

Playwriting In Nigerian Arabic Literature: A Study Of Form, Content And Cultural Influence

By

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Abstract

The paper aimed at presenting the play in Arabic literature in Nigeria by considering the form, content, and cultural influence. The paper analyzes its basic historical perspective, structural components, thematic views and cultural significance. The study indicates that, in contrast to poetry and prose, drama has garnered insufficient focus within Nigerian Arabic literature, despite its increasing significance. In reaction to the growing worldwide cultural interaction and the necessity for indigenous expression, Arabic play has developed as a vibrant medium through which Nigerian playwrights articulate religious, moral, and societal concerns. The study adopted historical and descriptive methodologies to analyze specific Arabic plays authored by Nigerians. Hence, the study examined the plays for their conformity to classical Arabic aesthetics, incorporation of indigenous cultural tales, and representation of Islamic principles. The results indicated that Arabic play in Nigeria serves as both a literary invention and a strategic pedagogical and ideological tool. This study analyzed Arabic language in Nigeria by focusing on its evolution and assessing the elements contributing to its persistence in a challenging environment. Findings showed a significant convergence of tradition and modernity, functioning as an effective instrument for cultural preservation, moral instruction, and literary enhancement within the Arabic-speaking Nigerian populace.

Keywords: Arabic Play, Nigerian Literature, Form, Content, Cultural Influence.

INTRODUCTION

The exact timeline of the Arabic Language's introduction to Nigeria remains uncertain; nonetheless, researchers and scholars generally agree that the Nigerian populace, akin to their West African counterparts, encountered Arabic through trade and commercial routes. Arabic literature in Nigeria has historically been significant in promoting Islamic education, safeguarding cultural values, and influencing socio-political discourse, particularly in Northern Nigeria where Islamic influence is most pronounced. Grounded in centuries of

Islamic study and enhanced by the intellectual heritage of the Sokoto Caliphate, Arabic writing has flourished in all forms, particularly poetry and prose. Nonetheless, the form of playwriting, despite its increasing importance since the mid-20th century, has garnered relatively scant scholarly focus. Nigerian Arabic plays, while not as extensive as poetic or prose literature, have evolved into a dynamic and influential literary genre. These plays integrate classical Arabic literary traditions with local Nigerian cultural frameworks and Islamic moral teachings, positioning them uniquely to tackle the complexity of Nigerian culture. The origin of Arabic plays in Nigeria corresponds with the greater development of Arabic literature in Africa, where Arabic was imported as early as the 11th century via trade, migration, and religious conversion. The Arabs got along well with the locals and demonstrated good values, which made the locals more likely to accept their teachings and convert to Islam.

Educational institutions, mosques, and local Islamic centres emerged as strongholds of Arabic literacy and literary innovation. Nonetheless, although poetry and prose were predominantly employed for religious commentary, political debate, and historical chronicles, drama emerged on the literary scene significantly later. As formal education progressed, literacy increased, and indigenous performance traditions exerted their influence, Arabic play began to thrive, especially in the second half of the 20th century.

Overtime, the study of Arabic in the universities such the University of Ilorin, Bayero University Kano, and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria have promoted the integration of playwriting materials into their curricula. More so, several Nigerian playwrights have excelled in employing the Arabic language to illuminate societal issues and advocate for ethical resolutions.

Before colonialism, Nigeria's Arabic education was not official. There were no regular classrooms or set study schedules. Instead, students would go to their professors' homes or mosques to learn from daylight to night. The playwrights featured include Prof. Oseni, Ibrahim Lere Ameen, Abdul Hafeez Abdus-Salam, among others, whose works will be examined in detail later in this study. This paper has three purposes. Initially, it aims to investigate the historical evolution of Arabic play in Nigeria. Second, it examines the structural and thematic elements of the selected Nigerian Arabic plays. Third, it assesses the cultural and educational functions these plays provide in modern Nigerian culture.

The research employs a historical-descriptive method to trace the genre's evolution and contextualize its major themes within Nigeria's socio-political and religious frameworks. By doing so, this study not only fills a significant gap in Arabic literary scholarship but also elevates the status of Nigerian Arabic plays as instruments of cultural continuity, religious instruction, and social reform. Ultimately, the study argues that Nigerian Arabic play should be recognized as a critical aspect of both Nigerian literature and global Arabic literary heritage. In an era where globalization threatens to erode indigenous identities and ethical foundations, Nigerian Arabic plays stand out as voices of cultural resilience and moral advocacy.

The development of Arabic literature in Nigeria has been widely documented in African literary and Islamic scholarly traditions. While most studies have emphasized poetry and religious prose as the dominant genres within Nigerian Arabic literature, the playwriting form has only recently begun to attract academic attention. This literature review situates the present study within existing scholarly discourse, focusing on the foundational texts in Nigerian Arabic literature, the marginalization of Arabic play in scholarship, and the emerging interest in its thematic and structural complexity. Arabic literature's history in

Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the spread of Islam and the establishment of Islamic emirates in Northern Nigeria. Reichmuth (2004) identifies the 11th century as the point of Arabic's introduction into the region via trans-Saharan trade, where it functioned initially as a lingua franca for commerce and religious teaching. By the 19th century, Arabic had become entrenched in Islamic scholarly circles, particularly in the Sokoto Caliphate. Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio, his brother Abdullahi, and daughter Nana Asma'u were pivotal figures in developing Arabic religious and didactic prose and poetry (Boyd & Mack, 2000). Their works were focused on moral instruction, social reform, and the application of Islamic law. Nana Asma'u's poetry, for example, advocated for women's education, combining Arabic and Hausa to reach a wider audience. Loimeier (2011) notes that Arabic literature during the colonial era served as a resistance tool against Western hegemony, with literary output reflecting concerns about identity, religious autonomy, and cultural preservation. Despite the colonization of formal education systems by English, Arabic remained relevant in Islamic institutions and continued to evolve. Ibrahim (2017) argues that the resilience of Arabic literature in Nigeria lies in its adaptability. From the classical era to the post-independence period, Arabic literature has expanded to include themes such as national identity, modernity, political corruption, and globalization. Universities such as the University of Ilorin and Bayero University, Kano have fostered scholarship in Arabic studies, producing a generation of writers and critics who contribute to the growth of Arabic literature in Nigeria. While much has been written about poetry and prose in Arabic, the playwriting form remains relatively underexplored. This gap in scholarship may stem from the historical perception of play as a European literary import, not traditionally associated with Islamic or Arabic aesthetics. As Junaidu (2010) explains, Arabic play was long delayed in both the Arab world and in regions like Nigeria, where it was introduced later through contact with Western literary traditions. In Nigeria, Arabic play was initially disseminated through Islamic schools and festive performances but lacked the canonical status enjoyed by poetry.

