

The Almajiri System of Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The Almajirai are children who are usually from poor backgrounds. They leave their hometowns to study Islamic learning with malammai, teachers of the Quran. Almajiranci (Hausa pronunciation) is said to refer to a system of Islamic education practiced in northern Nigeria. The male gender seeking for Islamic knowledge is called Almajiri, while the female gender is Almajira (plural is Almajirai). This system encourages parents to leave parental responsibilities to the attached Islamic school. The term has been expanded to include any young person who begs on the streets and does not attend secular school. Most malams are educated in the almajiri system themselves, and do not receive a salary but depend financially on the alms of the community and the work of the almajirai. The paper looks into the diverse issues surrounding the Almajiri system of education in Nigeria such as the causes, challenges, its impact on the society, and the probable solutions.

KEYWORDS: Almajiri, malams, Islamic school, education, youth poverty, youth delinquency, initiative

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Pre-colonial era: In the 9th century, the Muslim traders first came to the Nigerian regions of Kanem and Borno, where the Islam religion spread through trade and migration [1, 2]. Almajiri began in Kanem Borno in the 11th century, where many rulers practiced Islam [3]. After about 700 years later, in the 19th century, Islamic scholar Usman dan Fodio founded the Sokoto caliphate, and furthered the cause (course) of Islamic learning [4], as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Prior to the British arrival in Nigeria, almajiri children stayed at home with their parents and attended “tsangayu” to learn about the Quran. The schools were in close proximity with the immediate environment of the students [5] and were funded by the state treasury, the community, parents, zakah controlled by local emirs, sadaqqah, and sometimes the farm output of the students [6]. During the precolonial era, almajiri did not beg because there was sufficient funding to feed and clothe them [6].

The colonial era: The British colonized Nigeria in 1904, and brought many changes to the almajiri system [5]. The emirs were deposed, thereby

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The Post-Independence era: The oil boom of 1970s decreased the profitability of farming, and while the 1986 Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) also slowed economic growth, both of which led to increased poverty in Northern Nigeria and exacerbated the challenges of the almajiri system, as shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5 [6].

In order to improve formal and non-formal education systems (including the almajiri system) for nomadic Nigerian children, the Nigerian government in 1989 created the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) [10]. It is well known that some children come to Nigeria from neighboring countries like Chad Republic, Niger, and Sudan to attend almajiri schools.

HOW THE ALMAJIRI SYSTEM WORKS

When the students are not learning the Quran, the almajirai in rural areas may work on farms, while urban almajirai engage in small tasks such as domestic chores, running errands, and fetching water [5, 11]. Some of the almajirai attend secular schools concurrently, or switch between secular and almajiri schools [9]. The almajirai practice alms begging, or almajiranchi, out of necessity to eat, which was not an original part of the almajirai system, but it is now said to prepare them for the hardships of life, to make them strong and humble, and keep them devoted to studying the Quran [5, 11]. The practice of alms begging is widely denounced as child abuse in Nigeria [12, 13].

Approximately 8.5 million children attend Islamic schools in northern Nigeria, and with approximately 300,000 almajiri living in the State of Kano [9]. Furthermore, about 69% of the 13.4 million out of school children in Nigeria are children from northern Nigeria [14].

In Nigeria, the almajiri system is highly controversial. The system has been attacked for promoting youth poverty and delinquency, for failing to teach young boys vocational skills, making them unequipped for the workforce, and for radicalizing boys and making them perfect recruits for gangs and Boko Haram [5, 9, 14]. Despite the afore-mentioned facts, others believe that the almajiri system teaches young boys to be pious, good people who will benefit society [15].

USE OF ALMAJIRIS BY THE POLITICIANS

Even before now, there has been long standing accusation that the northern politicians and their cohorts make use of almajiris during elections in Nigeria. Nwackukwu (2019) stated that President Buhari while having an interview session on 22nd July 2015 with Caroline Baker of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) said, "I hope you have a

copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, that gave me 97% (of the votes) cannot, in all honesty, be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5% (sic)." Furthermore, after the general elections of 2015 that brought President Buhari to power, Rabi'u Kwankwaso an Islamic leader in Nigeria and a very strong politician boasted that the votes of the almajiris have been used to kick former President Goodluck Jonathan out of Aso Rock (Tijani, 2015). Moreover, according to Mansur (2018), there are five million almajiris in Kano State. This implies that following Kwankwaso's boast, the 1.9 million votes that brought President Buhari to power as declared by INEC, was gotten from the almajiris (Amanambu, 2020) [16-18].

