

Assessment of Selected E-Learning Centres of Arabic and Islamic Studies in North-Central and South-Western, Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

ADEBAYO, Wasiu Ibrahim^{1*}, QAMORUDEEN, Tiamiyu Olayiwola (Ph.D.)²

^{1,2}Department of Arabic Language, Federal College of Education Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author - ADEBAYO, Wasiu Ibrahim^{1*},

ABSTRACT: The technology has affected every human activity without exception. Series of e-applications like zoom, face book, whatsapp, google meet, google classroom etc. are essentially acknowledged by users. Muslim scholars are found of appreciating the modern technology by creating e-learning centres to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies. On this light, the paper attempts to delve into a number of selected e-learning centres in Nigeria to pinpoint their contributions towards educational and national development. Descriptive method and interview and library are used as tools for data collection. Findings reveal that the centres ease access to the Arabic and Islamic Studies beyond the Nigerian society and create legitimate source of income for the staff. Also, a major problem encountered by the centres is the network imbalance and sequential electricity failure especially those who reside in Nigeria. In conclusion, the paper recommends that energy and network agencies should revitalise them in order to minimise the challenges of the stakeholders of the centres. This will enhance productivity and contributions of the e-learning centres to the national development of Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Arabic and Islamic Studies, e-learning centres in Nigeria, Springboard Language Academy, Ad-Dar'hamiyy International College, Almanār Islamic Academy.

INTRODUCTION

The availability, accessibility and utility of technology has compressed the world including Nigeria into a micro entity. The technological advancement in the twentieth (20th) century is no measurable that almost all facet of human activities is redefined and electrified with the capacity of modern technology. Though, the usefulness of the technology does not claim hundred percent positive effect as there are negative identified by scholars of various fields.¹ Nonetheless, it is two coin-side matter which observers could address based on their perception.

The effect of technology on education is enormous that every aspect of education is not left untouched rather that some are innovated for use in educational sphere. Though, such observation is nothing but an effect of quality education that yielded production and advancement of technology. Currently, numerous gadgets, devices, webs, internets, and e-applications are readily available for use in accessing and teaching quality education by learners and teachers respectively especially through handphones and desktop/laptop devices. In other words, aside recorded educational programme that will require just playing gadget(s), live educational programme would, of course, require internet connectivity that serves as electro-channel that would enhance transmission and efficient communication between the senders (instructors) and receivers (learners) accordingly.² This development has no subject restriction whereby every subject that were being taught classically and traditionally are now exploring the modern waves of teaching methods, instructional materials, and venues technologically.

Arabic and Islamic studies are of classical subjects that had been taught through various channels and methods using slates, leaves, rubber-mats, wooden chairs and benches under tree and open spaces.³ Another era has experienced how the duo subjects are being taught in the wall of classroom with writing boards where the teacher and learners have face-to-face atmosphere. With birth of technological advancement in the contemporary world song has taken another dimension. It is very interesting to note that sphere of teaching-learning of the subjects (Arabic and Islamic Studies) has explored the technology maximally that such culture could hold between parties (instructors and learners) living in different localities and communicating efficiently and effectively. On this note, the present work sets to peruse how much Muslim scholars have maximised the tech opportunity, identify challenges experience by both instructors and learners, and shed light on prospects await such venture. Of course, recommendations would be in order that what may be cause of regret and challenges are addressed effectively by the concerned people and agencies that needed serene atmosphere is created in order that educational development is fostered progressively.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT / JUSTIFICATION

Arabic and Islamic Studies are subjects that had been in existence since time immemorial, though pass through series of policies, methodologies, and approaches before now even in Nigeria. Historically, in the name of disseminating and teaching Arabic and Islamic knowledge, the Muslim scholars had to travel or migrate from one place to another as itinerant scholars. Upon reaching a location some scholars would establish Arabic and Islamic Studies centres/schools where enthusiastic learners, from far and near would be taught accordingly. In the contemporary era, the employment of Muslim scholars by proprietors of schools to teach the subjects based on an agreed remuneration has reformed the teaching of approach and experience of the subjects as many scholars also founded schools where Arabic and Islamic Studies are majorly taught together with other subjects recommended in the policy of education in Nigeria. However, the technological advancement has paved way for the latter category of scholars to go online teaching-learning ventures. Even though, Nigeria is viewed to be under develop has observed during COVID-19 lockdown that hardly many learning institutions could shift from physical classes to virtual on the ground of technological adversity and backwardness. Nonetheless, this research work proposes to answer the following questions:

- I. What led to creation and use of e-learning centres?
- II. What modalities implored to converse for learners within and outside the country?
- III. How the stakeholders of such ventures manage using visual devices to engage themselves?
- IV. What are the possible ways to curb the problem of electricity failure and internet imbalance?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of this research work;

- i. to define e-learning as a concept;
- ii. to define Arabic and Islamic Studies as a course of study;
- iii. to delve into how numerous e-learning centre spring up in Nigeria especially in south-west and north-central of the country;
- iv. to shed light on challenges that are probable in the course of e-learning venture in Nigeria; and
- v. to foresight the prospect that await such venture in the future, which could enhance educational and national development of Nigeria.

