

Management of Arabic and Ajami Manuscript Resources In Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS)

By

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Abstract

Arabic manuscripts are not new phenomena in Nigeria, Africa and the world over. Their importance to the educational development and societal reconstruction along moral, ethics, spiritual, social, economic, political and what have you, is yet to be known, due to the poor understanding of where they can be found and access to them easily obtained, and to know their intellectual content. It is in view of these that this desktop study is set to investigate the management of the Arabic manuscript resources in the Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The total population of the research is 1508 in which 50% was used as the sample in deriving the data for the research. Documentary and survey methods were employed in achieving the objectives of the research, which include among others, what are the contents of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, how are they organized, accessed and use in Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The research recommend among others that the scheme should as matter of fact should try as much as possible to exploit the benefits brought by information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an alternative to its services and for easy access, retrieval and dissemination of information to its users.

Introduction

The Northern Nigerian area has been one of the earliest regions of West Africa with a literary tradition and heritage, book culture and documentation of events, centuries before the arrival of the Europeans on the African continent. This refers to information or idea related to what data one is concerned with, and it is the knowledge of the natural environment and resources of a people. The development of human intellect has made it possible for the people of Nigeria to participate in promoting world civilization and scholarship. The past leaders sought knowledge and managed it and left behind a great treasure of learning that will continue to be relevant for many generations to come. Knowledge and information are disseminated through various channels, writing has been known for centuries

The Muslim scholars in Nigeria and the world over are engaged in the dissemination of knowledge and scholarship through teachings, preaching and writing. Ibrahim (1988:13) notes that it is significant to point out that the Muslim scholars that were involved in the spread of Islam were highly learned. Their knowledge encompassed all types of disciplines and their studies. The early Ulama engaged themselves in the literary works through the writing of books and recording events which consequently became reference documents and source of inspiration for future generations. As a result of these, there exists a lot of literature that contains a great deal of knowledge that is of great historical, political, social, economic and religious importance. For example Sheikh Uthman Danfodiyo the leading intellectual and guide of the Sokoto Jihad movement, Sheikh Abdullahi Fodiyo and Sultan Muhammadu Bello have produced literatures that are counted in the thousands. The literatures produced by these scholars are mostly in Arabic and Ajami which were handwritten and distributed.

Northern History Research Scheme

The Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) is one of the public centres where Arabic and Arabic Ajami manuscripts can be found in the country situated in Ahmadu Bello University. The scheme was one among many local projects designed to study various parts of country in sufficient detail in order to provide basis for the subsequent synthesis of their findings towards the reconstruction of Nigerian history and development of new knowledge. The project was however, designed to collect and preserve primary source materials particularly Arabic and Ajami manuscripts. According to Bello (2009:121), the establishment of the project was informed by a number of considerations relating to the state of knowledge and history of the Northern Nigeria, and West Africa in general and as well as that of the states and societies of the Western Sudan in particular.

The Concept of Arabic Manuscripts

Arabic manuscripts are the pieces of handwritten information which the characters are in Arabic and the language is either Arabic or non Arabic, they are in a form of a book, pamphlet, letter, poem, poetry or otherwise. The information they recorded comprises records of events, sermons, preaching, judgment proceeding, treatise, transactions, and record of medicinal herbal, spiritual or magical treatise for charms which is known as kundi or rather something portable like a manual or diary. The Arabic manuscripts are in two distinct forms which are serving the same purpose. The pure Arabic manuscripts and the Ajami manuscripts. The pure Arabic manuscripts are those manuscripts that are wholly written in Arabic and with its characters. According to Adamu (2010:156) Arabic manuscripts as pieces of writing in which the characters are Arabic and the language is non Arabic is called Ajami. Umar (2007:6) notes that Arabic manuscripts were written in the standard Arabic language as a result of matured learning style, this is as a result of strict observation to its linguistics rules and conve ntion clearly demonstrated in the texts. On the other hand the Ajami manuscripts are

the manuscripts written in any language apart from Arabic, but using the Arabic inscriptions.

