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THE ROLE OF ARABIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TEACHING ETHICS AND PATRIOTISM IN QUR'ANIC, ISLAMIYYA AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA: THEMES, PEDAGOGY, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Arabic children's literature occupies a central but empirically understudied role in the moral and civic education of young learners in Qur'anic, Islamiyya and primary schools across Northern Nigeria. This study examined the thematic content, pedagogical use, perceived impact, and structural challenges of Arabic children's literature as a vehicle for ethical and patriotic education in selected schools across three Local Government Areas of Jigawa State, Nigeria. A mixed-methods design integrating content analysis of 18 purposively selected Arabic children's literature texts, a descriptive questionnaire survey of 45 teachers and 90 pupils, and semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and school heads was adopted across Ringim, Jahun and Hadejia LGAs. Content analysis of the 18 texts identified 120 theme instances across seven ethical and patriotic categories. Honesty (ṣidq: 22.5%), patience (ṣabr: 18.3%), and justice (ʿadl: 15.0%) are the most prominent ethical themes. Patriotism and love of homeland (ḥubb al-waṭan) accounted for only 9.2% of theme instances - the lowest of the seven categories - and was most concentrated in dialogue and dramatisation genres rather than in the moral narratives and prophet stories that predominate the corpus. Teacher questionnaire data confirmed strong agreement that Arabic children's literature is effective for teaching ethics (M = 4.28) but widespread concern about the inadequacy of

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current materials for patriotic education (M = 2.95), the insufficiency of teacher training (M = 2.62), and the shortage of resources (M = 2.35). Eighty per cent of pupils recognised

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ethical themes in assigned texts, 85.6% could name at least one moral lesson, and 64.4% expressed a sense of patriotism derived from the stories. The three most severe challenges are shortage of age-appropriate Arabic storybooks (major: 80%), inadequate teacher training in literature pedagogy (75%), and poor funding (72%). The study concludes that Arabic children's literature is a valuable and culturally grounded resource for Islamic moral education but that its patriotic education function is structurally underdeveloped due to the predominantly non-Nigerian origin of available texts, teacher training gaps, and resource scarcity.

Keywords: *Arabic children's literature; ethics; patriotism; moral education; Qur'anic schools; Islamiyya schools; Jigawa State; Northern Nigeria; ḥubb al-waṭan; value education; curriculum development*

1. Introduction

Children's literature is one of the oldest and most culturally embedded instruments through which societies transmit moral values and civic consciousness to their youngest members. As Nnolim (2010) observes, it serves as 'a medium through which society transmits its moral and cultural heritage to the younger generation.' In the context of Jigawa State and Northern Nigeria, where Qur'anic, Islamiyya and primary schools provide the educational foundation for the majority of children, Arabic children's literature - encompassing moral narratives, prophet and companion stories, didactic poems, and dramatised dialogues - functions simultaneously as a vehicle for Arabic language instruction, Islamic character education, and civic formation. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1997) and Ibn Khaldun (2005) positioned the cultivation of akhlaq (moral character) as central to the purpose of Islamic education, and the Arabic literary tradition has always been one of its primary instruments.

Despite its pervasive use, the role of Arabic children's literature in explicitly teaching ethics and patriotism in Jigawa State schools has not been empirically investigated. Nigeria faces persistent challenges of moral decadence and weakened national civic identity, challenges that make the foundational stage of education a critical site of intervention (Aremu, 2019; Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). If Arabic children's literature can be shown to contribute meaningfully to both Islamic moral formation and Nigerian patriotic consciousness, it represents a culturally grounded resource of considerable strategic value for educational policy. If it is falling short - in terms of content, pedagogy, or resource provision - the gaps need to be empirically documented. This study addresses both questions across three LGAs representing the geographic, educational, and cultural diversity of Jigawa State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Arabic Children's Literature and Value Transmission

Arabic children's literature draws on a classical tradition of didactic narrative stretching from Kalilawa Dimna through the Qisas al-Anbiya to contemporary moral storybook production across the Arab world and Northern Nigeria. Al-Mutairi (2016) documents its sustained dual function: language instruction and value transmission. In Northern Nigerian Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools, Sulaiman and Abdullahi (2019) confirm that Arabic literary texts serve as primary vehicles for transmitting the Islamic virtues of ṣidq (honesty), ṣabr (patience), ʿadl (justice), and raḥma (compassion) to young learners, drawing on the Qur'anic and Hadith

tradition documented by Abubakar and Yusuf (2018) and the classical Islamic moral philosophy elaborated by Al-Ghazali (1997).