CONCEPTUALISING E-LEARNING AND ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

Teaching-learning venture is as old as human existence. This is proved by a number of Qur'anic chapters where Allah is pictured as Instructor while angels and Adam were depicted as learners though they were taught according to their nature and assignment ahead of them (Q.2:30-33). Muhammad-Busayri and Sulaiman (2023:87-88) opine that acquisition of knowledge is purposely made compulsory for man to enable him discharge assignments being saddled as God's viceroy, "being responsible man on the earth who would not only manage the sphere progressively but also contribute to the human progression".⁴ The first revealed five verses of the glorious Qur'an are very elucidatory enough that the first of the verses majorly dwell on acquisition of knowledge and the pivotal role of Allah in granting academic success for a learner.⁵ E-learning refers to a system of receiving knowledge via electronic devices while teaching, on the other hand can be viewed as an activity of imparting acquired knowledge whether in or out of classrooms.⁶

The importance of Arabic language in the development of education and literary activities in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Arabic became the official language of the Kanem-Bornu and Sokoto empires, being used for administrative, communicative, diplomatic and legal purposes. As a result of this, Ajape posits that learning of Arabic language aside being historic its imperativity towards national development via utility of the modern technology could not be underestimated. According to him, e-learning should be encouraged for the development of learning and teaching of Arabic language in Nigeria, hence, concerned authority should be up to the task non-relentingly.⁷ However, with the rapid progress in technology and the advancement in learning systems, Arabic and Islamic Studies education require the use of technology for transformation of knowledge as successful Arabic and Islamic education programmes rely on the consistent and integrated efforts of students, school management, parents, government, and the community members.⁸ One cannot separate Arabic language from Islamic studies since the language of the Qur'an has always been regarded as an integral part of Islamic education moreover it (Arabic) has been the tongue/language of communication especially in the spiritual realm in Islam.⁹

Yusuf states that unavailability of resources such as computer, internet service and ICT knowledge could be major challenges that can hinder employing e-learning programme even if professionals deem it fit. He maintains that challenge of manpower is also affecting the programme in the sense that majority of the Mallams/teachers that can teach Arabic and Islamic Studies are not familiar with the uses of technology to teach their learners as such this would affect effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.¹⁰ On this note, a giant step taken by Dr. Bilal Philips towards establishing the first online centre for the teachings of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The centre, though commenced with diploma programme in 2007 but currently it has progressed to

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first degree and post graduate programmes with tuition-free mode.¹¹ The achievements which such mode of operation could yield are not quantifiable since it avails easy access to quality and unbiased Islamic knowledge to every enthusiastic individual globally.¹²

In view of the above, the paper deems it fit of researching and delving in how much Arabic and Islamic Studies scholars utilise the modern technology for teaching of the duo subject simultaneously, hence, they are interwoven. Knowing fully that there a number of online and e-learning programmes established in Nigeria, the scope and limit of the paper will be restricted to two (2) geo-political zones of the country i.e. south-west and north-central; Springboard Language Academy-Lagos, Ad-Dar'hamiyy International College-Osogbo, and Almanār Islamic Academy-Ilorin.

ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES ONLINE CENTRES: NIGERIA EXPERIENCE

It is no more a news that Muslim scholars at local and international levels have been exploring the modern technology by creating platforms and centres for teaching-learning activities and preaching clips. These, hence, are done through series of social media applications such as imo, zoom, whatsapp, face book, twitter, Instagram, google meet, etc. According to Bolaji posits that social media is necessarily efficient for easy accessibility and availability of learning materials, has usability prospects for every discipline, controls the risk of face-to-face mode of learning, and avails a bunch of opportunities for disseminating the intended information between learners and teachers.¹³ In Nigeria, young and vibrant Muslim scholars are immensely exploring the avenue to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies, proselytise the Islamic messages, and earn legitimately. With this fact, since there are numerous online centres serving the same purposes, the scope of this paper is limited to two geo-political zones i.e. south-west and north-central of Nigeria and Lagos and Osogbo represent the south-west while Ilorin city represents north-central. Springboard Language Academy-Lagos and Ad-Darhamiyy International College-Osogbo, and Almanār Islamic Academy-Ilorin.

