

Pedagogy in Arabic and Islamic Studies: Review of ‘Ala Al-Tariq of Adam Yahya Al-Fulāni

By

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Abstract

Pedagogy is the process of teaching that does not restrict itself to a time. It keeps on changing through development. Its evolution started from traditional to modern approaches in different fields. However, exploring its improvement in Arabic schools (*Madāris*) as portrayed in a Northcentral Nigerian autobiographer’s writing is pertinent. Thus, the reason why this article hinges on the changes in the Arabic and Islamic studies teachings over time as portrayed in an autobiography. Several works have been done on the author’s experience narrations, yet little has been done on their experiences on how they were taught. This paper, therefore, fills the gap by revealing the changes in the method of teaching the Arabic language and Islamic studies in Northcentral of Nigeria as pictured in ‘Ala Tariq of Yahya Al-Fulāni. Employing the interpretive research design, this paper picked one of the Nigerian Arabic autobiographies, *Ala Al-Tariq* (On the Road), as the tool for this study and adopt the theory of Johann Friederichs Herbert (1776-1841) that states that pedagogy revolves around preparation, presentation, association, generalization, and application. It is revealed and concluded that some teachers taught Arabic language and Islamic studies to students singlehandedly. This restricts the student’s acquisition of knowledge in Arabic and Islamic studies. Also, a group of teachers with different lines of subjects on the same knowledge produced students. The latter method led to the preparation of students for writing and presentation of papers.

Keywords: Pedagogy, ‘*Ala Al-Tariq*, Traditional method, Modern method, Autobiography

Introduction

According to Hardaker and Ahmad Sabki (2018), the universal nature of Islamic pedagogy is the learning of the Arabic language as a tool to understand Islamic studies. The pedagogy of these twin fields are shaped through orality, memorization and written word. These are teaching processes that informed the Instructors of teaching method, teaching materials, instructional strategies to aid student learning. Thus, the knowledge of pedagogy shapes both instructor and student with the knowledge necessary for personal growth (Doharey, *et al*, 2023). Learning improves knowledge and it is a priority in Islam. This is confirmed in the first revelation of the Quran (Quran 96: 1-5) that commands Muslims to learn what they do not know. The verses reveal the process of teaching and learning between God and human respectively.

Islam subjected learning to an integral part of Muslim endeavor in the history and civilization (Kelani, 2023). The reason why learning process is pertinent in the two fields. The source language of instructors of Islamic studies is Arabic. It emphasizes the reason why Initial works on Arabic language were prompted by the spreading of Islamic religion (Atotileto, & Adetunji, 2013). Thus, the necessity of the exploration of the teaching and learning of the two subjects as pictured in the Al-Fulāni’s autobiography, ‘*Ala Al-Tariq*. It is what Oladosu (2024) views as realism, the literature that portrays the reality of life.

‘*Ala al-Tariq* is an autobiographical narrative written by Yahya Al-Fulani. The narrative is a combination of reality and imagination; which includes storytelling elements such as a protagonist and members of intriguing characters. The narrative privileges factual recounting over emotional reflection. It narrates how the teaching of the Arabic language and Islamic studies began in Nigeria and how it has developed over time. It also narrates different aspects of the life experiences of the author from the childhood to the present age. Revealing the existing works that are relevant with the concept is pertinent.

These include *Al-Ayyam* (1926-67) written by Taha Hussein. It is a three-volume autobiographical account portrays his childhood while in the village and how he studied in Egypt and France. Omar Said’s autobiography focuses on his life experience before being abducted and

sold out of Africa and his life experience abroad. It is an autobiography that includes the sketchy history of his life and the portrayal of the extent of his Islamic faith (Anchi, 2019). The literary autobiography in the Song Dynasty, China is the highlight of Chinese Ancient autobiographical literature with its significance and the connotation (Ying, 2017). Albert Martis's autobiography reveals that he is a prominent figure among the Slovaks in Serbia, he is a teacher, it mentions the author's works, his memories of childhood, his school years and also his contemporary life (Senkar, 2020). Ballard's autobiography *Miracles of Life* focuses on his childhood and early phases of a writer with chapters covering his last four decades on the surface of earth (Maunsell, 2016). The reviews above are on autobiographies of different authors that cover their whole life experiences. However, there are other accounts that cover only an aspect of an author's life. These are called memoirs. Part of the previous works on it are:

Bjorn (2008) reveals that *The Years of Childhood* is a memoir written by Wole Soyinka. It portrays his childhood experience with his family; his encounter with colonialism and the efforts to face the difficulties of the time. The memoir of Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* narrates his personal efforts and environmental and human rights activist efforts (Tatiana, 2018). *The Art of the Memoir* (2010) reveals that Karr's memoir, *The Liars' Club* draws her experience as a writer and teacher. It is revealed through the review that the former is different from the latter. The former is termed autobiography while the latter is memoir. The concern of this article is autobiography. Despite many available ways to write this genre, there remains an in-depth analysis of the part of pedagogy as reflected in the Arabic autobiography written in Nigeria where Ala al-Tariq is relevant.

