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Cultivating Research Culture Towards Islamic and Arabic Language Education Excellence in Southeast Asia

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Students' Perceptions on Teaching and Learning of Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers: A Case Study of Lagos State University, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to trace the foundation of the teaching and learning of Arabic language as a course of study in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. It aims at assessing the curriculum development of Arabic language in Nigerian institutions, especially in the light of the contemporary challenges facing the nation's educational system and human development. Qualitative research paradigm was adopted for the study and data was collected through semi structured interview. The study explores the perspectives of three students in the Arabic Department of one of Lagos State University in the South West of Nigeria. Phenomenological analysis approach was used to analyse the data and some of the themes that emerged from the data analysis include; Prior knowledge, Methodology, Facilities, Means of instruction and Arabic relevance to Nation building. The findings of the study establish the fact that the present curriculum does not conform to the philosophy and goals of the national policy on education because of the prevailing circumstances identified in the research. Based on these findings, teaching and learning of Arabic language for specific purposes was recommended with emphases on academic, vocational, and religious purposes. It is hoped that this recommendation will go a long way in helping the curriculum designers of Arabic language in non-Arabic countries including South-East Asia to design an effective curriculum for the teaching of Arabic language for non-native speakers.

INTRODUCTION

Language education has passed through different stages of curriculum design and implementation. It was reported that up to1950s English language teaching was supported by an approach to syllabus design which focused on materials graded for their vocabulary level and linguistic difficulty. (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010). It later changed from syllabus design to curriculum development and from teachers to learners.

In recent times more emphasis is now given to student's perspectives toward the teaching and learning of a second language in order to determine the needs and wants of the students. As a result of this, Language curriculum development often starts with determining how syllabus design can address the specific needs and wants of the learners. The learners are often seen as the best judges of their own needs and want because they know what they can and cannot do with the target language and what language skills are most essential. As a result of this, the establishment and the development of the English for Special Purposes (ESP) program was designed to make learners ready to communicate efficiently in the tasks presented by their study or work circumstances.(*Khajavi* & Gordani, 2010).

Richards (2001) suggested that at present time, emphasis should be on learners' needs as the initial step in curriculum development. Once learners' needs were recognized, learning goals could be specified. Although there are many ways to obtain the specific language needed in a particular situation but the most recent researches in the field of language pedagogy revealed that it has become more imperative to determine the overall needs of learning a target language as perceived by the learners of the language. This will also allow the curriculum developers to get enough information on the student's perception about the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum designed for the program.

Brindley, (1984) defines the needs of a student for educational purposes as the wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constrains and requirements that must be put into consideration in the development of a curriculum for a target language program. In order to make this

definition more meaningful in the context of learning a second language, Balint, (2005) notes that the concept of the needs as defined by Brindley, (1984) will go a long way to resolve the possible conflict that may likely arise when the student's beliefs, aspirations and assumptions are not the same with curriculum designed for the acquisition of the target language. In this regard, Nuaan, (1989) as quoted by Baliat, (2005) opines that, "the effectiveness of a language program will be dictated as much as the attitude, perception and expectation of the learner as by the specification of the official curriculum"

Khajavi & Gordani, (2010). Viewed the needs of learning a target language in two ways; target needs and learning needs, the target needs referred to all the instructional materials that will make learners perform successful in the acquisition of the target language while the learning needs are the various factors such as the socio-political situation of the country, age, gender, academic background of the learner, and the attitude of the learner towards the culture and the people of the target language.

The curriculum of Arabic language in many of the Non-Arab speaking countries has not been designed to achieve the needs and wants of the students. In most countries, Arabic is still perceived as a language of Islam. Therefore it must be learnt exclusively for the understanding of Islamic religion. Teaching and learning of Arabic language in many of the Non-Arab speaking country' institutions of higher learning are good example of this situation. Many researches carried out on Arabic language in many of those country reveals that Arabic language curriculum has not been regularly updated and revised based on feedback obtained from both the students and the teachers.(Raji, R.A, 2002) And this continues to pose a great threat towards the development of the language in the educational system of those countries despite the fact that the language had played a significant role in the area of historical and cultural preservation of different tribes in the world.

