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Research Article

## Integrating Arabic Cultural Heritage Into Civic Education Curricula: Implications For Identity And Social Cohesion In Nigeria

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**Abstract.** This study explores the integration of Arabic cultural heritage into civic education curricula in Nigeria and its implications for identity formation and social cohesion. In a country marked by ethno-religious diversity and socio-political fragmentation, civic education is a crucial tool for promoting national unity, democratic participation, and inclusive citizenship. Northern Nigeria, with its deep-rooted Arabic-Islamic traditions, presents an opportunity for aligning civic education with learners' cultural contexts. Drawing on socio-cultural and constructivist learning theories, the study argues that embedding Arabic values such as 'adl (justice), shura (consultation), and mas'uliyah

(responsibility) can make civic education more relevant, relatable, and transformative. These values, historically embedded in Quranic and Tsangaya school systems, offer a culturally resonant foundation for teaching civic virtues. The integration fosters a sense of belonging and cultural affirmation among Arabic-speaking and Muslim learners, thereby enhancing their civic engagement and identification with national ideals. However, the study also identifies critical challenges, including resistance due to Nigeria's secular educational policy, lack of teacher capacity, curriculum imbalance, and sociopolitical sensitivities. To address these issues, the study recommends inclusive curriculum frameworks, teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy, development of localized learning materials, and stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, the paper posits that incorporating Arabic cultural heritage into civic education is not a religious imposition but a culturally grounded strategy to bridge educational gaps and promote unity in Nigeria's pluralistic society.

**Keyword:** Arabic Cultural Heritage, Civic Education, Identity Formation, Nigeria, Social Cohesion.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In present-day Nigeria, efforts to promote national unity and social cohesion are closely linked to the development of inclusive and culturally sensitive civic education. This form of education plays a crucial role in influencing citizens' values, behaviors, and their sense of belonging, particularly in a country characterized by religious, ethnic, and cultural plurality (Ajayi & Oni, 2021). Northern Nigeria, with its deep-rooted Arabic cultural legacy, showcases this influence through its language, Islamic faith practices, and traditional educational systems. Incorporating Arabic cultural elements into civic education curricula represents a timely and meaningful educational reform that could strengthen identity formation and foster unity in Nigeria's complex sociopolitical environment (Abubakar & Yahaya, 2020). Arabic culture, grounded in Islamic teachings, upholds communal values such as justice ('adl), consultation (shura), accountability, and mutual respect—principles that align closely with the objectives of civic education (Bello, 2022). Traditional Islamic schools, including the Quranic and Tsangaya systems, have historically delivered moral and civic teachings through an Arabic-Islamic framework, playing a vital role in nurturing responsible citizenship in many northern Nigerian communities (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2023). Aligning modern civic education with these indigenous systems may help bridge the divide between formal Western educational models and local cultural traditions. Nevertheless, incorporating Arabic cultural heritage into the national civic education framework presents certain challenges. Ongoing debates center around maintaining the secular nature of Nigeria's educational policy, ensuring religious neutrality, and achieving uniformity in curriculum design (Aliyu & Mustapha, 2021). Despite these concerns, Akinwumi (2022) emphasizes that an education system rooted in learners' cultural and social realities enhances participation, minimizes alienation, and fosters a collective national identity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study draws on two interrelated educational theories—socio-cultural theory and constructivist learning theory which together offer a comprehensive perspective on how incorporating Arabic cultural heritage into civic education curricula can shape identity development and encourage social cohesion in Nigeria.

### **Socio-Cultural Theory**

Originating from the work of Lev Vygotsky, socio-cultural theory posits that learning and cognitive growth occur through social interaction and are deeply embedded in cultural contexts. Vygotsky (1978) argued that individuals gain knowledge by engaging with more experienced members of their community, with culture significantly influencing how they interpret and respond to the world around them. In the northern regions of Nigeria, Arabic culture expressed through language, religious traditions, and social norms provides a key cultural backdrop for many learners. Applying this theory to civic education suggests that incorporating Arabic cultural values, such as Islamic principles of justice ('adl), consultation (shura), and social accountability (mas'uliyah), into the curriculum can enhance students' comprehension by linking new civic concepts to culturally familiar frameworks (Nasir, 2020). When educational content reflects learners' everyday experiences and cultural values, it becomes more meaningful and effective in nurturing civic identity and engagement (Akinyemi & Ubah, 2021).

