

JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATES OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The twin-discipline of Arabic and Islamic Studies enjoyed patronage across board in areas known as Nigeria in the pre-colonial era. Many Muslims took pride in possessing the knowledge as Arabic was the language of communication, trade and administration just as Islam was the religion of civilisation. This was due to the fact that the products of the twin-discipline were the government officials, school administrators and even judges especially in Northern Nigeria. Today, however, few people take pride in choosing careers in Arabic and Islamic Studies. For one reason, the shaky nature of the job prospects in those disciplines. Although, the socio-economic situation of the country is posing employment challenges to graduates of all disciplines including the professional courses, those of Arabic and Islamic Studies are great as both disciplines now have few people choosing career in them on the fear of what to do with them after graduation. This study, therefore, critically examines the course contents of the twin disciplines as offered in Nigeria and on the basis of that, argues that graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies are relevant and employable in any organisation, public or private. It posits that graduates of the two disciplines can be employed in the educational, health or financial institutions just as they can provide valuable services in government ministries, agencies, parastatals and the media. Instances of those already working in those organisations and are doing well there were also given. The study then concludes by offering a list of recommendations that can facilitate the employability of graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies especially in south-western Nigeria where the challenge is greater.

Keywords: Arabic, Islamic Studies, graduates, job opportunities, south-western Nigeria.

Introduction

Southwestern Nigeria consisting of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba people. They are also found in parts of Kwara, Kogi and Edo States. The date Islam penetrated Yorubaland is uncertain. Historians put different dates between 11th and 17th centuries as the period when Islam became noticeable in Yorubaland and attributed its introduction to the efforts of itinerant Muslim scholars and traders from the Northern parts of Nigeria¹. The twin-discipline of Arabic and Islamic Studies became pronounced in Yorubaland following the consolidation and spread of Islam in the area. Soon, Arabic became the classical language of the Yoruba people as most of them used it in daily conversations and business transactions. Later, a number of them pursued it, along with Islamic Studies as a course of study in higher institutions of learning. Today, a large number of Yoruba people are Arabists and Islamists possessing as high as doctoral degrees in the two disciplines. A good number of them have become professors of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Many of them earn their livelihood by paid jobs. They are mainly found in the teaching profession at all levels of education and a few ones are in the media houses as well as government ministries and parastatals.

There are others who are self-employed in the capacities of Imams, missionaries of Islamic/ Muslim organisations, Qur'anic teachers, etc. However, following westernisation and more importantly the challenges of job opportunity for youths in the country, the general impression now is that there are no job prospects for graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies and if at all there are, it is only available in the teaching profession unlike what was obtainable in the early days of Islam particularly in the Northern Nigeria when graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies were employed as administrators, judges and technocrats in government establishments². This is despite the fact that students of Arabic and Islamic studies are exposed to the socio-economic, political and religious challenges and realities of the contemporary world in the course of their studies. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the course contents of the twin-subject with a view to proving that graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies are employable in all areas of human endeavour be they health, management, administration, law etc and can therefore work in government ministries, hospitals, financial institutions and the likes. The study, therefore, examines the genesis of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria and its acquisition by

Yoruba Muslims as well as the prospects and challenges of graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in securing paid jobs in the southwestern states. Not minding the fact that unemployment is the general problem facing all disciplines/professions in Nigeria, the study offers a list of recommendations that can facilitate job opportunities (in private and public establishments) for graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in southwestern Nigeria.

Genesis and Growth of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria

The history of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria is traceable to the advent of Islam in the area now known as the Northern Nigeria as early as the period of the Kanem-Borno Empire around 7th century C.E. Islam is said to have penetrated into Nigeria through the efforts of the early itinerant Muslim scholars and traders who used to come to the area for commercial and missionary activities. Doi notes that teaching and learning of Arabic commenced with the spread of Islam throughout the Muslim world. In Nigeria, the elementary Qur'anic or tablet schools otherwise known as *makaranta allo* in Hausa language were established in the Northern cities where both Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion were taught simultaneously³.

