

Dynamics of Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences

Essays in honour of Professor
Is-haq Olanrewaju Oloyede

Editors

**Y. O. Imam
R. I. Adebayo
A. I. Ali-Agan**

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Olanrewaju Oloyede*

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THE POSITION OF ARABIC IN INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, MALAYSIA

A LESSON FOR THE NIGERIAN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES

Ibrahim Lere Ameen

Introduction

Before the incursion of Europeans to this part of the world, Arabic had been the major language of education, intellectual pursuit, administration and diplomacy.¹ Shortly after their arrival, the language was tactfully relieved of its frontal position and was replaced with English, a phenomenon which marked an inescapable rivalry between Arabic and English. A big question arising from this socio-political misadventure is: how could this language survive this difficult terrain without being subscribed to English which has now assumed an official status? If maintained being self-sufficient, its adherents suffer not only from social disparagement but also official denigration. Likewise, it is bound to lose some substances on accommodating English either as a medium of instruction or by incorporation into its curriculum. This scenario has made it difficult to have a

unified model of teaching the language in Nigerian tertiary institutions where Arabic is being offered as a degree programme.

Resultantly, the products of the system are non-homogenous; some graduates of this course-Arabic are found excellently worthy in the field, but extremely deficient at official engagement premised on the use of English², and vice versa.³ Unfortunately, all the recommendations made by some contemporary researchers⁴ to solve this problem, remain a mere paper work. It is disheartening to note that the emerging Islamic universities which ought to have mended the situation have unconsciously followed suit.

However, in view of tendentious capacity and commonness of the mission of these institutions, rising to the challenge will not only be required of them but also fully implemented. To achieve this, a new leaf may be borrowed from the International Islamic University, Malaysia, where such course is being run in a way which seems allaying the fear being entertained by various stakeholders in Nigeria, with varying views regarding the method of its operation.

Arabic in Nigerian Public Universities

Arabic, as recorded in the annals of history, was the first language of civilisation among the comity of foreign languages that later found their way into West Africa. Its history of penetration into what is known as Nigeria today was not unconnected with the history of Islam in the region. That was in the eleventh century A.D. when Islam entered Kanem-Bornu. Its entry into some Hausa states dates back to the fourteenth century and while Yorubaland got in touch with it in the sixteenth century. This development afforded the language the opportunity to enjoy a frontal position in virtually all human endeavours particularly

in both Borno and Hausaland.⁵ Some Obas in some ancient towns of Yoruba land such as Iwo, Ede and Ikirun equally adopted Arabic as a language of administration; it was used to document proceedings in the palace. Establishing the role of Arabic at early stage of its arrival to West Africa, Prof. Bamiro, a one time, Vice Chancellor of University of Ibadan says: "From the historical perspective, Africa, like some other continents, is greatly indebted to Arabic for serving as vehicle of a vast literature and for keeping African historical records which as Africans can be proud of."⁶

Further unravelling the historical antecedent of Arabic in the region, Dike posits thus:

... it is through the aid of these Arabic documents and those written in Arabic script, that scholar will be aided in his task of unlocking the secrets of the African past. It had been a revelation to the whole world of scholarship to realise for the first time that Africa before the European penetration, so far for being a "dark continent", was in fact a continent where the light of scholarship shone brightly, as the Arabic works now being discovered bear testimony... It is through their work on enormous amount of Arabic materials that both public and private, that we shall be enabled to put together coherent picture of Nigerian history based on our own indigenous source materials and not, as in the past, chiefly on report of colonial administrator and foreign travellers valuable though much of these materials is... The Arabic scholars of the present, drawing upon the writings of the Arabic scholars of the past, will be able to bring before us the events and happenings of the past ages of Nigeria and so help us to write a history we may rightly call our own.⁷

However, this language continued flourishing until the period of Europeans exodus to the land, the incident which eventually led to pulling down the traditional setting of Africans,

scattering their unity and robbing the language of its lofty position. Then, English language was substituted for Arabic as an alternative means of civilisation.⁸ Not dizzy by this demoralising occurrence, Muslims continued to pursue the cause of the language in their own unofficial capacity. That was due to its cardinal position in the practice of their religion.⁹ It was as a result of their continuous support coupled with its age-long established position that eventually led to its incorporation into Nigeria university curriculum, whose implementation started with University of Ibadan, the premier university in Nigeria, both in terms of existence as the highest citadel of learning and the running of Arabic as an awardable degree course.

