**KHIDR ABDUL-BAQI AND HIS CENTRE FOR ARABIC RESEARCH**

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**Abstract**

Yoruba Graduates of Saudi Universities have often been noted for specializing in Islamic-oriented fields of studies such as Shari’ah, Hadith, Fiqh, Usul al-Din, Quran Tafsir and Da’wah. Existing studies have concentrated on the religio-humanistic impacts of this set of scholars with little attention to the contributions of non-liturgical academic disciplines. This study, however, examines the contributions of the Centre for Arabic Research, an establishment of Professor Khidr AbdulBaqi, a graduate of Al-Imam University, in the area of information, research and literary enculturation. This will be done by reading into his personality as a teacher and a journalist within the purview of his Research body known as the *Nigeria Centre for Arabic Research.* The paper, leaning on the historical and descriptive methods of analysis adopts interviews as a tool for gathering data. Also, it benefits largely from reports on its activities, books and articles as secondary sources of data. The paper concludes that the eventual contributions of Khidr through his Centre have been so impactful not only in the field of academic communication and celebration of African socio-cultural values but also in the area of *da’wah*.

**Introduction**

Hierarchically, teaching in an educational setting precedes research and scientific investigation. This perhaps informs speaking of research only at higher levels of education such as diploma, College of Education, Mono-technique, Poly-technique and the University. At this level of academic maturity, the idea of knowledge advancement must have been conceived and the resilience required to achieve it developed. In most cases, aside from the term paper introducing the students to practical scientific investigation, serious academic research often begins at final the stage of graduation. This stage, for budding researchers, is often found so dreadful and burdensome. Scientific investigation as the hallmark of scholarship remains the only factor distinguishing the town from the gown. While those in pre-higher educational sectors may graciously rise to the pinnacle of their career without involving in research, those in academia, if found derelict in it, would continue to face humiliation and derision. This perhaps informs that popular saying in the academic context “You either publish or perish”. Considering, the role of research in social development, the idea of instituting independent centres mainly for scientific investigation of a given phenomenon was eventually conceived.

The history of Nigerian embankment on this intellectual feat dates back to the pre-independence era when it was being tactfully used by the British Government. Among the earliest research centres in Nigeria was the West Africa Institute for Oil Palm Research, (WAIFOR) established in 1939, and the Forest Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN) founded in 1959. With the dawn of the post-independence era, several other research institutions began to grow ubiquitously. While the growth centres in the former are noted to have focused mainly on agriculture and natural resources, those that emerged in the latter appeared to have factored in policy and strategic studies. From the 1980s till the 2000s, the attention of the established research institutions was caught to technological advancement. As the 21st century ushered, Nigeria has expanded the scope of its research to cover information technology space science and artificial intelligence.

Comparatively, aside from those research centres being within the context of academic institutions, instituting independent research centres for humanistic study is very rare. Considering the rich history of Arabic and the wonder it has performed in shaping the literary culture of the region and laying the foundation for academic scholarship, one would have expected that Arabic be treated in the like manner. Not until 2005, when Professor Khidr founded his Arabic research body located in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, there was no independent centre for Arabic research. However, the present study aims to examine this novelty, exploring the secret behind the decision which appears deifying the trending order among the graduates of Saudi Universities. In doing so, an enquiry will be made into the personality of Khidr, raging from his birth to his study and profession. An incursion will equally be made into the origin and development of his research body and the propelling factor for its seamless operation being a non-governmental agency. Also to address is the extent of achieving the line-up activities since its inception in 2005.

**Research Problem**

Instituting a research body on the Nigerian landscape is not a new phenomenon. Such institutions which started before the independence era continued to gain momentum during the independence. The role of the university system in sustaining this idea cannot be overemphasized. At the initial stage such institutes were put in place to cater for science-oriented programmes, later, social sciences had to follow suit. Yoruba language, among other studies in humanity, seems to have better enjoyed the fellowship. It is not only given the pride of the place in the Institute of African Studies but also given an independent research centre in many Nigerian universities. While Arabic might not compete with Yoruba in this respect for a number of reasons, notably, its attachment to Islam, one would have expected stakeholders of that discipline Nigerian Graduates of Arab universities to change the narrative. Instead, they are obsessed with the creation of the Centre of *da’wah* and philanthropic gestures. However, this research intends to investigate the paradigm shift led by Professor Khidr who, despite the compelling context to align with the trending order, has argued to act otherwise. The paper in this respect raises the following questions: who is Khidr Abdul Baqi? What informs his decision to defy the trending order? What did he intend to achieve with his academic body and the strategies adopted for achieving this?

