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ALMAJIRI EDUCATION INCORPORATION POLICY IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMME ACCEPTANCE IN JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The Almajiri education integration policy in Nigeria is an initiative aimed at reforming the traditional Almajiri education system that has been in existence for many years. The Almajiri system is characterised by the practice of sending children to distant locations for Quranic studies. This study seeks to explore the almajiri integration policy and its acceptance by the beneficiaries in the state. In doing this, both primary and secondary data was collected from a sample of the population across the three senatorial zones in the state. The findings of the study revealed that despite the potential benefits of the policy, the acceptance of the policy was very low due to a number of factors such as lack of consultation of the beneficiaries in the design of the policy, insufficient funding, lack of adequate infrastructure, and lack of community engagement. The study concludes that the incorporation of the Almajiri system into the broader educational framework in Nigeria necessitates a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes communication, community engagement and socio-economic development. The paper recommends a redesign of the policy that accentuates the fears and take into account the views of the beneficiaries for the policy to achieve the necessary results.

Key Words: Almajiri, Beneficiaries, Education, Integration, Policy.

Introduction

It is widely believed that the main indicator of social and technological advancement in any nation is anchored on the level of educational development of its citizens. The role that education play in improving the quality of people's lives, acceleration of economic growth, harnessing human intellect and potentials, realization of political stability, appreciation of tolerance and the institution of peace and unity, cannot be quantified (Jasada, 1999). Education is an important instrument through which society reproduces itself, passes its main characteristics to the next generation as well as a dynamic instrument of change and development (World Bank, 1994). This invariably shows that education may not be for the purpose of obtaining governmental jobs alone, but for the development of individual and society hence, it is desirable that everyone should be educated.

If a large proportion of children are not given quality education, it is greatly believed that there will be developmental problem in such a society. It is on this note that the United Nations General Assembly (2001) stipulates that everyone has the right to education which shall be free at least in elementary and primary stages. In line with this, the National Policy on Education emphasizes among other things equal opportunities for all citizens.

Despite this acknowledgement, it was reported that millions of children in Nigeria are roaming the streets, particularly in the north, without access to quality education as a result of the Almajiri education as traditionally practiced. Governments have over the years paid little attention to transformation of the Almajiri system into formal western styled education. For instance, both the initial objective and focus of the Universal Basic Education scheme did not seem to, at any point accommodate the Almajiri educational system.

Almajiri education refers to traditional method of acquiring and memorizing the Holy Quran where boys at their tender age are sent out by their parents or guardians to other villages, towns or cites for acquisition of Quranic education usually under a knowledgeable Islamic scholar called Mallam (teacher) (Isiaka, 2014). Initially, the Almajiri schools had functioned without any regulation and financial support from the government (Jibril, 2010). Government apathy, absence of basic learning materials, and poverty are factors that had not only affected the quality of the output of this system, but also rendered the product of the Almajiri system ineligible to compete favourably with those from formal western-styled school system. This, to certain extent, explains why local scholars (Mallam) who deemed it a moral and religious duty to educate this people for the sake of Allah shoulder the responsibility for taking care of them. Due to overwhelming number of pupils to cater for, the survival of the system rested solely on the support of the immediate community, odd menial jobs and worst of all begging to make ends meet.

In a bid to checkmate this trend, the federal government in 2010 established the National Committee on Implementation of Almajiri Education Programme. The purpose of integrating the two systems of education is to provide education opportunities for the Almajiri to acquire Quran education as well as basic western education and to eradicate street begging, child labour, unhygienic condition and related diseases, social vices and also to provide adequate and qualitative instructional materials in both Islamic and secular subjects. This also involves the infusion of numeracy, literacy and life skills of the public-school system into the traditional Quranic school structure. This special interest necessitated the formal signing into law the Almajiri Education integration policy on the 10th April 2012 with the construction of 117 Almajiri schools across the country as part of the governments' strategies aimed at curtailing the menace of street begging by children and youth in the name of pursuing Quranic education. Despite this development, the population of the Almajiri roaming the streets has failed to decline in virtually all the northern states of the federation (Jah and Gofwan, 2021).

The existence of a huge number of "out-of-school" children is a serious threat to active citizenship and social cohesion; it also breeds social exclusion and criminal tendencies in the youths as Wike narrated (2013). Data from the Universal Basic Education and other relevant government agencies has shown that the Almajiri incorporation programme is yet to achieve its integrative objective. The Executive Secretary of National Commission for Almajiri and out of school children revealed that no fewer than 30 million Almajiri and 20 million out of school children are roaming the streets (Daily Trust, 2024). The most important question one could ask is that why we still have a large number of such children or Almajiris in our streets despite government efforts towards integration policy.

In view of the above this study seeks to assess the level of acceptability of the Almajiri education policy by the community in Jigawa state. This becomes pertinent as most of the previous studies concentrated on reviewing the implementation of the policy, while the opinion of the target recipients received little attention as Isiaka noted (2014). Meanwhile, Adawo (2011) has attributed the failure of the governmental policies and programmes to top-down approach, adding that the opinions of the targeted recipients were, in most cases, also not

sought. This invariably explains why people, most especially in rural areas, resist change once their interests are not considered in the formulation and implementation of governmental policies and programmes.