2.2 Patriotism and Arabic Literature in the Nigerian Context

Islamic teachings support patriotism through the concept of ḥubb al-waṭan (love of one's homeland), which encourages Muslims to work for the peace, progress, and welfare of their communities and nations. In the Nigerian context, Aremu (2019) and Nwosu (2016) both identify primary and pre-secondary education as the critical stage for patriotic formation, arguing that civic values cultivated in these years become the foundation of adult national identity. However, as Oladipo (2018) documents, the Arabic literature currently available in Northern Nigerian schools is predominantly of non-Nigerian origin and does not systematically incorporate Nigerian civic content, creating a structural gap between the literature's moral formation capacity and its patriotic education potential.

2.3 Pedagogical Methods for Value Formation Through Literature

Bello and Garba (2020) identify storytelling, recitation, dramatisation, and guided discussion as the principal pedagogical methods employed in Northern Nigerian Qur'anic schools for transmitting moral values through literature. El-Naggar (2015) provides evidence that active engagement methods - particularly dramatisation and guided discussion - produce stronger moral internalisation than the passive reception methods of recitation and narration alone. Chukwuma (2017) demonstrates that the gap between moral recognition and behavioural change is typically bridged through deliberate follow-up discussion and reflection activities. The language barrier between classical Arabic and pupils' Hausa comprehension adds a structural layer to the pedagogical challenge unique to the Northern Nigerian context, requiring teachers to serve simultaneously as linguistic mediators and moral educators.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design, Sites, and Participants

A mixed-methods design integrating content analysis, descriptive survey, and qualitative interview methods was adopted. The study was conducted across 15 schools in three LGAs of Jigawa State: Ringim LGA (Jigawa Northwest Senatorial District), Jahun LGA (Jigawa Central Senatorial District), and Hadejia LGA (Jigawa Northeast Senatorial District). These three LGAs were purposively selected to represent the full geographic, educational, and cultural diversity of the state, each hosting significant concentrations of all three school types: Qur'anic (tsangaya) schools, Islamiyya schools, and primary schools with Arabic instruction. A total of 135 participants were engaged: 45 teachers (18 from Qur'anic schools, 15 from Islamiyya schools, 12 from primary schools) and 90 pupils (55 from Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools, 35 from primary schools). Twenty interview participants (15 teachers and 5 school heads) provided qualitative depth. Figure 1 presents the participant distribution.

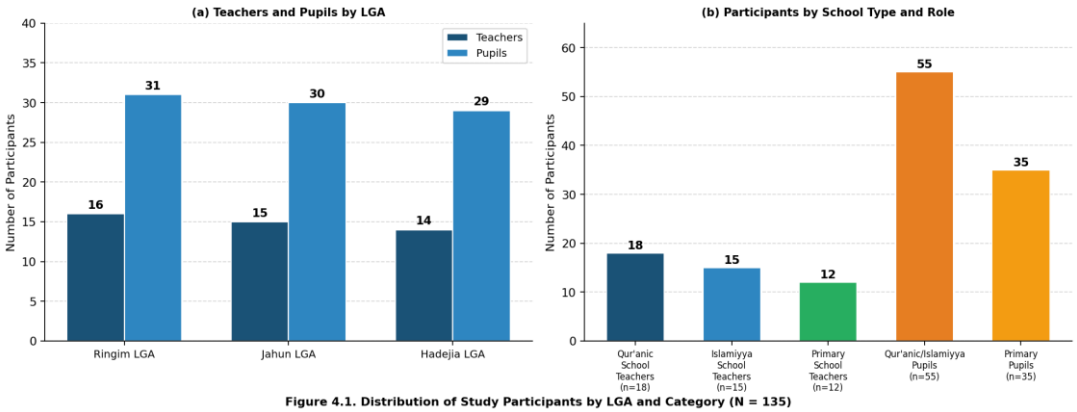


Figure 1. Distribution of study participants by LGA and category (N = 135).

