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## TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS IN ARABIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

This review examines the recent literature on Arabic education in Nigeria, synthesizing historical trends, prevailing challenges, and emerging prospects. Major trends include the persistence of Arabic across formal and informal educational settings, continued delivery through NCE and university programmes, and increasing attention to ICT integration. Key challenges identified in the literature are shortages of qualified teachers, inadequate instructional materials and curricula misalignment, low student motivation, infrastructural deficits, and uneven adoption of technology. Promising prospects include curriculum review (NCE minimum standards), teacher professional development, the growth of e-learning and digital resources, and policy interventions that integrate Arabic education into mainstream teacher education. The review concludes with recommendations for curriculum reform, investment in teacher training and ICT infrastructure, and targeted empirical studies to fill persistent knowledge gaps.

### INTRODUCTION

Arabic education in Nigeria occupies a distinctive and multifaceted place at the intersection of language, religion, and culture. The history of Arabic in Nigeria is inseparable from the history of Islam, which entered West Africa through trade, migration, and missionary activities as early as the 11th century (Hunwick, 1997; Alidou, 2004). The spread of Islam established Arabic not only as the liturgical language of the Qur'an but also as a medium of scholarship, administration, and intercultural communication. Over time, Arabic became both a language of religious identity and a channel for intellectual, political, and commercial transactions.

Historically, Arabic education in Nigeria has been delivered through Qur'anic schools, *madāris*, and *majālis al-taʿlīm* (learning circles), which placed strong emphasis on memorization of the Qur'an, mastery of recitation, and the study of classical texts in grammar, jurisprudence, and theology (Boyd, 1989). These traditional institutions laid the foundation for literacy in Arabic long before the introduction of Western-style education during colonial rule. In fact, many early anti-colonial leaders and reformists in northern Nigeria were products of Arabic and Islamic schools who later engaged with the colonial authorities through both Arabic and English correspondence (Loimeier, 2013).

With the establishment of colonial education, Arabic was marginalized from mainstream curricula, often relegated to religious institutions. However, the resilience of Arabic instruction ensured its continuity in both informal and semi-formal spaces. In post-independence Nigeria, efforts were made to integrate Arabic into formal education through its inclusion in secondary school curricula, Colleges of Education, and universities. Today, Arabic is taught at different levels with varying nomenclature and curricular emphasis, ranging from Islamic Studies (with Arabic components) to full-fledged Arabic language departments in Nigerian universities (Abubakar, 2015).

In contemporary Nigeria, Arabic education has expanded in scope beyond religious instruction to encompass linguistic, cultural, and vocational objectives. At the tertiary level, Colleges of Education and universities run degree and diploma programmes in Arabic and Islamic Studies, with the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) providing a standardized framework for teacher preparation (National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE], 2012). The NCE curriculum aims to produce competent Arabic educators who can teach at both primary and secondary school levels while also contributing to scholarship in the field. This institutionalization of Arabic underscores its importance not only as a religious language but also as a modern academic discipline.

Despite this progress, the teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigeria face numerous challenges. Research consistently highlights shortages of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, limited instructional materials, low student motivation, and infrastructural deficits (Adebayo, 2018; Yusuf & Alabi, 2020). These problems are compounded by wider systemic issues in Nigerian education, such as inadequate funding, policy inconsistencies, and a disconnect between curriculum design and labor market realities. Furthermore, globalization and the dominance of English as Nigeria's official language have created additional hurdles for Arabic learners, who often perceive limited socio-economic value in Arabic proficiency compared to English (Oseni, 2019).

Nevertheless, there are emerging opportunities for revitalizing Arabic education. Technological innovations, such as e-learning platforms, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), and artificial intelligence tools, offer new avenues for enhancing teaching and learning (Ahmed, 2021). For instance, WhatsApp, Zoom, YouTube, and other platforms are increasingly used by educators to supplement classroom instruction, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote learning became a necessity (Salihu & Bello, 2022). Similarly, curriculum reform initiatives spearheaded by the NCCE and other bodies present opportunities for updating teaching methods and aligning Arabic education with global best practices.