**Aims and Objectives**

The present study attempts to investigate the personality of Khidr Abdul Baqi along with his academic body- the Nigeria Center for Arabic Research, it examines the factors informing his decision to establish a research institute against a *da’wah* institute that was aggressively trending at the time of the establishment. It also seeks to know the area of relevance of the institution and strategies adopted. Leaning on this confession, the available materials related to the scope of the present studies will be reviewed as a basis of argument for the feasibility.

**Literature Review**

This paper does not pretend to be the first of its kind in the series of research into educational and cultural research institutes in Nigeria, as well as the struggle of the vanguards of Arabic at asserting their identity within the landscape of global Islamic tradition.

In 2020, Ibrahim wrote an article on the challenges facing Nigerian Arabists in their quest to secure admission into Nigerian universities in Yorubaland. He highlights the non-possession of O’-level results as the main factor debarring them from realizing the dream. Comparatively, the majority of those applying for Arabic are often older than their peers in order fields of studies, for they must have spent an appreciable number of years in Arabic school before thinking of tertiary institution. The paper argues that even at that the claim is not tenable to be left behind in modern ways of advancing knowledge. In fact, it would have dual advantages. However, this paper shares no scope with aspects being investigated by the current study.

In relation to this Yunusa and Abdullahi investigate the role of Nigerian scholars in improving the Arabic language. The paper which adopts qualitative descriptive research methods, identifies seven conditions to attract people to study the language. This includes, among others, targeting national development, being conscious of world politics and national patriotism. In the same vein, the aim of the paper considerably differs from the current study.

In his article entitled, Arabic Language: Historic and Socio-linguistic Characteristics, Al-Huri explains the historic development of Arabic across the centuries. “He presents the diglossic situation of Arabic through discussing the social role played by both modern Arabic and dialects in Arab societies as well as the relationship between diglossia and education”. Summarily, the attention of the paper has not caught the state of Arabic in Nigeria let alone the narrative of the Arabic research centre, the focus of the current study.

**Methodologies**

A qualitative survey was adopted. Secondary data were sourced from the archive of the centre for scrutiny and extraction of facts. Interview data were gathered from reports on academic collaboration between the Centre and the University of Ibadan. Personal observation is another research tool for gathering data. Seven people were interviewed. Two academic staff from the University of Ilorin, two among the scholarship beneficiaries in Iwo, two among the collaborators in the University of Ibadan, one from the Arabic Department and the other from the History department, and the NCAR’s Secretary at the Headquarter.

**Who is he Khidr Abdul Baqi Muhammad?**

AbdulBaqi, the founder of the Nigerian Centre for Arabic Research, was born in 1970 in Ajigbagun Compound, Iwo Osun state. His father Shaykh Abdul-Baqi Muhammad, was a popular Islamic scholar of high repute, a General Overseer of Islahudeen Missionary Association with its Headquarters in Iwo Osun State, Nigeria. As a ward of an Islamic scholar, he was exposed to rudimentary aspects of Arabic before joining Oke-Ifa Primary School, Iwo, for basic Western education. Despite his outstanding performance, consistent appeal and persuasion from his loving teachers to enable further his education in western, his conservative father, turned down the plea insisting on enrolling him on Islamic education. Consequently, he joined Islahudeen Arabic School where he obtained both *I‘dadi* and *Thanawiyyah* certificates with outstanding results (Aminu, 2016). Khidr Abdul Baqi, right from this level, had developed a passion for writing and teaching. His teaching career began in 1988 when appointed as a teacher at his alma mater and stayed on the job till 1989, upon getting a Saudi Government scholarship for higher education. Idiosyncratically, Khidr dissented going the way of his peers which was in vogue among his peers who ran after liturgical-oriented courses. Rather, he argued to bow to his intrinsic desire bordering on communicative writing and thus registered for Media and International Relations at the Imam Muhammad bn Saudi Islamic University, Riyadh. In spite of Khidr’s brilliant performance culminating in obtaining First Class and winning scores of awards at the departmental, Faculty and University levels, he was not privileged to further his studies in the university, as the department was yet to mount the course or postgraduate level. His strong interest in media-related courses was so inordinate that he rejected alternative admission offers (AbdulAzeez, 2017).