Sarumi (2016) documents the early stages of Arabic playwriting in Nigeria, attributing its initial growth to school dramatizations and public performances during religious celebrations. These plays typically addressed Islamic moral teachings, using theatrical devices to engage youth and adults alike.

Nevertheless, despite their popularity and pedagogical significance, these works were hardly examined in scholarly literature. Alabi (2016) considered Arabic drama through thematic analysis as modernized pattern that portray Islamic identity. More so Yahya (2019) evaluates the aspect of Arabic Play in Nigeria by explaining the oral tradition and major storylines. He explained that Nigerian playwrights adeptly integrate Qur'anic themes, Hausa and Yoruba folklore, and contemporary playwriting methods to communicate intricate ideas in an accessible manner. Arabic continues to have a prominent position in global civilisation as a language of academia, in opposition to the roles of other languages spoken in Nigeria.

Saidu (2020) analyse the cultural disposition and societal perspective on Arabic Play. The Arabic language and culture in Nigeria took a big hit when Christian missionaries came and British colonialists took over Nigeria at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Tahir (1983) examines Arabic play in Nigeria with major focus on the heritage of cultural resistance, the study analyzed the thematic perspective on justice, remorse, and communal solidarity originates from a deep-rooted Islamic tradition of literary activism. Arabic maintain prominent position in global civilization as a language compared to other languages spoken in Nigeria.

Plays such as *The Virtuous Family* and *Centralism* exemplify this legacy by employing religious authority figures to exemplify ethical conduct and condemn societal shortcomings. Moreover, Ahmed (2019) posits that the internet era presents novel prospects for broadening the dissemination of Arabic play in Nigeria. The emergence of online platforms and mobile accessibility has led to greater exposure of younger generations to Arabic plays, therefore preserving the genre's life. Nonetheless, the digital gap and the preeminence of English-language media persist in constraining the accessibility and distribution of Arabic literary output. The imperialist employed coercion and many deceptive tactics to eradicate Arabic, Islam, and their proponents. Consequently, several prominent Emirs and rulers were assassinated, others were exiled, and their power and influence were diminished.

METHOD

This paper adopts qualitative research methodology, specifically a historical and analytical approach, purposively to examine the evolution, thematic emphasis, and cultural impact of Arabic plays in the realm of Nigerian Arabic literature. This methodology is selected to delineate the historical progression of Arabic drama in Nigeria and to analyse the structure and content of exemplary works. A qualitative methodology is necessary to capture the cultural, ethical, and pedagogical subtleties inherent in these plays.

This study historical aspect entails examining the beginnings and development of Arabic literature in Nigeria from the classical Islamic period to the modern post-independence age... Significant events, like the impact of the Sokoto Caliphate, the colonial repression of Arabic education, and the postwar resurgence of Arabic studies in universities, are examined to establish a contextual framework for the plays being analysed. This analysis primarily utilises classical Arabic writings authored by early Nigerian Islamic thinkers, including Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio and Nana Asma'u, alongside institutional records from universities with robust Arabic departments. Secondary sources including scholarly articles, historical monographs, and previously published studies by scholars such Boyd and Mack (2000), Reichmuth (2004), Loimeier (2011), and Ibrahim (2017), among others. The descriptive component entails a thorough analysis of the structure, plot, characters, and linguistic characteristics of chosen Nigerian Arabic plays. The study selected ten (10) plays, purposively for their thematic depth, educational intent, and prominence in academic and religious contexts.

These include:

- “Al-Amid Al-Mubajjal” by Z. I. Oseni (1990)
- “Usthaz Raghma Anfih” by M. A. Adebayo (2003)
- “Aṭ-Ṭālib al-Mughtarr” by I. Lere Ameen (2004)
- “Farhatu Taobah” by Yahaya Umar Tanke (2012)
- “As-Sayyid al-Muḥāḍir” by Abdul Salam Al-Haqiqi (2015)
- “Al-Ḥaṣād” by Abdul Fatahi Olanru (2015)

“Al-‘Aqīdah al-Ḥadīthah” by Abdulganiyy Alabi (2016)
“Al-Majā‘ah” by Abdulganiyy Alabi (2016)
“Al-Wasatiyah” (Centralism) by Abdul Hafeez Abdus-Salam (2020)
“Al-Usrah al-Fāḍilah” by Ayyub Ishaq Babaoye (2020)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Emergence and Growth of Arabic Drama in Nigeria

Result from the findings confirms that Arabic play has played a prominent position in global civilisation as a medium of propagating Islamic injunctions. The study further reveals the relationships of Arabic play, traditional Islamic education and extensive cultural interactions. Result also reveal that playwriting became more distinct in the 20th century, as early dramatists adopt the Arabic language to convey religious, moral, and societal topics through performance.

Form and Structure of Nigerian Arabic Plays

Despite the scarcity of Nigerian Arabic playwrights, their efforts have been bolstered by those who write about their experiences. The study confirms that Nigerian Arabic plays mainly adopt a classical dramatic structure, including exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution. These plays are profoundly influenced by Islamic principles and ethical teachings, often blurring the line between drama and instructional discourse. Most of the publications is in alignment with few stage directives, indicating a closer affinity to oral performance traditions. More so, monologues and choral commentary are utilised to convey philosophical and ethical concepts, aligning with historic Arabic dramatic forms like *maqāma* and *qiṣṣa*.