This review, therefore, seeks to synthesize current scholarship on Arabic education in Nigeria with particular attention to historical trends, existing challenges, and emerging prospects. The study is motivated by the need to provide a consolidated account of how Arabic education has evolved, the persistent barriers to its effectiveness, and the potential strategies for strengthening its role in Nigeria's educational and cultural landscape. The review draws on both published and unpublished works from 2010 to 2025, with emphasis on recent empirical studies, curriculum evaluations, and policy analyses.

The central argument advanced is that Arabic education in Nigeria, while historically resilient, requires deliberate policy, pedagogical, and technological interventions to remain relevant in the 21st century. Addressing its challenges and leveraging its prospects will not only strengthen Arabic literacy but also contribute to Nigeria's broader goals of cultural preservation, religious understanding, and educational inclusivity.

**METHOD**

This review employs a narrative review approach**,** focusing on synthesizing and critically analyzing available literature on Arabic education in Nigeria. The choice of a narrative review was informed by the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks not to test a hypothesis but to consolidate scattered insights into trends, challenges, and prospects. Unlike systematic reviews that rely on stringent inclusion/exclusion protocols and meta-analytic techniques, the narrative review method allows for flexibility in capturing both published and unpublished materials that enrich the discourse (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

Search Strategy

To identify relevant literature, online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Scopus, and African Journals Online (AJOL) were systematically searched. The following search terms were used either singly or in combination:

"Arabic education in Nigeria"

"teaching Arabic in Nigerian Colleges of Education"

"Arabic language curriculum Nigeria"

"NCE Arabic education review"

"ICT in Arabic teaching Nigeria"

"Arabic education challenges Africa"

"Arabic and Islamic studies Nigeria"

Searches were limited to works published between 2010 and 2025, with emphasis on studies conducted in the Nigerian context. However, some earlier foundational works (e.g., Hunwick, 1997; Boyd, 1989) were also consulted to provide historical grounding.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for literature selection were:

1. Studies focused on Arabic language education in Nigeria (both secular and religious contexts).

2. Research that addressed curriculum issues, teacher education, instructional methods, or student outcomes in Arabic.

3. Works published in peer-reviewed journals, edited books, government reports, and credible theses/dissertations.

4. Empirical studies, policy reviews, and theoretical papers that directly discuss Arabic education challenges and reforms.

Excluded were:

1. Articles that only discussed Islamic education broadly without specific reference to Arabic.

2. Works outside Nigeria unless they offered comparative insights relevant to the Nigerian case.

3. Studies published before 2010 that did not provide substantial theoretical or historical grounding.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Relevant information was extracted regarding study objectives, methodology, findings, and implications. A thematic synthesis was then undertaken, clustering the literature around three broad categories:

1. **Trends** – historical continuity, curriculum development, ICT integration.
2. **Challenges** – teacher shortages, curricular gaps, student motivation, infrastructural deficits, policy fragmentation.
3. **Prospects** – curriculum reform, ICT innovations, teacher professional development, policy opportunities.

This clustering ensured that the literature could be discussed in a coherent narrative, showing both continuity and divergence across studies.

Limitations of the Review Method

The reliance on a narrative review method, while flexible, carries limitations. There is a risk of selection bias since inclusion was partly subjective and guided by availability of literature. Additionally, some unpublished or locally circulated Arabic education documents may have been overlooked. Nonetheless, triangulating insights from multiple sources provided a reasonably comprehensive view of the state of Arabic education in Nigeria.

**Trends in Arabic Education in Nigeria**

Historical Continuity and Institutionalization

Arabic education in Nigeria reflects a long history of resilience and adaptation. According to Hunwick (1997), Arabic literacy was widespread in West Africa by the 16th century, serving as the language of Islamic scholarship, law, and administration. The establishment of Qur'anic schools (*makaranta allo* in Hausa regions) institutionalized Arabic instruction long before Western-style schools were introduced. These schools emphasized rote memorization of the Qur'an, mastery of grammar through classical texts like *Ajurrumiyya* and *Alfiyya ibn Malik*, and exposure to jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*aqida*).

