

Research Article

Re-Invented Tradition: Exploring the Contribution of Quranic Competition on Arabic Language Use and Learning in Northern Nigeria

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Submitted: 05/14/2024

Revised: 28/09/2024

Accepted: 23/11/2024

How to cite this article: Yahaya, N., Samaila, A., Abdulganiyu, M. L., & Adam, F. S. (2024). Re-invented tradition: Exploring the contribution of Quranic competition on Arabic language use and learning in Northern Nigeria. *IJELR: International Journal of Education, Language and Religion*, 6(2), pp. 131-146. doi: <https://doi.org/10.35308/ijelr.v6i2.9495>

Abstract

The trend of Qur'anic recitation competitions, popularly known as *Musabaqah*, has grown rapidly across the Muslim globe since its inception at the international level in Malaysia in 1961 as a way to display the importance and value of Quranic recitation and memorization and inspire Muslims to do their best to understand and cherish the divine message of the Quran. This study examines *Musabaqah's* contribution to promoting Arabic in northern Nigeria, with a focus on Kaduna State. The research uses a qualitative method to collect data through observation and interviews with selected individuals within the state. The findings indicate that *Musabaqah* has a positive impact on Arabic language learning and use in the state, as it creates a competitive spirit among Muslims to learn more about the Arabic language in order to have a better understanding of the Quran and its sciences and increases community interest in learning Arabic. Therefore, the study recommends that the Nigerian Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the bodies regulating *Musabaqah* and teaching Arabic and Islamic studies, organize seminars and workshops that promote Arabic and preserve its cultural heritage. Finally, offering incentives, awards, and scholarships will motivate the competitors and enhance their capacity to participate favourably with any of their counterparts globally.

Keywords

musabaqah; Qur'an; participants; Arabic language



Introduction

New paradigms for teaching and learning foreign languages are being developed faster than ever due to the post-September 11 measures for fighting terrorism. In this regard, interest in learning Arabic has risen around the world (Sirajudeen & Adebisi, 2012). According to Adeyemi, (2016), scholars have recognized the great contributions of Arabic and Islam to human civilization, culture, and education for centuries.

In Nigeria, the Arabic language has a rich historical and cultural impact as it is an essential component of the nation's Islamic education and tradition. Ayuba, (2002) argues that the Arabic language has made significant contributions to the development of Nigeria as a nation, particularly in religious practice, education, economy, socio-psychology, diplomacy, and security. However, despite Arabic's great potential in Nigeria, studying Arabic has been highly challenged due to some factors, including the influence of local languages, societies' poor behavior towards Arabic speakers, and the impacts of traditional schools. (Ayuba, 2002; Sani, 2019). In this regard, new strategies are needed to kick off aiming towards the novel objective of developing and strengthening Arabic's potentiality as the language of the glorious Quran.

The popularity and wide use of the Arabic language in Nigeria are because of its association with the noble Qur'an being the most revered book by Muslims. Nigeria as a Muslim country attracted many memorizers of the Qur'an (*Huffaz*) in the world because it is among the most populous Muslim countries. The concentration of Qur'anic Memorizers in Nigeria was triggered by considering the reward and virtues of its recitation and the introduction of a Qur'anic recitation competition (*Musabaqah*) to the country a few decades ago with the prime objective of motivating Muslims to learn, memorize, and comprehend the meaning of the Qur'an as well as preserving the Islamic cultural heritage (Zubir et, al (2000). Quranic recitation is a priceless gift that enriches a Muslim's life by developing a solid spiritual connection. Qur'an mentioned that: "those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah, indeed by the remembrance of Allah the hearts are assured". (Q13: 29). This serves as an exhortation for Muslims to place high value on Quranic recitation because it connects them with the divine message.

The noble prophet Muhammad also explains the reward of Quranic recitation. According to Ibn Mas'ud, the prophet said "Whoever recites a letter from the Book of Allah, he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed gets a ten-fold reward. I do not say that Alif-Lam-Mim is one letter, but Alif is a letter, Lam is a letter, and Mim is a letter." (Al-Nawawi, 1999). In relation to this, many Muslims from various backgrounds and native tongues share the tradition of memorizing the Qur'an, despite the fact that its text is written in Arabic. This is why Muslims not only in Nigeria but wherever they are in the world send their children to an Islamic school popularly known as Madrasa or *Tahfizh* so as to memorize and comprehend the meaning of the noble Quran. Recently, Abdullah et al. (2018) maintained that there has been a rise in interest in memorizing the Qur'an, and the factors that contribute to that include parental pressure on their children, *Tahfizh*, and da'wah programs on television and the internet.