Thematic Content

A significant discovery is that Nigerian Arabic plays are profoundly thematic and goal-oriented. Common themes include:

- **Religious guidance** (e.g., the call to Islamic values, spiritual accountability),
- **Social justice** (e.g., exposing corruption, criticizing leadership failures),
- **Education and reform** (e.g., addressing youth delinquency, promoting knowledge),
- **Cultural identity and heritage** (e.g., preserving Islamic culture amidst Westernization).

These themes reflect the socio-religious realities of the Nigerian Muslim communities and the authors’ commitment to reformist discourse. The play serves not just as an artistic expression but also as a conduit for moral and spiritual enlightenment.

Language and Style

Poetry is integral to African life and capture the cultural ideals of African society. In traditional Africa, poetry unified and reinforced the multicultural spirit of the continent's diverse communities. The incorporation of Arabic in Nigerian drama is characterised by its hybrid quality. Authors frequently amalgamate *fuṣṣhā* (classical Arabic) with localised phrases or transliterations of Hausa and Yoruba terminology, especially when discussing community-specific matters. This code-switching enhances the writings and renders them more relatable to local audiences. The artistic incorporation of Qur’anic allusions, proverbs, and rhythmic dialogue highlights the linguistic richness of these performances.

Cultural Influence and Function

Culture has a greater impact on Arabic Poets in Nigeria. It has enabled them to pass messages to individuals and society, addressing various societal issues especially in the aspect of governance. More so, Arabic play is expected of Nigerian Arabic poets especially those that have served in the past as journalists and in addition to their Islamic religious orientation. Specifically, Arabic plays have aided in:

- Reviving the interest in Arabic language education among Muslim youths,
- Encouraging Islamic-based creativity,
- Promoting dialogue on contemporary social issues from an Islamic perspective.

Challenges and Prospects

There are basic challenges and prospects, which are:

- Limited publication and distribution networks,
- Inadequate critical attention from mainstream literary scholars,
- The dominance of English and indigenous language drama,
- The declining reading culture among youths.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ARABIC LITERATURE IN NIGERIA

Historically, Arabic literature in Nigeria can be traced to the 11th century with the proliferation of Islam and the demand for holy writings. Nigeria is a prominent African nation which has connection with Islamic and Arab civilisation, wherein the Arabic language has been instrumental in shaping the cultural and religious identity of the Nigerian society. The emergence of Islam to Nigeria during the Middle Ages facilitated the proliferation of Arabic as the principal language for science and religion, resulting in the development of a vibrant Arabic literary movement in the nation.

There were no formal classes or structured curricula. Arabic developed as a language of worship, law, education, diplomacy, and artistic expression as Islam expanded throughout the Sahel, but it transitioned from a medium of academia and religious education to include diverse literary forms such as poetry, historical narratives, and legal documents. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, Arabic developed into a distinguished intellectual language over the centuries, spawning a thriving literary tradition that eventually included historical chronicles, poetry, religious treatises, and, much later, plays.

Classical Period: The Intellectual Legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate

During the Caliphate, Hausaland experienced devastation due to religious and social inequity, political oppression, and moral decline. The religion of Islam was diminished to simple syncretism and superstition. When the Sokoto Caliphate rose to power in the early 19th century, Arabic literature flourished in Nigeria. Under the leadership of Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817), his brother Abdullahi, and his daughter Nana Asma'u, Islamic scholarship flourished during this time. These individuals established the groundwork for a long-lasting literary tradition that prioritised moral reform, social justice, and theological instruction. The majority of Uthman dan Fodio's writings were in Arabic, with smaller amounts in Hausa and Fulfulde. They included poetry, jurisprudence, and political commentary. By writing poetry in Arabic and regional languages to support women's education and Islamic ethics, his daughter Nana Asma'u (1793–1864) carried on this literary tradition (Boyd & Mack, 2000).

A good example is Islamic emirates like Kano, Borno, Ilorin, and Katsina, where Arabic was the dominant language of religious and intellectual life during this classical era. Arabic-language manuscripts addressed many different topics, such as history, exegesis (tafsir), jurisprudence (fiqh), and mysticism (tasawwuf). As Reichmuth (2004) points out, Arabic was

essential to the intellectual identity of Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria because it was not only a language used for liturgies but also as a medium of cultural and political expression.

Colonial Era: Literary Resistance and Identity Preservation

Resistance literature has served as an effective tool for social transformation throughout history, amplifying the voices of marginalised populations and contesting prevailing narratives. The traditional systems that had facilitated the creation of Arabic literature were severely upended by the arrival of British colonialism in the early 20th century. Arabic and Islamic educational institutions were marginalised as a result of colonial educational policies that prioritised English as the language of administration and instruction. Nonetheless, Arabic literary activity continued despite this marginalisation. According to Loimeier (2011), a distinct literary style emerged during this time that blended traditional Arabic with regional idioms and expressions. Arabic writing served as a medium for expressing native viewpoints that colonial rulers frequently disregarded or repressed.

Post-Independence Period: Diversification and Institutional Support

Ever since 1960, the Arabic literature began a new dispensation which began from scholars in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Bayero University Kano, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Ilorin, Nigerian. Diversification plans typically include a combination of broad-based ("horizontal") and sector- or industry-specific ("vertical") methodologies. Horizontal initiatives seek to enhance conditions that benefit all sectors. Vertical strategies concentrate on promoting particular activities or innovations.

Arabic authors started delving into secular and modern topics, such as political corruption, intergenerational strife, ethnic diversity, and the difficulties of globalisation, in addition to traditional religious themes. The genre's growth was further aided by the growth of Arabic publishing houses and literary associations like the Nigerian Arabic Literature Association (NALA). The authors started experimenting with literary criticism, prose fiction, and most importantly for this study, playwriting.

