

The Students' Perception of Arabic Language as a Tool for Islamic Studies in Ilorin University

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Abstract

Language is a mean of communicating ideas, thoughts, knowledge, feelings and opinions. Centuries ago, Arabic language has always been the pillar of Islamic studies due to epistemological association. Arabic as language has contributed significantly in learning Islamic studies and some other area of academia. The bone of contention is whether proficiency in Arabic language is a prerequisite for learning Islamic studies or not. The purpose of this research is to find out whether Arabic is a tool for learning Islamic studies or not specifically its finds out the: a. General perception of Arabic and Islamic studies students at the University of Ilorin on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies b. Arabic student's perception on Arabic whether is tool to learn Islamic studies. c. Islamic students' perception on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies. The population for this study is all the undergraduate Arabic and Islamic students at the university of Ilorin, the target population is all the 100 level to 400 level students while the study sample was 140 that was purposively selected. Arabic had 20 while Islamic had 120 students. Three research questions were answered using percentage indices analysis.

The result shows that; both Arabic and Islamic studies students perceived Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic studies. Arabic students perceived Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic studies. Islamic students perceived Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic studies base on the findings of this study, it was concluded that Arabic language serves as a tool for learning Islamic studies and recommendations were made that Arabic language must be made compulsory or required for all students of Islamic studies at all level of education to engender better understanding of Islamic studies.

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Introduction

Language is a medium of communicating ideas, thought, knowledge, feelings and opinions. Language is also any system of linguistic symbols used by the people of the community to communicate. It is a dynamic construct which is very important in the society due to its value in communicability. Across the centuries, the Arabic language has always been the backbone of Islamic sciences due to its epistemological relation. Not only Al-Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's traditions (Hadiths), the main epistemological sources for Islamic sciences were revealed in Arabic, both have been engrossed with Arabic metaphors, semantics, grammar, rhetoric and morphology. Thus, a sufficient command of Arabic language or at least a certain degree of competency in understanding certain Arabic terminologies and grammar/syntax are expected for one to master Islamic studies. This interconnectedness between Arabic language and learning of Islamic science through what is known nowadays as Islamic studies is pertinent as has been explained by scholars and researchers in the field.

In the present day, studying Islam has offered not only by speeches and scholars in the field. Islamic studies as a field of study have been a favourite course taken by many Muslims in Nigeria; at least in the higher learning institution many of these institutions offered courses in Islamic studies due to increasing demands by the people several years ago. In some courses offered, Arabic language has been made compulsory for all the students taking the courses. It is a fact that any student of Islamic studies must be able to speak in Islamic language no matter how little. However, Arabic language may not be made compulsory for Islamic students since students of the course feel they are less interested in Arabic language and they can handle their courses even without a strong command of the language (A. Rahman, 2007; An Zaruddin Ahmad, 2004; Najib Jaffar, 2013).

Due to such a premise, this study attempts to identify students' perceptions of the instrumentality of Arabic to Islamic studies in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The main reason behind choosing University of Ilorin students of Arabic and Islamic Studies is due to the fact that students at that level are offering courses inter-related and the two sets of students need the two courses as much as possible. The study also aims to understand the necessity of Arabic language to Islamic studies. Through the

students' perceptions, a purposive sampling of 140 students both Arabic and Islamic studies students from 100 to four hundred level were employed to administer questionnaire on the use of a Arabic language proficiency to understanding of Islamic studies. This paper starts with review of literature on the by the position of Arabic language in Islamic studies programme follow by research methodology, analysis of data and results, findings, discussions, conclusions and recommendations.

Arabic language in Islamic studies

According to Sammir (2016), Arabic language belongs to the Afro- Asiatic family of languages. The earliest known example of Arabic studies in the inscription in the Syria descent dating back to the fourth Century A.D. Some belief that Arabic is a sacred language because it is the language of the Quran, however by origin it is believed to have come into existence around three thousand years ago be the revelation of the Quran. (Abdul Majid, 2016). The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. Allah say: "indeed we have made it an Arabic Quran that you may understand (surah az- zukhruf verse 3). The sunnah of the prophet also came in Arabic. These two are the primary source of Islam that led scholars mastering Arabic language as a prerequisite to learn and understand Islam. Thus, a good understanding of the language will enable the person to understand the meaning be indicated by the Quran and Sunnah with respect to Islamic law. In other words, any negligence will; lead to deviation from the true meaning of the Quran and Sunnah. (Faisal, 2016).

