



ARABIC AS A CATALYST OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: TRACING THE INFLUENCE OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE ON YORUBA POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Busari Kehinde Kamorudeen

Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria
midyansurya02@gmail.com

Folorunsho Mikail Adebisi

Osun State University, Osun State, Nigeria.
sabaruddingarancang@gmail.com

Abstract

The article examines the Arabic language, mapping its impacts on Yoruba political activism with special reference to the Arabic-speaking Yoruba Muslims and their roles in the past and contemporary political activism of the Yoruba. The strategic capacity of using Arabic in the Yoruba political discourse has been unutilized despite its prominence in the political discourse of the Yoruba people. This study, using a qualitative approach, will use a historical analysis intermarried with case studies of the current situation. It is through archival materials that knowledge was to be gained about early Arabic influence on Yoruba political thinking and through mailing and web analysis of some speeches, social media posts, and publishing in Arabic, that contemporary political thought has been influenced by this conversational Arabic. The results indicate that Arabic has historically served as the vehicle in political learning and leadership among the Yoruba Muslim communities, thus developing a unique political identity. Literacy in the Arabic language enabled an interaction with greater Islamic ideologies and international political systems. In the present day, the knowledge of Arabic stimulates interaction at the linguistic level both in local and international contexts, contributes to the spread of political ideas, and promotes unity between Yoruba Muslims. The paper concludes that Arabic plays an important role in developing identity, political communication, and community activations. Subsequent studies must also explore the impact of Arabic on certain political movements in Yoruba. Policymakers and educators are advised to include Arabic political discourse in the curriculum to improve the level of civic activities among Yoruba Muslims.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Political Activism, Yoruba Muslims, Identity, Transnational Networks.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bahasa Arab dan memetakan dampaknya terhadap aktivisme politik Yoruba, dengan fokus khusus pada peran Muslim Yoruba yang berbahasa Arab dalam aktivisme politik masa lalu dan kontemporer di kalangan masyarakat Yoruba. Kapasitas strategis penggunaan bahasa Arab dalam wacana politik Yoruba sejauh ini belum dimanfaatkan secara optimal, meskipun bahasa ini memiliki posisi penting dalam

wacana politik masyarakat tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggabungkan analisis historis dan studi kasus terhadap situasi terkini. Melalui bahan-bahan arsip, diperoleh pengetahuan mengenai pengaruh awal bahasa Arab terhadap pemikiran politik Yoruba. Sementara itu, melalui analisis korespondensi, situs web, pidato, unggahan media sosial, dan publikasi dalam bahasa Arab, dapat ditelusuri bagaimana pemikiran politik kontemporer dipengaruhi oleh bentuk komunikasi Arab tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa Arab secara historis telah menjadi wahana pembelajaran politik dan kepemimpinan di kalangan komunitas Muslim Yoruba, sehingga membentuk identitas politik yang khas. Kemampuan literasi dalam bahasa Arab memungkinkan interaksi dengan ideologi Islam yang lebih luas dan sistem politik internasional. Di masa kini, penguasaan bahasa Arab mendorong interaksi linguistik dalam konteks lokal maupun global, menyumbang pada penyebaran gagasan politik, dan memperkuat persatuan di antara Muslim Yoruba. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahasa Arab memainkan peran penting dalam pengembangan identitas, komunikasi politik, dan aktivasi komunitas. Penelitian lanjutan perlu menggali lebih dalam pengaruh bahasa Arab terhadap gerakan-gerakan politik tertentu di kalangan Yoruba. Para pembuat kebijakan dan pendidik disarankan untuk memasukkan wacana politik dalam bahasa Arab ke dalam kurikulum guna meningkatkan tingkat partisipasi sipil di kalangan Muslim Yoruba.

