

# High Crime Rate: The Implicative Consequences of the Almajiri System of Education in North-Eastern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The high rate of crime in the North Eastern part of Nigeria is becoming very alarming, most especially in cases concerning petty thefts in communities. As minor as these cases seem, they often lead to loss of lives. In Nigeria, Almajiri educational system is viewed within two perceptions which are Islam and Hausa/Fulani. The phenomenon has given a negative impression about Nigeria as a country, most especially in the Northern part as it has taken a different dimension as against the initial concept behind the practice. The children are made to do other things such as working in the Tsangaya master's farm, begging for alms and remitting the monies and best food to the master instead of the learning they are supposedly sent to the Tsangaya for. The lack of formal education and parental care which are being replaced by harsh living conditions end up turning these children into aggressive and violent adults. In the quest to survive, the tendency of these children to commit crime without thinking twice is very high. The general objective of this research which is sponsored by **TETfund** is to examine the implicative consequences of the Almajiri education system on high crime rate in North Eastern Nigeria and to profound solutions to them. The specific objectives are as follows; to examine the institutional structure of the Almajiri system; ascertain the problems faced by the system; determine the basic necessities of the almajiri child; examine the factors militating against the co-existence of Western and Tsangaya education; determine the means by which crime within the Almajirai can be curtailed; and suggest ways by which the welfare of the almajirai can be improved. The methodology used for this research is through secondary and primary data. Secondary data was sourced from Journal publications, articles and other internet sources. Some data was also collected from the Magistrate courts, Police stations and the Nigerian Correctional Services. The research concludes by way of recommendations that there should be awareness on the dangers of child abandonment at an early age, enforce strict laws on child trafficking and begging amongst others.*

**Keywords:** *Crime, Almajiri, Western Education, Consequences, Implications.*

## Introduction

This research is aimed at establishing the relationship between high rate of crime and the Almajiri system of education in north east Nigeria and profound solutions to the impending issues caused by the system. Almajiri is a word borrowed from Arabians for someone who leaves his home in search of knowledge in the Islamic religion. Children of male status are sent to places far away from their various homes to acquire Islamic education at the tender age of between four and eight years. The system was in place since from the existence of Islam in Northern Nigeria and functioned in such a way that the members of the community took care of the almajirai and their

masters. Unfortunately, this present day is different as the almajirai fend for themselves through begging or doing both manual and hard labour jobs in exchange for food or some small peanuts(money) just to survive. They move most times bare-footed and are unsheltered. The stress related to this brings about their involvement in crimes such as theft, burglary etc. Other than this, it leads to high rate of severe crime in communities, the circumstances sometimes lead to loss of lives. The practice provides a recruiting ground for criminals and other shady behaviour such as, Area boyism, theft, pickpocket, drug abuse, narcotics. In some instances, the children (Almajirai) are used by Mallams to acquire wealth. Their daily and even nightly routines involve street and house to house begging for food, cloth and money, as well as menial jobs such as washing plates, sweeping and washing clothes, thus making the Qur'anic learning as an insignificant secondary pre-occupation (Ibrahim, 2011)

The Almajiri system exploded as a result of government negligence by failing to incorporate the system into the education system; the economic benefits derived from the system by the masters(mallams) and poverty and family structure which makes it difficult to take care of the children. They see the almajiri system as the way out of carrying out their responsibilities. These and many other circumstances have led to high rate of crime in the northern part of Nigeria.

### **Statement of The Problem**

The existence of western education is indeed the bedrock of development and as such a major ingredient in the spices of life which cannot be done away with to succeed. It further enhances the level of productivity of a child. So many declarations such as that made by the UN, MDGs etc to provide education for all are some of the declarations made in support of formal education in the world. This was fully supported by Nigeria as it is a signatory to them.

Western education for all cannot be achieved due to the issues of the almajirai phenomenon as even though presently the awareness of the significance of formal education is now high, there is still the problem of finances. Children cannot go to school because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees even in government owned schools. The recent hike in fuel price as a result of the subsidy removal has also made the general cost of living very expensive and as such one will rather he/she has access to their basic amenities than social amenities. Thus, formal schooling is not really a necessity and hence the complete support for the almajiri system of education which cost them almost nothing.