SPRINGBOARD LANGUAGE ACADEMY

It is an online Arabic and Islamic Studies centre founded by Dr. Adebayo Tajudeen born in the early 70s to the family of Alh. Ibrahim Adebayo (Baba Offa). He bags Doctor of Philosophy (Arabic) from University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 2009. The founder is the Chief Imam, Falomo Police Central Mosque, Executive Secretary, Forum for Islamic Education & Welfare, and Deputy Director Programmes, Languages, Voice of Nigeria, Broadcasting House all in Ikoyi, Lagos.¹⁴ The centre is a baby of physical Arabic and Islamic School situated at Falomo Police Central Barracks, Ikoyi, Lagos, which was initially registered with the Nigerian Cooperate Affairs Commission (CAC) as Springboard Language Concept in 2012 and was later upgraded to a Limited Liability Company in 2020.¹⁵ When it was a full physical classes, teaching-learning exercises used to hold between 5:00pm and 7:00pm from Saturday to Sunday for adults but while the children classes scheduled to hold between Maghrib and Ishā' prayers on from Monday to Wednesday and between 10:00am and 1:00pm on Saturday and Sunday.

As a result of COVID-19 outbreak that affected almost every activity and restrained physical contact and gathering¹⁶, Dr. Adebayo and management team of the school shifted to online classes whereby prospective students; adult and young people enrolled for the learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies.¹⁷ According to the Proprietor, since inception of the centre online, number of learners has been waxing through referral as there are local and international students. This, nonetheless, has prompted the management to employ a number of qualified hands to whom some subjects are allocated for efficient teaching-learning engagement which are held via recommended social media. It must be noted that the Proprietor always play monitory roles by first being on the class platform and would exit soon educational activity commences. The centre, as a core Arabic and Islamic learning centre, runs a number of subjects that cut across basic aspect of the fields such as Qur'an Reading, Qur'an memorisation, Hadith, Fiqh, Tawheed, Nahw, Sharf, Tajweed, 'Arabiyyah, Tafseer, Sīrah, Ta'rikh, Ulumu Ad-Da'wah, and Ulum Al-Qur'an.¹⁸

Springboard Language Academy adopts several ways to announce its programmes, which includes physical announcement at the Falomo Police Central Mosque, Ikoyi where the physical centre is situated, distributing flyers via social media such as face book, whatsapp, and others.¹⁹ It could be asserted that the centre enjoys referral most than other modes employed to advertise since majority of its students were able to convince their relations about the programmes.²⁰ Admission is open to various prospective students into various classes and programmes on termly basis and each is at liberty to fill an online form, afterward each will be subjected to qualifying interview to determine their placement.²¹ In order to achieve the set standard, the centre has to employ a number of scholars residing in Nigeria and/or abroad and specialising in the subjects taught at the centre.²² As a sampled centre, below is the statistics of Springboard Language Academy:

Table 1: Statistics of Springboard Language Academy received through interview with the Proprietor and a staff member.

DESCRIPTION	RESPONSE
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	SIXTY (60)
NUMBER OF STAFF	SEVEN (7)
AGE BRACKET OF STUDENTS	7 YEARS UPWARD

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LOCATION OF STUDENTS	NIGERIA, CANADA, US, UK
FEES	THIRTY THOUSAND NAIRA (₦30,000.00) PER TERM
DURATION	13 WEEKS
YEARS OF GRADUATION	2015-2024
NUMBER OF GRADUATES	75
FACE BOOK / WEB ADDRESS	https://springboardlanguageacademy.com

AD-DAR'HAMIYY INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

This is another e-learning centre established by Mall. Toyib AbdulWahid Ad-Dar'hamiyy in April, 2021 an indigene of Osogbo, Osun state, Nigeria. The centre is a full online Arabic and Islamic learning centre that aims at equipping young and old Muslims with qualitative Arabic language and Islamic education through series of related subjects in accordance with the level and class of students. In order words, the centre categorises the classes of students to preliminary, elementary, intermediate, advanced, and diploma. It majorly explores telegram and google meet as avenue to hold teaching-learning activities day and night according to the timing of the students' location.²³ In addition to the general subjects which the students of caliber of the centre could be taught, the students of Ad-Dar'hamiyy are specially exposed to some Arabic heritage and ancient books of Islamic studies e. g. Maqāmat Al-Ḥarīriy, Alfīyah bin Malik, Khaṣā'ish bin Janiy, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī etc.²⁴

As an educational institution, about eight teachers are employed and allocated different subjects in accordance with their competencies which are examined and confirmed hitherto their employment. At the time of this work, the least teaching staff of the institution is holder of diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies and the least paid monthly salary is seventeen thousand naira (₦17,000.00).²⁵

Table 2: Statistics received from the Proprietor of Ad-Dar'hamiyy International College-Osogbo through phone interview.

