

Opinions of Stakeholders on Effective Ways for Integration of the Almajiri Schools for Equity and Quality Education in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analyzed the opinions of stakeholders on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools for enhancing equity and quality education in Niger state, Nigeria. The study employed descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of Mallams (teachers), SBMC members and learners of the 200 Integrated Islamiyya and Tsangaya schools in Niger state. Three local government areas were selected randomly (one from each senatorial zone) and a simple of 252 participants was drawn randomly from twelve (12) schools (6 from rural and 6 from urban schools). Three research questions guided the study and inventory on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools was used as the instrument for data collection. The data analysis was carried out using the mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study showed that adequate toilet facilities to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy, feeding of the Almajirai while in school to enhance their attention and concentration, and training on skill acquisition programmes to provide Almajirai with coping strategy and opportunity of becoming self-reliant and independent are effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger state. The study recommends that school feeding programme, provision of grants and financial support, among others should be extended to the Almajiri schools.

Introduction

The concept of Almajiri refers to children sent from their homes to learn the Islamic Education (Ayuba, 2009; Yusha'u, Tsafe, Babangida, & Lawal, 2013). As a system, the Almajiri education refers to a traditional way of acquiring and memorizing the Glorious Qur'an. This happens when parents or guardians send their children at their tender ages to other neighbourhoods, villages, towns or cities for the purpose of Qur'an education usually under a knowledgeable and prominent Islamic scholar called Malam. Odumosu, Odekunle, Bararinwa, Taiwo, Ajala, Aluko, Alonge, Aliyu, and Akujobi (2013) observed that the Almajiri school system was characterized to teach children basic Islamic spiritual, moral and social norms in order to inculcate and their sense of humility, respect and responsiveness. Thus, the objective of the Almajiri system of education was to train children intellectually and morally. However, despite the goals and benefits of the Almajiri school system, a number of problems have been associated with it. These include: begging syndrome, enrollment of under aged, poor health and unhygienic environment, lack of feeding, over crowdedness, inadequate teachers, child abuses, and lack of organized curriculum (Muhammad, 2010).

The poor nature surrounding the Almajiri education has led to misconceptions, negative perceptions, and public outcry against the system; hence the need for interventions. Against this background, the federal government in 1998 made pronouncement that the Almajiri schools would be integrated into the formal system of education. Consequently, the National Council on Education (NCE) at its sitting in Enugu (2001) approved an integrated curriculum for the Almajiri schools in the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2002). This framework led to the establishment of the Almajiri Integrated Schools (AIS) across the country as one of the interventions of government strategies to curtail the menace of street begging, child abuse and out of school children (Paiko, 2013).

Therefore, integration refers to merging of the western system of education and Qur'anic system of education. In this case, the two forms of education are expected to be provided

hand-in-hand with the existing Qur'anic school programme (Baji & Sule, 2019). The aim of integrating the two systems of education is to provide educational opportunities for the Almajirai to acquire Qur'an education as well as Basic education so as to improve their living condition, to strengthen the ability of the learners to read, write and memorize the Qur'an, to be equipped with skills and vocations for survival, and to provide health and sanitary condition, physical and social security and social welfare that ensures protection of the Almajirai from all forms of dangers and risks (Yusha'u, Tsafe, Babangida, and Lawal, 2013; Adetoro, 2012; Muhammad, 2010; Mahuta, 2009; & Dukku, 2006). The concept of equity refers to justice, fairness, and equal education opportunity regardless of any affiliation and quality determines how much, and how well, children learn, and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits (Haruna, 2019:16). Equity in education therefore represents fairness and inclusion in terms of treatment and participation while quality in education includes the provision of curriculum, required learning resources, facilities and teachers which would enable learners to achieve desirable learning outcomes and standards. In pursuing the goals and purposes of integration of the Almajiri school system, the government of Niger state in April, 2016, set up a committee to address Almajiri issues and the begging syndrome in the state. This led to the establishment of integrated Qur'anic/Tsangaya schools across the state to enhance access, equity and quality education (Niger State Agency for Mass Education, 2019). To this end, strategies for effective integration of the Almajiri schools have been analyzed (Isah, 2013; Paiko, 2013 & Taiwo, 2013; Muhammad, 2010; Muhinat, 2008; Dukku, 2006).

