

INTEGRATED ALMAJIRI EDUCATION: THE CONSPIRACY OF BENEFICIARY STAKEHODERS TO SHUN THE PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The Integrated Almajiri Education System was introduced to amalgamate the Qur'anic or Islamic with Basic Education curricula. It was to avail the almajiri child with dual knowledge in moral/spiritual and formal/lifelong skills to entice and take them off the streets. Ironically, the gesture was shunned by the beneficiary stakeholders (the parents, the Mallams and naïve almajiris). Consequently, millions of them are still roaming the streets in the North especially North East Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria. The paper tried to find out why should such a good gesture be shunned by the beneficiary stakeholders who were expected to have enthusiastically grabbed the opportunity by enrolling their children en-mass into the model schools established for them. This paper employed a descriptive survey research design as a guide and then collected primary and secondary data using a structured questionnaire. Then the data was qualitatively analysed using simple percentages. The results revealed that poor policy formulation approach and lack of implementation strategy made the programme difficult to implement. Inadequate publicity and sensitization made the beneficiary stakeholders ignorant and suspicious of government intention. Hence, they rather perceived the programme as a ploy to rob them of the benefits of relief from childcare burden and almajiri exploitation that they were deriving from the anomaly. Lack of preliminary and feasibility studies and poor funding created inadequacies in term of quality and quantity of staff, office and classroom equipment, school plants and infrastructure.

Keywords: Integrated curriculum, Almajiri Education System, Model Schools, Beneficiary stakeholders, Issues, Solutions.

INTRODUCTION

The Integrated Almajiri Education System was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in late 2013 (Amoo, 2019) to address the problem of out-of-school Almajiri youths roaming the streets in their millions. The policy was followed up with the establishment of 152 Almajiri Integrated Model Schools in 26 states that have a significant Muslim population

(Amoo, 2018). The model schools were expected to be replicated by the beneficiary states. Ordinarily, it was expected that the beneficiary stakeholders, who are the *almajiri* parents, the Qur'anic teachers (Mallams), and even the *almajiris* themselves would enthusiastically grab the opportunity to acquire the dual knowledge of Islamic and Basic Education systems. On the other hand, it was expected that the states too would dovetail into the programme by establishing more model schools by way of replication. Ironically, a significant number of the stakeholders surprisingly shunned the model schools and most of the state governments also refused to take over the model schools in their territory (Amoo, 2019). Consequently, the *almajiris* are still being seen roaming the streets in their millions and most of the model schools are abandoned and undergoing decadence, except a few.

The reason for the rejection of the Federal Government's good gesture and offer of an opportunity for the *almajiris* to acquire modern and qur'anic education in an integrated institution could hardly be understood. Furthermore, what could be responsible for the rejection and shunning of the integrated *almajiri* education programme by the *almajiris* and their parents was also not immediately discernible. It is against this background that this paper intends to examine what could be the reasons for the disdain for such a laudable programme which normally any group of people should eagerly with enthusiasm accept and key into.

BENEFICIARY STAKEHOLDERS' SKEPTICISM

The Beneficiary stakeholders' skepticism about the integrated *almajiri* education programme could be caused by several factors. Some of the factors, from empirical observation, could be historical, religious, social, cultural, and even economic (Idris, 2016). However, the extent of the effect of these factors on individuals and groups could hardly be the same. Therefore, the magnitude of the effect of these factors in inducing the beneficiary stakeholders to be skeptical about the programme, even when found to affect their decision, could vary in degrees.

The effect from the historical perspective stems from colonial intervention (Idris, 2016). It is a fact that by the time the colonial authority introduced the Western or modern form of education in the Northern Nigeria, it was resisted because it met another extant form of education. Therefore, in the predominantly Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria in about 1904, Qur'anic education had been predominant in the area for over a hundred years (Shittu & Olaofe, 2015). However, whatever effect this factor has had on skeptics, it has waned with time. It is evident that in the North of Nigeria, especially the North East Geopolitical zone, time, events, experiences, and exposure to modernity have helped to produce dually (western and Islamic) educationally qualified erudite scholars from the area. Therefore, historical influence in the decision to shun the programme is insignificant.