According to Ahmed (2019), modern Arabic literature from Nigeria combines traditional styles with contemporary sensibilities. In order to tackle issues of the twenty-first century, authors usually use references to the Qur'an, Islamic moral principles, and local folklore. Arabic plays in particular have become powerful platforms for moral teaching and social criticism. They are perfect for communicating difficult ideas in an interesting and memorable way because of their accessibility, performance-focused style, and group settings.

The Enduring Influence of Key Literary Figures

Several individuals, both classical and modern, have influenced the growth of Arabic literature in Nigeria. For example, Shaykh Abu Bakr Gumi (1924–1992) was a leading advocate for Islamic education and reform. Arabic literature flourishes in Nigeria. The imitation of Arab prose and poetry commenced, culminating in the 17th century, which produced compendiums of Arabic poetry characterised by exceptional quality and beauty, free from grammatical faults. Literatures in Arabic Language has really influenced societal values in Nigeria, despite the new addition to this tradition supported by historical and cultural sources.

EMERGENCE OF ARABIC PLAY IN NIGERIA

The emergence of Arabic play in Nigeria is traced to trade and scholarship awarded northern Nigeria where Arabic language is accepted both for educational and administration services. Without controversy, Arabic play gained much recognition through the influence of western theatrical traditions and contemporary educational systems. Nonetheless, Arabic play in Nigeria has developed into a vibrant genre that captures the social, religious, and political issues by fusing traditional Arabic styles with local narrative forms. The historical development of Arabic plays in Nigeria alongside their major elements have fueled their popularity, their original purposes, and the ways in which they have evolved to meet modern demands.

Late Arrival of the Play in Arabic Literary Tradition

The absence of theatrical performance in early Islamic cultures was partly due to religious concerns regarding imitation of life on stage and partly due to the oral and didactic focus of Arabic literary expression. As Junaidu (2010) notes, Arabic play did not develop significantly until the modern era, particularly through the influence of European literature on Arab intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In Nigeria, the absence of early Arabic play was further compounded by colonial suppression of Arabic education and the dominance of English as the official language of instruction. However, by the mid-20th century, Arabic plays began to emerge as part of the curricula in Islamic and Arabic educational institutions. This was facilitated by a growing awareness of the pedagogical and moral potential of playwriting texts, particularly among teachers and scholars interested in reaching younger audiences.

Educational Institutions as Incubators of Arabic Play

The first notable emergence of Arabic plays in Nigeria occurred in formal educational settings, especially Arabic and Islamic schools that sought to combine moral education with artistic performance. These schools started featuring dramatic performances by student during such events like graduation ceremonies, religious holidays, and national holidays. Sarumi (2016) says that these kinds of events were places where people could write plays in Arabic that focused on Islamic values, civic duty, and standing up to Western-induced moral decline. Education has been fundamental to Islam since its inception, largely due to the significance of scripture and its examination within the Islamic tradition. Prior to the modern era, education commenced at an early age with the study of Arabic and the Quran.

These early plays were usually short, taught a lesson, and used a mix of classical and everyday Arabic. They wanted to teach people about Qur'anic morals, encourage good behaviour, and fix problems in society in a way that was both fun and educational. The plays' language was carefully chosen to strike a balance between elegance and easy-to-understand, so that it becomes accessible to people with different levels of Arabic proficiency. Islamic centres, such as Sheikh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory's Markaz of Agege, also played a big part in encouraging Arabic playwriting and performance. These centres were not only places to learn about religion, but they were also cultural centres where Arabic language and literature were promoted through plays, poetry, and debates.

Islamic education commenced at an early age with the study of Arabic and the Quran, either at home or in a primary school, frequently affiliated with a mosque. Most of the time, these early plays were short, taught something, and used a mix of classical and everyday Arabic. They wanted to use a format that was both fun and educational to reinforce Qur'anic morals, promote good behaviour, and fix problems in society. Madrasas rapidly proliferated across the Islamic world, facilitating the dissemination of Islamic knowledge beyond urban centres and fostering unity among varied Islamic communities in a collective cultural endeavour.

Influence of Indigenous Storytelling Traditions

Storytelling is part of African culture as it is considered as cultural inheritance. With time, Arabic play in Nigeria evolved courtesy of both Arab and European forms, but the development was by traditional Nigerian cultures. Arabic playwrights used cultural forms like the Yoruba *alarinjo* (travelling play) and Hausa *tatsuniya* (folktales) as examples for their story telling. These traditional genres already had a lot of dialogue, moral lessons, and performance elements, which made them a good fit for adaptation into Arabic playwriting. The Hausa *tatsuniya* also often had animal characters, moral dilemmas, and lessons for the whole community. Nigerian Arabic playwrights used these elements in their plays, using familiar storytelling styles to make Arabic plays more culturally relevant and interesting for local audiences (Tahir, 1983).

According to Yahya (2019), the combination of traditions across various cultures helps Nigerian Arabic plays work on more than one cultural level. This has greatly help in the moral and ethical values. They are based on Islamic morals, written in Arabic literary styles, and performed in a way that is unique to Nigeria.

Themes of Early Arabic Plays in Nigeria

Thematic approach is highly significant in Arabic play as its basis lies on different themes in different categories. Islamic tradition has respect for educational development as it is evidenced by several hadiths ascribed to a command to "seek for knowledge."

Early Nigerian Arabic plays were mostly about morals and religion. They were often based on stories from the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic history, and they helped reinforce basic values like honesty, humility, patience, and respect for authority. Arabic plays started to deal with bigger issues like corruption, education, leadership, conflict between generations, and gender relations as Nigerian society got more complicated.

