

## Review of Almajiri Education System in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This paper is a review of almajiri educational system in Nigeria. The paper explained the concept of almajiri in relation to Nigerian educational system, histological background of the almajiri educational system in Nigeria, Nigerian policy on integration of almajiri educational system goals of integrating almajiri education system and how the policy on the almajiri manifested in the perception of the children and their parents and the challenges of implementing almajiri educational system in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Almajiri, Education System, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

The term Almajiri is a Hausa word for pupil or student who migrates from home in search of Islamic knowledge. He migrates from his village to another town or city in search of Islamic knowledge. Almajiri is coined out of the Arabic word “**ALMUHAJIROUN**” Meaning **EMIGRANT OR TRAVELLER**. Almajiri is a student of traditional Qur’anic school. People living in a neighborhood or village gather together all the school age male children and hand them over to a mallam (teacher/Instructor) who would prepare them for learning the basics of Qur’anic education (Ocholi, 2018). The mallam takes his pupil in a group to far away cities or towns and camp them at a stable location and prepares them for their living. The idea of taking the Almajiri away from home to distance place or time is to keep them off from any parental interference or sympathy so that they may imbibe the needed discipline and austere living. (Ocholi, 2018).

According to Nwanze (2019), the Almajiri students are at liberty to acquire skill in between their Islamic lessons, and so they are involved in trades such as farming, fishing, and masonry, among others.

Abudulkadir (2020), opined that Almajiri comes different from socio-economic backgrounds, some rich, some poor and some not so poor. It does not matter what one’s family background is he or she must experience poverty life style (i.e. begging for food), which is part of the training so that one appreciates how poor people live. The Almajirai are normally drawn from rural areas to the urban cities, and towns for their education and the mallams receives no salaries from their parents and guardians

The integration policy envisions that basic education, which is 6-9 years of formal secular education, in addition to learning the Qur’an, in the new modern schools. That means learning such subjects as English, Mathematics, Primary Science, social studies and so on. The new policy on Almajiri education which is predicated on the idea that every child needs basic education.

The Almajiri in the traditional Qur’anic schools (Tsangaya) are denied the social and psychological rights as stipulated by the united Nations Declaration on the rights of every child to a standard of living, free and compulsory education, preparation of the children for responsible life but unfortunately the parents of Almajiri no longer pay adequate attention to those needs and care for their children. They forgot that children’s needs are not just priority but imperative due to the importance of children to the family and the society at large.

This study is carried out to pinpoint the awful plight of the Almajiri who often roam around the street begging for food and money. Looking at the needs and aspirations of Almajiri will improve the understanding of them in order to make necessary recommendations for repositioning it. The federal through their policy on Almajiri education has come with policies to improve the Almajiri system of education. Have these policies manifested in the system of Almajiri and in the life of the pupils? The school age Almajiri are seen roaming the streets from one house to the order begging for alms and searching for petty jobs in order to feed, clothe and take care of their health instead of going to school. Every child including the Almajiri aspires to stay alive, stay health, enjoy better living, achieve and contribute positively to the development of his society and they inspire to grow up to adulthood and old age. Almajirai aspire to take the positions of their mallams, become interpreters of Quran and hadith, imams or Islamic leaders Qadis (judge) and spiritual leaders. For these children’s aspirations to be great in future and be fulfilled, they need to be in formal school like other children, have a decent school uniform, have nice school bag, good sandals/shoes, and eat good meal than carrying bowl and moving around begging for alms. The plight of these

children worth the stress of examining how the Nigeria policy on Almajiri has manifested in the life of the Almajiri toward identifying their aspirations and proposing a means of repositioning them in order to improve their condition. What are the aspirations of the Almajiri in Nigeria and is there any difference between the aspiration of the traditional Qur'anic school (Tsangaya) and that of the islamiyya Almajiri in Nigeria based on the policy on Almajiri education system?

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ALMAJIRI EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA.**

Almajiri as earlier stated is a Hausa word meaning immigrant children in search of knowledge on Quranic education. The Quranic School is the primary level of traditional Islamic education. It is an institution which its origin traced to the prophetic period of Islamic education. According to Mohammed I. S. (2010), historians have traced the Almajiri system of education to the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, largely promoted by leading lights of Islam who were determined to spread Islamic knowledge and learning long before the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate of British Nigeria. He maintained that the word Almajiri was coiled from Arabic word AL-MUHAJIRI which came out of Prophet Mohammed migration from Mecca to Median, that from the Islamic perspective the word was first used by the Prophet to indicate those of his companions (Muhajirun) who migrated with him for the sake of Islam.