Unfolding the history of Arabic in University of Ibadan, Abbas¹⁰ argued that the penetration of the Arabic language into the University was a dictate of the situation. That is why, at the threshold of its entry, it had no distinct department like other academic programmes. It started first as a unit; for it was initially meant to serve history department by a way of translating the works on African past which were mainly recorded in Arabic. It was due to vibrancy and efficiency of this unit that subsequently necessitated the creation of a full-fledged Arabic department. According to Abubakre,¹¹ Bayero University, Kano and University of Ibadan pioneered a degree programme in Arabic. In spite of this, the entry requirements for the study in these pioneering universities are ambivalent. The bane of this contrast lies on the desperation of individual department to get candidates to enable it survive. Hence, the general admission requirements must be adjusted in view of the common qualifications of the interested candidates within the area of individual university. However, Kano considered strong background in Arabic as a prerequisite for admission, as medium of instruction was/is basically Arabic. This consideration was

based on the preponderance of non-certificated Arabists who were yearning to further their study in the area. Conversely, majority of those interested in the course in the South-west had little or no background in Arabic at all. Consequent upon the establishment of more universities both at federal and state levels, with Arabic as one of the approved courses, these varying requirements are not only maintained but also slightly modified. The basic admission requirements for Arabic Studies in South-western universities became comparatively stricter than those in the northern ones. While the latter consider candidates based on purely Arabic certificates such as *thanawiyyah*, Arabic Diploma and Certificates) without possessing 5 O' level credits minimum, the former consider these basic requirements, without questioning candidate's background in Arabic. As the stand of the latter hinges on the need for sound footing in the course which, to them, could not be achieved by fairing into other studies, the former's position was informed by need to produce candidates who could be competently involved in all facets of the Nigerian social life, such as participation in politics, civil and public service, military and education like their counterparts in other field of studies. And all these expectations can be achieved through being proficient in Nigeria official language. Justifying this stand, Abdul Rahman writes:

Proficiency in the Nigerian official language is of necessity for any Arabist/Islamist to function properly in the aspect of social integration. It is no secret that the disability of many of the Arabists in written and spoken English has hampered their efficiency. Such people become docile and reclude in their place of work and as such become object of ridicule in most cases; hence they are incapable of defending their discipline when it is necessary to do so.¹²

It is disheartening to note that this varying method of admission which was initially dictated by the prevailing circumstances has become a permanent status-quo till the present time; this has resulted to non-homogenisation of the products of Nigerian graduates of Arabic. There has always been a line of demarcation between its graduates from northern universities and those from the southern universities let alone the Arab trained ones. If the situation must change, Abdul Rahman argues, "there has to be a change in the government's attitude to the ...discipline".¹³

The Position of Arabic in Nigerian Islamic Universities

The term "university" is of Latin origin. It is derived from the Latin word *universitas* which was applied originally to connote scholastic guild (or guilds) that is cooperation of students and masters within the stadium. This was later modified as *universitas magistrorum* or *universitas scholarium*.¹⁴ The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*¹⁵, unravels the meaning of university as institution of higher education, which usually comprises a liberal arts and sciences college and graduate and professional schools and learning authority, the authority to confer degrees in various field of study.

