

Integrating Almajiri Education for Social Security in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper presents Almajiri Integrated Education as a panacea for social security in Nigeria especially, in the Northern part of the country. The paper explains that Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word 'Almuhajir'- meaning emigrant while integration is described as the combination of the western system of education with Qur'anic system of education. The paper looked at the history of Almajiri from the traditional perspective down to the modern time, how it has been bastardized, the menace it pose to the society and the effort made by the Government especially the Sokoto Government under the Ministry for Religious Affairs in establishing Almajiri Integrated Model School. Employment of the Almajiri Malams and avoidance of security threat were among the future impact of Integrating Almajiri education. Lastly, conclusion and recommendations were made on integrating Almajiri education to serve as panacea for social security.

Keywords— Integrating, Almajirai education, social security.

I. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of *Almajiri* Integrated Model School (AIMS) is one of the current Sokoto State Governments intervention strategies to curtail the menace of street begging and other social vices by children and youth in the name of pursuing Qur'anic Education. The school is to accommodate the Almajirai who are coming to the city from far and near villages for Qur'anic knowledge. They mostly arrive without provisions and other essential needs. Consequently they move from house to house, street, motor parks, restaurants, and other public places. Gradually they become exposed to child abuse, child neglect, health hazards, child hawking and other form of social vices. Many of the Almajirai are orphans and vulnerable children. The AIMS is further to provide educational opportunities for these categories of children to acquire traditional Qur'anic education and basic education. This will enable the State to achieve Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A. Who is an Almajiri?

The word 'Almajiri' is a singular derived from the Arabic word 'Almuhajir' emigrant narrated 'Adullah bin 'Amr: the Prophet (p) said, "...A Muhajir (emigrant) is the one who gives up (abandons)

all what Allah has forbidden" (al-Bukhari 2000). It refers to a traditional method of acquiring and memorizing the Glorious Qur'an in Hausa/Fulani community where boys at their tender ages are sent out by their parents or guardians to the far away villages, towns and cities for Qur'anic education under an Islamic scholar called *Malam*. Almajirai are categorized into 3 classes:

1. Adult.
2. Adolescent
3. An infant

The Adult engage in some labour services for a means of livelihood while the Adolescent and Infant beg for alms/food (Bambale, 2003).

B. Traditional Almajiri Education System

In the olden days when the quest to acquire knowledge was prevalent, especially the Qur'anic knowledge by the Muslims in obedience to the prophetic saying: "the best of you is he who learns the Qur'an and teaches it" (al-Tirmidhi 2004) however, there were no laid down procedures or channels to adopt in obtaining such, except the unconventional way of handing over your ward to a supposedly teacher, known as *Malam*. It was this *Malam* that now enlist the child and the teaching of religious scriptures and way of life are indoctrinated into the young pupils. It was so perfect and rewarding as rightly mentioned by the prophet p : "by is book, Allah would exalt some peoples and degrade others" (Muslim 2000), that highly educated Sheikhs, Imams, and Malams who became successful in life by holding positions of judges and teachers that were molding the character of the young on how to become righteous and exemplary in their future lives. However, when the civilized life styles of the west started encroaching into the big cities of the north, some of these Malams became allured to greed for money and started migrating to the cities and towns with their pupils and subjected them to the vagaries of the streets (Muhammad, 2010). In a similar view El Aminu in Kumolu (2012), said "while the Almajiri system was believed to have achieved the purpose it was set out to achieve in the past.

One teacher can register up to a hundred and more pupils singularly keeps, guides and controlling to keep them feed and accommodate them are also part of the teacher's responsibilities. But nowadays even to keep and feed one hundred mouths are not

easy, and perhaps impossible. The pupils have to, as a must, acquire the knowledge their parents sent them to do. The little stipends the parents were able to give their wards for them and the teachers hardly sustains them for a month, so an alternative means of getting more income has to be employed. During the day time, when there are no classes the pupils are allowed to go into the town and roam around until when classes are to begin. It is this going about around the town that affords the pupils to engage in menial jobs that fetches them some little amounts. This also was kind of stopped by the people because they have other means of doing such jobs and so the pupils venture into house to house begging for remnants of food to eat and even the pupils take back part of this food to the teacher. To further buttress this fact, Kumolu (2012) posited that while the Almajiri's are begging for alms, the children are given cooked food and sometimes money. Thereafter, the proceeds from these are returned to their teachers who give them a fraction of what they got. It is clear from the above, that the teacher himself is gaining from the engagements of the pupils in the town, and can do anything to sustain it.