The importance of Arabic language in the development of education and literary activities in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized, the language became the official language of the Kanem-Bornu and Sokoto empires, and it was used for administrative, communicative, diplomatic and legal purposes. The contributions of the scholars of these two empires towards the development of education in Nigeria are too numerous to mention. This, implies that Arabic language was the earliest, the first and the foremost medium of literacy for the people of west Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. See, Fafunwa, (1974); al-Ilori, (1978) ; Gbadamosi, (1978); Galadanci-Shaykh, (1982); Yahya, (1986); Lawal, (2007).

The decline of the Arabic language in Nigerian educational system started during the British colonization in 19th century C. E and the introduction of English as Nigerian official language; this was followed by the activities of European Christian missionaries and the introduction of Western education as the only means of acquiring knowledge in Nigeria. As a result of this Arabic language was relegated to the backdoor and both the teachers and learners of the language were no more given the adequate recognition in the country although the language still remains as a teaching subject at both primary and secondary education levels and also as a course of study in the Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

This research aims to investigate the present situation of the teaching and learning the language in Nigerian institution of higher learning through the perspective of the students studying the program in Lagos State University one of State owned University in Nigerian. This research believes that many of the vital information provided by the respondents will go a long way to address a lot of salient issues in the design and implementation of curriculum for Arabic tertiary institutions and also lead to a conscious, deliberate, purposeful, and directional policy formulation of the implementation of teaching of Arabic language for non-native speakers.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The learning of Arabic rudiments and its curriculum development is left in the hands of traditional scholars of Quranic schools and the pioneers of private Arabic schools, and they continue to serve as the only means of preparing students for admission into the Arabic Departments in many of the Nigerian Universities. The tertiary institutions in Nigeria always admit students of different background, different orientation and different system of learning Arabic language and they usually pass through a centralized curriculum irrespective of their past learning experiences. In most cases two categories of Arabic graduates always emerge from Nigerian institutions; those that are very versed in

Arabic language but very poor in English language and those versed in English language with a lot of deficiencies in Arabic language. (Galandachi, S, 1985).Therefore, this research believes that Arabic curriculum in Nigerian Universities needs to be designed towards the student's learning experiences, needs and motivation. More so, the goals of learning a modern foreign language has not been well introduced into the curriculum, all these and many more are the challenges facing Arabic curriculum. As a matter of fact, effective teaching and learning of Arabic language becomes a difficult task. The issue of Arabic lectures to get themselves prepared to accept the new technology in teaching modern languages is a thing of concern. Many Arabic teachers are not exposed to the new methodology of teaching a modern language most especially through the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and this continues to undermine the development of Arabic language in Nigeria. This research wishes to explore the students' perspective on the teaching methodology and curriculum designed for the Arabic students in the tertiary institutions in order to determine the effectiveness of the program and find out how the entire package of the program has been able to motivate students towards the learning of Arabic language in the Institutions of higher learning.

Purpose of the study

This study appraises and analyses the teaching and learning of Arabic language in Nigerian Universities. The primary goal of the study is an empirical, systematic and objective assessment of the opinions and views of Arabic students about the implementation, and achievement of the Arabic curriculum and its relevance to the present system of Education in Nigeria. As an evaluation study, the objectives of this study are:
i.   To explore the views of the students about the teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers.
ii.   To find out the relevance, fulfillment and sustainability of teaching of Arabic for non-native speakers.