Interestingly, the fact that Islamic education predated western education is incontrovertible. According to Opeloye, the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies received a boost from the Sokoto Caliphate between 1790 and 1893 as it predated western formal education by not less than two decades⁴. At the early stage of Islamic education in the Northern Nigeria, the *Mu'allim* (Arabic/Islamic Studies teacher) depended on charity for survival as his status was not more than that of a beggar who occupied a low cadre in the society. The pupils of the Qur'anic schools were called *al-majiri*, the corrupt Arabic word of *al-Muhajirun* which means an emigrant (in search of knowledge). The pupils were taught the reading of the Qur'ān and *Hadith* of the Prophet. However, the highest grade of *Mu'allim* in the Northern Nigeria consisted of those with profound knowledge of the science of the Qur'ān, *Hadith*, *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Islamic theology and etymology. They were highly respected and offered employment as administrators and technocrats in pre-colonial era⁵. The curriculum of Arabic and Islamic Studies during that era included rudiments of the Qur'ān, *Hadith*, *Fiqh* and commentaries of

Mukhtasar Khalil, a *fiqh* book written in accordance with the *Maliki* School of Thought⁶.

Osokoya reveals that the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies took place in semi-organised structural design in which the *Mu'allim* (teacher) operated free curriculum in terms of subject matter, time-table, size of class, admission, age, duration of programme and method of teaching⁷. According to Lawal, Islamic education began in Nigeria with literacy in Arabic whereby the Arabic/Islamic Studies teacher taught new converts the reading of the Qur'ān⁸. Three stages were identified in the Islamic traditional education. These were *Ibtidā'iyah*, *'Ilm* and post *'Ilm* stages. The *Ibtidā'iyah* stage is equivalent to the modern primary school, *'Ilm* stage is similar to the secondary school while post-*'Ilm* stage is equivalent to the tertiary/higher education. At the *'Ilm* stage, students were exposed to the study and translation of the whole Qur'ān, the learning of Arabic Grammar, Literature and Poetry, *Hadith*, *Tafsīr* (Qur'ān Exegesis) and Islamic law⁹.

However, the introduction of western education in 19th century in Nigeria dealt a great blow to the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies because the western education did not only bring about Christianisation of the Muslim children but also relegated Islamic education to the background. In an attempt to forestall the wave of evangelisation, some Muslim organisations notably *Ansar-ud-Deen* Society, *Ahmadiyyah* Movement, *Jama'tul Islamiyyah* and *Zumuratul Islamiyyah* started establishing formal schools for the promotion of Islamic cum western education. Such Muslim oriented schools encouraged and promoted the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria¹⁰. Between 1970s and 1990s, the Southwestern Nigeria entered a new phase in the growth of Arabic and Islamic Studies in view of certain innovations introduced into Islamic education system. Opeloye attributes the growth to the emergence of the colleges of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States. Among the colleges of Arabic and Islamic Studies that sprang up during this period were Ansar-ud-Deen College, Isolo, Lagos, Arabic Institute of Nigeria, Elekuro, Oyo State, Sulaimon College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ososa, Ogun State, Olanihun College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ibadan, Oyo State and Zulikha Abiola College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Abeokuta, Ogun State¹¹.

Due to the relevance of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria, some tertiary institutions in the country including Usmanu Danfodiyo University,

Sokoto, University of Maiduguri, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Ibadan did not only introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies as academic disciplines but also created departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies¹². In some other universities, Arabic Language is under the Department of Foreign Languages as in the case of Lagos State University, Ojo, while Islamic Studies is taught under the Department of Religions/Religious Studies in University of Ilorin and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State.

Trends of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Southwestern Nigeria

The Yoruba constitutes one of the major Nigerian tribes that occupy Southwestern Nigeria. Before the birth of Nigeria in 1914, there were about fourteen kingdoms that had ruled and reigned in Yorubaland in 18th century. Prominent among them were the Oyo, the Ife, Ekiti, Igbomina, Ijebu, Ijesha, Egba, Egbado (now referred to as Yewa), Ketu, Ondo, Owu and the Sabe kingdoms¹³. Islam as a religion became pronounced in Yorubaland between 1790 and 1893 after the establishment and consolidation of the Sokoto Caliphate.¹⁴ Arabic as a language of the Qur'ān is said to have been combined with Islam due to the fact that Islam cannot be profoundly studied, understood and practised without Arabic, the vehicle of communication of Islam. Thus, Islam and Arabic came to Yorubaland at the same period.

