

# Fluorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria

*FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR WAHAB O.A. NASIRU*

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Editor  
Zakariyau I. Oseni

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OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES IN NIGERIA

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## Contents

*Dedication*

*Foreword*

*Preface*

*Profile*

*List of Contributors*

- Chapter 1:** Perspectives in the Teaching and Learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Southwestern Nigeria  
– *M. O. AbdulRahmon*
- Chapter 2:** Arabic as an Alternative Medium of Education in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges  
– *H. I. AbdulRaheem*
- Chapter 3:** The Contributions of the University of Ibadan to Manpower Development in Arabic and Islamic Studies  
– *L. O. Abbas*
- Chapter 4:** Teaching *Fiqh* in Nigerian Secondary Schools: Problems and Prospects  
– *Abdus-Sami<sup>c</sup> I. Arikewuyo*
- Chapter 5:** Content Analysis of Sultan Muhammad Bello's Bayān Jamā'at al-Shaykh and Its Implications  
– *Yakubu Yahya Ibrahim*
- Chapter 6:** Treatment of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa and Swahili: A Comparative View  
– *Dahiru M. Argungu*
- Chapter 7:** Reflections on Strands of the Story of Abraham in Yoruba Traditions of Origin  
– *I. A. Ogunbiyi*
- Chapter 8:** The Challenges of Using Islam to Fight the AIDS Scourge in Nigeria  
– *M. A. Abdu-Raheem*
- Chapter 9:** Islam and the Problem of Abortion in Nigeria  
– *A. S. Alanamu*

# The Contributions of the University of Ibadan to Manpower Development in Arabic and Islamic Studies

L. O. Abbas

## 1.0 Introductory

The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the University of Ibadan is the first of its kind in Nigeria. Although many others after it have been established, it is unique in that it combines the twin disciplines of Arabic and Islamic Studies. In some other universities the twin disciplines are made to join other disciplines like Christian Studies, African Traditional Religion or History to make a department. On the other hand, Arabic language in some is made to pitch its tent with foreign languages to form a department. However, Bayero University, Kano, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto and the University of Ilorin have separate departments for Arabic.

Arabic and Islamic Studies came on board in 1961 and has since passed through some developmental stages. It relates with Islamic Scholars outside the university in addition to its normal statutory works as an academic department.

It also serves as a rallying point for the Muslims in Yorubaland as many issues of Islamic interest are either initiated by it or referred to it for guidance or solution. It therefore serves as model to similar developments in other higher institutions as well as provide consultancy services to Islamic institutions and groups outside the university system.

## 2. The Establishment of the department

The need for the study of Arabic and Islamic Studies at higher levels arose in the late 1950s. This was after it had been ensured that some secondary schools had started to offer the subjects as part of their curricula especially those schools owned by Muslims. In addition, the University of Ibadan, having realized the importance of these subjects to the knowledge of West African history and culture and to world history, caused the establishment of Arabic and Islamic Studies to be a full-fledged department in 1962, after it had been a unit of history for a year. (Faculty of Arts Brochure, 2002-2003:9).

In the following year, courses leading to the Bachelor of Arts (B.A Hons.) in both disciplines were instituted. Because of the dearth of qualified candidates for admission for degree in Arabic, Syllabus 'B' was introduced in order to ensure patronage of the department by candidates without Arabic background. They were to spend four years – including a year in an Arab country. In addition, a certificate course programme was also introduced in the 1963/64 session! It was a one-year intensive course for Arabic teachers, some of whom had had many years of experience in the teaching of the language. Two years later, the course was expanded to include Islamic studies. (*Brochure, 2002-2003*).

The programme was also designed to create a future and a hope for the teeming Arabic scholars who could not be employed by government for lack of the required qualification and who were therefore frustrated for lack of job. The intention of the department was to expose them to and generate their interest in modern education so that they could, after completion, work hard to obtain the ordinary and advanced level certificates of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which would qualify them for admission into degree programmes.

