



PONDEROUS CHILDHOOD AND THE CHALLENGES OF ALMAJIRAI PHENOMENON IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper assessed the ponderous childhood of Almajirai in Northern Nigeria with particular reference to their historical evolution. The practice of Almajiri system of education makes reference to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings that reiterates the search for knowledge even if it require travelling to the farthest area in the East (China). The Prophet and his disciples created a historic landmark culminating in migration from Makka to Medina, aptly referred to in Arabic as Almuhajirun (Migrants). By the 11th century, Islam was introduced to Borno Empire, hence their and advocacy of the Almajiranci system of education by the rulers. Again, the 19th century Islamic revival' movement led by Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo established Islamic theocratic states that bolstered a similar system. This led to the establishment of the Inspectorate of Qur'anic Education, charged with the smooth running and funding of Almajiri education. However, the British colonial incursion and subjugation of Northern Nigeria in 1903 espoused a paradigm shift that eventually resulted in the transformation of Almajiri education, and when funding ceased at its expense, Western education took the vantage. In the subsequent time, the Almajirai condition became exacerbated through the search for food and means for the survival of the Malams (teachers) through begging for alms and engagement in menial jobs and other illicit activities. It is quintessential that the Almajirai of many challenges that inhibit the achievement of desired objectives; this included their subjection to deplorable conditions, and conscription into criminal groups, among others. Some of them became political hoodlums, thugs and nuisances to the society through smoking of Indian hemp, drug abuse and other narcotics which engendered involvement in violent conflicts viz; Boko Haram, armed banditry etc. Up to this contemporary period, Almajirai between the age is 2 and 5 and beyond, according to United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), was estimated to be 13.2 million in Nigeria. Against this backdrop the study explored the origin, motives and challenges of Almajiranci phenomenon in Northern Nigeria. For adequate comprehension, the study adopted the historical sources and method of data collection as well as a descriptive form of analysis. The study examined and used substantial primary data for the research.

Keywords: Ponderous, Lumpen, Childhood, Almajirai, Northern Nigeria, Challenges



Introduction

It is an incontrovertible that the pattern of searching for knowledge prior to the emergence of Western education in the 19th century involved spatial and oscillatory movement from one region to another. The *Almajiranci* system of education in northern Nigeria is thus a reflection of such a historical trajectory described in the context of this study as Islamic system of education of the lumpen childhood, or in what Amzat (2008:55) refers to as ‘problem population.’ Invariably, others referred to it as *Karatun wahala* meaning- ‘problem education.’ Historically, the phenomenon originated according to Khalid (1998) from the flight of Prophet Muhammad and patriots from Mecca to Medina in the early days of Islam. It is interesting to note that knowledge was dispersed and not geographically bound; disciples were encouraged to seek knowledge. According to Ibn Khalidun (1967:427), the Prophet is quoted to have said, “find knowledge even if it is in China” and “whoever set out seeking for knowledge will be walking in the path of God until his return” and whoever dies while travelling for learning will be regarded as a Martyr” and those who respond to the call be referred as *Al-muhajirun* (emigrant). Northern Nigeria from antiquity up to this contemporary period is part of the disciples yielding and responding to the call of the Prophet in search of knowledge and scholarship away from their home.

In Senegal, Tanzania and Nairobi among others, the *Almajiranci* system is similar to what is obtainable in northern Nigeria (Aptekar, 1996) and in almost all West African countries. Perry (2004:59) corroborates the fact that “while the marabout *talibe* (*Almajir*) relationship does not exist in Arab countries, it is uniquely African institution, it is clearly modelled on Muslim ideas of submission and servitudes as written in the Glorious Qur’an.

Besides, Amzat (2008:23) also affirmed that the search for knowledge pushes the *Almajirai* (pupils) away from their parents and makes them set on the hot streets of Sokoto metropolis and other urban centres in Northern Nigeria. These *Almajirai* are evident in Maiduguri, Yola, Kano, Kaduna, Birnin Kebbi, Zaria, Dutse and Gusau to the extreme end of Sokoto. From the various studies and media assertions, Abuh (2010), Dodo (2012), Ali (2013) and Bashir (1994) exemplifies that *Almajirai* are almost ubiquitous in every part of Northern Nigeria and constitute major and distinct urban centres’ socio-economic, political and religious menace. In comparison to the South-western part of Nigeria where large proportions of Yoruba Muslims reside, they also practice the *Almajiranci* education, but distinct in nature as it becomes a cultural phenomenon among northern Muslims. The Yoruba *Alfa* (Islamic cleric) teaches the students by adhering with the changing trend and modernity in education of the socio-cultural and political milieu. The mallams engage the pupils in domestic chores; work in farms; as well serves the wife/wives of their *Alfa*, but not subjected to inhuman treatment or begging as the parent are ever ready to fend and cater for their children needs (Ghazali & Salaudeen, 2019). After graduation, the pupils may organise their own school or continue to serve the *Alfa*-cleric with some compensation paid since most of the schools are a paradigm in line with the modern educational system.