Examining these definitions, one could not but subscribe to the view of Alanamu, et al.,¹⁶ who see medieval *madrasah*, otherwise known as *jami'ah* today as atypical of such institution. The role played by early Muslims to sustain the culture of learning that eventually metamorphosed into well-structured institutions of higher learning cannot be overemphasised. It is interesting to state that the vibrancy of Muslims at that period eventually gingered up the West to fair into such structured-based intellectual venture. Aisha-Lemu¹⁷ identifies two Islamic

universities: Nizamiyyah and Al-Azhar, to be earliest universities in the world. These two institutions, founded in the 9th century in Baghdad and Cairo respectively have continuously survived till the present day. Aisha argues further that the much flaunted University of Paris and that of Oxford were not founded until the 12th and 13th century respectively. The Guinness Book of World Records, according to Alanamu,¹⁸ recognises another higher center of learning – University of Karaouine in Fez Morroco as the oldest degree-awarding institution. This university was founded in 859 by Fatima al-Fihri. Lemu also ascribed the establishment of Sankore University to the 16th century. The effort to sustain the culture of learning among the Muslims continues all over the world particularly in the Muslim countries where the influence of colonialism seems lighter. Appreciating the Muslims commitment regarding the culture, Adebayo writes:

Appreciable developments are being made in Muslim education in Bangladesh, India, and Indonesia, Philippines, Saudi Arabia and African continent. In Bangladesh, apart from the *Madrasah* and some higher institutions of traditional Islamic learning... some Islamic universities have been established to teach both modern and Islamic subjects. The Islamic International University Chittangog (IIUC) founded in 1995 is one of the government approved private Universities in Bangladesh. The Jalalabad International Islamic University in Sylhet of the Hikmah International Islamic Trust (HIIT) is also one of the Universities, while Bangladesh University in Dhaka has taken off in 2006. The International Islamic University in Uganda also came into existence in 1988...¹⁹

In Nigeria, the involvement of Muslims in setting up of Islamic faith-based universities seems somehow delayed. This may be attributed mainly to two reasons. First, the Nigerian government was initially indifferent to the initiative in spite of the obvious need for it, even having had the initiative sanctioned.

it received greater patronage from the hand of Christians than Muslims. The second reason may be attributed to the apathy of some well-to-do Muslims to the development. Oloyede²⁰ affirms that out of 41 private universities already licensed for operation, 4 of them belong to Muslims. They are: Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Crescent University, Abeokuta, Katsina State University, Katsina, and Fountain University, Osogbo. In addition to this, Alanamu, et, al²¹ identifies another three universities in the pipelines; they include: Shaykh Kamal-deen University by Ansarul-Islam, to be cited at Ogidi, Ilorin, Summit University, by Ansar-Deen, to be cited at Offa and Unity University being proposed to be in Ede. A frantic effort is equally being made by Anwarul Islam to cite another faith-based university at Iwo, Osun State. One thing to note in these universities is that aside the sameness of the goal (showcasing the Islamic values), common to them all, there is a little connection among them in terms of working association through which ideas could be exchanged to forge ahead as a formidable team. This is probably the reason for a three-day international conference and a day summit recently organised by International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) Bayero University, Kano. The conference was mainly to examine the prospects and challenges of these universities.

Undoubtedly, the dearth/delay of this all- important initiative which ought to have been the bedrock of such intellectual exercise has affected some fundamental issues such as Arabic whose operation in these universities remains non-homogenous. As a result, the course could not be immune from the problem of dichotomy already ravaging the government-owned universities. Just like government universities, the element of regionalism which actually bred the "virus" of dualism had no doubt been injected to them. The zeal to prepare the students of the language to compete favourably with Arab let alone the

graduates of Arab universities remains the main target of Katsina State University, Katsina, and Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, both of which are geographically situated in northern part of the country. Majority of the lecturers in these two universities, are graduates of Arab universities and those trained in the universities located in northern part of the nation. More so, owing to the weak background of these students in English they often find it difficult to perform well in general courses and hence, affect the CGPA of some individuals who could not manage to scale through.²² In the other two universities; Crescent and Fountain, established in South-West, the position of the course is quite non-identical; it is incorporated into academic curriculum of the school as part of general courses which must be taken and passed by all students and regardless of their major course.²³