The colonial period marked a turning point, as Arabic was sidelined in favor of English, the language of administration and schooling. Yet, Arabic persisted in Islamic schools, largely outside state recognition (Boyd, 1989). By the 1950s and 1960s, reforms sought to integrate Arabic into government-recognized curricula, especially in northern Nigeria where Arabic had greater societal demand.

Post-independence, Arabic education gained recognition through its inclusion in the national curriculum. Colleges of Education, regulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), incorporated Arabic and Islamic Studies into their training programmes. Universities such as Bayero University, Ahmadu Bello University, and the University of

Ilorin also established Arabic and Islamic Studies departments, further institutionalizing the discipline (Abubakar, 2015).

Curriculum Attention and Calls for Review

Curriculum development for Arabic education in Nigeria has been guided largely by the NCE Minimum Standards**,** which define learning outcomes and content areas for Arabic teacher training. However, several studies argue that the curriculum has remained stagnant, failing to reflect modern linguistic and technological needs (Yusuf & Alabi, 2020). Critics highlight that many syllabi remain overly focused on classical texts, with insufficient attention to communicative competence, contemporary Arabic usage, and digital resources.

In recent years, calls for curriculum reform have intensified. Researchers advocate aligning Arabic education with global language teaching standards such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Ahmed, 2021). This would involve moving beyond memorization and translation toward interactive skills like speaking, listening, and applied writing. Similarly, the NCCE has faced pressure to review teacher training curricula, ensuring that Arabic educators are equipped not only with linguistic expertise but also with pedagogical and technological

**Growing Interest in ICT and E-Learning Approaches**

In recent years, one of the most significant developments in Arabic education in Nigeria has been the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching and learning. The rise of mobile technologies, digital learning platforms, and open educational resources has provided new opportunities for language instruction, especially for Arabic, which is traditionally taught through rote memorization and face-to-face interaction.

Several studies highlight the growing role of ICT in transforming Arabic pedagogy. For instance, Salihu and Bello (2022) report that many Arabic teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education adopted WhatsApp groups, Zoom classes, and YouTube channels during the COVID-19 lockdown to continue instruction remotely. These tools enabled students to access lectures, share assignments, and participate in discussions, creating a form of blended learning that extended beyond the classroom.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is particularly promising in the Nigerian context. With high mobile phone penetration, students can access Arabic dictionaries, translation apps, and Qur'an recitation tools. Platforms such as Quran.com and Duolingo Arabic offer learners additional practice in pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension (Ahmed, 2021).

Some Nigerian scholars argue that MALL aligns with students' digital lifestyles, making Arabic learning more engaging and interactive (Yusuf & Alabi, 2020).

Despite these opportunities, ICT adoption is uneven. Urban institutions, particularly universities, are more likely to integrate ICT into Arabic education than rural or less-funded Colleges of Education. Challenges include unstable electricity, limited internet connectivity, and lack of teacher training in ICT use. Yet, the general trend points to a growing recognition of the potential of digital tools to modernize Arabic education in Nigeria.

**Main Challenges Identified in the Literature**

Shortage of Qualified and Motivated Teachers

A recurring theme in the literature is the shortage of well-trained Arabic teachers in Nigeria. Many teachers currently engaged in Arabic education lack specialized training in modern pedagogy, curriculum design, and ICT integration. According to Adebayo (2018), while teachers may have strong command of classical Arabic texts, they often lack methodological competence in delivering Arabic as a second language.

Furthermore, teacher motivation remains low. Poor remuneration, inadequate recognition of Arabic in mainstream education, and limited career progression opportunities discourage talented individuals from pursuing Arabic teaching as a profession. This shortage of qualified teachers contributes to declining student interest and low performance in Arabic subjects at secondary and tertiary levels.