It is worthy of note that the *Almajirai* face quite a number of challenges evident in their physical appearance which decipher their deplorable condition. Khalid (1998) observes that the search for knowledge makes them susceptible to scavenging for food and cloths and seeking livelihood at the margin of different types of difficulties. This is because the *Almajir*- lumpen childhood’s last available option is to avert starvation through begging. To sustain their survival and that of the *Malams*, the *Almajirai* engaged in child labour, a process which subjected them to undergo inhuman



treatment from the society. Consequently, they have no choice than to start menial or odd jobs at tender age of 5 in order to survive economically since the *Malams* (teachers) are not paid for the teaching job by the parents. Hence, *Almajirai* are shoe-shiners, nail cutters, washer-boy, errand-boys, house-help and hawkers among others (Amzat, 2008). This development implies that child slavery and abuse, which is highly detrimental to the overall national development still subsists. Against the above backdrop, this study discussed, apart from the introduction, the conceptual insights on *Almajirai* as lumpen childhood. It also carves out the historical genealogy of *Almajirai* education and the category of *Almajirai*. As the nitty-gritty of the study, it examined reasons for *Almajiranci* and their supportive roles, the challenges faced by *Almajirai*- lumpen childhood in northern Nigeria and finally the concluding remarks.

Conceptual Insights on Almajirai - Ponderous Childhood

The concept has been expressed in various ways; each author defines the phenomenon from distinct perspective, but ubiquitously arrives at a similar concept as explains in the following review. In the description of Amzat (2008:56), *Almajir* is a Hausa word for pupil or student, derived from the Arabic term *Almuhajiri*- meaning migrant. *Almajirai* are part of the disciples yielding to the call of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in search of knowledge and scholarships away from their homes. Also, Kabiru (2012) reiterates that the word is etymologically derived from ‘*Almuhajir*’ meaning a seeker of Islamic knowledge which originated from the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Makka to Madina. Most of the *Almajirai* are between the ages of 5-15 of which 33.33 per cent are in the age category of 5-9. However, Khalid (1998:12-22) observed that *Almajiri* does not originally connote the destitute or beggars. However, with their pattern of movement and living, the term is now closely related. Others, outside the Islamic purview see the practice of *Almajir* as one of the major forms of child abuse which is inhibiting northern Nigeria from spawning future professionals that will constitute the development of the nation.

The lumpen childhood concept is seen as the ‘poor of the poor’ a similitude of the *Almajirai* characteristics or life system described by Amzat (2008) to mean the ‘problem population.’ Spitzer (1975) singled out the social dynamite as the volatile group of which the street children are part. Therefore, the *Almajirai* are part of the social volatile, social dynamite, and therefore a part of the problem population. Connecting from above, the lumpen childhood or *Almajirai* are marginalised unemployable or alienated classless categories who have been the major feature of the poorest countries. Cobral (1974), cited in Amzat (2008) also described lumpen as *déclassé* In this perspective, lumpen childhood depicts a “class” that is not classifiable within the working-class category. Amzat (2008) emphasised that in developing countries which Nigeria is inclusive, the proletariats suffer from extreme poverty, and the condition of the lumpen proletariat is less human. In a nutshell, lumpen are social scavengers not only do street *Almajirai* scavenge for food, but they also scavenge for social existence within the margin.

Historical Genealogy of Almajiranci- Islamic Education in Nigeria

The strong affirmation of followership of Islam globally remains the catalyse for the search for knowledge even up to the farther East. The historic migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Madina spurred the practice of *Almajirici* in northern Nigeria. These have been made explicit in the Glorious Qu’ran and from the assertion of Ibn Khalidun (1976).



In Nigeria, the *Almajiri* system started in the 11th century, due to the involvement of Borno rulers in Qu'ranic literacy (Trimingham, 1966). By 1809, the Sokoto Caliphate was founded principally through the Islamic revolution that led to the establishment of Islamic theocratic state based on the teaching of the Glorious Qu'ran and Hadith (Anene & Brown, 1963). It suffices to understand that the two Empires run similar Qur'anic learning system, which became known as the *Almajiri* system. Besides, the 19th century jihad reformist movement introduced paradigm shift and modifications that resulted in the establishment of Inspectorate of Qu'ranic School that report to the *Emir* of the Province (Abdulqadir, 2012).

In addition, the British incursion and the subjugation of Northern Nigeria in 1903 bastardised the autochthonous socio-economic and political system (Crowder, 1978). The resultant effect was the invasion, deposition and extermination of some northern Nigeria Emirs leading to some pockets of resistance that culminated in supplanting of others. An instance was the removal of Attahiru I and his replacement with Attahiru II in 1903. As a result, the pre-existing Islamic education was tampered with by supplanting it the Westernised education (Ibrahim, 2014). This process and contraption is what (Yandaki 1995) refers to as the occidentalisation process or internationalisation called the Westoxification of ideology. For the British imperialists to chart a course for exploitation and exploration of the indigenous polity and people, a pristine socio-political policies was espoused that converted the rulers (Emirs) to mere or cross flag rulers. The Emirs were forced and coerced to acknowledge colonial authority, which rendered them powerless and submissive to British phony precepts and rules. As a deceleration of Islam, the Muslim rulers lost control of the *Almajiranci* system to the British colonial education policy through the incorporation of *Karatun Boko*- Western education as avant-garde for good governance as they perceived.

