

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE HISTORY OF ARABIC/ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND WESTERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

What is never in doubt is that Islam had established itself firmly in Nigeria long before the arrival of the British missionaries. Through the influence of Islam, the North attained an unprecedented level of progress and civilisation. It is still controversial as to whether or not the British brought reading and writing to Nigeria, since before their arrival, the Muslims in the North were well advanced culturally in the reading and writing of Arabic.¹

While the development and advancement in Arabic and Islamic education continued, the Europeans who were the colonial masters set in motion the machinery for the extermination of all other religions, particularly Islam, which had stood as a stumbling block to colonial machinations when they came to Nigeria in the 19th century.² The Muslim Northerners were the first group of people to reject outright the white man's education when it was first introduced to them. They realised that the main objective of such education was to bring Muslims into the fold of Christianity. The colonial masters soon realised the attitude of Muslims towards the missionary education and introduced what is known as "Secular education". Unfortunately, the introduction of this system of education led to a relative decline in the status of Arabic education in Nigeria.³

Introduction of the Arabic Language in Nigeria

Arabic is by far the most important of all Semitic languages existing in the world today, some of the others being Hebrew, Aramaic and Phoenician. Not only that, it is one of the most recognised languages in the world because it is spoken by over two hundred million people across Asia, the Arabian Gulf, Africa and the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, in relation to the number of speakers and extent of its influence, Arabic must be regarded as one of the most important world languages of the world today.

Consequently, however, the introduction of the Arabic language in areas outside the Arabian Peninsula, such as Nigeria is closely related to the spread of Islam in the country during the 14th century. The religion of Islam was accepted willingly by a considerable number of both rulers and ruled in the northern part of the country. Thus, Islam became not only their religion but also their total way of life. Arabic, the language of the Qur'ân, became the second language of Nigeria. During the 16th and 17th centuries, Kano and Katsina became famous centres of learning for students from the present-day Nigeria and Niger Republic to learn Arabic and study Islam. Sokoto also became a major centre for education, culture and civilisation.

Trade connections had long existed between the areas of North Africa particularly called the *Maghrib* by the Arabs and the towns around the great Sahara Desert of the South. That was before the advent of Islam in Africa.⁴ The routes popularly known for this trade include those which started from Marrakech to Tilmsan, Tunis, Tripoli, Egypt and connected with the great Sahara Desert in the south to the main trade centres of West Africa, like the Old Ghana, Timbuktu, the Hausa States and Kanem-Bornu (in Nigeria).⁵

This trade connection between the Arabs and the people of West Africa started in the 7th century and continued to improve after the 11th century, becoming the first root of the Arabic language in Nigeria. These trade and language connections continued even after the spread of Islam to West Africa. Trade, as we know, is a process which requires language as a communicating vehicle between the buyers and sellers for successful transaction, so without doubt, the Arabic language would have been one of the languages of transaction in that particular period.

Thus the trade connection was what brought the Arabic language to the old Hausa states and Kanem-Bornu empires of the present Nigeria in the first instance. The inhabitants of these areas, with whom the Arabs traded, acquired and used some Arabic words and expressions, which was how Arabic spread into their local language after the introduction of Islam. The presence of Arabic words and expressions in these languages up till today testifies to this assertion.

Moreover, after Islam was introduced into the old Kanem-Bornu and the Hausa states, trade continued to play a very crucial and important role in the spread of the Arabic language all over the country of what is now Nigeria. To this effect, Muslims became more aware of the need to learn more of this language in order to carry out day to day activities.

Islam is also a factor which contributed to the spread of the Arabic language in Nigeria. Islam has made the Arabic language its official language. Being the language of the Qur'ân, everyone needs to learn this language in earnest in order to perform his religious duties. This is the singular reason why the spread of Islam far and wide went hand in hand with the diffusion of Arabic language so, with the advent of Islam in Nigeria, the learning of Arabic took off.

Coupled with the factors mentioned earlier on, visits of individual and groups of scholars also had a great influence on the inhabitants. Some of

these trader-scholars stayed for some period of time and taught people their religion and, as far as the Arabic language and Islam were concerned, they left a great impact on any town visited.

