

Review on the Historical Development and Challenges Faced by *Almajiri* Educational System in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Herein, embodies the result of a study under a topic titled, Review on the Historical Development and Challenges Faced by *Almajiri* Educational System in Northern Nigeria. This study relied upon primary data collected from the literature, and aimed at investigating and feeding the general public with factual information concerning the original and eventual nature of *Almajiri* educational system in addition to the causes of transformation of the system into current state. The result of this study highlighted in the context of the literature, certain factors that might have influenced the *Almajiri* Education in Nigeria as suggested by different researchers. Such factors were classified according to this research, into eight categories which include: the economic-, educational-, environmental-, geographical-, legal-, political-, religious-, as well as socio-cultural-factor. However, the fact that such factors may vary depending upon the living conditions for the individual citizens of the country, this study recommended the need for carrying out another fresh research in the form of field survey for either validation and/or identification of the various contemporary factors resulting in the high resistance of such educational system under discussion.

Keywords:

- **Resistance:** The quality or state of being in continuous existence while resisting both the internal and external pressure.
- ***Almajiri*:** *Almajiri* is any child who is enrolled by parents or guardians in *Almajiri* School usually with a view to prepare the child acquire some rudiments of Qur'anic knowledge via rote memorization.
- ***Almajiri* System of Education:** Is the informal system of education which exposes *Almajiri* child to Qur'anic education through local instructor called *Alarammah* or *Mallam* (teacher).
- **Education:** Education is an elusive term that embodies within itself both the formal-, semi-formal- and informal forms of education that are essential towards securing social development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Almajiri Education which found its root in northern Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani land) is concerned with the attitude of sending out young boys, at their tender age, by their parents or guardians to other communities to acquire Qur'anic education under the supervision of a *Mallam* (Hannah, 2018). It was considered a reliable and

prestigious system of acquiring Islamic knowledge until the emergence of colonialism which brought alternative system of education that was said to had been imposed to the occupants of northerner Nigeria (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020). According to significant number of researchers, this system of education under discussion has currently transformed into an avenue for hatching an

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agony to the nation. Henceforth, *Almajiri* system of education as of today, faces several threats from the authorities at different levels, and social groups; both internally and from the foreign countries. Among these threats include several attempts made by certain governors from the northern part of the country, either individually or as a collaborative effort to ban or restrict the activities of *Almajiri* education in the northern part of Nigeria. Another attempt towards restriction of *Almajiri* activities was experienced in the year 2020, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the nation; where the southern governors practically intercepted the *Almajiri* children and deported them back to the north in an attempt to prevent the southern region against the spread of the pandemic. Vanguard news of 11th of May, 2020 reported a similar incident with Ondo State intercepting 13 *Almajirai* (plural of *Almajiri* children) and deporting them back to the northern part of the country. However, despite all the amount of pressure mounted upon the *Almajiri* Education both internally and externally, including the corrective actions taken by Federal Government (FG) under the leadership of former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2012; to formalize the system, in addition to the decision made by Northern Governors in banning the system (UBE, 2012; Guardian, 2020), *Almajiri* system of education still operates in Nigeria indicating a high degree of resistance. This interesting level of persistency of *Almajiri* Education makes the historical review of literature on the same subject matter worthwhile. With such knowledge of literature, one can easily be able to relate, compare and contrast between the past experiences and the present situation, in order to come up with lasting solution from the factual information available within the realm of the literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of *Almajiri* Education

Northern region of Nigeria which is a home to numerous social and political entities has an established culture since time immemorial and this culture was predominantly Islamic in nature. Northern Nigeria was in the advent of contemporary world never considered as a primitive society. It had all the features and potentialities of a civilized community. Actually this was why when the colonialists came they opted to administer it through what they call indirect rule, which means that they rule the rulers and the rulers continue ruling their subjects on their behalf. They met a well-structured educational system that starts from the kindergarten stage up to the university level (Yakubu, 2017). In Nigeria, *Almajiri* system started in the 11th century, as a result of the involvement of Borno ruler in Qur'an literacy. Seven hundred years later, the Sokoto Caliphate after the triumph of the Jihad led by Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio, was founded principally through an Islamic revolution based on the teaching of the Holy Quran (Isiaka, 2015). These two empires run similar Quranic learning which over time came to be known as the

