

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE QURĀN ON THE NIGERIAN ARABIC PLAYS; THE OSENI'S *AT-ṬABAQAT AL 'ULYĀ* (THE UPPER CLASS) AS CASE STUDY<sup>(\*)</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that the Quran has influenced Arabic literature in various ways. The Nigerian Arabic literature is not an exemption. This study therefore examines the influences of the Quran on the Nigerian Arabic plays using the Oseni's *at-Ṭabaqat al-Ulyā* (The Upper Class) as a case study. The research is therefore significant as it examines the semantic variations of the Quranic text appearing in the text of the play. The research reveals how much the Nigerian Arabic literary experts use and value the Quran. The researcher adopts the descriptive and analytical methods of research. The researcher describes and analyses how the writer has used the Quran to influence his styles and the characters' dialogue until the climax is reached. It is unfolded that the playwright's styles have been influenced by the Quran in five ways. These include using certain expressions prescribed by the Quran in dialogue, using it to introduce and reveal outcome of events, express fear, signify warning and most commonly for supplication. In all the five cases, the Quranic wordings are either quoted directly or paraphrased. The study reveals how the Quran influences the author's styles and thereby contributes strongly to the organic unity of the literary piece of work. It is recommended therefore that researchers should investigate more on the influence of the Quran on other aspects of the Nigerian Arabic writings.

**Keywords:** *Influence, Quran, Nigerian Arabic Plays, At-ṭabaqat ai-'Ulyā*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The word Quran is a verbal noun morphologically derived from a three lettered verb 'qara a', which means to 'read'. Linguistically the word simply means reading or reciting. The letters hamzah, qaf, and ra' form the root of the name 'Quran'. The nun is an addition. The fact that the Quran linguistically means reading or recitation is supported by the Quran itself when it says in chapter as in (1) 75 :180 قرآنه فاتبع فاذا قرأناه فاتبع قرآنه Transliteration as in(2):'Fa idhā qar'anāhu fatabi' qurānah<sup>2</sup> Translated as in (3); 'but when we have recited it follow, thou the recital (as promulgated)'. It is believed without any iota of doubt that the Quran is the word of Allah because of its inimitability<sup>3</sup>. It is a book of guidance for the entire humanity<sup>4</sup>. Reading it is an act of worship and it begins with Suratul Fatihah and ends with Suratun Nas It is generally defined as the book of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad through Angel Jibril for the period of 23years bit by bit. It has been argued that the Quran is a book of guidance, and its message should be used for the propagation of Islam<sup>5</sup>.

There are certain characteristic features of the Quran that distinguish it from other books, and it is inimitable in its contents and these features make it original and trusted. The Quran has a list name by which it is known and called. Some of these names include Al-Kitab (the book), Al-Furqan (the Criterion) and Adhikr (the remembrance)

### 1.1 Review of Related Literature

Review of the past literature has shown that researchers have done great job in investigating the impacts of the Quran on Arabic and Education. The concepts of the Quranic stories and their impacts on raising and reforming the children's behaviour using Surah Yusuf as a model has been examined it was concluded that the concepts can go a long way to facilitate the moral training and upbringing of the children. In the same vein, examination of the educational values of the same Surah using the inductive and analytical methods of research has been carried out.

2 Reza, S.M. (2011). The Quran as Intertext; a Critical Reflection. *Canadian Journal of Social Science* 7 (5).

3 Julie, S. M. (2020). *The Enclopaedia of Arabic Literature*. London: Rouledge.

4 Muhammad, F., and Negina, K. (2019). Summary of the Holy Quran. Malaysia: Buzdar Insights.

5 Sammah, M. A. (2020). Knowledge of the Different Names of the Quran. *Palareh's Journal of Egyptology* 17(4).

The research was concluded by giving pieces of advice to parents to shun giving preference to one child over the other and not to allow strangers reside in their house. A comparison of the story of Joseph and Yusuf in the Bible and the Quran respectively was investigated in another research and it was concluded that the Bible emphasises the history and journey of a nation while the Quran narrated the story to strengthen the faith of the Muslims<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, investigations on the structures and organic unity of Suratul Qalam was carried out. It was maintained that although some verses in the Surah are disconnected but they orbit around a central and main idea<sup>7</sup>. In the same vein, the semantic dimensions of appeal discourse in Surah Yusuf is investigated. The research came with a conclusion that the semantic dimension of the Surah is of three axis<sup>8</sup>.