The game being played by the politicians over the lives of vulnerable children must stop as valuable asset in the period of elections to get to the presidential villa and only to abandon them in the face of challenges.

CHALLENGES OF THE ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

The almajiri educational system is enmeshed in crisis of development with the current challenges posed by national and global convention on rights of the child (EFA 1990; SDC 2015; UBE 2008; CRC 1989), as shown in Figure 6. The international dimension of the phenomenon of almajiri is either ignored or overlooked. The challenges confronting the system is also exacerbated by the fact that many poor families send their children/wards to some neighboring countries of the West African sub-regions like Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Senegal, and Chad to acquire this type of education without any recourse to the implications to security, economy, and social problems (ECOWAS 2015). Both the teachers and the students move around northern Nigeria and most part of West Africa in the name of this practice [19].

Due to the nature of the almajiri system of education, these students are exposed to various social-ills and social explosion which is considered very dangerous to the society. This has also created the way to legitimate begging which is forbidden in Islam. They are forced to pay weekly dues, and they take care of their teachers' needs exposing them to child abuse and other derogatory appellations. Furthermore, the government's failure to properly remodel, integrate, and accept the responsibility of providing basic free and compulsory education, as shown in Figures 7 and 8. This has negatively impacted the Nigerian child for decades and has forced many parents to look for alternative in the almajiri/tsangaya educational system, particularly in northern Nigeria [19]. Social

exclusion of the almajiris breeds social explosion which is manifesting in the social problems that endanger societal peace, unity, and progress – as they are recruited as political thugs and being used for destruction and violence [20].

The almajiri system of education has therefore brought about:

1. The utter abandonment of these young children (from 3 to about 13 years of age) by their parents to be catered for by the teachers (the mallamai), and not knowing where they leave or are domiciled.
2. The mallamai lack proper training in education, i.e. they are illiterate teachers.
3. Lack of proper and adequate attention by the government, teachers and parents.
4. They lack social security and attend schools with no dormitories, no portable water to drink and wash up themselves or bath regularly.
5. Lack of basic infrastructural facilities for learning.
6. Lack of planned curriculum/poor professional handling of the pupils for effective learning.
7. Most if not all of the almajiris are from extremely poor homes or families [21 - 23].
8. These almajiris are sent out to beg and hawk on the street – struggling for survival, where they are manipulated (homosexuality and pedophilia) used as slaves, brainwashed and recruited for anti-social activities [24, 25]

BASIC AND POLICY THRUST OF THE GOODLUCK JONATHAN ALMAJIRI SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Former President Jonathan while addressing an audience at the Peace Summit at the Junior Chamber International in Malaysia reiterated the idea that birthed the Almajiri schools initiative thus: “In Nigeria, there were 10.5 million (about 15% of the population) out of school children who were of school age, going by UNICEF figures, as at the time I became President...over 80% of these children for which majority are known as almajiri came from the northern part of Nigeria, where I recorded the least votes in the elections I contested...knowing the value of education, I could see the ugly situation was limiting the opportunities of these children and negatively affecting the development of my country....that was why my administration decided to build 165 almajiri integrated model schools which combined both Western and Islamic education in its curricula” [26]. This was the thinking that drove the

almajiri schools initiative. The historicity of the almajiri system cum the problems the system is generating are as stated in extant literature [27, 28]. Considering the enormous problems posed by these vulnerable urchins and the fight of ideological war, this prompted President Jonathan administration to commit a colossal sum of money to build almajiri model schools.

Obviously, the almajiri system has created a situation whereby young boys who are out of school are exploited and used for selfish political ends after the promise of monetary rewards or psycho-social brainwashing. The potential threat to national security was a just cause for the Jonathan administration in this direction in intervening in the almajiri conundrum, though the actual implementation of the program left gaps. The program was officially launched on 10th April, 2012 with the commissioning of the first almajiri integrated school in Gagi, Sokoto State. These schools were structured along three architectural models with specific targets, which were located in the northeast and northwest Nigeria. The community acceptability of this idea was missed, which explains the lackluster attitude the host communities showed towards the almajiri schools. Furthermore, poverty and the criminal neglect of children by parents must be dealt with to keep them out of the streets, and while there should be sustainability and continuous funding of the almajiri schools. Unfortunately, the state governors did not allow it to work, since the governors wanted to be given fund to construct the schools on the basis of their peculiarities, and for the reason that basic education is within the jurisdictional sphere of local governments and the states. This was the reason why the state governors where the schools were located were not keen about the program, which does not justify why they should allow the decay of the infrastructural facilities provided. This brings to light that future projects like this should first be discussed with the state governors, local governments, and various communities to engage them constructively. This explains why the schools were abandoned and the initiative failed to resolve the problem it set out to mitigate [29].