Moreover, *Musabaqah* on the other hand became a strong motivating factor towards Qur'anic memorization and perfection of its recitation. Zubir et, al (2000) claims that Quranic competitions emerged within Muslim communities as a way to display the importance and value of Quranic recitation and memorization and inspire Muslims to do their best to understand and cherish the divine message of the Quran. The Quranic recitation competition, popularly known as *Musabaqah*, is a competition whereby participants compete in different



categories by reciting verses from the Quran in a melodious and articulate way. The competition is practiced and held across various Islamic countries and is open to both males and females of different ages. Furthermore, Zubir et, al (2000) also maintain that Quranic experts frequently judge the competition, and they evaluate the participants based on the following factors which include verse memorization, melody, voice, and accuracy of pronunciation. Besides the assessment on the perfection of recitation participants are mostly subjected to questions that are deeply connected to the Arabic language such as *Tajweed*, *Tafsir* and *Qira'at*.

Consequently, learning and understanding the Arabic language by the *Musabaqah* participants became imperative, as it gave them the opportunity to excel in the competition and interact with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and nations. In Nigeria, where it has existed for about three decades, *Musabaqah* is particularly common in the northern part of the country due to the concentration of Muslims in the region. Based on the researchers' years of experience as members of a panel of judges in a *Musabaqah* committee in Kaduna State, the language of communication between the panel of judges and *Musabaqah* participants is Arabic, and language barriers are considered to be a significant challenge. The adoption of this topic came as a result of overlooking the previous scholars concerning the contribution of *Musabaqah* towards enhancing the Arabic language communication among the participants and its benefits. The study argues that *Musabaqah* has the potential to boost the Arabic language command of the competitors as well as ignite interest in learning Arabic in the community.

Based on the above-mentioned problem, it is pertinent to investigate the participants' performance in terms of Arabic communication and how that affected their conduct of the *Musabaqah* competition as well as how the *Musabaqah* enhanced the diffusion of Arabic language and its rich heritage. Therefore, the research raises the following questions:

1. How does *Musabaqah* impact and promote participants' Arabic language use and learning, and to what extent does that facilitate winning *Musabaqah*?
2. To what extent has *Musabaqah* increased community interest in learning and using Arabic?

Against the above background, the current study aims to explore the contribution of cultural and religious events, *Musabaqah* in promoting Arabic language use and learning with a particular reference in Kaduna State. The study explores how *Musabaqah* creates a competitive spirit that promotes Arabic proficiency among its participants in order to have a greater understanding of the Quran and its sciences, better communication skills with the panel of judges, and how *Musabaqah* serves as a factor that promotes the community's interest in learning Arabic.

The contributions of the research findings are expected to offer the following:

1. The findings are expected to offer the authorities and educational institutions helpful advice on the advantages of improving the quality of *Musabaqah* in order to promote proficiency in the Arabic language among the participants.
2. It is expected to motivate *Musabaqah* participants towards their personal and academic growth.
3. The research will highlight how *Musabaqah* creates a competitive spirit among Muslim communities to learn more about the Arabic language in order to have a greater understanding of the Quran and its sciences.



4. The research will serve as a stepping stone for future researchers to build on this research.

The remaining parts of the research study are discussed as follows: the permissibility of *Musabaqah* from the Islamic perspective; the Quranic recitation competition (*Musabaqah*) in global context; the Quranic recitation competition in Nigerian context; different *Musabaqah* categories in Kaduna State; data and methods; the significant contribution of *Musabaqah* in impacting and promoting participants' use and learning of Arabic; and *Musabaqah*'s significant impact on the community's interest in learning and studying Arabic. Finally, the conclusion of the research answers the research questions in a narrative interpretation drawn from the research's findings and experiences. Also, the study made recommendations and emphasized the need for future study.

The Permissibility of *Musabaqah* from the Islamic Perspective

The Qur'anic recitation competition (*Musabaqa*) remained a contentious issue within the circumference of Muslim scholars, where the vast majority contend that it is permissible; a few of them regard it as impermissible and count it as part of religious innovation (*bid'ah*), containing the act of showing off (*riyah*) as the competitors recite the Qur'an to please others and perceive it as part of gambling because the winners will be jubilating while the others will be unhappy (Umar et al., 2020).

The scholars who uphold the legality of *Musabaqah* opine that *Musabaqah* can be rationally counted among the righteous acts in which believers were encouraged to compete in their performance (Hausawi, 2022). Allah says: "...So excel one another in righteous deeds...." (Q2:148). Al-sa'di, (2022) commented on this verse as follows: "The command to compete toward good deeds is more pronounced than the command to perform good deeds; this is because the command to strive and compete toward good deeds includes doing it, completing it, performing it in the most perfect manner, and hastening to it, and whoever excelled in this world to good deeds shall be the first to enter Paradise in the Hereafter ". In this connection, scholars noted that Islam encourages various competitions, whether in racing, swimming, archery, horse and camel racing, or anything else that benefits human beings.