- 1. Availability of a policy framework:** The initiative to integrate core subjects into the Qur'anic curriculum should have a policy framework that could readily be used by the project. This means that Government should make the policy document accessible to school communities for easy compliance.

2. **Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups:** Identifying key players in relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies whose roles and responsibilities could improve service delivery and provide the technical know-how and exposure for the integration policy. The steering and technical working committees should coordinate and implement approved programmes on the integration plans.
3. **Inter-ministerial collaboration:** Forming technical working groups with members from relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to create synergy and prevent overlaps of responsibility in allocating resources for integration of basic education into the Almajiri schools is paramount. This strategy will foster a clear understanding and planning towards achieving the goals and objectives of integration policy and need to complement and support government intentions as members of the communities.
4. **Community-based approach:** There is need to build programmes that could target the whole communities to create within them an awareness and sensitivity for the needs of integration and to avoid stigmatization on the part of the girls. In applying a community-based approach, CBMC, PTA and women associations should be involved to enhance overall participation.
5. **Integrating vocational training:** The major intervention to be implemented at the non-formal learning centers is a delivery of a basic literacy programme. This is an accelerated learning programmes that teaches literacy, numeracy, and life skills, along with vocational training. The vocational skills programmes implemented alongside with the basic literacy programme will be capable of heightening the interest of the Almajirai and their malams in accessing basic education and to become self-reliant.
6. **Empowering the capacity of state counterpart agencies:** Through policy framework, the capacity of state counterparts' agencies in charge of non-formal education like State Agency for Mass Education (SAME), Youth Empowerment Centre, and National Industrial Training

needs to be strengthened financially and with strong political will to effectively discharge their duties and oversight functions.

7. **Mainstreaming the Integrated Qur'anic Education Centers:** The Integrated Qur'anic Education (IQE) centers should be managed by relevant agencies such as the Adult and Non-formal Education Agency (ANFEA), the State Agency for Mass Education (SAME), the State Universal Basis Education Board (SUBEB), and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). These centers should manage learners with diverse learning backgrounds and some of the Almajirai that have never attended any formal school or have dropped out of school without completing basic education. This discrepancy in learning is one of the major reasons why basic education should be introduced in these learning centers to provide the opportunity of mainstreaming those who are lacking behind.
8. **Strengthening Center-Based Management Committees:** The project of the Center- Based Management Committees (CBMCs) for each of the non-formal learning centers should be strengthened through workshops and grants. The CBMCs which serve as the representatives of various communities should receive the training on the Whole School Development Plan and participate in a CBMC forum to stage enrollment drive and sensitization campaign for achieving access and quality of education.
9. **Use of grants mechanism:** Grants are financial support services rendered by Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), civil societies, and International Donors to Almajiri schools in order to build and increase their capacities in terms of provision of learning materials, toilet facilities, and portable water. This helps the schools to identify their priority needs to implement project activities and provide services.
10. **Psychosocial counselling of the learners:** Learners at the Integrated Qur'anic Education (IQE) centers should be provided with psychosocial counselling with the aim of

boosting their self-esteem, self-concept as well as self-efficacy to reduce their vulnerability and prepare them for the task of lifelong learning and achievement.

From the forgoing, it is pertinent to point out that seeking equity and quality education requires uncovering effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools. This is because the principle of equal education opportunity entails that all children should have and be given an equal chance to succeed which is the hall mark of the integration programme. Therefore, the opinions of key stakeholders on a successful implementation of integration programme of the Almajiri schools is paramount; hence the need for this study. The stakeholders considered in this study are Cummunity Based Management Committee (CBMC) which has membership across all the critical components of a school system, teachers or malams of the integrated Almajiri schools, and the pupils/learners.