Previous authors, Oseni's, Al-Amid, Al-Mubajjal (1990) criticizes the report made by Abdul Salam Al-Haqiqi's Mr. Lecturer (2015) which condemns sexual harassment and abuse of power in schools. This thematic expansion shows how flexible and useful the play is. It also shows that Nigerian Arabic playwrights are becoming more definite of themselves when it comes to using plays for more than just teaching.

Institutionalization and the Rise of Professional Playwrights

The first playwrights in Western literary tradition are the Ancient Greeks. William Shakespeare is one of the most renowned writers in literature. Prominent playwrights like Oseni, Abdulganiyy Adebayo Alabi, Ibrahim Lere Ameen, and Yahaya Umar Tanke have contributed significantly to this institutionalization.

Arabic play is considered a very important addition to Nigeria literature which shows how Islamic education, native cultural traditions, and modern teaching methods can all come together. Arabic play has been a useful way to teach morals, criticize society, and keep culture alive since its early days in school plays. As this genre grows and changes, it opens up a lot of new avenues for research and creative work in the larger field of Arabic and African literature.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES AND AESTHETICS IN NIGERIAN ARABIC PLAY

There are several structural characteristics when it comes to Arabic play. Islam constitutes one of the principal religions in Nigeria, having a historical presence beyond a millennium. Some academics propose that Islam was brought to the region as early as the 9th century

The structure is usually informed by religion and culture, with the duo shaping our collective heritage and creating a unique style of play that focusses on dialogue, moral stories, symbolic characters, and traditional performance elements. When it comes to western plays, the focus majorly lies on conflict and resolution in secular stories, but when it comes to Nigerian Arabic plays, the focus is on teaching morals, community values, and religious messages.

Language: Balancing Classical and Colloquial Arabic

Language is a great tool when it comes to balancing conflict between classical and colloquial Arabic. The formal language gives the play intellectual and spiritual weight, especially when it quotes from the Qur'an or Hadith. The informal language, on the other hand, makes the dialogue easy to understand and relate to for a wider audience.

Sirajuddin (2016) says that the language in Arabic plays changes a lot. It starts as an idea in the playwright's head, becomes a written script, and finally turns into spoken dialogue that makes people feel things and makes them think. The actors' ability to speak this language convincingly and rhythmically, showing both its meaning and spiritual depth, is often what makes a performance successful. The propagation of Islam was chiefly enabled by commercial routes via the Sahara and the impact of Muslim merchants and academics.

Dialogue and Narrative Structure

Nigerian Arabic plays are built on dialogue. Through it, characters share their beliefs, values, problems, and changes. Nigerian Arabic plays focus on talking to each other as a way to show moral and thematic meaning, while Western playwriting styles may use internal monologue or narration. An introduction, rising action, moral conflict, climax (which often involves divine intervention or moral realisation), and resolution are all parts of a typical narrative structure. This structure is similar to the way stories are told in the Qur'an, where events happen in a way that shows God's justice and moral order. People often make characters that are like archetypes, like the corrupt official, the pious scholar, the misguided youth, and the repentant sinner. These characters help the audience think about what is right and wrong and what their social responsibilities are. Their journeys often include personal failures, followed by repentance, punishment from society, or a spiritual awakening.

Plot and Moral Framework

Historically, Islam fostered trade relations between North Africa and West Africa. A moral plot is usually what drives Nigerian Arabic plays. The story is set up to show the effects of doing the right or wrong thing. Arrogance, injustice, corruption, dishonesty, and ignorance are some of the bad things that are compared to good things like humility, justice, repentance, and knowledge. Ameen (2004) analyses the main character of the play, Ahmed, who is portrayed as a smart but arrogant student. He neither respects his teachers nor appreciates the blessings that God has given him. There is clear indication from the book that his downfall is shown not only as a failure in school, but also as a lesson about how pride and ingratitude can be dangerous. Most Nigerian Arabic plays have this kind of moralistic plot structure, which is what makes them useful for teaching.

Characterization and Symbolism

Symbols and character are also indexed in Arabic literature as it is respected for its commitment to tradition and its intricacy. Characters frequently embody representations of virtuous or malevolent qualities in Nigerian Arabic dramas. The protagonist may represent the ideal Muslim—truthful, disciplined, and devoted—while the antagonist may symbolise moral degradation or colonialism. Certain plays, such as Abdul Hafeez Abdus-Salam's *Al-Wasatiyah* (Centralism) from 2020, utilize individuals' ideological disputes to represent broader debates within the Muslim community, particularly the tension between religious radicalism and moderation. Secondary characters frequently illustrate the protagonist's strengths or faults by serving as foils. In numerous narratives, protagonists undergo transformation, particularly following counsel from a sage or divine retribution. These changes make the plays' main point stronger: that moral change is both possible and necessary.

Artistic Elements: Performance and Staging

Even though Nigerian Arabic plays often have small budgets and simple settings, they are better when they use traditional art forms. Costumes usually show Islamic modesty, but they can change depending on the character's role or social class. Sound effects, chanting, and Qur'anic recitation in the background are used to make the spiritual atmosphere better. Lighting and stage props, which are often simple, are used in a planned way to show changes between scenes or highlight important moments in the play. Arabic has historically influenced languages worldwide, particularly in regions where Islam is the main religion and in nations that saw Muslim conquests. Sometimes, music and poetry are included in the performance, especially during scenes where people are thinking about or repenting for their actions. Sometimes, the structure is like a "didactic poem in motion," where everything that happens and is said helps the play's educational and spiritual goals (Yahya, 2019).