By and large, consequent to the above, there exist today in Nigeria particularly in the northern part and south, a lot of literature written in Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Nupe and Etsako and Yoruba languages, using Arabic inscriptions, that referred to Ajami manuscripts. Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are vast treasures of invaluable source materials that contained the heritage of northern Nigeria and beyond, which documented materials on the period of Islamic Jihad in the West African sub-region. It also shows the contribution of African scholars to Islamic heritage and to the world civilization. These manuscripts have provided the written testimony to the skills of African scientists in the field of mathematics, medicine, climatology, archaeology and general scholarship in the middle ages. Mohammed (2009:12) notes that manuscripts can be simply described as document written, printed and or/unconventionally published information source or sources in bounded or unbounded format regardless of the language of communication and alphabet of writing. It is also conceived as handwritten, hand-press, or printed document, diary of events or information record on variety of events, issues and subjects vital to the writer, composer, compiler or collector. Furthermore, Umar (1995:341) is saying that there are two distinctive locations where to find the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in the country, the private and public collections. Private collectors are those in the libraries of individuals and families. The public collections; include those Arabic and Ajami manuscripts at the Universities, National Archives and some States Historical Bureaus.

Management of Arabic Manuscripts In Nigeria

The management of Arabic manuscript in Nigeria was however, started since 1914, when the country became a single political unit under the colonial rule. This was with the initial objective among others to preserve books of account and treasury. As reported, Alegbeleye (1988), in 1948 a circular was dispatched by the colonial office prior to the establishment of National Archives, on the need for preserving Nigeria's records is significant. According to National Archive of Nigeria (1989), the National Archives Kaduna houses the oldest records dating back to the 12th century; these records deal with the activities of Muslim traders, Muslim missionaries and adventures. Ibrahim (1988:17) reported that in 1950 the British Administrators in Nigeria from the seat of Northern region government in Kaduna gave order to collect all Arabic manuscripts from all corners of the country. The exercise was successful by collecting thousands of manuscripts in the custody of the National Archives Kaduna. The list of these manuscripts was compiled by their titles only and other bibliographical details were left out.

Management of Arabic manuscripts from this perspective entails the activities and efforts for proper planning, processing, preservation, conservation, organisation and dissemination of the resources, through organized structures, systems and relevant manpower for its coordination and facilitation. More often than not, management is for the total satisfaction and harmony, of both the managers in the organisation and the users towards attainment of its goals, mission and vision and vice versa. Drucker (1990:42) described management as a specific organ of the business enterprise and organs can be described and defined only through their functions. Subsequently, management could be seen in two distinctive ways; from the perspective of the people and from the working environment and equipment or tools to do the activities.

Statement of Problem

The, learning processes of any society are the nerve centres of its adaptive capability which allow it to learn much from the past, engage the present and imagine what the future may likely be. In the Northern Nigeria, the Arabic manuscripts constitute important and valuable resources for understanding the people's religious, culture, societal natural sciences and traditions. It is these resources that preserved records about the region, Nigeria and Africa in general. These resources are found in most of the Nigerian University's libraries, Historical Research and 'Documentation Centres, States Cultural and Historical Bureaus, museums and archives and private own libraries. Unfortunately, these resources despite their presence in these collections centres, have problems of identification, classification and in all likelihood were not catalogued. These make their accessibility, retrieval; dissemination and use become very difficult. There are no special care and protective measures for their safekeeping, preservation and conservation that would ensure their availability accessibility and use for future generations to come.

Batiste (2007:2) generally speaking I found the Arabic manuscripts in the Northern Nigeria covered with thick harmattan dust, mold and moisture damaged by insects very badly frayed or ragged pages, water and coffee stained pages and damaged binding were also observed. It is in view of these problems that this papers set to examine some relevant questions and answers on the availability and management of Arabic manuscripts in Northern History Research Centre A.B.U, Zaria.

Research Questions

In line with the identified problems this paper is set to answer the following questions:

1. What are the contents of the Arabic manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria?

2. How are the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts organized in the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria?
3. How does the users access Arabic ad Ajami manuscripts resources in the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria?
4. How are the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts resources use in the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria?

Objectives of the Study

This paper is set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the contents of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria.
2. To identify how the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria are organized.
3. To find how the users are accessing the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria.
4. To uncover how the users are using the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria.

Significance of The Study

The study is significant in documenting the progress so far achieved by the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria in its effort towards making the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts resources available and as well accessible in the country. It is also significant by revealing the contents of the Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources, their organization, access and use. However, this will also assist the stakeholders, scholars, teachers, students and the general readership get aware about the existence of the resources in the scheme, for development of new knowledge in the cause of human endeavor.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited only to the Arabic manuscript collections of the Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria. By this it means that other resources such as books, audio visual e.t.c. of the NHRS are excluded from the study. The population of the research is 1508 Arabic and Ajami manuscripts through which as a result of using a purposive sampling 754 (50%) of the total population. This is with cognizance of what Adetoro (1986:40) reported that most of researchers, such as Borg and Gall (1971) suggest the use of 20% up to 1,000 when determining sample size from a given population as a sample. However, for the purpose of this paper and to ensure fair and adequate representation the researcher adopted 50% of the population.