In the early stages of Islam in Yorubaland, the mosque played significant roles in the establishment of *Ile-kewu* (i.e. Qur'anic/Arabic school) where some *Alufa* (Qur'anic/Arabic teachers) used their residences and tree shades as Qur'anic schools. The *omo-ilekewu* (Qur'anic pupils/learners) were often seen sitting down on mats and ram skins. The common and popular writing materials were the slates on which Arabic alphabet in various forms were written for pupils to learn through rote method.¹⁵ As a strategy to encourage the completion of the reading of the whole Qur'ān, feasts were organised to mark the gradual movement of pupils from one chapter to another. For instance, on reaching chapter 105 (*Sūratul-Fīl*), a feast involving cooking of beans would be held. When the pupil reached chapter 87 (*Sūratul A'ala*), another fowl feast would be held. If the pupil reached chapter 36 (*Suratu Yāsīn*), a ram would be slaughtered and upon the completion of the whole Qur'ān, an elaborate feast, where a cow was slaughtered, would be organised.¹⁶ Such a pupil would be mounted on a horse and followed round the city, singing and dancing in his honour.

This actually encouraged children of Yoruba Muslims to want to attend the Qur'anic school as children who could not achieve these feats were rebuked by their parents and looked down upon by their colleagues.

Following the completion of the whole Qur'ān, the pupils would proceed to learn the meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān, otherwise known as *Tafsīr* with other books such as *al-Khaḍarī*, *al-'Ashmāwī*, *Muqadimatul-'Izzīyah*, *Risālah* and *Mukhtasarul-Khalil*-which were written in accordance with Maliki School of Thought¹⁷. Historically, the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies became more pronounced in Ilorin due to the attempt of Afonja to liberate Ilorin from the old Oyo Kingdom by inviting Muslim warriors to Ilorin. This gave rise to the influx of the Muslim scholars to Ilorin. These itinerant Muslim scholars came from the Northern parts of the country. Among these early Muslim scholars were Shaykh Ali Bakr Buba from Sokoto, Shaykh Ibrahim from Borno and Shaykh Muhammad al-Takuti an-Nafani from Nupe. These scholars established Arabic and Islamic schools which produced many students that later became renowned Islamic scholars in Yorubaland. As a result, Arabic and Islamic centres were established in Yoruba towns namely Saki, Iseyin, Ibadan, Iwo, Epe, Ede, Ikirun, Badagry and Ilaro¹⁸. It could be seen that Arabic and Islamic Studies had reached an appreciable level in Yorubaland before the introduction of western education.

After the introduction of western education by the Christian missionaries, Arabic and Islamic Studies witnessed an unprecedented rivalry and stiff competition. The western education system influenced the Islamic education tremendously and it posed a great challenge to the Muslim scholars who reformed the traditional Arabic and Islamic schools in Yorubaland. The first modern and standard Arabic and Islamic school in Southwestern Nigeria is *Markaz at-Ta'lim* established in 1952 in Agege, Lagos State by the late Shaykh Adam Abdullahi al-Ilori. Later, similar Arabic and Islamic schools emerged; notably among them are *al-Ma'had al-Arabi* in Ibadan, founded by Shaykh Murtadah Abdus-Salam in 1957 and *al-Ma'had al-Adabi* founded in Ilorin by late Shaykh Kamalud-din al Adabi. The school later came to be known as *al-Ma'had al-Azhari* in 1964¹⁹. The curriculum of these modern Arabic and Islamic schools included: *Nahw*, (syntax), *Sarf* (morphology), *inshā'* (composition), *Balāgha* (rhetoric), and *Mantic* (logic). Other subjects are *Tafsīrul-Qur'ān*, (Qur'anic Exegesis), *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) *Hadith* (Prophetic tradition) and *Tarikh* (Islamic History)²⁰.