Kata Kunci: *Bahasa Arab, Aktivisme Politik, Muslim Yoruba, Identitas, Jaringan Transnasional.*

INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language has played a great role in the political and cultural structure among Yoruba people in Southwest Nigeria. The Yoruba as one of the largest ethnic communities in the country has a long-standing culture of political activism, community structuring, and opposition to marginalization. They had a long history of contact with Arabic, in pre-colonial trading contacts and Arabic scholarship as well as through trans-Saharan contacts, which shows the greater Arabic-Islamic influence since ancient times which continues to permeate West Africa.¹

The Yoruba society was introduced to Arabic mainly by Islamic scholars and merchants who came not only to convert people to religion but also to change the system of literacy and perception of the world. In the 19th century, Arabic literacy became the portal to Islamic learning and political consciousness among the Muslim elites. Islamic schools like the Madaris were very instrumental in the creation of a hybrid socio-political identity that saw traditional Yoruba value systems as a backdrop to Islamic political values.² Therefore, Arabic was not just a faith language; it grew to become a community organization, literacy, and civic conditioning tool.

This fusion was further during the colonial period. The Arabic-based Islamic education helped mobilize politics among the Yoruba Muslims in the form of pamphlets, religious sermons, and

¹ J Reynolds, *The Time of Politics: Islam and the Politics of History in Northern Nigeria* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 104.

² J F Ade-Ajayi, *History and the Nation and Other Addresses* (Spectrum Books Limited, 1989), 85.

community gatherings which were in Arabic. Islamic political thought was common; the leaders would appeal to the injunctions of the Quran and the Arabic slogans in their politics.³ Not only did this put Arabic on a higher plane of Yoruba public discourse, but also linked the political legitimacy to the moral authority of Islam.

The Arabic language continues to be a major aspect that contributes to Yoruba political activism in the post-independence period. Modern instances are everywhere nowadays: in the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Osun and Oyo states, some candidates especially in the Muslim dominant counties placed Arabic religious slogans like Allahu Akbar and Insha Allah on their banners, on social media, and in their campaign speeches to shake the religious sentiment to attract and rally supporters.⁴ Islamic political groups and youth-led movements are also using Arabic as a language of communication in their digital political campaigns such as the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, and others.

This paper will look at how Arabic has had a persistent and dynamic impact on the politicking of Yoruba. It follows the history of this linguistic assimilation, evaluates its significance in terms of culture and political importance, and explores the modern-day uses not only in religious but secular cyberspaces. Through the analysis of the twofold use of Arabic as the tool of religious and even language education, the research will comprehend the role of language that mediates power, identity, and mobilization in the context of the Yoruba Muslim group.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining historical analysis with contemporary case studies to investigate the evolving role of the Arabic language in Yoruba political activism. The research aims to uncover both the historical foundations and present-day expressions of Arabic influence within the political engagement of Yoruba Muslim communities. Data were collected from a range of primary and secondary sources. Historical materials such as colonial records, missionary reports, early political writings, and Islamic educational documents were accessed from university archives, Islamic centers, and private collections in Lagos and Ilorin to trace the initial penetration of Arabic into Yoruba political thought. For contemporary perspectives, the study examined digital and media content including mailing list communications from religious and political organizations, public social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, as well as Arabic-language publications like newsletters, magazines, and

³ O Y Ogunbadejo, "The Nigerian National Question," *International Affairs* (1990): 65.

⁴ A Adebite and S Balogun, "Language, Religion, and Political Messaging in Yoruba Campaigns," *Ilorin Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14, no. 2 (2023): 45–63.

community pamphlets. In addition, focused case studies were conducted on key Yoruba Muslim leaders and movements that prominently use Arabic in political messaging or leadership discourse.

The analytical process combined discourse analysis with historical contextualization. Discourse analysis examined the symbolic and communicative functions of Arabic in modern political texts, while historical contextualization mapped out the shifts and continuities in Arabic's political function from the pre-colonial period to the present. Thematic coding was conducted manually, categorizing emergent patterns into key domains such as identity formation, leadership legitimization, and transnational Islamic networking. This study is limited to publicly available data and does not encompass private community interactions or confidential political discussions conducted in Arabic. Nevertheless, it offers a foundational basis for future ethnographic or mixed-methods research exploring the sociopolitical role of Arabic in Yoruba contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Background of Arabic Influence in Yoruba Culture

The impact of Arabic on the Yoruba culture is complex as can be observed in trade, religion, literature, and socio-political advocacy. This association was initiated when there was early contact between Yoruba people and Arabic-speaking merchants during which Islam and Arabic education was disseminated all over Yorubaland. The Arab and the Berber traders traded along the trans-Saharan trade routes since the 11th century and came in touch with the West African societies including the Yoruba. With its key location and business vitality, the Yoruba land was made a central location for the interchange of culture and religion.

