

Almajiri Model School System and the Problematic  
of Implementation

**Dr. Mohammed Bello Baban'umma**

Muhammedbello2244@gmail.com

07067160954

Nasarawa State University Keffi

Faculty of Social Sciences

Department of Political Science

**Abstract**

The new "Almajiri" model school system is a step forward in the Nigerian quest to solve the abuse of the traditional 'Almajiri' system where there are no checks and balances. But it should be understood that the traditional "Almajiri" system has come a long way. A millennia-old tradition cannot be transformed with the wave of hand or a passionate upsurge akin to the ones Nigerian government established. All the stake holders have to be more pragmatic and realistic. Doing so entails understanding the psychology and motivations of the parties involved, the parents, the mallams and the students (the almajirai). The programme must appeal to their level and relate with their world view and perception. There are different lenses through which people perceive the world. To an average father that sends his child to 'Almajiranci' he is of the spiritual belief that he is observing a religious obligatory duty (whatever that means). The task then is to convince him that observing a religious obligatory duty is not mutually exclusive from a temporal quest. Unfortunately, most of the people involved in addressing the 'Almajiri' system (the government and private individual, analyst) come with a mind-set that dealt only into the material benefit of abolishing the system, at the expense of the spiritual and psychological means. Unless and until the campaign hinge on the spiritual and religious belief, this useful though will move to Bermuda triangle like other laudable policies. We must exercise reasonable care, patience and perseverance for the programme to succeed. By exercising reasonable care we can prevent this useful children from becoming destructive giants.

Keyword: Almajiri, Model school, Implementation, Tradition,

**Introduction**

In contemporary time, the traditional Almajiri system has come under severe attack and criticisms in the Nigerian body politics and the establishment of the new model has also attract the attention of all stake holder both national and international. It has attracted heated debate among divergent groups each claiming to advance its argument based on their perception, dispositions and idiosyncrasies. This unprecedented concern, worries about Almajiranci and the phenomenon of begging are among the issues most frequently mentioned in the media, in political campaigns and governmental policies, and in academic discourses. Indicators of these concerns are obvious and quite glaring over the Almajiri Education System is informed by several factors. Some of them include explosion in population informs increased churning out of Almajirai, especially into increasingly chaotic urban centres and their concomitant and associated effects such as over crowdedness and over stretching of the urban space and

public utilities, upsurge in social deviation, maladjustment, and disorders and general vulnerability to all sorts of social hazards.

Most observers have claimed that the almajirai are children living under a horrific condition, most of them left their homes and parents at tender age to be taught under a teacher (mallam) who is vast in the Islamic knowledge but left on their own to feed on themselves under the mercy of Allah.. A very pathetic aspect of their lives 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. From their appearance too they rarely take their bath. It is surprising however to see that they rarely fall sick (Kabiru,2012) lamented that:

The condition under which these street urchins lives makes them to develop very strong immunity to illnesses and diseases, which baffle medical practitioners.' They are growing in geometrical progression a population too large for individuals to handle; this has led the Quranic education system into a modern form of slavery and unimaginable child abuse.

It is in line with this protracted character, nature of the traditional Almajiri School that the federal government came with articulated and martial out planned model of Almajiri School to alleviate the suffering of the people for their development.

However, since the induction of the new Almajiri model schools in 2013, like any other innovations in education divergent tunes have continued to trail the policy. There has been daunting challenges revolving around the implementation and non-availability of relevant curriculum in school, Therefore, the central focus of this of this paper is to examine of challenges of implementing the New Almajiri model system of education in Northern Nigeria with a view to finding means of recouping the policy.

#### **The Traditional Almajiri System: A Historical Perspective**

From the Islamic perspective, seeking for knowledge is the first principle before worshipping. Therefore, the word Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word "almuhajirun" meaning an immigrant. It usually refers to a person who migrates from the home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. It is hinged on the Islamic concept of migration which is widely practiced especially when the acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient.

Its origin was the migration of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina. Those who migrated with the prophet to Medina were called 'Al-Muhajirun', meaning emigrants. These emigrants had no means of livelihood on getting to Medina, but based on the fraternity established by the prophet, between their hosts and them, they were co-opted into different trades and vocations as apprentices who were paid for their services.