Due to the prominence and patronage which Arabic and Islamic Studies enjoyed in 1960s, some tertiary institutions in Southwestern Nigeria began to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies in their academic programmes. This was the case of University of Ibadan where Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies was created in 1961. Besides, the University introduced a two-year diploma course in Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1975. Earlier in 1963/64 session, a certificate course in Arabic was introduced. In 1976, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies was established in University of Ilorin but later changed to Department of Religions.²¹ Nowadays, elements of Arabic and Islamic related courses are being offered in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State University, Ojo, Ondo State University, Akungba, and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State either as requirements for graduation in Religious Studies or Education.

Content Analysis of the Arabic and Islamic Studies Curriculum

One may be tempted to assume that many people know the content of Arabic and Islamic Studies programmes in colleges and universities in Nigeria while other people have the impression that Arabic and Islamic Studies are all about studying the five pillars of Islam, the Qur'ān and the story of Prophet Muhammad. A careful examination of the contents of Arabic and Islamic Studies programmes shows that the two courses are relevant to the socio-economic and political affairs of Nigerian society. The Islamic Studies programmes for the undergraduates of these colleges and universities as packaged in the students' handbooks and the academic programmes reveal that Islamic Studies students are exposed to courses such as Islam and Science, Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Political System, Islamic Economic System, Islam and Gender issues, Islam and the Civil Society in the Globalising World, etc. These are aside other general courses like the Use of English, Logic etc. that must be taken and passed as conditions for graduation.²² The courses being offered in the Department of Religions/Religious Studies of these colleges and universities in Nigeria particularly the Southwest cover aspects of Islamic Studies majorly '*Ibādāt*' (concept of worship), their foundations, studies in the Qur'ān and the Hadith, history, theology, law, spiritual, social, economic and political institutions.²³ For the Arabic curriculum, courses like *Tarjamah* (translation), *An-Nahw* (Grammar), *Balāghah* (Rhetoric), *al-Adab* (Literature), *Aṣ-Ṣarf* (Etymology), *Manṭiq* (Logic) and *Arud* (Prosody) are

learnt by the students²⁴. All of these courses as indicated in the curriculum must, as a matter of necessity, be taught within the contemporary realities.

While learning these Arabic and Islamic courses, students are also exposed to conventional and secular based disciplines and professions. For instance, in Islamic economics, courses like Islamic Banking and Finance and Islamic Insurance are offered. These courses allow the students to grasp the rudiment knowledge in western economic system as pre-requisite for studying the Islamic aspect. A Professor of Islamic Studies who teaches Islamic economics will, necessarily first of all, teach his students the economic system from the western perspective before dwelling into proper Islamic economic theories. Concepts like capitalism, socialism, communism etc. would have to be taught to the students before introducing the Islamic economic theories. Similarly, the teaching of Islamic History will require the study and understanding of the world history, paying particular attention to great men in history as well as the events that characterised their reigns. Furthermore, in studying Islamic political system, the world political history and the administration and leadership styles of world political leaders will necessarily be studied before students of Islamic Studies are taught the leadership qualities and styles of the Prophet Muhammad, those of his rightly guided caliphs and notable world Muslim political leaders. The students are also taught the western political theories as pre-requisites to the Islamic political principles of justice, equity, accountability, qualities of leadership and followership. Human rights principles of the United Nations, children's and women's rights enunciated in U.N and African Charters are all taught to the students of Islamic Studies as pre-requisite for learning the Islamic principles on those issues. The study of *Tahdīb* (moral precepts) which includes honesty in words and deeds, modesty in dressing and behaviour, dignity of labour, hard work, patience and perseverance will add flavour to the knowledge of the students as the products of Arabic and Islamic Studies who imbibe those virtues will function effectively wherever they may be employed²⁵. The point being made here is that before any course(s) or topic(s), are taught from the Islamic perspectives, students are first exposed to the secular based disciplines and professions. This, will no doubt, give them the opportunity of having rudiment knowledge of all the existing secular-based subjects and disciplines and at the same time, make them function in any environment they find themselves.

