

# Arabic Literature as a Tool for Educational Transformation in Nigeria

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**Abstract**—This paper started with the definitions of literature, Arabic literature, transformation and went further to highlight the components of educational transformation. The general history of Arabic literature was discussed with focus on how it undergoes some transformations from pre-Islamic period through Quranic era, Abbasid literature to renaissance period in which the modernization of Arabic literature started in Egypt. It also traces the spread of Arabic literature in Nigeria from the pre-colonial era during the Kanuri rulers to Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio and the development of literature which manifested to the Teacher's Colleges and Bayero University in Northern Nigeria. Also, the establishment of primary and post-primary schools by Muslim organizations in many cities and towns of the Western part of Nigeria. Literary criticism was also discussed in line with Arabic literature. Poetry work of eminent poets were cited to show its importance in line with educational transformation in Nigerian literature and lessons from the cited Arabic poetry works were also highlighted to include: motivation to behave well and to tolerate others, better spirits of interaction, love and co-existence among different sexes, religion etc. All these can help in developing a better educational transformation in Nigeria which can in turn help in how to conduct researches for national development. The paper recommended compulsory Arabic literature at all levels of the nations' educational system as well as publication of Arabic books and journals to encourage peace in this era of conflicts and further transform Nigeria's educational system for better.

**Keywords**— Arabic, literature, peace, development, Nigeria.

## I. INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE means different things to different scholars. Reference [11] defines literature as that part of the total of preserved writings belonging to a culture which is notable for literary form as distinguished from work of merely technical or erudite journalistic or ephemeral nature. However, [8] considers literature to be: a creative and universal means of Communication and the emotional Spiritual and intellectual concern of mankind.

Arabic literature to [1] is the writing produced both in prose and poetic form by writers of the Arabic Language. According to [2], Arabic Literature means the knowledge of searching for language selections either writing or poetry in different generations and what happens to their people in those generations.

The Arabic word used for literature is *adab* (أدب) which is derived from the meaning of etiquette and it implies politeness, culture and enrichment.

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Generally speaking, literature or Arabic Literature is regarded as a reflection of life. In simple terms, it can be described as any piece of writing that can give the reader pleasure, wisdom and spiritual upliftment and is thought provoking. [12].

Transformation is a complete change in somebody or something as well as a nation. In Nigeria for instance has recently had her transformation from military dictatorship to democracy. Thus, transformative education means the ways to follow for the improvement of our education system in Nigeria. The components of educational transformation are reflected as:

- Building Instructional Leadership
- Ensuring High Quality, Effective Teaching
- Using Data to Make Decisions on Instruction, Interventions, and Enrichment
- Developing Tomorrow's Leadership

## II. THE HISTORY OF ARABIC LITERATURE

Various transformational stages have evolved in the development of Arabic Literature and each period has provided for the people ways of thought, joyful and endurance. The first period is pre-Islam Literature. The period before the writing of the Qur'an and the rise of Islam is known to the Muslims as Jahiliyyat or period of ignorance. And there is little literature before this time although significant oral tradition is postulated.

Tales like that of Antara bin Shaddad (525 – 608 AD) was probably pertinent. The first decades of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, however began to show the flowering of a lively written tradition. This tradition was captured over two centuries later with two important compilations [7].

The second period is Islamic period in which Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad and this Qur'an was one of the first major works of Arabic Literature and definitely the most influential on the Arabic language. The language used in the Qur'an is called classical Arabic, and the classical is the style that was admired because it has a far more complicated structure than the earlier literary works with its 114 Suras which contains 6,236 verses. It contains Injunctions, narratives homilies, parables and direct addresses from God.

There was a marked lack of significant poets until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. One notable expectation was Hassan Ibn Thabit who wrote poems in praise of Muhammad and was known as the prophet's poet.

The third period is Abbasid literature and it was a period of compilation of facts, ideas, in structured stories and poems on single topics and covers subjects as diverse as house and

garden, women, gate-crashers, blind people, envy, animals and misers. The subject of sex was frequently investigated in Arabic Literature. The ghazal or love poem had a long history. Sex manual was also written such as Tawq al-Hamamah or the dove's Necking by Ibn Hazim, and (Rawdat-al muhibbin wanzhatal mushtaqhi) or meadow of lovers and diversion of the infatuated by Ibn (qayyim al-jawziyyah) who advises on how to separate love and lust and avoid sin. [6].

The other period is (al-Nahada) or Renaissance or modern literature. A revival took place in Arabic literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century along with much of Arabic culture and it is referred to in Arabic as Al-Nahada or Renaissance. This resurgence of writing in Arabic was confirmed mainly to Egypt until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when it spread to other countries in the region.

### III. "MODERN ARABIC NOVELS"

The modernist movement began to translate Western works, primarily novels into Arabic. Individual authors in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt created original works by imitating the classical maqama.