However, contextually, in modern times, the word refers to seeker of knowledge in an organized and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. The Almajiri Education System is a reflection of Islamic learning centres in many Muslim countries such as the Madrasah in Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt and Indonesia and so on. The system was funded by the state treasury and the zaka funds, and was under the control of the emirs of the traditional government system that existed before the coming of the British. Since Islam encourages charity to wayfarer and to a student of learning, the community as well readily supported this Almajiri most of whom came from faraway places to enrol in the Tsangaya schools. In return, the almajiris offer services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving, sowing and so on as charity to the community that contributed to their wellbeing; hence they gave the society what the society gave to them. The almajiri system, though funded was over dependent on the state. The students were at liberty to acquire vocational and occupational skills in between their Islamic lessons and so were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, and tailoring, small businesses and so on. Many of them were the farmers of the northern Nigerian cotton and groundnut pyramids. They formed the majority of the traders in the

commercial city of Kano. They were the leather tanners and leather shoe and bag makers in the old Sokoto Empire. The weavers and tailors in Zaria city were said to be almajiris.

The implication is that the Almajirai, formed the largest percentage of the community work force and made significant contribution to the economy of the society before the introduction of white collar jobs. The system also produced judges, clerks, and teachers and so on, and laid an elaborate system of administration in northern Nigeria. They provided the colonial administration with the needed staff. The first set of colonial staff in northern Nigeria was provided by the almajiri schools and this went on for years. In fact, the almajiri system was a civilizing agent second to none, before they were gradually replaced, phased out and indeed abandoned as a result of capitalist mode of production.

However, the British conquest of Nigeria and subsequent annexation of both the north and south came alone with several consequences. First and foremost, they killed and disposed those emirs who resisted the foreign rule, took control of the state treasury, while those who were subjugated lose control of their territories and accepted their new roles as mere traditional rulers used only for the indirect rule. The British also refused to recognise the Almajiri education system as an important educational system and deliberately abolished its state funding arguing that, they were mere religious schools. To add to the already dreaded bomb, all the learned people who were at the helm of affairs in pre-colonial north fell in one swoop and were considered illiterate or uneducated (at least to the government), making them not only unemployed but unqualified to be employed despite being able to read and write. Islamic scholars who were revered professionally for controlling the moral fiber's of the society gradually became neglected. An Imam who may be the source of arbitration to the people of his community was relegated to delivering sermon once a week at the local Friday mosque. The same Imam is considered not qualified enough to have a say in government or to sit in the chambers of the state house of assembly to deliberate on the laws and constitution of the state because he was considered uneducated and illiterate.

The worst hit brought by colonialism to the almajirai system was the entrenchment of the capitalist value of primitive accumulation of wealth by all means hence, the collapse of traditional values of communalism, brother hood and hospitality under which the traditional almajirai system survive.

To resuscitate the situation, the responsibility of the almajirai was then taken over by the local scholars who deemed it a moral and religious duty to educate these pupils for the sake of Allah. Although there was scarcity of funds and overwhelming number of people to cater for, the system continued to flourish with the support of the immediate community and begging was still not a norm instead they resorted to odd menial jobs to make ends meet (Okonkwo & Alhaji, 2014) (Ellechiagu, 2012)

Disregard for the almajiri system in preference to western education couple with the increasing level of poverty in the country, the care of the almajiri became overwhelmingly burdensome for the mallams who were left with no choice but to send these little boys out to beg from the good will of the society. To make ends meet, some of these mallams began to impose on the almajiris what is called "KundinLaraba", a form of weekly Wednesday fees for the lessons they derived. They were reassured that to beg was better than to steal. These boys horde into the society with no bearing, moving from street to street, house to house, vehicle to vehicle. They were everywhere including Mosque, Churches, markets, car parks, restaurants and even graveyard, and so on. They became a burden as well as a pest to the society. They sang, begged and prayed appealing to the mercy and good will of the people.