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were employed. First, a structured Content Analysis Checklist was applied to 18 purposively selected Arabic children's literature texts in active use at the study schools, coding all identifiable ethical and patriotic theme instances across seven predefined categories using independent dual-rater coding (inter-rater kappa = 0.85). Second, a structured questionnaire administered to all 45 teachers covered seven Likert-scale perception items (scale 1 to 5) and six pedagogical method frequency items. A separate shorter questionnaire was administered to the 90 pupils on theme recognition and perceived moral and patriotic impact. Third, a semi-structured interview guide was used with 20 participants (sessions averaged 45 minutes, conducted in Hausa, audio-recorded and transcribed). Content validity was established through expert panel review (five specialists from BUK and JSCELS), and Cronbach's alpha for the teacher questionnaire was 0.82. Data were analysed using SPSS Version 27 for descriptive statistics, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for interview data, and frequency tabulation for content analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Ethical and Patriotic Themes in the Corpus (RQ1)

Content analysis of the 18 texts yielded 120 identifiable theme instances across seven categories. Figure 2 and Table 1 present the findings.

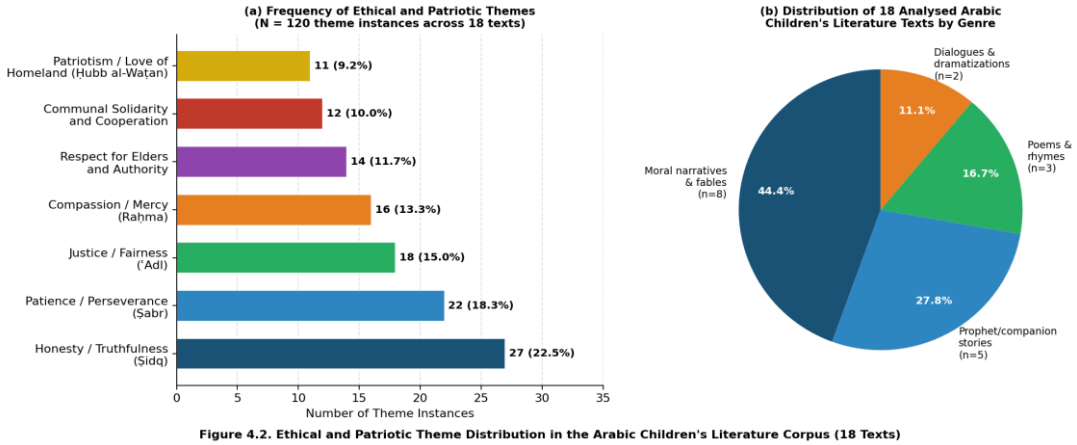


Figure 2. Ethical and patriotic theme distribution in the Arabic children's literature corpus (18 texts, 120 theme instances).

Table 1 Distribution of Ethical and Patriotic Themes in the Arabic Children's Literature Corpus

Theme	Arabic Concept	n	%	Genre with Most Instances	Rank
Honesty / Truthfulness	Ṣidq (صدق)	27	22.5	Moral narratives (14)	1st
Patience / Perseverance	Ṣabr (صبر)	22	18.3	Prophet/companion stories (10)	2nd
Justice / Fairness	ʿAdl (عدل)	18	15.0	Prophet/companion stories (8)	3rd
Compassion / Mercy	Raḥma (رحمة)	16	13.3	Moral narratives (9)	4th
Respect for Elders/Authority	Iḥtirām al-Kibār (احترام الكبار)	14	11.7	Moral narratives (7)	5th
Communal Solidarity	Taʿāwun (تعاون)	12	10.0	Moral narratives (6)	6th
Patriotism / Love of Homeland	Ḥubb al-Waṭan (حب الوطن)	11	9.2	Dialogues/dramatisations (5)	7th
Total		120	100.0		

Note. Theme instances coded by two independent raters using the structured Content Analysis Checklist (inter-rater kappa = 0.85). Theme instances are discrete, identifiable occurrences of each theme prominent enough to constitute a teachable moral or civic lesson. Multiple instances may occur within a single text.