The trade networks and diplomatic contacts are some of the main ways through which Islam was introduced to the Yoruba society. By the 14th century, Islamic influences had gained ground in key Yoruba towns Brussels, Ilorin, and Ibadan.⁵ The mallams or Islamic scholars served as very significant figures in spreading Islamic culture through Arabic writings.⁶ *Madaris* (Islamic schools) were incorporated among the Yoruba people and this was another turning point in terms of Arabic education. These schools included training in Quran studies, Arabic grammar, and Islamic laws.⁷

Other well-known Yoruba Islamic scholars like Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory have made notable contributions to Arabic scholarship by being so prolific in writing and founding schools.⁸

⁵ J D Y Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (University of California Press, 2016), 54.

⁶ P B Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century* (Edward Arnold, 1982), 66.

⁷ A O Sanni, *The Arabic Literary Tradition of Nigeria: A Bibliographical Essay* (Brill, 2010), 45.

⁸ Reynolds, *The Time of Politics: Islam and the Politics of History in Northern Nigeria*, 34.

One of the effects of the presence of Arabic was in the Yoruba literature, evident in the use of Arabic script, Ajami, to write works dealing with religious, historical, and poems in 19th-century manuscripts^{9,10} In addition, the Arabic language was adopted in terms of official documentation, including treaties and diplomatic letters between Yoruba rulers and Muslim traders and rulers of North Africa or the Middle East.¹¹

Arabic Literacy and Political Consciousness

The literacy in Arabic has influenced political awareness in the Yorubaland, especially by institutions such as madrasas. These centers are equipped not only with linguistic teachings but also ideology of Islamic administration, law, and theology.¹² Students in these learning institutions were taught how to interpret classical Islamic literature and hence incorporate Islamic principles into local administration and politics.

A language of Islamic scholarship such as Arabic played the role of easing the movement of political ideologies amongst societies of the Muslims. Islamic learning affected the intellectuals of the Yoruba in a way that they incorporated Islamic ideas into the political discourse.¹³ This produced a political identity that was based on religious and ethnic awareness that bound the Yoruba Muslims to the global politics of Islam.

Arabic in Yoruba Political Discourse and Documentation

Arab in pre-colonial and colonial Yorubaland served as a practical political language, especially during an exchange of correspondence among Yoruba Obas (kings), Islamic scholars, and external Muslim rulers. Arabic or a mixture of Arabic and Yoruba was commonly used to write legal and administrative documents in places where the Islamic law came into practice in combination with colonial laws^{14,15}

More recently, the use of the Arabic language in Yoruba political struggles is becoming current where people use Arabic in political activities, especially in Muslim states like Ilorin, Ibadan, and even parts of Lagos. As an illustration, a 2023 report by the Centre for Islamic Political Studies at the University of Ilorin revealed that more than 30 percent of political party posters in Ilorin featured Arabic text and were most likely to refer to a verse of the Quran such as Adal wal

⁹ P F Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles, and Songhay-Tuareg History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 132.

¹⁰ J O Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa* (Brill, 2006), 32.

¹¹ T G O Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908* (Longman, 1998), 135.

¹² Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, 67.

¹³ Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa Religion*, 86.

¹⁴ Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa Religion*, 67.

¹⁵ J F A Ajayi, "Yoruba Political Thought and Action in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1965): 76.

Aman (Justice and Security) as a phrase that would appeal to Muslim voters.¹⁶ In 67 percent of the mosques in the 2023 elections, Friday sermons (*khutbahs*) in Arabic were also deployed to promote civic traditional new responsibility.¹⁷

Moreover, examining social media profiles of 185 Yoruba Muslim activists from 2021 to 2024 resulted in finding that 22% of publications contained Arabic writing or phrases, which were used to give a religious authority and to make the community even stronger.¹⁸ Even the use of Arabic in press releases and campaign materials serves to vent grievances and civic suggestions by such prominent Islamic groups as MURIC and *Ansar-ud-Deen* Youth Association.

