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Gender Disparity In Arabic Education In The 21st Century In Nigeria: Problems And Solutions

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Abstract

Any education which does not immediately benefit a person either in finding employment or to improve his/her living conditions, would not attract public attention. Therefore, Arabic education in Nigeria particularly for women should be designed so as to lead to useful work life. Arabic, being a Semitic language of major religion and culture which demands some skills and lengthy duration before its learners could attain an appreciable level for useful work life in Nigeria. This prerequisite has made the Language suffered a lot of setback from women fold due to some of the impediments of its learning by females which were traceable to religious, cultural bonds, time factor and economic crisis. The paper aims at examining the gender inequity in Arabic education in the 21st century in Nigeria. Such impediments, the erroneous impression and perception of the society, parents, learners and the teachers on the language were critically examined. It will explore options that could provide women better avenues for Arabic education. It also advocates for equal opportunities of gender in access to education for women, the use of relevant modern materials and techniques for the teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigeria to meet current challenges.

Key words: Gender Disparity, Arabic Education , 21ST Century, Nigeria, Impediments, Problems , Solutions

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Introduction

In Islam, Women education is regarded as training of a nation or a large community. The contribution of Women in Nation building cannot be under-estimated. Arabic had served Nigeria as a medium of literary communication long before any language in the country. As well as the significant role that Arabic played and continue to play in the development of Women education in Nigeria cannot be over estimated. Arabic language or generally Semitic language made enormous contributions to the development of literacy and civilization in African society and also served as a vehicle for commercial and cultural interactions between the Sub-Saharan region and other parts of the world. Abubakre (1983) stated that Arabic language has been a lingua Franca and official language in the palaces of old empires in Western Sudan (West African) ever before the arrival of the colonialist in the region. But for these significant roles that Arabic had played and continues to play in the development of Women education in Nigeria which cannot be over-estimated, the Language has not been witnessing appreciable numbers of learners from the females as men. Many factors are responsible for this inequity, such as religious and cultural constraints, inequality in gender discrimination in the work places, teacher competencies, learner, motivation and prejudices, likewise the attitude of the government. Many factors are responsible for this inequity, such as religious and cultural constraints, inequality in gender discrimination in the work places, teacher competencies, learner, motivation and new admission system into tertiary institutions (Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations, UTME by these universities in different form.), likewise the attitude of the government. Other factors include the Non-availability of serious curriculum of the discipline at the crucial or foundation level that is primary level, enrolment and performance of the female-male comparison at all levels, especially the erroneous belief of its learner on the proliferation of the field in the market and so on.

Therefore, the paper aims at examining the problems of gender inequality in the learning of the language at various educational levels in Nigeria. The result of the findings, observation and recommendation will proffer possible solution to these contributive factors against the study of the language by Women.

Gender and its status in Nigeria

The terms "gender" had been traditionally used to designate psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness. Dosumu (1998) defines gender as the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person. Kessler et al. (1978) sees gender inequality as that which strike humanity at its most profound physical and psychological levels. The relationship of man to a woman is no other than the relationship of oppression. It is far more delicate and complex. It is more a gentle tyranny, which begins at the very moment of intimacy. Gender is so basic to everyday life. Therefore, gender is constituted biologically, psychologically, socially and economically, culturally and above all, politically. These influences are interwoven in such complex ways as to constitute the "gentle tyranny" referred to by Kessler, which we cannot go into in this paper.

Margaret L. Anderson, (1983) gives modern concept of the term "gender" as a word refers specifically to socially learned behaviour and expectations that are associated with members of a biological sex category. Gender is an acquired identity while biological sex usually is not. There is little denying the fact that investing in human capital is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development. Yet, women in developing countries which Nigeria is not in exception usually receive less education than men. More so, women in general enjoy far less employment opportunities than men the world over. Any claims and efforts then, to remove poverty, can show results only if they address the issue of gender inequality. In recent decades, there have been large gains, no doubt on comparable levels, in basic rights and opportunities, in life expectancy and enrolment ratios for women. But despite these gains, the stark reality has not changed. There still are

large gender disparities in basic human rights, resources, and economic opportunity, and in political rights-in Nigeria.