Methodology

The paper is set to survey the management of Arabic manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme of A.B.U, Zaria as a case. The paper employed the used of documentary, survey and interview methods for gathering the data for the research. The data derived from the research were quantified, analysed and discussed for each objective of the paper. The analysis and discussion where possible were done using simple statistical techniques, such as percentages and table.

Report on the Findings

The Contents of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts

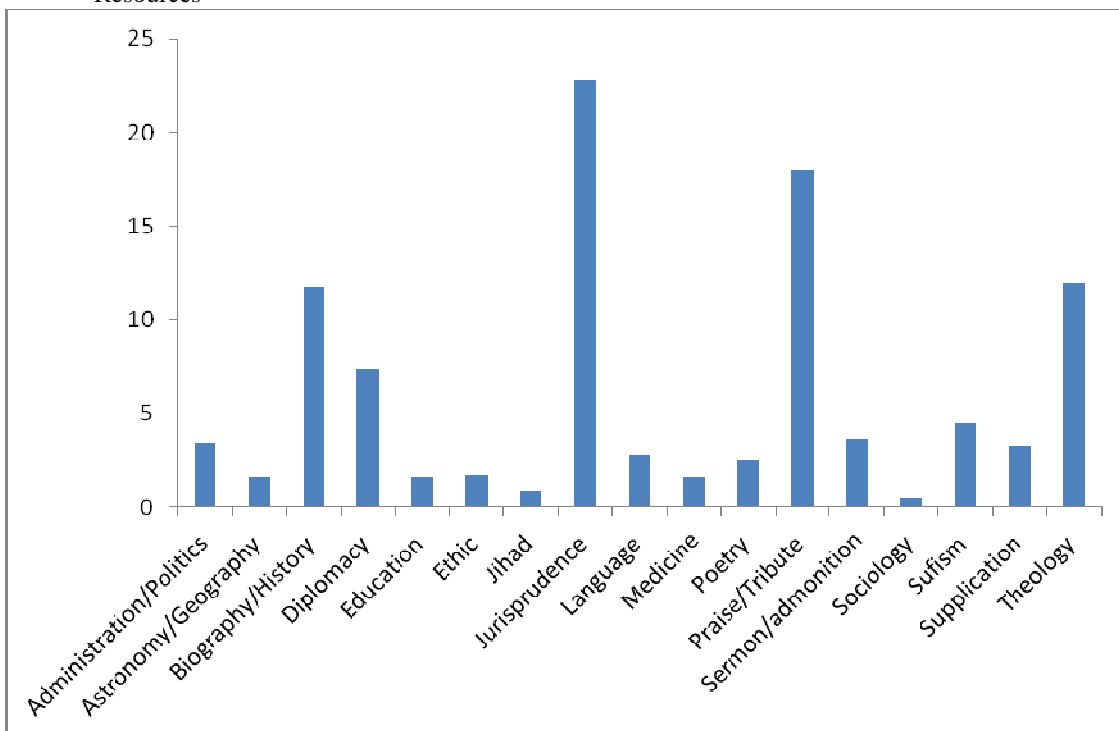
Knowledge of the content of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts is ultimate towards understanding the vast potentials of knowledge in the in the resources. In the process of this research paper an analysis was made to the content of 754 Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

Table 1.1: Subjects in the Arabic and Ajami Manuscript Resources in NHRS ABU, Zaria

S/No.	Subject	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Administration/Politics	26	3.4
2.	Astronomy/Geography	12	1.6
3.	Biography/History	88	11.7
4.	Diplomacy	56	7.4
5.	Education	12	1.6
6.	Ethic	13	1.7
7.	Jihad	7	0.9
8.	Jurisprudence	172	22.8
9.	Language	21	2.8
10.	Medicine	12	1.6
11.	Poetry	19	2.5
12.	Praise/Tribute	136	18
13.	Sermon/admonition	27	3.6
14.	Sociology	4	0.5
16.	Sufism	34	4.5
15.	Supplication	25	3.3
17.	Theology	90	11.9
	TOTAL	754	100

Fig.1:Distribution of Subjects Analysis of the Arabic and Ajami Resources

Manuscript



From the above table and chart we can see what the various Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources are as to their content as information resources. This analysis confirmed the claimed made by Umar (2007:4) that the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts to their content contained discourse on various subjects, such as law, theology, Qur'an and Hadith sentences, philosophy, language, linguistic, literature, administration, politics, sociology, education, astronomy and mathematics among others.