The almajirai consume all kinds of foods that come to their way either fresh or stale. Their common food called "gajala" which is stored by an almajiri over a number of days. It is a combination of locally made of corn food (tuwo) and 'qanzo', pasta and boiled yam altogether like a fresh vomit. They roam about dirty, tattered, bare foot, pale with flies pecking on their cracked lips and dry faces which is filled with rashes or ring worm. They sleep on worn out mats in an uncompleted building where even animal and reptile may not find it convenient as there are no windows for cross ventilation and the walls have given room to cracks as if it will fall the next minute.

With loss of support from the government and the community, the helpless emirs, the scholars Mu'allims have no option other than to allow almajirai to go for begging for their survival. Thus picture of the almajirai became bleak and precarious like an accident victim where the faith of the sympathizers remain elusive for the almajiri survival (Hilda & Ibrahim 2014)

It is really sad when you see these almajirais, hungry, malnourished, wounded, rushing for fly invested left over food, searching through trash can for little morsels just to stay alive. In fact the blurred memory of this young future generation keeps one in perpetual pain as to whether to cry or search for alternative for them.

### **The New Almajiri Model**

In 2013 the federal Government of Nigeria made attempts to integrate western education with Islamic education so as to surpass the Almajiri to functional member of the society. Merging the two system of education together to curtail the plight of street begging by children and youth pursuing Qur'anic education is a welcome development. The system is to accommodate the Almajiri who are coming to the city from far and near villages for Qur'an knowledge. The purpose of the integration is to strengthen the ability of the learners to read, write and memorize the Qur'an in a conducive learning atmosphere and to introduce secular subjects of western education into Qur'anic school system thereby making the products literate, numerate and equipped them with manipulative and survival skills in the modern system to meet the goals of Education For All (EFA) and to eradicate Almajiri method of involving teenage children into street begging, hard labour, unhygienic condition, social vices and also to provide adequate and qualitative instructional materials in both Islamic and secular subjects (Yusha'u & Lawal, 2013)

However, to achieve the aim of the programme, national guidelines for the development and integration of the Almajiri education into basic education were developed and printed to guide the federal, states, local governments and nongovernmental organizations, which may collaborate with the federal government on the project to meet its objectives and sustainability. The guidelines have three models.

- (i) This Model focuses on the integration of traditional Tsangaya- Qur'anic School into the formal education system within its original location.
- (ii) Model two deals with boarding Almajiri schools involving the establishment of model boarding schools to serve a group of Tsangaya/Qur'anic schools within a given location. Aside the facilities mentioned above, this model has two laboratories and two workshops. It also has a Mallam's residence, kitchen and dining facilities.
- (iii) Model Three is the integration of basic education in established Islamiyyah and Ma'ahad schools. This Model is in form of support for existing Islamiyyah and Ma'arifa schools in the areas of rehabilitation and provision of additional infrastructure (Media trust, 2013).

On the part of the government, to achieve the objectives of the above models, the Almajiri schools where established. The almajiri are to be thought both western as well as Quranic education so that they will be removed from the streets. A total of 125 Almajiri model schools are being constructed in 27 states of the Federation, out of which over 80 have been completed (Shehu, 2002). The completed schools are being handed over to the state governments to facilitate enrolment and employment of teachers to man them. The responsibility of constructing the schools was shared among the funding agencies of both basic and tertiary education. The Universal Basic Education, UBEC, is to construct 89 of these schools, out of which 64 have been fully completed and furnished with learning taking place, while the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, TETFund, constructed 35 of these schools, which were already commissioned.

On the November 2, 2013, President Jonathan performed a symbolic launching of the 64 newly completed and furnished Almajiri schools in Sokoto state, signifying a laudable achievement in the development of the basic education subsector in that part of the country. The 64 schools commissioned are located in Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Oyo,

The integrated Almajiri schools are to offer the following core subjects, English, Sciences, Mathematics, Social Studies together with Hausa, Computer, PHE and Handwriting under formal system of education with Agriculture, Trade, Commerce, Handcraft, Mechanic, Vulcanizing and Islamic Calligraphy among others as vocational skills of their curriculum. While the component to the curriculum of non-formal education is Qur'anic education which involve strong foundation in recitation of the Glorious Qur'an and Islamic studying include Qira'atul Qur'an, Tahfeez, Tajweed, Arabic, Islamic Studies, Tauhid, Hadith, Fiqh and Sira (Yusha'u and & Lawal,2013).The model boarding school which is in phases entrust four responsibilities to the federal government, Provision of funding for construction of the schools, accommodation, equipment and furnishing, Provision of textbooks; Designing of curriculum for use in the schools; Provision for capacity building training for teachers.