CONCLUSION

The almajiri system of education should be re-integrated and modeled into the secular system of education to help provide and equip these teeming population to become useful/resourceful people which will enable them to be able to contribute their quota to the society. The northern elites and the good spirited individuals must of necessity re-educate the people into embracing secular education, and not to

see it as “haram.” The federal government must persuade the state governors, local governments, and the communities to see reason for the education of the almajiris in order to transform them, save them from poverty/neglect, as well as from being a reservoir of potential militia, or recruits as political thugs in the hands of opportunistic politicians, and to help avoid wastages of public funds in white elephant projects.

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Figure 2 Islam in Nigeria.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=bbfe05642f884d57&sxsrf=ADLYWlJuG6yGbqLbdPX1iKmqZMWnTUTKxw:1731169306101&q=images+on+almajiri+system+of+education+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWd8nbOJfsBGGB5IQQO6L3J5MIFhvnvU242yFxzEEp3BcbXWGQjBp6XyyqfUu6Wz8hDrmQY6r35AfNzVfNsLIsJAetF9yPOUSEO5PZfYsNis3jDptA3FnHsJ39fki4iqqzfa8bS3aREzMDiVF3cGeJ4MfM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjO3aSc1MJAXUBQkEAHXLjJkgQtKgLegQIFhAB&cshid=1731169420289325&biw=1034&bih=539&dpr=1#vhid=2WjFnVMDHfxTCM&vssid=mosaic



Figure 1 Map of Nigeria States.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=fc5aac19e4c6e8a&sxsrf=ADLYWILc4RqmURRgsg31wjXyRkN1yu7Uw:1731213659690&q=images+of+Nigeria+map+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0A2qeMemLzzt_2BVemHLFNuCS15jMwuDXSDytTb5xOFugulBwSVKrcaczAYRUt2Z5_be3rr2W2c6mcvRLEBy7B8OoFBW2ddfwIZc2oYTC DQ1iCuvHelksIAXRGLHukGddKBP6yt5C23FV6



Figure 3 Almajiranci.



Figure 4 Poverty.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=images+on+poverty+by+wikipedia&sca_esv=9d94dd5c257ef4ca&udm=2&biw=1034&bih=539&sxsrf=ADLYWII57PaegOQ1D51yHAE6GlyM96FYA%3A1731217261172&ei=bUcwZ7yjCrmSkdUPjNjk8Qs&ved=0ahUKEwj8jYbvhTGAxU5SaQEHQwsOb4Q4dUDCBA&oq=images+on+poverty+by+wikipedia&gs_lp=EgNpbWciHmltYWdlcyBvbiBwb3ZlcuR5IGJ5IHdpZ2lwZWVpYUiuYFCcBljIPHABeACQAQKYAZYT0AGQSAoBEzAuNC4xLjAuMS4xLjluMS4wLjK4AQZlAQD4AQGYAgKgAt8BwgIKEAAYgAQYQxiKBcICBRAAGIAEwgIGEAAAYCBgewgIEEAAYHpgDAIgGAZIHAEuMaAHgU&sc_lent=img#vhid=B1QF74gHN_G8TM&vssid=mosaic