The noble Prophet said: "No stake is acceptable except in archery, racing a camel, and racing a horse" (Sunan Abi Daud, 2574) Based on the above, scholars compare warriors in war with experts in the study of the glorious Qur'an (Umar et al., 2020). However, giving prizes to the *Musabaqah* participants is also debatable among Islamic scholars. While many scholars support that it encourages and motivates the participants to exert their effort in memorization and perfection of recitation, others dislike it as they view that giving prizes might affect the sincerity of the competitors. It is reported that Ibn Taimiyah (1987) opposes giving money as prizes in any competition other than the one for helping the cause of Allah as taking money in exchange for recitation is not permissible, because recitation is an act of worship, and for acts of worship no fee is charged, and it is not permissible to be hired for it. Nevertheless, based on the scholarly arguments presented above, it can be concluded that *Musabaqah* is permissible as it is considered to be among the means of memorizing the Qur'an, which is among the main methods of preserving the glorious book. Similarly, taking prizes is allowed provided that the competitor did it with sincerity and good intentions and that taking prizes is just a means, not an end. It is narrated on the authority of Umar ibn Khattab who said: I heard the messenger of Allah saying: "Actions are judged by their intentions".



The Quranic Recitation Competition (*Musabaqah*) in Global Context

Zubir et, al (2000) focused on the historical context of *Musabaqah* in Malaysia. The findings indicate that in 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, made the decision to organize such an event in order to promote Quranic learning and strengthen relations between the Islamic countries. Recently, the name of the event has been changed from "International Quranic Recitation Competition" to "International Quran Reciters." *Musabaqah* continues to be a significant Islamic event in Malaysia since it is sponsored by the Malaysian Kingdom under the support of the Prime Minister. Generally, the participants are classified into male and female, and at least eight recognized experts on Qur'anic reading make up the judging panel. Normally, two of the judges are from the host country, while the rest are from other countries around the world. The organizing committee makes sure that all regions of the Muslim world are represented. East Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe are among these regions. Subsequently, there has been an increase in the number of participating countries as well as the number of participants across the globe.

Moreover, Gade et al., (2004) explore the motivation for Quranic recitation competition in Indonesia within the theory of ritualized religious practice, and the findings show that Popular educational and performance programs were developed on the foundation of Indonesian *Musabaqah* in order to motivate and inspire individuals to engage in "motivated" activities in line with the goals and objectives of *Musabaqah*. Also, it serves as a point of view on inspired systems of religious practice which highlights rehearsal regimens that improve knowledge and understanding of the inspirational dynamics of prolonged, voluntary, sustained practices of piety. In his research into new media in the Islamic world, Galal, (2008) demonstrated how traditional religious practices such as *Musabaqah* are regarded as useful in the development of the Islamic identity. In addition, Firat, (2014) argues that new phonetic styles were produced within the Turks due to environmental and social factors, which impacted effectively in their own way of recitation in *Musabaqah*. Therefore, in order to recite the Quran in its original form, it is suggested to correct the local way of recitation by adapting the knowledge of Tajwid.

Furthermore, Mohamad Salleh et al., (2017) research was based on an analysis of mastering Tarannum Alquran among *Musabaqah* participants of Klang and Sepang secondary schools in Malaysia, the findings indicate that there is a very weak relationship between the respondents' understanding and expertise of Tarannum Alquran. As a result, the achievements of the participants, such as basic work and recording, must be given more attention in order to produce a great Tarannum of the holy Quran. Nasier, (2018) explores the impact of the involvement in memorizing the Qur'an, and the ability to speak the Arabic language as an achievement in the hope of contributing ideas for the future of Quranic education in Indonesia. The findings show that with a correlation coefficient of 0.790, there is a significant and positive influence on the interest in memorizing the Qur'an and the ability to speak Arabic together in the case of the study which is Ma'had Raudatul Jannah li *Tahfizh* Alquran, Tangerang, Indonesia.

Additionally, Demina et al. (2022) focused on the application of the *wafa* method which is considered to be one of the Quranic learning strategies in *Musabaqah*. The finding indicates that the *wafa* method's implementation and evaluation in Indonesian primary schools are very useful as it helps students focus more during the learning process. Thus, the method is very suitable for use in the implementation of learning strategies for achieving rapid and accurate memorization of the Qur'an. Shaluni M, (2022) focuses on the endowment for Quranic



competitions, their needs, and the rewards assigned to them in conformity and compliance with Islamic Sharia. The results show that endowment for Quranic competitions should be encouraged and promoted as it is one form of ongoing charity that its benefit exists even after death. Abd Aziz et al. (2022) explore the use of Fuzzy evaluation methods as an assessment of Quranic recitation competition in Klang, Malaysia. Based on the findings, the fuzzy markings with linguistic values offer a reasonable and intelligent alternative approach to evaluating competitors' performance. Also, the method is useful due to the fact that it can increase participant satisfaction and help the panel of judges make reliable decisions during the competition.

Interestingly, having understood how the *Musabaqah* evolved in the international context it is imperative to note that it was subsequently diffused to different parts of the world with various methods and procedures.