Literature Review

Almajiri' is a Hausa word meaning immigrant children in search of knowledge on Quranic education. The Quranic School is the primary level of traditional Islamic education. It is an institution which has its origin traced to the prophetic period of Islamic education. Historians have traced the Almajiri system of education to the beginning of the 11th Century, largely promoted by leading lights of Islam who were determined to spread Islamic knowledge and learning, long before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of British Nigeria. The word '*Almajiri*' coiled from Arabic word *"AL-MUHAJIRIN"* which came as a result of Prophet Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina (Gregory, Mohammed and Halilu, 2023).

The Federal Government took special interest in integrating the *Al-Majiri* system into the main stream educational system in the country. In addition to educating the *Almajiris*, the programme seeks to empower the students with various skills to enable the pupils participate more positively in the development of their immediate environment and the nation at large. For smooth implementation of the programme, the Federal government sometimes collaborates with the state governments in providing infrastructure. Among the benefitting states in the country are Niger, Jigawa, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi and Katsina (Shimawua, 2020). The objectives of the Almajirai Integration Education policy as outlined by the Federal Government are:

i. To provide a conducive and organized learning environment that will ensure *Almajiri* acquire both Qur'anic and Modern Basic Education
ii. To provide an integrated curriculum that promotes the study of Al- Qur'an and basic education subjects
iii. To provide the *Almajiri* with opportunities to acquire knowledge and vocational skills and that will enable them to be self-reliant and useful to their communities
iv. To provide sound foundation for *Tajweed* and *Tahfeez* for Almajirai
v. To provide opportunities for graduates of the school to further their studies
vi. To provide health and sanitary condition, physical and social security and social welfare that ensures protection of almajirai from all forms of danger.

The *Almajiris* by the nature of their historical, socio-cultural, and economic background are vulnerable to several barriers to accessing basic education. At the operational level, the barriers stem from unavailability of adequate number of schools, closeness of the schools to the residents of the targeted beneficiaries, lack of sensitization, and advocacy to convince parents to enrol their children (Mohammed, Timson and Gyang, 2024).

Extant literature has attributed the failure of the Almajiri school integrated programme principally to poor implementation by the Federal and the State government. Isiaka (2015), conducted a study on the *Almajiri* integration programme in Sokoto state where he discovered a very poor level of fund allocation, very poor enlightenment campaign and limited programme supervision on the part of the government agencies in charge of the programme. This position corroborated an earlier position held by Hilda and Ibrahim (2014), where they argued that despite the investment in the *Almajiri* education, 'pupils' enrolment has been low and the dropout rate high. They argued that inadequate infrastructural intervention by government is a major problem facing the proper running of the *Almajiri* schools. Ganduje (2016) also re-echoed

the infrastructural inadequacy when he said that the *Almajiri* schools in his state caters for only 50 students when there are over 3 million *Almajiri* in Kano state alone.

In a departure from the emphasis on poor government implementation and provisions for the *Almajiri* schools, Idris (2016) rested on the Pierre Bourdiue's cultural and social reproduction theory to argue that there are cultural and social models inhibiting the success of the *Almajiri* school programme and, thus, militating against the effectiveness of government's effort. Idris further argued that cultural capital in the form of parent's disposition and social capital as represented by societal norms imbibed from the "*Mallam*" inhibits the success of the Almajiri school programme. In line with the above, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in its 2015 update on the *Almajiri* school programme admitted that the non-integration of the *Alarammas/Mallams*/Proprietors into the *Almajiri* schools programme has negatively affected the success of the programme. The lack of input and cooperation of the *Mallams* on the integration programme was discovered by UBEC to be a strong factor working against successful implementation of the *Almajiri* school programme.

Thus, it can be deduced from the above argument that there are existing literature (findings) focusing on the prospects and challenges of *Almajiri* education incorporation policy, whereas, on level of acceptability of the integration policy, the available literature is scanty. This further show the identifiable gap in literature which this research intends to explore and bridge also.

Methodology

The Study Area is Jigawa state. It was created on Thursday, 27th August 1991 and borders with Kano and Katsina states in the west, Bauchi and Yobe in the east. In the north, the Jigawa state shares an international border with the Republic of Niger (Jigawa Investor's Handbook, 2013). Jigawa state has 27 local government councils with 30 state constituencies, 11 Federal constituencies and 3 Senatorial Districts. The projected population of the state has a total population of 7,763,488 million (NPC, 2025).

Based on Yamane (1967) sample size determination method, therefore, 399 respondents would be sampled for the study; out of which questionnaires would be administered to the 390 respondents and interview would be held with 9 stakeholders in the sampled area. Multi stage sample procedures were employed to collect data for this study. The first stage would involve stratification of Jigawa state into three senatorial districts. And in each stratum (district) random sampling technique was used to select a local government for data collection in each senatorial district.