In Nigeria, products of Arabic and Islamic education system have occupied prominent positions and served as judges, permanent secretaries, commissioners, ministers, ambassadors, provost of colleges and vice chancellors of universities.²⁶ Apart from a good number of them who, like their colleagues, have held positions of responsibilities in the administration of schools, colleges and universities (e.g. as Head Teachers, Principals, Heads of Department and Deans/Provosts) and did the jobs satisfactorily, there are also a good number of them who have also been tested in other areas. Examples are Professors Razaq 'Deremi Abubakre and Ishaq Olanrewaju Oloyede who were Vice Chancellors and Muhib Opeloye who was Commissioner for Education in Osun State. Professor Oloyede has also served in other various capacities such as co-secretary of the National Confab put in place by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2005. He is currently the Registrar of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). There are those who work in the media houses and other walks of life. People in this category include Mrs. Monsurat Olapelola Ajayi Jaji who is Producer of Programmes at the Amuludun F. M Radio Station in Ibadan, Oyo State, Mrs. Halimah Funke Olawunmi who works with the Mobile Tele-communication Network, MTN, Mr. Taoheed Sikiru who works with an insurance company in Lagos and Alhaji Ibrahim Owodunni who rose through the ranks to become the State Director of the Bureau of Code Conduct, a Federal Government agency. All of these people mentioned got their jobs on the strength of their degrees in either or both of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

Job Opportunities for Graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies: Empirical Evidence

Arabic is said to be a language that belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages with about 500 million speakers all over the world. Besides English and French, Arabic is used in an international field.²⁷ It is the language of the revealed monotheistic religion-Islam. That is why wherever Islam spread and preached, encouragement was always given to the teaching and learning of Arabic and as well for the establishment of schools for teaching the reading of the Qur'ān and study of Arabic language and Islamic literature.²⁸ Arabic is said to have contributed to the understanding of Islam, the second largest religion in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, France and Germany²⁹. Islamic Studies, on the other hand, is a branch of classical divinity, a branch of

Theology and organised discipline that is sub-divided into the study of Qur'ān, *Hadith (Sunnah)*, Arabic language (*Al-Lughah*), Ethics (*Ta'dhīb* or *Akhlāq*), Islamic Law (*Fiqh*) and History (*Tarīkh*)³⁰. While stating the objective of Islamic Studies, Oloyede writes thus:

Islamic Studies, as an academic discipline, is expected to study, analyse, utilise and develop Islam for the improvement of the understanding and application of the derivatives of Islam to the advantage of humanity and its complex and dynamic environment.³¹

It is evident that graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies from University of Exeter in Southwest England in United Kingdom could offer careers in England as civil service fast streamer, Government social research officer, politician's assistant, public affairs consultant, public relations account executive, and social researcher. Other job opportunities for graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Exeter are charity officer, diplomatic service operational officer, human resource officer, local government officer, newspaper journalist, army officer, translator, and public relation officer.³² Besides, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies from University of Exeter are allowed to further their studies as post-graduate students to pursue Masters' Degrees in Palestine Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Marketing and International Relations.³³

The relevance of Arabic and Islamic Studies to Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. During the 19th century in Nigeria in particular and in West Africa in general, Malik notes that Arabic language was used for correspondence, political books and pamphlets, treaties of advice to rulers, biographical literature, histories, ethnography, sociology and education.³⁴ In the Northern Nigeria, the products of Arabic and Islamic Studies became Grand *Qadis*, Chief Justice, secretaries to the government, university vice chancellors and professors.³⁵ In Nigeria today, products of Arabic and Islamic education can be employed in primary and secondary schools, universities, embassies, telecom companies-MTN, Etisalat, etc. broadcasting companies like Voice of Nigeria (VON), bank and aviation industry.³⁶ Olai, while responding to questions (in social media) on job opportunities for graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria replies and writes thus:

In fact you can work in virtually all companies now...Gone are those days when somebody would read a course and

would be told he/she cannot work somewhere. Companies have what is referred to as psychometric tests now. They administer the test to graduates from all disciplines be it science, engineering, arts, languages etc. just to determine the level of IQ of applicants to see the extent to which they can perform on duties. The general belief is that a graduate should be able to handle every duty with little training. This is why you would see the graduates of Yoruba, Agric, Engineering, Biology, Education, Physics, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Medicine, Islamic Studies etc in banks³⁷.

