

The Amajiri Education System and the Economic Implications for Northern Nigeria

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijdashmss.v12.i3.14

Abstract

The incidence and evolution of the Almajiri educational system had a subsisting dominant phenomenon which has socio-economic implications for northern Nigeria where it flourished. It is a system associated with Islam and the Qur'anic system of education inherent in the culture of Muslims and Islamic families in northern Nigeria. This work examines the evolution and development of this educational system in northern Nigeria where its prevalence and pervading educational system through historical research methods, using primary and secondary data. The paper established that the Almajiri system has kept a reasonable percentage of northern youths away from formal educational systems either western or oriental. The analysis further shows that the economic development of northern Nigeria has been undermined as the prevalence of this education system could not equip the youths with the required skills to drive the economic development of a twenty-first-century society. The paper argues that there is an urgent need to restructure the Almajiri system and incorporate it into the Nigerian educational system for the much-needed economic transformation and avoid the current prevalent fundamentalism, child abuse and poverty where this system thrives. The paper concludes that the slow socio-economic growth of northern Nigeria is associated with the thriving Almajiri educational system and strongly recommends the restructuring of the education system to use it as a weapon for enhancing civilization, economic development and growth.

Keywords: *Educational system, Islamic clerics, poverty, Islamic culture and economic development.*

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Background to the Study

Education plays a pivotal role in the cultural development of any society. This is true in northern Nigeria where the Almajiri Educational system played a pivotal role in the cultural development of the entire northern society. This is based on the fact that Islam is the tradition upon which the Islamic educational system is hinged. It is the accepted medium of teaching and learning in a typical Muslim society. The Almajiri system as practised today in Nigeria has raised serious concerns about its viability and expediency as the system and its practices are considered primitive and socially anachronistic, given its degradation posture, child abuse, poverty and social vices associated with the system. Besides, the Almajiri educational system is not in conformity with the 21st-century formal educational system, more so, as the pupils because of lack of funds are sent out by their teachers (mallams) to beg in the society, most times and are being adjudged as out of school which, accounts for the high-level percentage of out-of-school children rate ascribed to Nigeria.

According to Al Amin (2019), the Almajiri educational system was established as an organised and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and ultimately the recitation and memorization of the glorious Qur'an which became basic learning centres in Muslim communities. The Almajiri children were placed under Islamic teachers known as Mallams who due to the high level of poverty and the large number of children, that they have to cater for, often sent them out to search for their livelihood, making them vulnerable, ignorable and poor. This further makes them often hypnotised, hoodwinked, coerced or simply hijacked to play active roles in many of the northern conflicts (Uchenna 2020).

The Almajiri system, therefore, is fast becoming synonymous with youth poverty and crime and therefore as an educational system would not play the role of laying the foundation for enhancing the economic development of northern Nigeria. This paper would comprehensively examine the Almajiri system beginning with its origin and its initial socio-economic role in northern Nigeria. It is pertinent to consider the twist the British brought to the Almajiri educational system with its colonial policies. The current system of almajiri education would finally be examined in light of its implications for the economic development of northern Nigeria.

The Tragety of the Almajiri System in Northern Nigeria

Nwanze (2019) in his piece had given background information on the emergence of the Almajiri system in northern Nigeria in which he offers that the Arabic word Almuhajiri is an immigrant from home to a popular teacher in the quest for knowledge. It was the system through which the majority of the youths acquired basic Islamic educational knowledge. In northern Nigeria, this migration system replaced Tsangaya prevalent in the kenem-Borno Empire which was an organised and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. As in the other parts of the world from where tsangaya was moulded, it was a social system which benefited both Islamic society and the participants at the time. The reason for which it was founded largely by the state who in return gave back to society through manual labour. It was modelled after madrassas in other parts of

the Muslim world. With time the Almajiri system has undergone different mutations to acquire the posture and practice we see today.

as seen today roam about the streets without a care. This total lack of care makes them vulnerable. These crops of people are innocent children having been left to fortune, chance or luck and neglected by society hence becoming ignorant and poor. They are simply hijacked to play active roles in many of the Northern conflicts According to Bature (2020), 80% of the present insurgents known as Boko Haram in the North East may produce Almajiri schools.

The Almajiri educational system was adjudged to have provided the foundation for Islamic moral knowledge acquisition in the north. In northern Nigeria, no actual date is identified as the beginning of this practice. Islam entered West Africa as early as the 7th century AD in the Chad basin but it was from the 11th to 15th centuries that this practice was said to have started from Borno to Hausa states as a result of the conversion to Islam of the king of Kanem Humai. Falola et Al (1989) that the sub-region referred to as Bilad-din-Sudan then (Songhai Empire) was conquered by Islam and that it was the Arab merchants and scholars that introduced the Islamic religion in Nigeria and West Africa at large.