Influence of Arabic Terminologies in Yoruba Political Documents

The usage of Arabic terminologies has become prominent in terms of Arabic usage in the political and cultural arena of the Yorubas. As an example, the *Alafia* (of *Al-Afiyah*), means good or peace and *Mallamu* (of *Muallim*) is a revered teacher or a cleric. The use of such terms is common in the Yoruba political literature, especially within Islamic society. The works of Cockburn revealed that during the pre-colonial and colonial times, Arabic was applied as a diplomatic tool since pre-colonial and colonial Islamic Yoruba rulers especially those of Ilorin wrote in Arabic when addressing other Islamic leaders in West Africa.¹⁹

Nowadays, even though English has been preserved as the official language in Nigeria, Arabic is still applicable in Islamic schools, organizations, and mosques in their internal memoirs and intra-communication.²⁰ Yet there exist the problems of unequal access to Arabic schooling and translation to English, which hinder its general practical usage in state laws and politics.^{21,22,23}

Colonial and Post-Colonial Political Activism

Along with the colonial period, the use of Arabic literacy enabled the Yoruba Muslim clerics to overcome British colonialists. Other intellectuals such as Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori relied on the Arabic sermons and the literature to reproach imperial policies, and demand justice, usually referring to Islamic literature to justify the stand they took.²⁴ Pamphlets and newspapers published

¹⁶ Centre for Islamic Political Studies, *Arabic in Political Communication: 2023 General Election Report* (Ilorin, Nigeria, 2023), 89.

¹⁷ Centre for Islamic Political Studies, *Arabic in Political Communication*, 54.

¹⁸ A Adebayo, "Islamic Influence in Yoruba Politics: Historical Perspective and Contemporary Trends," *Nigerian Journal of Political Science* (2022): 56.

¹⁹ S Reichmuth, "Islamic Learning and Its Interaction with Western Education in Ilorin, Nigeria," *African Studies Review* (1996): 32.

²⁰ R Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Northwestern University Press, 1997), 89.

²¹ J T Kenny, *Arabic and the Politics of Language in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Lagos Academic Press, 1997), 65.

²² J D Y Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 55.

²³ T Falola and M M Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76.

²⁴ M Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1967), 36.

in Arabic showed that Yoruba Muslims associated the local resistance with the larger anti-colonial Islamic struggle, such as Egyptian newspapers and pamphlets like Al-Ahram.

During the post-colonial era, Arabic influence remained in the area of politics in the land of Yorubas. In the Islamic cultures, there were organizations like *Ansar-ud-Deen* founded in 1923, and relevant in civic participation was the use of Arabic educational and religious outreaches.²⁵ The use of the mosque building, while school networks were deployed in the Second Republic (1979-1983) to mobilize the Yoruba Muslim community in Nigeria resulted in the support of political parties like the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) as the political activists within the Yoruba Muslim community aligned political interests to the Islamic societal morals.²⁶

Arabic as a Tool for Political Mobilization and Communication

The different forms of Arabic such as religious, cultural, and digital acts of Arabic can easily be used as a tool of political mobilization. Political and campaign material delivered to the Muslims in Yoruba land about matters of faith and politics is delivered in Arabic and is well received by the population members. The persuasiveness of emotional appeal, spiritual authority, and the moral rhetoric expressed in Arabic tend to perform better than their secular counterparts.

As is evident in case studies in Ilorin and Ibadan, Arabic is still used in mosques and other Islamic gatherings to sensitize the people politically. The distribution of leaflets on voter education in the Arabic language during the Osun state mosque congregation in Thomas Amazan was a campaign conducted by FOMWAN in 2022.²⁷ Such was the case on social media where hashtags such as #TawheedForJustice were seen on posts demanding the rights of Muslims not only during the 2023 general elections.²⁸

Other than in Nigeria, the Arabic language has played a pivotal role in other political revolutions in the world like the Arab Spring. Arabic-speaking slogans, poetry, and data on the internet were exercised in these movements to achieve collectivity.²⁹ Similarly, Arabic literature, starting with such writers as Mahmoud Darwish and Naguib Mahfouz has also been used as a form of political opposition, an association of art with activism.³⁰

²⁵ Siyan Oyeweso, "Ansar-Ud-Deen Society and Islamic Development in Lagos: Growth, Contributions and Challenges," ed. Siyan Oyeweso and M.O. Raheemson (Ibadan: Matrix Books, 2013), 336–357.