Statement of the Problem

The practice of the Almajiri school system in contemporary days has made the Almajirai to constitute major security threats and a source for out- of- school children in Niger state (Niger State Universal Basic Education, 2019). The scenarios surrounding various social ills, delinquent behaviour, banditry, kidnapping, and insurgencies in Niger state in particular and Nigeria as a whole has rendered the Almajiri schools vulnerable to risks and the lives of the Almajirai endangered which calls for a concern through a research of this nature. Thus, to achieve social justice, equity and quality in education, this study is necessitated to explore effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools among stakeholders in Niger State.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the objectives of this study include:

1. To investigate the opinions of SBMC members on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.
2. To find out the opinions of Teachers/malams on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.

3. To determine the opinions of learners/pupils on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.

Research Questions

1. What are the opinions of SBMC members on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?
2. What are the opinions of Teachers/Malams on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?
3. What are the opinions of learners/pupils on ways that could be used for effective integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?

Methodology

The design for this study is a descriptive survey research. This method was relevant because it investigates the phenomenon of Almajiri schools across a wide range of participants which allows for adequate and appropriate sample in order to generalize the findings on the entire population.

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target population of this study is all members of Community Based Management Committee (CBMC), teachers/malams and learners/pupils of the Integrated Islamiyya and Tradition Qur'anic/Tsangaya schools in Niger State. There are over 15,000 Islamic and Qur'anic schools in Niger State but two hundred (200) are integrated (Niger State Agency for Mass Education, 2019). The sample size of this study is 252 participants. Three (3) local government areas were selected randomly one from each senatorial zone and in each local government area, four (4) Integrated Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools (2 each from rural and urban areas) were sampled through the random sampling technique. From each school, 7 participants were selected randomly for CBMC members, teachers/malams and pupils/learners respectively (giving 21 participants per each school) and a total of 84 participants in a local government area (28 per each category for CBMC members, teachers and pupils/learners).

Research Instrument

The instrument developed by the researcher for collection of data was titled: An inventory on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State. It has two (2) parts: Part one is on demographic data measuring school location and school type. Part two has 10 items which measures effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools. The items were prepared on a four-point modified Likert's scale namely; Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree and were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. A total of 120 scores were the maximum for a participant while 30 was the least score.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts in Educational Psychology, Test and Measurement, and Islamic Studies from University of Abuja and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Cronbach Alfa-20 method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and it yielded 0.78 value which was considered significant.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The collection of data in this study was carried out personally by the researcher with the aid of two (2) research assistants. The process of the data collection was by a way of focus group which took a period of one (1) week. The analysis of the data was carried out using the mean and standard deviation.

Research Question 1: What are the opinions of SBMC members on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?

Table 1: Opinions of CBMC members on effective ways for Integration of the Almajiri Schools in Niger State ($n = 180$)

Status	Ways for Integration	Mean	SD	Decision
CBMC	Government should take responsibility of feeding the Almajiri while in school.	3.51	.787	Determinant
	Vocational training should be provided to the Almajirai to be able to cope with the changing society.	3.44	.710	Determinant
	School uniform should be made free for all learners in the Almajiri schools.	3.43	.767	Determinant
	Exercise books, pencils, chalk and biros should be provided to learners of Almajiri schools to replace the use of slates (Allo) and (Tawada)	3.36	.810	Determinant
	Communities should provide volunteers to serve as facilitators in order to meet shortage of personal at the Almajiri schools.	3.54	.711	Determinant
	Non- governmental organizations and individual philanthropists should participate in supporting the Almajiri schools to make teaching and learning more effective.	3.50	.732	Determinant
	Salaries or allowances should replace charity, gifts and weekly, monthly contributions to facilitators at Almajiri schools.	3.51	.731	Determinant
	There should be fence to Almajiri schools in order to provide security and protection for the pupils against rituals and child traffickers	3.67	.650	Determinant
	There should be regular medical check-up at the Almajiri schools and quick treatment for sick Almajirai for healthy growth and development while in school	3.65	.735	Determinant
	Adequate toilet facilities at Almajiri schools should be made a priority to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy	3.71	.615	Determinant
	Total Mean Score	3.53	Determinant	

The analysis in Table 1 indicates the mean score rating of CBMC members regarding their opinions on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State. All the indicators on the strategies for integration of the Almajiri schools had mean scores above the criterion mean score of 2.50. Based on the cluster mean score of 3.53, it was concluded that the CBMC members perceived the indicators in Table 1 above as effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.