These artistic choices are based on both Islamic play ethics and the way performances are done in Nigeria. In order to respect religious sensitivities, there are no explicit depictions of violence or romance. Instead, symbolic gestures and suggestive dialogue are often used to convey deeper meanings without breaking cultural or religious rules. The basic structure of Nigerian Arabic plays is a mix of classical Arabic form, Islamic narrative rules, and Nigerian aesthetics. These types of plays are uniquely different because they use carefully written dialogue, archetypal characters, moralistic plots, and performance techniques that are culturally relevant. Their structural integrity shows not only literary creativity, but also a strategic design meant to teach religion, make people think about ethics, and get people involved in the community.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN ARABIC PLAYS

Thematic analysis is a prevalent method of analysis in qualitative research. It highlights the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data. Like most literary works, Nigerian Arabic plays are ways for writers to share their values, criticise how society works, and suggest better moral choices. When you look at the themes in Nigerian Arabic plays, you can see that they are very focused on teaching morals, forming identities, reforming religion, and criticising politics and society. Thematic analysis is best

regarded as an overarching concept encompassing various methodologies rather than a specific methodology. This part looks at the main themes that come up in a lot of Nigerian Arabic plays, using a few examples.

Religion and Morality

In Islam, morality refers to "non-practical guidelines" or "specific norms or codes of conduct" for virtuous actions. Almost all Nigerian Arabic plays are based on the theme of religion and morality. People often think of these works as teaching tools to promote Islamic values like honesty, modesty, humility, patience, and repentance. Islamic teachings are used to judge the characters' actions, and a lot of the tension in playwriting comes from moral dilemmas and what happens when people break God's laws.

In Yahaya Umar Tanke's *Farhatu Taobah* (Happiness in Repentance) (2012), the main character Sheikh Labeed represents moral integrity in a society full of sin. The play shows how a gang member named Badil changes his community after he repents and changes his ways. This story structure highlights the redemptive power of Islam and the need for everyone to take moral responsibility. These kinds of plays often end with quotes from the Qur'an or proverbs that reinforce what the characters learnt and, by extension, what the audience learnt. Nigerian Arabic plays are like khutbah (sermons) that are not held in mosques but in public and educational settings.

Social Justice and Educational Reform

Islam represents the comprehensive and worldwide manifestation of a fundamental faith that was disclosed repeatedly through preceding prophets and messengers. Almost all Nigerian Arabic plays are based on the theme of religion and morality. People often think of these works as teaching tools to promote Islamic values like honesty, modesty, humility, patience, and repentance. Islamic teachings are used to judge the characters' actions, and a lot of the tension in playwriting comes from moral dilemmas and what happens when people break God's laws.

Identity and Cultural Preservation

Nigerian Arabic plays are also very interested in cultural identity, especially in a world that is becoming more globalised and where traditional values and Islamic values are becoming less safe. In Abdul Hafeez Abdus-Salam's *Al-Wasatiyah* (Centralism) (2020), the conflict is about Nazif, a man who comes back from an Arab university and starts to force his community to follow extreme interpretations of Islam. His eventual correction by local scholars and reconciliation with the community show how important it is to be moderate (wasatiyyah) in both belief and action. The play suggests that we need to talk, learn, and be humble to keep our religious and cultural authenticity. Islam represents the comprehensive and worldwide manifestation of a fundamental faith that has been disclosed repeatedly through preceding prophets and messengers. Keeping cultural identity alive isn't just about language or clothes; it's also about keeping up moral and community traditions.

Resistance to Colonialism and Neocolonialism

Even though direct colonial rule ended decades ago, its effects on Nigerian society are still being felt today. Nigerian Arabic play has taken on the job of fighting these neocolonial trends, especially when they show up in education, government, and social values. Metaphors of spiritual struggle, identity confusion, and foreign control of thought are often used to talk about the theme of resistance. The main character in Ibrahim Lere Ameen's 2004 book *The Expatriate Student* is Ahmed, a

rich and smart student who shows how privilege and Western-style education can make people feel arrogant and alone. His eventual failure is a warning against blindly copying foreign systems and a call to be humble, thankful, and aware of one's religion. Abdulganiyy Adebayo Alabi's *The Modern Creed* (2016) and other plays criticise strict or aggressive forms of religious preaching that push people away instead of inspiring them. The play tells Muslim preachers to use gentler, more welcoming methods, which supports the idea that people should fight against harmful ideas both mentally and morally.

Gender, Family, and Social Roles

Nigerian Arabic play has traditionally been conservative, but it has not been afraid to look at the roles of women and families in Islamic society. The plays often show perfect Muslim families where everyone respects and helps each other, just like the Quran says they should. Ayyub Ishaq Babaoye's *The Virtuous Family* (2020) is an example of this method. It shows Muniru, a father who runs his home with honesty and discipline, which leads to his children's moral and professional success. This play teaches Islamic parents on moral values concerning their children.

These plays capture both the family gender disposition and social engagement to talk about moral problems and suggest Islamic solutions, whether they are about faith, education, leadership, or gender. The themes involve timeless and universal issues, and they come from both Arabic and African traditions. They give Nigerian literature a voice that is both unique and relevant to everyone.

PARADIGMS IN THE SELECTED PLAYS

These plays cover a wide range of issues, from corruption in schools to religious extremism. They show how Nigerian playwrights use the form of playwriting to deal with social problems within the framework of Islamic ethics. The case studies show the main points, storylines, and bigger social or moral issues that each play deals with.

Al-Amid Al-Mubajjal (The Honorable Dean) by Z. I. Oseni (1990)

This play is a criticism of how academic power is abused in Nigerian universities. Professor Akhili, the main character, is a dishonest university don who expects too much respect from students and uses threats to control how well they do in school.

He insists that students must purchase his personal lecture materials to pass their courses, and he mistreats both students and staff. Akhili's eventual arrest and imprisonment mark a significant fall from grace to grass, hence serving as a divine and social reckoning.

Themes: Academic corruption, abuse of power, justice

Moral Message: Authority must be exercised with humility and fairness; unethical leadership ultimately fails.

Usthaz Raghma Anfihi (A Teacher by Compulsion) by M. A. Adebayo (2003)

This play tells the story of Atanda, a brilliant student who resists being labeled a teacher. Despite his natural aptitude for teaching, he initially rejects the role. Over time, he embraces his calling and becomes a model teacher and husband. His transformation reinforces the idea of divine destiny and the importance of serving others through one's talents.