Through this arrangement, a lot of people have become professors and lecturers in Nigerian and other African universities, leading Administrators in government and other corporate bodies. Some have become diplomats while others have risen to managerial positions in Banking and Insurance services. (Abbas, 2003:283) Having recorded high degree of success in that regard, the department further thought of another way of strengthening the Muslims academically.

### 3. Two-Year Diploma Programme

In 1975/76 session, a two-year diploma course in Arabic and Islamic Studies was introduced. The programme was specially designed for Grade Two certified teachers who had taken Islamic Studies as one of their subjects at the teachers' certificate examinations. It also included holders of West African School Certificate or General Certificate Examination ordinary level with five credits. (Abbas, 2003:284). It was designed to arouse the interest of the candidates for the two subjects and as well to prepare them for the degree programme in the two subjects. Also, it was a measure for the production of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers for Secondary Schools where there were dire needs for them. When in the early 1980s, the University authority decided to do away with sub-degree courses, the two programmes were scrapped along with others.

### 4. Affiliated Colleges

In 1992, when the Department saw the effects which the stoppage of the two programmes had on holders of certificate of Arabic Schools and the seeming unconcerned attitude of proprietors of these schools towards the future of their students, it floated a similar programme to arrest the situation. It was a three year diploma in Arabic and Islamic studies in the approved Arabic Schools owned by individuals and by some of the existing *Madaris* affiliated to the university and supervised by the department.

The programme was approved by the University Senate and various bodies and individuals were encouraged to sponsor it. Out of the lot that signified interest, four were able to obtain affiliation with the university. They were: Mufutau Lanihun College of Arabic and Islamic Studies,

Ibadan; Sulaiman College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ososa near Ijebu-Ode; Ansarud-Deen College, Isolo, Lagos and *Ma'had* Arabic Institute, Olodo, Ibadan. The programme allowed that holders of *thanawi* (secondary) certificate of selected Arabic Schools be given admission into these colleges. Like the result of the previous programmes already discussed, many of these students have sat for and passed the General Certificate Examination ordinary level and have been admitted into various Nigerian universities for degree courses. Some have even completed their Master's degree programme. (Abbas, 2003:285).

In 2002 however, the university of Ibadan reviewed its admission policy on the affiliated colleges to the effect that only holders of ordinary level certificates would henceforth be admitted for the programme. The implication of this policy on our affiliated colleges is grave in that, very few candidates could continue to be qualified for admission and that seems to be the beginning of the end of the programme. Right now, the department is left with only Arabic Institute Olodo to supervise for the programme as the rest now run in Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) programme.

## 5. Higher Degree Programmes

Within six years of its establishment, the department began to produce Ph.D. holders from amongst the first set of its academic staff. This achievement served as encouragement to both staff and students and it also ensured a sound academic foundation for accelerated development of the department. The following two decades saw many students of the department already completing the Ph.D. programme. By now, the mother department of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria can boast of over forty Ph.D. holders it has produced including a woman, the first of her kind in the West African sub-region. (Brochure, 2002-2003:41-43).

Between 1978 and 1983, a period of five years, the department produced seven holders of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil). Shortly thereafter, all of them completed their Ph.D. programme and most of them are now professors scattered all over Nigerian universities, helping to develop the much-needed manpower for the nation. (Brochure, 2002-2003:41-43). Since 1979, when the Master of Arts programme took off in the university, the department has made tremendous progress. Very many B.A. holders of the department and other Nigerian universities, including graduates from Arab countries, have been trained and are still being trained in the department. They abound in colleges of education, secondary schools, civil service and other sectors of the economy.

The decision of the department in allocating quota to graduates from various Arab countries has helped them and the Nigerian trainees to blend together academically and has also encouraged healthy competition and academic fraternity. In addition, it has helped a lot to bridge the gap between those foreign graduates whose roots were the *madaris*, *marakiz* and *ma'ahd* and the home-based graduates.

