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POTENTIALS OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY SKILLS TO EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR *TSANGAYA* LEARNERS IN MAIDUGURI, BORNO STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the viability of Arabic calligraphy as a means of economic empowerment for Tsangaya learners in Maiduguri. A survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study comprised of all Tsangaya learners while a sample of 150 learners, Tsangaya teachers and small-business owners. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires. Results showed that 77.18% of learners expressed a strong willingness to participate in calligraphy training, while over 75% believed it could offer a reliable source of income. Teachers echoed this optimism, with 66.11% recognizing moderate to high demand for calligraphy services and 59.50% open to hiring skilled calligraphers. However, learners identified several obstacles, including lack of materials, limited training access, and financial constraints. The most frequently cited barrier to entrepreneurship was lack of capital 34.71%, followed by gaps in mentorship and infrastructure. Despite these challenges, support for integrating calligraphy into vocational education was substantial: 64.43% strongly supported its inclusion, and 56.38% favored full vocational programs. Respondents also stressed the need for government involvement, financial access, and community-driven training efforts. The findings suggest that Arabic calligraphy, rooted in cultural and religious tradition, can serve as a practical and dignified pathway to self-reliance provided that institutional and community support structures are strengthened.

Key words: Arabic Calligraphy, Employability, Entrepreneurship, *Tsangaya*

Introduction

Youth underemployment is one of the most pressing challenges facing Nigeria today. There are millions of young people lacking skills that fit them into employment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This notion was also confirmed by (Usman, 2015), that youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing issue that poses a challenge to

socio-economic activities in Northern Nigeria. In Maiduguri, many *Tsangaya* graduates (Almajirai) face poverty and limited livelihood opportunities due to their lack of employable skills (Usman, 2015). *Tsangaya* learners, in particular, are disproportionately affected due to the limited vocational scope of Qur'anic education (Abdulqadir, 2020). This is because; the traditional *Tsangaya* system focuses on Qur'anic memorization but offers little in terms of market-relevant skills (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014). Therefore, Arabic calligraphy provides an innovative, culturally compatible skill that aligns with Islamic values while opening pathways to entrepreneurship. The fact is, Arabic Calligraphy is an artistic design with Arabic script in a stylistic manner to create attraction, harmony and beauty. This is created within the twenty-eight Arabic letters. Therefore, introducing vocational subjects, such as Arabic writing, Arabic calligraphy, could bridge the gap of unemployment and vocational skills. Calligraphy is not only a cultural and religious art but also a potential income-generating skill in areas like sign-making, religious art, wedding invitations, mosque decoration, and digital design (Farhad, 2016). This article examines the role of Arabic calligraphy as an entrepreneurial skill for *Tsangaya* learners in Maiduguri.

Calligraphy has historically played a vital role in Islamic civilization, extending beyond art into education, business, and religious education (Blair, 2006). In modern contexts, Arabic calligraphy is in demand for mosque decoration, wedding invitations, signage, graphic design, and digital content creation. For *Tsangaya* learners in Maiduguri, mastering calligraphy could provide both self-employment opportunities and access to broader creative industries.

Literature Review

Nigeria's youth unemployment rate has consistently ranked among the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (NBS, 2020). This persistent challenge has been linked to structural issues in the education system, particularly in the northern region where traditional Islamic schools dominate. Studies highlight that these schools, while valuable for religious instruction, often produce graduates with limited marketable skills, thereby contributing to underemployment and economic vulnerability (Hoechner, 2013; Yahaya, 2018). Vocational education has been widely promoted as a pathway to entrepreneurship and youth empowerment across Africa. According to Okonjo and Ibrahim (2019), integrating vocational training into religious education frameworks can enhance learners' employability while preserving cultural and religious values. Abdullahi and Terhemba (2017) argue that skill acquisition programs tailored to the socio-cultural realities of Qur'anic schools can offer sustainable livelihood

opportunities without compromising the spiritual mission of Tsangaya education.