A description of the Quranic wordings in political speeches in classical Arabic Literature is examined. The research concluded that the Khutab (speeches) of the Classical Arabic literature are stripped of their original Quranic meaning and used to convey absolutely new message<sup>9</sup>. Having made an attempt to give the summarised meaning of the Quran in another research; it was noted that researchers in the field of Social Sciences have least focused on using the Quran for setting the foundations of different theories in their various researches. It was therefore argued that the reason is that most translations of the Quran are word for word and it is difficult for some researchers to understand<sup>10</sup>. Using a qualitative approach, the significance of the Quran to the entire world was explored. The paper emphasised on the moral, societal and historical benefits of the Quran. An examination of the importance of knowledge in the light of the Quran with special reference to Ibn Kathir's exegesis was done, and it was concluded the Quran aids and supports various forms of studies.<sup>11</sup>

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- 6 Muhammad, H. M. (2020). Concepts of Quranic Stories and Their Impacts in Training and Reforming Children's Behaviour: Surat Yusuf As A Model. *Turkish Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12(3).
  - 7 Neiza, Mh. O. (2021). Educational Value of Surat Yusuf. *Journal of Human Sciences* (3)1.
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  - 10 Muhammad, O. (2019). The Quran as Literary Masterpiece within Its Historical and Religious Milieu. [Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment for The Degree of Master of Arts in The Department of Near Eastern Language of Arts University of Washington].
  - 11 Hafiz, M.U (2019). Importance of Knowledge in The Light of The Holy Quran with Specific Reference To Ibn Kathir. *Al-Bashir Research Journal* 8(21).

However, it has been observed from the above that little or no effort has been put in place in terms of research to investigate the influence of the Quran on Arabic plays in Nigeria. Hence this study investigates the influence of the Quran on Arabic plays in Nigeria using the following method and research questions.

## 1.2 Method

The methods used in this study is descriptive and analytical methods of research .The researcher identifies the scenes in the play where the author has cited verses or chapters of the Quran and then he describes, and analyses style used.

## 1.3 Research Questions

- 1 How does the author's style reflect influence of the Quran?
2. What are the frequencies of appearance of certain verses and chapters of the Quran in the play?
- 3 Does the influence of the Quran uphold organic unity of the play?

To provide answers to the research questions, the study sheds light on the following:

- A. Brief information on the author
- B. Summary of the play and,
- C. Analyses of the influence of the Quran on the play.
- D. Conclusion

## 1.4 Brief Information About The Author

The author, Professor Zakariyau Oseni,<sup>12</sup> is one of the Arabic literary giants in Nigeria. He was born in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State Nigeria on Wednesday 20<sup>TH</sup> December 1950 equivalent to 10<sup>TH</sup> Rabiul Awwal 1370) (shehu 2002). He is a retired professor of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria from the, Faculty of Arts, Department of Arabic language and literature He taught Arabic for more than forty years.

Some of his Arabic plays include:

1. Al amid Al Mubajjal (The Honourable Dean)

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12 Kankawi, U. I. (2020). *The Guardian of Arabic Language and Literature in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Alhasby Production

2. At Tajir wa Sahib al Mat ‘am (The Trader and the Restaurant Owner)
3. At Tabaqat AL –Ulya (The upper Class)
4. Al Malik Momo Al’azim(King Momo the great)
5. Fi Mashhad Talfisyun {At the television Scene<sup>11</sup>}
6. He retires as at the age of seventy and currently he is the Imam of Auch Central Mosque.