Also, pilgrimage to Makkah has had its own contribution in the spread of the Arabic language in Nigeria. Many Muslims made visits to Makkah and Medina, usually on foot. During this journey, some of them engaged in trading for survival, while some embarked on teaching in all the towns they passed through. This contact with the Arab world increased their knowledge of the Arabic language and by the time they arrived at their various home towns, they had become erudite scholars. Some of them even brought back many Arabic books to their cities and some stayed in many towns on their way back home, to teach for a number of years. An example of this was a learned scholar, Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad bin AqTM As-SinhâjTM, the grandfather of the famous Ahmad Baba at-Timbukti, who passed through Hausaland on his way to and from the Holy land, and stayed and taught at Kano.⁶

Those scholars who visited the trade centres to transact business brought a number of books written in Arabic with them. This was of great assistance in the dissemination of the Arabic language in Nigeria. Many indigenous scholars copied from the books and passed the copies from hand to hand. A good example of this was that of Shaykh Muhammad al-Maghili who came to Kano and Katsina with a number of Arabic books, in addition to the one he had written himself for the King of Kano. Also, some Fulanis came to Kano from Mali in the reign of King Ya'q**≠**b, the father of King Muhammad Rumfa, and they brought with them many Arabic books on theology and language (*TawTMd wal-lughah*).⁷

The impact of the Jihâd of Uthman Dan Fodio in 1804, which paved the way for the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, crowned the efforts of the early scholars. The Arabic language became the official and governmental language. It also became the lingua franca of the élite in the whole caliphate. Many Arabic books were written and Qur'anic schools were established in towns and villages. Eventually, Arabic became the language of education.

According to Malik S. H. A., "In the modern times the importance of Arabic as a language transcends the religious sphere. This will be clear if we realise that in the 9th and 10th centuries, which were accompanied by an enormous literary output, the Arabic language acquired a universal character. As the medium of intellectual expression it had a general appeal not only among Muslims but also among non-Muslims."⁸

From what we have said above, it can be seen that the attraction to the Arabic language has been influenced not only by aesthetic and religious appreciation but also by cultural considerations and by a strong historical consciousness.⁹

The Take-Off of Western Education in Nigeria

The fact that Nigeria's educational system has been framed by the British colonialists to serve and sustain their interests has never been challenged

either by the British or its Nigerian agents. Many historians have endeavoured to probe into this history, highlighting the system's crypto-Christian and neo-colonial foundations.¹⁰

The history of the Western educational system in Nigeria has witnessed three phases of development. It began with the Christian Missionary phase, which passed into a system in which the missionary along with the colonial masters, had control of it. The educational system finally came into the control of the 'native' in a crypto-Christian and neo-colonially structured entity. In all three phases, the Christian-cum-colonial interests have been the main interests served by the "Western educational system" in Nigeria. The realisation of such a pretext by the Northern Nigerians and Muslim communities in the South go a long way in explaining the resistance to, and the slow sceptical development of, Western education in Nigeria.¹¹ An example of this can be seen in the reaction of the Emir of Kano (Emir Aliyu) who was bold and openly hostile to the white missionaries and addressed them in the following words when they paid a visit to him:

We do not want you. You can go. I give you three hundred days to prepare—I give you a hundred donkeys to carry your loads back to Zaria, and we never wish to see you here again.¹²

It was also reported that the Sultan of Sokoto, in 1902, wrote to Sir Frederick Lugard showing how the Muslim rulers, right from the outset, had vowed strongly not to allow or welcome either the Christian missionaries or the British Colonial Administration because of their aims:

Between us and you there are no dealings except as between Muslims and Unbelievers, War, as God Almighty has enjoined on us. There is no power or strength save in God on High.¹³

The period from 1515, the year the Portuguese Catholic Missionaries set up a school in the Oba of Benin's palace, to 1900 was punctuated by active missionary activities. During this era, education was the sole responsibility of the Christian missionaries. Education was free but with costly strings attached—conversion and what came with it. Education was therefore synonymous with Christian evangelism ostensibly geared towards helping the benighted African (Nigerian in particular) to accept Christianity as the means of achieving Western civilisation.¹⁴ If Muslims kept away from Christianity they could stop themselves from becoming prey to Western vices but by doing so they lost the opportunity of acquiring a Western-oriented education whose custodians then were the Christian missionaries.¹⁵ William Boyd, in his analysis of the objective of such a Christian missionary-controlled education system said:

... it must be kept in mind that the church undertook the business of education not because it regarded education as

good in itself but because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents and especially its clergy, as much of the former learning as was required for the study of the sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties.¹⁶