Almajiri system of education (Ifijeh and James 2012). *Almajiri* is a semi-formal education system relying solely on Quranic education, in which children; mostly boys are sent by their parents to take up residence with Islamic *Mallams*, for instruction in the Qur'anic and other Islamic texts (Alkali, 2001). It also refers to the traditional inculcation of children into adulthood (i.e. learning how to fend for the mselves) usually under the tutelage of a *Mallam*. More so, as a means of compensation for knowledge gain and for their wellbeing, the students could serve in their teachers' farm or beg for alms (Sunday and Doris, 2020). The word *Almajiri* was derived from Arabic word "*Almuhajir*" which literally means an emigrant, and usually refers to a person who migrates from luxury of his home to other place or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge especially when acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). This was affirmed by Mclean (2020) who stated that the term *Almajiri* originated from the Arabic word *Almuhajir*, which means a migrant. It was used in history to describe patriots of the holy Prophet Muhammad who migrated from Mecca to Medina during the early days of the Islamic religion. *Almajiranci* is the term being used to describe the system of *Almajiri* education (Mclean, 2020). It has been argued that *Almajiri* system was imported into northern Nigeria from northern Africa (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). This term '*Almajiri*' although derived from this Arabic word '*Al-Muhajir*'; the migrants, occupied different meaning which can simply be summarized by a typical Hausa man as 'the seeker of knowledge' (Lapidus, 2012). Yakubu (2017) in trying to provide hint on another literal meaning of the word *Almuhajir* (migrant) with regards to Islamic perspective affirmed that a sound report of both Bukhari and Muslim states: A Muslim is he in whom people remain secure from his utterances and actions, and a Muhajir (migrant) is who abstains from what Allah has forbidden.

However, in Nigeria '*Almajiris*' means those who left their villages or town, parents, relations, and friends in search of Islamic religious knowledge and scholarship (Kabiru, 2012). Basically, any male child who is made to leave the luxury of his family in search of Islamic knowledge may be referred to as *Almajiri*. This is exactly as highlighted by Yusha'u *et al.*, (2013), who affirmed that, in the northern part of Nigeria *Almajiri* system refers to a traditional method of acquiring and memorizing the glorious Qur'an where boys at their tender age are sent out by their parent or guardians to other villages, town or cities for acquiring Qur'anic education under a knowledgeable Islamic scholar called *Mallam*. As stated by Sunday and Doris (2020), a study titled: "Begging among *Almajiri* Qur'anic Boarding School Children of *Almajiri* System of Education in Sokoto Metropolis" by Ayuba (2009) averred that *Almajiri* practices are religiously legalized

since the Prophet (P.B.H) was reported to have advised Muslim to travel in search of knowledge. In the Hadith, it was narrated that “Whoever is able to set out seeking (knowledge) will be walking on the path of God until his return and whoever dies will be seen as a martyr”. This connotes why Islamic scholars and their students migrate or travel to different parts of the world in search of knowledge (Sunday and Doris, 2020). Imam Shafi’i (a founder of one of the four Islamic Schools of Thought; Shafi’i School) was the greatest proponent of migration for seeking knowledge which he also extended even to business and a number of things (Yakubu, 2017). He likened it to a precious stone and has summarized everything in two verses: “Emigrate from your home in quest of excellence, and travel for in travel there are five benefits: relief from sorrow and earning a livelihood, then knowledge, good manners and friendship with the famous”. Perhaps these and similar episodes were the basis upon which scholars have taken the issue of travelling in search to be akin to the endeavor of migration which has its roots in the Islamic tenet as a religious rite (Yakubu, 2017). However, the idea of begging was never the original plan of the *Almajiri* movement, as begging was discouraged by the Islamic Prophet that brought Qur’an and knowledge of Islam where He noted that it is better for believers to fetch firewood for sell (work to earn) than to beg (Sunday and Doris, 2020). Islam encourages knowledge seeking but does not in any way promote alms begging or allowing children to wander on empty stomach under the guise of attaining Qur’anic education (Ibrahim, 2010).

In Nigeria colonization era which signified a gradual diversion of colonial government interests towards western education began in the early 1900 (Helen, 2004). Prior to this era, the *Almajiri* School was established as an organized and comprehensive system of education for learning various fields of Islamic knowledge (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). At the onset of the colonial hegemony the system only needed support in order to develop so that it would grapple with modernity. However, colonial administration deliberately turned its back to this system because it dreaded any form of civilization to exist with it side by side (Yakubu, 2017). The collapse to *Almajiri* system has commenced from the year 1904 when the British invaded and colonized the northern Nigeria territories and took control of the state treasury after killing and disposing those emirs who resisted the foreign rule, while those who were subjugated lost control of their territories and accepted their new roles as mere traditional ruler used only for the indirect rule (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). Europeans regarded Islam as a major stumbling block towards their suzerainty because the Muslims are the ones who have elements of civilization when the Europeans came over to their land. Hence, they refused to recognize the *Almajiri* School, resulting in the abolishment of its state funding which was the only most important means of sourcing revenue for the smooth