Currently, the admission policy of Ibadan University that allocates sixty percent of all admissions to postgraduate programmes enables the department to train more graduates at a higher level. This has, to a large extent, reduced the manpower shortage hitherto experienced.



## 6. Religious Activities on Campus

Leadership of the Muslim community of the University, naturally fell on the academic staff of the department of Arabic and Islamic studies being experts in both Arabic and Islamic Studies, the two disciplines that are of direct relation to the religion of Islam. However, that did not happen in 1962 when the old mosque was built and the Muslim congregation began to take shape. This, perhaps, was because no Nigerian academic staff came on board until 1964 when M. O. A. Abdul joined the staff.

The first Imam was one Alhaji Jimoh, who worked as a steward at the Mellamby Hall of the University. He was not actually selected but took up the challenge when no one was to come up. When in 1966/67 session, the few committed Muslim students around chose their own Imam, Alhaji Jimoh had to step aside to avoid friction. There was, however, an agreement between the students and staff Muslim congregation to the effect that the student Imam would lead during academic sessions while Alhaji Jimoh would lead only during the holidays.

This arrangement worked out for barely a session when it was disrupted resultant from a clash between the duo during the 1967/68 session. The problem arose from the disagreement on who was qualified to lead between the workers and the students. The matter was referred to the Department for expert advice. The result led to the establishment of Muslim community and the selection of a staff of the Department as the Chief Imam.

Dr. (later professor) Ismail A.B. Balogun emerged as both the chairman and the Chief Imam of the community and was assisted by the then Imam of Abadina Mosque, while Alhaji Adegbite, a non-academic staff served as the vice-chairman. A student representative was made to interpret the sermon from English to Yoruba language. (Abbas, 2003:228).

In 1974, when the need to expand the mosque became imperative, a message was sent to the Saudi Arabian Government for financial assistance. In response, a delegation was dispatched to visit the community and assess the situation. The delegates discovered with dismay on their arrival, that the Chief Imam was a member of the Ahmadiyah Mission. They took exception to it and even passed a *fatwah* (religious verdict) that the congregation had no value for all the *salawat* offered behind him. This issue was discussed at the committee level of the community and Dr. Balogun had to resign as the Chief Imam. Other members of the Ahmadiyah Mission like Dr. F.B.A Giwa (later professor of Physics) and the then university's deputy Librarian, Mr. Mahmud were said to have ceased to attend the mosque thenceforth. (Abbas, 2003:229).

## 7. Selection of Subsequent Imams

The above stated development that led to the resignation of Dr. Balogun as the Chief Imam made the community to select another chairman/Chief Imam in person of Dr. (later professor) Musa Abdul of the same Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Musa Abdul later reorganised the community such that a second-year student of Arabic and Islamic studies who possessed qualities of an Imam would be selected as the Chief Imam. Such Imam will only serve for one academic session when another one will take over. The arrangement was meant to train and prepare Islamic scholars for such future challenges.

This arrangement subsisted till sometime in 1986 when it was observed that sermons delivered

had begun to lack the required quality and standard for which the mosque had been known. It was then decided that a staff of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies be henceforth made the Chief Imam. (Abbas, 2003:230).

The first person to hold the position in the reorganised system was Dr. (later professor) D.O.S. Noibi. He had as his deputies, Dr. (later professor) W.O.A. Nasiru and Dr. D.A.A. Tijani of the same department. In 1990, Professor Noibi left for London on a sabbatical leave and Professor Nasiru acted for him for some time before he handed over the Imamship to the second deputy, Dr. Tijani who in turn acted as Imam till 1996 when he was made the substantive Chief Imam upon Noibi's voluntary retirement from the services of the University. Dr. Tijani served as the Chief Imam till his death on November 1, 2006.