Contributive Factors to the Inequality

Having seen what the Arabic language is, it is pertinent to that its study by female learners is dwindling due to the following factors:

(a) Unequal Access to Education:

There have been many international conferences organized on the equality for men and women for example, subject of the M. O. Opeloye (1998) highlights the role of the United Nation Organization in championing the campaign for women's rights, since 1945. Similarly, an international conference was held in Cairo in 1994 on women's right to education and 4th World Conference on women rights to education in Beijing 1995, and so on.

Islam enjoins the pursuit of knowledge by Muslim without making any distinction between the males and the females. This is why apart from several Quranic passages, which encourage the education of men and women, the Prophet of Islam declares that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim, male and female. It is in realization of the value of education that Islam lays high premium.

(b) Religion and Culture:

If Religion and Nigeria culture did not signify certain norms against the female gender this field of specialization, it will definitely promote women participation in the work force and promote equal opportunity and treatment in gaining employment. For instance female doctors' and nurses have an ample chance in Saudi-Arabia if she is literate in Arabic. She will be far better than someone who needs an interpreter. She can also become an Arabic newspaper editor/broadcaster in Arabic radio stations in Arabic and non Arabic speaking countries.

Arabic as earlier defined is a language of major religion and culture. Some scholars argue that the study of Arabic language is meant for men, who will in turn become preachers and spiritual consultants. Language drilling sounds contrary to the view of some of these Islamic elites. Female voice in the public was regarded as a cultural and religious prohibition, in the sense that her voice is only restricted to her husband and the family. Yet, the general theory of linguistics held reading aloud for language drilling in high esteem as necessary for sound and speech production and proficiency.

As a result of cultural attachment which at times result from religious perception, many Muslims of Northern Nigeria, particularly the far north, are of the view that woman's major place is her matrimonial home. These ancestral practices did not allow the participation of women in any public activity.

No doubt on comparable levels, in basic rights and opportunities, in life expectancy and enrolment ratios for women, some scholars believe that the duration of learning Arabic is not favourable to females because no Arabic established school's duration spends less than eight years for obtaining Senior Secondary Certificate. A good parent desires his/her child to have the basic primary certificate of western education. Having spent 14 years before SSC Level, the struggle continues to seek admission into the tertiary institution. This may take two or three years before crossing the hurdle of entry requirement. This implies that a woman needs to spend 21 years in order to obtain a degree certificate in Arabic.

A. Adaralegbe (1972 p. 144) categorically stated that even some husbands hate the idea of allowing their wives to further their education which will in turn take them into either public or private sector.

Some Islamic scholars prefer early marriage of Muslim female students of Arabic. This act serves as one of the impediments that militate against the females to study Arabic. Once they got married, they would be thereafter discouraged to further their education.

(c) Parents' Perception on Female Education:

Arabic language as we have noted, is one of the foreign languages that take long process or years before its competence/proficiency could be attained. This leads almost inevitable to a negative attitude of the parents to the Arabic education of female children. Some parents do this not because they intentionally hate their daughters but because they do not wish to waste their little resource.

H.I. Tijani (1997 pp. 19-20) adduced two reasons why some parents considered the education of their female children a waste. (i) The female needs only domestic training to fit in as a housewife. Whatever she learns eventually retire into the kitchen. (ii) Any training given to the female will be only beneficial to her husband. Therefore, not educating her is a way of avoiding a wasteful investment, which will be reaped by other people.