In order to achieve their aims of converting Muslims and animists to Christianity, most of the schools established by the missionaries were boarding schools. This was because they felt that if children were to develop along 'civilised' lines, their daily life must be controlled, supervised and directed along the proper Christian lines. That is if a 'raw' African is to be 'manufactured' into a "civilised black European Christian", he must be isolated from the evil influences of his pagan or Islamic past and present.¹⁷ The operation of such crypto-Christian education systems under the cover of secular education in Northern Nigeria started in the latter part of the nineteenth century, some time in 1865 when Dr. Baikie of the Church Mission Society (CMS) founded a settlement with a school attached to it at Lokoja. But the proclamation of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria on 27th December 1889, and the consequent appointment of Lord Lugard as High Commissioner on 1st January 1900, combined for the first time, Christianity, commerce and colonialism to open the North to the "three-in-one civilisers."¹⁸

At Bida, the CMS dubiously opened a school for local *Mallams* (Islamic Scholars) to enable them to write Hausa and Nupe in Roman script. Though Lugard insisted that the school be run on a secular basis, the dubious nature of the missionaries to attempt to convert the *Mallams* woefully led to the failure of the Bida School, and dashed hopes for an easy conversion of Muslims into Christianity. Subsequently, Dr. W. R. S. Miller, also of the CMS, opened another school in Zaria for 'education', yet again for the *Mallams* and sons of chiefs. Though Miller was also warned by Lugard to moderate his missionary zeal in his educational endeavours, he could not help but use the school as a vehicle for the conversion of Muslims.

On one hand the British imperialists kept on giving promises to the Muslim Emirs that they would not interfere in their chosen form of religion (Islam), while on the other, they encouraged the missionaries to establish their centres in the Muslim areas. In 1903, Lord Lugard promised that his rule would be fair and that his government would not interfere with Muslim religion (Islam). The Christian missionaries interpreted Lord Lugard's promise only to mean that Lugard had not promised the Muslim Emirs that he would exclude Christian missionaries, only that he would not force Christianity upon Nigerians.¹⁹

By the time Dr. W. R. S. Miller opened the school in Zaria, he had introduced a textbook to the students called *Labarin Allah*, a Hausa translation of St. Mark, and some Bible stories translated into Hausa and Nupe, all in an attempt to misguide the Muslims and introduce Christianity into the lives of these *Mallams* under the pretext of making them read and write Hausa or Nupe in the Roman script.²⁰ To this effect, one of the

secretaries of the CMS wrote, "As we shall use the gospel as our textbooks and carefully chosen texts as writing copies, I feel it will be very definitely a missionary opportunity. Also, if the people see these *Mallams* coming to us for teaching, we shall possibly later on be able to open a school on more definite missionary lines."²¹ Though Lugard had been warning the missionaries to run their schools in as secular way as possible, he also had the intention of using the schools as a means of realising his colonial objectives. As Lord Macaulay, the Minister of Education in the colony of India, forthrightly puts it, the whole purpose of Education is to train at least a class of persons, Indian in blood but English in opinion, morals and intellect. And what was good for the Indian colony was no doubt good for Nigeria. Such an education was therefore designed for the subjugation and subordination of our people. It also prepared an effective ground for our exploitation in all fields of life. The irony of such a system of education is that it makes one physically free while one is simultaneously mentally enslaved. Such mental slavery is worse than the situation of a slave caught, sold and transported to Europe during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The implementation of colonial-cum-missionary education for the production of the mentally enslaved attracted the attention of no less a person than Sarkin Musulumi Attahiru Ahmadu, who composed a poem which expresses the feelings of all Muslims to date against the covert and overt strategies and policies of colonialism and imperialism in Nigeria.²² These attitudes consequently caused the colonialists to make their policy public. Sir F. Lugard had to declare that:

We would not interfere with pre-colonial systems of government but to make it more humane and democratic. Our policy was to support the traditional rulers, their councillors and courts, their customs and traditions in so far as these were not repugnant to the British ideals of humanity and justice.²³

With the idea of making the pre-colonial system more 'humane' and 'democratic', secularism as a political philosophy with its own secular legal code, the 'common law', was introduced. All the emirs and chiefs who resisted such policies were either killed or deposed and a new set of emirs and chiefs installed on the terms that they were ready to take orders from the British political officers. This new set of emirs also swore an oath of allegiance in the name of Allah and His Prophet to "truly serve his majesty and representative of the High Commissioner."²⁴