The corpus is dominated by Islamic ethical themes, with the top four categories (ṣidq, ṣabr, ʿadl, raḥma) accounting for 69.1% of all identified instances. Patriotism and ḥubb al-waṭan ranks last at 9.2%, and is disproportionately concentrated in the dialogue and dramatisation genre (5 of 11 instances, 45.5%), which are used primarily in Islamiyya and primary schools rather than in Qur'anic schools where the majority of pupils in the study are enrolled.

4.2 Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Use (RQ2 and RQ3)

Figure 3 and Table 2 present the teacher questionnaire findings.

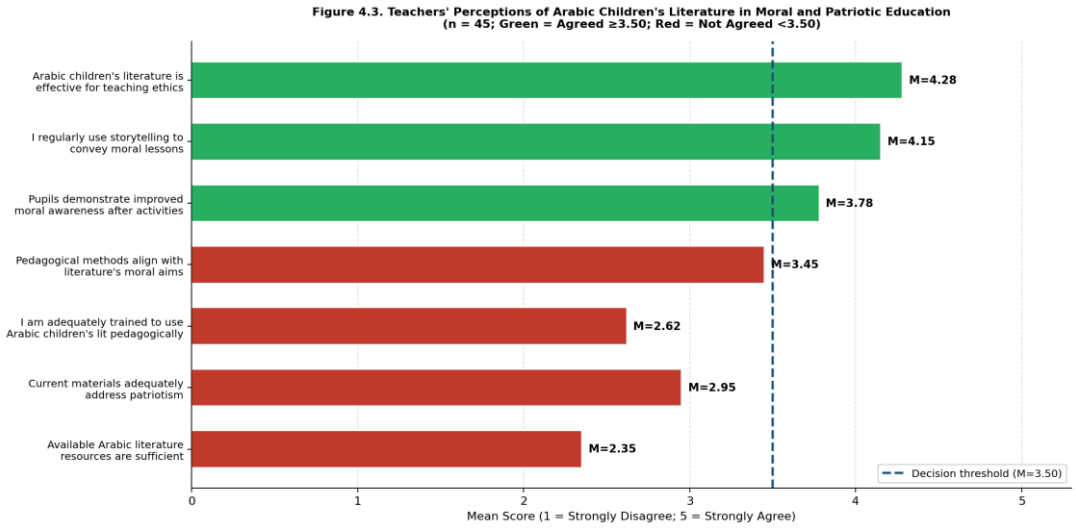


Figure 3. Teachers' perceptions of Arabic children's literature in moral and patriotic education (n=45; green M≥3.50, agreed; red M<3.50, not agreed).

Table 2 Teachers' Perceptions of Arabic Children's Literature in Moral and Patriotic Education (n = 45)

Statement	SA n(%)	A n(%)	U n(%)	D/SD n(%)	M (SD)
Arabic children's literature is effective for teaching ethics	24(53)	16(36)	3(7)	2(4)	4.28(0.88)
I regularly use storytelling to convey moral lessons	20(44)	17(38)	5(11)	3(7)	4.15(0.93)
Pupils show improved moral awareness after literature activities	14(31)	17(38)	8(18)	6(13)	3.78(0.97)
Pedagogical methods align with literature's moral aims	10(22)	14(31)	11(24)	10(22)	3.45(1.08)
Current materials adequately address patriotism	4(9)	8(18)	10(22)	23(51)	2.95(1.03)
I am adequately trained for literature-based pedagogy	3(7)	5(11)	9(20)	28(62)	2.62(0.98)
Available Arabic literature resources are sufficient	2(4)	4(9)	7(16)	32(71)	2.35(0.88)

Note. SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D/SD=Disagree and Strongly Disagree combined. Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. Decision criterion: M≥3.50=Agreed.

