

## **Role of Arabic and Islamic Studies Teachers in Suppressing the Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic in Northern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role played by Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in northern Nigeria amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Against the backdrop of the global health crisis, the study explores the unique position of these educators in influencing behavioral patterns and disseminating information within their communities. The primary aim is to investigate the effectiveness of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in suppressing the effects and spread of COVID-19 through religious and cultural channels. The methodology involves a comprehensive survey, interviews, and observations within selected communities to assess the impact of these scholars on preventive measures, hygiene practices, and public awareness. Research findings highlight the significant influence wielded by Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in shaping community responses, with their teachings serving as a powerful tool for fostering adherence to health guidelines. The paper concludes with recommendations for targeted educational programs, collaboration with health authorities, and the integration of COVID-19 awareness into the curriculum, emphasizing the pivotal role these teachers played in safeguarding public health.

**Keywords:** Role, Arabic, Islamic, Scholars, Suppressing, Effect, COVID-19, Pandemic

### **Introduction**

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge to societies worldwide, demanding a collaborative and multi-faceted approach to mitigate its impact. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the educational sector has been significantly affected, with schools facing closures, disruptions to learning, and the need for innovative strategies to navigate these challenging times. Amidst these circumstances, the role of educators becomes increasingly crucial, particularly those in specialized fields such as Arabic and Islamic Studies.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus in the early year of 2020 proved to be one of the most transformative events in the modern period. It was first detected in China in December 2019, where several cases of unusual pneumonia were discovered in the city of Wuhan. On January 7, health officials linked these cases to a newly identified virus that belongs to the family of Coronaviruses, which was named COVID-19. China reported its first death as a result of the new virus on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2020, and the second on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, as the disease started to spread quickly outside China in the following days<sup>1</sup>.

The World Health Organization urged governments to take appropriate measures to fight the disease in the middle of global anxiety over the steadily increasing numbers of positive cases. The international organization eventually designated the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11<sup>2</sup>. By mid of August 2020 the number of confirmed cases globally reached 20 million and the number of confirmed deaths was more than seven hundred thousand, as the numbers kept

increasing. By mid of February, 2021 the number of confirmed cases was over 110 million and the number of confirmed deaths was close to 2.5 million<sup>3</sup>.

Prior to the corona virus pandemic, the world witnessed several succeeding episodes of devastating pandemics both in the pre-modern and modern periods. The closest example of comparable magnitude in the modern period was the influenza pandemic (H1N1 virus) that spread worldwide in 1918–1919, which is known as the Spanish Flu. It is estimated that about 500 million people, about one third of the world's population, were infected by the virus and it eventually claimed the lives of about 50 million people worldwide<sup>4</sup>.

Within the early weeks of the pandemic the term became part of the pandemic-specific vocabulary that infiltrated public discussions, along with expressions such as social distancing, flattening the curve, and super spreader, which were previously used mostly by medical experts only<sup>5</sup>. Transmission recedes only when the number of immune people increases. In the absence of a vaccine or an effective cure for the Coronavirus, some argued that lifting restrictions and increasing exposure can be a means to achieve<sup>6</sup>.

Medical experts, however, warn that seeking community immunity through this means is risky because the large number of patients would exhaust medical resources with no guarantees for ending the transmission of the disease. The term became notorious when it moved from technical medical discussions to political disputes and controversies, as some politicians, such as the former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, championed it as a solution to avoid or overcome the massive consequences of shutting down economies. Also, some countries such as Sweden, for example, have actually adopted this approach<sup>7</sup>. As medical experts note, one of the main problems with this application of herd immunity is its impact on vulnerable segments of the population with weakened immunity such as the elderly and those who have chronic diseases. According to Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security: "In Stockholm, they did not reach herd immunity, and the price you pay for that is that you get transmission chains that end up landing on a vulnerable individual who then can be hospitalized or die from this"<sup>8</sup>.