Consequently, to achieve the pernicious acts, the British advertently exterminated the State funding of Islamic education as introduced and incorporated by the government of Sir Ahmadu Bello Sardauna based on religious schools. This manifestation was the beginning of the decline in the *Almajiranci* system. As a result of the visicitude of time and changes in respect to the British colonial polity, Abdulqadir (2003) was explicit that the indigenous people lost government, *Emirs* and community support, and eventually the *Almajiranci* system collapsed. With this, *Karatun Boko*- Western education begins to be funded at the detriment of *Almajiri* education. Amzat (2007) analysed how the pupils survive economically as they resorted to begging and scavenging for food and clothes and engaged in menial jobs for livelihood. However, this sordid development arising from British colonial incursion and the Muslims overwhelming embracement of Islamic culture being the monolithic religion in Northern Nigeria was the origin and development of the lumpen childhood or the 'problem population.' This sordid development was the incipient that accounts for the origin of the contemporary challenges of *Almajiranci*, *Boko Haram*, armed banditry and other socio-economic, political and religious menaces in Northern Nigeria. The iniquities experienced during the British colonial and immediate post-colonial periods necessitated why hundreds of thousands of *Almajiri* in the Northern States still roamed the street in the contemporary period. Henceforth, the street *Almajirai* faces enormous challenges which reflect their deplorable conditions during the search for Islamic knowledge and scholarship. The *Almajirai* and their *Malams* (Islamic teachers or clerics) in manifestations of their disenchantment, concoct Hausa lyrics interpreting the nature of *Karatun Boko*- Western education as follows:

Yan makarantan bokoko,



Ba karatu, ba sallah,

Sai yawan zagin Malam

Meaning:

Pupils of Western schools,

You do not learn or pray,

But only abuse your teachers.

Conceptual Insights and Category of *Almajirai*- Ponderous Childhood

The Marxian theory was the first of its kind seeing economic development as the catalyst and one of the motivating forces that drive people towards robust relationships. This makes the *Almajirai* of northern Nigeria not an exception. This explanation is summed up by Karl Marx in Jhigan (2006:95) as the dialectic of the materialistic interpretation of history. According to Marx, the materialistic interpretation of history attempts to show that all historical events result from the continuous economic struggle between different classes and groups in society. The main cause of this struggle is the conflict between the mode of production and the relations of production. This struggle was the European reaction that ignited the British colonial conquest of northern Nigeria in 1903 (Crowder, 1978) that later resulted in the integration of Hausaland into the mainstream capitalist economic system (Bello, 2011). In relation to the phenomenon under review, the capitalist mode of production transformed the masses into the working class, which thereby (the proletariats) constitute a class that suffers from exploitation, pauperisation and alienation (Bello, 2011). However, as a corollary effect evident, the Glorious Qur'anic schools in northern Nigeria was pulverised. Deriving from Marxist ideation, the action depicted that there is still a class below the working class refers to as the ponderous childhood- *Almajirai* contrary to the sole objective of acquiring Islamic education.

The *Almajir* or the ponderous child category forms what Spitzer (1975) cited in Amzat (2008) as the problem population, not only found at the margin but made up of the social junks who have failed to contribute to the capitalist economy. The *Almajirai* constitute "parasites" to the economy of northern Nigeria and has been described in the preceding. It is quintessential to describe the three types of *Almajirai*; the first category is the *Almajirai* sent in the urban centre to live with an Islamic scholar (*Malam*) permanently until the completion of their Islamic education. Those *Almajirai* are generally given in trust to a resident *Malam*. However, they have to fend for themselves and may not return until they graduate. The second category is *Almajirai* that may not return to their parents during the rainy season for farming activities. In this category *Almajirai* worked as forced labourers and assiduously engaged in such activity as to fetch water and firewood for their *Malams* and themselves for economic survival. The last category is that type of *Almajirai* that migrates (from rural areas) with their Islamic scholars during the dry season to the urban centres to return rural areas for learning and farming during the raining season (Amzat, 2008). In another view, Oloko (1989), Khalid (2001) and Amzat (2007) aver that the *Almajirai*, mainly during the learning period have to strive to better their lots since their parents might provide little or no support. In a nutshell, it is pertinent to understand that the nature of northern Nigeria socio-cultural, political and religious systems have constrained many *Almajirai* from the first two categories to live on the street alone, attend lessons only when the chance occurs and then return to the street. In the plethora of times,



the pupils were subjected to a situation where their credulity among others was exploited to accomplish dreadful expeditions at the expense of the sole objective of acquiring Islamic education.