Then the colonial masters structured education to serve, support and sustain all their imperialist designs, the goal of which was to produce people who could diligently serve the interests of the imperialists in their thoughts, opinions, morals and actions without necessarily being physically and politically under colonial bondage. Such products are people who could only see and understand their local problems and their solutions in terms of European realities and perspectives. And tragic are the people we see

around us today. Through the colonial masters' structured education, a great deal of lethargy and inaction crept into the Muslim *Ulamā'* and the Muslim rulers. Arabic education and Islamic studies became the cinderellas of all the subjects. Islam merely remained in the form of prayers and fasting and the real spirit became almost non-existent. The traditional learning, for which the *Ulamā'* were well known, declined gradually. The *Makarantas* (Muslims traditional schools) did not find patrons to help the students or their *Mallams* and they were left under the supervision of the native administration. There was "no prescribed syllabus in the schools of higher learning."²⁵

On the other hand, the teaching of the English Language, the language of the missionaries, and the Bible gained momentum. If someone was educated in Arabic, he was no longer considered as an educated man but was merely referred to as a *gambari* or *Malim*. But if one could speak a few words of English Language, he was considered to be a knowledgeable person, while a person learned in Arabic could not find a job since the new rulers' administrative language was not Arabic but English or French. An Arabist looking for a job would be interrogated openly "of what benefit is your course ((Kewu) Yor.)? What can you do with it?" If anyone learnt a few tracts of the Bible in English, he could become an administrative officer or clerical officer under the West African Company or the British or French Governments.

With the coming of Christian Missionaries and Christianity, there gradually crept in the new form of Western way of life with its vices. Drinking of alcoholic liquor became rampant, and other forms of decadent Western culture spread among the African youth—dancing, gambling, free sexual relationships, tight dresses and other pernicious habits.

Although Christianity came late, it came with all the facilities of the colonial masters, from anti-malarial drugs to the material means to bribe the natives, health services to the highest government positions. One of the first things that the Christian missionary organisations did in Africa was to penetrate deep into remote towns and villages. With facilities available and the missionaries' needs properly taken care of by their home countries, they worked hard to establish a small chapel, a Sunday school and a small dispensary in each village. English and French became the languages of public administration and the mediums of instruction in the schools of the British and French colonies of West Africa—Nigeria being an integral part of that area. Hence, those who were trained in these languages got government employment. The Christian missionaries thus paved the way to provide their administration with clerks well-versed in English and French languages, and the colonial government equally helped them to spread the Christian gospel. The Muslims of Nigeria resented the white men, their religion and culture, and hence did not send their children to Christian schools for fear of conversion which explains why they lagged behind in getting their fair share in the administration of the country. Thus, local political power became vested in the Christian-educated élite who have multiplied in numbers as time has passed. They thus became the masters of the destiny of their people and rulers over the Muslim majorities or

minorities. Even after the independence of this country they have continued to be the masters of their destiny. This is the major reason why Muslim-majority countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Chad and Sierra-Leone, to mention but a few, are ruled by such Western-educated élite. In countries where Muslims are in a minority, it is quite natural that the Christian-educated élite should be the rulers of the people. In case of an attempt by a Muslim to rule in the countries where an Western-educated élite dominated and where Muslims formed a minority, resentment would be so much against such a ruler that the entire forces of Western Christianity would join hands together to unseat him from power and the attempt would fail.

This promotion of Western secular education had a profound effect on the position of Arabic education, both psychologically and structurally. In fact, its introduction into Nigerian schools by the colonial masters led to a relative decline in the status of Arabic education in Nigeria, as the affairs of Arabic education were left under the supervision of individual proprietors.

Arabic within the General Education System

It may sound ironical to note that Arabic learning has not been properly absorbed into the education system in the country. This assertion may be contested due to the fact that Arabic is one of the subjects taught in public schools. However, it should be pointed out that the mere appearance of Arabic on the timetable of the public schools is not enough to ensure its perfect absorption into the schools' curriculum. The factors responsible for its imperfect absorption are many and varied,²⁶ and such problems militating against the progress of Arabic studies in Nigeria have been studied by researchers. The problems centre on the scarcity or non-availability of relevant books, the nonchalant attitude on the part of the government, the poor position and attitude of Arabic teachers and the poor attitude of some parents. These problems can be elaborated as follows:²⁷

(a) The problem of the dearth of Arabic books has been with us for long. This has been aggravated in recent times by restrictions on the importation of foreign books, scarcity of enterprising, standard Arabic printing presses, inflation, and the scarcity of indigenous Arabic writers. From the manner in which Nigerian Muslim bodies handle this problem, it seems that most of them merely pay lip service to the Arabic language. In fact, without adequate books, Arabic is in jeopardy.