The Muhajirin later came to refer to those knowledge seekers who move from one place to another in search of knowledge like the Quranic school teacher and his pupils. In a Hadith (sayings) the prophet is quoted to have said “the search of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”. This and many other similar Hadith propelled Muslims to go and search for knowledge. In Nigeria the Almajiri system started in the 11<sup>th</sup> as result of the involvement of Brono rulers in Quranic literacy. Seven hundred (700) years later, the Sokoto Caliphate was founded principally through an Islamic revolution based on the teachings of the holy Quran. These two empires run similar Quranic learning system which over time came to be known as the Almajiri system. The Danfodio revolution brought with it some modifications. The establishment of an inspectorate of Quranic literacy, the inspectors reported directly to the Emirs of the province concerning all matters relating to school. Mariam (2011) stated that the colonialist specifically came up with policies aimed at destroying the traditional Quranic schools and replacing them with the western style of school. It was after independence that serious efforts were made to improve the system of Quranic schools. Islamic scholars and organization like Jama'aiul Nasirul Islam struggled to establish and maintain the schools. From here the quest to keep the Quranic knowledge lead to the urge to provide skills to the citizen increased and educational service is important tool for the Almajiri’.

### **REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ALMAJIRI EDUCATION**

Olaranran S. O. (2018) worked on Almajiri Education: policy and practice to meet the learning needs of the Nomadic population in Nigeria, he maintained that Almajiri school system is a way of providing education opportunity to the disadvantaged group in Nigeria known as Almajiri. He postulated that pastoralist of northern Nigeria constitute a major socio-economic group that patronize Almajiri schools.

Shimawua D. (2020) aptly put it that Almajirai are just like other children from families brought to learn the Qur'an under the watchful eyes of Mallams (Islamic teachers), some dropout along the way and become a problem to the society. Most pupils withdraw due to hardship that is encountered during the training. Shimawua poised that they have not only become a source of concern to Islam and their parents but the society at large because they

are seen on the street begging for alms and food, at the end of the day they go back to their camps to sleep. They came across various kinds of dangerous juvenile and adolescent peer. The Almajiri children are living under a horrific life condition, few of them do not know their homes or who their parents are as they left early in life (Shimawua D, 2020).

National Commissions for Nomadic Education (NCNE) (2022) states that Almajiri owns more than 90% of Nigerian's estimated 15.3 million heads of cattle and despite the Almajiri immense contribution to the Nigeria economy, these group are highly disadvantaged in terms of access to education and to meet educational needs of this group, the Nigeria Government established the National Commission for Nomadic, which has helped to increase the rate of children receiving formal education in addition to their Islamic teachings.

Tiwo (2013) Described the life of Almajiri in the following way; they are abounding in all the cities, towns and villages in the northern part of Nigeria, they sleep in the out-house or veranda of dilapidated houses which also serve as their schools or classes in the day time. Every day they are seen carrying plastic bowls, dressed in tattered cloths and mostly without footwear begging. He concluded they are pupil of Islamic knowledge known and referred to as Almajiri. (Tiwo, 2013)

Ojuekaiye (2014) identified Almajiri as migrant ethnic population that have common traits, goals and occupation, he cited example of them as nomadic fulunans who move about different communities and regions to search for greener pasture for their cattle, they are majorly traders, herders, hunters, fishermen, because they are characterized by the absence of fixed domicile and abode (Ojuekaiye 2014).

Ogundele, Oke and Hauwa (2016) noted Almajiri or Nomadic as member of a Community that migrated with their cattle or other form of trade from one place to another. He opined that some sections of Asia, parts of Africa and Australia are people with Nomadic. In Nigeria for instance, they are pastoralist and predominately found in Northern part of the country because of Sites sustainability for agriculture and animal rearing. He maintained that they do not have access to adequate food, clean water, good health care, cloths or shelter, they do not possess basic literacy skills and their children the Almajiria do not have access to basic education (Ogundele, Oke and Hauwa, 2016).

Shargari, Bello and Umar (2013) harangued that challenges associated with reaching the Almajiri with formal education as millions of them remain outside the education system despite their enormous contribution of their parents to the socio-economic development of the society especially in terms of agriculture and food production, the need for alternative form of education for the nomadic populace in Nigeria prompted the introduction of Almajiri schools under the National Commission for Nomadic education in the Country.