Ja'afar (2008) declared that the Almajiri system of education is the intellectual and moral training (of pupils/students). This point was further strengthened when Imam (2011) stated that Almajirai (plural of Almajiri) students who successfully completed their studies and become scholars are those that mostly take the responsibilities of Imams, mediators, (Qadis) judges, counselors etc. in the traditional Hausa communities. The intellectual objectives are of two types depending on the type of enrolment in the school. Thus, the intellectual objective for pupils/students enrolled under the domestic type is mostly restricted to expose them to reading and writing of Glorious Qur'an only. As for the boarding pupils, their enrolment mostly is aimed at producing future teachers and professionals in various fields, such as Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), Sirah, (Prophets biographical life), Hadith (sayings and practices of Prophet (S.A.W.) among others.

The system that was hitherto organized and well charted has now been neglected to the extent of letting our children roam the streets and picking remnants of food left over from dustbins. One other aspect of the system that has been abused nowadays is the degenerated value of trust and togetherness that our forefathers have lived and died with. This issue of lack of trusts is as a result of the changing world in terms orientation and our rush for acquiring the status of a civilized lot. Couple with this is also the government's nonchalant attitude of fending for the citizenry that result in thousands of our youths daily roaming the streets looking for what to eat.

The resultant effect of that system is child labour in which (Almajirai students) are to earn a

living by begging not only to feed themselves but also to contribute to welfare of their teachers. They work under hazardous conditions; and they toil daily to scavenge for a living. These experiences do not only affect the children but also the society. The practice has been observed very often to have relationship with child abuse [1].

C. Integrating Almajiri Education for Social Security

Integration of almajirai education becomes necessary due to the predicaments of traditional almajirai educational system which is becoming more renounced in the society today. Integration is the merging of the two system of education together, i.e. the combination of the western system of education with *Qur'anic* system of education. According to Mahuta (2009), the concept of integration introduces literacy, numeracy and life skills of the western type of education into the traditional *Qur'anic* school system 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 education into *Qur'anic* school system thereby making the products literate, numerate and to enable them acquire manipulative and survival skills in the modern formal system to meet the goals of Education For All (EFA) and to eradicate *almajirci* 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.

This will also help in empowering and improving the welfare of *Malams* through receiving salary and enjoying of allowances for them to live happily. It is this realization that makes the federal government in 1976 introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme and re-introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE) in September, 1999. Various efforts had been made over the years by groups, individuals, organizations and governments towards a successful integration of the *Qur'anic* school or Islamic education into the Western Education System, such attempts had achieved varying degrees of success.

Khalid (2002) explained that Sokoto State Government signed into law an edict regulating the movement of *almajirai* entitled "The control of juvenile accompanying *Qur'anic Malams* adoptive rules" and the State Government appointed a committee on control of migrants in 1986 in order to enable the Government to determine the needs of these children, provide such needs, to settle the children in their places domicile so that they could undertake studies in both Islamic and Western education in their home and villages. Similarly, the senate had in 2008, made an attempt to end the

Almajiri problem by proposing a bill for the enactment of the National Commission for the Eradication of Child Destitute in Nigeria. The bill popularly known as the Almajiri Bill and sponsored by Umaru Argungu and 31 others, sought to punish any proprietor of an unregistered 'tsangaya' school with two years jail term. But this effort failed, while the numbers of Almajirai have been on the increase across the 19 Northern states.

In 2008, the Sokoto State Government under the Ministry for Religious Affairs established *Almajiri* Integrated Model School. The institution was established to curtail the menace of street begging by children and youth in the name of pursuing *Qur'anic* education by the current Sokoto State Government. Similarly, the Federal Government recently, in 2012, inaugurated its first Almajiri Model Boarding school in *Gagi* area of Sokoto State. This school, according to the Federal government, which will be replicated across the country, is dedicated to the Almajiri to ensure education for all Nigerian children to sustain access to quality education.

The school accommodates the *Almajiri* who came from villages to the city and other states like Kano, Kebbi and Niger state for *Qur'anic* knowledge, without provision and other essential needs. Before the establishment of the institution, they were forced to beg from house to house, streets, motor parks, restaurants and other prohibited public places; as a result they became exposed to child abuse, child neglect, health hazards, and child hawking and other forms of social vices.

Many of the almajirai who are enrolled in the Integrated Model Schools are orphans and vulnerable children selected from the (Makarantar Allo) Traditional Qura'nic Boarding Schools, therefore it is the aims of the current Sokoto Government and the Federal government to provide educational opportunities for these categories of children to acquire traditional Qur'anic education and secular education which will enable the state to achieve Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The State owned institution is both primary and secondary school, which enrolled about 700 pupils and students between ages of 9 – 16 years. The students were all placed in one condition under general training and supervision for one year in the mosque. Then later they were screen into 3 groups of classes based on their performance in various subjects. Majority of the pupils were selected from traditional Qur'anic boarding school (Makarantar Allo) and some almajirai were brought by their parents directly to the school for admission, but they were registered with the School and giving the full contact addresses of their parents or guardians.