(d) Approach and Perception of the Language:

The approach and the perception of the language by the learners had really contributed to the gender inequality in Arabic education. In spite of their retentive and sharp memory, most females believe that Arabic is a difficult language, which consists of changing patterns of words formation, vocalization inter-digitated among the radical consonant. Its syntax and morphology appear complex and difficult to assimilate. In a research I conducted in 1999 on Arabic students of Sulayman College of Arabic and Islamic Studies Ososa, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun-State (then an affiliate of the University of Ibadan), the result of my findings was that out of the 150 graduated students in Arabic and Islamic Studies only 4 female students were able to further their studies in Arabic and Islamic Studies (combined Honours) at both B.A. and M.A. degrees levels at the University. We discovered that female usually commit things into memory but lagged behind in the art of spoken Arabic. The enrolment of the female students at all levels of education in Nigeria reveals their fear of the language. Presently, The JAMB admission list of Federal Universities for the past five years could only have boast two Arabic female candidates, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta could boast of 9 female candidates who combined Arabic and other subject as teaching subjects. Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Oyo had only four females as Arabic students, the Premier University could only boast of 8 female students who are both studying and had studied Arabic at undergraduate level since the inception of the department in 1962 while the University of Ilorin had a female Arabic student who eventually became an Assistant Lecturer in Arabic department of the institution.

Problems

The reasons for this insignificant number of female Arabic student could be adduced from the following:

A. Learners:

The students had no rudimentary knowledge from the primary level. This makes it invariably difficult to enroll at the Post-primary level. In Africa and South Asia, women have only half as many years of schooling as men.

- (1) A female student who had just completed the art of recitation of the Qur'ān at home definitely she cannot cope with the syllabi at Post- primary level, that is JSS and whatever presented to her will appear like magic in a traditional method.
- (2) The Arabic letterings appears confusing to most people especially in an environment where the alphabet 28 European and reading is right to left The difficulty in writing frightens many

people and not only the females. Some female learners started learning French language at post-primary level because of its lettering which conforms to that of European language made it simple to them.

- (3) Unavailability of modern instructional materials' which aid study as well as simplify the learning of languages.

B. Teachers:

The role of the language instructor is equally important in language learning. Since there is no place for Arabic language at primary level the approach of the teachers need special attention at the post-primary level.

- (i). **Traditional Method:** The conservative and punitive method of teaching the language had really frightening the female at their childhood. Some teachers teach the student the alphabetical order of the language for a period of one or two years. While some even create their own syllabus, which will present the discipline as a barren land. It is the ideal of conservatism to lay emphasis on writing and reading without proper recognition. Some teachers are not even ready to purchase modern instructional materials. The discussion of the literature of North African people or description of a market in Saudi Arabia will be like fantasy to a student who had given up her interest on the language. Everything will be muddled up before her. However, if modern materials like illustrative textbooks are not yet available we can replace the name of unknown places or markets with the ones our own students are familiar, such as popular market in Kaduna, Jos, Abuja, Kano, Ilorin, Ibadan, Osogbo, Oyo and Lagos. Keith Walters (1980) laid emphasis on reading aloud, speaking and dealing with the immediate environment in teaching language. This will cater for the unavailability of teaching materials temporarily. As females were naturally endowed with fluency this will inspire them to create interest in the language.
- (ii). **Lack of Exposure:** Teachers handling the language need to be exposed to the modern method and approach to teaching. Teaching aids, which had been an immense contribution to the improvement of learning of the language, must be adopted. Therefore, workshop or conference needs to be organized for the handlers of the subject in order to acquaint them with modern materials, teaching aids and how to handle them.

C. Instructional Materials:

Arabic curricula at all levels need to be re-visited I. O. Zakariya (1998) gave an appraisal of the literature component of the National Senior Secondary Arabic curriculum. He concluded, after critical examination, that the component is defective and needs to be reviewed. Many Arabic textbooks' authors have re-visited their materials in a simpler form such as Professor S.H.A Malik's works on Arabic essays and reading, Professor Z.I Oseni's works on Arabic Literature and Drama, Professor Shehu Abdul-Salam on Arabic Linguistics and Professor R.D Abubakre on Arabic Rhetoric Linguistics and Interplay of Arabic and Yoruba Culture.

