an indigenous language and English Language (NERDC: National Policy on Education (1988)). French and Arabic therefore exist under this policy as language options at both the Junior and the Senior Secondary School levels. Thus, the emergence and official recognition of Arabic Language in the Nigerian Teaching Curriculum and on the Educational stage of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

**Progress and Prospects of Arabic and Islamic Education in Nigeria**

There is no gain without pain says a popular adage. Despite various problems and difficulties which characterised the journey of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria, the twin subjects were able to surmount the challenges to record significant and tremendous fortunes today. Before going into most of these challenges in the next segment, it must be noted here that the major fortune that has come the way of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria is the provision made in the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1993), for Arabic and Islamic Studies to be studied at all levels of education. Adeyemi (1996 pp.28-29) lends credence to the early predicament of Arabic Language in Nigeria by lamenting that for years in the history of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria, graduates from Qur’ānic schools had neither future nor a specific parameter for measuring their level of educational attainment, making it difficult to fix salaries for them. This idiosyncrasy, according to the source, was due to the fact that the Qur’ānic and Islamic schools at that time had no uniform curriculum.

The above painted condition changed for better with the establishment of the school for Arabic Studies (S.A.S) in 1947 for training of Arabic and Qur’ānic teachers for primary schools. Subsequently, similar programmes were designed for post-primary Qur’ānic and Arabic teachers (Adeyemi: 2016). This gesture today has been extended to the post-secondary level of education in Nigeria. This is also evident in a number of Nigerian Colleges of Education and universities offering Arabic and Islamic Studies at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. This does not only provide opportunities for Arabic and Islamic Studies to be recognised like other foreign languages such as French and German, it also creates employment opportunities for graduates in the fields of Arabic and Islamic Studies beyond the four walls of classroom.

**Wrong Approaches to Teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies**

Previous studies have dwelled extensively on the problems facing Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria. Such problems as documented by literature include lack of unified syllabus, inadequate qualified teachers, unavailability of relevant textbooks and Government’s negative disposition to the subjects. As apt as the identified problems among others are, it is our submission that that a wrong approach to teaching the subjects is greater than all of the problems. This submission is hinged on the fact that if adequate provisions are made to address the problems militating against the survival of the twin subjects, the tendency for the subjects to remain backward and be treated with inferiority will still be there if a proper and pragmatic approach to teaching them are not institutionalized. It is on this premise that this segment aims at examining some wrong approaches employed in teaching the subjects. These approaches will be discussed in a way to be able to “right” the “wrong” and also serve as a good background to further suggest better teaching methodologies otherwise referred to as pragmatic approach in the title of this paper.

First and foremost, teaching without adequate preparations is a bad procedure often employed by most teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Note that **a teacher without a lesson note only has something to say but nothing to teach!** The blame put at the door stop of non- availability of required text books is no more tenable in any way. Without necessarily having access to hard copies of required materials, a lot can be found on the internet.

It was also observed that most teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies fail to deliver basically because they fail to collaborate and network. Teaching without networking to keep pace with the new trends in the teaching, learning and examination of the subjects is tantamount to waste of time and energy in the classroom as it will have no positive impact on the students’ performances. How soon and regular do examining bodies change their literature texts in Arabic among other languages examined by them? Most teachers of Arabic at the secondary school level are not aware of this trend! Then, the “what” of their teaching is questionable “?” Changing texts from time to time becomes necessary to inculcate good reading habit in the teachers and students of subjects like Arabic Language. Besides, it is not everything in a text that is examinable, however wonderfully written. Thus, the need to change literature texts as soon as the projected time for exhausting the examinable contents of such texts lapse. This, as applies to NECO and WAEC is every five years.

Another observed wrong approach which permeates all levels of education is teaching of Arabic in a language different from Arabic or and in non-Arabic speaking areas of domicile. This approach poses a serious set-back to acquiring proficiency in the learning of language generally and Arabic as a focus of our discussion.

Teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies without taking cognizance of their rudiments is another wrong teaching approach observed. It must be noted that the basic rudiment for learning and teaching Islamic Studies is little knowledge of Arabic why that of Arabic is appreciable ability to read, write and understand Arabic, using Qur’ānic readability as a starting point. Only God knows the number of Islamic Studies teachers who cannot read the Qur’ān at all or fluently and teachers of Arabic who cannot read simple Arabic passages fluently! Why is it practically difficult to bring out the competence in a student of Arabic who has no simplest idea of the language before enrolling to learn the language? The answer is because most teachers do not start from these rudiments in the teaching of the subjects under review. This explains why most candidates run away from questions which require to be answered preferably in Arabic under Qur’ān and Hadith in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

We also observe passivism and inferiority complex on the part of teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies as against activism and self- confidence in the school environment. Most of them have no passion and love for the subjects as teachers. How then would they create interest of the subjects in their students? Arabic is a language like English and French. How competent is the teacher of Arabic to be able to use other languages to simplify the teaching of Arabic in the class?

Demonstration of the “beast” erroneously equated with Arabic education with the use of cane and wearing of unfriendly look in the class is a phenomenon which still exists among teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies. This practice distracts students’ attention from the lesson and it becomes difficult for the teacher to enhance the enrolment figure of the subjects. Kudos to Nigerian universities such as Kwara State University (KWASU) that now make Arabic a language option under General Subjects (GNS). In KWASU to be precise, eitherArabic, French or Portuguese must be offered as a compulsory course in 200 level and must be passed as a requirement for awarding a degree in the University! If the question may be asked, what is the percentage of students going for Arabic option compared to both French and Portuguese?