The Tsangaya system overtime has deteriorated in standards leading to the Almajiri phenomenon becoming a problem. Though originating from the term '*Hijra*' referring to Prophet Mohammad migration from Mecca to Medina, and initially reflective of the movement of the Tsangaya students in search of knowledge, the term today has become synonymous with begging. Many of the students within the Tsangaya system on moving to cities start to beg for survival. Odumosu et al (2013). Previously, these children are being taken care of after migrating to cities other than theirs by the people in the community, but this is not the case now as the economy is terrible in Nigeria and most especially in the Northern part of the country. As a result of this economic hardship faced by not only the almajirai but every other person, survival becomes very difficult that the begging yields little or no results. This leads to petty thefts and later they go into even more complicated

violent crimes so much so that the almajirai are blamed for any major crises carried out in the North for instance, post-election violence in most part of the north in 2011 and 2015 are said to have been carried out by almajirai. In almost the same vein, religious crises are also perpetrated by the almajirai. It is in these crises that they find a means of committing other crimes, hence the increase in crime rate whether or not crises abound.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this research is to examine the Implicative Consequences of the Almajiri System of Education on high rate of crime in North-Eastern Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows;

- i. To examine the institutional structure of the Almajiri system;
- ii. To ascertain the problems faced by the Almajiri system;
- iii. To determine the basic necessities of the almajiri child;
- iv. To examine the factors militating against the co-existence of Western and Tsangaya education;
- v. To determine the means by which crime within the Almajirai can be curtailed;
- vi. To suggest ways by which the welfare of the almajirai can be improved to reduce crime rate in North Eastern Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

**Ho:** There is no significant relationship between high rate of crime and the Amajiri system of Education in North East Nigeria

**Hi:** There is a significant relationship between high rate of crime and the Almajiri system of Eduation in North East Nigeria

### **Literature Review**

The term Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word “Almahajirun” which means “migrants”. Yahaya (2005) The Islamic holy book has always emphasized the need for alms to the poor and also to always assist migrants. The *Al-mahajirun* referred to in the Qur’an were the people who gave up their wealth and families to follow the Prophet Muhammad during the *Hijira* (migration) from Mecca to Medina. They arrived Medina without knowing anybody nor even knowing where to sleep or even what to eat. This was why those who had the means were employed to extend generosity to the migrants, not only as a religious solidarity, but also as a religious duty to reduce the hardship suffered by the migrants. Those who took them in were referred to as the helpers. The student studying Qur’an in the early days of Islam in West Africa shared the same characteristics with the *Al-mahajirun* of Medina. They had left their homes and families, had no means of livelihood since they were devoted to their studies and had no housing of their own since they were on the move. Over the years, *Al-mahajirun* developed into what we know today as *Al-majirai* and *Al-majiranci* (the act of being Almajiri) in Northern Nigeria. Odumosu et al (2013)

Almajiranci is a popular phenomenon in Northern Nigeria in which children of male status leave their homes to in most cases far away place to be under the tutorship of an individual in a place called Tsangaya. The teaching and learning process is carried out by both the teacher and the students. The teacher is not employed by anyone as school and lesson teachers are employed and

paid in a formal means of education. Yet it may not be entirely correct to describe him as self-employed, as that could mean that he is fully responsible for his means of sustenance Yahaya (2005).

The Almajiri educational system is enmesh in crisis of development with the current challenges posed by national and global convention on rights and education of the child (EFA 1990; SDGs 2015; UBE, 2008; CRC, 1989). The international dimension of the phenomenon of Almajiri is either ignored or overlooked. Many poor families sent out their wards to neighbouring countries of the West African sub-region (Ghana, Chad, Niger, Mali, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Senegal) to acquire this type of education without any recourse to the implications to security, economy and social problems (ECOWAS, 2015). Both teachers and students move around northern Nigeria and most part of West Africa in the name of this practice.