## 2. ABOUT THE PLAY

### Summary of the play

At –tabaqat al Ulya (The Upper Class) is a four act play in Arabic. It involves events at Funore, an imaginary Nigerian City. Sequel to the death of its traditional king, a new one was to be appointed and there were three candidates –Prince Abdul Muqsit Finafina, Prince Abdul Sabur Oshioke and Abdul Hakim Udu.

In the struggle for the throne, many elites, associations and key individuals played various roles in the final determination of the most suitable candidate. The most active group was the league of Ulama and Imams (Islamic Scholars). Thanks to the apt leadership of Sheikh Abdul Muiz Gomina, the Deputy Chief Imam, and a courageous, forthright and kind scholar. He is the hero of the struggle for truth, justice, and fair play.

In the end, the Government toad line of Abdul Muizz and based on the report of a commission of Enquiry it set up, prince Finana was arrested for his atrocities at home and abroad, and consequently lost the throne to prince Udu, who was unanimously elected for the throne.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1 Characters of the play

The author has influenced his styles of writing with the Quran through dialogue and interaction of some of the characters of the play.

The following are the characters of the play;

1. Malam Abdul Muiz Gomina: He is deputy Imam, the Mufassir (The Quran Exiget) and children’s Quran teacher of the city of Funore.
2. Al-Amir Abdul Muqsit Finafina; One of the contestants for the post of the king in Funore after the demise of King Abdul Aziz Ojako.
3. ‘For-The-Baba Akaba’: The chairman of the Labour Union in the city of Funore.

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13 Oseni, Z. I. (2006). *A Nigerian Arabic Play in Arabic. At-Tabaqat Al –Ulya (The Upper Class)*. Nigeria: Darunn-Nur Auchi.

4. Friends of For-the-Baba': Four among the big businessmen in the city
5. The students: The students of Sheikh Abdul Muiz, who study reading and memorisation of the Quran.
6. Al-Arif AbdulHadi: He is the head of students of Quranic School owned and managed by malam Abdul Muiz.
7. Mrs Adeso: She is the wife of Malam Abdul Muiz. She assist her husband in teaching the students how to recite the Quran.
8. Imam Ibrahim; The chief Imam of Faunore Central Mosque and the chairman of league of Imams unore
9. Malam Ikramah: He is one of the scholars in the city of Funore.
10. Malam Daudu: one of the scholars of the city of Funore.
11. Malam Momo: one of the scholars of the city of Funore.
12. Malam Saka: one of the scholars of the city of Funore
13. Lady Dije: Her name is Khadijah but was popularly known as Dije. She is the only wife of Amir Finafina.
14. Mr Nosa Isovo: one of the directors of Ministry of Royal affairs sent from the State Capital to the city of Funore to gather information on the problem of the throne of city of Funore.
15. Alhaji Okolo: He is the chief of Sagaga Quarters of Funore. It is the first of the main Quarters that make up the city of Funore.
16. DR Omodide: A Lecturer in Political Science Department Ake University Ake and also the Chairman of progressive Association in Funore.
17. Agadagidi Oloko: The chairman of farmers' Association in the city of Funore.
18. Dar Nadwa Association: A Large crowd of people that gather in Dr Nadwa to investigate royal issues.
19. Dokodoko: One of the followers of Al Amir Finafina and a friend of 'for-the Baba'.
20. Minister of Royal Affairs, His name Mr Bashir Fadaka.
21. Deputy Minister: Mrs Safia Lerama
22. Commissioner of Police: Alhaj Mujtaba Gako.
23. Governor: The state governor, Mr Muhammad Ilera.
24. Al-Amir Abdul Sabur Oshoke: One of the contestants for the throne of Funore.
25. Al-Amir Abdul Hakim: One of the contestants for the King but later withdrew.
26. Mr Talha Ibara: The chief of Isaga Quarters in the city.
27. Mr Aliyu Dada: Chief of Gasas Quarters in the city



آلآن حصحص الحق أنا راودته عن نفسه

Transliteration: as in (7) '...alān has-ḥaṣal haqqa anā rāwadtuhū an nafshi'

Translated as in (8)

'...Now is truth manifest (to all): It was I who sought to seduce him'.