(b) The various governments in Nigeria have not done much to help the development of Arabic studies. The Federal Government and the State governments know too well the great potentialities of Arabic in Nigeria—as a language of diplomacy, international relations, literacy, national historical studies and Islamic Studies, as well as the language of the Shuwa Arabs, an ethnic group in Borno State of Nigeria.

Yet, Arabic is regarded as optional and has inadequate teaching periods in our schools. Staff and books are also inadequate. To remedy this situation, the government should come out in full force to train Arabic

specialists in our universities both at home and abroad. In addition to this, there should be an aggressive recruitment of Arabic teachers to join the few on the job at present. The Government should also take the initiative of ensuring that books are produced cheaply; Arabic should also be given a preferential treatment by both the government and well-meaning patriots by regarding Arabic as "an endangered subject" that needs adequate attention.

(c) On the position and attitude of some Arabic teachers in our schools, a lot needs to be done to put them on the right track. The teachers are few where they are available at all. In most cases, it is the already overburdened Islamic Studies teacher who is compelled to teach Arabic. In some cases, he takes it upon himself to teach Arabic in addition to his normal workload in Islamic Studies. In this type of arrangement, one should not expect the teacher to be able to give his best.

Also, some of the Arabic teachers, though knowledgeable, are not devoted enough to cope with the challenges of the new syllabus in our schools. They allow themselves to be drowned in apathy and frustration which are a general malady in society today. The average Arabic teacher (at least with reference to his Islamic connection) should know that his reward for teaching well is both in this world and the Hereafter. This belief should give him some incentive to work harder and succeed where some other teachers fail miserably. This should also make him shun all immoral behaviour that may tarnish his good image and destroy his laudable efforts.

Lack of self-confidence among some of the teachers also hinders the progress and development of Arabic in Nigeria. Perhaps because our society is dominated by Western values, many people look down on Arabists who do not know English and consider them as second-class citizens. Sometimes, such people do not help themselves; rather they exhibit an inferiority complex, where, in order to be 'accepted' in society, they are sometimes subservient to their bosses and colleagues. The solution to this problem for them is to deliberately assert themselves by studying English, and, considering the complexity in Arabic syntax and morphology, one knows that learning to communicate effectively in English is easier.

(d) Some parents have their own share of blame in their nonchalant attitude to the progress their children make in Arabic studies. Many a time, students are not given adequate encouragement by their parents. Can you imagine the statement of a parent who said that instead of allowing his son to study Arabic in any higher institution, he would either give him as an apprentice to an auto-mobile mechanic or send him to his farm to cultivate land? Also, some Arabists often behave as if they studied the course out of frustration or by mistake. This is very discouraging. For positive continuity, this ugly situation should be quickly checked and well addressed. If it continues, such scholars should see themselves as active contributors to the slow death of the course and their attitude should be deemed as the height of thoughtlessness and folly.

Prospects of the Arabic Language in Nigeria

Considering the role and place of Arabic before and after colonisation, one discovers that Arabic has achieved a lot, to the extent that other nations have had to copy Nigeria's educational and scientific achievements.²⁸ Muslims, according to George Sarton, as quoted by P.K. Hitti, have produced great learned Muslims in all branches of knowledge.

The main task of mankind was accomplished by Muslims. The greatest philosopher, Alfarabi, was a Muslim; the greatest Mathematicians, Abu Kamil and Ibrahim Ibn Sinan, were Muslims; the greatest geographer and encyclopedist, al-Mas'udi was a Muslim; the greatest historian, Al-Tabari, was a Muslim.²⁹

Reputable Muslim scholars have been produced in other branches of Islamic education and other subjects, such as the science of Islamic monotheism, exegesis of the Qur'ân, Islamic Law, Islamic Jurisprudence, Arabic, and varieties of sciences and literature including Philosophy, Medicine, Astronomy, to mention but a few. Such literary and scientific contributions by Muslims have not only been the foundation stones for the establishment of the early institutions of learning from the 8th to the 13th centuries, Muslims have also led the caravan of learning unceasingly. Such literary and scientific contributions were achieved in Arabic, not in any other languages—the language of learning, instruction, literacy and scientific contributions in all Muslim lands was Arabic.