Research questions
i.   How do students perceive the teaching and learning of Arabic language in Nigerian Universities?
ii.   Has the teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers fulfilled the objective of its establishment as a course of study?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction
The methodology adopted in this research is a naturalistic qualitative paradigm purely based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) the reason for adopting this approach in this research is to explore in detail how respondents make sense of their personal and social world as far as the topic of this research is concern. IPA is especially useful when one is concerned with complexity, process and novelty. (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Research design
Purposeful sampling in qualitative research allows the researcher to select respondents and sites for the study because the ultimate aim of a qualitative research is to get an in- depth data on a particular phenomenon from an individual who can give an accurate information about the research problem and also has a good understanding of the central phenomenon in the study. On this account, the researcher realized that the best option to get accurate information for the topic under study is to get in touch with the current students in the department of Arabic in Lagos State University. Hence, three final year students were contacted for the interview. It was held separately but at the same day and each interview lasted for about forty five minutes.

Synopsis of the respondent
The three respondents are assumed to be more suitable for this research because of their past and present experience of the topic understudy. Each of them had passed through a private Arabic school and they are presently in their final year in the university system. Based on this, the researcher believes

that their past antecedents and exposure on the issues concerning Arabic language at both private and public schools will give them the opportunity to have detail information of their views on the teaching and learning of Arabic language in Nigeria.

Methods of data collection

The ultimate aim of the interpretive phenomenological analysis is to get the accurate information of the study from the respondent and make sense of the respondent's perspective to all the issue discussed during the interview, and this involves the investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript.

While one is attempting to capture and do justice to the meanings of the respondents in order to learn about their mental and social world, those meanings are not transparently available – they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation.

In order to come out with meaningful and accurate themes that justified the actual phenomenon of this research, the following steps were taken;

- Each of the interviews was recorded down with Mp3 recorder.
- The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim
- The researcher read through the transcribed data several times in order to make meaning of the interview.
- The respondents were coded as ARBS 1, ARBS 11, ARBS 111,
- The interview procedure was arranged in a tabular form to become a discourse Unit and coded as (D.U).
- Main ideas generated from the interview procedure were grouped together and emerged as themes.

FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question wants to find out the background of the student including his level of Arabic proficiency in Arabic language before joining the program, the students' perspective on the content of the curriculum, the methodology used by the teachers in teaching the four basic language skills in the class and the relationship between the students and native speakers in terms of interaction and exposure. The themes that emanated from the research question are: Prior knowledge, unskilled curriculum content and methodology of teaching.

Prior knowledge;

It clearly shows that the respondents have a good background of Arabic language prior to their admission into the university. This good background is as a result of their 7year program of Arabic and Islamic studies in different private Arabic school. It also shows clearly that the Arabic proficiency of the respondents is highly influenced by this private Arabic school The private Arabic school serve as the most important source of getting students into the department of Arabic language in most of the Nigerian tertiary institutions Although there are few students studying Arabic language in LASU without passing through the Arabic schools, But their proficiency in terms of the four basic language skills is very poor And they cannot perform very well in the school and even after graduation from the university. The respondents' remarks are as stated below.

I have a good background of Arabic before I join LASU because I have passed through all the levels of Arabic school, ibtidaiya, idadiyah and thanawiya, ARBS III, (DU, 4)ahhm   am an average student before I join lasu because that private school is also recognized as secondary Arabic school only that we studied Arabic and Islamic study in the school without any western education --------------- ARBS I, (DU, 12)after that school I went to another Arabic and Islamic institute to obtain diploma in Arabic and Islamic studies, the name of the institution is known as   erh erh erh erh ansar ud een institute of Arabic and Islamic studies, I obtain diploma there also, so combining the two together before I join lasu I think I have enough proficiency in Arabic language before I join lasu. ARBS I, (DU, 12)

This shows clearly that all the respondents have a good background of Arabic language before their lasu program. Unskilled curriculum content, The respondents are of the opinion that most of the course contents in the present Arabic curriculum in Nigerian Universities is too abstract and theoretical and it does not take into consideration some vocational courses that will allow the students

to be self-reliant after graduation, they noted that the present curriculum is only designed for either religious or academic purposes and as a result, many of the Arabic graduates always take to teaching profession. One of the students observed thus:

I am expecting some courses in the curriculum that can make us to become a   professional and self-reliant, like some skilled works, you know that is what we need in Nigeria now; we don't expect every one of us to be a teacher or civil servant ARBS I1, (DU, 12)

Another student complains about content of the curriculum that doesn't tailor the students toward specific purposes, he said:

First and foremost the curriculum is not dynamic at all, it is what we were taught in secondary school that we continue to be taught here, although more advance than that of secondary school, for example I want to be an Arabic broadcaster, but there is no any course in the Arabic curriculum that can be linked to that profession at least contemporary issues about the Arab world ARBS III, (DU, 24)

Another student complains that the curriculum is designed mainly for academic purpose because it involves class activities only: the curriculum doesn't have any practical, and everything is based on class work, no other activities involved, the curriculum is good for those that want to engage in teaching alone not for somebody that is dreaming to be a professional translator like me. ARBS I11, (DU, 24)

Methodology of teaching

The methodology used in teaching Arabic reading and writing is not different from the traditional methodology of teaching. One of the respondents said thus;

"The way they use is just like the traditional way we are used to in the private Arabic school, ----------- -They will give us a passage to read and er er er after the reading they will ask us questions in the passage, -------- this can lead into writing. ------------It is just like the traditional way of reading and writing", ARBS I11, (DU, 24)

The traditional way the respondent is referring to is the method adopted by the private Arabic school which is more less a grammar based translation, this method of teaching language is basically on reading and writing with relative attention to speaking and listening, priority is always placed on the accuracy and ability of the student to construct and correct sentences through the translation process. The respondents also laid mush emphasis on the medium of instruction in teaching Arabic language, they said categorically that the method used in teaching speaking and listening skills is very poor because the teachers always use English language as medium of instruction in the class and they always communicate with students in English even outside the classroom. Some of the lecturers according to the respondents cannot even speak Arabic very well and also the listening and speaking skills are not enhanced through the modern equipment of teaching and learning of modern language. Hence the teaching of the four basic skills in Lasu has not been well implemented.

On the issue of language teaching facilities and medium of instruction used in the class all the respondents lamented as follows:

Err err , err err   err   we say this speaking of Arabic in lasu is very worst, they lack behind er er er because for any language as I perceive it, if you want to teach the speaking aspect of any language you need to have a language laboratory, so therefore they lack behind in that aspect--------. Because 80% of them are communicating with us in English language ---------So I can say that er er er er er the aspect of Arabic speaking skill in lasu is not good enough, it is not good enough (ARBS I11, DU, 24)

we don't have any language facilities, may be that is the most reason that we are not so much familiar with listening aspect, some of us only listen to Arabic news in our home most especially al-jazeeharah so as to listen and understand how Arab speaks

Because we don't have any facilities on ground, and in most cases we don't use the language everywhere, even in the class, we don't always speak the language. So if you don't always practice the language we can't improve on it (ARBS 111, DU, 24)

The themes highlighted above show the students 'perspective on the design and implementation of teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers.

However, the finding of the second research question shows that teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers produce students for teaching profession only. All the respondents

observed that the design and implementation of Arabic curriculum turn out students to be teachers in either primary or secondary schools.

The students' perspectives on the job prospects of Arabic students after graduation are as follows:

Arabic graduates are teachers so apart from this no more, although some of them works in some areas too, and even many of them are Islamic preachers and imams for Islamic associations No, no, no, it is not, it is not at all, you know i said that the curriculum is too rigid, all what the content is all about doesn't have any course for mass communication, but I take elective courses in mass communication department.

The curriculum doesn't have any practical, and everything is based on class work, no other activities involved, the curriculum is good for those that want to engage in teaching alone not for somebody that is dreaming to be a professional translator like me.