International Islamic University, Malaysia: A Historical Survey

The birth of IIUM could be regarded as a product of collaborative efforts of Organisation of Islamic Countries and a number of some Muslim nations. The idea was first mooted by the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Muhatir at a special meeting held by OIC leaders, in 1982. Translating this idea into fruition, Prof. Kamal bin Hassan was charged to prepare the first working paper on the project. The whole efforts in this direction came to reality in 1983, with the receipt of the license of operation from His Majesty the Yang di-pertuan. Following this development was the appointment of Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah as the first constitutional Head of the Institution and Tun Hussein, as its first elected President. The University's Board of Governor comprises representatives of OIC and eight sponsoring governments; Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, Maldives,

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.²⁴

The institution was first run at Petaling Jaya before it eventually moved to its present permanent site at Gombak, Kuala Lumpur.²⁵ The university's vision is basically to be a leading international centre of educational excellence through the provision of the following services: teaching and learning, research and publications, student services, financial services, human resource services and information technology services.²⁶ This vision is predicated on world-view of *Tawhid* and Islamic philosophy of the unity of knowledge as well as its holistic education.

The university embarked on academic activities with its pioneering students totalling 153, from Malaysia and abroad. At present, IUM runs 13 faculties called *Kuliyyah*, an Arabic term for college/faculty. They are: Ahmad Ibrahim *Kuliyyah* of Law (AIKOL) *Kuliyyah* of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS). Others are: *Kuliyyah* of Economics and Management Sciences (KENMS), *Kuliyyah* of Engineering (KOE), *Kuliyyah* of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED), *Kuliyyah* of Information and Communication Technology (KICT), Institute of Education (INSTEAD), Centre of Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD). The above mentioned *Kuliyyaat* are resident at the main campus while the Kuantan campus houses the following *Kuliyyaat*: *Kuliyyah* of Medicine (KOM), *Kuliyyah* of Allied Health Sciences (KAHS), *Kuliyyah* of Pharmacy (KOP), *Kuliyyah* of Nursing (KON), *Kuliyyah* of Dentistry (KOD). Aside some other foundation centers established by the university in different parts of the country, the university equally has a very big mosque named after Sultan Haji Sha.

Today, about 3000 students are considered for admission annually for various courses and different levels of academic programmes being run in 13 *Kuliyyaat* presently in the

university. Recognising the intellectual impact of this university on some Nigerian students and educational institutions, Adebayo²⁷ writes:

It is equally pertinent to mention that the university (IIUM) has trained a quite good number of personnel for the programme. In Nigeria, the university authority of Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, has benefited from the manpower-training programme of the university, as some members of the UDUS Department of Economics received training up to Master degree level from there.

The students of this university have received, in the field of research, an enviable recognition both at regional and international levels by winning gold, silver and bronze, which include PENCIPTA, INPEX, ITEX, Geneva and KIPA.²⁸

The Position of Arabic in IIUM

The birth of IIUM, like other intellectual devices of Islamising knowledge, was informed by the strong need of world Muslim Community to create an enabling environment to provide the entire humanity with unadulterated knowledge inspired by the world-view of *Tawhid* and Islamic philosophy of unity of knowledge, predicated on the concept of holistic education.²⁹ Considering the strong affinity of Arabic with Islam and its viable role in the past and present in spreading its gospel, the university found it inevitable to carve out a special niche for the language in its operating system. Though, the linguistic global challenge has its influence on the design, yet, the position of Arabic language in IIUM could be marked different compared to other Islamic universities all over the world. This may be one of the reasons why the university is recognised by the Wikipedia Encyclopaedia as being distinct from its peer thus: "...it is

completely distinct from the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan and International Islamic University in Chittangog, Bangladesh. The university's plan to adopt Arabic and English as official languages of instruction and administration got frustrated in the process. This frustration was not unconnected with its incongruence with the provision of Malaysian Law, the host country. Therefore, IIUM became incorporated under the Companies' Act of 1965, with the choice of English as an official language of instruction and administration. The situation eventually turned out to add social value to the university, being the first international university to adopt English in Malaysia and its acquisition by foreign students, particularly those from English-speaking countries, as a potent tool to disseminate their academic message.³⁰