The failure of successive government to properly remodel, integrate, and accept responsibility of providing basic free and compulsory education to the Nigerian child in line with the National Policy on Education (1977; 1988; 2004; 2008). This neglect has impacted negatively on the Nigerian child for decades which has forced millions of parents to look for alternative in the Almajiri/Tsangaya educational system particularly in northern Nigeria. The social exclusion of the Almajiris breeds social explosions which manifested in the social problems that endanger the societal peace, unity and progress. Even though, there are stereotypes but the teeming youths that roam the streets and serves as nuisance are usually mistaken as Almajiris. This visible manifestation of social explosion according to Sule (2002) are: Maitatsine, Yan-Daba, Area Boys, Boko Haram, „Yan-Daukanamarya and Political thugs etc.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The Socialization theory was adopted for this research work. Socialization involves a variety of outcomes, including the acquisition of rules, roles, standards, and values across the social, emotional, cognitive, and personal domains.

Socialization is often assumed to occur primarily in childhood even when it goes throughout the lifespan of an individual. Socialization can then be described as a succession of processes occurring at successive stages of development, with the child's family of origin being the first, and in many cases the most enduring, socializing institution, joined by peer groups, schools, religious institutions, and, in adulthood, employers and intimate partners as sources of norms for social behavior (Maccoby, 2007). The primary agents of socialization include those people who are closest to an individual. These primary agents of socialization include family and friends. The most important primary agent of socialization, family, plays an important role in shaping the life and behavior of an individual within the society. The secondary agents of socialization are those institutions or places that help an individual find his place within the society. As the primary agent of socialization and the first "educator", the family, plays an essential role in the transmission of the fundamental values that encourage and nurture learning in a young child. Learning to read and write the Holy Qur'an at an early age is an integral part of the socialisation processes of every child in the northern part of the country. It is therefore an established norm for parents to register their children with selected Makarantar Tsangaya (Qur'anic school) which could be found in every

Muslim community, no matter how small. The expectation of the society is that by the time a pupil graduated from one of such schools, he would be able to recite the Qur'an and read and write, using Arabic scripts. The introduction of Western education did not significantly affect enrolment into Makarantar Tsangaya, as the school age children still attend primary schools in the morning while they go to Islamic schools in the afternoon. However, not all the children receive their Qur'anic education in the neighbourhood under the watchful eyes of their parents. Once farm work is over, some parents in distant villages dispatch their boys off to urban centres in search of Qur'anic education, which brings about the issue of Almajiri system. The dilemma of these children is that of being taken from home to an "unknown" person, as far as the children are concerned, and the absence of their family members to internalize norms and values of the society that are passed across through the family. Although there are claims that the children are exposed to Quranic studies, but the price they have to pay is the fact that they must by all means ensure the up-keep of themselves, hence they beg for alms. With the Almajiri system of education taking over the formal type of education, the type of socialization expected to be performed by education as an agent of socialization is mixed with religious colouration thereby deviating from the role of education as an agent of socialization.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area**

The study was carried out in the six North-eastern states of Nigeria comprising of Gombe, Bauchi, Taraba, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. The unit of analysis was officers of the Nigerian Police, staff of the Nigerian Correctional services, Magistrate courts, the Almajirai and the masters of the Tsangayas.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Primary and secondary sources was used to gather the data in this study. The primary sources of information entailed gathering new, previously undiscovered data. Primary data was gathered using specially created questionnaires that was administered to the staff of the police, Nigerian correctional services and staff of Magistrate courts. Secondary sources of data was also sorted from there. There was also a Focused Group Discussion (FDG) with the Almajirai and personal interviews with the Tsangaya masters. The choice of the instruments is for the fact that they are very effective as proven by previous research.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Inferential statistics were used in this study's data analysis to draw conclusions and inferences. SPSS 23.0 was used to analyze the data that was collected. The study used Spearman Rank Order Correlation to check the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

## **Findings**

There are conflicting estimates on the number of Almajirai in the country. It is estimated that there are nearly 15 million Almajirai in the North, out of which 45% of them are from the Northeast alone and nearly 90% of these children do not attend conventional schools. The classical structure of the Tsangaya is that they were located on the outskirts of towns near farmlands that are devoid

of any activity during the dry season - thus providing a conducive atmosphere for learning. In contemporary times, however, the Tsangaya is often located in inner urban areas, giving them direct access to food and casual labor.