Lack of dynamism and ability to garnish the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies with various ingredients of dynamism is completely missing in the teaching methodology of most teachers of the subjects. Do we encourage debates and conversations in Arabic? Do we embark on excursions to major sites and monuments taught in the subjects? Do we organise drama to be performed by the students in Arabic Language or even in teaching some historical aspects of Islamic Studies?

The most worrisome approach, on a final note, is the observed lack of character and integrity to drive home to students, the teachings of Islam taught in the classroom. How do we describe teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies aiding and abetting malpractice during examinations and those who join others in defiling young and innocent female students under their tutelage? Actions teach better than utterances! Both should go in the same direction. Teaching of religious studies by people of questionable character amounts to efforts in futility!

**Pragmatic Approach to Teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies**

In addition to different pragmatic approaches inherent in the wrong methodologies to teaching the twin subjects examined in the last segment, this segment will deliberately employ a test- developer cum test-administrator approach in enumerating major ways of ensuring a result-oriented teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies, having developed and administered tests in the two subjects for over a decade in the West African Examinations Council. Basically, most of the techniques to be highlighted here are to enhance performances of Arabic and Islamic Studies students in public examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). These teaching techniques include but not limited to the following:

* Teaching in line with the content of the teaching curriculum and more importantly the Council’s Examination Syllabus in each of Arabic and Islamic Studies.
* Using the Chief Examiners’ Reports as a guide to improve on teaching methodology and train students on good answering techniques.
* Revising past question papers with students in preparation for examinations in the subjects.
* Giving preference to Arabic texts during teaching of selected *suwar* and *ahādith* in Islamic Studies. Transliteration comes next to Arabic texts mostly in terms of scoring/marks.
* Engage in conscious teaching of basic rules of English Grammar during Islamic Studies class.
* Correct spelling of terms and terminologies is sacrosanct for effective teaching of Islamic Studies.
* Familiarity with new set of literature texts in Arabic as it changes from time to time. The texts are now harmonized by NECO and WAEC to reduce the number of literature texts to be studied by students preparing for the two examinations at the same time.

To close this segment, it must be borne in mind that to further enhance the students’ performances in public examinations through pragmatic teaching; various techniques should be employed as they evolve out of regular appraisal a methodology in juxtaposition with its outcome in the performance of students. In respect of that, consideration of these seven tips is imperative in the course teaching activities- **encourage contact between students;** **develop reciprocity and cooperation among students;** **give prompt feedbacks;** **encourage active learning; emphasize time on given tasks; communicate high expectations; and respect diverse talents and ways of learning** ([www.ut.edu](about:blank): The University of Tenessee Chattannooga: Walker Centre for Teaching and Learning).

**Recommendations**

Teaching as profession is what teachers do for a living and therefore, what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. Hence, the following recommendations to further facilitate a pragmatic approach and result-oriented delivery in the class-room:

* Sacrifice to participate in the coordination and marking exercises of WAEC and NECO and it will be of help. Never mind the token being paid or the herculean task of marking, the experience and the exchange of ideas among subject experts from diverse backgrounds cannot be quantified in monetary terms.
* Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies should constitute a taskforce for joint and collaborative book writing in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The books in circulation for consultation by teachers and students of Arabic and Islamic Studies are almost the same old books written by the teachers of our grand-parents. Despite the new trends evolving in the subjects in terms of syllabus and curriculum reviews, new ideas in line with the new thinking are not forthcoming.
* Self-development in the areas of postgraduate studies and participation in conferences and seminars for the required pragmatic result.
* Knowledge update on regular basis in the twin subjects with the aid of computer literacy. The level of computer literacy among teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies is abysmally and unspeakably low. There are lot of resource materials on the net awaiting consultation.
* In addition to the above, access the free online WAEC Syllabus, past Chief Examiners’ Reports and Final Marking Schemes in each of Arabic and Islamic Studies among other subjects. Besides, every school, at the point of registration, is given a CD containing Chief Examiners’ Reports of all subjects in the immediate past examination. This document highlights candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in the examination with suggested remedies to overcome the observed weaknesses. This document should be a teaching aid which every teacher of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the secondary school level must have and study every year it is circulated.
* Exploration of all possible avenues to secure approval to take students of Arabic to the Arabic Village at Ngala, Maiduguri for a reasonable part of their stay in school, secondary school inclusive. Languages are better learnt in the midst of native and indigenous speakers.

**Conclusion**

As much as the focus of the paper was majorly on Arabic and Islamic Studies and at the secondary school level, it must be noted that its thrust is universal across subjects and levels of education in terms of application. Therefore, for any pragmatic approach to be well driven in the teaching of a particular subject or course, the attitude of its teacher matters. Thus, the attitude of a teacher to a subject/course determines the altitude of that subject/course in the comity of subjects/courses. However, Arabic and Islamic Studies for students seeking admission to study courses like Sharī‘ah Law, Arabic Language and Literature and Arabic and Islamic Studies are as crucial as Physics and Chemistry for those seeking admission to study courses such as Engineering, Medicine and Pharmacy. Be proud of your discipline, stand tall in the midst of other professionals and profess your fields of study. Considering the level of expertise and all-inclusive nature of knowledge gathered in the process of studying Arabic and Islamic Studies, I therefore proudly choose to describe teachers of the twin subjects as Arabic “Engineers” and Islamic “Scientists” as the case may be. Any aspect of the duo disciplines one wishes to profess, one should use ‘Arabic’ or ‘Islamic’ as an adjective to qualify it and one will be good to go!

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