Through the tradition of learning in Islam, Arabic as a language of the Holy Qur'ân has become the lingua franca of the multi-lingual Muslim world. It has succeeded by means of its proven potentialities in assimilating the best of intellectual works of Muslims and has played a decisive role in the internal integration of the Muslim world. Arabic is, without doubt, the language through which all other literary contributions have been made by Muslims from time immemorial and it is the only medium through which Qur'ân, —ad™th and other relevant branches of Islamic education, can be understood. Any language other than Arabic will give a corrupted or distorted meaning of Qur'ân, —ad™th and other Islamic literature. Doing justice to knowledge developed in a particular language means studying it in the language. In appreciating the value of Arabic, a scholar asserts:

From the sixth century A.D. to the present day, there has been a continuous tradition of literary achievement in Arabic—the continuity partly being in the language itself, which in the Twentieth Century is structurally the same as it was in the sixth. As to space, this literature originated in pre-Islamic Arabic. With the coming and spread of Islam, it became the literature of all the regions that comprised the Islamic world, irrespective of native tongue or race, and for many centuries, it

was the literature on which were nurtured all the regions that comprised the Islamic world.³⁰

Further, the scholar explains:

For more than three centuries it was the literature of the whole Islamic World, Arab and non-Arab contributing to it and taking pride in its excellence.³¹

The Qur'ân cannot be divorced from Arabic in the same way as Arabic cannot be separated from it. To read the Qur'ân means to learn Arabic, and to study Arabic means to be able to read and grasp the message of the Qur'ân. That all scientific and intellectual contributions in Islamic education were made in Arabic, implies that only Arabic could be essentially used as the medium of understanding it. Prof. Hamilton Gibb emphasised the importance of the Arabic language in the following words:

No one can hope to grasp the human endeavour and the grand variety of the elements that have entered into the making of Muslim culture, or to comprehend what Muslim culture really is, unless he pursues his quest through the medium of Arabic. The more that other interests obtrude themselves upon the attention of every society, the more necessary it is that, at least, of those whose task it is to mould the thought and guide the destinies of a Muslim society in the world of today should have a full and clear understanding of its roots. Only thus can society maintain that continuity which is an essential for its spiritual life, just as the succession of generations is for its physical life.³²

Relatively, therefore, the place of Arabic in relation to the Qur'ân, which emphasises the importance of Arabic as the language of Islam, can be inferred in not less than eleven places in the Holy Book. Before colonisation of Hausaland in particular and West Africa in general, Arabic had been the language of the spreading, teaching and learning of Islam and its educational system. West Africa was a multilingual subcontinent but nevertheless, Arabic became its language of unity under the banner of Islam. The rulers of the West African kingdoms embraced Islam and most of the seats of governments were under Islamic influence. In support of the role of Arabic as the language of scholarship in Islam, A. Babs Fafunwa says:

Arabic as a language contributed to an understanding of the early history and civilisation of West Africa.³³

He further says:

Beyond any doubt, Arabic is, in many respects, the classical language of the Qur'ân and therefore has great spiritual value. Indeed, the history of the teaching of Arabic throughout the Islamic world, but particularly in the non-Arab world, has been the history of the spread of Islam. This is one of the reasons why elementary Arabic and Islam were taught simultaneously.³⁴

In the seventh century, eminent scholars were produced in Hausaland and their contributions were mainly in Arabic. Scholars such as Muhammad al-Kashanwi, Muhammad Dan Masani, Abu Bakr al-Bakun, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, to mention but a few, wrote scholarly works in Arabic. To this effect, A. M. Kani says:

In the Seventh Century, Hausaland witnessed the rise and growth of local authorship and literary activity. A great number of its intellectuals started to produce their own works.³⁵

Most of the literary contributions by Sheikh Uthman, Sheikh Abdullahi and Sheikh Muhammad Bello, their helpers and relations, were in Arabic. The tradition of literary activities and contributions in Arabic became the culture of scholarship, and a higher standard of Arabic and Islamic education continued until the coming of the British to Nigeria in the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁶

The British came to Nigeria with the sole aim of domination—political, religious, cultural, social and economic. Though they refused to directly involve themselves in religious issues, indirectly the missionaries were their agents who were responsible for Christianising the colony. When they came to our land, with their concerted efforts to carry out their process of evangelisation, they undermined the indigenous languages and cultural norms of the people to achieve this. They undermined and segregated our history and religion. They imposed upon us their educational system. In other words, the system of Muslim education which had been firmly established in Hausaland and other parts of Yorubaland was not recognised by them as an educational system.

Katsina College was one of the early educational institutions in the North. Some scholars suggest that, in its early years, Arabic and Islamic instruction had a prominent place in the curriculum. As time went by, the system changed. In 1930 Katsina College broadened its scope and introduced Science and other modern subjects. The periods allotted to Arabic Studies and Qur'ânic instruction fell sharply. This demonstrated the increasing influence of British education officers who were impatient to modernise what they thought was extreme conservatism of Islam.