***Almajiranci* and their Supportive Roles in Northern Nigeria**

There are complexities and subtle array of social, cultural and religious forces behind the *Almajiranci* phenomenon in Northern Nigeria. The phenomena are best construed in conscious and subconscious factors as follows: Firstly is the search for Islamic education and scholarship buttressed by the Islamic tradition (hadith) as it reiterates that if it requires travelling to the farthest area in the East (China). This is also bolstered by the assertion that those whose life truncated in the cause of struggling for Islamic survival as a martyr will benefit enormously from the beatitudes of Allah in the hereafter. This belief remained incontrovertible to the understanding of Islam in the mind of some recipients of the *Almajirai* system of education. Secondly, often pertinent to the reason behind the practice of *Almajiranci* is the government lack of commitment, fragility of some states in northern Nigeria and the inability to cater for the needs of the emerging populace, particularly in their integration and incorporation to modern educational system where the *Malams* will be handsomely compensated. Thirdly, the *Almajiranci* practice has become part of the northern Nigeria social and psycho-cultural phenomenon they believed acknowledged and cannot be separated within their social and political milieu. Lastly, is the effervescent socio-economic and political status of northern Nigeria people's perception that deems it a double necessity to own and supply their wards/children to *Malams* for *Almajiranci* autochthonous education. In fact, the synthesis of conscious and subconscious forces is asymmetrically responsible for the *Almajiranci* nature of education, which in the long run is eventually aggravated by conservative ideologues and accelerated poverty ambiance on a decimal point.

In an examination of the supportive roles of the *Almajirai* in the area under review, this cannot be undervalued particularly in both positive and negative roles. Invariably, Dukku (2009) reported that apart from begging, some of the *Almajiri* also develop "innovative" ways of survival by engaging in menial jobs. Henceforth, they provide cheap labour for the urban community. A substantial majority of the *Almajirai* are now house-help who assist the urban population in different domestic chores at cheap rates. Besides, there are growing numbers of shoe-shiners, wheel barrow pusher and domestic labours among the *Almajirai*. The *Almajirai* or the street children are even attached to women in purdah who send them on different errands at the end of the day (Dukku, 2009). A critical study and observation of *Almajirai* is that they wash plates, fetch water, wash clothes, dump refuse and engage in other domestic chores. Similarly, there are abound evidences of their engagements as labourers. Some of their activities are also replicated in tertiary institutions in northern Nigeria-poignantly referred to as *Yaro-boys*. There are also the proliferating numbers of some street hawkers, among which are attached to traders at the market places who give them wares for sale (Razak, 2019). Generally, the *Almajirai* plays significant supportive roles for the household fundamentally for survival in the various northern Nigeria cities. Khalid (2001) reported that almost one in Sokoto, Zaria, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Dutse and Katsina, including those who oppose their presence use the services of *Almajirai*. It is further observed that over 80% of households during the survey utilize the service of the *Almajirai* either occasionally or permanently. It is germane to understand that most of the urban families rely heavily on the labour of the *Almajirai* especially for domestic chores. By and large, the *Almajirai* are thus deprive of parental emotion for others, especially in society where they have to sing, roam and roar, work and wait for leftover at the restaurant, or worse still, scavenge for food in the refuse for livelihood (Khalid, 1998). It is the profound nature of the



difficulties and challenges' faced by *Almajirai* that unintentionally make a quite number of them vulnerable to atrocities in northern Nigeria. The recent protests in Sokoto State on Thursday 12th of May, 2022 over the arrest of the killer of Miss. Deborah Samuel Yakubu,- a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, over the passing of derogatory and disparaging statements on Prophet Mohammad (SAW), suffices the dreadful activities of *Almajirai* insidious act. The mobs were vigorously supported by some *Almajirai* who aimlessly wander around in search of means of survival dogmatically advocated and joined the massive destruction of private properties, looting, injury and displacement of innocent persons in the state. The spill-over effect of the scoundrel act leads to Islamic radicalisation in other northern states of Nigeria in justification of the lynching, killing and setting ablaze of the malfeasant student in Sokoto State. Similarly is the case of Miss. Naomi Goni alleged blasphemy of the Prophet in Maiduguri, in which punitive measure is outright dead by stoning, lynching and burning as proclaimed by the mob vanguard and his *Almajirai* acolyte.

Challenges of Ponderous Childhood-*Almajirai* in Northern Nigeria

Almajirai faces many challenges that have inhibited their life progress toward achieving of the desired Islamic knowledge. These are exemplified as follows:

The Conservative Idea and Belief System of the Almajirai Parents

The unyielding character and behavioural system of *Almajirai* parents towards change and adoption of modern education constitute one of the fundamental challenges which the *Almajirai* pupils or invariably the prole child faces from *ab initio*. Even in the face of transforming the *Almajirai* education system into a modern one, they found it extremely subtle and complex to divorce or adapt to some valuable changes and standards that are enjoin by Islamic tenets and principles. In the expression of Akeem, Maroof & Abdurashid (2019) their perceptions and belief of anything incongruous to the dictates and practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is heathen or Shriek an abominable sin in the sight of Allah. Again, the generic opinion of the parents inclination to orthodox Islamic principles and practices is that anything refers to as a modern educational system is strategically tantamount to the conversion of their wards/children to Christianity. This is a development that Muslims in northern Nigeria abhor mostly and any acknowledgment of it is synonymous with brandishing the beneficiary as *Kuffir*- unbeliever. More so, one of the fundamental challenges is the overwhelming embracement of Islamic cum indigenous culture by the people in expression of Islam as a monolithic religion of northern Nigeria. Their conception and belief of this ideation were attributed by some northern Muslim as the origin and development of the lumpen childhood sufferings and challenges. This is because of the inability of the parents to cater to their needs in conjunction with their lackadaisical attitude poised for the mis-use and maltreatment of the *Almajirai* pupils.