Consequently, he returned back home with an appointment as a correspondent for the Saudi-based Al-Haram newspaper in Nigeria. During this period, he used to assist in teaching some subjects in his father’s school. Khidr’s penchant for media study naturally dragged him to process admission for postgraduate study at Arab World University, Cairo where he obtained a Master's and Ph.D. in International Media. Young Khidr, as a versatile postgraduate student, had been known across sub-Saharan Africa for participation in paper presentations in various academic forums showcasing African socio-cultural values. He argues for the need for cultural synergy between Arabs and Africa. Among the countries to he took his campaign are Saudi Arabia, Cairo, Jordan Tunis, Libya, Algeria, Uman Emirate, Sudan, France etc. His academic popularity and humanistic rarity perhaps endeared him to all such that upon his declaration of his desire to float the Research Centre, it met uncommon acceptance from all. Khidr received an invitation to serve as a pioneer Director of the Pre-degree Programme for Arabic studies at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. He later resigned from his appointment in favour of another appointment to teach International Communication at his alma mater- Riyadh. His personality as a university lecturer has been so helpful in repositioning his academic body. He is an honorary member of Majma’ al-luggah al-‘Arabiyyah, Jourdan, a member of the Forum of International Moderation (Al-Muntada al-‘Alami li al-Wasatiyyah), Jordan and the Director of its Nigerian branch. He is the Chairman of the Executive Committee, of the Union of African ‘Ulama, Bamako, Mali, former Vice-Secretary General, African and Asian Writers, Cairo, Coordinator of Academic Collaboration with African Universities for Lisan al-Arab Association for Preserving Arabic, Cairo, member of academic consult for Rufuf International Journal Al-Adrar, University, Algeria, Journal of African Studies for Digital Content, London, Journal of Al-Isti’rabi Al-Afriqi and Islamic Research Centre Burney Darussalam (Sutti, 2018).

Having finished his contract with Al-Imam University in 2019, he instantly came back home to manage his Centre.

**Nigeria Centre for Arabic Research, Origin and Development**

Nigeria Centre for Arabic Research (NCAR) is an international research institute established in 2005 in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria. It is a non-governmental organization with an Arabic-oriented culture and Islam as its guiding principle. It seeks to investigate both the cultural and intellectual aspects of Nigerian and non-Arab Africans’ lives using Arabic as a medium of communication. This body has neither affiliation with a particular ideological movement nor any external influence. The organization was initiated by Dr Khidir Abdul Baqi, and it started operation with 15 members from its immediate locality. Presently, the Centre has opened a brand office in Riyadh (Ibrahim, 2014:64).

The Centre is particularly investigating the Arab-Islamic cultural tradition outside the Arab domain and awakening the spirit of self-identification by non-Arab Arabists (NNA) (*Al-Musta’ribun*) among the Africans not minding ideology and affiliation to the socio-religious belief of the members. This is intended to be achieved through the following;

* Resisting the age-long aspersion regarding the language by making it a viable cultural language among the non-Arab Arabists.
* Sustaining the cultural identity of the non-Arab African Arabist
* Creating an enabling environment for uninterrupted intellectual discourse on local, regional and international issues in Arabic
* Facilitating viable intercultural connections between Africa and the Arab world.
* Reviving the works of tall figures in the circle of Arabic cultures in Nigeria and Africa, present and past.
* Researching into Nigerian and African issues in various aspects of life.
* Raising the linguistic taste among the non-Arab Arabists.
* Instituting a public media house (Arabic channel for no-Arab Arabists)

As a way of achieving this laudable vision, the following strategic plan is put in place: Translation of African literary works into Arabic, Floating viable website for non-Arab Arabists in Africa, Publication of non-Arab literary productions by Africans, Production of Bibliography Encyclopedia for Arab gurus in Africa, Strategies report on Sustaining Islamic *Da’wah* in Africa, Training young ones for acquiring linguistic skills in Arabic.

**The Contributions of the Nigerian Centre for Arabic Research (NCAR)**

The contribution of NCAR is not only enormous but also multifaceted. Its entire functions for the sake of analysis can be divided into: Research and Publications, Workshops and Conferences, Academic Collaboration and Educational Guidance, and Literary Translation. Scholarship Distribution. Each of these aspects is briefly detailed as follows.

**Research and Publications**

Research and publication are principally the basic requirements for sustaining being in the academic. This perhaps informs that common saying in academics “You either publish or perish”. Professor Khidr, as an academic and a journalist often finds it despicable to see people in the academics being derelict in research and publication. He therefore sees the need to assist individual academics with Arabic as a writing tools to publish their works. The following are the series of publications printed by the centre and those printed under its supervision AbdulBaqi, 218, 6).