Curriculum and Instructional Material Deficits

The Arabic curriculum in many Nigerian institutions remains outdated, emphasizing grammar-translation methods and rote memorization. While these approaches preserve classical scholarship, they fail to equip students with communicative competence necessary in contemporary contexts (Yusuf & Alabi, 2020).

Instructional materials are also limited. Many schools rely on imported Arabic textbooks from the Middle East, which may not align with Nigerian learners' cultural and linguistic realities. Locally produced materials are scarce, and where available, they are often outdated or poorly designed. This mismatch between curriculum content and student needs undermines learning outcomes.

Low Student Motivation and Attitude Problems

Another significant challenge is low motivation among students. Several studies suggest that many learners perceive Arabic as a "religious" subject with limited socio-economic value

compared to English or other vocational subjects (Oseni, 2019). This perception leads to low enrolment in Arabic programmes, absenteeism, and lack of commitment to learning.

In addition, students from non-Muslim backgrounds may find it difficult to relate to the cultural and religious dimensions embedded in Arabic instruction. Even among Muslim students, those who prioritize English as a language of upward mobility often see Arabic as secondary. Addressing these motivational challenges requires rebranding Arabic as not only a religious language but also a skill with global opportunities in translation, diplomacy, and academia.

Infrastructure and ICT Inequities

While ICT holds great promise for Arabic education, infrastructural deficits remain a barrier. Many Colleges of Education in Nigeria face unstable electricity, poor internet access, and inadequate computer facilities. Teachers often lack digital literacy, limiting their ability to exploit available e-learning resources (Salihu & Bello, 2022).

The "digital divide" is particularly stark between urban and rural institutions. Whereas students in Lagos or Abuja may access online Arabic resources, their counterparts in smaller towns or villages may struggle with basic internet connectivity. Without infrastructural investment, ICT-driven Arabic education will remain unevenly implemented.

Fragmentation and Lack of Unified Policy Enforcement

Arabic education in Nigeria is delivered across diverse settings: Qur'anic schools, Islamic schools, Colleges of Education, and universities. However, there is little policy coherence or standardization across these institutions (Abubakar, 2015). While the NCCE sets minimum standards for Arabic at Colleges of Education, many informal institutions operate without oversight, resulting in inconsistent quality.

Policy fragmentation is further compounded by political sensitivities around religion and language. Efforts to mainstream Arabic into national curricula sometimes meet resistance from non-Muslim communities who view Arabic primarily as a religious language. This lack of unified policy enforcement hinders the development of a robust, standardized framework for Arabic education.

## Prospects and Opportunities

Despite the challenges, Arabic education in Nigeria presents several prospects that, if harnessed, could transform the discipline into a vibrant component of national education.

Curriculum Reform and NCCE Engagement

One of the strongest prospects lies in curriculum reform. Scholars argue that the NCE Minimum Standards for Arabic education should be updated to reflect communicative language teaching, digital literacy, and applied skills (Yusuf & Alabi, 2020). This reform would modernize Arabic pedagogy by balancing classical scholarship with functional language use.

For instance, integrating conversational Arabic, translation skills, and contemporary literature into the curriculum could enhance student engagement. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has already signaled willingness to revise standards, presenting a unique opportunity for stakeholders to influence Arabic education reform (NCCE, 2012).

Teacher Professional Development and Communities of Practice

Another prospect is investment in teacher professional development. Workshops, refresher courses, and international exchange programmes can expose Arabic teachers to new methodologies and resources. Encouraging communities of practice where teachers share experiences through associations or digital forums can also enhance professional growth. Teacher motivation can be boosted by improved remuneration, recognition, and career progression pathways. With stronger teacher capacity, Arabic education can move beyond rote methods toward more interactive, student-centered approaches.