Three items exceed the agreement threshold: effectiveness for ethics (M=4.28), storytelling use (M=4.15), and pupil moral awareness improvement (M=3.78). Four items fall below threshold: methodological alignment (M=3.45), patriotism adequacy (M=2.95), teacher training (M=2.62), and resource sufficiency (M=2.35). A teacher from Hadejia's primary school observed:

> *The books we have are mostly from Arab countries or from Islamic publishers in Kano. They talk about honesty, patience, respect - all very important. But Nigeria? Jigawa State? Love of our country? These things are barely mentioned. I sometimes add it myself in the way I explain the story, but it is not in the text. (Teacher T29, Hadejia LGA, interview, 2025)*

4.3 Pupil Recognition and Pedagogical Methods (RQ3 and RQ4)

Figure 4 presents the pedagogical methods used by teachers and the pupil recognition findings.

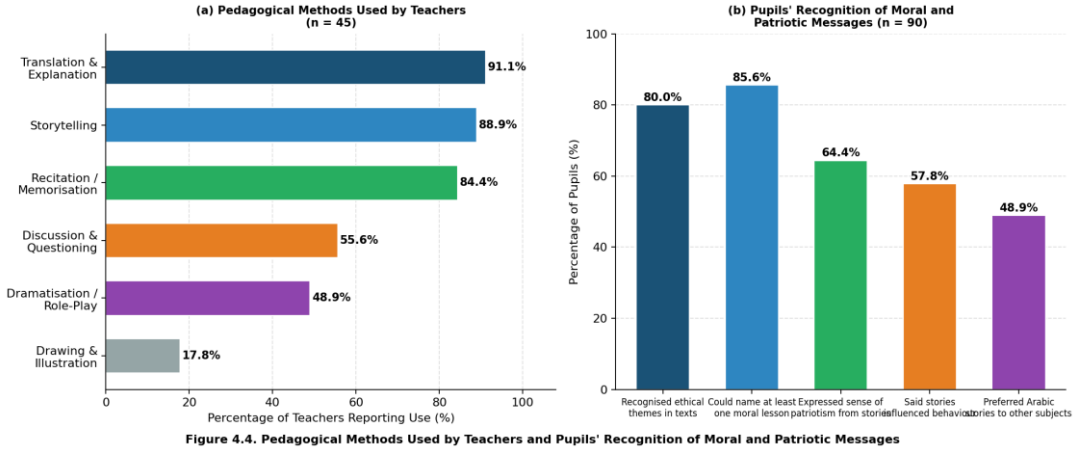


Figure 4. Pedagogical methods used by teachers (left, n=45) and pupils' recognition of moral and patriotic messages (right, n=90).

Translation and explanation (91.1%) and storytelling (88.9%) dominate the pedagogical repertoire, while discussion and questioning (55.6%) and dramatisation (48.9%) - the methods most effective for deep moral internalisation per El-Naggar (2015) - are used by fewer than half of teachers. On the pupil side, 80.0% recognised ethical themes in assigned texts and 85.6% could name at least one moral lesson, confirming cognitive engagement with the moral content. The 64.4% who expressed a sense of patriotism from the stories is consistent with the 9.2% share of ḥubb al-waṭan theme instances in the corpus: there is less patriotic content to recognise, so fewer pupils recognise it. Notably, 57.8% of pupils reported that stories influenced their behaviour- an important indicator that the literature's moral impact extends beyond intellectual recognition toward reported behavioural change. A teacher from Jahun described the deeper impact of active methods:

> *When the children act out the story of the honest merchant who refused to cheat even under pressure, and they speak his words and feel his courage, they understand honesty in a completely different way than when I just tell them about it. The lesson stays in them. But we rarely have time for this. (Teacher T21, Jahun LGA, interview, 2025)*

4.4 Challenges (RQ5)

Figure 5 and Table 3 present the severity ratings of the seven identified challenges.