Facing the reality above, the following questions demand immediate contemplation: what is pedagogy in the context of Al-Fulāni's autobiography, 'Ala-Tariq? what are the past and the present situations of teaching and learning Arabic and Islamic studies in the author's country? It is important to first engage with existing scholarly perspectives that are relevant to the subject matter, is the view of Norm and Hanno (2022) who explores practical perspective that has been extended to form a particular pedagogical theory and discipline. Rajendra (2021) believes it is the art of teaching children. It forms a circle about what a teacher does to influence learning. However, since there cannot be knowledge without learning; pedagogy can be defined as the process of teaching and learning. Going by Johann Friederich Herbert's theory of pedagogy; it has five components: preparation, presentation, association, generalization and application (Radhika, 2020). These components are for teaching-learning processes. They are useful for the instructors and students. The two parties are required to be prepared before teaching and learning. They are expected to present writing with clear language and facts. They need to associate themselves with one another to acquire more information. Testing a fact to generalise it is expected of them. Whatever they read must be applied to the process of teaching-learning.

The root of learning process for Arabic and Islamic studies in Nigeria is indigenous learning, which, according to Achi (2021), is a holistic, community-centered, and lifelong procedure that centers on oral tradition, experimental learning, and cultural context rather than formal schooling. However, Islamic education is a holistic approach to formal learning, integrating religious principles with secular knowledge to cultivate well-rounded individuals and communities (Hilgendorf, E., 2003). The former was passed down from one generation to another. It revolved around all areas of life. The latter, Islamic education, also influences the teaching-learning process of Islamic religious knowledge.

Religious instructions were taught in Arabic (Okoro, et al, 2019). Thus, learning religious instruction cannot be divorced from learning Arabic. The latter was the medium of instruction. Bakare (2004: 152) reveals that Islamic and Arabic learning process in Nigeria can be classified into four, which is also applicable to many parts of West Africa to a large extent: Quranic schools, 'ilm or Higher Arabic Schools for the elderly, modern Arabic schools, and secular institutions. Pupils of a Quranic school only gain reading skills in the Arabic language. 'Ilm school is categorized into low, mid, and high. The low-level students attain the skills of comprehension, speaking, communication, reading, and understanding skills, as well as writing and communication abilities. The mid-stage students also learn to acquire the aforementioned abilities in addition to oral comprehension, while the high category is represented by the scholars, prolific writers, and fluent speakers of the Arabic language.

Learning takes place in the modern Arabic school in the four corners of the classrooms where the students acquire all the abilities of four language skills in 'Ilm school. However, the students under this category have a better understanding of diction and beautiful calligraphy, as well as better phonetic realisation of Arabic phonemes. The products of the modern Arabic school further spread to the secular schools. The aim of the Quranic and 'ilm schools was to spread Islamic faith, while the latter came into existence based on the contact of Arabic language speakers with secular Western education (Bakre, 2004: 164). The Arabic language is learnt in primary, secondary, and university.

Thus, this chapter explores the different pictures of teachers and learners in 'Ala Al-Tariq. The autobiography depicts the old way used by Arabic teachers in Nigeria to teach the Arabic language to their students; it depicts the diverse means employed by the teachers to offer several opportunities for students to have access to several methods of teaching that will make their students learn various knowledge from different specialised teachers of Arabic, as against sticking with a teacher with just an area of specialization. The stages of teaching as reflected in the autobiography are as follows:

School in a Mosque Corner

According to Zaimeche (2002) one of the characteristics of Mosques is to spread education in the Muslim world. It was the center of the Muslim community. It was established and used for the basic religious and educational instructions. It later developed into well-known place of learning. It is what Al-Fulāni in his autobiography pictures as school in a mosque corner. This is a school where a teacher teaches students to be able to read the Qur'an and celebrate it after the students have satisfied the requirements. This stage is what Abdul-Ramon (1989) termed the Quranic stage. In his view, this is when the students are made to learn and memorise the Quran. It is learnt from different teachers who organised different schools individually. The Quran according to him is divided into sixty. Each part is called *hizb* of which some parts must be memorized. This is portrayed in the autobiography, thus (38):

وعلماء الولائم، كانوا آخرين من علماء الدهاليز، وكانوا منبثين في هذه المدينة وما حولها من القرى، وكانوا يجتمعون في الدهليز كلما دعاهم إليه صاحب الوليمة، وكانت الولائم كثيرة متنوعة، وأعظمها هي وليمة القرآن. كان الشيخ المعلم يكلف تلميذه الصبي الوليمة الصغرى إذا أتم قراءة جزء عم من القرآن، والوسطى إذا أتم قراءة يس أو الكهف، والكبرى إذا اختتم القرآن كله وكان لكل وليمة أجر.