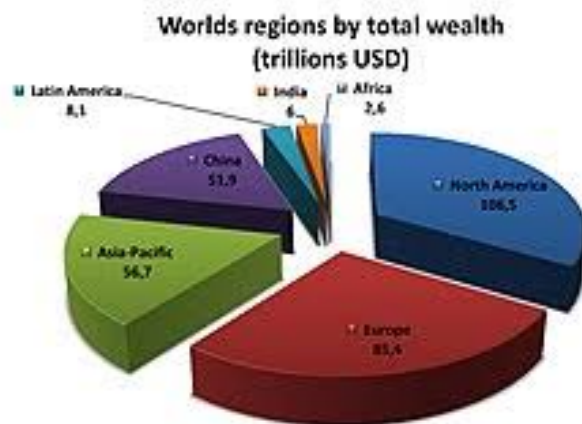


Figure 5 Poverty.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=fb1607ebde4714f4&sxsrf=ADLYWIIYvRAKlpMgsPQ6U8btg71TKZ0Qpw:1731219238551&q=images+on+poverty+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWd8nbOJfsBGGB5IQQO6L3J5MIFhvnvU242yFxzEEp3BcbXWGQjBp6XyyqfUu6Wz8hDrmQY6r35AfNzVfNsL-IsJAaetF9yPOUSEO5PZfYsNis3jDptA3FnHsJ39fki4iqqzfa8bS3aREzMDiVF3cGeJ4MfM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj8jYbvhTGAxU5SaQEHQwsOb4Q4dUDCBA&oq=images+on+poverty+by+wikipedia&gs_lp=EgNpbWciHmltYWdlcyBvbiBwb3ZlcuR5IGJ5IHdpZ2lwZWVpYUiuYFCcBljIPHABeACQAQKYAZYT0AGQSAoBEzAuNC4xLjAuMS4xLjluMS4wLjK4AQZlAQD4AQGYAgKgAt8BwgIKEAAYgAQYQxiKBcICBRAAGIAEwgIGEAAAYCBgewgIEEAAYHpgDAIgGAZIHAEuMaAHgU&sc_lent=img#vhid=FX3QjDGRozhWWM&vssid=mosaic



Figure 6 Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=1286343edbd9c9c&sxsrf=ADLYWIJ41Wmzah_ls1XuVosIS4JSCDCSwQ:1731248133498&q=images+on+universal+basic+education+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWd8nbOJfsBGGB5IQQO6L3J5MIFhvnvU242yFxzEEp3BcbXWGQjBp6XyyqfUu6Wz8hDrmQY6r35AfNzVfNsLIsJAaetF9yPOUSEO5PZfYsNis3jDptA3FnHsJ39fki4iqqzfa8bS3aREzMDiVF3cGeJ4MfM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj8jYbvhTGAxU5SaQEHQwsOb4Q4dUDCBA&oq=images+on+universal+basic+education+by+wikipedia&gs_lp=EgNpbWciHmltYWdlcyBvbiBwb3ZlcuR5IGJ5IHdpZ2lwZWVpYUiuYFCcBljIPHABeACQAQKYAZYT0AGQSAoBEzAuNC4xLjAuMS4xLjluMS4wLjK4AQZlAQD4AQGYAgKgAt8BwgIKEAAYgAQYQxiKBcICBRAAGIAEwgIGEAAAYCBgewgIEEAAYHpgDAIgGAZIHAEuMaAHgU&sc_lent=img#vhid=gRnH9wIKsxP29M&vssid=mosaic



Figure 7 Education in Nigeria.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=1286343edbd9c9c&sxsrf=ADLYWIJ41Wmzah_ls1XuVosIS4JSCDCSwQ:1731248133498&q=images+on+universal+basic+education+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWd8nbOJfsBGGB5IQQO6L3J5MIFhvnvU242yFxzEEp3BcbXWGQjBp6XyyqfUu6Wz8hDrmQY6r35AfNzVfNsLIsJAaetF9yPOUSEO5PZfYsNis3jDptA3FnHsJ39fki4iqqzfa8bS3aREzMDiVF3cGeJ4MfM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj8jYbvhTGAxU5SaQEHQwsOb4Q4dUDCBA&oq=images+on+universal+basic+education+by+wikipedia&gs_lp=EgNpbWciHmltYWdlcyBvbiBwb3ZlcuR5IGJ5IHdpZ2lwZWVpYUiuYFCcBljIPHABeACQAQKYAZYT0AGQSAoBEzAuNC4xLjAuMS4xLjluMS4wLjK4AQZlAQD4AQGYAgKgAt8BwgIKEAAYgAQYQxiKBcICBRAAGIAEwgIGEAAAYCBgewgIEEAAYHpgDAIgGAZIHAEuMaAHgU&sc_lent=img#vhid=U0wNq1XF59Ht8M&vssid=mosaic



Figure 8 Education.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=1286343eddbc9c9c&sxsrf=ADLYWIJ41Wmzah_ls1XuVosIS4JSCDCSwQ:1731248133498&q=images+on+universal+basic+education+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWd8nbOJfsBGGB5IQQO6L3J5MIFhvnvU242yFxzEep3BcbXWGQjBp6XyyqfUu6Wz8hDrmQY6r35AfNzVfNsLIsJAaetF9yPOUSEO5PZfYsNis3jDptA3FnHsJ39fki4iqqzfa8bS3aREzMDiVF3cGeJ4MfM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjgpI_wdGJAxXTQ6QEHamFKDYQtKgLegQIFhAB&biw=1034&bih=539&dpr=1#vhid=D0tx0A8o0_GjQM&vssid=mosaic