### **Constructivist Learning Theory**

Constructivist theory asserts that learners construct knowledge by building on their previous experiences, social interactions, and the realities of their environment (Piaget, 1954; Bruner, 1996). It highlights the value of designing educational experiences that are rooted in learners' cultural and social contexts. In the realm of civic education, this theory advocates for the integration of Arabic cultural heritage as a bridge for understanding civic duties, rights, and national identity. Presenting civic concepts through familiar cultural mediums such as language, religious teachings, and community practices can promote deeper engagement and more enduring learning outcomes (Ogunyemi & Mustapha, 2022). This culturally responsive approach not only supports cognitive development but also fosters a stronger sense of relevance and ownership among students, which is vital for building social cohesion in Nigeria's multicultural society.

Together, these theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of culturally grounded education. Socio-cultural theory highlights how cultural identity reinforces individual and communal belonging, while constructivist theory demonstrates the cognitive advantages of culturally contextualized learning. By integrating Arabic cultural heritage into civic education, educators can promote unity, tolerance, and national integration within Nigeria's diverse social fabric.

### **Concept of Civic Education**

Civic education is the process of equipping citizens with the knowledge of their rights, duties, and roles within a democratic society. Its objective is to cultivate informed, responsible, and active citizens who can contribute to national development and uphold democratic principles (Ajayi & Oni, 2021). This form of education includes an understanding of government structures, political systems, national values, civil rights, and essential skills for civic involvement, such as critical thinking, communication, and participation in community life. According to Okafor and Anyaegbunam (2022), civic education plays a critical role in fostering unity in diverse societies by instilling values such as tolerance, justice, patriotism, and social responsibility. In Nigeria, civic education holds particular significance due to the country's intricate ethnic and religious composition, as well as its history of political instability and social unrest. Through effective civic education, citizens are empowered to understand the constitution, respect legal frameworks, and actively engage in governance (Ogunyemi & Mustapha, 2022).

Moreover, civic education serves a transformative purpose. It goes beyond simply imparting knowledge to fostering democratic attitudes and behaviors that contribute to peace and social harmony. Recent studies stress the importance of making civic education contextually relevant and culturally inclusive, acknowledging the specific social, religious, and historical conditions of different regions (Bello & Ibrahim, 2023). For instance, incorporating Arabic cultural heritage into the civic curriculum in Northern Nigeria could increase engagement and relevance, particularly in communities with a Muslim majority. Ultimately, civic education is not just about preparing individuals for citizenship but also about promoting a shared sense of identity and belonging, especially in fragmented or conflict-prone societies. Its effectiveness hinges on how well it connects with the lived experiences and cultural values of the learners (Akinwumi, 2022).

### **Historical and Cultural Context of Arabic Heritage in Nigeria**

Arabic heritage has been a key factor in shaping the socio-cultural and educational landscape of Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. The spread of Arabic language and culture began as early as the 11th century with the introduction of Islam through trans-Saharan trade routes and intellectual exchanges (Yakubu & Abdullahi, 2021). Over time, Arabic became not only a language of religion but also of education, governance, and cultural identity among various ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa and Kanuri. The institutionalization of Arabic culture occurred during the 19th century with the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, which implemented a governance and educational system grounded in Islamic values and Arabic literacy (Usman & Bello, 2022). Quranic and Tsangaya schools, which utilized Arabic as the primary language of instruction, became widespread, playing a central role in promoting literacy, moral teachings, and civic values based on Islamic principles. These schools emphasized communal

responsibility, justice ('adl), leadership, and consultation (shura) all of which align closely with the objectives of contemporary civic education (Abubakar & Yahaya, 2020).

