

From Legacy to Uncertainty: The Impact of Insurgency on Ngala's Arabic Village and Arabic Studies in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Nigeria has long recognized Arabic Village in Ngala, Maiduguri, as a pivotal hub for Arabic language education. As a center for linguistic and cultural immersion, it has shaped generations of Arabic scholars and contributed significantly to Arabic literacy and Islamic scholarship. The village's unique environment provided students with the opportunity to experience Arabic in a native-like setting, enhancing their linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. However, the emergence of Boko Haram and the ensuing insurgency have severely disrupted educational activities in Ngala. The once-thriving village has faced challenges such as infrastructure destruction, displacement of educators and students, and widespread fear. These challenges have stunted Arabic education's growth in the region and reduced participation nationwide, particularly in the south. Parents and institutions hesitate to send students to Ngala due to security concerns, limiting immersion opportunities. Although the Nigerian government's language policies support Arabic studies, they have struggled to address the insurgency's impact. The paper calls for strategic interventions, including security measures, infrastructure rebuilding, and adaptive policies, to revitalize Arabic education and restore confidence in the region's educational offerings.

Keywords: *Arabic, Language, Insurgency, education, Nigeria*

التعليم العربي في انغالا بين الماضي والحاضر: أثر التمرد على القرية ودراسات اللغة العربية في نيجيريا

تاج الدين يوسف (1)

الملخص:

لطالما عُرِفَت قرية اللغة العربية في نغالا في ولاية مايدوغوري، كمركز أساسي لتعليم اللغة العربية في نيجيريا. وهي مركز للانغماس اللغوي والثقافي، أسهمت في تكوين أجيال من علماء اللغة العربية وساهمت بشكل كبير في نشر المعرفة بالعربية والضمير الإسلامي. وفرت القرية للطلاب فرصة فريدة لتعلم اللغة العربية مشابهة للبيئة اللغوية الأصلية، مما عزز مهاراتهم اللغوية وفهمهم الثقافي. ومع ذلك، فإن ظهور جماعة بوكو حرام والتمرد المستمر في المنطقة قد عطل بشكل كبير الأنشطة التعليمية في انغالا. وواجهت القرية التي أنوعت من التحديات مثل تدمير البنية التحتية، ونزوح المعلمين والطلاب، وانتشار الخوف. وقد أدت هذه التحديات إلى إعاقة نمو التعليم العربي في المنطقة وانخفاض المشاركة على الصعيد الوطني، لا سيما في الجنوب مما جعل الآباء والمؤسسات في الخوف لإرسال الطلاب إلى انغالا بسبب المخاوف الأمنية، مما يجد من فرص الانغماس اللغوي. وعلى الرغم من دعم سياسات الحكومة النيجيرية لتعليم اللغة العربية، إلا أنها كافحت للتكيف مع آثار التمرد. وتدعو هذه الدراسة إلى تدخلات استراتيجية تشمل تعزيز الأمن، وإعادة بناء البنية التحتية، وتعديل السياسات لاستعادة الثقة في البرامج التعليمية التي تقدمها المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العربية، التمرد، التعليم، نيجيريا، سياسات اللغة

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Introduction:

Nigeria's history deeply roots the study of Arabic, especially in the northern regions where Arabic has long served as the language of religious instruction, education, and scholarly pursuits. This region has traditionally been a hub for Islamic learning, with Arabic playing a central role in both religious and secular education. Among the most significant institutions promoting Arabic studies in Nigeria is the Arabic Village in Ngala, Maiduguri. This village has historically functioned as a hub for Islamic scholars, students, and academics, fostering a rich tradition of Arabic literacy and contributing to the broader dissemination of Islamic knowledge across Nigeria (Amalu, N. S., 2015).

Arabic Village has been instrumental in providing an immersive environment where students could deeply engage with the Arabic language and Islamic culture. It attracted learners from various parts of Nigeria, particularly from the northern regions, who sought to enhance their proficiency in Arabic and gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. However, the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency has severely disrupted the educational activities in this region. The insurgency has led to widespread destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and a pervasive climate of fear, which has significantly impacted the operations of Arabic Village (Salisu and Saleh, 2019).