Sometime in 2002, the *fatwah* and ceremonies committee of the Muslim Community came up with a rotational system of Imamship amongst the academic staff of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The arrangement, as in operation in the *Harams* of Makkah and Madinah, they contended, would engender dynamism, healthy competition and equal participation from those who possess the qualities of Imamship. Those selected to join the Chief Imam in the task were Drs. M.O. Abdul Rahmon (he has been deputy Imam and vice-chairman of the Community's executive), A.F. Ahmed, K.K. Oloso and A.A. Rufai. The system has since been working as desired and that was perhaps responsible for the smooth continuity after the death of Imam Dawood Tijani.

## 8. Festivals and Ceremonies

Among the major activities of the Muslim Community of the University of Ibadan is conduct of *Īdul-al-fitir* and *Īdul-Adha*; ceremonies like *zawaj* (marriage) *'aqiqah* (naming) and even house warming. Conduct of these events are done mainly by the academic staff of the Department, on behalf of the Muslim Community. The uniqueness in the style adopted for their conduct makes U.I programmes attractive to various Muslim communities and groups within and outside the city of Ibadan. That is surely responsible for many invitations being received for such programmes on a weekly basis.

For about a decade now, marriage counselling has been introduced as part of the required services for the intending couple before the marriage. It was designed to enlighten and prepare them for the marital responsibilities and challenges before them. The objective is to prevent or at least reduce drastically the spate of divorce and broken homes among the Muslims, resulting from weak marriage foundation.

## 9. Adult Qur'anic Class

The Department saw the need for a Qur'anic class for adult members of the Community to enable them read the Qur'an in its original language. This was borne out of their observation that most members of the Community may not have had a taste of Arabic learning at their youthful age. It was felt that such programme if acquired would make up for the loss and prevent the rate of patronage of local mallams and seers since they would be able to commune with their Creator as they wish.

The programme commenced with wives of some senior members of the University who were leading members of the Muslim Community. Professor S.H.A Malik was the first person to teach in the programme but when academic engagements outside the country disturbed his full attention at the programme, Professor Balogun who had more time in his retirement from the University of Ilorin, took over and ran the programme. The first *walimat-khatmil Qur'an* came up in 1992. After the first Walimah, Dr. Daud Adekilekun Tijani from the department, and who was then a deputy Imam, took up the teaching with the support of two assistants.

The success of the programme attracted other very important people, both within and outside the university community. They comprised judges, lawyers, business people, Administrators at the levels of Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Registrar; Deans of Faculties, and Heads of Departments among others. The programme, shortly after inception, came to be a major annual event of the Muslim Community. About one thousand people have so far completed the programme within a period of fourteen years. The annual *walimah* that terminates each class is fixed for a Sunday before the commencement of Ramadan of each year.

#### **10. Arabic Proficiency Class**

Immediately after the completion of the Qur'anic class for the twelfth set, in 2004, some people approached the Department with a request for the establishment of an advanced level of the Qur'anic class to enable them further their study of Arabic to facilitate their understanding of the language.

The Department considered the proposal and set up a committee to come up with a programme in line with the people's request. The programme drawn and approved was divided into three stages viz: Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced Arabic class with a duration of twelve months for each stage. The first set commenced in September 2005 with the enrolment of eight students. The pioneer students completed the programme in August, 2006.

#### **11. Legal Year Programme**

One of the important programmes of the Judiciary in Nigeria is prayer session to herald a new legal year. In the entire Southwest, up till 1983, it was only in the church that the programme held. Participants were subjected to prayers in the Christian way irrespective of their religious persuasions. The agitation of the Muslims, since the regional system of government, was introduced in Nigeria only materialized in 1983 during Olunloyo's civil regime of the old Oyo State. The department was consulted to design the programme to be used and the one it came up with has since been in use. In fact, members of the Department, in collaboration with the Imam-in-council in Ibadan, execute the programme yearly.