1. **Festschrift in Hounor of Academic Personality**

Though not many personalities had enjoyed this honour. The one and only achieved so far is that which was put together in commemoration of Shaykh Adam Al-Aluri. It is entitled: Shaykh Adam Al-Aluri in the Tableau of Immortality. It is a proceeding of an international Conference. The work was edited by Professor R.D. Abubakare formerly, the Vice-Chancellor of Al-Hikmah University. It is in two volumes with 2000 pages.

1. **Works on Socio-Religious Affairs**

In this regard, the submission of Dr Bilal Sirajudeen Al-Asra features so prominently. These works include: *Ahkam intiqal al-Hadanah fi al-Fiqh al-Islami* (Ruling on Al-Hadanah in Islamic Jurisprudence (120 pages) and Hukm Musharakat al-Muslim fi- intikhabat ma’ gayr al-Muslimin ((Ruling on Muslim Participation in Politics with Non-Muslim (120 pages). In the same vein, Dr Oba Ahmad Ibrahim wrote: *Tatbiq al Shari’ah fi Najiriya: Qira’atun fi Dastur al-Fadrali al-Naijiri* (Executing Islamic Law in Nigeria Reading into Nigeria Federal Constitution) (140 pages). Also *Qawanin Imamah fi Shariah al-Islamiyyah*. (AbdulBaqi, 2016)

1. **Education**

It features the work of Dr Zakariya al-Qari who authored: “*al-Sura’ bayna al-‘Arabiyyah wa al-Injiliziyya fi Naijiriya* ( The Conflict between Arabic and English in Nigeria), and *Nahwa Tatwir al-Ta’lim al-‘Arabi fi Naijiriya* by Ali Abolaji AbdulRazaq.

1. **Novel and Drama**

The first dramatic work published by the Centre is that of Dr Lere Ameen Ibrahim. It is entitled: Al-Talib al-Mugtarr (A Self-Deluding Student) (Ibrahim, 2004). Also, *Rihlah al-Bahth an al-Insan: Hiwarun bayna Sa’il wal Mas’ul* (In Search of Humanun: A Dialogue between the Asker and The Asked) by Professor K.A. Balogun, a retired Professor of Islamic Studies, O.O.U, Nigeria. Other works are; *al-Masra’yyah al-Arabiyyah fi Nigeria* (Arabic Drama in Nigeria), Rida’u al-Jabar

1. **Poetry and Studies on Poetry**

The works of that African Poet, Professor Isa Alabi Abubakar featured prominently in this aspect. His Diwans, *al-Suba’iyyat* and Riyadh were both published by the Centre. Other works published on this subject are *Diwan Sahwa*. Also *al-Shir al-Arabi Al-Naijiri al-Mu’sir fi naijiriya Qadaya wa itijahat*

1. **Acculturation and Enculturation**

Under this heading, *Min Ilorin Ila Timbuktu: Rihlatun ‘Abra Sahra’ al-Kubra Bahtthan an Madi afriqiya* was published by Professor Mashood Mahmud Jimba. Also T*arikh l-Kitabah wa Nashr bil-‘Arabiyyah fi Dawlat Naijer and Suwarun mina al-Nashr al-Ganiyy fi Nijeriya, Nail al-Maysur fi Fuyud alArifina*.

1. **Arabic Manuscript**

The published work under this heading is: *Al\_Mahtutat al-Aluriyyah* edited by Jimba. Several other manuscripts are still under review for possible printing.

**Academic Collaboration**

The collaboration of NCAR with other cultural and academic institutions can be bifurcated into two, namely, local and international collaboration. At the local level, NCAR has an unblemished rapport with virtually all the academic institutions and centres where the Arabic language is being offered particularly as an awardable degree programme. Its relationship with the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan better illustrates the connection. One Dr Ibrahim, L.A. of the Department has been so helpful in forming the synergy. In one commemoration of Arabic Day. Dr Ibrahim was asked to deliver a paper on the role of the University of Ibadan in promoting translation exercises in Nigeria. That paper later appeared in the Ascendancy of Arabic & Islamic Studies in Nigeria, a Festschrift in Honour of the Late Professor M.O.A Abdul, the first Nigeria Academic Scholar in the Department of Arabic Studies, University of Ibadan, (Ibrahim, 2024,403). In 2018, a delegate of researchers from Khamis University was jointly hosted. The group was to investigate the origin of Yoruba and its connection with Arabs. The group benefited immensely from egg-head professors across the faculty and Institute of African Studies. Present at the discussion sitting were the Dean of Arts Professor Da Silver of the English Department, Prof L.O. Abbas, the then Head of Arabic, Dr Jimoh, the Director of African Studies, Prof. R.O. Olaniyi of History, and a host of others. Also, the frantic effort of NCAR to invite Prof Anward of the Nobel of Jaiz Faisal to present the Departmental Personality lecture in 2019, cannot go unnoticed. The presentation which had the then Saudi Ambassador in attendance added glamour to the mien of the department. In 2024, Hamad Jaiz for Translation and International Understanding through NCAR held a workshop at the University. The intention of the visit was to advertise their rewarding planned programme for the translators of Yoruba literary works into Arabic and vice vasa (Ibrahim, 2019:3). The latest of this collaboration featured in the department’s host of one American researcher Ahmad working on Arabic manuscripts authored by Yoruba migrants to Brazil, in 20th of December 2024.