Lack of Proper Affection

The *Almajirai* are devoid of the affection needed for proper development and this is because they form a substantial part of the street population in Northern Nigeria. This is partly emanated from the government, parents, guardians and individual *Mallam's* proactiveness and commitments in addressing Islamic education to a form of a modern formal system of education. As observed (Fieldwork, 2017-2019), they roam the streets of Sokoto, Argungu, Zaria, Gusau, Katsina and Maiduguri, among others in the name of searching for livelihood in preference of street begging to starvation. As from 2017, UNICEF estimates that there are more than 17.5 million street children in



Africa, and more than 13.2 million constitute the *Almajirai* of northern Nigeria. Yunusa (1994) explains that the growth of pupils is impaired; they grow without affection and self-respect and often suffer from battering. A typical *Almajirai* is deviant, sick, dirty, poor, homeless, untaught, neglected and ill-treated. The pupils grow up unskilled, and form a large number of unemployable in northern Nigeria roaming the street unmonitored and unsupervised. These unscrupulous behaviours continue subjecting the *Almajirai* to laziness, ultimately investigating and accelerating contemporary violent conflicts in northern Nigeria.

The Level of Ignorance and Nature of Teaching

It is quintessential to understand that the teaching of the *Almajirai* to some extent is very coercive. The *Malam* always possess a cane or cudgel which he can swing at any slight provocation. These *Malams* also impose severe punishment on the pupils depending on the nature and gravity of the offenses committed. A typical example is the recent discovery of a reformation home in Daura in Katsina State in October, 2019 where children and pupils of young ages are maltreated (Daily Trust, 2019). A fundamental aspect is that the *Almajirai* school time-table is an informal structure that it allows the pupils to go and search for their means of sustenance (Khalid, 2001). In other words, they enjoy much freedom after the morning session till later in the evening for another session. But the freedom is exercised not under the supervisory eyes of the *Malam* but along the carefree urban streets (Oloko, 1989). He added that some of them still bother to attend classes, while others don't. For those who do not attend classes anymore, the purpose of coming to the city is outrightly defeated; hence they constitute a great nuisance to the urban community (Oloko, 1989). It has been observed that these inadequacies in several records by media and elites have consequently been responsible for the upsurge in the number of children (*Almajirai*) sleeping along the streets, in motor parts, markets and other odd places in northern Nigeria. In addition, Yunusa (1994) adduce that the growth of the pupils is impaired; they grow without affection and self-respect and often suffer from battering. A typical *Almajiri* is deviant, sick, dirty, poor, homeless, untaught, neglected, and ill-treated. The pupils grow up unskilled and form a large number of unemployable in northern Nigeria roaming the street unmonitored and unsupervised. This unstable ambience of the *Almajirai* makes them vulnerable to any slight opportunity that may unequivocally avail them of income or means of sustenance.

The Struggle: Means of Survival

In an attempt to educate and exploit the credulity of the *Almajirai*, the *Malams* and the public indirectly converts them to mere chattel meant to be mis-used for their parochial interests and gains. These *Almajirai* struggle independently for economic survival. They strive and fend for their *Malams* as well as themselves through under-paid grubby and illicit services to the public. Osenwegie (1973) & Oloko (1989) observed that *Almajirai* are normally visible where economic activities are at the highest, such as busy streets, markets, motor parks and roaming in search of livelihood. To sustain their living, they hawk the streets for sales of Pure water, Cakes, etc, have their engagement in illicit deals.

Non-Incorporation of Almajirai Teachers (Malams) into Formal Education System Payroll

As observed over many decades the prolonged challenges the phenomenon faces is the non-incorporation and inclusion of Islamic teachers (*Malams*) into the modern educational system. This has the propensity to attract some incentive and compensation equal to or non-equal in proportional



to the gains accrues through the exploitation of *Almajirai*. For instance, Khalid (2001) and Amzat (2007) pointed out that the *Almajirai* schools are far different from modern schools or even modern Islamic schools where classes are held in the early mornings and late afternoons. In the conventional indigenous northern Nigeria society, *Almajirai* education system, most classes are held under trees or in other available open spaces or in *Zaure* (open space just at the entrance to the compound); where they stay in the open air, a blazing fire is source of light for the venue or at times some of them have lanterns (Amzat, 2008). According to Maizuma (2019), the pupils sit on bare floor with wooden slates and at times a classroom might be available to the school; such a classroom may serve multiple purposes, one of which is to serve as a sleeping place for hundreds of the pupils. As expressed by Abubakar, Aliyu & Umar (2019), generally, there is no formalized register for attendance check-ups, thus pose challenges to *Malams* who might not know all the students or their actual numbers. This short-coming consequently resulted to some of the students absconding the school with impunity. The lack of appropriate supervision and coordination of school activities has rendered the cardinal objective of imparting of knowledge futile and unachievable.