DESCRIPTION	RESPONSE
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	SIXTY-TWO (62)
NUMBER OF STAFF	EIGHT (8)
AGE BRACKET OF STUDENTS	17 – 50 YEARS
LOCATION OF STUDENTS	NIGERIA, GHANA, SAUDI ARABIA AND BENIN REPUBLIC
FEES	FIFTEEN THOUSAND NAIRA (₦15,000.00) PER TERM
DURATION / TERM	THREE (3) MONTHS
YEARS OF GRADUATION	2021-2024
NUMBER OF GRADUATE	723
FACE BOOK	Ad-dar'hammy international foundation

ALMANĀR ISLAMIC ACADEMY-ILORIN

The madrasah (school) is an Arabic and Islamic learning centre founded by Ustadh Abdulsalam Abdulghaniy Aromaradu. The founder is a product of University of Ilorin where he bagged B.A. and M.A. in Islamic Studies. The physical classes, which is situated in Ilorin and online classes were founded and registered with Cooperate Affairs Commission (CAC) in June, 2019.²⁶ Like its sister-centres, the centre teaches Hifzhul-Qur'an (Qur'an Memorisation), Fiqh, Hadith, Tawheed, Arabic language, Tajweed, and Tafseer.²⁷ As a way of uniqueness and flexibility, prospective learner enjoyed one-on-one mode of learning, which is scheduled according to the student's timing and could make special request by selecting and naming the exact area of interest either among the above itemised subjects or other aspect of Arabic language and Islamic Studies. Before the staff members were relieved of their duties as a result of students' drastic withdrawal due to financial and time constraint.

Table 2: Statistics received from the Proprietor of Almanār Islamic Academy-Ilorin through phone interview.

DESCRIPTION	RESPONSE
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	10
NUMBER OF STAFF	THREE (3)
AGE BRACKET OF STUDENTS	FIVE YEARS UPWARDS
LOCATION OF STUDENTS	CANADA, TURKEY, INDIA, NIGERIA, PAKISTAN, U.K., AUSTRALIA, AND U.S.
FEES	TWENTY THOUSAND (₦20,000.00) PER MONTH
DURATION / TERM	WHEN COMPLETE THE PRESCRIBED CURRICULUM

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YEARS OF GRADUATION	2021-2023
NUMBER OF GRADUATES	7
WEB ADDRESS	https://almanaracademy.com.ng/

FINDINGS

In the course of interviews and conversations with the proprietors of the three sampled online centres, it was observed that they have some things in common and some other things in difference, though all these do neither deny them of being Muslims scholars nor hinder them from disseminating the Islamic knowledge through e-learning centres for Arabic and Islamic Studies, vis-à-vis:

1. All are Nigerian Muslim scholars with recognised educational certificates and needed experiences;
2. They all aim at promoting, educating, and equipping Muslims with the qualitative Arabic language and Islamic knowledge;
3. They able to penetrate and promote Arabic language and Islamic education beyond the boarder of their homeland (Nigeria);
4. They could explore the modern technology to serve Islam and humanity, which in the long run contribute towards the national development of Nigeria educationally;
5. Their establishments allows both proprietors and staff members to earn source of income legitimately;
6. They have similar challenges which revolve internet/network imbalance, electricity power failure, economic constraint, timing differences;
7. Students of each sampled centres commend and appreciate the dedication, prowess and methodologies employed by their teachers/instructors;
8. The mode of teaching-learning (e-learning centre) devoid of stress and rigorous experience rather grants easy-access to qualitative Islamic education in the comfort room of parties; teachers and learners; and
9. That majority students of the centres are not only working-class members but also mature and live in diaspora.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

One of the ways of proving dynamism of Islamic studies is the utility of the modern technology in disseminating the teachings of Islam beyond one's locality. Aside the bitter experience which past gipsy Muslim scholars recorded, though were successful to a large extent²⁸ but yet much could had also been achieved with little or less rigor had there was technological advancement then as enjoyed by the recent scholars. However, their experience is a pointer to their cogent dedication, sacrifice, and servitude towards Islam and humanity that serve as pedagogue for the contemporary scholars to improve on modality and methods towards easing access to the Islamic knowledge.

This, in essence has been explored by the contemporary scholars as sampled above by instilling the language of Islam and its knowledge into the mind of the world conveniently. In order that prospects of the activity to sustain;

1. The government should work for stability of electricity power supply and internet friendliness.
2. The proprietor should create a forum/platform where they could recognize each other and share ideas chiefly to enable them improve on their professionalism.

In conclusion, the efforts of the current Muslim scholars towards spreading the teachings of Islam via electronic devices, internet exploration, and social media is highly commendable. In fact, such does not only prove genuineness of the teaching profession as entrenched in the Qur'an 2:30 but as well contributes towards eradication of unemployment which has enwrapped the country, and above all is the reward which awaits both teachers and learners.

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