At the moment, humanity lives in chaos and panic as a result of what is being spread about COVID19 pandemic through media, including TV's and social networks. This mini review displayed the procedures and the measures to deal with the diseases and pandemics according to the Islamic *Shari'ah* concept. It also addressed the responsibility of the patient and the doctor in such situations as well as against other diseases. In addition, this review addressed the causes and the symptoms of COVID-19 pandemic and how it could spread; he avoided and treated by following and committing to the recommendations of the Islamic religion and through the application of the teachings and guidance of the Glorious Qur'an and Prophetic traditions. This is due to the fact that the Islam is a comprehensive religion that can effectively handle all the humanity issues and solve all of its scientific and practical implications<sup>9</sup>.

According to Al-Gorany (70) the world live these days throughout a difficult stage due to the spread of this pandemic "Corona". As the quarantine forced each of us to zoom in inside our dwells, and the people started to feel bored and started expressing bitterness, also each one of us patience is being tested in the first place, which is proving to be exhausting. In the past several days and until now, the spread of this virus has been observed in many countries, which in turn has led to an increase in fear and panic among people. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus has now spread rapidly across China and around the world, causing acute infectious pneumonia to break out<sup>10</sup>.

### **Islamic Historical Overview on Epidemics, Pandemics and Contagious Diseases**

Tracing the Islamic historical overview of epidemics, plagues, pandemics, and contagious diseases

involves examining various historical accounts, classical Islamic texts, and the contributions of Muslim scholars. The following is a brief overview of pandemic according to Islam:

**Plague of Amwas (639 CE):** The Plague of *Amwas*, also known as the Plague of Emmaus, was a devastating epidemic that occurred in the 7th century CE during the time of the early Islamic Caliphate. It is named after the town of *Amwas* (modern-day Emmaus or *Imwas*), located in present-day Israel. The plague is particularly associated with the year 639 CE, during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam. The epidemic had a significant impact on the Muslim army, and it is estimated that tens of thousands of people died, including many prominent companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>11</sup>.

The outbreak is described in historical sources, including Islamic traditions and chronicles. According to accounts, the plague began during the military campaign known as the Battle of *Yarmouk*, a decisive confrontation between the Muslim forces and the Byzantine Empire. The plague affected both the Muslim and Byzantine armies, resulting in a high number of casualties on both sides. One of the key figures affected by the Plague of *Amwas* was Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, a close companion of Prophet Muhammad and a prominent military commander. He succumbed to the illness, along with many other notable companions. Umar ibn al-Khattab, upon hearing of the severity of the plague, he implemented quarantine measures by ordering Muslims to leave the affected area to prevent further spread of the disease<sup>12</sup>.

**Black Death (14th Century):** The Black Death, one of history's deadliest pandemics, affected Islamic lands as well. The Black Death, a devastating pandemic that swept through Europe in the 14th century, also had profound and lasting effects on the Islamic lands. While historical records vary, it is evident that the plague reached various parts of the Islamic world, causing widespread mortality and societal upheaval. The impact of the Black Death on Islamic lands was multifaceted, affecting demographic patterns, economic structures, and cultural dynamics. The sharp decline in population led to labor shortages, disrupting agrarian economies and causing economic downturns. Furthermore, the social fabric of affected regions underwent transformations as traditional hierarchies and social structures were challenged and, in some cases, dismantled. Additionally, the Black Death had implications for religious practices and cultural norms, with communities grappling with questions of faith and existentialism in the face of such overwhelming catastrophe. Overall, the Black Death left an indelible mark on Islamic lands, reshaping their societies and contributing to a reevaluation of various aspects of life in the aftermath of this devastating pandemic. As such, various Islamic scholars recommended quarantine measures and cleanliness practices<sup>13</sup>.

Another plague was attributed to Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's Recommendations: During an outbreak in Egypt, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani recommended quarantine measures and social distancing<sup>14</sup>. However, in the modern days, contemporary Islamic scholars issue fatwas supporting vaccination to prevent contagious diseases.