In addition to the challenges posed by the insurgency, the Nigerian government's language learning policies and the apprehensions of parents and higher institutions, particularly from the southern regions of Nigeria, have added layers of complexity to the challenges faced by Arabic Village. These policies, while aimed at promoting Arabic studies, have struggled to effectively address the security concerns and logistical challenges brought about by the insurgency. Parents and institutions are increasingly reluctant to send students to Ngala for language immersion due to safety concerns, thereby limiting the opportunities for students to benefit from the rich educational environment that Arabic Village once provided (Segun, 2016).

This paper delves into the historical significance of Arabic Village in promoting Arabic studies in Nigeria, examining the profound impact that the insurgency has had on this institution. It also explores the implications of the Nigerian government's language learning policies and the fears of parents and educational institutions regarding the continuity of Arabic education in Ngala. The paper calls for urgent and strategic interventions to address these challenges, emphasizing the need for improved security, infrastructure reconstruction, and adaptive policies that can restore confidence in Arabic education in the region and ensure the sustainability of this vital educational tradition.

Historical Significance of Arabic Village, Ngala

Nigeria has long recognized Arabic Village in Ngala as a center of excellence for Arabic education. Established in the early 20th century, the village aimed to promote the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic sciences. The institution attracted students from various parts of Nigeria and neighboring countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, due to its reputation for rigorous academic standards and the quality of its scholarships (Baba, 2020). The village offered a curriculum deeply rooted in classical Arabic studies, including Qur'anic exegesis (Tafsir), Hadith, Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and other Islamic sciences. These disciplines formed the core of the educational programs that contributed to the intellectual and religious development of students.

The village also played a significant role in preserving and disseminating Arabic manuscripts and texts, many of which were rare and held enormous historical value. By maintaining a vast repository of these texts, Arabic Village served as a vital resource for scholars conducting research in various fields of Islamic studies. This role was particularly important in a context where access to such resources was limited (Aminu, 2019).

The importance of Arabic in Nigeria

Arabic holds significant importance in Nigeria and internationally, particularly in a contemporary era marked by globalization and cultural exchange. In Nigeria, Arabic is not only the liturgical language of Islam but also a medium of religious, educational, and legal instruction, especially in the northern regions. The language is integral to the religious identity of millions of Nigerian Muslims, facilitating their understanding of the Qur'an and other Islamic texts. Moreover, Arabic serves as a bridge for Nigeria's diplomatic and economic relations with the Arab world, enhancing trade, cultural exchange, and cooperation on issues such as education and security (Abubakar, 2017).

Internationally, Arabic is one of the six official languages of the United Nations, underscoring its importance in global diplomacy and international affairs. As the language of a vast body of classical and modern knowledge, Arabic connects scholars and professionals across various fields, from religious studies to economics and science (Yusuf, 2021). In the current era, proficiency in Arabic opens up opportunities for engagement in global Islamic finance, international law, and cultural studies, making it a valuable linguistic asset both within Nigeria and beyond. The growing influence of Arabic-speaking nations in global politics and economics further elevates the strategic importance of the language in international relations (Aminu, 2019).

Ngala's Contributions to Arabic Studies in Nigeria

Arabic Village has made substantial contributions to the development of Arabic studies in Nigeria. Through its rigorous academic programs, the village produced numerous scholars, many of whom have become prominent figures in Nigerian academia, religious institutions, and educational organizations. These scholars have significantly influenced the intellectual landscape of Nigeria, contributing to the teaching and interpretation of Islamic law, theology, and ethics. The village's impact extends beyond academic achievements. It has been instrumental in promoting Arabic as a key language of instruction in Northern Nigeria, ensuring that it remains integral to the region's educational system. This has facilitated the integration of Arabic into the broader cultural and social fabric of Northern Nigeria, making it a language of both religious and academic discourse (Yusuf, 2021).

Additionally, the village has served as a cultural bridge, fostering better understanding and integration of the Arabic language and Islamic scholarship within the broader Nigerian society. This has contributed to the preservation of Northern Nigeria's cultural identity, deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and the Arabic language. The Centre for Arabic Immersion's relocation from Ngala's Arabic village to Maiduguri town presents both opportunities and challenges. While Maiduguri offers a new cultural environment, it may struggle to replicate the authentic exposure and immersive experience that Ngala's Arabic village provided. The village's unique setting, surrounded by native Arabic speakers and rich cultural heritage, allowed students to fully engage with the language and its nuances. In contrast, Maiduguri, although still a culturally rich environment, may not offer the same level of linguistic and cultural homogeneity as Ngala's Arabic village. The new location may require additional efforts to create an immersive experience, such as:

Establishing partnerships with local Arabic-speaking communities and organizations.