The influence of religious factors was intense from the beginning of the introduction of the Western form of education because it was mainly handled by Christian missionaries (Shittu & Olaofe, 2015). Hence, the then Muslim communities saw it as a clandestine motive to rob them of their faith. However, with time, interactions, and understanding, the fear was allayed to the extent that even some Muslim children attended missionary schools without a change of their faith. Therefore, religion as a factor for the skeptics' shunning of the integrated *almajiri* education programme has substantially been debunked.

The effect of sociocultural factors on stakeholders' reluctance to readily accept the integrated almajiri education programme could have emanated from the early days of limited interaction among the different ethnic nationalities in the country. At the inception of the introduction of the new Western system of education, a sociocultural conservative attitude was intensely clung to by the stakeholders (Sidi et al, 2022). This might have inhibited the ready and free acceptance of the new system of education by the almajiri parents, Mallams, and even the almajiris themselves. At any rate, with time, the acquisition of experience through greater interactions by pioneer students of the initial schools caused the adherence to sociocultural biases to wane and allowed significant acceptance of modern forms of education by more Muslim communities. Therefore, the influence of this factor as a cause of stakeholders' skepticism is observed to be weak.

The impact of economic influence on targeted beneficiary stakeholders was initially insignificant. This was because in the pre-independence and early post-independence era, education was virtually free. Therefore, the children of the rich, the poor, the highly placed and the peasants could all go to school, usually the same public schools (Baba, 2013). The schools were good public schools imparting quality education to all children. This continued for a little while until the effect of elitism crept into our society. Then the concept ushered in the idea of establishing private schools to segregate the children of the rich and the poor (Nwaogwugwu et al, 2019). Progressively, with time, people realised the importance of modern education and were yearning for it. But the elites, who were in the ruling class, were poised on churning out budgetary and educational policies that were tailored to make education costly and beyond the reach of the majority poor. Therefore, the economic factor remained a strong negative influence that could indirectly induce the shunning of the integrated almajiri education programme because they could not afford it, even though they inherently desire it.

BARRIERS TO ALMAJIRIS' ACCESS BASIC EDUCATION

The *almajiris* by the nature of their historical, sociocultural, and economic background are vulnerable to several barriers to accessing basic education. Like any human endeavor, access to Basic Education can be susceptible to the vagaries of society's economic, social, and political dynamics. Therefore, in general terms, the barriers that could be viewed from the perspective of access to basic education can be affected at the strategic level by the quality of policy formulation, policy implementation strategies, political will, funding of the education sub-sector, public enlightenment, and quality of staff.

At the operational level, the barriers that can affect *almajiri* access to basic education are many, some of which are the unavailability of an adequate number of schools, the closeness of the schools to the residents of the targeted beneficiaries, sensitization, and advocacy to convince parents to enroll their children, empowerment of the parents, inadequate school feeding, unavailability of facilities and amenities in the schools, insurgency, natural disasters, and epidemic/pandemic.

Most of the barriers referred to above have been extensively studied by scholars and solutions have been proffered as a panacea for the problems. However, despite efforts by the government, though conservative, the response on the side of beneficiary stakeholders has been insignificant with multitudes of the *almajiris* still found to be roaming the streets of cities,

especially in the North East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria (Teke et al, 2020). Therefore, there might still be a factor or factors hindering the *Almajiri*'s access to basic education which the government has not gone the extra mile to address, thereby indirectly denying the *Almajiris* access to basic education. Hence, this study intends to fathom an explanation for the persistence of the *Almajiri* system of education and the shunning of the established *Almajiri* Integrated Model Schools (AIMS) by the majority of beneficiary stakeholders.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DENYING ALMAJIRIS ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION

There are always outcomes and/or consequences to every action and inaction in all human endeavours. In cases where the results are positive, they are referred to more as outcomes, whereas if the results are negative the term consequences are used because the word connotes an adverse situation. Denial of access to basic education to the teeming *Almajiri* youths will naturally have consequences on those who deserve to bear them, and the north of Nigeria, especially the North East Geopolitical Zone are examples. The growing number of *almajiris* roaming the streets and begging for alms in cities and villages of Northern Nigeria, especially the North East Geopolitical Zone, has made them ubiquitous and has become a cause for concern not only to the elites but the general public. As a consequence, recently, the incident took a different dimension and even got worse when children as young as three- to four-year-olds could be seen on the streets begging for alms to survive. This situation is unprecedented and is callous on the part of those pushing toddlers who need parental care and love into the streets to fend for themselves. These children hitting the street this young, if they survive by some divine providence, are most likely to become diehards and a potential reservoir for recruiting foot soldiers for insurgents, bandits, and other forms of common criminality. The practice of unleashing toddlers into the streets portends danger to our society. It bothers the mind that the problem of *almajiri* proliferation into the streets of urban and rural settlements without access to basic education is prevalent unabated. It will even be more worrisome if the *almajiri* phenomenon is left unresolved because it will continue even with greater security risk by serving as a source of recruiting foot soldiers for insurgents, political thugs, and other criminal gangs across the nation (Mashema et al, 2018). Hence, there is a need to find out to what extent is access to basic education available in the Integrated *Almajiri* Education System.

This study, therefore, seeks to empirically examine the degree of access to basic education in the *Almajiri* Integrated Model Schools system to mellow down the degree of the impact of the consequences the nation will have to bear. In an attempt to fathom the extent of the level of *Almajiri* access to basic education in the model schools, a pilot study survey of access to one of the models schools in Igabi LGA Kaduna State was conducted. Table 1, below is the access data obtained.

Table 1:

Access to Basic Education in the *Almajiri* Integrated Model Schools System from 2019 to 2023 for Urban Schools

Year	Enrolment		Dropout		Completion	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
2019	131	26	25	5	106	21
2020	102	21	10	2	92	19
2021	105	21	15	3	90	18
2022	98	20	16	3	82	17
2023	60	12	8	2	52	10
Total	496	100	74	15	422	85

The deductions that could be made from Table1 are: the 5-year data obtained was from 2019 to 2023; only 383 almajiris enrolled in the school in the five years under study; enrolment was dropping progressively through the five years at an average rate of 22.9%; dropout rate was contrarily increasing at 30%; and the completion rate achieved is only a bare 57.4%. Since enrolment was dropping as dropout was increasing then there is a cause for the phenomenon which is negatively impacted on the overall access to basic education in the area as shown from the data.

THE SPOILS FOR ALMAJIRI PARENTS' AND MALLAMS'

The relevant authorities have been groping in the dark purporting to search for a solution to *Almajiri's* access to basic education. But as the saying goes, “Water will always find its level”. Since parents must discharge the responsibility of training their children, under the circumstances, the alternative for them is Qur’anic schools. The parents have then considered the burden of their responsibilities which include, but are not limited to feeding, clothing, sheltering, medical care,

and school fees against the background of their poverty. They, therefore, resorted to making do with the cheap or even free Qur'anic schools. This is the ready alternative that they have for the educational requirements of their children and wards. The alternative on the other hand coincidentally or deliberately provides the *Mallams* with the opportunity to exploit the *Almajiri* students by charging them N200.00 Wednesday levy, using them as commercial labourers, domestic servants, sourcing for begged food, and workers on his farms.

The duo of parents and the *Mallams* have found succor in the dilemma of implementing the stalemated Integrated *almajiri* system of education. As the parents have clandestinely shirked off the burden of their responsibilities to their children, the *Mallams* are accepting the children from the parents without a dime to exploit them. In the end, the *Almajiris* are the victims. Attempts in the past to frown at the victimization of the *Almajiris* have been countered using religion as a shield by the parents, the *Mallams*, and even the naïve *Almajiris* themselves.

AMELIORATIVE MEASURES

The Federal and state governments have taken several interventionary actions to ameliorate the menace of the *Almajiri* phenomenon. One of the interventions made was the establishment of Islamiyyah Schools, shortly before and a little after independence in 1960. The measure did not get general acceptance by the Muslim communities because of its skewed curriculum content which lent more weight towards Western than Qur'anic education (Idris, 2016). Secondly, the tuition and other charges costs were prohibitive for the majority poor. Thirdly, the schools were inadequately spread in the relevant areas that require them. Therefore, the average distance from homes to schools was beyond the reach of the children of the poor Muslim population in the north, especially in the northeast geopolitical zone.