**Northern Nigeria:** Northern Nigeria refers to the northern region of Nigeria, a country located in West Africa. Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones, and the northern region is one of these zones. The northern part of Nigeria is known for its diverse ethnic and cultural composition, with a predominantly Muslim population<sup>15</sup>. Some key features and aspects of Northern Nigeria include:

1. **Ethnic Diversity:** The region is home to various ethnic groups, including the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, Tiv, and others. The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group is one of the largest and most dominant in the region<sup>16</sup>.

2. **Religion:** Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, with Islam being the dominant religion. The region has a rich Islamic heritage, and many of the historical cities in the north, such as Kano,

Katsina, and Sokoto, are known for their Islamic traditions<sup>17</sup>.

3. **Economy:** Agriculture is a significant part of the economy in the northern region. The cultivation of crops such as millet, sorghum, maize, and groundnuts is common. Livestock farming, particularly by the Fulani people, is also prevalent<sup>18</sup>.

6. **Cultural Heritage:** Northern Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage, with traditional festivals, music, dance, and art playing significant roles in the lives of the people. Traditional rulers, known as emirs, hold important positions in the social and cultural fabric of the region<sup>19</sup>.

### **The role of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in suppressing the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic in northern Nigeria**

Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers play a crucial role in northern Nigeria, where Islam is a major religion and Arabic is often associated with the study of Islamic literature and religious texts. The role of these teachers extends beyond the academic sphere and encompasses various aspects of cultural, ethical, and religious education. The following were some of the roles they played:

1. **Religious Education:** Teaching Qur'an and Hadith: Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers are responsible for teaching students the Quran, the glorious book of Islam, and the Hadith, the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on preventive and safety measures to be taken when there was outbreak of any pandemic in the Muslim communities. Through education and awareness, Arabic and Islamic studies teachers play a crucial role in disseminating accurate information about COVID-19 to their students and communities. They use their positions to educate people about preventive measures, such as hand hygiene, wearing masks, and social distancing, drawing on Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of health and well-being. However, Islam places a strong emphasis on social responsibility. During pandemics, Muslims are encouraged to take measures that protect not only themselves but also others from harm. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

"There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (Ibn Majah vol. 2, Book3)

2. **Moral and Spiritual Support:** Arabic and Islamic studies teachers often play a role in providing moral and spiritual support. During challenging times like a pandemic, they offer guidance, counseling, and spiritual comfort to individuals and communities facing difficulties. They educate students and the general public about Islamic principles, values, and ethics, helping them develop a strong moral and ethical foundation. Islam encourages seeking for medical treatment at the time of pandemic outbreak. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

Make use of medical treatment, for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, with the exception of one disease, namely old age. (Sahih Bukhari, Book 76, Hadith 6).

Muslims are encouraged to consult medical professionals and follow their advice during pandemics.

3. **Promoting tolerance and Cultural Awareness:** Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers contribute to fostering cultural understanding and promoting tolerance among students of diverse religious backgrounds by educating Muslims about the rich Islamic history, traditions, and practices and that the concept of quarantine (*I'tisam*) is present in Islamic tradition. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said,

If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; but if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place. (Sahih Bukhari, Book 7, Hadith 624).

This hadith encourages the practice of quarantine during the outbreak of contagious diseases.

4. **Integration of Technology:** Incorporating Technology: Teachers leverage technology to enhance the learning experience, using multimedia resources, such as radio, television, online platforms, and educational apps to make lessons more engaging and interactive. This alternative measures undertaken by the Arabic and Islamic teachers promote awareness of online based education system which remain relevant and important to eternity.

5. **Online Education:** With the closure of schools and the shift towards online education during the pandemic, Arabic and Islamic studies teachers adapt to the digital format to continue providing religious education to students. They leverage technology to conduct virtual classes, share educational materials, and engage with students in a remote learning environment.