From the above quoted passage, it is understood that as far as graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies can perform creditably in interviews or tests conducted for applicants in different disciplines, there is nowhere in Nigeria, the graduates of the two disciplines cannot work. Thus, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies that are found to be profound and sound in knowledge can work in media, business, finance, management of all levels of government, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), religious institutions and other private and public establishments in Nigeria.

Challenges facing Arabic and Islamic Studies' Graduates in Southwestern Nigeria

Like graduates of other professions and disciplines in Southwestern Nigeria, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies often face unemployment problem. It is a known fact that due to bad governance and leadership, unemployment rate in Nigeria has increased to 8.20% in the second quarter of 2015 from 7.50 % in the first quarter of 2015. Out of about 1.8 million graduates that Nigerian educational institutions produce annually, only 35% get employed leaving about 15million youths jobless.³⁸ A situation whereby graduates of Accountancy, Engineering and Law and other science inclined courses are roaming about Nigerian streets without job is disheartening. Thus, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies are no exception.

The attitude of some state governments in the Yoruba speaking states towards the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies in public schools is unpalatable and unwholesome in terms of recruitment of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers. Most of the government owned schools in these states are without competent Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers. For instance, in Ogun State, Arabic and Islamic Studies are not

offered in public schools such as Baptist Boys' High School, Abeokuta Grammar School and Abeokuta Girls' Grammar School where Muslim children constitute large number of the students' population.³⁹ In 2013, due to agitation of some Muslim groups on non-recruitment of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in Ogun State, the State Government set-up a panel of the interviewers (one of the present writers was a member of the panel), to conduct interview for over six hundred graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in National Certificate of Education (NCE) and first degree. One and half years after the interview, Ogun State government offered two hundred of them teaching job, one hundred to teach in government primary schools and another one hundred to teach in public secondary schools in the state. Yet, many public schools in Ogun State are without Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers⁴⁰.

The present Yoruba society is said to have not given due recognition to the twin-discipline unlike in the early days of Islam when Yoruba Muslims patronised Arabic and Islamic education. Today, Yoruba society sees Arabic and Islamic Studies as religious knowledge that is not beneficial and relevant to socio-economic and political affairs of the people with the impression that graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies can only function as *Alufa* or *Muallim* (i.e. Qur'ān teacher). In some Yoruba communities, products of the twin-discipline are often derogatorily called *ọlẹ ntele Alfa* meaning that it is indolent and lazy person that follows *Mallam*.⁴¹ Therefore, offering job to Arabic and Islamic Studies graduates by government ministries and private companies is like building castle in the air.

Due to ignorance and prejudice, some Yoruba Muslim parents do not see any rationale behind asking their children to pursue Arabic and Islamic Studies as academic disciplines in tertiary institutions. They have an erroneous notion that Arabic and Islamic Studies are all about five pillars of Islam, the Qur'ān, Allah and Muhammad. Arabic, to some people, is the language of the Qur'ān and the Muslim prayers.⁴² To some Muslim parents, Arabic and Islamic Studies are twin-discipline that is not lucrative unlike other disciplines like law, medicine and accountancy that are lucrative in the Yoruba speaking states⁴³.

Secularism is a concept that is posing challenge to Arabic and Islamic Studies as academic disciplines in the tertiary institutions in the Southwestern Nigeria. Secularism, according to Bidmos, is a system of social ethics based upon a doctrine that ethical standards and conduct

should be determined exclusively with reference to the present life without reference to religion or God⁴⁴. Nigerian society, Yoruba inclusive is said to be a secular society where religion is said to be a private affair. Thus, Arabic and Islamic Studies are seen as religious courses that should not be given prominence. This impression and lukewarm attitude towards Islamic education, consequently, led to paucity of Muslim students pursuing the twin-discipline in the Southwestern Nigerian colleges and universities.