There is evidence indicating that many almajiri are from states other than the ones in which they are resident and engaged in the almajiranci phenomenon. Majority of them are from very poor parental backgrounds and mostly children of farmers, traders, civil servants, the unemployed and the Mallams themselves.

There has been a deviation from the original approach to Qur'anic education and the societal understanding of Almajiranci which has resulted in a bastardization of the system with the concomitant obnoxious practices (beggary in particular) that has cropped in. Practically, the Almajirai survive on "*bara*" (or beggary) and scavenging for remnants which is hardly a means of adequate sustenance in a poverty-stricken society.

They serve as domestic servants or porters to other people and engage in odd jobs that are perceived to be hazardous, detrimental to their health and exploitative of their basic rights to survival and development. The original practice was for such migrants to engage equally in productive labour and to be supported in the predominantly Islamic societies of the time. The culture of begging was, therefore, not a part of the original almajiranci.

Only a few Mallams have any form of formal educational qualification at NCE, Diploma and First Degree levels. The remaining bulk of them only lay claim to non-formal educational qualifications in the context of memorization of the Holy Quran and possession of knowledge of Hadiths and other books of Islamic tradition. The Mallams are reported to be exploiting the almajirai. That the Mallams resort to exploiting and abusing the almajirai was not surprising as their sources of livelihood are only limited to charity, levies on the pupils, charges on spiritual healing, spiritual consultations and peasant farming, while the pupils themselves largely relied on begging and labour as a means of sustenance.

As the *Almajirai* do not live inside nuclear families, they are often considered to grow up outside appropriate adult care and control. Alternative upbringing arrangements are considered unable to provide sufficient support. The lack of parental participation in the moral up-bringing of the Almajiri pupils predisposes them to become delinquents.

The neglect of the ideals of Islamic support systems of social welfare is also regrettable in the predominantly Muslim states as the peasant become severely pauperised. Therefore, some of the social implications of present practice of almajiranci include the institutionalization of beggary as a means of sustenance, as well as endemic child abuse, neglect and exploitation.

For the almajiri, as for all Muslims, knowledge and its acquisition in Islam leads man to the realization of the truth, the Supremacy and Greatness of Allah, and the happiness of mankind. Revelations from Allah through His Prophets and the historical experience of man (in the genetic sense) constitute the two sources of knowledge. Hence Allah and His Prophets enjoin man to constantly endeavour to acquire every type of knowledge for the glorification of Allah and the

service of mankind. In that vein the acquisition of knowledge in Islam, is seen as a religious duty, the essence of which is the “attainment of God’s pleasure.” In the context of Almajiranci, the individual purposely travels out far from their home and looks or acquires knowledge of the Holy Qur’an. The belief in this instance is that, one will concentrate the more when he is away from home.

The almajiri system was designed to build in young minds, sound doctrines of Islam, as specified in the Holy Qur’an. Essentially, it was meant to teach children basic spiritual, moral and social values in order to enhance their sense of responsibility. It was also meant to inculcate in them the value of caring for those in need. That was why they were made to live on the goodwill of people, who freely donated for their upkeep. The original Almajiri system of education before its subsequent adulteration with the beggary institution, the sole objectives was intellectual and moral training as well as life-long discipline.

There is clear evidence that almajirai children are indoctrinated by their Mallams to truncated principles that Islam expects them to “suffer” in order to achieve their aspirations in this life and the hereafter. Most almajirai children suffer from what can be termed fixated life aspirations of wanting to become Mallams or Sheiks as their present Mallams. Hence, early in life, they already see nothing wrong in the almajiranci phenomenon and hope to carry on the tradition without recourse to any other careers that may be available.