More also, the *Malams* who harbour hundreds of pupils are not paid and the parents provide little or none support. Most of the *Malams* also live on earning of the *Almajirai* in order to survive at the expense of the students' struggles. Normally, earning from begging is usually shared between the *Malams* and the pupils. Some of them already have a fixed rate to deliver to the *Malams*, while some the *Malam* shares depend on their earnings for the day. As it has been noted, most of the *Malams* do not work except teaching. Against this backdrop, the students strive by crook and hooks to ensure the accomplishment of the teacher's demand. In some rural and urban areas, majorities of them are farmers therefore, they move with the pupils during the long dry season to the city. Hence, the *Almajiri* become an economic instrument for the migrant *Malams*. It is not difficult to imagine that the daily returns from *Almajiri* systemically transformed *Almajirai* from an education to a political economy category as expressed by Indabawa (1992).

Vulnerability of *Almajirai* to Criminality and Violence

As substantiated in the proceeding, the integration of northern Nigeria into the capitalist economic system in the 20th century by the British colonial government (Bello, 2011) created a paradigm shift that distorted the orthodox way of inculcating *Almajirai* education. This is because of its perception of being heinous and scoundrel to the British colonial aspiration of exploitation. However, due lack of actual and inadequate means of survival for the *Almajirai*, they are insidiously conscripted into crime perpetration, an acts which subjected them to the whims and caprices of political bigwigs. It is worthy of note that the *Malams* are not paid for the educational services; render, they rely heavily on the *Almajirai* as well as the benefit they accrue from the society through whatever means. Evidences indicate that some atrocities, and violence which took place in northern Nigeria stats are often lethal acts orchestrated through the exploitation of the credulities of the *Almajirai*.

Further reports in the nation's dailies and electronic media also bolstered that a majority of the instabilities in northern Nigeria were instigated and carried out by *Almajirai*. For instance, Loimeter (2012) advocated that those who fought in the Maitasine uprising in Kano in 1980s and the Boko Haram (Aminu, 2018) were *Almajirai* who needed to survive economically. He added that the streets of *Almajirai* have been implicated in the incessant riot/ethno-religious conflict and killing in Kano and other parts of northern Nigeria States. In fact, the armed banditry activities in the north-western States of Nigeria is inundated by a political undertone that spurred dogma conscription of *Almajirai*



and other alien fighters beyond Nigeria's boundary. These *Almajirai* are brainwashed, and they could be self-acclaimed "defenders" of religious matters whose perception revolved around the belief that if killed with die as a martyr (Maizuma, 2019).

Furthermore, the *Almajirai* are vulnerable to elite and religious manipulation. The streets lumpish children are recruited to perpetrate the agenda of "others" and thus have been vitally instrumental in perpetrating ethno-religious conflict especially in the northern part of the country. For instance, on the 9th of July, 2010, a nineteenth (19) years old was arrested by the police for attempting to assassinate the Emir of Kano with a gun during a *Jumma* service at the Kano Central Mosque. In the course of an investigation, the *Almajiri* confessed that the attempt was to execute the expedition sent by his *Malam* who gave him the weapon fortified him with charms. He added that the money robbed and carted away from an Igbo trader a week earlier had been deposited to his *Malam* (Abuh, 2010). Other confessions by some children arrested in connection with the Boko Haram terrorism and armed banditry provide insights into the vulnerability and radicalization that culminated into violence. Also, some of the children released in May, 2013 confessed to being *Almajiri*. One of them admitted that they were paid about \$30 each by some politicians and rebel leaders to spy on troops, vandalise property, and maim and kill non-Muslims. Others confessed that they were paid N5,000 and given a keg of petrol by their bosses to set some schools ablaze within the Maiduguri metropolis (Alli, 2013).

Child Abuse and Stigmatization

It is essential to construe that *Almajirai* in their status particularly in how they have been maltreated and stigmatised in northern Nigeria society, seem alarming and disgusting. From physical appearance, it is easy to observe and identify the deplorable condition the street lumpen children have to contend with in their study area. Bashir (1994) cited in Amzat (2008) affirmed that an *Almajirai* lumpen children could be identified by their haggard, tattered looks, carrying calabashes, plastic or enamel bowls used in carrying their offerings. More challenging, it has become a ubiquitous abuse to call anyone appearing as dirty and grubby as an *Almajirai*, whereas in the real sense of it meaning- a migrant in search of knowledge. The *Almajirai* children put hope in their bowl and were always fastened with tiny string on their neck. Khalid (1997) expounds that they mostly walk barefooted and have developed the spirit *de corps* as they walk in groups of mostly 2-10 (or more) and they share the offering within the group. In addition, the *Almajirai* live at the margin within the society; but a margin is a place of both possibilities and vulnerabilities. The *Almajirai* are left to strive for survival on the street without any adequate parental support. This partly explains why the children are vulnerable and susceptible to different social-ills. In analysing the status and condition of *Almajirai*, Mohammed (1991) added that *Almajirai* are dirty, unkempt, truant, and infested with various diseases. Because they are mostly thugs without self-esteem, they easily recruited into anti-social behaviour and movement.