The British colonial masters openly segregated our system of education and imposed upon us a less serious system of so-called modern education. It is in this respect that M. Abdul-Rahman and P. Canham elaborate further:

Similarly, early attempts to encourage the broadening of the curriculum in Qur'anic Schools, as in Borno soon stopped. This was partly from lack of funds, but mainly from lack of interest on the part of the colonial authorities. From 1939 to 1960, the British administration paid less and less attention to the problem of encouraging a workable union between the Islamic and Christian Western systems of education.³⁷

In support of the above fact, Professor Haliru Binhi explains:

The present A. B. U. (Ahmadu Bello University), known before as the College of Arts and Science, was established without including in its curriculum, Arabic and Islamic Studies. A private arrangement was made to the effect that the Muslim students needed to come to me in the government College where I was teaching for religious instruction.³⁸

At that time, the College was one of the most important institutions of higher learning in the North, yet in its curriculum, provision was not made for Arabic and Islamic Studies in the syllabus. The whole Northern region could not boast more than one Islamic institution of higher learning. This was Kano Law School where Arabic and Islamic education were rigorously and deeply studied. Today in Nigeria there are Islamiyyah Schools. These are primary schools which are more formally structured than the Qur'anic schools and have a broader syllabus. They are a comparatively recent development and were originally established by private initiative to meet the growing demand for improved standards in the Qur'anic schools. They can be converted to government-recognised primary schools provided that certain conditions are fulfilled. Many Islamiyyah Schools have now been officially recognised. They follow the same syllabus as the standard primary schools except that Arabic is taught throughout and there is also emphasis on Islamic instruction.³⁹

Also, there are independent schools of Islamic higher studies called *Makarantum ilmi*, like those which flourished at least two centuries ago. These have continued to exist and were tolerated by the British who allowed the schools to pursue their course without interference.

Finally, there are the Higher Schools of Islamic Studies which have now received government recognition and financial support; for example, the School for Arabic Studies in Kano. In the past few years, several institutions have been established at various centres throughout Northern Nigeria. Their principal objective is to assist Arabic and Islamic scholars and teachers who are fully equipped to teach Islamic Studies. Millions of Nigerians are Muslims, and large numbers of them have had their basic education in a system and tradition which is in many respects different from the formal education standardised and financed by the government of the country. Islam is deeply embedded in Nigerian culture, and Arabic/Islamic education has a continuous history stretching back over many centuries. At a time when Nigerians in all walks of life are questioning many aspects of

schooling for their young, it is surely important that the particular characteristics of Islamic education should be clearly recognised.

It is not a simple question, as many appear to think, of modernising Qur'ānic schools and encouraging them to convert to the standard pattern of primary schools. Rather, it is a question of recognising an educational approach which differs from the approach which currently dominates Nigerian educational institutions at all levels. Muslim scholars are not old-fashioned disciplinarians and teachers fighting to preserve ancient practices merely as an act of piety towards their ancestors and in defence of their faith. In assessing the quality of an educational system, one does not only look at the practices in the most remote areas by the least enlightened teachers. One examines the philosophies which underlie the general pattern, however imperfectly they may be expressed in practice at the humbler levels of the system.

A thorough reappraisal of Nigerian education is under way at the present time. Universal Primary/Basic Education is being introduced. In the Ministry of Education and in the universities new curricula are being devised. New ways are being explored of constructing an educational system which will be closely related to Nigerian society and to its ideals and its practical objectives. Nigerians everywhere are united in their determination that wider educational opportunities should be made available to their children. But there are reservations to this enthusiasm for educational development. There is a widespread feeling that Nigerian schools, colleges and universities are not only alien in structure but failing to nourish Nigerian spiritual and cultural values. There is also the fear that a simple policy of "more of the same", that is, an expansion in the number of existing schools, etc., will worsen the problems which already affect Nigerian society. There are the problems of unemployed youth, of social misfits, of juvenile crime and immorality and so on. In this paper, it is surely reasonable to suggest that more attention be paid to the themes which we have sought to trace. They are Arabic/Islamic themes which are also echoed in the educational traditions of other faiths but are monopolised by Islam because together they form the particular hallmark of Arabic/Islamic education. They are themes which are surprisingly up-to-date in their agreement with the findings of present-day psychological and educational research. Above all, they are themes which have such deep roots in Nigerian soil that they form an integral part of Nigerian culture as a whole.