The *Walimah* scholars were other scholars in the corridors and they were spread out in the city and the surrounding villages. They would gather in the corridor whenever the owner of the *walimah* invited them to it. The banquets were many and varied. The greatest of which was the Quranic banquet. The Sheikh, teacher used to assign his students the minor feast if he completed the recitation of Juz Amma from the Qur'an. The middle feast if he completed the recitation of Yasin, and the major feast if he completed the entire Qur'an, and each feast had a reward...

The first stage of teaching Arabic in the author's environment is narrated in the extract above. Students started learning the Qur'an in a school singlehandedly organised by a teacher termed Walimat-teacher. The Quranic content is divided into parts for easy teaching by the teacher and easy learning on the side of the students. The teachers of the Qur'an envisage the importance of promotion in learning. This is why the levels of learning the Qur'an are divided into three to serve other students as a motivation; however, in the same corner of the mosque. Promotion motivates learners to achieve hopes and aspirations (Li, yi, 2016). These levels are mentioned in the extract above as: the lowest level; the middle level; and the Quranic level. The certification of a student to the requirement of one level calls for promotion to another level; until the whole Quran is learnt.

Instructional Materials and Teaching Method

Instructional materials are important in the teaching and learning process. The materials aid, supplement and make teaching and learning easy. The materials used to teach Islamic studies and Arabic can be traced back to the age that Olawale (2013) referred to as the stone age. This is when the stones were used as matches, flat bones, stones, date-palm, leather and bark of trees were the instructional materials. These materials in Al-Fulāni's autobiography are initially pictured as slate and ink that were used by the *Walimah*'s teachers. This was when a portion of the Qur'an to learn would be written on the black slate with black ink. It would be taught until being memorised, then another portion would be written until the whole Quran was taught and learnt (Oloyede, 1989). This is narrated in the text, thus: (29)

وكان النظام التقليدي هو الذي ساد في معظم أحياء إلورن في ذلك الوقت، حيث يكتب المعلم على لوح الصبي بالمداد والدواة آيات من القرآن الكريم ويجلس الصبي في زاوية من زوايا المسجد وينعطف أعلى جسمه على أسفله فكأنه كرة ويقراً تلك الآيات إلى ما شاء الله

The traditional system was the one that prevailed in most of the neighbourhoods of Ilorin at that time; whereby the teacher would write the verses of the Qur'an on the boy's tablet with ink. The boy would sit on a corner of the mosque and curl the top of his body over the bottom as if it were a ball and recite those verses as long as God wills.

In the extract above, it is revealed that the author is from Ilorin. He narrated that at the beginning of his academic sojourn, Arabic and Islamic teachers in Ilorin used traditional methods to teach the Qur'an. They did write the Quranic verses on the slate portion by portion. The transition to a new portion indicates the successful memorization of the previous one. The statement that narrates this is: "as long as God wills"; and Learning takes place at a corner in the mosque.

Islamic Educational Institution

It is a purposively designed school to learn Arabic and Islamic education. It is handled by a set of teachers. Al-Fulani experience is narrated thus (77):

كان إصلاح منهج التعليم أول شئ يروقني في دار العلوم، وكان هذا الإصلاح قد بدأ من وجود الأساتذة الأكفاء، وتقسيم الفصول ووضح الكتب المقررة، وكان هذا النوع من النظام جديداً في منهج التعليم الديني في ذلك الوقت

The first thing that appealed to me at Dar al-'Ulūm was the educational curriculum reform. This reform began with the presence of competent teachers, the division of classes, and the establishment of prescribed books. This system was new in the religious educational curriculum at the time.