In line with the objectives of this study, the data was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. For primary source, interview and questionnaire was used to illicit information from sampled population. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from sampled respondents (*Mallams* and Parents) in the study area. While in-depth interview was used in case of traditional rulers (ward heads), Staff of UBE and *Mallams* in each of the selected local government areas. The second aspect of sources of data is secondary source. The information was obtained from UBE reports, journals, E-resources, and workshop papers for the study. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Discussion of findings.

The findings indicate that the almajiri qur'anic and integrated education and the ameliorative measures taken to address them were observed to have shortfalls. Some of the measures that have fallen short in addressing the problem include, poor policy formulation approach and lack of implementation strategies. For instance, quantitative preliminary studies were not carried out to have correct statistics in terms of accurate numbers of *Almajiris*, required number of

infrastructures, reliable quantity of school plants, adequate number of staff (academic & non-academic) and reasonable school running costs estimates; inadequate publicity and sensitization of the stakeholders and even some policy implementers. Table 1 below show the respondents view on the existence of the programme.

Response on the existence of the *Almajiri* policy	
Yes	102 (32%)
No	218 (68%)

Source: Field Survey 2025

The above is from respondents of 320 in Jigawa state and the majority, accounting for 68% are not aware of the existence of the almajiri integrative education policy, only 32% have knowledge of the existence of the programme. The policy was not well sensitised and the beneficiaries (*Mallams* and *Almajirirs*) were not properly carried along. In the words of an interviewee "We heard of the policy in the news, but as a *Mallam* with hundreds of *Almajiris* hearing such important policy from the news left me suspicious of the real intention of the policy". The nature of most government policies depicts a pattern of top-down approach and this usually creates a problem in the implementation. Our analysis indicates a notable gap in communication between traditional leaders and Almajiri integrated schools' authorities, which has limited their engagement in school-related matters and kept them uninformed about school activities. This has negatively impacted their capacity to act as intermediaries between the government and the community. It is a recognized practice in northern Nigeria to involve traditional leaders in initiatives affecting their communities; hence, their inclusion is crucial for the program's success. This suggests that the Almajiri education program did not adequately engage all relevant traditional leaders at the local government level and this affected the level of awareness of the policy.

The factors affecting the acceptability of the policy are varied from the view of the respondents as highlighted in table 2:

Factors affecting acceptability of the almajiri integration policy	
Non-involvement of stakeholders in the planning of the policy	102 (32%)
Rejection by major stakeholders (parents, *Mallams*)	77 (24%)
Government top-down approach to the policy	58 (18%)
Lack of sufficient funding and infrastructure	83 (26%)

Source: Field Survey 2025.

The findings indicate that the policy has not gathered the necessary support from the stakeholders. This can be seen from the lack of the involvement of the beneficiaries in the design and planning of the policy. 32% of the respondents argued that lack of the involvement of the beneficiaries affected the acceptability of the policy. The rejection by the stakeholders followed closely the lack of their involvement, 24% of the respondents supports the assertion. The lack of adequate infrastructure and finance for the policy to have the necessary impact contributed to why many did not accept the policy. The numerous numbers of the *Almajiris* in the streets and the limited number of the schools that were created cannot adequately meet the objectives of the policy. The qualitative data supports the notion that reorientation among parents, educators, and the Almajiri students themselves is crucial for any reform to be effective.

Delivering quality education to all Nigerian citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, is a key responsibility of government at all levels. Education needs to be qualitative and functional

to ensure individual and societal prosperity. However, the government's neglect of the education sector is palpable. An interviewee noted that "the government's dereliction of duty in education has attracted international support, but Nigerians remain sceptical about the true intent behind well-crafted programs". The Nigerian government's tendency to disregard policies and programs after several years is worrisome. Continuity in governance should naturally extend to its initiatives. Our research in various schools revealed static infrastructure, with no additions to the original structures, leading to constrained admissions due to insufficient classrooms and hostels. This static state indicates governmental neglect post-establishment, dampening hopes for future expansions. A respondent highlighted policy inconsistency as a significant issue, where programs gain initial approval but are eventually abandoned.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As an intervention, the Integrated Almajiri Education System sought to tackle the problems of *Almajiris* excluded from formal education, but its hasty execution was beset by multiple issues, including poor policy formulation, lack of stakeholder awareness, omission of preliminary studies, engagement of unqualified staff, inaccurate quantification of resources, and inadequate funding. The incorporation of the Almajiri system into the broader educational framework in Nigeria necessitates a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes communications, community engagement and socio-economic development. Through this approach stakeholders can create a more inclusive and effective educational environment that the needs of *Almajiri* students while fostering their potential contributions to the society. The importance of tailored communication aimed at changing attitudes and fostering collaboration among parents, educators, and government authorities. The paper recommends the following:

i. A redesign of the policy that accentuates the fears and take into account the views of the beneficiaries for the policy to achieve the necessary results.
ii. Adequate funding and infrastructural facilities should be provided and backed up by necessary laws at the federal and state levels.
iii. Provide a broader array of vocational training initiatives tailored to regional market demands, encompassing mechanics, computing, and diverse trades.

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