Culturally, Arabic heritage has had a profound impact on various aspects of Nigerian life, including dress, naming traditions, architecture, legal systems, and core values. In northern Nigeria, Islamic festivals, Arabic calligraphy, and religious rituals remain central to the region's cultural identity (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2023). The Arabic script, known as Ajami, was historically used to transcribe local languages like Hausa, allowing the preservation of historical documents, poetry, and legal records, further embedding Arabic culture into indigenous knowledge systems (Aliyu, 2021). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes the continued significance of Arabic heritage in Nigeria's educational and cultural spheres. Scholars advocate for the incorporation of Arabic cultural values into national curricula to encourage inclusivity, cultural pride, and active civic engagement, particularly in regions where Western-style education has not fully aligned with traditional values (Bello & Ibrahim, 2023). Therefore, understanding the historical and cultural influence of Arabic heritage in Nigeria is essential for developing culturally responsive civic education that honors local identities while promoting national unity and democratic citizenship.

### **The Role of Arabic Culture in the Civic Education Curriculum in Nigeria**

Arabic culture, deeply embedded in Islamic traditions, plays a pivotal role in enhancing the civic education curriculum in Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions, where both Islam and Arabic literacy have deep historical and cultural roots. The cultural values inherent in Arabic tradition spanning moral, spiritual, and communal aspects closely align with the objectives of civic education, such as justice, responsibility, leadership, and social cohesion (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2023). One of the most significant contributions of Arabic culture to civic education is the transmission of ethical and civic values through Islamic teachings, which are often delivered in Arabic. Core concepts such as 'adl (justice), amanah (trust), shura (consultation), and ukhuwwah (brotherhood) are foundational in Islamic political thought and governance, echoing the democratic principles promoted in civic education (Nasir, 2021). When these values are incorporated into the curriculum, they provide students with a culturally familiar framework for internalizing the principles of responsible citizenship and social responsibility.

Furthermore, Arabic culture supports civic education by offering a robust framework for moral education, a crucial element in national development. Traditional Islamic education, particularly through the Quranic and Tsangaya school systems, has long emphasized obedience to the law, respect for leadership, and community solidarity values vital for meaningful civic participation (Abubakar & Yahaya, 2020). By integrating these teachings into the civic education curriculum,

educators can bridge the gap between formal schooling and indigenous systems of knowledge, making civic education more relevant and impactful, especially for learners from Muslim-majority areas. Recent studies also highlight the importance of embedding Arabic cultural content to enhance inclusivity and cultural representation within the curriculum. Such an approach fosters a sense of belonging among Arabic-speaking and Muslim students, reducing feelings of marginalization (Bello & Ibrahim, 2023). When learners encounter educational content that reflects their identities and values, they are more likely to cultivate positive attitudes toward civic duties and national unity (Okafor & Anyaegbunam, 2022). Consequently, Arabic culture provides a rich reservoir of civic ideals and educational traditions that, if thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum, can nurture a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and socially cohesive approach to civic education in Nigeria.

### **Civic Education and Identity Formation in Nigeria**

Civic education plays a crucial role in shaping both national identity and individual consciousness in Nigeria, a country marked by its rich ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. It serves as an essential tool for unifying the diverse populations under a collective understanding of citizenship, rights, and responsibilities, thus promoting unity within a pluralistic society (Akinwumi, 2022). Through civic education, individuals are introduced to democratic principles, national values, and cultural perspectives that help define their roles and identities within the larger Nigerian state. The process of civic identity formation is especially vital in Nigeria, where regional and religious affiliations often compete with national loyalty. As noted by Okonkwo and Adeyemi (2021), civic education provides a shared platform where learners can explore themes like patriotism, justice, equality, and democratic participation fundamental concepts in nurturing a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation, particularly among youth still shaping their social and political identities.