Quranic Recitation Competition (*Musabaqah*) in Nigerian Context

Musabaqah in the context of Nigeria has been in existence for a period of three decades. According to Umar et al. (2020), the Center for Islamic Studies at Nigeria's Usmanu Dan-Fodio University Sokoto proposed a Qur'anic recitation competition in 1985. However, the first national competition trial was held in Sokoto in 1986; since then, the competition continued and transformed into an entirely vibrant and exciting annual event organized by the center and hosted by various states that rotate the national event among themselves after due selection. The National Qur'anic recitation competition has been held successfully every year since its inception in 1986. Abdulhamid, (2015) claims that initially, when the competition began in Sokoto in 1986, in order to measure the program, very few states participated, owing primarily to a lack of qualified participants and a lack of awareness of the National Qur'anic Program's goal. On this note, Hussaini (2020), asserts that the competition's main goals and objectives include encouraging Muslim youths to memorize and recite the Qur'an, establishing unity among the Ummah, and improving the quality of learning tajwid and other Qur'anic sciences. To properly achieve these goals, Umar et al., (2020) stated that the Centre established rules and regulations for running the competition successfully. Such rules include those dealing with competition eligibility, competition categories, judge qualities and qualifications, the moral standards expected from all, including what is expected from the audience, and the criteria for awarding marks to competitors. According to Abdulhamid, (2015), Nigeria has been taking part in the annual International Qur'anic Recitation Competition held in Saudi Arabia and other countries. As a result, the country once emerged first and second position among the world's 84 countries.

Gusau, (2012) assessed the factors that attract females to Qur'anic competition as well as the impact of the competition on the lives of Northern Nigerian female Muslims. The findings indicate that encouraging women to participate in *Musabaqah* as a form of motivation will not only provide them with a sense of security and belonging but will also transform and positively shape them into virtues. Sani, (2019) gives the historical development of Islamic Qur'anic schools, as well as the evolution of traditional and modern Qur'anic schools and their activities in Nigeria. The findings show that the traditional Qur'anic schools succeeded more at memorizing the Qur'an, whereas the modern Qur'anic schools succeeded more at reciting the Qur'an proficiently, which makes them succeed in *Musabaqah*. Also, the study suggested that the two schools should connect, collaborate, and exchange experiences in order to improve the quality of the recitation and memorization of the holy Qur'an since they share the same aims and goals towards the Qur'an, but differ in their teaching approaches. Abdulhamid, (2015) who



conducted research based on the impacts of *Musabaqah* on the lives of Muslims in Abuja the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria provides that *Musabaqah* has spiritual, educational, social, and economic positive impacts on the Muslims in the area. Also, the organizers have taken action to address the challenges faced by the *Musabaqah* committee which include a lack of funds, a lack of publicity, and a lack of a secretariat.

Tahir Maigari et al (2019) research explored the factors affecting *Musabaqah* participants in compliance with Ahkamut *tajweed* in Gombe state. According to the findings, geographic area, parental background, linguistic factors, occupational status, and nature of training used by schools are among the factors considered in determining competitors' propensity to perform well in a Quranic recitation competition. Umar's et al. (2020) study look at the development of *Musabaqah* organization in Nigeria in general and Bauchi state in particular, tracing the various successes as well as some of the major challenges faced by the organization. According to the findings, *Musabaqah* has broadened young Muslim's knowledge of the Qur'an, and it encouraged many Muslim youths, particularly females, to memorize and recite the Qur'an properly, which was previously uncommon. The competition also brought unimaginable unity in Qur'anic recitation and strengthened Islamic brotherhood among Nigerian Muslims. Hussaini, (2020), examines the phenomenon of *Musabaqah* and its impact on the promotion of various aspects of Qur'anic sciences in the area from its inception in 1986 to 2015, with a reflection on Bauchi state metropolis. Based on the findings, *Musabaqah* has a positive impact by bringing new perspectives to the field of Qur'anic studies in Bauchi state. Beyond mastering the Quranic recitation, *Musabaqah* results in significant improvements in studying and understanding the meaning of the Glorious Quran.

Another important phase of the development of *Musabaqah* in Nigeria is the establishment of a counterpart *Musabaqah* to the one initiated by Usmanu Dan Fodio University. The Jama'atu Izzatil Bid'ah wa Iqamat as-Sunnah (JIBWIS), Nigeria, whose headquarters is in Jos, started organizing its own *Musabaqah* in 1997 and has continued to do so till date. The group was created by Sheikh Ismaila Idris Ibn Zakariyyah in 1978 (Ben Amara, 2012). Some of the *Musabaqah* participants attested that the Jibwis society expressed its dissatisfaction with the *Musabaqah* organized by the Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University for giving biased treatment to their contestants and the mixing of male and female contestants during the *Musabaqah* session. They stressed that Islam prohibits women from traveling for a day without a *mahram* and also the free mixing of opposite genders. Based on these reasons, they separated and established their own *Musabaqah*. The *Musabaqah* flourished and attracted participants across all the nooks and crannies of the country.