Another intervention was the introduction of a universal basic education programme in 1999 and it was backed up by the UBE Act of 2004. It was meant to replace the Universal Primary Education programme, introduced earlier in the 1970s. The UBE programme whose objective was to avail basic education to all Nigerian school-aged children was bedeviled by so many problems such as an inadequate number of schools, inadequate staff (academic and non-academic), poor funding, inadequate school plant, poorly designed curricula that excluded faith and moral lessons in its syllabus. The exclusion of faith and moral teaching has automatically made the programme unacceptable for the *Almajiris*, their parents, and the *Mallams*.

The latest intervention was the introduction of the Integrated *Almajiri* Education System in 2013. To implement the programme, the *Almajiri* Integrated Model Schools (AIMS) were established to achieve the objectives of the policy. However, the system was hurriedly put in place without adequate planning, organizing, and execution of the programme. Eventually, as posited by Amoo (2019), the 152 *Almajiri* Integrated Model Schools was established in some twenty-six states to cater for only about 15% of the then estimated 9.5 million out-of-school *almajiris*, while the relevant state governments were expected to replicate the model schools to cover the remaining 85%. But somewhat, the state governments reneged. This was because they felt the Federal Government had breached the terms of their mutual agreement, when it single handedly went ahead to build, staff and equip the 152-model school to their exclusion. The integrated curriculum content of the model schools was not clearly defined as to the ratio of time allotted to Qur'anic and UBE lesson periods of the

programme. Hence, the lapses created mixed feelings in the minds of beneficiary stakeholders, especially the *almajiri* parents.

Consequently, a significant number of beneficiary stakeholders shunned the programme. They then continued to patronize the traditional Qur'anic schools with multitudes of the *almajiris* still roaming the streets of northern Nigerian cities especially the north east geopolitical zone. A substantial number of the *Almajiri Integrated Model Schools* were then abandoned and are undergoing infrastructural decay except a few that are skeletally functioning. Therefore, the latest intervention has failed to create a significant impact on the *almajiri* menacing phenomenon.

SHORTFALL OF THE MEASURES

The problems and challenges of *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 problems and challenges were caused by: firstly, 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; secondly, another major shortfall was inadequate publicity and sensitization of the stakeholders and even some policy implementers. For example, empirical observation has revealed that most parents and the *Mallams* hardly understood what and for whom the Integrated *Almajiri Education System* was established. This has resulted in their ignorance of the gesture extended to them by the government, and rather saw the programme as a ploy to rob them of the benefits they were deriving from the anomaly. Hence, the goals and objectives of the Integration was not significantly achieved because the beneficiary stakeholders were hardly aware and sensitized to readily take ownership and key into the system by enrolling their children en mass into the model schools; thirdly, the next important shortfall is non-conduct of feasibility studies at conceptual level of the *almajiri* system to establish the degree of stakeholders' attitude and the acceptability of the system to discern to which extent the programme can be achieved. To buttress this claim, it can be recalled that the Integrated *Almajiri Education System* was muted in 2012 and launched in 2013, the eve of the 2015 general elections. Amoo (2018) posited that it was in the bid of the then ruling party to entice the predominantly Muslim core-north's voters that the system was hurriedly packaged as a strategy to catch their votes. Hence there was no enough time to conduct a feasibility study to determine the workability and acceptability of the proposed Integrated *Almajiri Education System* by the beneficiary stakeholders.

Then, fourthly, non-employment of educational experts at some critical points of policy formulation, implementation and running of the *AIMS* programme led to unprofessional establishment of the model schools that were frothed with lots of inadequacies, employment of quack academic and non-academic staff, acquisition of inappropriate and low-quality equipment as well as poorly designed and constructed infrastructures. Lastly, poor national and states budgetary allocation for the educational sector in Nigeria has always been grossly inadequate and far short of the UNESCO recommended educational budgetary allocation bench mark for international adoption. Odigwe, et al (2019) observed that the highest annual budgetary allocation in Nigeria from 2009 to 2018 has not been more than 5.45 % on average.