#### **12. Reorganisation of the leadership of the community**

At inception, all affairs of the mosque were initiated and executed by the department because of their expertise. Until 1986 when he died, Professor M.O.A. Abdul was the chairman of the Community. After him Professor D.O.S. Noibi took over as both chairman of the executive and the Chief Imam of the mosque. Shortly before this time, the progress of the Community and

mosque had drawn members from other faculties and departments of the University nearer and increased their commitment and participation. This was particularly noticeable when the new mosque was commissioned for use in December, 1985.

In 1987, when Chief Obafemi Awolowo died, there was clamour by some elders of the Community for funeral *salat* (inabsential) for him being a very important Yoruba leader. The suggestion was rejected by the Chief Imam on the premise that Islam does not approve of it for a non-Muslim. When the insistence on the matter by the proponents became intense, the Chief Imam, D.O.S. Noibi, agreed to deliver a sermon on the subject instead of funeral *salat*. In his sermon (*khuthah*), Noibi explained the position a Muslim should take in the funeral ceremony of a non-Muslim.

The sermon did not go down well with some people, particularly the proponents of *salat* on Chief Awolowo's corpse. Thereafter, a meeting of elders of the Community was summoned at the Bodija residence of Professor Lateef Salako. There, a reorganization was approved for the Community thus:

- (i) that a board be established to which the executive reports.
- (ii) that the most senior member of the department of Arabic and Islamic studies be made the Chairman of the executive council and to double as the Chief Imam.
- (iii) that the secretary to the executive council be the most senior Muslim administrative staff and
- (iv) that the treasurer be the most senior Muslim staff of Bursary/Account section.

Thus, Professor Mosobalaje Oyawoye became the President-General, Professor Noibi became the Chairman/Chief Imam, Alhaj Kehinde Okusanya became the Secretary-General while Alhaj O. Dele became the Treasurer.

The new arrangement has since added dynamism into the system and has ensured more participation by members from various segments of the University. It has largely relieved the "burden" being solely shouldered by the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Notwithstanding the constitutional provision on where should the chairman of the executive be produced, the immediate past chairman as well as the current one were drawn from outside the Department. They both have helped to inject dynamism and improvement into the affairs of the Community. There exists now more cordial relationship and understanding between the executive council and the Department. There is also constant consultation (*shurah*) among the two, moreso that the Vice Chairman is from the department.

### 13. Challenges

In life there must be ups and downs to individuals and corporate bodies. The peculiarity of the department being the only one of its kind in the entire south of the nation opens it to suspicion and sometimes attack. In the mid-1980s, there was a move to merge the Department with that of Religious Studies. This move was viewed by members of the Department as a ploy to frustrate

the leadership role they have been providing the Muslim Community of the entire Southwest.

The brilliant defence of the Department by Professor Noibi and Malik at the Faculty Board of Arts saved the situation. Had the move been carried out, it may have reduced the role being played to the Muslim body and humanity as a whole.

#### 14. Conclusion

The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, is the first of its kind in Nigeria. It is simply referred to as the mother of them all because many of the senior academic staff in similar departments in other universities are graduates of the Department. The story is the same with numerous Nigerian Colleges of Education particularly those in the Southwest of Nigeria.

The department has contributed immensely to the production of high-level manpower in all strata of the Nigerian economy. The department has made efforts to combine its academic activities and programmes with those of the local mallams in the city centres. That accounts for its influence on the *madaris marakiz* etc, and its impact on the career of students in these schools. Academics apart, the Department gives leadership role to Muslim organizations in terms of advice and guidance. The establishment of the National Council of Muslim Youths Organization (NACOMYO) was muted by a group of people, majority of whom were staffers of the Department. Its formation was done in the library of the Department.

While it may be difficult for academics in some areas to deal with the local Mallams in their areas of operation, it is very easy with the department. Ceremonies like *Zawaj, Janazah 'Aqiqah* and house warming are done together successfully. That is why the impact of the Department is felt everywhere in Nigeria and abroad particularly in the Southwest and Kwara State. On the campus of the University, the role of the department is always appreciated by the authority.

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