Despite the wide scope of literature on *Musabaqah*, there is a lack of studies that conceptually link *Musabaqah* to Arabic. The findings of the previous scholars are limited to the importance of *Musabaqah* in boosting the Qur'anic memorization of the participants and its positive impact on the lives of Muslims at large. The closest literature to the current topic is the study conducted by Nasier, (2018). The author explores the impact of the involvement in memorizing the Qur'an and the ability to speak the Arabic language as an achievement. Thus, it should be understood that there are many differences between involving in the Memorization of the Quran (*Tahfizh*) and involving in the Quranic recitation competition (*Musabaqah*). Therefore, the current study tries to fill this gap as it aims to explore the contributions of *Musabaqah* in promoting Arabic Language use and learning, with a specific focus on Kaduna state. This research is necessary for two reasons: Firstly, the researchers believe that *Musabaqah* participants will have the potential to interact and communicate with any of their counterparts or panel of judges at the



state, national, and international levels, which will contribute to their breakthrough in the competition. Secondly, it is observed that the previous researchers underestimated the potential and impacts of *Musabaqah* towards inculcating Arabic language communication and learning to its participants and by extension to the entire Muslims.

Different *Musabaqah* Categories in Kaduna State

Umar et al. (2020) outlined seven various categories being completed by the participants accordingly. But presently, the Kaduna State Standing Committee on Qur'anic Recitation Competition has adopted only six categories, as follows:

First Category: sixty *hizb* plus *Qira'at* and *Tafsir* of five *hizb*. This comprises memorization of the whole Qur'an, applying rules governing its recitation with its seven different dialects (*Qira'at*), in which the competitor would be given four different portions to recite with different dialects, then to answer four questions from the book of *Shatibiyyah* and three-three questions from the books of *Ibanah* and *Taysir*, respectively, followed by the questions on *Tafsir* in the book of *Kalimat al-Qur'an* by Muhammad Hasanayn Makhluḥ.

Second Category: sixty *hizb* with *Tafsir*. In this category, the competitor would be examined in the memorization of the entire glorious Qur'an and the book of *Muyassar fi garib al-Qur'an*, followed by the final question (*su'al al-akheer*), which is specifically on Arabic grammar in the book of *I'irab al-Qur'an*.

Third Category: sixty *hizb* with *Tajweed*. The competitor would be evaluated in the whole text of the glorious Qur'an and answer questions on *Tajweed* in Arabic.

Fourth Category: thirty *hizb*. In this category, a competitor would be assessed in the memorization of half of the Qur'an and answering questions of *Tajweed*.

Fifth Category: 10 *hizb* with *Tangeem* In this category, the recipient would be asked to recite 10 *hizb* of the Qur'an together with a sound melody and intonation.

Last Category: Two *Hizb* A memorizer would be examined in two *hizbs* of the Qur'an while observing the rules of recitation. This category is only for selected participants from Zone 3.

Data and Methods

The scope of the current study is limited to Kaduna State, Nigeria. According to Yahaya et. al, (2023) Kaduna State, one of the Nigerian 36 states has a population of more than 6 million people in 23 local government areas. While there are many different ethnic groups, Hausas make up the largest ethnic group of the population, and Islam is the dominant religion in the state. The state was selected for many reasons, including its large Muslim population, outstanding performance, and achievements in *Musabaqah* at both the national and international levels, which resulted in the emergence of champions like Abdulkarim Tahir Abdullah, Sahura Adam, Sulaiman Saleh Ikara, Abubakar Umar Balarabe, Sulaiman Abdulkarim Isah and many more.

The current study adopts a qualitative research approach. Coreil, et. al (1989) claim that diverse sources of information, including interviews and observation can be used to explain and interpret the habits and beliefs of a group of people. According to Carolyn Boyce (2006), interviews are a qualitative research technique with a small number of respondents on a specific



idea, program, or situation. Similarly, Creswell & David, (2011) posit that qualitative research methodologies are used for describing, evaluating, and interpreting shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs, and language that evolve through time in a culture-sharing group by using diverse sources of information, including interviews and observation, in order to explain and interpret the habits and beliefs of a group of people. Also, Akyildiz, et al (2021) maintains that qualitative research helps in improving a person's life, observations, beliefs, perceptions, and opinions.

The research adopts purposive sampling to identify the participants. In the view of Van Eeuwijk & Angehrn, (2017), purposive sampling is a qualitative sampling technique where participants are chosen based on several factors, including experience, position, and knowledge in a group or society. The researchers use purposeful sampling because participants for this study ought to fulfil certain criteria to be recruited. Creswell & David, (2011) maintain that People with extensive knowledge about the topic of the research can be chosen for purposeful samples. This allows the researchers to speak with people from Kaduna state who are knowledgeable, and have the experience of participating in *Musabaqah* across all levels be it local, national, and international respectively. Thus, the researchers can learn to perceive the concept from different perspectives. Therefore, the interviewees of this research are selected based on their knowledge and experience on the subject matter. The interviewees consist of 7 people from three different segments; four male participants, one female participant, and two panel of judges. Akyildiz, et al (2021) argues that in qualitative research, the questions that the participants are asked attempt to provide deeper and more relevant justifications.