The phrase 'Now the truth is manifest' is used to show the confession of the wife of the Aziz in Surah Yusuf that she was the one who actually sought to seduce prophet Yusuf and that Yusuf knew nothing about it, while it is used in the play to emphasise that the election result represents the wish of the voters and that it was not manipulated to favour any of the three contestants.

Ibn Abbas, Mujahid and others say that the meaning of the Quranic phrase is *الان تبين الحق وظهروبرز* That is the truth is clear, shown and manifest<sup>15</sup>.

The clause that follow the phrase both in the Quran and in the play suggest that they emphasise different occurrences. However, the point of similarity between the two is that they both emphasise an outcome that is true.

### 3. Using the Quran to warn

Send a message of warning is another way the author has used the Quran. For example, the 26<sup>th</sup> verse of Surah at-Takwir was used to send warning message by Malam Abdul Muizz to correct the erring scholars who support the bad politicians when he says in act 2 scene 2

*فاين تذهبون ايها العلماء في هذا البلد الامين*: meaning, what has come over you oh the scholars of this peaceful town?

The Quranic expression ' in (9) *فاين تذهبون*' with transliteration in (10) (fa-ayna tazaabun) is contained in 26 the verse of Surat Takwir can be translated as in (11) as 'where are you heading to'

The phrase is used in the Quran to counter the unbelievers who claimed the Quran is not from Allah despite clear evidences that it is from Him. Qatadah says the verse means: 'why are you deviating from the book of Allah and His obedience, but in the play it is used to warn the erring Muslim scholars who go after politicians because of money. The clause that follows the verse in the Quran strongly suggests it does not carry the same meaning it carries in the play.

### 4. As symbol of fear

Another way the author has used the Quran is to symbolise fear. This is noted in the expression of Prince Abdul Muizz Finafina in act 3 when he fears he might lose the seat and says out of fear;

15 Ibn Kathir, A. A. (1992). *Tafsir Al-Quran Al Azim*. Lebanon: Dar Al-Fikr.



وقد قيل في اشياء تزلزل الارض زلزالها من اجلها

Translation

And things said against me are capable of shaking the earth to its final quake

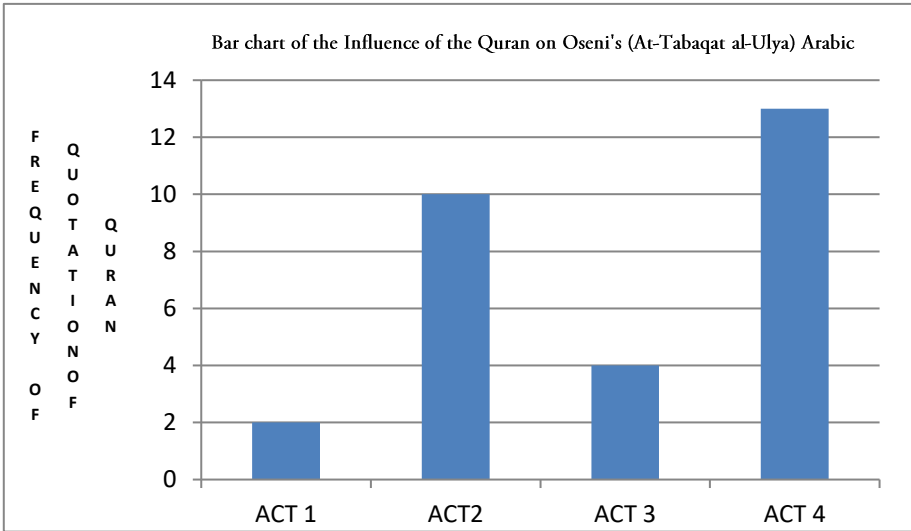
The phrase in (12) *زلزلت الارض زلزالها* translated as as in (13) *idhā zulzilatil ard zilzalahā*) is the first verse one of *Sūrat Zilzāl* is grammatically restructured by the author of the play and used to convey a completely different message in the play. The verse is used in the Quran to supply us information given by the Quran regarding the final shaking of the earth on the day of Judgement. Ibn Abbas says it means when the earth shakes from its bottommost part .In the play it is used to convey surprise and shock regarding the information that has reached people regarding the atrocities committed by one of the politicians who contested for the election.