In this difficult terrain, the desire of the university's proprietor to give the language a well-deserved position remained intact. Unlike the common tradition in English-based universities such as Nigeria's where Arabic is being offered as an awardable degree, Arabic is given fair treatment; a lot of strategies are put in place to enable every member of the university see it as a worthy course of study, to which one can be proud of (Adelani, 2010). These strategies include:

- **Acculturation Process:** Despite the fact that the adopted language of instruction is English, the university ensures that all its members get acculturated, regardless of one's academic programme or religious affiliation. One starts getting permeated by Arabic culture right from the point of accessing university's website. Even though, the available information regarding the university is in English, yet, at the home page of the web one is bound to confront some Arabic wordings indicating the name of the university. Closely related to this is the substitution of the word faculty

with *kuliyyah* an Arabic term which signifies college/faculty. So, College of Medicine for instance, by a way of university tradition, is known as *Kuliyyah* of Medicine. Equally, virtually all the university's property including letterhead and internal memo and even the certificate which bears the school's name has some Arabic inscriptions. All these put together, speak volume of natural permeation of Arabic culture in the university system.³²

- **Integration Device:** This basically hinges on the university curriculum carefully designed to fulfill the management desire. Aside some Islamic related courses which are taken in Arabic, the language is designed to be taught to all students, regardless of their academic background, area of specialisation and religious affiliation. It is a general course that must be taken and passed in partial fulfillment of award of academic degree. The tutors are trained individuals and the facilities abound for the realisation of the basic objective. Just like major courses, the programme is properly monitored and supervised. As a result, the non-major students even those with little or no previous orientation in it, eventually develop interest to further the course upon their graduation.³³
- **Entry Requirements:** At the point of entry, applicants are expected to possess at least 3 principal passes in the General Certificate of Education 'Advance level' (GCE) 'A' Level (UK Educational System) obtained in one sitting or International Baccalaureate (IB) with minimum of six subjects obtained in one sitting. The university equally recognises any other qualification equivalent to the above. Aside this requirement, candidates applying for programme with English as medium of instruction is expected to have a score of 550 in the test of English as a foreign language

(TOFEL) or Band 6.0 the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) Academic. As an alternative to the above, the IIUM conducts English Placement Test (EPT). The test should be passed at least with 6.0 point. Conversely, the applicant for the programme with Arabic as a medium of instruction should sit for IIUM-administered Arabic Placement Test (APT). But if the candidate's performance falls below the university's bench mark, he would be encouraged to pick up Language Proficiency Courses to prepare him for University's admission.³⁴ And this is called Pre-sessional Programme, where listening, reading and writing skills are acquired. The minimum duration for this programme is one academic semester. A student willing to change from any academic programme being taught in English to the one with Arabic as a medium of instruction is equally made to undergo the course and vice-versa. The secret behind these series of test and training is to determine candidate's ability regarding his chosen field of study which shall be concurrently run with some other complementary studies such as English or Arabic as applies to individuals.³⁵

- Admission Palaver: Prospective students of Arabic are of two categories. The applicants willing to offer the programme with English as a medium of instruction as obtained in some Nigerian universities located at southern part of the country, and those seeking to offer their course in Arabic³⁶ as being the practice in those Nigerian universities in the northern part of the nation. With this all embracing method of admission which accommodates Arabists of varying cultures and orientations, the university has been able to resolve the linguistic differences which have turned to be a torn in the flesh of peaceful co-existence of Arabists in a given community.

- **Library Equipments:** The same attention given to other university's programmes is given to Arabic; the section is well-equipped with relevant and recent materials, periodically reviewed and updated to meet the target of modern researchers. Internet services are adequate and the library staff are such that are well-trained to adequately respond to peculiar needs of the users.³⁷
- **Students' Attitude:** Some of the Arabic students without previous background in English consider the system appropriate to develop themselves in the language; they feel free to interact with other members of the university, who are equally inclined to develop themselves further in Arabic to which the university has made them to taste. This symbiotic relationship has no doubt created in the Arabists sense of self-esteem and spirit of being indispensable within the system. With this four-year academic programme, a candidate registering for the course with weak background in either of these international languages; Arabic/English, graduates as "amphibian" without being found wanting in either of the languages.³⁸

Comparative Analysis of the Position of Arabic in Nigerian Public Universities and IIUM

In view of the foregoing analysis, it is perhaps apposite to bring afore some contrastive factors regarding the operation of Arabic in Nigerian public universities and IIUM.