Themes: Self-discovery, education, destiny

Moral Message: A person's true calling often lies in what they resist most; acceptance of destiny leads to societal benefit.

Aṭ-Ṭālib al-Mughtarr (The Expatriate Student) by Ibrahim Lere Ameen (2004)

Ahmed, the wealthy and intelligent protagonist, becomes arrogant due to his academic success and privileged background. He disrespects his professors, particularly Dr. Salah, and fails to recognize that intelligence is a divine gift. Eventually, he fails his final examinations

and loses a court case filed by his father against Dr. Salah. The narrative critiques pride and overconfidence.

Themes: Arrogance, academic ethics, accountability

Moral Message: Arrogance leads to downfall; humility and gratitude are necessary for sustained success.

Farhatu Taobah (Happiness in Repentance) by Yahaya Umar Tanke (2012)

Set in a crime-ridden community, the play revolves around Sheikh Labeeb, a virtuous religious leader targeted by local criminals. After surviving an assassination attempt, Labeeb's endurance leads one of the criminals, Badil, to repent. Badil then plays a pivotal role in dismantling the gang. The story showcases the transformative power of repentance and leadership.

Themes: Repentance, resilience, moral leadership

Moral Message: One righteous person can influence and reform a corrupt society.

As-Sayyid al-Muḥāḍir (Mr. Lecturer) by Abdul Salam Al-Haqiqi (2015)

The protagonist, Dende, is a university lecturer who engages in sexual misconduct and bribery. He takes advantage of a female student, Titi, and helps her cheat in exams. His actions ultimately lead to her health complications and his dismissal and imprisonment. The play serves as a sharp indictment of moral failure among educators.

Themes: Exploitation, immorality in education, consequences

Moral Message: Abusing professional roles has severe personal and social consequences.

Al-Hasod (The Harvest) by Abdul Fatahi Olanru (2015)

Jibril, a wealthy man, squanders his resources in immoral living, leading to his financial ruin and family breakdown. In contrast, Abdullahi, a hardworking student, rises to success through discipline and perseverance. The contrast underscores the moral principle of personal accountability.

Themes: Wealth misuse, perseverance, moral contrast

Moral Message: Good deeds and discipline yield lasting rewards; material wealth without ethics leads to ruin.

Al-ʿAqīdah al-Ḥadīthah (The Modern Creed) by Abdulganiyy Adebayo Alabi (2016)

This play addresses the dangers of harsh religious preaching. It portrays a preacher whose aggressive style alienates people and causes division within the community. He later learns the importance of gentleness and wisdom in delivering religious messages. The play encourages balanced preaching styles based on compassion.

Themes: Religious extremism, preaching ethics

Moral Message: Harsh methods in religious propagation often cause more harm than good; wisdom is key.

Al-Majāʿah (Starvation) by Abdulganiyy Adebayo Alabi (2016)

Al-Majāʿah (Starvation) discusses the hardships of Nigerian lecturers who are underpaid and neglected by the government. It humanizes the struggles of academics and portrays their resilience despite economic hardship.

Themes: Injustice, worker welfare, perseverance

Moral Message: Societies must value and support educators who shape future generations.

Al-Wasatiyah (Centralism) by Abdul Hafeez Abdus-Salam (2020)

Set in a fictional village transitioning from idol worship to Islam, the play focuses on the return of Nazif, a foreign-trained scholar who brings rigid interpretations of Islamic law. He challenges his mentors until he is corrected through scholarly dialogue. He eventually repents and embraces a more balanced approach.

Themes: Extremism vs. moderation, community dialogue

Moral Message: True scholarship is open to dialogue, humility, and balanced understanding.

The Virtuous Family by Ayyub Ishaq Babaoye (2020)

Muniru leads a devout Muslim family in this play. He raises his children with love and Islamic discipline. All of the kids do well in life, which shows how important it is to train your family the right way. The family is like a small version of a well-ordered Islamic society. Nigerian Arabic playwrights attend to some cases equity, justice, moral standards family, religion, justice, morality, and society in general. They don't just use play to have fun; they also use it to correct behaviour, teach Islamic values, and encourage people to live morally.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF NIGERIAN ARABIC PLAY

There are several ethnic groups that are determined by cultural disposition, therefore when it comes to Arabic plays in Nigeria, the literature is also a cultural force that strengthens the system, and sometimes challenges the values and norms of the society. Its effects are strongest in Northern Nigeria, where Islamic and Arabic traditions are very strong. Nigeria possesses more than 1,150 dialects and ethnic groups. These plays have done a lot to keep Islamic morals alive, promote cultural identity, and change the way people think about social issues in general.

Preservation and Promotion of Islamic and Cultural Identity

Preservation of cultural identity has to do with the efforts and practices aimed at maintaining and protecting the unique cultural traits, traditions, and values of a specific group, particularly in the face of external pressures such as colonization, assimilation, or globalization. It should be considered as an individual's recognition of his belonging to the Islamic religion and its values. Muslim identification is one of the main medium of socialization through the acquisition of the value of Islam. *Al-Wasatiyah* being the virtuous family are two plays that show how you can mix religious principles with a setting that is recognizable to you. They remind people that faith; it has an impact on daily life, family ties, and ties to the community. These plays help keep Islamic norms and community traditions strong in a world where Western values and global media are becoming more important. Islam is a major way for people from different ethnic and national backgrounds to come together and share their cultures via a shared Muslim identity.

Educational and Moral Instruction

Education is not just the bedrock of knowledge; it is also considered a lifeline. The importance of education in the Islamic tradition has made education a core value of the faith throughout its history and in many different situations. Nigerian Arabic plays have a theme and a goal: to instruct. Islamic schools, colleges, community centres, and religious festivals all put on the plays a lot, which is why they are wonderful for teaching morality. Most Teachers adopt to teach Islamic principles, grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical strategies. Students utilize them to work on their reading, acting, and critical thinking skills.