The incorporation of these Arabic/Islamic themes into the future pattern of Nigerian education will surely do much to provide that social and intellectual nourishment without which no nation can become, or remain, great.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigerian education today, in our opinion, is 'one-eyed'. This one eye is the vision brought to Nigeria by the early Christian missionaries in the middle of the nineteenth century. The educational system which we have in Nigeria today is still, basically, the system which those missionaries

brought with them. The good intentions of those pioneers cannot be questioned, nor their devotion to their cause, nor the very great value of their contribution to Nigerian education. However, we do feel bound to protest that their successors have monopolised the term 'Western education'. Western education is generally accepted as meaning the type of education which had its origins in ancient Greece and Rome. This education was encouraged by Christianity, and it has expanded the frontiers of knowledge with the scientific and technological discoveries of the last two centuries or so. But 'Western education' cannot be claimed to be the invention of Christians or Europeans. For many centuries while Europe was in the Dark Ages, Western civilisation was developed by the Arabs, who were the first people to accept Islam. In our view, the phrase 'Western education' should now be used only as an historical term. From one end of the world to the other, there is only 'one education'. The word 'education' is very imprecise, it is true, but it carries the same general meaning everywhere. Christian Europeans were the torch-bearers of education for many centuries, as Muslim Arabs were for many centuries before them. Today, however, only a minority of Europeans are Christians, and they are no longer the sole torch-bearers of education, or of civilisation. Old torches have been rekindled and new ones lit in all the other continents. How the light of education is focused so as to light up a country's nature and its own specific problems is a matter for each individual country to decide. In other words, education is now universal, but an educational system must be specific to the country in which it operates.

The unique contribution which Arabic/Islamic studies has made, and can still make, to education is matchless and unparalleled. It seems to us that it should be a matter of regret that in Nigeria, with its many millions of Muslims, there should be such widespread ignorance of the history of the contribution of Arabic/Islamic studies to education, and so much misunderstanding of its present activities and its potential for the future. Arabic/Islamic education is still often thought of as backward. Its Qur'anic schools are dismissed as irrelevant to Nigeria's development plans. It may well be that Arabic/Islamic education in Nigeria is backward in the sense that it is not in the forefront of the Nigerian educational system. If this is so, it is not because it is out of date and has nothing to bring to the great task of building Nigeria, but because during the colonial period, it was pushed into a corner and deprived of the funds contributed to an education system which came in from the South. If successive "governments had not subsidised the latter system, many Christian missionary schools would probably now be merely Bible Schools."⁴⁰

If the government of today goes a little way towards rectifying what we can only term as a short-sighted policy, we shall be more than grateful and satisfied.

Notes

1. Kareem, Yisa (1983), "Nigerian Press attitude to Islam". *Al-Ilm* (The Knowledge), June-Sept., 1983, p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
3. Mustapha, Abubakar (1983), "A Critical Evaluation of the History of Western Educational system in Nigeria". *Radiance*, Sept.-December, 1983, p. 16.
4. Abdul-Azeez, R.A. (n.d.), "Arabic Literature and its Early Development in Nigeria." Seminar paper, Osun State College of Education, Ilesa, pp. 4-5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
8. Malik S. H. A. (1980), "Towards the Improvement of the Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language", *Al-Fikr*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 32.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
10. Mustapha, Abubakar, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
12. Doi, A. Rahman (1983), "Muslim Minorities in West Africa". *Al-Ilm* (The Knowledge), June-Sept. 1983, p. 15.
13. Abdul-Kareem, Y. A. (1990), *A Guide on Historical Foundations of Education in Nigeria*. Ibrahim Kewulere Commercial Press, Ilorin, p. 71.
14. Mustapha, Abubakar, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
15. Doi, A. Rahman (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 15.
16. Mustapha, Abubakar, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
19. Doi, A. Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
20. Mustapha, Abubakar, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
25. Doi, A. Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
26. Bidmos, M. A. (1991), "In Quest of Methodology of Teaching Arabic in Nigeria" *NATA/S*, p. 2.
27. Oseni, Z. I. (1991), "Teaching Arabic Literature at the Senior Secondary Level in Nigeria: Problems and Methodology." *NATA/S*, pp. 13-14.
28. Sokoto, Abdullah Shehu (1991), "Islamic Studies Teaching through the Medium of English: A Critique" *NATA/S*, p. 72.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
39. Abdurrahman, M. and P. Canham (1978), *The Ink of the Scholar. The Islamic Tradition of Education in Nigeria*, Macmillan, Nigeria, p. 65.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 3.