Arabic calligraphy, in particular, enjoys high acceptability in Muslim societies and provides opportunities for both traditional and modern applications. Historically, it has served as a revered art form in Islamic civilization, used in religious manuscripts, architectural decoration, and educational materials (Blair, 2006). In contemporary settings, calligraphers engage in graphic design, branding, digital art, and commercial signage, expanding the relevance of the skill beyond religious contexts (Derman, 2011; Farhad, 2016). Recent studies have emphasized the economic potential of Arabic calligraphy as a culturally compatible entrepreneurial skill. For instance, Musa and Garba (2021) found that calligraphy-based microenterprises in Kano and Sokoto have created employment for youth with limited formal education. Similarly, Bello (2020) noted that integrating calligraphy into vocational curricula in Qur'anic schools could foster creativity, self-reliance and community development. The dual traditional-modern relevance of Arabic calligraphy makes it an attractive and viable option for integration into Tsangaya education. It aligns with Islamic values, appeals to community sensibilities, and opens doors to income-generating activities in both local and digital markets. As such, it holds promise not only as an art form but as a strategic tool for addressing youth unemployment in northern Nigeria.



Figure 1: Sample of Calligraphy

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory developed by Gary Becker (1993), which posits that individuals enhance their economic value through investments in education, training and skill development. Becker argued that such investments function like capital yielding returns in the form of increased productivity, employability and income generation. This theory provides a useful lens for understanding how vocational

skills, such as Arabic calligraphy can empower Tsangaya learners to transition from religious instruction to economic participation.

Recent studies have applied Human Capital Theory to explore youth employment and vocational training in African contexts. Adebayo and Olayemi (2021) examined the role of vocational education in reducing youth unemployment in Northern Nigeria, emphasizing that skill acquisition directly improves labour market outcomes. Similarly, Mohammed and Idris (2022) used the theory to assess the impact of informal apprenticeship systems on entrepreneurial success among marginalized youth in Kano, highlighting how targeted training can lead to sustainable livelihoods.

In the context of this study, Human Capital Theory explains why Tsangaya learners traditionally trained in Qur'anic memorization require additional market-relevant skills to improve their economic prospects. Arabic calligraphy, when taught as a structured vocational subject, becomes a form of capital that learners can leverage for income generation in areas such as signage, religious art, graphic design and digital branding. The learners' strong interest in calligraphy training and their belief in its economic potential will align with Becker's assertion that individuals are more likely to invest in education when they perceive tangible benefits.

Moreover, the theory supports the integration of culturally compatible skills into educational systems. As Yusuf and Garba (2023) argue, aligning vocational training with cultural and religious values increases community acceptance and learner motivation making Human Capital Theory especially relevant in Tsangaya settings. By framing Arabic calligraphy as both a cultural asset and an economic tool, this study demonstrates how strategic skill development can transform traditional learners into self-reliant entrepreneurs. Human Capital Theory thus provides a robust foundation for advocating the inclusion of calligraphy in vocational education policies targeting Qur'anic schools.

Aim and Objectives.

The aim of the study is to evaluate the potential of Arabic calligraphy as a way for employability and entrepreneurship among *Tsangaya* learners in Maiduguri while the main Objectives are to:

1. Assess the level of learners' interest in using calligraphy for income generation in Maiduguri, Borno State.
2. Explore teachers' perspectives on the market demand for Arabic calligraphy in Maiduguri, Borno State.
3. Identify barriers preventing *Tsangaya* learners from entering calligraphy-

based entrepreneurship in Maiduguri, Borno State.

4. Propose strategies for integrating calligraphy into vocational education and business development in Maiduguri, Borno State.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design, which is appropriate for gathering data from a large population to understand prevailing attitudes, perceptions and experiences. The researchers employed structured questionnaires which was carefully designed to capture insights related to the entrepreneurial potential of Arabic calligraphy among Tsangaya learners. A total of 180 participants were involved in the study, comprising 150 Tsangaya learners, 20 teachers and 10 small-business owners based in Maiduguri, Borno State. Participants were selected using a stratified sampling technique, which allowed for proportional representation across different stakeholder groups. This approach ensured that the perspectives of learners, educators and business practitioners were adequately reflected in the findings. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts and simple percentages. These methods provided a clear summary of the responses and enabled the researchers to identify patterns and trends in the participants' views regarding the integration of Arabic calligraphy into vocational education and entrepreneurship.