The school offered the following core subjects, English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies together with Hausa, Computer, PHE and Handwriting under formal system of education with Agriculture, Trade, Commerce, Handcraft, Mechanic, Vulcanizing, Handsets repairs, Wood work and Islamic Calligraphy among others as vocational skills in the 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 which include *Qira'atul-Qur'an*, *Tahfeez*, *Tajweed*, *Arabic*, Islamic Studies, *Tauhid*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh* and *Sirah*.

D. Integrating Almajiri Education in Sokoto State

Currently the *Almajiri* Integrated Model School (AIMS) in Sokoto State had taken about 700 pupils and students off the street of Sokoto State. When this figure is compared to the present millions of almajirai outside the system, one can easily say that the number of enrolment is insignificant. However, with the involvement of all stakeholders such as the government, parent, Malam, and the NGOs this future is bright. Therefore the following are the expected impact of *Almajiri* Integrated Model School (AIMS) in Sokoto State that could promote social security.

1. Knowledge acquisition at Integrated *Almajiri* School will not be limited to Quranic and Western Education but will also include other vocational skills (e.g. Mechanic, Handset repair, Wood work, Technician, Fashion Designer, Vulcanizing, etc) that will make them to be self-reliance thereby reducing their poverty level.
2. Enrolment of *Almajiri* from *Makaranta Allo* into the Integrated *Almajiri* School will drastically reduce the numbers of beggars on the street, restaurant and other public places.
3. Employment of the *Almajiri* Malams (teachers) will also salvage them from poverty.
4. All security threats in the nation such as post-election violence in most of the Northern states and rampant increase in the number of area boys who are usually responsible for many violence in the Country.
5. Honour and dignity will be accorded to the student, graduates and teachers of Integrated *Almajiri* School in the society as their mode of dressing and way of life will be totally different from the traditional *Almajiris*.

II. CONCLUSIONS

It is pertinent to state here that the Sokoto State Government had taken the lead in the establishment of Integrated *Almajiri Model* School in the State in 2008 which was letter replicated by the Federal government which come as the aftermath of the post-election violence in the Northern part of the country in 2012. This is a step taken at the right time when there is global call for the provision of free,

compulsory, and basic education to young ones especially orphans and vulnerable children, which is in line with the country's strategy for the achievement of Education For All (EFA) and the education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also important to note that this development will go a long way in checking the social vices being perpetrated by the youths in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this gesture should be sustained and maintained while other state government should also replicate the good effort by establishing the same type of school in their states and not wait for the Federal government to establish the schools for them.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS / SUGESTIONS

For peace and social harmony through integrating of *Almajiri* Education the following are recommended.

- The first step to be taken in ameliorating the hardships being generated by *Almajiri* and their sponsors is for the governments at all levels to appreciate the fact that these people are also Nigerians and that they deserve to be treated as such. When this is done, governments should now embark on building schools that will teach both Qur'anic and western education. It will then make it compulsory and incumbent on parents to take their wards to such schools and obtain admission for them. Failure of parents to comply with the government's directive, a punitive step should be taken. The governments also should use appropriately, the social welfare offices all over the country, to obtain a comprehensive list and data of all youngsters that have no surviving parents. These data can adequately be used to offer assistance to such wayward citizens.

- Governments should ban the *modus operandi* whereby people just take about a hundred or more kids and travel with them from one town to the other, subjecting them to harsh and sometimes unbearable conditions. This range from street begging and perhaps even picking pockets which renders the kids useless to the parents and the society should be stopped through counsel.

- It is equally the responsibility of the authorities to make compulsory on all parents to enroll their children in the only recognized schools for acquiring both Qur'anic and western education. It is worthy of note here that these schools are springing up and doing just very well in academic performance.

Once these schools are given the desired recognition and support by government and the wealthy individuals, the roaming about of youths along the streets will drastically be reduced, and one day, might be phased out completely.

- Parents have a bigger role to play by resisting the urge to give their children out to the wandering teachers, who could take them to destinations that are unknown to the parents. Unless a father takes into account the future well-being of his son or daughter into consideration and having him/her grow and attain maturity right under his personal coaching, the child will never get that type of good and decent character molding elsewhere. Therefore, there is no doubt that a child who grew up under the care of both parents enjoys maximum care and support than the one who did not enjoy growing up under his parents.

Lastly, a Ministry should be created which will be responsible for the need and education of the *Almajiri* which will bring them to the level of other children in Nigeria.

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