- Developing cultural exchange programs and activities

The curriculum should incorporate authentic materials and resources.

- Encouraging students to engage with the local culture through extracurricular activities

By acknowledging the differences between the two locations and proactively addressing them, the Centre for Arabic Immersion can still provide a valuable language learning experience in Maiduguri, even if it differs from the one offered in Ngala's Arabic village. (Salisu, A. M., & Saleh, S. M., 2019)

The Language Learning Policies of the Nigerian Government

The Nigerian government's language learning policies have a significant impact on the promotion and development of Arabic education in the country. The National Policy on Education (NPE) recognizes the importance of indigenous languages and mandates that students learn at least one Nigerian language in addition to English

(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The NPE also emphasizes the importance of immersion as a strategy for effective language learning, which has implications for Arabic education in regions like Ngala.

The Language Education Policy of Nigeria's higher education system recognizes the importance of language immersion in achieving linguistic proficiency. For Arabic and French students, the policy recommends a period of immersion in respective environments to enhance language acquisition (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019).

Research has consistently shown that language immersion programs significantly improve language skills, cultural competence, and cognitive abilities (Genesee, 2004; Met, 2003). Immersion experiences facilitate authentic language use, interaction with native speakers, and exposure to cultural nuances, thereby fostering linguistic and cultural proficiency (Baker, 2017).

For Arabic students, immersion in an Arabic-speaking environment, such as the Centre for Arabic Immersion's previous location in Ngala's Arabic village, provides opportunities for:

- Authentic language practice (Al-Batal, 2017)
- Cultural immersion and understanding (Samuels, 2013)
- Development of linguistic and cultural competence (Bryam, 1997)

Similarly, French students benefit from immersion in Francophone environments, such as Morocco or Senegal, where they can engage with native speakers, explore cultural differences, and refine their language skills (Lafontant, 2017). By incorporating language immersion programs into their curricula, Nigerian higher education institutions can enhance the proficiency and cultural understanding of Arabic and French students, preparing them for an increasingly globalized world.

However, the implementation of these policies has been uneven across different regions of Nigeria. In the northern regions, where Arabic is more widely spoken and integrated into the educational system, the policies have supported the development of Arabic studies. In contrast, in the southern regions, where Arabic is less prevalent, there has been less emphasis on Arabic education. This disparity is further compounded by the reluctance of parents and higher institutions in the south to send students to northern regions like Ngala for language immersion due to concerns about security and cultural differences (Salisu and Saleh, 2019).

Challenges of Insurgency

Boko Haram's emergence in Northern Nigeria has severely damaged the region's educational infrastructure, including Arabic Village in Ngala. The insurgency has led to the displacement of residents, destruction of educational facilities, and disruption of academic activities. The fear of attacks has caused many students and scholars to flee the region, leading to a significant decline in enrollment and academic output. The village, which once stood as a beacon of Arabic scholarship, now faces the

challenge of maintaining its legacy amidst insecurity and violence (Mohammed, 2018).

Displacement and loss of academic resources.

The insurgency has displaced students and faculty, a major impact. The insurgency has forced many to abandon their homes and studies, resulting in a decline in the availability of experienced educators and scholars. This displacement has caused a brain drain, leaving the village struggling to maintain its academic standards. Furthermore, the destruction of educational infrastructure, including libraries, classrooms, and dormitories, has resulted in the loss of valuable academic resources. The village's libraries, which once housed manuscripts, books, and research materials, have lost them, further crippling its ability to function as an academic hub (Baba, 2020).

The displacement has also led to the scattering of the village's alumni, who were once a close-knit community of scholars. This has weakened the network of academic and religious support that the village previously enjoyed. The loss of these connections has made it more difficult for the village to attract new students and faculty, further exacerbating the challenges it faces.

Psychological and Social Impact

One cannot overstate the psychological toll on students and educators. The constant threat of violence has created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, which is not conducive to learning. Those who have witnessed or been victims of insurgent attacks experience trauma that has long-term implications for their mental health and academic performance. Many students suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, which affect their ability to concentrate on their studies and achieve academic success (Mohammed, 2018).

The violence has also torn apart many families, affecting the social fabric of the community. The village, which was once a thriving community of scholars and students, has transformed into a shadow of its previous state. The loss of social cohesion has made it difficult for the village to function as a centre of learning, as the bonds of trust and mutual support that once held the community together have been severely weakened.