**Workshops and Conferences**

The founder, leveraging his international exposure, has been able to use the Centre to bridge the gap between the Arab trained individuals and those trained in Nigerian academic settings (AbdulBaqi, 2005). He argued that every Nigerian Arabist and by extension, Africa has come on board for the purpose of deepening and celebrating Arabic culture within the context of Africa (Adebisi, 2024). Translating the dream into action, he facilitates participation in Arabic-oriented international conferences and workshops for teachers of Arabic. The conference held at Al-Ashmariyyah University, Libya can be instantiated as the most well-attended conference of all the conferences facilitated or jointly by the Centre. It had in attendance representatives from virtually all Nigerian Universities- private and public. At the conference issues bordering on learning Arabic were the focus. One of the papers that generated hot debate was that which probed into the challenges facing Arabic in Nigerian Private Universities (Ibrahim & Alimi, 2019:150). The conference was fully sponsored by the government of the late leader of Libya Muammar Gadhafi. That was in 2009. In 2017, another conference involving Nigerian university teachers and founders of private centres of Arabic was held in Morocco. All these conferences are often held with NCAR as a collaborator.

**Educational Guidance**

Another aspect of NCAR’s concern is offering education guidance to students of Arabic schoolssome of whom, out of ignorance, are full of themselves in terms of knowledge. Owing to non-exposure to a higher educational environment and probably because of the dimness of chances of furtherance of graduates of Arab universities, the majority of them believe to have no future in the course (AbdulAzeez, 2024). Hence they become complacent with respect to their study. Campaign to reshape their attitude in this regard is prioritized. Among the schools visited are: Amin Arabic Traning Centre, Islahudeen Arabic School, both in Iwo Osun State, Arabic Institute of Nigeria, Elekuro, Ibadan, Mubarakah, Osogbo, Mahd al-Islamimi, Ede etc.

**Literary Translation**

Nigeria Centre for Arabic Research, as stated in its vision, is an intellectual outlet for knowledge regeneration, with Islam as its guiding principle. The centre considers translation, using the word of Ibrahim, as a tool for achieving *da’wah* goal, a duty owed by every reasonable Muslim to Allah (Ibrahim, 2023: V). This perhaps informs the creation of a translation unit for achieving the purpose. The unit has continued to serve not only to serve humanity but also Allah. The unit is currently being headed by one Dr Ibrahim from the University of Ibadan. The latest manuscript published by the unit was submitted by Dr AbdulAzeez AbdulBaqi. The title of the manuscript translated from Arabic to Yoruba is *Faysal ani nla*. Another pointer to the importance attached to translation is the employment of simultaneous translation in virtually all the conferences held by the body in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2024:424).

**Conclusion**

Instituting research institutes in Nigeria dates back to a pre-independence era when it was being by the British Government in support of their economic interest. When such independent research centres continued to grow even after the independence, they received further support with the emergence of higher academic institutions. Such centres include the Institute of African Studies, the Centre for Yoruba Studies, the Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies and so on. While all these centres continue to garner support from the government and non-governmental stakeholders, Arabic has not enjoyed such fellowship. Worst still, those graduating from Arab universities with such capabilities to support the idea are indifferent to it. Instead, their attention has always been vested in establishing Arabic schools and the Centre for Da’wah. The recent research body of Professor Khidr has been very impactful in this regard. It aims to assist writers in Arabic to have their works published for global consumption, as such would aid in projecting African values and eradicate an undue aspersion being cast on Africa and those literate in Arabic. So far, as facilitating participation and collaboration in academic research and organization of conferences, the body also contributes to da’wah propagation in its own way.

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