Further more, to the content of these resources in N.H.R.S., it was found in one of the manuscripts that to it content is a discourse on medicine, that revealed from the prophetic sayings, that people should avoid to much eating of herbivorous meat (red meat) rather they should eat their skin as it does not have any side effects to human health. There are so many manuscripts that to their content discussed at length on different types of diseases and ailments that are affecting humanity and their cure. On the eating of herbivorous skin, there is a book written by Muhammad Bello b.Uthman b. Fudi, known as Kitab al Shifa'ul Asqam, with reference number J10, and many of it types in the Scheme that discussed a lot on the human health care. There is also a book that carried a big deal oon manuscripts form on astronomy, known as Kitab al-Tabih Al-hasma'u wal zulma, written by Muhammad Tukur with reference number J24/5 to its contents is discourse on the lighting system of the universe as it relates to the solar system and the changes that do occurs between day and night. There are so many manuscripts that to their contents dealt with aspects of education, politics, economics, administration, theology, science, Sufism, languages and many other subjects and on languages such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Nupe and other languages in Nigeria apart from Arabic.

Organization of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts

On the organization of the manuscripts as reported since at the process of recovery of the manuscripts they were microfilmed in the field. Then they were processed and organized while coming back to the office after printing. Apart from microfilming, photocopying and copying methods were adopted and all the original copies purchased or donated to the scheme were catalogued and organized on shelves. The manuscripts are arranged individually in an envelope bearing the following bibliographical information written by hand: title, author, dates and reference number.

The manuscripts are arranged into individual folders as they were received or purchased from the owner or author. The arrangement is by ascending order which served as the call number or access number to the document. The catalogue to these documents is done in both in Arabic and English (Transliteration) capturing the following bibliographical information about the

documents: author, title, and number of pages and Number of the folder of the manuscript (As the call number for the document) only.

Uthman b.Muhammad b.Fudi
Al –Ajwiba al –Muharrara ‘an al –As’ ila
Al –muqarrara.
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For proper preservation and ensuring their life cycle, the manuscripts are stored in a room with full air conditioning atmosphere and fan. The door and the windows were constructed in a manner that that they will provide cross ventilation and only staff are allowed access to their vicinity.

Access to Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts

Provision for access to information resources is an integral component of overall information management that that is in place to assure the achievements of the organizational aims and objectives. Access to Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources in Northern History Research Scheme, it was reported that users are having access to the resources through the usual traditional system. Whereby users will go through the catalogue or ask the librarian what they want, and respond to their request. The way or manner in which the users are using the manuscripts resources, initially they used the resource through the micro-film reader machine for those manuscripts that their writings are not clear to view. At present due the obsolescence of the later technology, magnifying glasses are used in facilitating readings to the resources.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of Arabic manuscripts in preserving the literary tradition and heritage, events and ideas of the people of Nigeria, West Africa and Africa in general. The knowledge contained in the manuscripts will continue to be relevant for many generations to come. Furthermore, the concept of Arabic manuscript has been discussed, its types and on the account of its contents. Such as morality, ethics, medicine, astronomy, Sufism, spiritual, politics, economics, social lifestyle of the people, their administration and so many others. The significant role of Arabic manuscript management was also discussed from the perspective of library and information science as the efforts in making proper processing, preservation, conservation, organization and dissemination of the resources through organized structures and relevant manpower, for its coordination

Recommendations

Considering the findings from this study and the invaluable enormous importance of the Arabic manuscript resources, the following recommendations were made:

1. The scheme should try as much as possible to exploit the benefits brought about by the information and communication technologies as alternative to computerized its services for easy access, retrieval and dissemination of the its resources to users.
2. The scheme should among others conduct a survey on the nature and extent of cataloguing and classification needs of its users in order to provide easy access to the resources.
3. The scheme should also determine the language and inscriptions to be adopted for their catalogue entries.
4. The scheme should as a matter of urgency conduct in house, seminars, workshops and exhibitions on what the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are for the members of the university community and the general public.

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