Job Prospects for Graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in South-western Nigeria

Yoruba Muslims constitute appreciable number in the Southwestern Nigeria. This is evident from the large number of Muslim organisations and Islamic bodies that abound Lagos, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo States. The prominent among the Muslim organisations whose branches are all over the Yoruba speaking states are Nawair-ud-Deen, Ansar-ud-Deen, Ahmadiyyah, Anwarul-Islam, Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO), Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih Society (NASFAT), Al Fatih-Ul- Quareeb Islamic Society of Nigeria, etc.⁴⁵ These Muslim organisations have missionaries that perform socio-religious and spiritual roles for their members. Such Muslim organisations like Ansar-ud-Deen and NASFAT often offer graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies employment as Imams and missionaries either on full or part time basis.

The proliferation of *ratibi* (local or compound) and *Jum'ah* (Friday/central) mosques built and managed by individuals, Muslim organisations/societies, local communities, corporate bodies, media organisations and government is well pronounced among the Yoruba Muslim communities.⁴⁶ Some of these mosques especially those owned by the individual Muslims, Muslim organisations, health institutions and media organisations in Southwestern Nigeria require competent imams to lead them in prayers and in other socio-religious functions. Thus, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies that are competent can work as paid imams by the management committees of these mosques. It is generally observed that each of these organisations/bodies has its own well established Muslim community. For instance, in Ogun State, there are Muslim Community Federal Medical Centre Idi-Aba, Muslim Community, Ogun State Television, Abeokuta, Abeokuta South Local Government Muslim

Community, Ake etc. Each of these Muslim communities can employ graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies to coordinate the affairs of Muslim workers/civil servants working in such environments. Furthermore, mosques built by the State Governments also require competent imams to lead top government functionaries in prayers. State Governments in Southwestern Nigeria can offer graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies job opportunities as missionaries and coordinators of Islamic activities in those government owned mosques. Apart from this opportunity, State Governments in the Yoruba speaking states can employ or appoint graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies to serve on Muslim pilgrims' welfare boards where they would be useful as resource persons for smooth Hajj operation and administration.

In a recent research on the need for collaboration between psychiatrist doctors and Muslim exorcists in South-West Nigeria, it has been established that Muslim exorcists can provide cure in the treatment of mental disorder in cases of demonic possession through the use of the recommended Prophetic medicine and recitation of certain portions in the Qur'ān.⁴⁷ Thus, health institutions such as psychiatric hospital in Yoruba speaking states can offer job opportunities as social health workers/counsellors to the graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies that understand the theory and practice of treatment of mental disorder caused by demonic possession technically known as *Ruqyah* (exorcism).

Da'wah (religious proselytisation) via print and electronic media is a common practice among the adherents of different faiths in Yorubaland. Religious programmes are regularly aired on radio and television. During the Ramadan fasting period in Southwestern Nigeria, Muslim philanthropists often sponsor Islamic programmes on electronic media. It has been argued that most of the Islamic programmes being transmitted on radio and television during the Ramadan fasting season are poorly presented and coordinated. The presenters often unknowingly display their ignorance about Islam.⁴⁸ Such media organisations can offer job opportunities to competent graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies that can present Islamic programmes that are informative, educative and entertaining. This role will not be limited to the fasting period or on Fridays but on daily basis with a view to educating Muslims and non-Muslims on Islam and Muslims and at the same time generating more revenue for the media organisations.

Educational institutions established and managed by individual Muslims and groups are scattered all over the Southwestern Nigeria. Muslim oriented private nursery, primary and secondary schools and universities have been established and more are still being established on daily basis. Since Federal Government welcomes private participation in education industry, Muslims in Yorubaland have taken the opportunity to establish Islamic educational institutions at all levels. These Muslim educational institutions often take the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies as core subjects in their curriculum, hence there is always demand for the graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies that will teach students especially at secondary school level. Besides teaching in schools, graduates of the twin-discipline can embark on book project by writing valuable textbooks based on the school curriculum for the consumption of pupils and students in Muslim nursery, primary and secondary schools that are scattered all over the Southwestern Nigeria. It is a known fact that dearth of Arabic and Islamic textbooks is one of the challenges facing the twin subjects in primary and secondary schools in the South-West Nigeria.⁴⁹ However, If the graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies cannot find teaching job, they too can establish Muslim schools where both Islamic and western education would be offered.