The Hadith of Issa Hishain critiqued Egyptian society in the period of Ismail. This work constitutes the first stage in the development of the modern Arabic novel. This trend was furthered by Georgy Zeidan, a Lebanese Christian writer who migrated with his family to Egypt following the Damascus riots in 1860.

In the early twentieth century Zeidan Serialized his Historical novels in Egypt newspaper (Al Hilal). These novels were extremely popular because of their clarity of language, simple structure and the authors' vivid imagination and some others in the period.

In Pre-colonial Nigeria, the spread of Arabic Literature was directly connected to the spread of Islam. [5] asserted that Islam was first accepted by a Kanuri ruler, Umme Jilmi (1085 - 1097). Subsequent rulers, Dunama I (1097-1150) and Dunama II (1221 - 59), continued the tradition of Islamic learning such that by the end of the 13th Century, Kanuri had become a centre of Islamic learning.

In the early 14th Century, Islam was brought into Hausa land by traders and scholars who came from Wangarawa to Kano in the reign of Ali Yaji (1349 1385). Before long, most of what later became the Northern Nigeria was islamised. Islamic education brought along with it Arabic learning since Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and was therefore perceived as having great spiritual value. Arabic and Islam were taught simultaneously in primary schools.

The Jihad by Uthman Dan Fodio helped to revive, spread and consolidate Islamic and Arabic studies and extend access to education also to women.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria, support for Islamic education came from some traditional Muslim rulers. Abdullahi Bayero, (Emir of Kano), for instance, on his return from Mecca in 1934, introduced the idea of building a Law School for training teachers of Islamic subjects and Arabic as well as English and Arithmetic. The school continued to grow and expand in scope and with the support of the then Northern

Region Ministry of Education, it metamorphosed into the popular Bayero College, Kano, which became a part of Ahmadu Bello University and later the present Bayero University, Kano. The institution helped to expand the scope of Arabic Islamic studies in Nigeria.

The millennium deteriorating condition of Nigeria's public educational system makes it easy for the Arabic and Islamic scholars (*Ulama*) and their schools to regain relevance as credible alternatives. The platform the *ulama* in Nigeria employed was to register a significant presence in the country's education arena. In the North, an institution called the Northern Provinces Law School (NPLS) was established by the British colonial authority in 1934 to train judges to administer Islamic law in its territories [12]. Although the school passed through changes in its name, structure and curricula in subsequent years, it eventually provided a synthesis between western education and Islamic education.

The spread of Arabic colleges and Madaaris in some parts of Nigeria also strengthened the growth of Arabic Literature. Examples of such are Arabic Teachers Colleges established in the Northern Nigerian cities of Katsina, Sokoto, Gombe, Maiduguri, Hadejia and Kano by 1979.

The pioneering work of Muslim organisations had already established similar models at the primary and post-primary levels among the Yoruba Muslims of South-West Nigeria [12]. Examples of such Arabic institutes are: Modarasati Haraashii by shaykh Muhammad Thaani haraashi 1947, Shamsu Su-udil-Islam Arabic Institute by shaykh Abdulmojeed Ahmod in 1950 and Ma'adul Arabiyya in Ibadan by shaykh Murtada Abdulsallam in 1958, Ma'aad Azhar in Ilorin by Shaykh kamoldeen Al-Adabiyyi in 1953, Markaz in Lagos by Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Aluuriyyi in 1952, Modarasalti Sumuratal Hujjaaji Iseyin 1962, Ma'aad Arabiya Wal-islamiyyi Iwo by Shaykh Ma'ali Araworeki in 1958, Ma'aadi Arabuyyi Wal-Islamuyyi Iwo by Shaykh badrudeen Mu'ali in 1963 and Morkazil Madinatu Raodatu Islamiyyat in Ikirun by Shaykh Yuunus Ya'akuub in 1978.

### IV. "LITERARY CRITICISM"

Literary criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature. Criticism has been inherent in Arabic Literature from the start. The poetry festivals of the pre-Islamic period were witnessed during annual tribal festivals where poets would compete with each other and a master poet would be asked to judge and declare the winner at the end. Arabic literature is as old as the literary tradition itself, and a remarkable feature of many Arab societies today is the extent to which public performances by poets can still be subject to assessment of their audience where two poets are pitched against each other in a war of verse in which one would be deemed to have won by the audience.

This study allowed for better understanding of the message and facilitated interpretation for practical use, all of which help the development of a critical method important for later work on other literature.

A clear distinction regularly drawn between works in literary language and popular works has meant that only part

of Arabic was usually considered worthy of study or criticism. Some of first poetry is the rules of the poetry by Thailab and poetry criticism by quddamah. All these works continued the tradition of contrasting two poets in order to determine which one best follows the rule of classical poetic structure.