6. **Mental Health, Hygiene and preventive Support:** Teachers, including those teaching Arabic and Islamic studies, contribute to mental health support by addressing the emotional and psychological challenges that individuals may be facing due to the pandemic. They provide spiritual guidance and support based on Islamic teachings to help cope with stress and anxiety. Islam emphasizes cleanliness and personal hygiene. The Prophet Muhammad ((SAW) is reported to have said:

"Cleanliness is half of faith." (Muslim, vol.1, Book 2, Hadith 223)

This underscores the importance of maintaining cleanliness to prevent the spread of diseases.

7. **Community Engagement:** Connecting with Communities: These teachers often engage with local Islamic communities, mosques, and cultural organizations to strengthen the connection between the school and the broader community. Parental Involvement: They work to involve parents in their children's education, fostering a collaborative relationship between the school and the community. Arabic and Islamic studies teachers are often respected figures in their communities. They use their influence to encourage adherence to public health guidelines and dispel misinformation related to COVID-19. Organizing community discussions, webinars, or other events can be effective ways to address concerns and share information.

8. **Addressing Contemporary Issues:** Discussing Current Affairs: Teachers discuss and address contemporary issues within the framework of Islamic teachings, helping students and the general public to understand the relevance of their religious education to real-world challenges. They conduct research on the history and etymology, the courses as well as preventive techniques of the pandemic so as to guide Muslim *Ummah* against its repercussions. - While taking necessary precautions, Muslims are also reminded to place their trust in Allah. Seeking protection through supplication (dua) and placing trust in Allah's wisdom are important aspects of dealing with challenging situations.

9. **Charitable Activities:** Many Islamic teachings emphasize charity and helping those in need. Arabic and Islamic studies teachers actively participate in or organize initiatives to support vulnerable individuals or communities affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic. However, they encouraged Muslims to support and help those affected by pandemics. Charity (sadaqah) and acts of kindness are highly recommended in Islam, especially during times of crisis. In summary, Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers in Nigeria play a pivotal role in shaping the religious, cultural, and ethical perspectives of students and general Muslim communities. Their influence extends beyond the classroom, impacting the broader community and contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals with a strong foundation in Islamic principles and Arabic language proficiency.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Government should recognize the diverse cultural and religious landscape of Nigeria while Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers should develop and implement educational initiatives that are culturally sensitive and relevant. This includes integrating COVID-19 and other related plagues

and pandemics prevention measures into religious teachings and promoting hygiene practices in a manner that respects local customs.

2. Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers should work collaboratively with educational authorities to integrate COVID-19 and other related plagues and pandemics education into school curricula. This ensures that students receive consistent and accurate information about preventive measures, fostering a culture of health awareness from an early age.

3. Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers should persistently maintain and be utilizing religious platforms such as mosques and Islamic community centers, to disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 and other related plagues and pandemics prevention. Incorporating health messages into sermons, lectures, and community events will enhance the reach and effectiveness of public health communication.

4. Recognizing the psychological impact of the pandemic, Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers should address mental health issues within the context of their teachings. Providing emotional support, guidance, and incorporating coping mechanisms from Islamic teachings can contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

5. Embracing technology, Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers can leverage online platforms and social media to reach a wider audience. Creating informative content, live sessions, and interactive discussions can facilitate continuous learning and reinforce preventive measures beyond the physical classroom.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the paper has dug into the significant role that Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers play in curbing the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. As educators who hold a unique position of influence within their communities, these teachers have the potential to disseminate crucial information about the virus, promote preventive measures, and foster a sense of responsibility among their students and the broader population. By leveraging the respect and trust they command, Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers can serve as effective conduits for public health education, encouraging adherence to guidelines, and dispelling myths and misinformation surrounding the pandemic. Furthermore, their integration of Islamic teachings can offer a moral and ethical framework that reinforces the importance of community welfare and individual responsibility in the face of a global health crisis.

It is evident from the discussion that collaboration between health authorities, educational institutions, and religious leaders is paramount in implementing effective strategies. By harnessing the potential of Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers, Nigeria can establish a grassroots approach to combating the virus, one that is culturally sensitive, community-driven, and aligned with the values inherent in Islamic teachings.

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