The most distinguishing method of data collection utilized by the researchers is field observation. Generation of data through observation can be seen as a process of observing people and places at a research site in order to obtain informal initial data as a method for data collection. It offers the chance to document events as they happen, see real and genuine actions, and examine people with difficulties expressing their thoughts. Therefore, good listening skills and close attention to physical details are crucial when the observation takes place. Finally, it requires handling issues, including possible deception by individuals who have been observed (Brazen, 1995). This method of data collection was chosen because the researchers reside in Kaduna and one of them is among the panel of judges at Igabi local government of the State, during the time of this research (September 2023) *Musabaqah* events were ongoing at the state level, with the participation of the states 23 local governments. Therefore, the researchers will join the events for observation in order to experience the event live and take note of relevant themes as they happen. Another form of data collection used in this study is semi-structured interviews. Creswell et al, (2018) maintain that a semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection technique where the researcher conducts interviews with participants, in order to gain insight into the participants' ideas and opinions. Also, based on Creswell, (2015), this approach is used to interact with the research participants in order to gain details of information that cannot be obtained through observation only.

The main objective of using the semi-structured interview technique is to allow the researchers to ask follow-up questions in order to enrich the data gathered. As a result, the researchers will have the opportunity to gain as much insight as possible through research participants to figure out how *Musabaqah* contributes to promoting Arabic language use and learning. However, in order to have accurate findings, the study considers both observation and semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate and suitable data sources for the research. The researchers, therefore, deem it fitting to adapt the mentioned technique.



The information obtained from the data collection was analysed using thematic analysis of Miles & Huberman, (1994). They suggested four steps during data analysis: first, the researchers obtain data through field observation and semi-structured interviews, which are done in Arabic language, transcribed, and then translated into English. The data was reduced through coding by selecting the significant themes that were important to the research. Then, general themes are displayed from the data obtained, and conclusions are drawn from the themes presented in the findings.

Findings

The Significant Contribution of *Musabaqah* in Impacting and Promoting Participants' Use and Learning of Arabic

Facchin, (2017) argues that Arabic emerged as one of the most popular foreign languages studied in the twenty-first century. However, *Musabaqah*, an innovative and engaging platform, has developed into more than just a competition; it's also a driving force supporting language learning and intercultural understanding. In this research, we argue that *Musabaqah* has impacted participants and helped them improve their Arabic language proficiency, which led to the emergence of several top positions in the competition based on the following factors:

First of all, the *Musabaqah* is an excellent motivating factor for participants to engage with Arabic in terms of communication, especially for those participating in the first, second, and third categories. Interestingly, during the *Musabaqah* organized by the Kaduna state standing committee on Quranic recitation competition (KSSCQRC) that was held at Kinkinau (September 2023). it was observed that participants were motivated to invest time and energy in improving their language skills because of the competitive aspect of the religio-cultural event, which instilled a strong enthusiasm and curiosity. According to Krashen (1981), this kind of motivation is particularly essential in second language acquisition, where consistent practice and exposure are seen among the key components of success. Moreover, the competition often includes categories such as 60 Hizb memorization along with Qira'at and 60 Hizb memorization along with Tafsir, each demanding a unique set of linguistic skills. Therefore, it encourages participants to delve into the classical Quranic sciences (*Ulum al-Qur'an*) and other branches of knowledge relating to the Qur'an, such as *Qira'at* knowledge, Arabic grammar (*nahw*), philology (*Sarf*), *balaga*, and *adab*, which will, in turn, boost their understanding of the complex linguistic constructs and meaning of the glorious Quran and improve their command of the Arabic language. Hussaini (2020) believes that *Musabaqah* has a positive impact on the promotion of the study of various aspects of the Qur'anic sciences.

On the other hand, *Musabaqah* exposes an individual to the reservoir of the vocabulary of Arabic, which is the Quran, because *Musabaqah* motivates people to memorize the Quran, which text is in Arabic and has the highest level of linguistic eloquence. Allah the Almighty attested to this assertion when He mentioned that this Qur'an was revealed in pure Arabic language (Q39:28). The linguistic style and literal eloquence of the Qur'an are superb and acknowledged by all. Therefore, a memorizer of the Qur'an can be considered a master of thousands of Arabic vocabularies, and this would in fact enhance his chances of learning the Arabic language and its communication. Alqahtani (2015) maintains that having a limited vocabulary in a second language makes it difficult to communicate successfully; therefore, vocabulary knowledge is frequently seen as an essential skill for second-language learners.