The trend has not changed significantly up to 2023. Considering the enormous population of school aged children in Nigeria and especially those that are out of school, the budgetary amount usually allocated by Federal and state governments to the education sector is usually grossly inadequate annually (Ohaegbulem, 2023). Therefore, funds allocated as running costs for perishable school materials and school plants maintenance were usually insufficient for efficient running of the schools for quality education to be imparted to the children generally not to mention the almajiri integrated model schools that are exclusively established for a single faith out of several.

WAY FORWARD

The launching of Integrated Almajiri Education System and the implementation of Almajiri Integrated Model Schools programme has been bedeviled by several problems and challenges. The challenges are boadering on policies, programme execution, publicity and sensitization, feasibility studies, staffing and equipping as well as funding. The way forward is necessary out of the problems and challenges to make the model schools to be functional for the benefit of the stakeholders. Some of the ways forward could be by: revisiting the policy formulation process and taking the bottom to top instead of top to bottom approach. The aim would be to carry the stakeholders along in decision making process to make them take ownership of the programme and easily key into it; preliminary studies are essential at the planning stage to determine the 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. Then, at the execution stage of the programme, feasibility studies at conceptual level of the almajiri system is necessary. This is to establish the degree of stakeholders' attitude and the acceptability of the system. It is also to determine the workability of the system and to what extent the programme can be achieved; adequate publicity and sensitization of the stakeholders and even some policy implementers is essential through organized regular conferences, workshops and media jingles. This will help all stakeholders to understand, accept and always remember the programme and for whom it was established; employment of educational experts at all critical points of policy formulation, implementation and running of the AIMS programme is imperative. This would lead to professional establishment of the model schools devoid of inadequacies. It will also ensure that expert academic and non-academic staff are employed. Then the acquisition of appropriate and quality equipment as well as a better designed and constructed infrastructures will be guaranteed; the integration of curricula is vital and could be elaborate and all-encompassing to include that of other faiths extant in the country in one school. The aim is to eliminate segregation of almajiris from the rest of the children in a multi-religious and plural societies that we have in Northern Nigeria especially the North East Geopolitical Zone, because such arrange could render the beneficiary stakeholders especially the almajiris vulnerable to resentment by those who may feel excluded; It is crucial that national and states budgetary allocation for the educational sector in Nigeria be improved upon. The aim is to it make reasonably close to, if not in total conformity with the UNESCO educational budgetary allocation bench mark recommended internationally.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the incident of shunning the Almajiri Integrated Model Schools by the state governments and the beneficiary stakeholders. The findings revealed that the most state governments, who supposed to takeover and replicate the model schools, in accordance with an agreement between them and the Federal government refused to oblige because of a breach of the terms of the agreement. While most of the beneficiary stakeholders (the parents, the Mallams & almajiris) shunned the programme because of an inadequate publicity and sensitization leading to ignorance and suspicion. The integrated almajiri education system was packaged to integrated the Islamic and Basic Education curricula. The aim was to settle the almajiri near his/her parents to acquire dual knowledge, without addressing his/her other basic needs, which the parents are relieved of when they migrate. While on the other hand the Mallam accepts the almajiris without any form of fees to exploit them. Hence, the parents and the Mallams rather saw the programme as a ploy to rob them of the benefits they were deriving from the anomaly and shunned it. Consequently, the *almajiris* are still being seen roaming the streets in their millions and most of the model schools are abandoned and undergoing decadence, except a few.

The Integrated Almajiri Education System in itself was an intervention to solve out of formal school almajiri problems. But the hurriedly packaged intervention was frothed with myriads of problems that ranged from poor policy formulation process; lack of publicity and sensitization of stakeholders, non-conduct of preliminary and feasibility studies, engagement of non-professionals, interpolated human and material quantities leading to inadequacies, poor budgetary allocation and funding, all constituted shortfalls for the integrated almajiri education system as an intervention. Therefore, the study's findings imply that the shortfalls ought to be addressed to make the stakeholders accept and key into the Almajiri integrated model schools' system programme. This is to ensure that the stakeholders accept and key into the programme with the objective of taking them off the streets to make them productive citizens.

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