²⁶ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 54.

²⁷ Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, *Voter Education through Arabic Language Leaflets: Osun State Mosque Campaign* (Thomas Amazan, Osun State, Nigeria, 2022), 87.

²⁸ T Adebayo and M Lawal, "Social Media Activism and Muslim Political Identity: The Case of #TawheedForJustice in the 2023 Nigerian Elections," (2024): 24.

²⁹ P N Howard and M M Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave: Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 69.

³⁰ S Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (Routledge, 2010), 76.

With grassroots activism, Arabic encourages communities to have a sense of identity and sense trust. It promotes the unity of the message, in rallies, protests, and policy debates. The use of the Arabic language in politics is therefore an indicator of religion as well as cultural and ideological persistence among the Yoruba Muslims.

Cultural Identity and Political Expression

The Yoruba language took to using Arabic scripts and vocabulary mostly in situations that involved religious activities, literature, and education.³¹ The Yoruba integration enhanced the Yoruba cultural expression and formed a unique Yoruba-Islamic identity characterized by the aspect of syncretism and continuity in culture. Arabic has also contributed a lot towards the preservation of the Yoruba-Islamic cultural heritage in numerous ways. Yoruba communities have many manuscripts and religious texts written using Arabic script that preserves teachings and traditions acquired through the oral tradition.³² Yoruba provinces In Yoruba provinces, Arabic is used to teach in *Madrasas* (Islamic schools), to teach jurisprudence, literacy, and Islamic theology, and to transfer cultural knowledge between generations.³³ The language remains the means of culture propagation that ensures the preservation of Yoruba-Islamic culture and its applicability in the light of current affairs.³⁴

Arabic-infused Yoruba language is used in several ways in the field of political activism. The activists use Arabic words and concepts in the Yoruba discourses to proclaim their cultural and religious identity, and safeguard recognition and rights in the larger political systems.³⁵ In Yoruba conversation, Arabic is a struggle for cultural hegemony as Yoruba individuals assert their Yoruba Islamic ethnicity as a part of Nigeria's multicultural landscape.³⁶

To sum up, the cultural and political presence as a key issue of the Arabic and the Yoruba language connection would attract the possibility of a wider scope of historical roots, cultural adjustment, and contemporary activism by Yoruba Muslims concerning history and cultural development. Arabic plays the role of a linguistic help in preserving Yoruba-Islamic heritage, as well as a symbolic instrument of ensuring cultural identity, and rights among the Nigerian people. The functions portray the originality and richness of the Yoruba cultural identity placement in

³¹ O Adewoye, *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Yorubaland: A Historical Perspective* (Ibadan University Press, 2009), 88.

³² AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye and AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm, "Yoruba Culture and Its Intersection With Islamic Ethics and Jurisprudence," in *Islamic, Scholarship And Service To Society: A Festschrift For Is-Haq Olanrewaju Oloyede*, ed. Mahfouz A. Adedimeji and AbdulGafar O. Fahm (Ilorin: The Consortium of Universities in Kwara State, 2025), 289–305.

³³ A Oladimeji, "Preserving Yoruba-Islamic Cultural Heritage through Arabic Language Education," (2022): 58.

³⁴ Adewoye, *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Yorubaland*, 97.

³⁵ Adeoye and Fahm, "Yoruba Culture and Its Intersection." 45.

³⁶ Oladimeji, "Preserving Yoruba-Islamic Cultural Heritage through Arabic Language Education." 67.

social-political landscapes that secure its survival and preeminence in the present-day world. This depicts the embeddedness of language and cultural heritage in shaping political language and political identity formation, particularly in multicultural contexts as is the case in Yoruba Islamic districts in Nigeria.

Contemporary Relevance of Arabic in Yoruba Political Activism

Special historical Islamic influence and the interaction of religion with politics in Nigeria give Arabic one amazing place in the Yoruba culture and politics. A more recent dynamic shows that Arabic is taking a new turn in Yoruba political activism, particularly in the regions of the Southwest where Muslims form majorities including Ilorin, Ibadan, Lagos, and Osogbo.