In addition, it was also observed that participants mostly confine themselves in a secluded place where they memorize, revise, and have a cross-examination of the portion they intended to compete in, a practice known as “Qur’anic Camping,” which is usually done prior to the state and national level competitions and during the *Musabaqah* process. This has proven to be helpful in advancing their Arabic communication skills, as the participants are evaluated not only on their Qur’anic recitation skills but also on their capacity to communicate proficiently in Arabic. In addition, participants are motivated to investigate the historical, literary, and social aspects of the Quran through this integration of language and culture, which goes beyond simple vocabulary and grammar, so as to enhance their proficiency in the language while acquiring a deeper understanding of the wider context in which Arabic is used.

Following a semi-structured interview with participants, questions related to the influence of *Musabaqah* on the participants' proficiency in Arabic were asked and the responses are as follows:

“Apart from what we all learned at our respective schools, most of us during Musabaqah sessions learn from other participants’ talents and weaknesses in a conducive learning environment that is supported by the Islamic brotherhood bond through several methods including Tukuri, Musaffah, and exchanging questions within ourselves on Tajweed and Qira’at, which are a form of collaborative learning. This strategy has been adopted to improve language acquisition, making the process of learning more successful and enjoyable and also creating multiple perspectives and the development of a sense of belonging. In fact, there is one distinguished tafsir question that largely depends on one’s good Arabic language command and understanding known as “su’alu al-akheer” (final question) as such we trained ourselves thoroughly in order to have an effective response during the Musabaqah race” (Farida Zakariyyah).

In relation to the above statements, it is understood that collaborative learning such as study groups, resource sharing, and peer-to-peer language communication considered to be among the common methods employed by the *Musabaqah* participants during the Qur’anic Camping and the time of *Musabaqah*. Laal & Ghodsi, (2012) maintain that there are several advantages of collaborative learning, including greater efficiency, success, supportive and deeper connections, improved social skills, psychological well-being, and self-esteem. Also, Yahaya et. al, (2024) argue that Musaffah is critical in maintaining the Quranic memorization.

Some of the interviewees from the panel of judges expressed the importance of Arabic towards excelling in the *Musabaqah* thus:

"Another worth noting aspect of Musabaqah that facilitates the learning of the Arabic language by the participants based on my experience is the Tajwid and Qira'at question sessions, which are solely done in Arabic. The judges mostly ask the competitors in Arabic, and the competitors will also respond in Arabic. Giving responses in a vernacular language other than Arabic is not only discouraged but also reduces the marks of a competitor. As such, the participants take it as a challenge to learn Arabic so that they can appropriately answer the questions. This certainly, helps in no small measure in increasing the curiosity of Musabaqah participants about acquiring Arabic language skills." (Goni Sulaiman Saleh Ikara).



Based on the above-given information, it is understood that *Musabaqah* participants perceive acquiring Arabic as a challenge not only to communicate with the panel of judges but also as a factor that facilitates winning the *Musabaqah*.

In a nutshell, *Musabaqah* has significantly impacted the participants' use and learning of Arabic through its special nature of competitiveness, integration of cultures, practical use, and collaborative learning, which are considered to be among the effective language learning tools. In addition to the acquisition and improvement of language proficiency, participants acquire a greater understanding of the culturally complex aspects of Arabic. The *Musabaqah*, then, is a strong mechanism and living example of the transformative power of competitive events in creating a lively and active Arabic language-learning community.

Musabaqah's Significant Impact on The Community's Interest in Learning and Studying Arabic

Since its inception, the *Musabaqah* has served as more than a mere platform for Quranic and linguistic display; it additionally serves as an inspiration for a larger cultural and educational movement among the communities in northern Nigeria. This is because it fosters a strong passion for Quranic and Arabic language learning among participants, judges, and the general public. Moreover, one of the key factors contributing to the community's growing interest in studying Arabic is the *Musabaqah's* capacity to attract large crowds of people. The competitive nature of the competition and the variety of its categories come together to create an incredible performance.

Apart from the competition period, it is observed that the *Musabaqah* serves as an inspiration for educational programs. Some of these programs include *Musabaqah of Rabidah* (which is female-based only, who are in high school), Nana Asma'u's, Gaskia TV's, Orphans', Annuraniyyah foundation which consists of competing in Qur'an, Hadith and Fiqh, Imam al-shatibi Foundation which comprises contending in the Qur'an, *Qira'at* and Hadith specifically book of *Umdat al-ahkam* and *Riyadh al-Salihin*. These programs aim to involve the community by educating them about the value of the Arabic language and its role in maintaining cultural heritage. These programs as indicated above came into existence as a result of *Musabaqah* as such we can safely argue that *Musabaqah* created a wide enlightenment that triggered the general public to study and compete in learning different Islamic subjects which were learned and taught in Arabic thereby making the language more popular and frequently use. Some individuals on the other hand learn Arabic for them to have a better understanding of those subjects. Ayuba, (2002) expounds that learning of Arabic language thrived with the growing interest in the acquisition of Islamic knowledge.