Besides teaching profession, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies can engage in lawful profession like agriculture, be it livestock or poultry farming. The Yoruba speaking states are said to be fertile lands for farming. The Qur'ān has been quoted to have encouraged agricultural activity (Read Q6:99, Q15:19-22, Q55:10-13 and Q80:24-28). The Prophet is also said to have encouraged farming in his traditions. Al-Qaradawi, in his book, quotes Prophet Muhammad as saying:

When a Muslim plants a plant or cultivates a crop, no bird or human being eats from it without its being accounted as a (rewardable) charity for him⁵⁰.

In another tradition, the Prophet is also quoted saying:

If anyone plants a tree, patiently protects it and looks after it until it bears fruit, Allah the Almighty and Glorious will count as charity for him anything for which its fruits are used⁵¹.

It can be argued from the foregoing discussion that without religious bias and intolerance, there are a lot of job opportunities open to the graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Southwestern Nigeria. What remains for them is to explore all these identified opportunities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Arabic and Islamic Studies have come to stay not only in the Southwestern Nigeria but also in the whole Nigeria. The study has been able to show that, without bias and religious intolerance, graduates of Arabic and Islamic Studies could be employed by media organisation, health and educational institutions, ministries, extra-ministerial departments, Armed forces and para-military agencies, embassies, etc. where they could function effectively as resource persons in those public establishments and corporate bodies. Right from the time immemorial, religious education has been playing key role in shaping the spiritual and moral life of a person because all forms of knowledge were originally developed from religion. Therefore, the multi-religious nature of Nigeria should call not only for the promotion of Arabic and Islamic Studies but also for offering job opportunities for the graduates of the twin-discipline. To overcome the challenges facing Arabic and Islamic Studies graduates in Southwestern Nigeria, the following recommendations are offered:

- (i) Considering the bilateral and international relationships of Nigeria with Arab world like Oil Producing Exporting Countries (OPEC), Arabic as an academic discipline should be encouraged and promoted in order to get resource persons as ambassadors of Nigeria in Arabic speaking countries.
- (ii) The proprietors of Arabic and Islamic institutes and colleges in the Southwestern Nigeria should endeavour to get government approval and recognition so that certificates being awarded could be useful for the products of their schools. Besides, those Arabic and Islamic institutes/colleges could be affiliated to Nigerian universities where Arabic and Islamic Studies are being offered.
- (iii) The existing private Arabic and Islamic colleges and institutes in Yoruba speaking states should standardise their curricula by introducing some secular subjects in their curricula and make efforts to Islamise those secular subjects as it is being done in

the Northern states where Islamisation of knowledge project is being undertaken

- (iv) Nigerian colleges and universities should re-design and review the Arabic and Islamic Studies academic programme to accommodate other secular courses with a view to encouraging inter disciplinary courses and cross fertilisation of knowledge. Thus, Arabic and Islamic Studies could be combined with other courses such as Islamic Studies/Computer Science, Arabic/English Studies, Islamic Studies/International Relation, Arabic/Diplomatic Studies, etc.
- (v) State Government in Southwestern Nigeria should recruit more Arabic and Islamic Studies to teach in public primary and secondary schools where Muslim children are in large number.
- (vi) In order to address paucity of students pursuing Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigerian colleges and universities, prominent Islamic organisations, Muslim philanthropists, Muslim professionals and Muslim alumna of various institutions of learning in Southwestern Nigeria should encourage and promote Arabic and Islamic Studies in colleges and universities by instituting scholarship schemes for the interested Yoruba Muslims wishing to pursue Arabic and Islamic Studies as an academic discipline in Nigeria or abroad.
- (vii) Bearing in mind the moral decadency in Yoruba speaking states as well as multi-religious nature of Nigeria, religious education like Islamic Studies should be made compulsory at all levels of the country's educational system

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