Despite the recognition for the need of Arabic language in Islamic studies in general, however, there are debates among educators on this subject. According to majority of academician involved in teaching Islamic studies in the institution of higher learning, this subject can be better taught in the language easily and commonly understood by both teachers and learners. They contend that all the subjects of Islamic studies can be learned and taught through the translated work.

On the other hand, others believe that the proficiency in Arabic language is a prerequisite for learning and teaching Islamic studies. This is mainly because the entire Islamic literature including Al-Quran and hadith are all in Arabic. It cannot be denied that much of this heritage have been transmitted into different language, but a known fact remain that translation have their limitation in conveying whole idea of certain

knowledge and concepts. This limitation will lead to the ability for the learner to understand and attain the depth of the field.

In support of this argument, in practical context, Imitiaz highlighted the prevailing methods of teaching Islamic studies in the institution of higher learning in non-Arab countries as Pakistan, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Thailand. According to him, most of Islamic studies programmes in these countries are third in their local/national language or English (Imitiaz, 2001).

Furthermore, almost all the institutions of higher learning with exception of the University of Brunei, Darussalam are producing Islamic studies graduates through the medium of their local language. To reconcile the two contradicting views, imitiaz proposed that Arabic language must form part and parcel of Islamic studies curricula of all graduate programmes. In view of the practical difficulties and in order to make the subject more easily understandable, local or national language may also be used as medium instruction (Imitiaz, 2001).

The importance of Arabic language to the study of Islam

There can be no doubt that the leaning of Arabic language should be one of the top priorities and indeed, it should be seen as basic necessities for a person who wish to study Islam. Likewise, the teaching of Arabic is equally a priority for those who wise to impact Islamic knowledge to others. This is especially the case when the student is young. The only reason this is so is because the Arabic language is the bedrock of our enduring religion. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, Allah says "indeed we have made it an Arabic Quran that you may understand (surah az-zukhruf, verse 3). Just as the Qur'an came to us in Arabic, the sunnah of our prophet (peace be upon him) came to us as well.

Both of these sources are Arabic in their wording, in their idioms and in their meanings. Because of these, the people of knowledge have concurred that proper understanding of the sacred text can only be realised in accordance with the dictates of the Arabic language has understanding the Arabs at the time the revelation took place.

If the person who wishes to seek Islamic knowledge is not a native speaker of Arabic, he needs to learn the language and acquire a solid understanding

of it. This will enable him to understand the meaning being indicated by the Qur'an and Sunnah with respect to Islamic law. Once he is equipped with this ability, he will be able to carry out what the Qur'an and Sunnah command of him and shun what these two sources prohibit him.

However, it must be admitted that acquiring such intimate and in-depth knowledge is not a small task. It is difficult for a native speaker of Arabic and this difficult is multiplied for someone who is not a native speaker. A student who wishes to become fully proficient in Arabic language before embarking on the study of various branches of Islamic knowledge may never find time to do so. The study of Arabic, as experience as shown can take a considerable amount of time.

In consideration of this fact, the best approach for a non-Arabic speaking student is for him to pursue the study of Arabic language in conjunction with the study of other Islamic discipline in his own language. While developing his ability to understand the Arabic language he can seek knowledge form the Qur'an and Sunnah and from the books written by scholars in theology, Quran commentaries, Hadiths studies, Islamic law and various other fields that are available in the language he understands. This book might be written in his native language or be translation of Arabic works. If a student employs such an approach, he will benefit greatly with the help of Allah. After sometimes he will see that he has accumulated a body of knowledge that is not all insignificant. When he reaches desired level in his Arabic proficiency, he will be able to build upon the knowledge that his already acquired by referring directed to the original Arabic source works. With such a background this will not present any difficulty for him. A student should try to benefit from the experiences of many non-Arabic Muslim communities around the world whose educators have developed tried and true methods and syllabi to reach their people Arabic and the most important matter of their faith in their local languages. It may be possible for student and educators to acquire this programmed syllabus through various charitable and educational organisation (Sheik Ahmad, 2016).

Moreover, Islam had learnt its own lesson from the experiences of Judaism and Christianity; it has stuck religiously to Arabic and conferred on it, the status of the official language of Islam. With the revelation of the Quran in classical Arabic, a standard was set, which has hitherto remained the norm not only for artistic confirmed this when he said that:

The classical form is not only the literary form used by all the Arabic writing peoples but also the religious language of all Muslims, no matter what their natives' tongue may be. To Muslims, Arabic is the only appropriate language of approach to Allah (Hitti, 1976, p.112).