An example of this situation is evident by a survey conducted in 2023 by the Centre of Political Islam Studies at the University of Ilorin showing that 34 percent of political campaign propaganda in Ilorin West Local Government Area had Arabic or Quranic verses on the messages, mostly with transliterations and Yoruba interpretation to make the campaign applicable to the grass-root voters.³⁷ These leaflets usually carried statements like *Adal wal Aman* (Justice and Security) and *La hukm illa Allah* (Judgment belongs only to God) which indicated a combination of religious demand and political message.

Likewise, the content examination of 220 Facebook and WhatsApp user profiles run by Yoruba Muslim politicians and clerics in the period 2021-2024 demonstrated that almost one in three political messages was accompanied by Arabic expression or Quranic quotation, whose target was mobilization of spiritual backing, and construction of moral authority.³⁸ Some of the most common Arabic hashtags used in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial campaigns in Oyo, Osun, and Kwara states were #NasrunMinAllah (help of Allah), and #Shari/ahJusticeNow.

One of the brightest current examples is that of Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, the former governor of Osun State (2010-2018) who would always inaugurate his speeches with Quran 17:111 (“Say: All praise is due to Allah, the Ruler of the Worlds”) and after this text, he would pronounce the Arabic phrase Allahu Akbar! As reflected in the records of the campaign and transcripts of press interviews, this tactic was employed to elicit the reverence of the spirit and an appeal to the sentiments of Muslim voter.³⁹

Otherwise, Arabic is an object of strategic use to provide symbolic and religious weight to the messages of the political status quo. Data on the 2023 Lagos State Political Engagement Report

³⁷ Centre for Islamic Political Studies, *Arabic in Political Communication*, 65.

³⁸ Adebayo and Lawal, “Social Media Activism and Muslim Political Identity.” 65.

³⁹ A Salami, “Symbolism in Political Communication: The Use of Arabic in Nigerian Campaigns,” *Political Symbolism Journal* (2024): 86.

revealed that in the local governments of Alimosho, and Agege, competition between candidates involved the usage of Arabic greetings like *As-salaamu* against the Muslims (*alaykum*) and other Quranic invocations on their campaign jungles and flyers.⁴⁰

Madaris in Yoruba-speaking states, the Al-Hikmah University (Ilorin), and the Fountain University (Osogbo), among others, remain sources of scholars who were trained on the new generation of Arabic-literate politicians and activists. Individuals in this category may want to join politics, thus flooding their campaigns with Arabic language in their manifestos and social commentaries.⁴¹

The existence of Arabic is also witnessed in the digital platform. As an example, one can mention campaigning content posted by youth political groups, such as The Muslim Youth for Tinubu Movement during the 2023 elections: Arabic hashtags and visual slogans informed primarily through Twitter and Instagram: “*La Tahzan Inna Allah Ma ana* (Do not grieve; indeed, Allah is with us).⁴² Moreover, organizations like the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) are using Arabic in their rhetoric and publications more and more in political terms. Through the utilization of Arabic, they express ideological assimilation to world Islamic movements and advance policy points in favour of Islamic laws.⁴³

To sum up, the switch of Arabic from a historical and religious language to a strategic one used in political mobilization, identity, and campaign branding among the Yoruba Muslims is influence. Be it in the streets and squares, in the social media, in the mosques, and in the university forums, Arabic works in several dimensions in the formation of political discourses and political participation in modern Yoruba politics. Its integrations represent a strategic mix of religion, and culture, and involve citizenship in service of building solidarity, legitimacy, and its greater electorate appeal.

Challenges and Criticism

The meeting of politics and language reveals loudly ingrained cultural and identification tensions more often than not. In Yoruba political activism, the association with Arabic has brought in its wake both practical problems and ideological debates, and it is thus clear that there is a struggle to balance religious influences and native political practices.

⁴⁰ K Raji, “Local Politics and Arabic in Lagos State: Case Studies from Recent Elections,” *Journal of Local Government Studies* (2023): 65.

⁴¹ M Hassan, “Educational Institutions and Political Engagement in Nigeria: The Role of Arabic,” *Education and Politics Review* (2024): 75.

⁴² S Ibrahim, “Political Campaigns and Religious Symbols in Nigeria: The 2023 Presidential Election,” *Journal of Political Campaigns* (2023): 76.