#### V. ARABIC LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

Arabic literature and other language literatures have played a better role in Nigeria system of Education and still needs to play its greatest role in Educational transformation in Nigeria.

There is a close tie between literature and education. Each has to do with people and society. In fact, it is the education that provides literature with its subject matter either in poetry, drama, novel or prose.

Arabic literature is one of the most valuable literatures in the world because of its richness, vastness and its contributions to social values.

It is clear that the aim behind the learning and teaching of Arabic Literature and others is for the pleasure, satisfaction, experience, wisdom, and different types of knowledge. An important feature of all literature was the idea that it must be pleasing to the ear.

It is certain that literature greatly fulfills some of the aims of Education which are numerated by [3]:

- Infusion of piety and religiousness
- Formation of character
- Development of personality
- Promotion of social efficiency and happiness
- Preservation and spread of culture.

It is interesting and clear that one cannot do without the other.

A study of literature works is a study of the culture of different races; [9] observed that:

*Most cultures ... possess a rich store of stories which are meant specifically to promote values of the society, its history, beliefs and practices and also in order to entertain them.*

Maqama was an incredibly popular form of Arabic literature, it is one of the few forms which continued to be written during the decline of Arabic in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century [4]. Thus, any student of Arabic reading this literature will discover to a large extent Arab-Histories, cultures, knowledge and a lot of Arabic vocabulary, reading of the literature will provide students a lot of ideas, and it will motivate them on how to behave, how to tolerate others, the ways to think and how to conduct research for national development. This spirit of good behavior, tolerance, and research will assist greatly in educational transformation in Nigeria. There were several elements of courtly love which were developed in Arabic literature, such as the notion of love for love's sake and exaltation of the beloved lady, which have been traced back to Arabic literature of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century. [6]. The notion of the "ennobling power" of love was developed in the early 11<sup>th</sup> Century by a Persian Psychologist and Philosopher Ibn Sina known as "Avicenna" in Europe. In this Arabic treatise Risala fil ishq (Treatise on love). The final

elements of courtly love, the concept of love as desire never to be fulfilled" was also at times implicit in Arabic poetry. Reading of these books (Maqama and Risala fil ishq) will endow the students with the spirit of interaction and co-existence between male and females in the school, and having this will help each of them in developing educational transformation in Nigeria. Criticism also has been inherent in Arabic Literature. The poetry festival of the pre-Islam period often pitched two poets against each other in a war of verse in which one will be deemed to have won by the audience. This study allowed for better understanding of the message and facilitates interpretation for practical use, all of which help in the development of a critical method important for a later work on the other literature.

A clear distinction regularly drawn between works in literary language and popular work has meant that only part of Arabic Literature was usually considered worthy of study or criticisms. All these works tend to continue the tradition of contrasting two poets in order to determine which one is the best that follows the rules of classical poetic structure. Thus, learning this knowledge and understanding it will help learner and students chose the method of contrasting and selection between two things in order to pick the best and it will definitely assist in transformation of Nigerian system of education. Many words of wisdom, endurance and dignity have been derived from those poets such as Bashar Ibn Burd, Abu-atahiyat in Abbasid period and Barud in Nahada period.

Arabic literature teaches patriotisms. It makes students to cultivate and adopt differences among themselves. These encourage them to see the need to fight for the common good irrespective of what it will cost them that is why Basshar Ibn Burd advise that:

يقول بشار بن برد عن العفو والسماحة:  
إذا كنت في كل الأمور معاتبا # صديقك لم تلق الذي لاتعاتبه  
فعض واحدا أو وصل أخاك فإياه # مقارن ذنب مرة ومجانبه  
إذا أنت لم تشرب مرارا على القذى # ظمنت وائي الناس تصفو مشاريه  
ومن ذا الذي ترضى سحاباه كلها # كفى المرء نبلا أن تعد معايبه

Translation:

If you always blame and condemn your friend upon all his mistakes, then hardly for you to get a friend without mistake. Then in a situation like this, it is either for you to live alone or tolerate him because every human being is born to make mistake. If you refuse to drink water from a dirty cup, then automatically you should be ready for thirst. Nobody in life can claim perfection. Who is that person? That can boast of confidence in all his efforts? It is painful for a person to mention his mistake in His presence.

It also teaches us the importance of opportunity because opportunity lost can never be regained. That is why Abu Attahiya said:

ويقول أبو العتاهية: عن حكمة الحياة واغتنام الفرصة.  
إذا هبت رياحك فاغتنمها # فإن لكل عاصفة سكون  
ولا تنقل عن الإحسان فيها # فما تدري السكون متى يكون  
وإن درت نياقك فاحتلبها # فما تدري الفصيل لمن يكون