It is against this background that Muslims in Nigeria committed to the course of Arabic and Islamic studies. Wherever there is a Muslim population, some kinds of Quranic as well as Advanced Arabic schools are established in which both Arabic and Islamic are taught simultaneously (Fafunwa, 1984, p.55). Generally speaking, this naturally makes Arabic 'second language' of every non-Arab Muslim, being the language supposedly acquired next to his mother tongue through the study of the Arabic Quran and later through other branches of Arabic and Islamic studies.

It may be postulated therefore, that Arabic for religious purposes is theoretically acquired by some, if not most Nigeria Muslims, as a second language. In fact, in some cases, some Nigeria Muslims, having acquired their 1st language, are exposed first to Arabic and only later to English language. In this context, Arabic is closely attached to all the school subjects taught within the Arabic school system. It is the medium of instruction and communication among staff and the student. The intimate association between Arabic and Islamic Studies puts the language at the disposal of every student learning in this environment.

The role of Arabic Quran, in this respect, is remarkable. It is the pivot around which several branches of knowledge have revolved: Arabic syntax and morphology were developed to protect the Quran from corruption by foreigners who later embraced Islam as a way of life: Tafsir – (Quran exegesis) evolved in an attempt to interpret specific verses, expatiate on concise and precise expressions and explain new words introduced by the Quran; Tajwid (the art of reciting the Quran according to established code of pronunciation and intonation) emerged to ensure correct oral production of the Quran, Arabic lexicography and philology developed in order that specific expressions embodied in the Quran may be traced to their roots; Arabic Rhetoric evolved to justify the use of unfamiliar images in the Quran (Abd al-Tawwab, 1980). Thus, the Arabic Quran, with its set of expressions, values, concepts and outlook has become a factor to be reckoned with in any study of Arabic language. To date, the Arabic Quran, believed by the Muslim to be divine origin, is taken for a linguistic miracle

which is inimitable in all respects. It has consequently facilitated the development of the language and contributed to its transformation from an obscure dialect into one of the great languages of medieval and modern times (Chejne, 1969, p. 8).

This tradition of linking Arabic with the Quran and indeed with other branches of Islamic Studies has been integrated for a long period of time within the informal Arabic Education system in Nigeria. Yet, the Islamic undertone is at the expense of learning Arabic as a literary language. Most of the Arabic teachers in our primary and secondary schools and lecturers at our Higher Institutions were, at one time or the other, students of Arabic schools outside the formal setting. It seems plausible therefore, to argue that the concept of foreign language, as it relates to Nigeria, is a relative term: with regard to Arabic, it is not, after all, as foreign as other language like English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Russian to which some interested Nigerians are exposed at one stage or the other. However, the religious affiliation peculiar to Arabic has far reaching consequences on people's attitude to it and on the involvement of government in its cause.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine students' perception of Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study. Specifically, the study intends to examine:

- (a) Arabic and Islamic students' perception of Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies
- (b) Perception of Arabic student on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies
- (c) Perception of Islamic student on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study

• Research Questions

1. What is the general perception of Arabic and Islamic student as a tool for learning Islamic study?
2. Does Arabic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study?
3. Does Islamic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study?

- **Research Design**

This research is descriptive survey type. According to (Gay, 1976) a descriptive survey tends to describe and report the process of education the way it is. This study describes a process of how Arabic and Islamic students perceived Arabic as an instrument or tools for leaning Islamic studies at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

- **Instrumentation**

A checklist that comprised of twenty items on student's perception of Arabic as instrument of learning Islamic studies was used. Each of the items has three linker options of a lot, which attracts two marks, a little, which attracts one mark, and not at all, which attracts zero mark. Section A of the instrument requested for general and personal information about the respondents while section B was made up of the items on checklist to elicit responses from students.

Data Analysis and Results

The data presented in Table 1 included demographic characteristic of the respondents' frequency counts and percentage. The variables used included faculty, course, level, gender and age.