Research Question 2: What are the opinions of Teachers/Malams on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?

Table 2: Opinions of Teachers/Malams on effective ways for Integration of the Almajiri Schools in Niger State
(*n* = 72)

Status	Ways for Integration	Mean	SD	Decision	
Teachers/Malams	Government should take responsibility of feeding the Almajiri while in school.	3.43	.859	Determinant	
	Vocational training should be provided to the Almajirai to be able to cope with the changing society.	3.39	.758	Determinant	
	School uniform should be made free for all learners in the Almajiri schools.	3.34	.807	Determinant	
	Exercise books, pencils, chalk and biros should be provided to learners of Almajiri schools to replace the use of slates (Allo) and (Tawada)	3.32	.850	Determinant	
	Communities should provide volunteers to serve as facilitators in order to meet shortage of personal at the Almajiri schools.	3.44	.757	Determinant	
	Non- governmental organizations and individual philanthropists should participate in supporting the Almajiri schools to make teaching and learning more effective	3.41	.768	Determinant	
	Salaries or allowances should replace charity, gifts and weekly, monthly contributions to facilitators at Almajiri schools	3.46	.772	Determinant	
	There should be fence to Almajiri schools in order to provide security and protection for the pupils against rituals and child traffickers	3.61	.705	Determinant	
	There should be regular medical check-up at the Almajiri schools and quick treatment for sick Almajirai for healthy growth and development while in school	3.62	.778	Determinant	
	Adequate toilet facilities at Almajiri schools should be made a priority to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy	3.67	.650	Determinant	
	Total Mean Score		3.47		Determinant

The results in Table 2 indicate the mean score rating of Teachers/Malams regarding their opinions on effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State which all factors of the instrument had mean scores above the criterion mean score of 2.50. Based on the cluster mean score of 3.47, it was concluded that Teachers/Malams viewed all indicators of the instrument in Table 2 as effective ways for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.

Research Question 3: What are the opinions of learners/pupils on strategies that could be used for effective integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State?

Table 3: Opinions of Learners/Pupils on effective ways for Integration of the Almajiri Schools in Niger State

Status	Ways for Integration	Mean	SD	Decision
Learners/Pupils	Government should take responsibility of feeding the Almajiri while in school.	3.32	.853	Determinant
	Vocational training should be provided to the Almajirai to be able to cope with the changing society.	3.32	.766	Determinant
	School uniform should be made free for all learners in the Almajiri schools.	3.38	.796	Determinant
	Exercise books, pencils, chalk and biros should be provided to learners of Almajiri schools to replace the use of slates (Allo) and (Tawada)	3.32	.853	Determinant
	Communities should provide volunteers to serve as facilitators in order to meet shortage of personal at the Almajiri schools.	3.32	.819	Determinant
	Non- governmental organizations and individual philanthropists should participate in supporting the Almajiri schools to make teaching and learning more effective	3.33	.787	Determinant
	Salaries or allowances should replace charity, gifts and weekly, monthly contributions to facilitators at Almajiri schools	3.38	.795	Determinant
	There should be fence to Almajiri schools in order to provide security and protection for the pupils against rituals and child traffickers	3.49	.805	Determinant
	There should be regular medical check-up at the Almajiri schools and quick treatment for sick Almajirai for healthy growth and development while in school	3.60	.799	Determinant
	Adequate toilet facilities at Almajiri schools should be made a priority to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy	3.63	.759	Determinant
	Total Mean Score	3.41		Determinant

The results in Table 3 indicate the mean score rating of learners/pupils regarding their opinions on strategies for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State. All factors of the strategies for integration of the Almajiri schools had mean scores above the criterion mean score of 2.50. Based on the cluster mean score of 3.41, it was concluded that learners/pupils perceived all the factors in Table 3 as effective strategies for integration of the Almajiri schools in Niger State.