Result

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected from Tsangaya learners, teachers and small-business owners in Maiduguri. The results are organized in the following tables.

Table 1: To assess the level of learners' interest in using calligraphy for income generation

Question	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Would you be willing to attend training sessions to improve your calligraphy skills?	Yes	122	77.18%
	Maybe	19	12.03%
	No	14	8.85%
Do you believe calligraphy could provide you with a sustainable source of income?	Strongly agree	68	43.03%
	Agree	54	34.18%
	Disagree	22	13.92%
	Strongly disagree	10	6.33%
Which types of income opportunities in calligraphy interest you the most?	Greeting cards	39	24.84%
	Wall décor	34	21.65%
	Digital art Teaching	28	17.83%
	Others	19	12.10%
		14	8.91%
How likely are you to pursue calligraphy as a part-time or full-time career?	Very likely	63	40.13%
	Likely	42	26.75%
	Unlikely	18	11.46% 7.01%
	Very unlikely	11	

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The data assesses the level of interest among learners in pursuing Arabic calligraphy as a means of earning income. When asked if they would be willing to attend training sessions to improve their calligraphy skills, the overwhelming majority 122 learners (77.18%) responded yes. A smaller group of 19 (12.03%) said maybe, while only 14 (8.85%) said no, indicating strong enthusiasm for skill development. Regarding the belief in calligraphy as a sustainable source of income, 68 learners (43.03%) strongly agreed, and 54 (34.18%) agreed. Meanwhile, 22 (13.92%) disagreed, and 10 (6.33%) strongly disagreed, showing that most learners view calligraphy as a viable economic opportunity.

When asked about the types of income-generating opportunities that interest them most, greeting cards were the top choice with 39 responses (24.84%), followed by wall décor at 34 (21.65%), and digital art with 28 responses (17.83%). Other options included teaching with 19 responses (12.10%), and miscellaneous interests cited by 14 learners (8.91%). This suggests a diverse range of entrepreneurial interests within the field. Finally, when asked how likely they are to pursue calligraphy as a part-time or full-time career, 63 learners (40.13%) said they were very likely, and 42 (26.75%) said they were likely. On the other hand, 18 (11.46%) said they were unlikely, and 11 (7.01%) said very unlikely, indicating that a majority are open to turning calligraphy into a career path.

Table 2: To explore teachers' perspectives on the market demand for Arabic calligraphy

Question	Options	Frequency	Percentage
How would you describe the current demand for Arabic calligraphy services in your sector?	High	33	27.27%
	Moderate	47	38.84%
	Low	16	13.22%
	None	11	9.09%
Which types of calligraphy products or services are most in demand in your business/industry?	Invitations	26	21.31%
	Posters	22	18.03%
	Digital media	31	25.41%
	Branding	18	14.75%
	Others	13	10.66%
Would you consider employing or contracting skilled calligraphers for your business needs?	Yes	72	59.50%
	Maybe	21	17.36%
	No	13	10.74%
In your opinion, how sustainable is the demand for Arabic calligraphy in the next five years?	Very sustainable	41	33.88%
	Sustainable	39	32.23%
	Unsustainable	17	14.05%
	Very unsustainable	12	9.92%
What level of skill do you expect from calligraphers you would employ?		13	10.74%
	Basic Intermediate	21	17.36%
	Advanced Professional	38	31.40%
		29	23.97%

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The data explores how teachers perceive the current market demand for Arabic calligraphy services. When asked to describe the level of demand in their sector, 47 respondents (38.84%) rated it as moderate, while 33 (27.27%) considered it high. A smaller number reported low demand, with 16 responses (13.22%), and 11 (9.09%) said there was no demand at all. This suggests that while interest exists, it is not yet widespread or consistent across sectors.