Amajiranci is a word that connotes a distinct system of Islamic education that evolved in the West Africa sub-region from traditional Qur'anic school (TQS) in the Northern Nigeria. The traditional Qur'anic school system entails the enrolment of a prospective student of tender age by his parents or guardians under a reputed Mallam, mostly in a distance place for the purpose of acquiring Qur'anic Knowledge (Mohammed, 2001). Mohammed opined that the practice centuries back was respected and regarded as necessary and an integral part of the growth of the community as it produced the future educators, administrators and teachers of the largely unlearned population.

Muhinat (2008) condemned the practice of child street begging embedded in the Almajiri system of education and call for reform of the system in order to reposition the Almajiri status in the society. He maintained that the Almajirai themselves dislike begging, they prefer

not to beg if given a better source of livelihood. They want Government to take care of their feeding and other basic needs by integrating their school into basic education.

Okafor C.E (2018) raised concern that the awful plight of the Almajirai who are often found roaming around the street begging for food and money has been heighten in view of the fact that some of these Almajirai becomes easy tools in the hands of self-serving politicians who manipulate and use them as thugs. They also constitute hazards and public nuisance to the society

Yahaya (2010) Stated that Almajiri is problem to Nigerians, in his view the problem of the Almajiri and Quranic School started with the colonial invasion of the northern parts of Nigeria, which led to the relegation of Islamic education to the background. According to him, this led to the gradual eroding of the Islamic educational system. Curriculum contents, teaching methods, teachers' qualification, infrastructure and administration have been compromised, therefore the Quranic School has remained archaic. Consequently, the Almajirai is more of a social problem than a useful member of society. Almajirai are vulnerable to being used as political thugs by benefactors who take advantage of their lack of formal education. They are considered as great security risks as many of them have become miscreants who actively participate in ethnic, religious and political violence and terrorize Christian (Yahaya, 2010).

#### **NIGERIA POLICY ON INTEGRATION OF ALMAJIRI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

From the National policy on education and transforming agenda of Good luck Jonathan administration in the country, the federal Government Authority took special interest in integrating the Al-majiri system into the main stream educational system in the country. This was formally signed into law and presented to the National Economic of Council in July 2013. On the occasion the then Minister of State for Education Barr. Nyesom Wike reiterated that the authority had set up the National committee on Implementation of Al-majiri education programme to ensure that the pupil is provided with opportunities to access basic education. The programme according him would also involve acquisition of various skills to enable them participate more positively in the development of their immediate environment and the Nation at large. This development is an indication that the Federal Authority has not turned a blind eye to the menace of the *al-Majiri* system. (Shimawua, 2020)

Quadri (2020) also acknowledges government's intervention through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETfund) and Universal Basic Education Commission, which culminated in the provision of day and boarding facilities for the pupils and their teachers. In addition, an in-depth survey carried out, revealed that the Federal Government has intervened in ameliorating the plight of these children. Classroom blocks were constructed across the Northern parts of the country where the system is being practiced. The Federal Authority sometimes collaborates with the state authorities by providing infrastructures while the states take care of staffing and pupils' enrolment. Among the overwhelming states in this intervention are Niger, Jigawa, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi and Katsina. While commending the government's efforts in providing enabling environment and necessary facilities for the Almajiri pupils to be properly educated, Quadri reiterates that for this gesture to have meaningful impact on the lives of the pupils, it must be properly maintained and sustained by the authorities. In the same vein, he warns that parents must take the destiny of their children in the own hands by ensuring that they are immunized against deadly diseases such as polio to complement government's efforts in eradicating street begging. Having acknowledged the involvement of the authorities in finding a lasting solution to the problem, a lot needs to be done as some of the infrastructures in some

states are lying fallow and unattended to. After the euphoria of groundbreaking and commissioning ceremonies, some state governments starve the scheme and allow it to die a “natural death”

### **GOALS INTEGRATING ALMAJIRAI EDUCATION**

The following are the goals of Integrating Almajirai Education.