The respondents believed that the objective for the teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers has not been fulfilled. Therefore, the sustainability of the program in tertiary institutions needs to be given a special attention by introducing some other courses into the program that will make it to be vibrant and produce graduates that will be self-reliant and contribute to the development of the nation not only in the area of teaching profession and Islamic purposes.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that many of the students that enrolled for Arabic language in the University have a good background of the four basic skills of language, this is not unconnected with the fact that almost all of them are products of the private Arabic schools, as a result of this, they always find it easy to pass all the courses taught in the program most especially if such courses are delivered in Arabic language. While courses taught in English language may be difficult to comprehend for those that do not have adequate background of English language or do not pass through the Western education schools. (Abubakare R.D). Therefore, different methods need to be adopted in accordance with the student's background, environment and student's proficiency in the target language.

The most crucial aspect of teaching Arabic in the Nigerian institutions of higher learning is the medium of instruction. The information gathered from the respondents revealed that English language is always the medium of instruction in teaching Arabic for non-native speakers. However, communicative language teaching is the most accepted method of teaching modern language. In this regard, Ricardo, S V, (1999) highlighted the views of some of the linguists on the medium of instruction in teaching a foreign language, some of these views are: Finocchiaro and Bonomo (1973) mentioned crucial role of the teacher in the class and present a list of 16 tasks which the good language teacher should be able to put into practice: among them is that teachers should use the students' native language sparingly in the classroom, but not hesitate to use it to clarify instructions or to ensure that essential information has been understood. Apelt, (1981) on his own account noted thus: "foreign language as medium of instruction in the classroom without excluding absolutely the use of the mother tongue". Sanderson (1983) provides a list of 14 characteristics of a good foreign language teacher and laid much emphasis on the use of the target language predominantly. Bailey (1985) presents the results of classroom research on «the good language teacher». Some of the characteristics of outstanding teachers' lessons involved: More use of the target language by the teacher and the students combined, more teacher talk in the foreign language, more student talk in the foreign language and less student talk which is off the task. Therefore, learning and teaching of a second language should involve communication and interaction between the students and the teachers in the target language. Furthermore, much consideration should be given to the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), it is the systematic way of study through the use of different applications of computer in language teaching and learning. It is a growing field in ILT (Information and Learning Technology) with wide selection of applications such as; reference works, study and research tools for the effective teaching and learning of a foreign language. The teachers of Arabic language need to familiarize themselves with this new approach of teaching, and they must also adopt it in their methodology of teaching. The new technology of teaching language has a tremendous impact on the development of the learning competence and in the proficiency of the students learning a foreign language, among the benefits of (CALL) has highlighted by Kuang-wu Lee, (2000 are: (a) experiential learning, (b)

motivation, (c) enhance student achievement, (d) authentic materials for study, (e) greater interaction, (f) individualization, (g) independence from a single source of information, and (h) global understanding. Therefore teaching of Arabic as a foreign language should be moved from the traditional system of teaching and tailored toward the modern approach of learning. The need to provide students with enough facilities to carter for the new technological advancement is highly needed for the effective teaching and learning of a foreign language.

RECCOMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This research recommends that teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers needs a holistic evaluation and redesign of a new curriculum that will be inconformity with the needs of the student and also leads to the National and global development, Some of the themes emanated from this research show that teaching and learning of Arabic in for non-native speakers is facing a lot of predicaments that may likely lead to a serious threat on the sustainability of the course in the curriculum of the tertiary institution in many non-Arab countries . Hence, a purposeful, focus and reasonable effort must be made towards the development of Arabic language in institutions of higher learning. And also the research recommends that the curriculum for the teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers needs to be redesigned in such a way that it will produce graduates of a skilled workforce that will be able to operate in the global knowledge economy with both international and intercultural competence. Hence this study proposes that teaching and learning of Arabic language for non-native speakers should be tailored towards specific purposes. The specific purposes suggested based on the findings of this research are Arabic language for academic purposes, Arabic language for vocational/professional purposes and Arabic language for religious purposes.

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