Strategic ICT Integration and Localized E-Resources

The rapid growth of digital technologies in Nigeria presents unprecedented opportunities. Developing localized Arabic e-learning platforms, mobile apps, and digital textbooks tailored to Nigerian learners can make instruction more relevant and accessible (Ahmed, 2021). Moreover, ICT can be used to bridge gaps in teacher shortages. For example, recorded video lectures, online tutorials, and mobile-based quizzes can support students in remote areas. If infrastructural deficits are addressed, ICT could democratize access to quality Arabic education across Nigeria.

Research and Evidence-Based Policy

There is also a growing recognition that policy must be informed by research. Empirical studies on the effectiveness of Arabic teaching methods, ICT interventions, and student motivation strategies can provide the evidence needed to guide reforms. Universities and Colleges of Education can collaborate with government agencies to conduct pilot projects that evaluate new approaches before scaling them nationally.

5.5 Interdisciplinary Opportunities

Arabic education can also benefit from cross-disciplinary collaborations. For instance, linking Arabic with business studies, diplomacy, or international relations can highlight its practical value. With the growing global demand for Arabic speakers in international organizations, Nigerian graduates could gain competitive advantages if Arabic education is repositioned.

**Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Directions**

The reviewed literature reveals several gaps that require further investigation:

1. Limited empirical studies on ICT integration. While many studies highlight ICT as a prospect, few have rigorously evaluated the impact of mobile apps, online platforms, or AI tools on Arabic learning outcomes in Nigeria.

2. Insufficient longitudinal studies. Most research is cross-sectional. Long-term studies tracking Arabic students from NCE through teaching careers could provide insights into curriculum effectiveness.

3. Neglect of gender perspectives. Few studies examine how male and female students experience Arabic education differently, despite cultural and social variations in access.

4. Under-researched motivational factors. While low motivation is identified as a challenge, there is little empirical work exploring how motivation can be enhanced among Nigerian Arabic learners.

5. Policy-focused research gaps. Limited studies examine how national education policies directly influence Arabic curricula, teacher deployment, and funding.

Future research should address these gaps using mixed methods, experimental designs, and large-scale surveys to generate evidence-based solutions.

**Recommendations**

Based on the trends, challenges, and prospects identified, the following recommendations are advanced:

Policy-Level Recommendations

The Federal Ministry of Education and NCCE should review the Arabic curriculum to emphasize communicative competence, ICT literacy, and employable skills.

Policies should ensure standardization of Arabic curricula across Colleges of Education, universities, and secondary schools.

Increase funding for Arabic teacher recruitment, training, and professional development.

Institutional Recommendations

Colleges of Education should invest in ICT infrastructure, including stable internet, computer labs, and digital learning resources.

Arabic departments should collaborate with international universities and organizations to share best practices and exchange programmes.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Teachers should adopt interactive teaching methods such as task-based learning, group discussions, and problem-solving activities.

Instructional materials should be locally developed to reflect Nigerian contexts and student realities.

Encourage blended learning models that combine classroom instruction with mobile and online resources.

Research Recommendations

Universities should prioritize research funding for Arabic education projects, especially in ICT integration.

Encourage collaborative research between educators, linguists, and policymakers to bridge theory and practice.

## CONCLUSION

Arabic education in Nigeria stands at a crossroads. Rooted in centuries of tradition, it has demonstrated resilience in the face of colonial marginalization and modern policy neglect. Today, however, it faces new challenges ranging from teacher shortages and outdated curricula to infrastructural deficits and low student motivation. At the same time, opportunities abound. With curriculum reform, ICT integration, teacher development, and evidence-based policymaking, Arabic education can be revitalized as a dynamic and relevant field. Its prospects extend beyond religious literacy to include employable skills in translation, diplomacy, and intercultural communication. Ultimately, the future of Arabic education in Nigeria depends on coordinated efforts by policymakers, educators, researchers, and communities. By addressing its challenges and leveraging its opportunities, Arabic education can contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's cultural preservation, educational inclusivity, and global competitiveness.

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