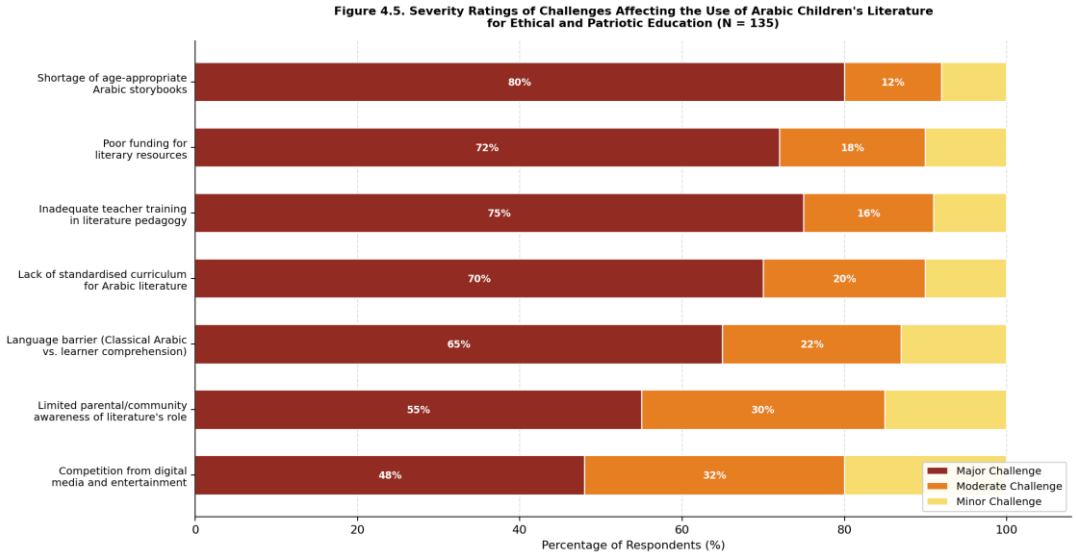


Figure 5. Severity ratings of challenges affecting the use of Arabic children's literature for ethical and patriotic education (N = 135).

Table 3 Severity Ratings of Challenges Affecting the Use of Arabic Children's Literature (N = 135)

Challenge	Major n(%)	Moderate n(%)	Minor n(%)	Not a Challenge n(%)	Rank
Shortage of age-appropriate Arabic storybooks	108(80)	16(12)	11(8)	0(0)	1st
Inadequate teacher training in literature pedagogy	101(75)	22(16)	12(9)	0(0)	2nd
Poor funding for literary resources	97(72)	24(18)	14(10)	0(0)	3rd
Lack of standardised curriculum for Arabic literature	95(70)	27(20)	13(10)	0(0)	4th
Language barrier (Classical Arabic vs. learner comprehension)	88(65)	30(22)	17(13)	0(0)	5th
Limited parental/community awareness	74(55)	40(30)	21(15)	0(0)	6th
Competition from digital media and entertainment	65(48)	43(32)	27(20)	0(0)	7th

Note. No respondent rated any challenge as 'Not a Challenge.' All seven constraints are universally recognised across school types, LGAs, and participant categories. A school head in Ringim described the resource situation: 'We have fourteen classrooms and four hundred pupils. We have two Arabic storybooks - old, falling apart, and neither written for Nigerian children.' (School Head SH02, Ringim, 2025)

5. Discussion

5.1 The Patriotism Gap: A Structural Problem

The most significant and policy-relevant finding of this study is the patriotism gap: ḥubb al-waṭan accounts for only 9.2% of identified theme instances in the Arabic children's literature corpus, and is disproportionately absent from the moral narratives and prophet stories that constitute the majority of texts in use. This gap is structural rather than incidental. It reflects the predominantly non-Nigerian origin of the texts in use: Arabic storybooks imported from Arab countries or produced by Nigerian Islamic publishers without specific attention to Nigerian civic contexts cannot be expected to address Nigerian national identity or Jigawa State cultural heritage. Oladipo's (2018) observation that the Arabic education materials used in Northern Nigerian schools rarely incorporate Nigerian civic content is confirmed and quantified by the present study. Teacher responses confirm awareness of this gap: 51% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that current materials adequately address patriotism (M = 2.95, below the 3.50 threshold), and the qualitative data show that individual teachers are already improvising patriotic content in their commentary - content that should be in the texts themselves.