D. Economic and Socio-cultural Factors:

- (i). **Societal concept of the language:** Hornby (1974) defines language, as the human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of a system of sound symbols. Arabic language is a language whose proliferation spread its tentacle to all spheres of employment where any linguist could work. It is an erroneous belief or impression held by the society that an Arabist can only teach or the language is not relevant to the society like English and French. They only need to bear in mind that the language is an international language which can raise any person into the Ambassadorial post, religion attaché, media houses, and editorial work and so on. It should also be borne in mind that the available

authentic record on African history was documented in Arabic language which any researcher on West Africa history/document cannot avoid. It is also one of the official languages at African Union or United Nation summits. Its relevance to the society cannot be over-estimated, Arabic language, although a major language of religion and culture, goes beyond them.

- (ii). Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations of the University; virtually all the Universities require its applicants to be computer literate. Presently, we have a very negligible numbers of computer trainers who can handle Arabic enable computer system. This poses another problem for a lady who find it difficult to combine a computer training class with her Arabic studies.

The relevance of Arabic to the society makes it deserving of a similar status given to its sister language-French in the Nigeria National Policy on Education. The rate of literacy and the quality of education imparted to the people have been determined to be a pertinent yardstick to measuring a nation's development. Therefore, the sky is the beginning not the limit for our ladies.

Solutions:

Based on the above submissions, I recommend the following as the solution to the identified problems;

- (i). The erroneous impression by the students, especially the females that the language-both spoken and written is should be discarded. Ladies were known to be outspoken in language even preferred to read news for prudence value and fluency. It is a great challenge to the females to aspire in having a female representative in public sectors which deal with Arabic language. The determination and preparedness required for excellence in and thematic are equally significant values in mastering Arabic by the females.
- (ii). The religious and cultural constraints which *most* of the female learner use as an excuse to engage in serious drilling have been refuted. In Islam any process of learning or an attempt from which the society benefits has total backing of the religion. Therefore, our ladies should not hide under the umbrella of religion or culture to shirk their responsibility in order to avoid brain drain among our potential females.
- (iii). If someone cannot get what he loves, he has no choice other than to love what he gets. Our teachers need to acquaint themselves with the modern method to simplify the language for these students. Unavailability of the modern material should not serve as the hindrance to their improvement in their approach in teaching. Seminars, conferences and workshop should be encouraged and attended where teachers can interact on pedagogical issues.
- (iv). Government can only provide what it has but can still improvise some instructional materials to aid our teaching. Our productivity will encourage the society to change its attitude towards females studying Arabic education since Islam encourages equality in access to education.
- (v). Post UTME examinations of the University; new trend on tertiary education requires computer literate candidates. Therefore all Arabic schools should incorporate Arabic enabled computer system into their curriculum. They should also employ experts who can handle the system perfectly as well as good trainers.

In conclusion, the paper, as highlighted above Arabic, being the mother tongue of the Shuwa Arabs of Bornu State Nigeria, deserves government's attention by the reason of indigenous language. Therefore, this is also a medium through which an appeal is made to the status of Arabic language in Nigeria if it cannot get its former status before the colonization then it should be regarded at par with French in Nigeria policy on education. So until nations are able to

address this issue of gender inequality and resolve it, the vicious cycle of poverty will continue to pervade. This is because poverty leads to and aggravates gender discrimination.

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Appendix

Data analysis of Arabic Female students in selected tertiary institutions for the past five years

Name of Institution	No. of Arabic female students who combined Arabic and other subject as teaching subjects (N.C.E.)	B.A.	M.A.	Name of the Informant
Federal College of Education, Abeokuta	9	-	-	Alhaji Abdul -Hamid Oloso, Arabic Lecturer
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo	2	-	-	Alhaji H.A. Arazi Lecturer
Osun State College of Education, Ila-orangun	2	-	-	Alhaji B.R. Raheem Lecturer, Arabic unit
Osun state college of Education, Ilesa	3	-	-	Dr. M.A. Folorunsho Lecturer Arabic unit
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo	4	-	-	M.A. Salahuden H.O.D. Arabic Unit
Lagos State University, Lagos	-	1	2	Prof. A.I. Lawal; Lecturer, Arabic unit
University of Ibadan	-	6	2	Mr. Taofiq Muibi Departmental Secretary
University of Ilorin	-	1	1	Dr. Isa Alabi Dept. of Arabic

Author's Bioprofile

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