From the above structural design of the model, it seem the initiative is particularly commendable in the light of the age old deprivation, neglect and abuse these children have been subjected to. The new system will undoubtedly and for the first time in the lives of most of the almajri children, insure that they are properly clothed and have access to food and learning materials while studying. It could easily be deduced that these pupils stand to reap the best of two worlds- they will receive a structured Islamic education and will also enjoy the benefits of modern western education in the form of practical skills needed to compete in today's world. In some ways, these new policies and the new education project will serve as a check on the security threat that these children constituted as it stands to arouse in them patriotic sentiments towards the country that is now caring for them.

Most important is the fact that the new Almajiri Education Programme does not in any way affect the Qur'anic education that the Almajiris are presently exposed to. What it brings to the table is the assurance that the Almajiris will have access to quality basic education in a conducive environment backed by an adequate feeding programme and quality educational resource materials. The Almajiris will also be exposed to skills that will enable them participate more actively in the society, other than beg for survival.

They will also be housed in their respective hostels with facilities that are of high societal standards. Simply put, the Federal Government has put in place several measures to ensure the retention of these Almajiris in the schools.

### **The Challenges of Implementing Almajiri Model**

It is imperative to note that some civil society groups, the northern aristocrats and commentators have raised questions about the implementation and sustainability of new almajiri model system. Some of the teething challenges bedevilling the implementation of the programme are thus:

#### **- The Protracted Poverty In The North**

Statistics has shown that the northern states have highest indices of poverty according to NBS report of 2012. This no doubt contributed to parent sending their children to begging. There are cases where the children bring back the remnantsof what they have scored in the begging business. Most families in the rural areas live under the carnage and chain of poverty as most social amenities could only be found in the cities. As in the case of Sokoto state where most remote villageshave no access to road, drinking water and health facilities. For this type of families sending children to almajiranci is the best alternative option. Hence begging became the order of the day. This is not meant to say Islam does not frowns at begging in any form because it reduces Muslim's self-esteem and dignity. Yet parents release their children to undergo this horrific condition out of poverty.

#### **- Lack Of Adequate Knowledge Of Islamic Means Of Acquiring Knowledge**

In Hadith collection by Wali'al-din (1977)quoted (Mishkat al-masabih) the prophet said “ go in search of knowledge even to china” (Ifijeh& James 2012). In a similar thought the Prophet in the collection Al-tirmidhi said “the search for knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”. This implies that the prophet

did not discriminate against age, status, gender. Similarly, the quest for knowledge knows no geographical, social or religious boundary. These and many others similar Hadith propelled Muslim in the whole world to go in search of knowledge. However, this hadith is wrongly interpreted as knowledge must be seek without a guide.

Most renowned Islamic scholars have elaborately explained the means, the strategy, and the method of acquiring knowledge according to the ideals of Islamic teachings. In all the explanations neither the prophet nor his companions, or their followers see begging as part of the teachings. In fact, in a renowned book written by Burhanudeen Al-zarnuji titled 'Ta'alim Muta'alim dari quta'alim' meaning 'an instruction to students a method of learning'. This book has extensively explain how Islamic knowledge should be acquired as he explain thus:

The pursuit of knowledge is not carried on without six things which I shall inform you of through words that are clear; ingenious acumen, fervent desire, patience, sufficient sustenance, guidance of a teacher, and length of time.

#### - The Mislaid Ideological Construct

The age-long twincultural belief that a child who has not been sent to Almajiri School will not spiritually prosper in life. This believe goes to the extent of claiming that the child will rescue his parent in the day of judgment. Hence, sending children to traditional Almajiri School is generally accepted as a spiritual means of purifying children. On the other side of the misled ideological construct there are claims that western education is contradictory to the whole essence of Islamic belief. This is ingrained in the belief that the western education called Boko is of Christian-European origin and therefore anti-Islamic. Some nurture the fear that a child with western belief will eventually lose his Islamic identity and embrace vices that negates the values and principles of Islam, such as alcoholism, fornication, semi unclad dressing, partying, abandoning the prayer, fasting, zakka and so on. This make it difficult to reform and integrate the system in to the mainstream educational system.