This finding has a direct and actionable policy implication. The development of bilingual Arabic-Hausa children's literature texts that integrate ḥubb al-waṭan and civic values within the Islamic moral framework - set in Nigerian communities, featuring Nigerian Islamic exemplars, and addressing Nigerian civic challenges - is not a supplementary enhancement to the Arabic literature curriculum but a core requirement for the curriculum to fulfil the patriotic education objectives of the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). The concentration of existing patriotic content in dialogue and dramatisation genres (45.5% of all patriotism instances from 11.1% of texts) further suggests that these genre forms are particularly well-suited for civic content delivery and should be prioritised in new text development.

5.2 The Training-Method Gap and Its Educational Consequences

The dominance of translation/explanation (91.1%) and recitation (84.4%) over discussion and questioning (55.6%) and dramatisation (48.9%) as pedagogical methods represents a training gap with direct educational consequences. El-Naggar (2015) provides compelling evidence that dramatisation produces the deepest moral internalisation because it requires pupils to embody characters' moral choices - to speak their words, feel their motivations, and experience the narrative consequences of virtue and vice from the inside. The teacher from Jahun's account captures this insight precisely: the honest merchant's courage 'stays in them' in a way that narrated description alone cannot achieve. Yet dramatisation is the third least-used method in the study, and the teacher who describes it most eloquently says they 'rarely have time for it' - a comment that points simultaneously to workload, timetable, and training constraints. The 62% of teachers who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were adequately trained for literature-based pedagogy (M = 2.62) confirms that the training gap is the most immediately addressable structural constraint: unlike the text shortage, it can be addressed without large capital investment, through targeted in-service professional development.

5.3 Pupil Recognition and the Moral Impact of Arabic Literature

The 80.0% pupil recognition rate for ethical themes and the 57.8% reported behavioural influence rate confirm that Arabic children's literature is achieving meaningful moral impact

in the study schools, even under the constrained conditions documented throughout the study. These figures are consistent with the broader literature on narrative-based moral education: Nwosu (2016) documents recognition rates of 75–85% in studies of children's moral understanding of narrative content in Nigerian primary schools, and the present study's figures sit at the upper end of this range. The lower patriotism recognition rate (64.4%) is directly consistent with the lower patriotic theme prevalence in the corpus, confirming that recognition follows content: pupils recognise what is present in the texts, and what is most present are Islamic ethical virtues rather than civic and patriotic themes. This is not a failure of pedagogy but a direct consequence of curriculum content - the most important evidence in this study for the urgency of text development that integrates civic with moral content.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study makes four contributions to knowledge. First, it provides the first empirically grounded content analysis of Arabic children's literature texts in use in Jigawa State Qur'anic, Islamiyya and primary schools, establishing a documented baseline of ethical and patriotic theme distribution. Second, it quantifies the patriotism gap (9.2% of theme instances) as a structural feature of the corpus rather than a pedagogical failure, identifying text development as the primary policy lever. Third, it measures pupil recognition of moral and patriotic themes for the first time in a Northern Nigerian multi-LGA study, confirming both the literature's ethical effectiveness and its patriotic underperformance. Fourth, it documents the pervasiveness of the resource shortage (80% major challenge) and training gap (75% major) across all school types, LGAs, and participant categories.

Three recommendations are most urgent.

- First, the Jigawa State Government and Federal Ministry of Education should commission and fund the development of bilingual Arabic-Hausa children's literature texts integrating ḥubb al-waṭan and Nigerian civic themes within the Islamic moral framework, prioritising the dialogue and dramatisation genres in which civic content is currently most effectively presented.

- Second, a structured in-service teacher professional development programme focused on discussion-based and dramatisation-based literary pedagogy should be developed and delivered through SUBEB and the State Arabic Education Department, addressing the training gap that prevents teachers from fully exploiting the moral and civic potential of existing materials.

- Third, a dedicated Arabic children's literature procurement budget should be established at state level, ensuring every school has access to a minimum corpus of age-appropriate texts across the full range of ethical and patriotic themes. The gap between the educational potential of Arabic children's literature and its current realisation in Jigawa State schools is not primarily a function of cultural resistance or community values; it is a function of resource scarcity, curriculum absence, and training deficiency — all of which are amenable to institutional intervention.

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