- While Nigerian public universities are government oriented with various religious adherents as their stakeholders, the IIUM is an establishment founded and managed by a group of Islamic countries with stakeholders of the same

religious orientation and fundamental philosophy.

- The expectation and objective from Nigerian graduates of various fields of studies is to produce a high level manpower in individual callings including Arabic with no particular regard to religious affiliations, whereas, the goal of IIUM is not only restricted to manpower development but also production of a complete human being who will recognise Allah by his acquired knowledge and dispenses it to benefit humanity for His sake.
- Majority of members of Nigerian public universities are hostile to the language; they regard its operation within the academia as a technical way of promoting Islam and not just an academic programme which should be given equal treatment with other courses, whereas in IIUM, Arabists/ Arabic occupy an enviable position not only at official level but also at personal level.
- In Nigeria, the affiliated colleges to Arabic departments particularly in South-West Nigeria are discouraged by a way of tightening the condition of maintaining the affiliation; whereas such is not in operation in IIUM.
- The condition of admission in Nigerian universities is diverse and restrictive, while in IIUM, it is an all-embracing method; just as a candidate with no background in Arabic could be admitted so also those with no English background.
- Maintaining being “amphibian” scholar, (well-balanced in both Arabic and Islamic) in Nigerian tertiary institution requires extra efforts from individuals, whereas, practising it in IIUM is not only feasible but also well-facilitated. As non-Arabists within the system would love speaking the

language with the experts, so also the Arabists would prefer speaking English to the experts in it.

- The Arabic cultures in Nigerian public universities are adumbrated while it is well-pronounced and preserved in IIUM.

In view of these differences in the mode of operation of Arabic in both Nigerian universities and IIUM, attaining the same objective can hardly be achieved. Conversely, the sameness of the goal of Nigerian Islamic universities with IIUM, portends the feasibility of learning of the former from the latter, particularly in the following areas:

- Creation of an all embracing mode of admission, as its restriction only to those with paper qualification may limit the patronage.
- Encouraging the university members to learn the language as second language of communication of the university.
- Even, with English being employed as the university's language of instruction, all the equipments including linguistic laboratory should be provided for Arabic in the same proportion being apportioned to English. This will not only create sense of honour in its students but also create further awareness for the public including some university members whose shallow knowledge regarding Arabic is mainly to serve the religion.
- Experts in both English and Arabic should be employed to teach English to Arabic students, as their wealth of experience in contrastive study of language facilitates better understanding of the students.

- That staff to be appointed be such that are well-equipped to face the challenges of the globalising world.
- The linguistic flaw being committed by some Arabists without English background should not be only overlooked but also be likened to the error that one is bound to commit while trying to speak Arabic in which they are equally sound.

It is believed that if these lessons are adopted and implemented, the problems of dichotomy creeping into Islamic universities in Nigeria could be overcome as the spirit of Islamic brotherhood, as enjoined in the glorious Qur'an, be further cemented.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Revealed in the foregoing discourse is the problem of dualism ravaging the study of Arabic in this part of the world. The quest for permanent solution to this problem has put Arabists of various levels and strata into confusion regarding the appropriate measure to employ in order to rescue the language from such ignominy. As a result, the university products of this programme are branded as either southern or northern. Unfortunately, the recently emerging universities which could have devised a unifying model, singing the praise of the language have unconsciously fallen into the pit of such confusion; the system of studying Arabic in them could not be immune from dichotomous traits already characterising the existing public ones. However, having critically studied the mode of studying Arabic in International Islamic University, Malaysia, the writer sees that borrowing a new leaf from this institution could bring about viable solutions to some problems stemming from this dichotomous situation.

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