Poor Accommodation System and the Search for Food

It should be noted that these *Almajirai* are left at the mercy of their *Malams* who provide accommodation (usually very clumsy and not comfortable) but because of the economic constraints with the *Malams*, they have to scavenge for food. Fundamentally, Khalid (2001) noted in a study conducted in Sokoto that most *Almajirai* sleep in overcrowded houses, uncompleted building where amenities like toilets, bathrooms and pipe-borne water are not available. Hence, they look haggardly dirty in their dirty clothes. As a matter of fact, visits to some of their residences in the *Makaranta*



Islamiyya (Islamic school) indicated that they sleep almost in hundreds in very clumsy environments, partly on the mats or floor in houses without doors, windows, screens and other basic facilities (Fieldwork, 2017-2019).

Moreover, Amzat (2008) explained that the “tragedies” and nature of urban life not only account for the demise of the *Almajirai* system, but also enable their livelihood by providing a carefree atmosphere where they roam and sleep. He accentuated that *Almajirai* are also mostly found in the front of houses, shops and restaurants waiting for leftover food and drinks. For instance, the *Almajirai*- lumpen children roam the street, and they walk with melodious song in their mouths begging for means of survival. These *Almajirai* prefer begging to starvation, as if they are specially trained for survival to beg and forage for food and refuse dumps. In the contributions of Amzat (2008), the *Almajirai* in their search for foods and clothes among others, chat the slogan as follows:

Ya almajiri!	O almajiri!
Bayin Allah	Servant of Allah
Inna taimakeni	Mother help me
Da abinci na ci	With food that I will eat
Domin Allah	For the sake of Allah
Inna mai ba kowa	Mother who gives to everyone
Domin Allah	For the sake of Allah
Inna, sadakaa!	Mother, bring alms
Domin Manzon Allah	For the sake of Allah’s messenger
Ya almajiri!	O almajiri!

Susceptibility of *Almajirai* to ill-health Condition

The relative freedom enjoyed by the street destitute children also made them vulnerable to drug and other narcotic uses. It is pertinent that the *Almajirai* are no exception in this regard; some of them smoke cigarettes, marijuana/India-hem and inhale the fume of glue and petrol among others. They found solace in drug use; this however, makes them susceptible as they mixed with adults who serve as a reference group for them at the motor parks, market place and streets at different times of the day (Amzat, 2008). This could explain the link between drug users and other deviant behaviour they perpetrated within the social milieu they found themselves in. The consumption of these illicit drugs also made the *Almajirai* susceptible to different health problems. The *Almajirai* lumpen childhood lives on the street especially in the cold weather condition of cold contracted asthma and many forms of injuries. They are also vulnerable to accidents, knocked down by motorcycle and other vehicles. Besides, the *Almajirai* eats leftover food and scavenged for food from the refuse dump, making them contact different food-borne diseases. To corroborate the fact, Luggala and Kibasse (2003) extols that street children are usually exposed to hazardous and harmful social conditions which adversely affect their physical, emotional and psychological well-being. Through this, the developmental processes of the lumpen children are impaired thereby seriously threatening the well-being of the *Almajirai*. Also the *Almajirai* are also susceptible to sexual perversion ubiquitous



among street children. This could predispose such children to STDs, including HIV/AIDS incurred due to limited and very low utilisation of health care services in their respective areas.

Some Strategic Steps Toward Almajirai Education and Social Malaise

Some serious-minded individuals, philanthropists, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the government have to some extent strategised efforts to transform the educational typology and as well to curtail the menace and scourge perpetrated by lumpen/prole children in the struggles to acquire Islamic education. In Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kaduna and Kano States, the government has encouraged to a limited spectrum of established Islamic educational institutions modelled in line with Western education. To actualise and assuage the cardinal objective, in the 1950s, the late Sardauna of Sokoto- Sir Ahmadu Bello established an Inspectorate for Glorious Qur'anic Education to oversee *Almajirai* education in northern Nigeria. In the post-independent period, from 1970s up to the 21st century, plethora of strategies were also designed and ensconced in distinct democratic dispensations. In addition, the Sultans of Sokoto and the administrative Governors, viz; Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa, Alhaji Aliyu Wamakko and others did not relent on their oars in amelioration of *Almajirai* system of education and condition in Sokoto State. Similar expedition as a strategic step was also spawned and taken by Governors of Kano State, namely; Alhaji Ibrahim Shekarau, Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwaso, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, and fundamentally by the former Emir of Kano- Alhaji Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. Some gullible minds in northern Nigeria perceived the former Emir of Kano excruciating discourse and ideas on several times on *Almajirai* education and deplorable condition wrongly as an attempt to disrupt and pulverise Islamic culture and practice. In response to the above, only few Islamic scholars and clerics (*Malams*) who offered themselves to discharge their teaching duties were not consistently paid due to incessant changes of government and lack of continuity from subsequent administrations.