Fear of acculturation and language immersion in Ngala

The insurgency and the prevailing insecurity in Northern Nigeria have also affected the willingness of parents and higher institutions, particularly in the southern parts of Nigeria, to send students to Ngala for acculturation and language immersion programs. Students of Arabic need these programs to master the language and immerse themselves in its cultural context. However, many parents and institutions are reluctant to expose their students to these risks due to the fear of violence and cultural and religious differences between the north and south (Oloyede, 2018).

This reluctance has significant implications for the development of Arabic studies in Nigeria. Without access to immersive language environments like Ngala, students may struggle to attain the level of fluency and cultural understanding necessary for advanced Arabic scholarship. This creates a divide in the quality of Arabic education between students in the north, who have greater access to such environments, and those in the south, who may rely solely on classroom-based learning without the benefits of immersion (Yusuf, 2021).

Recommendations

To address the challenges faced by Arabic Village, there is a need for comprehensive strategies aimed at restoring and sustaining Arabic education in the region. This includes rebuilding educational infrastructure, providing psychological support to students and educators, and ensuring the safety and security of the village. Rebuilding efforts should prioritise the reconstruction of libraries and classrooms, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary resources to support academic activities. Additionally, psychological counselling services should be made available to help students and educators cope with the trauma they have experienced (Abubakar, 2017).

Governments and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to provide scholarships and other forms of support to displaced students, enabling them to continue their studies in safer environments. We could also extend these scholarships to displaced faculty members, enabling them to continue their academic work in other institutions while preserving their connection to Arabic Village. We should also make efforts to document and preserve the village's academic contributions, ensuring that its legacy persists despite its challenges. This could include digitizing manuscripts and other valuable resources so they are accessible to scholars worldwide.

Furthermore, there should be a concerted effort to improve security in the region. This could involve increasing the presence of security forces around the village, establishing early warning systems to detect potential threats, and engaging with local communities to build trust and cooperation. By creating a secure environment, the village can once again become a thriving center for Arabic education.

In addition to security measures, there is a need to revisit and enhance the Nigerian government's language learning policies to better support Arabic education. This includes promoting policies that encourage language immersion programs in safe and supportive environments. For instance, alternative locations within the northern region that are less affected by insurgency could be developed as centres for Arabic language immersion. These centers could offer similar cultural and linguistic experiences as those historically provided by Ngala, ensuring that students from all regions of Nigeria have access to high-quality Arabic education.

The government should also consider providing incentives to higher institutions and parents to encourage participation in language immersion programs. Such incentives could include financial subsidies, scholarships, or even the establishment of secure and well-equipped boarding facilities that ensure the safety and comfort of students during their immersion programs. Additionally, collaborations with international organisations and educational institutions could be explored to provide exchange programs or online immersion experiences, offering students the opportunity to engage with Arabic language and culture in a global context (Segun, 2016).

Efforts to bridge the cultural and educational gap between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria are also crucial. This could involve educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the importance of Arabic studies and addressing misconceptions or fears that may exist in the southern parts of the country. By fostering a more inclusive approach to language education, the Nigerian government can help mitigate the reluctance of Southern parents and institutions to engage with Arabic language programs.

Finally, we should reimagine the role of Arabic Village in the broader context of Nigerian Arabic studies. While the village's historical significance is undeniable, it is essential to adapt to the current realities by exploring new models of education that combine traditional learning with modern technologies. This could involve the use of online platforms to deliver courses, enabling students to access high-quality Arabic education without the need to travel to insecure regions. Virtual classrooms, online seminars, and digital libraries could all play a role in ensuring the continuity of Arabic education in Nigeria despite the challenges posed by insurgency and insecurity.

Conclusion

The Arabic Village in Ngala has played a pivotal role in the advancement of Arabic studies in Nigeria, serving as a center of excellence in Arabic language and Islamic scholarship. However, the insurgency in Northern Nigeria, the challenges posed by the Nigerian government's language learning policies, and the reluctance of parents and institutions in the southern regions have severely impacted the village's ability to function as a hub of Arabic education.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes improving security, rebuilding infrastructure, providing psychological support, and enhancing language learning policies. By preserving the rich tradition of Arabic scholarship in Ngala, we can ensure the continued flourishing of Arabic education in Nigeria. The future of Arabic studies in Nigeria depends on the collective efforts of government, educators, and communities to overcome these challenges and ensure that the next generation of scholars has access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

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