Moreover, civic education aids in instilling values that promote peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity. According to Bello and Ibrahim (2023), a culturally inclusive approach to teaching civic education one that acknowledges the diverse heritages of groups such as those rooted in Arabic and Islamic traditions helps students harmonize their ethnic or religious identities with their broader national identity. This inclusive approach reduces identity conflicts and fosters active, responsible citizenship. Furthermore, civic education enhances identity formation by promoting political literacy and critical awareness. When students understand their rights, duties, the structures of governance, and the importance of civic engagement, they are better prepared to actively participate in democratic processes and advocate for social change (Usman & Oladipo, 2022). This awareness not only strengthens individual identity as engaged citizens but also reinforces a collective identity grounded in democratic values. Ultimately, civic education serves

as a catalyst for identity formation in Nigeria, fostering an inclusive national consciousness while affirming the nation's cultural diversity. However, its success is largely dependent on how well it reflects the lived experiences and historical contexts of all Nigerian communities.

### **Civic Education and Social Cohesion in Nigeria**

Civic education serves as a powerful tool for fostering social cohesion in Nigeria, a nation characterized by ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and ongoing socio-political challenges. Social cohesion refers to the level of integration and unity within a society, as well as the presence of trust, respect, and cooperation among citizens from various backgrounds (Okafor & Anyaegbunam, 2022). In this context, civic education nurtures a shared sense of identity, mutual respect, and collective responsibility values that are essential for creating a cohesive society. Civic education plays a pivotal role in addressing the root causes of division in Nigeria by providing citizens with the knowledge, values, and skills needed for peaceful coexistence and active participation in democratic processes. Bello and Ibrahim (2023) suggest that when civic education is taught with an awareness of Nigeria's cultural and religious diversity, it becomes a powerful platform for promoting tolerance, dialogue, and conflict resolution, especially among young people. This is particularly crucial in areas affected by communal conflicts, ethno-religious violence, and political exclusion.

Furthermore, civic education fosters inclusive narratives that help bridge the gaps between Nigeria's over 250 ethnic groups. It introduces students to national symbols, democratic values, and constitutional rights, thereby reinforcing a unified national identity. As Olatunji and Eze (2021) highlight, civic education in schools plays a key role in cultivating a sense of "we-feeling" among students, reducing prejudices and stereotypes that often drive division. Recent research has also underscored the importance of tailoring civic education content to reflect the unique histories and cultural experiences of different regions. This inclusive approach not only enhances the relevance of the subject matter but also promotes social harmony by acknowledging the contributions of various cultures including Arabic and Islamic heritage in the process of nation-building (Nasir, 2022). By integrating these diverse cultural elements, students are encouraged to embrace their own identities while fostering an appreciation for others, leading to greater unity in diversity. In essence, civic education acts as both a preventive and proactive mechanism for social cohesion in Nigeria. When effectively implemented, it can transform schools into nurturing environments for national integration, peaceful coexistence, and responsible citizenship.

### **Challenges in Integrating Arabic Culture into Nigeria's Civic Education Curriculum**

While integrating Arabic culture into Nigeria's civic education curriculum presents significant opportunities for promoting cultural relevance, inclusivity, and national cohesion, several obstacles hinder its successful implementation. These challenges span across ideological, pedagogical, institutional, and political dimensions. One of the most prominent barriers is the issue of curriculum standardization and resistance to religiously-influenced elements. Nigeria's educational system is predominantly secular, shaped by Western pedagogical traditions that often marginalize or overlook indigenous perspectives, including Arabic and Islamic values (Akinwumi, 2022). This secular approach frequently results in institutional resistance to incorporating religiously-based cultural elements, which are sometimes erroneously seen as a threat to national unity or a violation of constitutional secularism (Nasir, 2022). Another key challenge is the shortage of trained personnel and culturally competent educators. Successfully integrating Arabic culture into the curriculum requires teachers who are not only proficient in the Arabic language but also well-versed in its socio-cultural values and their connection to the goals of civic education. Unfortunately, teacher training programs in Nigeria seldom include specific training on how to incorporate indigenous or Arabic-Islamic pedagogies into mainstream education (Abubakar & Yahaya, 2020).