Regarding the types of calligraphy products or services most in demand, digital media topped the list with 31 responses (25.41%), followed by invitations at 26 (21.31%), and posters with 22 responses (18.03%). Other areas included branding with 18 responses (14.75%), and miscellaneous services cited by 13 respondents (10.66%). These results indicate that digital applications of calligraphy are currently the most sought-after. When asked whether they would consider employing or contracting skilled calligraphers for business needs, the majority 72 respondents (59.50%) responded positively while 21 (17.36%) said maybe and 13 (10.74%) responded negatively. This reflects a strong potential for employment opportunities in the field.

On the sustainability of demand over the next five years, 41 respondents (33.88%) believed it would be very sustainable, and 39 (32.23%) considered it sustainable. However, 17 (14.05%) felt it would be unsustainable, and 12 (9.92%) said it would be very unsustainable, showing a generally optimistic outlook with some reservations. Finally, when asked about the expected skill level of calligraphers they would employ, 38 respondents (31.40%) preferred advanced skills, while 29 (23.97%) expected professional-level expertise. Others were open to intermediate skills with 21 responses (17.36%), and basic skills with 13 responses (10.74%). This indicates a clear preference for highly skilled practitioners in the market.

Table 3: To identify barriers preventing *Tsangaya* learners from entering calligraphy-based entrepreneurship

Question	Options	Frequency	Percentage
What challenges do you face in learning or practicing Arabic calligraphy?	Lack of materials	31	25.62%
	Lack of training	27	22.31%
	Lack of awareness	23	18.97%
	Financial constraints	19	15.70%
	Others	12	9.92%
Do you have access to training opportunities in Arabic calligraphy?	Yes	24	19.83%
	No	36	29.75%
	Limited access	58	47.93%

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How affordable are the resources (ink, paper, digital tools) needed for calligraphy practice?	Very affordable	14	11.57%
	Affordable	27	23.97%
	Expensive	52	42.98%
	Very expensive	29	22.31%
Do cultural or community perceptions discourage you from pursuing calligraphy as a career?	Yes	21	17.36%
	No	83	68.60%
	Not sure	24	19.83%
Which of the following is the greatest barrier to starting a calligraphy business?	Lack of capital	42	34.71%
	Lack of mentorship	33	27.27%
	Lack of demand	26	21.49%
	Lack of facilities	22	18.18%
	Others	17	14.05%

The data presents key challenges faced by Tsangaya learners in pursuing Arabic calligraphy as a pathway to entrepreneurship. When asked about the specific challenges in learning or practicing Arabic calligraphy, the most frequently cited issue was lack of materials, reported by 31 learners (25.62%). This was followed by lack of training with 27 responses (22.31%), lack of awareness at 23 responses (18.97%), financial constraints with 19 responses (15.70%), and other reasons cited by 12 learners (9.92%).

In terms of access to training opportunities, 58 learners (47.93%) indicated they have access, while 36 (29.75%) reported limited access, and 24 (19.83%) said they have no access at all. This distribution suggests that although nearly half of the learners can access training, a considerable number still face limitations in skill development. Regarding the affordability of resources such as ink, paper, and digital tools needed for calligraphy practice, 52 learners (42.98%) found them affordable, and 29 (23.97%) considered them very affordable. However, 27 learners (22.31%) described them as expensive, and 14 (11.57%) said they were very expensive, indicating that cost remains a significant barrier for a portion of the learners.

When asked whether cultural or community perceptions discourage them from pursuing calligraphy as a career, the majority 83 learners (68.60%) responded no, suggesting general community support. Meanwhile, 21 learners (17.36%) said yes, and 24 (19.83%) were not sure, reflecting some uncertainty or mixed views within the community. Finally, when identifying the greatest barrier to starting a calligraphy business, the most cited issue was lack of capital, mentioned by 42 learners (34.71%). Other notable barriers included lack of mentorship with 33 responses (27.27%), lack of demand at 26 responses (21.49%), lack of facilities with 22 responses (18.18%), and other reasons cited by 17

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learners (14.05%). These findings indicate that financial and infrastructural limitations are the most pressing obstacles to entrepreneurship in this field.