The Sokoto Jihad by Dan Fodio marked the turning point of Islamic hegemony in northern Nigeria. This historic event promoted the spread, reform and justification of the Almajiri educational system under the emirates. The 1804 Jihad was waged by Islamic clerics who in their conviction maintained that education is a top priority and the Almajiri education system major system that the Muslims used to read, write and commit the Qur' to memory vigorously promoted It. The reformers were driven by their conviction to propagate Islam through education as an act of worship. Khalid (2002) asserts that Almajiri education was more organized and with a clearly defined learning system that served the educational need of the Islamic societies Ajami, a system of writing and reading in the Hausa language using Arabic alphabets was introduced. This was the height of the golden era of Quranic education in northern Nigeria. At this golden age of Almajiri education in Northern Nigeria Islamic institutions of Baitul-mal (public wealth), Zakkah (alms), and Sadaqah (charity), farming, trades and occupations were properly used to take care of the needs of the teachers and students. During this period, begging and other social youth subculture was not associated with Almajiri educational system. The emirate system after the Jihad maintains this practice until the conquest of northern Nigeria by the British and the establishment of western education. The Almajiri education in Nigeria through the different eras of Nigerian history experienced mutations. Before the inception of British colonial rule, the Sokoto jihad firmly entrenched the Almajiri system of education as basic means of transmitting Islamic education in northern society.

The British complete conquest and colonialization of Nigeria starting with the Lagos colony in 1861 and ending in 1903 with the conquest of the Sokoto Emirate, the seat of the Caliphate which was the last northern territory brought about a turnaround in the fortunes of the Almajiri system Jonah(2013) holds that Lugard's military campaign in northern Nigeria including his famous march to Borgu marked the consolidation of this conquest was achieved

from 1903-1906 when all the major empires, chiefdoms and cities came under British control. With this conquest, western education was entrenched in northern Nigeria. The colonial government stopped funding the Almajiri schools while their teachers who were considered illiterates were sacked. This development brought about the reduction of the influence of the Almajiri educational system in northern Nigeria. The reductionist imperialists ensured that not much attention was given to this system of education in reform, modification and continuity. This affected the livelihood, quality and importance of the Almajiri education in northern Nigeria. It was undermined for being an Islamic education and supplanted with Western education which has a Christian-European origin. This action Mazrui (2004) sees the convergence and divergence of values between the West and Islam which has a very long history centuries ago.

The post-colonial witnessed the resurrection of the Almajiri schools in Northern Nigeria. There is a resurgence of the educational system in this era. According to Kurusa (2016,) there has been an astronomical increase in the establishment of Islamic schools in northern Nigeria. Fufunwa (1990) observed that the Almajiri education system had serious footings in Kano and the multiplier effects spread to other parts of the country. Kano state has shown that it has the highest number of Islamic schools totalling about 26,000 schools with over 2 million students. This is followed by Kaduna State with about 824, 233, and Borno State having 29,000 Almajiri schools (AYM, 2015). Despite the increase or expansion of the Almajiri education system, it is laden with contradictions. In the 21st century, many variables have contributed to the dynamics and contradictions of the Almajiri educational system. The development of Nigeria generated a lot of changes in society. These changes disproportionately affected all facets of life from politics, economy, religion, demography and social problems in northern Nigeria. During this period since the teachers and students under the Almajiri education are not being taken care of by the emirate system the burden shifts to society. This explains why bara or roko (begging culture) became prevalent in northern Nigeria, thereby constituting a nuisance in the society. Through the 2008 Nigerian Senate passed the bill on the Almajiri system which made the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) step up its effort to reform the Almajiri system with the sole aim of redressing the out-of-school children phenomenon. UBE (2018) records that so far 125 model schools were constructed by the federal government under the National Almajiri Education Program to integrate the creative and productive potentials of the students.

Challenges of Almajiri Education

The current challenges of the Almajiri educational system have been sufficiently captured and explained by Mohammed and Yusuf (2015) that the Almajiri system has been enmeshed in a crisis of development with the current challenges posed by national and global conventions on the rights and education of the child UBE, In his view, the major challenge of this system is the attitude of Muslims towards this non-formal educational practice. It is a practice that has been considered a symbol of Islam and Muslims in northern Nigeria for over seven centuries. The international dimension of the phenomenon of Almajiri is either ignored or overlooked. ECOWAS (2015) observed that Many poor families sent out their wards to neighbouring countries of the West African sub-region (Ghana, Chad, Niger, Mali, Cameroon, Nigeria, and

Senegal) to acquire this type of education without thought of its possible implications for security, economy and social problems. Both teachers and students move around northern Nigeria and most parts of West Africa in the name of this practice. Moreover, the Almajiri due to its nature students exposed to social ills and social explosion which is very dangerous to society. It has created an avenue for the legitimization of begging which is forbidden in Islam. Both pupils and adults are forced to pay "Rudin sati" (weekly dues) to be allowed to remain in the system. The Almajiris now take care of their teacher's needs which exposes them to child abuse and other mean engagements. The failure of successive governments to properly remodel, integrate, and accept responsibility for providing basic free and compulsory education to the Nigerian child is in line with the National Policy on Education (1977; 1988; 2004; 2008). This neglect has impacted negatively on the Nigerian child for decades which has forced millions of parents to look for alternatives in the Almajiri educational system, particularly in northern Nigeria. The social exclusion of the Almajiris breeds social explosions which manifested in the social problems that endanger societal peace, unity and progress. Northern society is currently reported with children who are roaming about either being involved in stealing or recruited by insurgent gangs. The current practice of the system produces teeming youths that roam the street's a nuisance and are usually mistaken as Almajiris. This visible manifestation of social explosion according to Sule (2002) is Maitatsine, Yan-Daba, Area Boys, Boko Haram, Yan-Daukanamarya and Political thugs among others.