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Faculty, Course, Level, Gender and Age

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Arts	113	80.7
Education	27	19.3
Total	140	100.0
Course	Frequency	Percentage
Arabic Studies	20	14.3
Islamic Studies	120	85.7
Total	140	100.0
Level	Frequency	Percentage
100 Level	23	16.4
200 Level	52	37.1
300 Level	38	27.1
400 Level	27	19.3
Total	140	100.0
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	65	46.4
Female	75	53.6
Total	140	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percentage
15 – 20 years	33	23.6
21 – 25 years	83	59.3
26 – 30 years	24	17.1
31 years and Above	-	-
Total	140	100.0

Table 1 reveals that out of the 140 respondents that participated in the study, 113 representing (80.7%) of the students were from Faculty of Arts, while 27 representing (19.3%) of the students were from Faculty of Education. This shows that majority of the respondents in this study were from Faculty of Arts. Also, from Table 1, 20 representing (14.3%) were Arabic Studies students, while 120 representing (85.7%) were Islamic Studies students. This implies that majority of the respondents were Islamic Studies students. Furthermore, Table 1 reveals that out of the 140 respondents that participated in the study, 23 representing (16.4%) were 100 Level students, 52 representing (37.1%) were 200 Level students, 38 representing (27.1%) were 300 Level students, while 27 representing (19.3%) were 400 Level students. Also, from Table 1, 65 representing

(46.4%) were male students, while 75 representing (53.6%) were female students. From Table 1, 33 representing (23.6%) were between the ages 15 – 20 years, 83 representing (59.3%) were between the ages 21 – 25 years, 24 representing (17.1%) were between the ages 26 – 30 years, while none were between the ages 31 years and Above. This implies that majority of the respondents were between the ages 21 – 25 years in this study.

Research Question 1: *What is the general perception of Arabic and Islamic students as a tool for learning Islamic study?*

Table 2: Percentage Analysis of Perception of Arabic and Islamic students as a Tool for Learning Islamic Study

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	111	79.3
Negative	29	20.3
Total	140	100.0

Table 2 presents the responses of the respondents to items that sought information on the perception of Arabic and Islamic students as a tool for learning Islamic study. The result on Table 2 indicated that 111 representing (79.3%) of Arabic and Islamic students have a positive perception on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies, while 29 representing (20.3%) of Arabic and Islamic students have a negative perception on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies. This implies that majority of Arabic and Islamic students have a positive perception on the use of Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies.

Research Question 2: *Does Arabic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study?*

Table 3: Percentage Analysis of Arabic Students Perceived Arabic as a Tool for Learning Islamic Study

Arabic Students Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	15	75.0
Negative	5	25.0
Total	20	100.0

Table 3 presents the responses of the respondents to items that sought information on the Arabic students' perception on Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies. The result on Table 3 indicated that 15 representing (75.0%) of respondent Arabic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies as positive, while 5 representing (25.0%) Arabic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies negative.

Research Question 3: *Does Islamic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study?*

Table 4: Percentage Analysis of Islamic Students Perceived Arabic as a Tool for Learning Islamic Study

Islamic Students Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	96	80.0
Negative	24	20.0
Total	120	100.0

Table 4 presents the responses of the respondents to items that sought information on the Islamic students' perception of Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies. The result on Table 4 indicated that 96 representing (80.0%) of respondent Islamic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies positive, while 24 representing (20.0%) of respondent Islamic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic study negative. This implies that majority of the Islamic students perceived Arabic as a tool for learning Islamic studies positive.

Results of Major Findings

- 1) Both Arabic and Islamic studies students perceived Arabic language as tool for learning Islamic studies.
- 2) Arabic students perceived Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic studies.
- 3) Islamic students perceived Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic studies.

Discussion

The general purpose of this research as said above is to investigate the university Of Ilorin students of Arabic and Islamic studies perception of Arabic language as a tool for learning Islamic Studies, specifically, the study finds out the Arabic student's views as regard this, and also Islamic students views. The findings for the three research questions shows that both Arabic and Islamic students of university of Ilorin were of the positive perception that Arabic serves as a tool for learning Islamic Studies. This findings agrees with the findings of earlier researchers such as Samir (2016), Abdul majid, Hassan and Bello (2016), Sheik Ahmad (n.d), Hitti (1984), Abdul-Tawab (1980) and Chejne(1969) that Arabic language serves as a tool for learning Islamic Studies.

Conclusion

From the findings of this research, it could be concluded that:

- 1) Arabic and Islamic Studies students positively perceived Arabic Language as a tool for learning Islamic Studies.
- 2) Arabic students of the University of Ilorin positively perceived Arabic Language as a tool for learning Islamic Studies.
- 3) Islamic Studies students of the University of Ilorin also perceived Arabic Language as a toll for learning Islamic Studies.

Recommendation

As a result of the findings, it could be concluded that:

- 1) Arabic language must be made compulsory or required for all students of Islamic studies at all level of education as to engender better understanding of Islamic Studies.
- 2) Students of Islamic Studies must be encouraged to attend seminars that borders on Arabic Studies to enable them to understand all aspect of Islamic Studies very well.

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