The most intrinsic educationally related needs of almajirai children gravitate essentially around copious and advanced acquisition of Qur’anic and Islamic knowledge. Most almajirai children are conscious of the possible relevance of western type education to their lives in a modern day society and would desire to acquire this in addition to Qur’anic studies. Others are divided as to whether western type education should be acquired along with or after Qur’anic schooling. Almajirai children are of the perception that western type formal education may not be acceptable to them, more because of their lack of early opportunity for it and because most of their Mallams and parents do not support it. So, some of them do not just believe in western type education. Although many desire to acquire western-type education in addition to Qur’anic studies Most of them, however, aspire more to become a Mallam or Sheikh (Islamic Scholar) than aspiring to other occupations such as trading, business, carpentry, mechanical works, farming and teaching.

The circumstances of the almajirai’s upbringing are sufficient conditions to make them inherently dangerous. Merely by living supposedly unchild-like lives, the almajirai acquire problematic behaviours and attitudes. Many of these children, because of the harsh realities they found themselves in, end up becoming juvenile delinquents and, subsequently, adult criminals. The average almajiri is also extremely vulnerable to ill health and diseases.

Factors alleged to be inhibiting the integration of Tsangaya and western education include: suspicion and resistance from teachers and parents; variations in approaches, patterns, forms, depth and dimensions of integration; staffing and the crisis of qualified manpower (teaching force); poor funding; participation and performances in public examinations; accreditation, the labour market and the general society.

Reforms and intervention efforts of the Tsangaya school system have gone through a number of trends and have taken various perspectives and areas of emphasis. However, one major characteristic of the integration movement sadly though, is the fact that so far, the efforts are uncoordinated, unorganized, and haphazard and indeed, there are some elements of confusion. This is the factor that informed the formation of the National Association of Model Islamic Schools (NAMIS) formed in Minna, convened by the Islamic Education Trust (IET) in 1998, to co-ordinate such efforts and bring them together. It has organized workshops, seminars and conferences for the proprietors of such schools. In spite of that however, the efforts are still in disarray, and every individual proprietor or group continue to operate their integrated schools along their own vision and aspirations. In spite of all these, there are glaring and promising indications for hopes and prospects.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is worthy of note at this point that the UBE programme still remains the best option to provide unlimited access to all Nigerian children irrespective of religion, tribe, ethnicity and socio-economic circumstances of their parents. On the strength of field work conducted to determine possible areas of focus for reforming the Almajiri system and arising from the review of available information and various suggestions put forward by different stakeholders, the following reformative measures are recommended:

1. A baseline study should be conducted to determine the location, size, staff strength, facilities and problems of the Qur'anic schools that are appropriate enough to be involved in the integration project. A macro-research framework needs to be developed immediately to cover all states of the Federation that will utilize more structured data sourcing instruments to focus on a census of numbers of almajiri children, Quranic schools, facilities and infrastructure and varied input of strategic stakeholders for an envisaged Action Plan;
2. Government should establish at least one integrated Qur'anic schools in each local government area of the state to serve as a model;
3. The Qur'anic schools involved in the integration project should receive assistance from government in form of textbooks and other teaching facilities for the modern disciplines and the teachers to teach the disciplines;
4. Proprietors and teachers of the integrated model Qur'anic schools need to be trained on basic teaching methods, administrative skills, school management and child management;
5. Vocational education that provides skills related to occupations like carpentry, welding, farming, etc., should be introduced for adolescents and adults attending the Qur'anic schools. Initiatives should be taken by Government for private sector inputs in providing skills acquisition and entrepreneurship for products of Quranic schools;
6. Governments and other stakeholders need to provide direct intervention programmes to address the resource constraint of the Quranic schools, integrate and standardize them, remunerate and certificate the Mallams and the pupils, as well as create opportunities for gainful employment of the products of this schooling arrangement in order to prevent and



protect them against manipulation and exposure to moral, physical and economic hardship and danger.

7. Public enlightenment is required to sensitize and convince the general public as well as the proprietors and teachers of the Qur'anic schools on the importance of the introduction of modern disciplines in the Qur'anic schools. Hausa films and Radio programmes can be sponsored for this purpose. Intensify public awareness (especially among parents/guardians) on the negative consequences of child neglect and poor monitoring of children in the hands of the Mallams. Emphasis should also be on the health, social, and educational implications of child begging and exploitation;
8. There is need for the enforcement of existing laws against child trafficking, begging and abuse, and sustained legislative interventions.

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