

Assessment of the Implementation of Almajirin System of Education in Nigeria

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Article DOI:
10.48028/iiprds/ijsreth.v8.i1.10

Abstract

The word Amajiri was derived from Arabic "Almuhajiri" meaning an emigrant. It usually refers to a person who migrates from luxury of his home to other place or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. The board objective of this study is to assess the progress in the implementation of Almajiri policy on Education. This is with due cognizance of the original objectives of the Almajiri implementation system. The Bastardisation of the Almajiri system by its contemporary operators, pupils and the society encourages child abuse, and, above all, portrays Islam in bad light to the outside world. The current system should be abolished as it puts the future of the younger generation in jeopardy. The government integration scheme is a welcome development provided it is sustained by successive governments.

Keywords:

Almajirin system,
Assessment,
Education system,
Nigeria

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Background to the Study

The 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, they have not only become a source of concern to Islam and their parents but the society at large, hence they are seen on streets begging for alms and food, and at the end of the day go back to their camps to sleep. They come across various kinds of dangerous juvenile and adolescent peer. The Almajiri are children living under horrific conditions, few of them do not know their homes or who their parents are as they are left early in life. These children had no option than to follow other group of children that come their way, in the mornings, they are seen following a bean cake seller who approaches a buyer to buy her bean cake and distribute it as Sadakkah to these children. In most cases these children population is large which the Mallams can't meet their basic needs and they will have no option than to send them out to beg. A very pathetic aspect of their life is what they eat, they do not care about the nature of the food cooked, fresh or stale and it can be picked from anywhere. It is against this background that the researcher intends to carry out this study with a view to come out with relevant suggestions that will enable the government and the society to address these problems and proffer solutions.

Historical Background of the Almajiri Educational System in Nigeria

Almajiri' 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 has its origin traced to the prophetic period of Islamic education. Historians have traced the *Almajiri* system of education to the beginning of the 11th Century, largely promoted by leading lights of Islam who were determined to spread Islamic knowledge and learning, long before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of British Nigeria. The word 'Almajiri' coiled from Arabic word "AL-MUHAJIRIN" which came as a result of Prophet Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina. From the Islamic perspective, the word was first used by the prophet Muhammad to indicate those of his companions European Scientific Journal (Muhajirun) who migrated with him for the sake of Islam from Mecca to Medina.

The name 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) of the prophet in the collection Al-Tirmidhi (1980), the Prophet is quoted to have said "the search for knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim". The Hadith did not discriminate against age or status. In another Hadith collection by Walialdin (1977), the prophet said: "go in search of knowledge". The above Hadith shows that the search for knowledge knows no geographical, social or religious boundary. He said in another Hadith "wisdom" (knowledge) is the lost property of the believer wherever he sees it, he picks it up." These and many other similar Hadith propelled Muslims to go in search of knowledge.

In Hausa land Almajiri refers to 'children' sent from their homes and entrusted into the care of Islamic teachers (Mallams) to learn the Islamic studies. In Nigeria, the Almajiri system started in the 11th century, as a result of the involvement of Borno rulers in Quranic literacy. Seven hundred years later, the Sokoto Caliphate was founded principally through an Islamic revolution based on the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. 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 emir of the province, concerning all matters relating to school. Shehu (2004), states that the colonialists specifically came up with policies aimed at destroying the traditional Quranic schools and replacing them with the western style school. It was after independence that serious efforts were made to improve the system of Quranic schools. Islamic scholars and organizations like Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI) struggled to establish and maintain the schools. Sir, Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto established Quranic schools in Muslim localities.

Traditional Islamic education has a long history of existence in Nigeria. It started in the northern parts of the country, long before the advent of western education. It operated through the Quranic schools, whose main objective was to familiarize pupils with the tenets of the Quran and probably become Islamic scholars. The Quran has been the core-curriculum of this system of education since its inception because it plays a central role in the life of a Muslim spiritually, politically, socially, economically and otherwise. Yahaya (2004) suggests that the problem of the 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 Almajiri 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 terrorism Christian (2010).

Western education means institutionalized system which was inherited from the British colonist, education or secular education is a cumulative process of development of intellectual skills, habits, attitude and values all from different dispositions of life. Generally, education is the quality of learning that which helps us improve ourselves and the society at large. In short formal education provides people with specific skills useful in the production of manpower for example skills acquisition like craftsmanship, teaching, engendering etc. Educational system is regarded as the means of providing the man power at various level on which modernization depends, the educational service is an important tool for the Almajirai and the society at large.

Integration of Almajiri Educational System in Nigeria

Based on the National Policy on Education and transformation agenda of Goodluck Jonathan's administration in the country, the Federal 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 Council in July 2013. On the occasion, the then Minister of State for Education, Nyesom Wike reiterated that the authority had set up the National Committee on Implementation of *Al-Majiri* Education Programme to ensure that the pupils are provided with opportunities to access Basic Education. The Programme, according to 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. Similarly, a visit by the author to some *al-Majiri* facilities in Niger and Nasarawa States revealed that the authorities are really committed to the integration of the *al-Majiri* pupils into the nation's educational system. Quadri 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 by the Leadership Newspaper, one of the leading dailies in the country revealed that the Federal Government has intervened in ameliorating the plight of these children. Classroom blocks are being constructed across the Northern parts of the country where the system is being practiced. For smooth implementation of the programme, the Federal Authority sometimes collaborates with the state authorities by providing infrastructures while the states take care of staffing and pupils' enrolment. Among the benefitting 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 *al-Majiri* 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 of Integrating Almajirai Education

The following are the goals of Integrating Almajirai Education.

- i. To provide a conducive and organized learning environment that will ensure Almajirai acquire both Qur'anic and Modern Basic Education.
- ii. To provide an integrated curriculum that promotes the study of Al- Qur'an and basic education subjects.

- iii. 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.
- iv. To provide sound foundation for Tajweed and Tahfeez for Almajirai.
- v. To provide opportunities for graduates of the school to further their studies.
- vi. To provide health and sanitary condition, physical and social security and social welfare that ensures protection of almajirai from all forms of danger

Challenges of implementing Almajiri Educational System in Nigeria

The major problems affecting the almajiri schools are:

- i. Unfriendly environment
- ii. Over crowdedness.
- iii. Inadequate instructional materials.
- iv. Insufficient teachers and instructors.
- v. Inadequate community support to Qur'anic 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 labourers to feed themselves. This sometimes exposes them to juvenile delinquency.
- ii. Over population: Numerical growth of these Almajiri per Malamand Qur'anic centers makes it difficult for Malamto 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 why 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 and Recommendations

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. Bastardisation 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. The current system should be abolished as it puts the future of the younger generation in jeopardy. The government integration scheme is a welcome development provided it is sustained by successive governments. In order to avoid abandonment, 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. Almajiri system should be transformed to suit socio development progress. This will help to reduce the possibility it serving as a mobilization center for security threat agents. The core value and objection of Almajiri School should be resuscitated. The spiritual and moral growth attain 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.

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