- a. To provide a conducive and organized learning environment that will ensure Almajirai acquire both Qur'anic and Modern Basic Education.
- b. To provide an integrated curriculum that promotes the study of Al-Quarn and basic education subjects
- c. To provide the Almajirai with opportunities to acquire knowledge and vocational skills and that will enable them to be self-reliant and useful to their communities.
- d. To provide sound foundation for Tajweed and Tahfeez for Almajirai.
- e. To provide opportunities for graduates of the school to further their studies
- f. To provide health and sanitary condition, physical and social security and social welfare that ensures protection of Almajirai from all forms of danger

### **HOW HAS THE POLICY ON THE ALMAJIRAI MANIFESTED IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS?**

Despite the integration policy of free and compulsory education, it is still reported that about 9 million school aged children in Nigeria are currently not served by the policy as many children and their parents still insist on the Almajirai moving around with their instructor and being expose to danger the Federal Government want to mitigate. No significant impact has been noticed as most states abandoned the project and jump into what they felt should be given priority attention other than bring these children together to better their future. Yet many of Almajirai show a lot of disenchantment in their present condition, it has been revealed that some of the Almajirai aspire to be properly dressed, earn their own money, give alms to others, be politicians, be a high ranking civil servants, owe car, build a befitting house and offer better education to their own children.

### **CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING ALMAJIRI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

The major problems affecting the Almajiri schools are:

- I. Unfriendly environment
- II. Overcrowded environment
- III. Inadequate instructional materials
- IV. Insufficient teachers and instructors
- V. Inadequate community support to Quranic Schools among others.

Commenting on the problems of Almajiri system of education, Muhammad (2010) explained that many people criticize and condemn the system of Almajiri education due to some problems associated with it. The condemnation is not in relation to the type of knowledge received by the pupils, but due to some identified problems in it which include;

- i. Inadequate provision of feeding: The Almajiri migrates without adequate provision for feeding, clothing, shelter and essential human needs. This may not go well for small children, who may not be able to work elsewhere as laborers to feed themselves. This sometimes exposes them to juvenile delinquency.
- ii. Over population: Numerical growth of these Almajiri per Malam and Qur'anic centers makes it difficult for Malam to control them and it also leads to congestion, health hazard, poor environmental conditions and in security among others.

- iii. Lack of payment of salary: Although imparting knowledge in this type of schools are on voluntary basis, with an intention of seeking Allah's reward in this world and hereafter. This has some negative effects on the pupils because Malams may not concentrate fully on the teaching process, because of other business like trading, farming etc. so as to get means of survival for himself and his family, this is the major reason they engage Almajiri in farming, hawking, child labour and begging
- iv. Age: Pupils in Almajiri system of education are under aged (below six years) are admitted into the system (boarding) instead of the studying on domestic basis schools where they will be under the care of their parents/guardians.
- v. Methods of discipline: The nature of discipline in some Almajiri school does not help in changing the pupils for the better. For instance, continuous flogging is assumed to instill fear in the minds of the Almajiris but instead of them to change their negative attitudes they become recalcitrant.

### CONCLUSION

In order to avert greater catastrophe more than what is being experienced in Nigeria today as a result of laxity on the part of the major stakeholders in the education sector, all hands must be on deck. Basterdisation of the *al-Majiri* system by its contemporary operators, pupils and the society encourages child abuse, and, above all, portrays Islam in bad light to the outside world. It is then concluded that the status of the Almajiri child in Nigeria is quite pathetic with overwhelming needs and aspirations. It follows therefore, that present government effort in addressing the plight of the Almajiri child is not only justified but that it is quite inadequate. While some Almajirai are not interested in formal education system, majority of them have high aspirations in life to be like other children if given the chance.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the former system of Almajiri training which puts the future of the younger generation in jeopardy, it should be totally abolished. The government integration scheme is a welcome development provided it is sustained by successive governments. In order to avoid total abandonment as witnessed in some state, which customarily characterizes some of such interventions, the programme should be adequately funded and backed up by necessary laws at the federal and state levels so as to compel succeeding authorities to make adequate budgeting for its funding.
2. Almajiri system should be transformed to suit socio development progress. This will help to reduce the possibility of it serving as a mobilization center for security threat agents. The core value and objective of Almajiri School should be resuscitated. The spiritual and moral growth attained in Almajiri school is well and capable of ensuring security in the nation. Therefore, in as much as, Almajiri system could represent northern belief or culture; it should be transformed to avoid abuse of the vulnerable Almajiri pupils to perpetuate violence in the nation.
3. Having clearly seen the inspiration of some of these Almajirai, all stakeholders – both Government and well-meaning citizens should invest effort in the rehabilitation of the Almajiri child by providing education and means of present survival.
4. Vocational schools should be urgently established to provide the Almajirai with urgent technical skills needed to make them self-supporting.
5. Parents should make careful choice in the type of Quranic School they allow their children to attend. The relatively more organized ones where children are not left to beg should be preferred.

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