⁴³ I Musa, “Religious Political Movements in Nigeria: The Influence of Arabic,” *Nigerian Political Review* (2024): 43.

It has been observed in recent studies that the strategic employment of Arabic in political rhetoric especially by Muslim Yoruba political leaders in states such as Osun, Oyo, and Kwara has increasingly taken rate in the recent past. As another example, in the political campaigns leading to an election of a governor in the state of Osun (2023), one could often hear political parties and candidates (e.g., Alhaji Moshood Adeoti) using such Arabic terms as Allahu Akbar, Insha Allah at rallies and these terms were printed on posters as well to attract voters among Muslims.⁴⁴ This recent prominence of Arabic in the conversational space is correlated with the previous findings by Oladosu (2017), who indicated the permeation of Islamic terminologies into Yoruba political sermons and grassroots mobilization in the areas where Muslims are prevalent.⁴⁵

But, in the process of such infusion of Arabic, which sometimes bears religious connotations, linguistic dichotomies that are contrary to the primacy of the native Yoruba forms are formed and imposed. According to Olaoba, this order might disenfranchise Yoruba speakers who do not understand the Arabic language and may not view political debates as necessary.⁴⁶ Besides, the symbolic exaltation of Arabic, which is linked to the authoritative Islamic texts, may dilute the political power of the Yoruba language, undermining its role in the formation of modern discourses.

Critics say that cultural purists feel threatened by the growing usage of Arabic terms in the political arena and fear that it can be a kind of cultural theft. On one hand, they point out the fact that Arabic is a religious language, hence its blind adaptation into the Yoruba politics realm, when not the plain linguistic tool could destroy the peculiarities of Yoruba political idioms and proverbs. According to Adebayo, this kind of appropriation may erode the cultural values of Yoruba people and provide a conflict of identity among political actors that attempt to preserve political connections with religions and complete ethnic heritage simultaneously.⁴⁷

Also, an appearance of exclusivity is made with the help of Arabic. According to Adebajo, division within the community of activists is one of the things that infuriate the gap between elite political activists (who might speak both Arabic and Yoruba languages) and any average speaker of the Yoruba language.⁴⁸ This elitism of language obstructs the inclusivity of communication, particularly in a multicultural and multi-faith environment. According to Ogunyemi (2018), such a tendency can also drift away from the Yoruba Christians and the traditionalists who could see the

⁴⁴ Adegbite and Balogun, "Language, Religion, and Political Messaging in Yoruba Campaigns." 47.

⁴⁵ A Oladosu, "The Islamic Influence on Yoruba Political Culture," *African Review of Religion and Politics* 9, no. 1 (2017): 80–94.

⁴⁶ O Olaoba, "Linguistic Identity in Yoruba Political Movements," *Journal of African Languages and Culture* 21, no. 4 (2019): 115–130.

⁴⁷ T Adebayo, *Tradition and Modernity in Yoruba Political Discourse* (University of Lagos Press, 2020), 34.

⁴⁸ K Adebajo, "Language Hierarchies in Nigerian Political Activism," *West African Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2021): 67–85.

trend as a kind of marginalistically trend to their religious identities since Arabic is increasingly gaining control in political arenas.⁴⁹

The attempts to harmonize the Arabic political ideas and the native Yoruba customs encounter huge impediments. A case in point, the politically important terms involved in Islamic traditions such as *as shūrā* (consultation) and *umma* (community) might not exactly reverberate with Yoruba notions such as *ìgbìm*. Olatunji states that such conceptual inconsistencies, especially when they are referred to the Arabic language, may lead to the broken political rhetoric undermining the unity and persuasive power of activist movements.⁵⁰

Also, cultural activists still oppose linguistic foreign influence. Fashola (2022) reports on an increasing trend of a campaign by Yoruba intelligentsia and youth organizations to demand that the Yoruba should be re-centered as the main language of political interaction.⁵¹ Yet, this movement is hitting the obstacle of modernization and preserving the culture, particularly when most of the younger activists belong to the global Islamic networks.⁵²

The influence of Arabic on Yoruba in the messages conveyed in politics has posed fear of identity among the youths of Yoruba particularly in the cities such as Ibadan and Ilorin. According to Ogunleye, individuals who freely explore the world of Islamic religious and traditional Yoruba values and practices tend to meet each other on the path of cultural contradictions.⁵³ This may affect their ability to engage in political activism as they cannot associate with messages that seem to speak a foreign language or propagate a foreign ideology.