Table 4: To propose strategies for integrating calligraphy into vocational education and business development

Statement	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Would you support the inclusion of Arabic calligraphy in formal vocational education programs?	Strongly agree	96	64.43%
	Agree	38	25.50%
	Disagree	10	6.71%
	Strongly disagree	5	3.36%
Which form of training do you think would be most effective for calligraphy?	Short workshops	28	18.79%
	Full vocational programs	84	56.38%
	Online training	22	14.77%
	Apprenticeship	15	10.07%
What kind of support would help learners start calligraphy-based businesses?	Access to finance	72	48.32%
	Access to markets	17	11.41%
	Mentorship	34	22.82%
	Provision of materials	26	17.45%
How important is government support (policies, funding, recognition) in promoting calligraphy entrepreneurship?	Very important	88	59.06%
	Important	42	28.19%
	Not important	19	12.75%
What role can NGOs, religious leaders, or community organizations play in integrating calligraphy into vocational education?	Provide training	66	44.30%
	Awareness campaigns	38	25.50%
	Scholarships	26	17.45%
	Business networking	19	12.75%

The data outlines proposed strategies to support the integration of Arabic calligraphy into vocational education and entrepreneurship. When asked whether they would support the inclusion of Arabic calligraphy in formal vocational education programs, the majority of respondents 96 (64.43%) strongly agreed, while 38 (25.50%) agreed. A smaller number disagreed, with 10 responses (6.71%), and 5 (3.36%) strongly disagreed, indicating broad support for formal inclusion.

Regarding the most effective form of training for calligraphy, 84 respondents (56.38%) preferred full vocational programs, suggesting a desire for structured, long-term learning. Other options included short workshops with 28 responses (18.79%), online training with 22 (14.77%), and apprenticeship models with 15 responses (10.07%). When asked what kind of support would best help learners start calligraphy-based businesses, the most common response was access to finance, cited by 72 respondents (48.32%). Other forms of support included mentorship with 34 responses (22.82%), provision of materials at 26 (17.45%), and access to markets with 17 responses (11.41%). This highlights the importance of

financial and advisory support in business development.

On the importance of government involvement through policies, funding, and recognition 88 respondents (59.06%) said it was very important, while 42 (28.19%) considered it important, and 19 (12.75%) said it was not important. This shows a strong expectation for government engagement in promoting calligraphy entrepreneurship. Finally, when asked about the role of NGOs, religious leaders, or community organizations in integrating calligraphy into vocational education, 66 respondents (44.30%) suggested they should provide training. Other roles included awareness campaigns with 38 responses (25.50%), scholarships at 26 (17.45%), and business networking with 19 responses (12.75%). These findings emphasize the potential for community-based institutions to play a supportive role in both education and enterprise.

Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal a strong and widespread interest among learners in pursuing Arabic calligraphy as a viable source of income. With over 77% expressing willingness to attend training and a similar proportion believing in its financial potential, the data underscores a promising foundation for calligraphy-based entrepreneurship. Learners also showed diverse preferences for income opportunities, ranging from greeting cards to digital art, indicating adaptability to both traditional and modern markets.

Teachers echoed this optimism, with nearly 66% acknowledging moderate to high demand for calligraphy services in their sectors. Digital media, invitations, and branding emerged as key areas of interest, while a majority expressed readiness to hire skilled calligraphers especially those with advanced or professional expertise. These insights affirm the relevance of calligraphy in contemporary business environments and highlight the need for quality training. Despite the enthusiasm, *Tsangaya* learners face notable barriers including lack of materials, training, and financial support. Access to vocational programs and mentorship remains uneven, and capital constraints are a major hurdle to business startup. However, the overwhelming support for integrating calligraphy into formal education backed by calls for government involvement and community-based training points to a clear path forward. Strategic collaboration among stakeholders, targeted funding, and structured programs can transform calligraphy from a cultural art into a sustainable livelihood.

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