Another strategic step toward the accretion of *Almajirai* Islamic education and social malaise is the formalisation type introduced and implemented by influential individuals and philanthropists in northern Nigeria. Influential and well-to-do individuals contribute their wealth in no small measure to ensure the mitigation, or probably the mortification of the conservation nature of the Islamic education system. This strategy also lacks the commitment and aesthetic continuum of these crops of influential people as the *Almajirai* manifested some element of dereliction as the system seems strange to them. The ideations evoked quite a number of challenges and complexities due to the trammel style of education pedagogy. Infact, the *Malams* constant nature of an autochthonous system of education and means of livelihood inherited by the students and from antiquity was mitigated. This informed the difficulties the Islamic teachers were imbued to, as constant means of sustenance through the *Almajirai* by hooks or cooks were truncated.

Often opposite to the strategic step are the unprecedented contributions of government through the established specialised office of Zakat and endowment in the respective States of northern Nigeria. This is evident in Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kano States with the vision to provide and cater for the needs and aspirations of *Almajirai* lumpen children and *Malams* which to a certain level mitigated the propensity of violence conflicts in northern Nigeria States. In retrospection, Kano State, the efforts of Alhaji Ishiaka Rabiu, Late Alhaji Abdullahi Danbaranjadda and others cannot be under-valued towards the creating a strong paradigm shift in the trajectory of *Almajirai* system of education and condition. Lastly, the presently situation of *Almajirai* education and social scourge will have adequately been addressed, but was truncated by conservative ideations and ideologies of



some Islamic teachers northern Nigeria. This study hopes that effervescent action must be taken to reposition the education of *Almajirai* through the modern and formal educational system. This will have a long way to mitigate; if not outright mortification as perennial violence conflicts instigate the dogma *Almajirai* conscription in northern Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks

The paper examined a chequered history of the lumpen childhood- *Almajirai* phenomenon in northern Nigeria with specific references to their supportive roles and challenges. In a general perspective, the evolvement of *Almajiranci* in the search for knowledge as prescribed by the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) even if it necessitate to travels to the farthest area in China was paramount. This assertion further influenced and poised the search for knowledge by *Almajirai* pupils in northern Nigeria. The study revealed that the introduction of Islam in Borno Empire in the 11th century led to adopting *Almajiranci* literacy. As a result of the visicitude of time and changes, the 19th century jihadists' reformist movement created the fulcrum for the establishment of Islamic theocratic state that further aided the spread of *Almajiranci* education in Northern Nigeria. To address the situation of *Almajirai* education, the Sokoto Caliphate administration espoused an Inspectorate of the Glorious Qur'anic education where Islamic affairs were promoted and funded. In this perspective, the *Almajirai* pupils found solace in this respect, but it truncated and exacerbated through the British colonial conquest and subjugation of Northern Nigeria in 1903. The British imperialist ushered in a capitalist economic system, a pristine development that thus demoralised the continued existence of *Almajirai* system through non-funding because of it being religious affairs. This development eventually led them to the deplorable situation that converted the *Almajirai* to lumpen childhood, invariably as northern Nigeria's problem population'. However, the search for food, clothes and the means of livelihood by the *Almajirai* is at the margin very difficult for the lumpen children as it became imperative as the last option available for starvation. In this perspective, they were subjected to inhuman treatments making them vulnerable to different diseases and criminalities. For the survival of their *Malams*, the *Almajiri* has no choice but to start menial or odd jobs at the tender age of five (5) years hence, their engagement as shoe-shiners, nail cutters, washer-boy, errand-boys, house-help and hawkers among others. In a nutshell, the study identified the numerous challenges faced by *Almajirai* which includes among others, lack of affection, susceptibility to crime and violence, poor health condition, stigmatization and non-incorporation of *Almajirai* teachers (*Malams*) to any remuneration commensurate to the services rendered. It is essential to understand that the *Almajirai Malams* are always at the mercy of what the pupils realise from begging and struggling.

One of the insidious and heinous challenges is the vulnerability nature to which *Almajirai* pupils were subjected by using their credulities by politicians to foment troubles, and execution of illicit activities in Nigeria. Abound evidences alleged that the *Almajirai* orchestrated quite a number of socio-political and religious pugnacities in northern Nigeria through the dictate of the sponsor as well as those who gain economically from the conflicts. It is the hope of this study that proactive action should be espoused by the government, parents, individuals, philanthropists and *Malams* to sustain the integration of *Almajirai* into modern and formal educational system. Besides, the *Almajirai* teachers (*Malams*) should be certificated and paid remunerated on a monthly basis through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs at the State, Local Government and at the Federal level. The suggested strategic steps and intervention will aid in no small measure to systemically ameliorate the challenges faced by *Almajirai*- lumpen childhood in Northern Nigeria.



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Oral Information

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