In addition to formal education, the plays often deal with crucial moral and societal themes including cheating in school, neglecting family, religious extremism, and inappropriate behaviour by young people. There are many hadiths attributed to Muhammad that talk about how important education is in Islam. The plays not only make people aware of these issues, but they also explain how Islam may help by encouraging justice, remorse, and communal change. This part of the lesson gives Arabic play two goals: to instruct and to have fun. Ahmed (2019) and Saidu (2020) concludes that this dual purpose is what makes Arabic plays so popular in Muslim-majority communities, where teaching morals is particularly vital.

Community Engagement and Collective Consciousness

Community service has been a fundamental aspect of Muslim life and culture since the inception of Islam at the Slough Islamic Trust. These kinds of events give people a chance to talk about problems in society and think about their own problems and responsibilities as a community. Hence, it has become necessary for individuals to work together to be aware of the dynamism in Arabic language. People regularly put on Arabic plays at community occasions including religious festivals, walimatul-Qur'an ceremonies, inter-school competitions, and Arabic Day activities. These shows make people feel like they belong to a group and have the same beliefs. The people who come to see the plays, which typically include kids, teachers, parents, and local leaders, are not just watching; they are also emotionally and intellectually immersed with the plays' messages.

Advocacy and Social Reform

Advocacy becomes a force for positive change. It is important to raise awareness and make social, political, and policy changes in the face of life's challenges and global inequalities. Many Nigerian Arabic plays are used as indirect tools for reform and advocacy. They don't normally get active in politics, but they do speak out against social structures and demand moral leadership and fairness. For instance, plays like the modern creed and Starvation highlight how hard it is for groups that are typically left out, like teachers and preachers, to get by. They draw attention to social injustice and systematic negligence.

In the early years of Islam, advocacy was very important since it helped the Muslim community grow and gave it a moral base. The best thing about these plays is that they may make significant issues without being disrespectful to religion or culture. They don't want to spark a revolution; instead, they want people to change by thinking about their actions, repenting, and making changes.

Limitations and Challenges

A major obstacle lies in the differences between Modern Standard Arabic and its colloquial dialects. Modern Standard Arabic is employed in writing, formal events, and media; colloquial dialects are utilised in daily contact. Even though they are good for Nigeria, Arabic plays have a lot of problems. One is that it does not reach many people. Because the plays are written and acted out in Arabic, most people who can read and write Arabic or have religious education can only see them. This makes them less effective in Southern Nigeria and with people who are not Muslim.

Also, some critics are of the opinion that the plays can reinforce stereotypes, especially when it comes to gender roles or ethnic identities. Some assert that the Hausa-Fulani cultural themes are too strong, which could make other Muslim communities in Nigeria feel less important (Jimba, 2010). These are places where future playwrights and scholars can work to make stories that are more inclusive and varied. Furthermore, the principles of grammatical inflection in Arabic are challenging as they necessitate a profound comprehension of how word cases alter with variations in sentence construction. Nigerian Arabic plays have a big effect on society and culture. It strengthens Islamic and cultural identity, teaches morals and academics, gets communities talking to each other in a meaningful way, and calls for social change. It has limitations in terms of reach and representation, but there is no denying that it has made important contributions to Nigerian literature and society. As the genre changes, it has a lot of potential to change society in deeper ways.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Having considered various submission of several scholars, the study hereby concludes that Arabic play is considered to be an important element in Arabic literary and legacy in West Africa. Historically, playwriting began after poetry and prose, notwithstanding this has turned out to be a channel to integrate moral lessons, religious values, and cultural heritage. Review of several studies has shown that these plays are based on Islamic principles and are influenced by the way stories are told in Nigeria.

The study has shown that there are lot of rules that govern how sentences are structured and how words are formed. There are several expansions in Nigerian Arabic play, from cultural disposition to religious programmes.

These plays also address cases such as arrogance, cultural identity, declination of education, religious fanaticism, family values, and social injustice to demonstrate the moral and ethical dilemmas that Nigerian society faces today. The plays also give true picture based on Islamic principles, corporate social responsibility in the community.

Report from Al-Amid and others reveal how imaginative and socially aware Nigerian Arabic playwrights are. These works indicate that Arabic theatre is not just for the Arab world; it can also do well in African places where Arabic is significant for religion, education, and culture.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion and submission of various studies, the following recommendations were made in order to improve and promote the role of Nigerian Arabic play:

- i. There should be support given to Islamic schools and universities on Arabic playwrights by adding additional Arabic dramatic texts to their curriculum and also encourage stage performances.
- ii. There should be competitions and prizes for writing plays to promote creativity in Arabic drama in Nigeria.
- iii. Arabic plays should be translated into English and the primary languages spoken in Nigeria to gain wider accessibility. People from various cultures and religions could also understand each other better if they saw performances or read scripts that were written in two languages.
- iv. The government, NGOs, and literary groups should donate money, run seminars, and set up mentorship programme for budding Arabic actors and playwrights. This would assist the field to become more professional and make sure the genre stays around.
- v. Future playwrights should aim to incorporate more Muslim perspectives by displaying a range of ethnic, gender, and geographical points of view. This will make the plays more like what life is really like in Nigeria, which is very different.
- vi. Arabic plays should adopt the use of digital media like YouTube, podcasts, and social media to interact with younger audiences.
- vii. There should be more academic publications, conferences, and books about this topic so that people from diverse fields can talk to and work with each other.
- viii. Playwrights should be encouraged to write on modern societal issues such as climate change, digital ethics, political accountability, and gender justice. This would make Arabic play more current and ready to cope with contemporary challenges.

Conclusion of Discussion

Arabic play is seen to be an integral tool for Islamic development. The study found that Arabic play in Nigeria is in a developing stage and requires a conscientious support to attain expected level. The study captures literature with religious and cultural activity which was structured from ancient Arabic literature and real-life societal difficulties in Nigeria.

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