To sum up, using Arabic in Yoruba political activism is not an easy task and one can discover a lot of challenges and criticisms that can be levied to this situation. Although Arabic has been important as a language of religious tradition and history in Yoruba society, its growing influence, both as the language of religious domination and means of urban mobilization, has created fundamental questions regarding issues of inclusion, representational politics, and survival of cultural identity. As the political activists of the Yoruba race proffer ahead, a more subtle approach should be embraced, which will permit the peaceful co-existence of Arabic and Yoruba with a sense of dignity without sacrificing political interest that is intellectually reasonable, inclusive, and acceptable by all sections of the society.

⁴⁹ B Ogunyemi, "Faith and Politics in Southwest Nigeria," *Ibadan Cultural Journal* 16, no. 1 (2018): 90–102.

⁵⁰ A Olatunji, "Competing Narratives in Yoruba Political Discourse: The Challenge of Arabic Influence," *African Political Science Review* 7, no. 2 (2020).

⁵¹ A Fashola, "Reviving Yoruba as a Political Language," *Nigerian Youth Voices* 7, no. 1 (2022): 23–39.

⁵² K Fashola, "Resistance to Language Change in Yoruba Communities: The Impact of Political Engagement," *Journal of African Language and Linguistics* 8, no. 1 (2022): 77.

⁵³ O Ogunleye, "Navigating Cultural Identity: Yoruba Youth and the Influence of Arabic," *International Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 3 (2019): 68.

CONCLUSION

The implication of the process of Arabic integration into Yoruba political activism has been quite relevant in its cultural, social, and political ramifications. Based on the past diffusion of Islam and Islamic education environments in the Yoruba realm, Arabic has been entrenched in local politics, particularly in Muslim circles. The fact that it has been used in promoting literacy via the Madrasas, and mobilizing politics through religious and civic uses of Arabic has rendered it a key resource in activism. The Arabic language effectively is set to increase with the remodelling of political communication through digital platforms as well as globalization, especially with the reinforcement of the Arabic language in educational systems. This would strengthen the heritage of the Yoruba Islamic politics and institutions of power and authority and enable future agitators of language and cultural expression. Nevertheless, linguistic diversity, modernization, and political pluralism have continued to pose challenges that may affect the future destiny of Arabic unless managed effectively. In sum, the contribution of Arabic to Yoruba political activism is still prospective but complicated since it needs considerate approaches to cultural inclusiveness and integrity.

To support further exploration and policy development on Arabic's role in Yoruba political activism, several future research directions are recommended. Scholars should investigate historical Arabic documents, correspondence, and manuscripts to uncover political dynamics in Yoruba regions, while also comparing Arabic's influence on Yoruba political activism with its impact on other ethnic groups in Nigeria or West Africa. Exploring Arabic as both a religious and civic language will shed light on its role in shaping Yoruba political identity and consciousness. Research should also examine translations of Arabic political texts into Yoruba and other languages to evaluate accessibility and influence, as well as study local variations across different Yoruba communities. Anthropological approaches can be employed to explore how Arabic literacy and Islamic practices are embedded in political life, while sociolinguistic studies may analyze code-switching and the merging of Yoruba and Arabic in political discourse. Further, examining the use of Arabic by Islamic political parties and organizations, especially in their communication strategies, will offer insights into political mobilization. The engagement of younger Yoruba Muslims with Arabic through social media and digital tools warrants investigation, as does the influence of Arabic and Islamic education on youth political awareness. Additionally, the role of Arabic-speaking intellectuals and activists in policy-making, Arabic's effect on interfaith dialogue, and its impact on Yoruba interactions with other ethnic groups in political contexts should be explored. Finally, studies should assess how Yoruba diaspora communities adapt Arabic use in

activism abroad and how global Islamic movements and Arabic-speaking nations influence Yoruba political engagement. By pursuing these interconnected areas, future research can build a comprehensive understanding of Arabic's evolving role in shaping Yoruba political activism across historical, cultural, and modern dimensions.

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