The author's learning environment changed after a while. In the past, religious learning was in a corridor of a mosque with just a teacher taking students all the subjects they needed to learn. It later changed to a well-designed school building where students' promotion from one class to another indicates the change of classrooms and different textbooks from the former level. Students learn various subjects from teachers with different personalities. This change later led to sociopolitical change whereby the products of Arabic schools have a chance to gain admission to the secular schools to further Arabic learning. There are three sub-categories as revealed by (Razaq, 2004). Some students proceed to teacher training colleges to further their learning after their successful completion in Arabic school, some proceed to secondary school to offer Arabic in their West African certificate or National Examination Council. The category of these students further the learning of Arabic in the institution of higher learning in some of Nigerian Universities, the third category is the students who gain admission to Bayero University to study Arabic, Hausa/Yoruba and Islamic Studies. The aim on this is for the students to be multilingual. However, there was a barrier for Igbo or Yoruba students to benefit from this initially. This led to the Yoruba version of the course in the affiliate of Bayero

University, the College of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies Ilorin where Arabic, Yoruba and Islamic Studies are studied.

The aforementioned changes occurred in Al-Fulaniy's experience from the Quranic School to modern Arabic school in Darul al-'Ulūm where he studied in a four corner of the classrooms promoting from one class to the other. He reveals how he later left the modern Arabic school – after the successful completion of learning- to further the learning in the modern Arabic secular school as requested by his father against the will of his mother who wanted Al-Fulani to become a medical doctor (60). His experience in the latter school is not narrated in the autobiography. This signifies that the narration is ongoing. A statement emphasises this where the author says:

“As for me, I am unable to tell you anything today about my learning and advocacy journey, so I have postponed that until another day (106)”

School Inspection

Pedagogy moved forward in teaching Islamic and Arabic language in Ilorin as revealed in the text; teachers were always under the inspection of other teachers whom al-Fulani termed in the text as grand-teachers. Among al-Fulani's Grand teachers were: Shaykh Ghazali, Shaykh Adam al-Ilori and Shaykh Adam al-Gambari. He narrated what they do thus 82-83:

وكان الشيخ غزالي لا يأتي إلى المدرسة إلا في نهاية السنة حيث تعلن في حضرته نتائج الإمتحان، ويتحدث كمدير المدرسة...
وكان الشيخ ادم الإلوري لا يأتي إلينا إلا مرة في كل عام، فيشرف عند حضوره على شئون الطلبة والأساتذة، وينظر في أنشطتهم العلمية من نواحي عديدة ويشير إلى جوانب تحتاج إلى الإصلاح والتغيير أما الشيخ ادم الغمباري فهو الذي يأتي كل يوم كمفتش صباحا ونهارا

Shaykh Ghazali did not come to school except at the end of the year when the exam results were announced in his presence, and school. He spoke as the school principal.

Shaykh Adam al-Ilori used to come to us only once a year. When he came, he would supervise the affairs of the students and teachers and would look into their academic activities from many aspects that needed reform and change. As for Shaykh Adam al-Gambari, he was the one who came every day as a supervisor, morning and day

The extract above narrates the contributions of al-Fulani's grand teachers – through supervision and inspections – to teaching in Arabic and Islamic institutions. The two concepts are explained by Sulayman and Rilwan (2022), who state that inspection deals with official investigation and examination activities to ensure school members adhere to the laid-down standards. He categorized it into five as follows:

Full Inspection: This involves inspections of the entire school's activities, which are usually followed by a comprehensive report.

Routine inspection: This is done at regular intervals to determine the school's compliance with the established standard.

Check-up inspection: this is an impromptu visit of an inspector to a school to ensure that the right things are always done.

Development Inspection: This is done to upgrade a school by ascertaining what is on the ground to make provision for what is required for the upgrade.

Emergency Inspection: This is done when an emergency petition is written against a member in the school.

Follow-Up Visit is done after a report has been forwarded to the Ministry of Education to ensure the school's compliance with the inspectors' recommendations. Supervision is improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school system to minimise weaknesses and maximise strengths to improve the quality of instruction.

Paper Presentation

Teaching Arabic and Islamic studies in the era of al-Fulani's academic sojourn continued to improve to the extent that students were taught paper presentations among people without any fear. This area is narrated thus (96-97):