#### - Polygamous Marriage System of the North

The polygamous nature of the core northern state is structurally part of the problem. Most people have faith in having more children based on the Hadith of the prophet that says marry and generate so that I can be proud of you in the day of judgement. In another narration it has been reported that the prophet had said marriage is my tradition and whoever negate it is not with me.

It should be noted that the above twonarrations are in conformity with the explanation of the third verse of suratulnisai which state thus:

And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, then marry women of your choice –two, three, or four. But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one or the captives and the slaves that your right hands possess. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice. Quran 4:verse3.

The above verse clearly shows that it is not compulsory to marry many wives and children. It is conditional that is, if you can do justice to both the wives and the children. Is it justice for one to allow his children moving on the street? Is it justice for the parent not to take responsibility of their children? For Allah sake the prophet had said

( kullukumra'iwakullukummas'uluna an ra'iyatihi) that means 'all of you are shepherd and each will be asked on how he treated what he was given to take care of.

This implies that you can only have more wives and children if you can do justice to them as explained in the above verse. This entails having enough resources for their feeding, schooling, health, housing and all the necessary requirements.

#### - Politicization of the Model

The new model is seen as a political weapons to canvass votes by the Jonathan administration which was over politicised without adequate and substantial planning reflecting on the socio-economic realities of the North. A visit to most almajiri schools revealed that it is ill funded thus hindering the success of the programme. This is partly due to low percentage of the budget allocated to education. The

Nigerian government has never allocated up to 26% as recommended by UNESCO of its annual budget to education in any given years in order to achieve the objectives of peace, citizenship, and security (Education for All EFA-Global Monitoring Report, 2005). This no doubt, has adversely affects the implementation of the programme.

- **Communication Gap**

The communication gap embedded in the Almajiri education system make understanding difficult as greater percentage of the enlightenment was done only within the major cities in the North. The enlightenment programme has not really spread across both the metropolis and the rural areas. The rural populace is not fully aware of the Almajiri integration programme. This makes it difficult as most of the people especially those in the rural areas are unwilling to participate in the implementation of the programme.

- **Conclusion**

The traditional "Almajiri" System of education in itself is not a problem, it is just like any other system subject to abuse when there are no checks and balances. Besides, the "Almajiri" System is a millennium-old tradition that cannot be dismissed with the wave of hand or an emotional outburst. The government has to be more pragmatic and realistic. To an average father that sends his child to 'Almajiranci' he is of the belief his observing a religious duty (whatever that means). The task then is to convince him that observing a religious duty most conform to the ideals of Islamic teachings. This entails understanding the psychology and motivations of the parties involved, think at their level and relate with their world view and perception. Unless and until the both the psychology and the belief of the participant is work on the model will remain a mirage.

**Recommendation**

- A call for abolishment of Almajiri School is assumed as an encroachment into the culture and belief of the North. The parents in the north should be enlightened to abide with the ideal of Islamic means of acquiring knowledge. The dogmatic mislead belief that a child must pass through the traditional almajirai system before he prosper must be campaigned against. The mallams and traditional rulers in the nook and crannies of the North should spearhead this campaign. Hausa films and Radio programmes can be sponsored for this purpose, Vocational education that provides skills related to occupations like carpentry, welding, farming, etc should be introduced for adolescents and adults attending the Qur'anic schools. The Islamic scholars, educational administrators and the Islamic clergy must come together, with the Mallams to form a central structure or a unilateral control over every Traditional Quranic school

- For the new model of Almajiri school to succeed Poverty should be targeted in the northern area using some empowerment programme by both the state government and the stake holders. Agriculture could be an alternative to the empowerment since almajiri pupils could lead to increase in labour supply. A skilled acquisition could re-channel the waste of labour to useful activities in the country.

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