In addition, the *Musabaqah* promotes the community's greater interest in learning of Qur'an as well as its related sciences. This is evident in the views of our respondents that some *Musabaqah* participants were once mere audience that was impressed and motivated by the event to learn the Qur'an and pursue Arabic education so as to be able to contest in the competition. Moreover, one of the aspects of *Musabaqah* that make it more pronounced and known within the society is its occurrence on a rotational basis in the sense that if it is done in a given community the following year will be done in another community. This system indeed exposes people of different backgrounds to know and have an interest in the competition. People from rural areas who are not familiar with communicating in Arabic consequently become more open to learning about the language and its subtle cultural aspects.



Furthermore, the *Musabaqah* became a significant and celebrated event across different learning institutions. The event is frequently integrated into both Islamic and governmental institutions ranging from primary, secondary, and university levels respectively, where it serves as a motivating element for students to do well in their Quranic and Arabic language studies through the possibility of competing in the *Musabaqah*, which creates a beneficial relationship between the competition and formal education. In this regard, Arabic language education is promoted in educational institutions. From the area under study, it has been observed that the Local government *Musabaqah* comprises pupils and students from both the Islamic and government institutions. Also, in tertiary institutions of learning like Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and Kaduna State University among others, *Musabaqah* is celebrated on a yearly basis which is organized and regulated by the Muslim Student Society of Nigeria of the respective institutions, where opportunities are given to any Muslims irrespective of his course study to participate in the competition.

In summary, the *Musabaqah* has substantially raised the community's interest in learning and using Arabic by drawing attention from the general public, promoting cultural pride, starting educational programs, encouraging community involvement, and serving as a link between communities. The *Musabaqah* has evolved into more than just a competition; it is now an effective driver for a movement in culture and education that has a broad impact. The *Musabaqah* is a light that shines the way to a future that is more vibrant, connected, and linguistically rich as communities continue to appreciate the significance of their language heritage.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussions, it is clear that Nigeria, being a Muslim-dominated country, has attracted great attention to the learning of Arabic since the very time of the advent of Islam in the area. However, there are many challenges that have arisen in recent times, including the influence of local languages, poor societal behaviour towards Arabic speakers, and the impacts of traditional schools, which make Arabic learning receive low turnout, but with the emergence of *Musabaqah*, the Arabic language started to regain its glory that began to fade. *Musabaqah* was established a few decades ago with the prime objective of instilling enthusiasm and motivation for Muslims towards the constant companionship of the glorious Qur'an, The Malaysian government served as a trailblazer in this aspect for the entire Muslim world, but later the phenomenon diffused to different parts of the globe. The goals of *Musabaqah* have indeed been actualized in Nigeria, where it has become a driving force towards inculcating the Qur'an and perfecting its recitation. It also significantly contributed to disseminating Arabic and its rich cultural heritage to the participants and the community at large. In Kaduna, for instance, there are many memorizers of the Qur'an who excelled in Arabic communication due to the influence and competitive nature of Arabic communication in the *Musabaqah* event and its capacity to facilitate the chance of winning the competition. The factors that catapulted the dissemination and wide use of Arabic language communication among the participants and injected interest in the community towards learning Arabic are among other things: memorization of the noble Qur'an in itself being a repository and compendium of Arabic language vocabulary, using Arabic as a medium of communication during the contesting session, collaborative learning by the participants, Qur'anic Camping, expanding the *Musabaqah* scope to include other branches of Islamic knowledge that have direct bearing with Qur'an and Arabic languages like *Qiraat* and Arabic grammar (*nahw*), communal rotation system of conducting *Musabaqah*, organizing *Musabaqah* by both Islamic and conventional



Institutions and the introduction of different sorts of competition related to the event such as the Jibwis *Musabaqah*, Gaskiya TV's, *Rabidah Musabaqah* and many more.

In light of these findings, the study set forth the following recommendations:

Firstly, it is suggested that the Nigerian Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies, the National Standard Committee on Quranic Recitation Competition, and the Nigerian Literary Club, establish new approaches and methods for organizing seminars, workshops, sensitization, and awareness programs in the society that aim at promoting Arabic language and preserving the cultural heritage of *Musabaqah*.

Secondly, it is recommended that the government and well-to-do individuals re-strategize in giving incentives to the winners of *Musabaqah* by giving them something that would permanently impact their lives, such as an over-the-seas scholarship, securing a promising job, awards, and the like.

Thirdly, the organizing committees should organize workshops and training programs for the judges of *Musabaqah* so that they can be equipped with the recent developments and enrich their potential in judging *Musabaqah* at any level, be it local or international, as well as giving training and producing competent contestants that can contend in any global contest.

Finally, the organizers of the Qur'anic recitation competition should establish new regulations that will ban the competitors from forging another state's identity or reducing their age in order to take part in the competition, and participants and schools should give maximum cooperation in bringing their students to the competition and abide by the *Musabaqah* rules and regulations.

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