من هو أول مبارز منكم، يتقدم ويلقي علينا مقالته؟
 هناك أشار أحد أساتذتنا إلي فقال: تقدم يا فلان بن قلان، أنت نقيبهم!
 فنظر إلي الشيخ نظرة غريبة وطويلة فقال:
 هل هذا هو نقيبهم؟ هذا صبي! قد لا يستطيع أن يتمالك نفسه من
 الجبن إذا وجد نفسه في ذلك اليوم أمام الملوك والعظماء من هيبتهم
 وجلالتهم.
 قال الأستاذ وجلا ومذعورا:
 قد يجتهد هو في إلقائه بعونكم وبركاتكم
 قال الشيخ في شيء من الرفق والعتاب:
 أين يوجد العون والبركة لطالب جاء إلي عاري الرأس؟...
 قلت له هادئا ومنضبطا:
 ما جئت إلى حضرتكم عاري الرأس، فإن معي قلنسوتي الآن، وقد
 وضعتها في جيبى بعد ما نهاني خادمكم عن لبسها، ولقد قال لي أنها
 قلنسوة لا خلاق لها في الآخرة.
 قانفجر الشيخ ضاحكا وقال: أين تلك القلنسوة إذن؟ فسرعان ما
 أدخلت يدي في الجيب فأخرجت منه القلنسوة
 أما سؤالي عنها ومهاجمتي لك عليها فإنها نوع من التجربة
 والإمتحان لأنني أشك في شجاعتك ومقدرتك على الصمود امام
 الجمهور إذا أسند إليك الكلام، أما الآن فقد جربناك ووجدنا فيك
 الكفاءة والقدرة على إثبات شخصيتك عن طريق جوابك، فتقدم الآن
 واقرأ مقالتك فورا

Who will come forward first to deliver the speech?

One of our teachers pointed to me and said, "Come forward, so-and-so. You are their leader!"

Shaykh looked at him with a strange long look and said:

Is this their leader? This is a boy! He may not be able to control himself from cowardice if he finds himself that day in front of kings and great people of majesty and glory

The teacher said fearfully and terrified:

He may try to deliver it with your help and blessings

The Shaykh said with some gentleness and reproach:

Where is the help and blessing for a student who came to me bareheaded?

I said to him calmly and disciplined:

I did not come to you bareheaded, for I have my cap with me now, and I put it in my pocket after your servant forbade me from wearing it, and he told me that it is a cap with no place in the afterlife.

The Shaykh burst out laughing and said: where is that cap then? I quickly put my hand in my pocket and took out the cap

My question and my attack on you are a kind of experiment and test because I doubt your courage and ability to stand up to the audience if you are assigned to speak. But now we have tried you and found in you the competence and ability to prove your personality through

your answer, so come forward now and read your article immediately.

In the extract above, it is revealed by al-Fulani how one of his grand teachers, Adam al-Ilori, brought out the latent ability of courageousness in him. He was out to meet the grand-teacher in the school as usual. It was a normal routine for the students to write either prose or poetry and present it in the presence of scholars and dignitaries. On his way to the school premises, he met with someone called the Shaykh's servant. He was harsh at al-Fulani simply because of the cap he wore. The servant slapped him and was told to remove the cap. Al-Fulani felt devastated. However, he refused to let it affect him. This shows the hidden potential in him, which was discovered by al-Ilori. The history further narrated that the teaching went across all the students as thus (98):

على هذا النحو من الخبرة والمهاجم والذكاء، كان الشيخ يجرب هؤلاء الطلبة، أصحاب النثر وأصحاب الشعر، ويفاجئ كل واحد منهم بما لا يتوقع حدوثه، يلين في هذه المفاجآت حيناً، ويقسو عليهم أحياناً، ثم يقوم بتعديلات في النثر والشعر حتى يستقيم الموضوع الذى لأجله وضع الكلام شعراً ونثراً.

With this kind of experience, attack and intelligence, the Shaykh would test these students, the prose writers and the poets, and surprise each one with something he did not expect to happen. He would soften the surprises sometimes, and be harsh with them sometimes, then he would make adjustments to the prose and poetry until the subject for which he had composed the speech, both poetry and prose, would be correct

Conclusion

The history of Arabic and Islamic pedagogy in Northcentral Nigeria revealed by the author started from the traditional method whereby a teacher faced many students with his solemn knowledge of a teaching method and instructional materials in a corner of the mosque. This later improved to another level of teaching; structurally designed buildings are built mainly for teaching Arabic and Islamic where many teachers with different lines of knowledge are employed to produce students. Teachers and students cannot do what they like simply because their activities are supervised and inspected. Pedagogy later developed to utilise the four corners of the classrooms, producing students who can memorise, write, and present papers.

Recommendations

- A set of rules that will standardise the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic studies in the 'madāris' should be drawn in Nigeria. This will make all Arabic schools to be on the same level and compete with secular school in term of standardisation.
- There should be a body of supervisors and inspectors to ensure compliance with the rules by the schools as did by Al-Fulani grand-teachers. By so doing, teachers will be up and doing to ensure the impact of their teaching on the learners.
- Students should be encouraged to write and present papers. This will encourage them to improve the different abilities in the areas of diction, writing, confidence and speaking of Arabic language as their counterparts in the secular education.

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