5. for supplication

Supplication is known as *D'* in Arabic. Mankind has been commanded to call upon Allah in the Quran. This instruction is contained Quran 40:60 which says: 'And your Lord says, 'Call Me.I will answer your prayer, but those who are too arrogant to serve me will surely find themselves humiliated in Hell'. It is found that the characters of the play under study supplicate to Allah using selected Quranic Chapters and Verses .That is another influence of the Quran on the play.

The commonest way the author has used the Quran in the play is for supplication and invocation to Allah. It has been noted that some Quranic chapters such as the Chapters 114, 113 and 122 which include *Ikhlās*, *Falaq* and *Nas* are read by the characters for supplicating to Allah. Similarly, verses such as *Āyat al Kursiyy* (The throne verse), *Āmana Rasūl*, verses beginning with 'Rabbanā' and many others are used for invoking Allah .The characters supplicate with the Quran in various scenes of the play such as Act 2 Scene2 and ACT 4 Scene3.The main reason for supplication here is to seek safety from Allah and ask Him to protect inhabitants of the imaginary settings mentioned in the play on one hand and to seek guidance from Allah in electing a good leader on the second hand after the demise of the King.

Figure1. FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE OF CERTAIN VERSES AND CHAPTERS IN THE PLAY



The data collected from the play reveal that verses of the Quran appear in all the acts of the play. The act with the highest frequency of Quran quotations is the fourth one while act one has the lowest frequency. An examination of the play also shows that Surat al Fatihah appears most frequently among the chapters of the Quran. In addition, Surāṭ al-Nās, Falaq and Ikhlās are often read in the play especially by the Muslim scholars who seek refuge from the evil of bad politics and politicians.

Similarly, it observed that verses commanding what is good and forbidding evils are often repeated to correct the evil practices of the politicians. That justifies the central theme of the play which is correcting the evils perpetrated by some bad politicians.

Hence it is noted that there is strong correlation and concord between the themes of the play and the Quran quotation. Hence, it can be justified that the Quran fosters the organic unity of the play.

### 3.2 QURAN AND ORGANIC UNITY IN THE PLAY

Organic unity in literature is a structural principle first discussed by Plato and later described and analysed by Aristotle. The theory emphasise that a narrative or drama must be presented as a complete whole and that it must be internally consistent and connected such that the transposition and withdrawal of any part

will disrupt and dislocate the whole<sup>16</sup>With these theory in mind it can be concluded that the Quran quotation in the play have strongly improved the organic unity in the play .This is because the removal or dislocation of any the verses or chapters will affect the message and structure of the play.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Arabic play, no doubt is influenced by the Quran .These influences are in five major forms. First, the writers often uses certain expressions ordained by the Quran for greeting fellow Muslims ,appreciating Allah and the saying of phrase such as In shāAllah before making an expression that takes place in the future. Second, the authors uses the Quran wordings to symbolise fear and grief. Third, the playwright used it to emphasise statement of fact. Sending a warning message is the fourth way its wordings have been used. The fifth, and the most common way is using it for supplication and invocation to Allah. In all these cases, the Quranic words are either quoted directly or paraphrased

It is worthy to note that the Quranic words have been used by the author to convey entirely different contextual meaning given to them in the Quran in most of the cited examples. However, the Quranic wordings and expressions adapted in the play have given special meaning to the characters' thought which facilitates the organic unity of the play.

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