Implications for the Economic Development of Northern Nigeria

The prosperity of a community is the direct result of individual initiatives and efforts. No amount of privilege or patronage can take the place of initiative, hard work and perseverance. Nobody should improve a society that deliberately decides to undermine itself. Economic Associates, a consultancy firm published in 2007, a state-by-state breakdown of Nigeria's Gross Domestic (GDP), The publication puts crop and livestock production as contributing about 31% of Nigeria's GDP. These activities, livestock and crop production are the dominant economic mainstay of northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, majority of the Northern youths are so much into begging, menial jobs that they have become unproductive, thereby undermining their economic development.

To buttress this point, UNICEF (2014) reported that about 9.5 million children exist in Nigeria which according to it, makes up about 72% of Nigeria's out-of-school and unproductive children. Recent estimates however show that the number has increased to between 13 to 15 million. The majority of these children are in Northern Nigeria. This has negative effects on the economic growth or economic development of Northern States in Nigeria. This is a gross indignity that will lead to a lack of economic productivity. Northern Nigeria cannot grow economically with the Almajiri school system in its present state. The economy of the North is already retarded. These groups of people do not have the desire to be productive either in agriculture which is the mainstay of the region, or other conventional skills as they are used to begging and other street hustling since they do not have any basic parental good upbringing and care. The impact and effect of Almajiri on the economic development of Northern Nigeria are devastating.

Also, when the majority of a society's population has no education nor enlightenment, no requisite skills, talents, qualification, vocation and a conventional social-economic way of life, that society cannot improve its economy. In a society where the majority of its children who should ordinarily be tomorrow's leaders are involved in begging, street urchin, banditry, violence and another societal menace, such society will be retarded in economic development. Drugs taking and peddling have become the common practice in the region which is detrimental to the economic growth of any society. The menace of the Almajiri syndrome is caused by societal and cultural norms as well as the low socio-economic status of parents, the high level of the parent's illiteracy and ignorance of the negative impact of sending their children away in the name of searching for religious knowledge at a very tender age. The children suffer emotional and physical abuse and are also in most cases hindered from getting a good education or none at all, this is capable of making them unproductive members of society. We are inclined to assert that the negative impact of Almajiri on children in Northern Nigeria is huge, and has frustrated economic growth or development in northern Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Child Rights Act of 2003, stipulates free and compulsory primary education for children, children protection especially against different types of abuses, ranging from trafficking to outright sale, line or use in any demeaning circumstances as it relates to seeking for alms, hawking prostitution or initiation into other criminal tendencies. This was a bold step in the right direction towards addressing the problem of the Almajiris. Secondly, the Federal Government building and commissioning of Almajiri schools was equally good, for this to be successful, the government need to strictly fund the schools. The school should encourage technical skills and vocational courses to enhance the economic development of the region. If possible, adults too should be encouraged to undergo technical training in vocation. Where most of them have done well, scholars' opportunities should be offered to them to enhance their educational pursuits. By so doing the region will develop economically.

There could not possibly be economic progress in a region that is reported with insecurity, insurgency, kidnapping, cattle rustling, bandits, armed robbing, senseless killings, burning of villages and springing up of IDP camps in every available school building and open space. Today, insecurity has bedevilled the region. Without the security of lives and property, economic, social, political, cultural or even religious life as we know it is not possible.

Present-day Almajiri has therefore completely devastated the economic development of Northern States as a result of the Almajiri system. There is therefore an urgent need to restructure and remodel this outmoded system to conform with an educational system that would engender economic development in northern Nigeria.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing, we proffer the following recommendations that might turn the Almajiri educational system into a vehicle that would enhance the economic development of the northern States of Nigeria where the system holds away hitherto and stalling overall economic growth;

1. The Federal Government Should Integrate the Almajiri education system into the Nigerian educational system.
2. Legislation should be enacted to remodel and integrate outmoded into the mainstream national educational structure for national development.
3. The northern states should establish a regional approach to Almajiri education and holistic societal re-orientations campaigns.
4. The northern states which have not ratified the National Policy on Child Rights Acts should be forced to quickly do so to frustrate the continual practice of the Almajiri system.
5. Awareness campaigns should be mounted by both the government and private organisations to discourage or possibly completely dismantle this obnoxious system.
6. Vigorous awareness and re-orientation campaigns should be out to change the perceptions of many teachers and students concerning the negative effects of the Almajiri system.

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