Summary of Findings

The strategies identified for effective integration of Almajiri schools in Niger state are:

1. Adequate toilet facilities to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy.
2. Fencing of Almajiri schools in order to provide security and protection for the learners/pupils against child trafficking, abduction and kidnapping.
3. Regular medical checkup and quick treatment for the sick Almajirai for healthy growth and development.
4. Feeding the Almajirai while in school to enhance their attention and concentration.
5. Vocational training to the Almajirai to be able to cope with the changing society.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 1, 2 and 3 showed that adequate toilet facilities at the Almajiri schools to solve the problem of gender insensitivity and to guarantee privacy is a key way or strategy for integration of the Almajiri schools and it should be made a priority in the state. The other factors also considered as important include: Fencing the Almajiri schools in order to provide security and protection for the pupils against rituals and child traffickers, and regular medical check-up at the Almajiri schools and quick treatment for sick Almajirai for healthy growth and development while in school.

Provision of toilet facilities is described as one of the developmental needs of the Almajirai (Sule, 2014), and a viable measure for addressing gender sensitivity which is a factor hindering integration of the Almajiri schools and a requirement for attainment of vision 2020 (Muhinat, 2008; Taiwo, 2013). Similarly, Okugbeni, (2013) posited that security and protection of the Amajirai is a fundamental right that should be maintained in order to achieve peace and tranquility in the society. This means that intensive efforts are required from government at all levels and other key stakeholders to ensure that all the Almajiri schools are given the right and deserved security through fencing of the schools and provision of security guards

to minimize cases of kidnapping, child trafficking and abduction in our society. This view agrees with the position of (Haruna, 2019 & Adetoro, 2010) who maintained that provision of social security and equity is a viable step to curtail the potential threats or barriers to the Almajiri syndrome and quality education in our society.

Further, Yusha'u, Tsafe, Babangida, and Lawal, (2013) discussed the problems and prospects of the Almajiri education and suggested medical care services as a step for managing issues related to outbreak of diseases as a result of congestion in one single location. This is also in line with the view of Taiwo, (2013) who posited that to curtail the outbreak or transmission of diseases and infections at the Almajiri schools, adequate attention should be given to the health conditions of the Almajirai while in schools. This suggests the need to extend medical care programmes and environmental hygiene to the Almajiri schools to enhance safety and reduce health hazards in the society.

Conclusion

The purpose of integration of the Almajiri schools is to expand access to education as well as to achieve inclusive and quality education. Thus, there is no doubt that concerted efforts toward pursuing and realizing the strategies discussed in this paper for effective integration of the Almajiri schools would serve as a catalyst for achieving the targets of basic education, Education For All and SDG4 in Niger State.

Recommendations

1. Training on skill acquisition programmes should be extended to the Almajiri schools to provide them with the opportunity of becoming self-reliant and independent.
2. Adequate sensitization and enlightenment of the public on the relevance of integration of the Almajiri schools into Basic Education to improve the level of public participation so as to enhance literacy level in the society and to achieve the goals of Education For All.
3. Continuous training of the CBMC members and the

- teachers of Integrated Almajiri Schools should be sustained to enhance more efficiency in management of the schools.
4. Provision of grants and financial support should be sustained to assist in improving the programmes of the Almajiri schools quality educational development in the state.
 5. The relevant agencies and parastatals in-charge of Basic Education and Adult and Non Formal Education should conduct adequate and regular monitoring and supervision of the Almajiri schools to identify their areas of strengths and weaknesses for proper support services and interventions; and to guarantee the quality of teaching and learning.

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