Furthermore, the lack of a clear and inclusive policy framework exacerbates the challenge of localizing civic education. Often, civic education curricula take a generalized, one-size-fits-all approach that disregards regional and cultural diversity, limiting their relevance in areas like Northern Nigeria, where Arabic culture is central (Bello & Ibrahim, 2023). The absence of a defined policy for integrating regional cultural inputs into the national curriculum leaves educators without the necessary direction or institutional support. The sociopolitical climate and ethno-religious tensions also complicate the process. Some stakeholders fear that including Arabic cultural content may be perceived as an attempt to Islamize the country, particularly given Nigeria's complex religious dynamics. This concern can generate opposition from both policymakers and communities in non-Muslim regions (Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2021). Finally, resource limitations, such as a shortage of Arabic textbooks, limited access to regionally adapted civic education materials, and inadequate funding for curriculum reforms, further constrain the effective integration of Arabic culture into the curriculum (Usman & Oladipo, 2022). Without culturally relevant teaching resources, translating Arabic cultural values into classroom practice becomes a significant challenge.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Policymakers in education should revise the national civic education curriculum to ensure it embraces regional and cultural diversity, including the incorporation of Arabic cultural heritage. This will enhance the curriculum's relevance and inclusivity, particularly in Northern Nigeria.

2. Teacher education programs should incorporate training on culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of Arabic-Islamic values into civic education. This will provide educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach and engage diverse student populations.
3. Government bodies and educational stakeholders should promote initiatives that encourage intercultural understanding, dispelling misconceptions about the integration of Arabic culture in civic education. Such dialogue can help reduce cultural tensions and promote national unity.
4. It is essential to invest in the creation of textbooks and instructional resources that reflect Arabic cultural heritage while aligning with the objectives of national civic education. These materials will help make civic education more relatable and impactful for students from diverse backgrounds.
5. Engaging local scholars, religious leaders, and community stakeholders in the curriculum development process can enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of Arabic cultural content in civic education, ensuring the integration process is grounded in local realities.
6. Clear and comprehensive policies should be established to support culturally responsive civic education. These policies will help standardize and sustain the integration of Arabic culture, aligning the efforts with national educational goals.
7. Continuous research and impact assessments should be conducted to measure the effectiveness of incorporating Arabic cultural heritage into civic education. The findings will guide future reforms and ensure that the integration process remains relevant and effective.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has examined the vital role of integrating Arabic cultural heritage into Nigeria's civic education curriculum as a means of fostering identity development and promoting social harmony in a nation defined by ethnic and cultural diversity. Grounded in socio-cultural and constructivist educational theories, the study emphasizes the need to align civic education content with the cultural realities of learners to foster meaningful civic participation and democratic values. The Arabic-Islamic tradition offers a rich tapestry of ethical principles such as justice ('adl), consultation (shura), and collective responsibility that naturally complement the core objectives of civic education. Incorporating these culturally embedded values into the curriculum can bridge the divide between formal education and indigenous knowledge systems, thereby making civic education more relevant, inclusive, and transformative, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Nonetheless, the path toward integration presents several challenges. Issues such as the dominance of standardized curricula, concerns about religious neutrality, inadequate teacher training, and limited policy support continue to hinder progress. Yet, the potential benefits of a culturally responsive civic education model one that validates the

identities of Arabic-speaking and Muslim learners while advancing the cause of national integration are profound.

However, such a curriculum does more than transmit knowledge; it nurtures a sense of shared citizenship, belonging, and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria's often divided socio-political landscape. Importantly, integrating Arabic cultural heritage into civic education should be seen not as a religious agenda, but as a strategic educational innovation aimed at strengthening unity through cultural inclusion. To realize this vision, there must be sustained commitment to inclusive policy development, active engagement with local stakeholders, and equitable educational practices that reflect Nigeria's diverse cultural makeup. Only then can the country cultivate a generation of informed, culturally grounded citizens who are dedicated to justice, unity, and democratic governance.

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