running of the Programme. These colonialists argued that *Almajiri* schools were mere religion schools, and so the western education was introduced and funded instead to replace the popular *Almajiri* School. All the educational laws were promulgated in utter disregard to the system as it was officially allowed to wither away as the colonial power had wished and wanted (Yakubu, 2017). At the loss of support definitely the system had to collapse just like a pile card or into a state of coma on which it never really recovered (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). Yakubu (2017) emphasized in addition that even before leaving, the colonialists had already groomed those who would replace them and continue to do exactly what they have been trained to do, which was marginalizing and disregarding the Qur’anic School system. So the people who like any other sovereign entity and being proud of their own had no other alternative than to continue to support the system themselves (Yakubu, 2017). Henceforth, local scholars who deemed it a moral and religious duty to educate these pupils for the sake of Allah took over the affair of the *Almajiri* education immediately as they witnessed the unfortunate situation with this historic system of education (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). This is the major and the most fundamental predicament of the Quranic School. In actual fact the colonial powers had done exactly what the parents of the present *Almajiri* boys are now doing. So the end result of the type of care that the Qur’anic School has received from the colonialists and their stooges over the years is what is being portrayed now in the most disdainful manner by certain elites who claim that the *Almajiri* system of education is responsible for all the atrocities committed by youngsters. The western oriented mind is thereby presented with the most gruesome picture of a system that is so barbaric as to allow its little children who are in dire need of support and help to turn into vagabonds (Yakubu, 2017).

Today the word “*Almajiri*” in Hausa language has gradually acquired a completely different meaning as interpreted by some researchers; it is more or less referred to as beggars roaming the streets in towns or cities. Amidst these beggars include young pupils who left the comfort and protection of their parents and relations at a very tender age for the purpose of Qur’anic education (Sa’id, 1992). According to AbdulQadir (2003), the *Almajiri* system of education as practiced today in the northern Nigeria is a completely bastardized system compared to the then form and condition under which the system was operating together with its output during the pre-colonial period. *Almajiri* system in the Islamic religion has become a matter of sad concern for the North and the Nigerian nation as these children of *Almajiri* school age and above roam about the street in tattered clothes begging, scavenging and doing all sort of odd jobs including clinical (Taiwo, 2013). Originally, the *Mallams* survive from the benevolence of the rich people in the community as the schools were not tuition fee paying schools (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020). However, as

the country drift into poverty levels from the 1980s, it also had ripple effect on the locals' ability to support the *Mallams*. The result was that the *Mallams* and the children had to fend for themselves (Muhammed, 2010). Some of these *Almajiri* students were sponsored fully by their parents while others were assisted and motivated by individuals within the learning communities (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). Others were at liberty to acquire vocations and occupational skills in between their Islamic lesson and so were involved in farming, fishing, well constructive, masonry, production, trade, tailoring, small business, etc. as their means of earning for living (Sebastine and Obeta 2015). These *Mallams* had to encourage their respective students to engage in street begging as a result of such economic constraint experienced in 1980s. The proceeds or money obtained from wandering are usually returned to their respective *Mallams* (Muhammed, 2010). In a contrary opinion, Sebastine and Obeta (2015) opined that *Almajiri* education was bastardized by greedy *Mallams* who became allured to the greed for money, and started migrating to other cities and towns with their pupils while subjecting these children to the vagaries of the streets for begging and carrying out some other menial jobs for survival. When such *Almajiris* (*Almajiri* children) return to their villages, they participate in the act of selling and taking drugs (Zakir *et al.*, 2014).

The issue of *Almajiri* system of education in Nigeria has attracted global attention. This is due to the current trends of insecurity, terrorism, child abuse, child labour, child neglect, kidnapping, electoral violence and malpractices, incessant killings and bombings and other social vices are at increasing rates in Nigeria (Sunday and Doris, 2020). Today, the *Almajirai* (plural of *Almajiri* child) have become ready-made recruits for prosecuting violence against political and business opponents and rivals. As noted by Oladosu (2012), many *Almajirai* are exploited and used by the politicians as thugs and hoodlums to foment trouble, cause a riot, disrupt peace and achieve selfish political interest. In fact, it has been alleged that most of the terrorist attacks involving suicide bombings, setting places of worship ablaze, killing innocent souls and destroying property were masterminded by jobless pupils of the *Almajiri* schools (Oladosu, 2012). The predicaments of the *Almajiri* system now made available manpower that could pose threat to the national security and it was easy for the *Mallam* who take charge of feeding and accommodation to redirect the pupils for some insecurity acts (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). However, a contrary opinion inferred that the *Mallam/Alamma* is not responsible for feeding the *Almajiri* children and therefore these pupils are forced to beg on the streets, depending upon strangers for their food and other life needs; the process which exposes them to various forms of hazards and situations and turns them into victims of economic hardship, child neglect and abuse (Salis, 1995; Ibrahim, 2008). The practice of *Almajiri* is one of the

major forms of child abuse in northern Nigeria which denies the society a privilege of producing future professionals that will contribute to the development of our nation (Zakir *et al.*, 2014).

Babangida (1993) narrated that, according to United Nation Convention on Child Right, a child is any person below eighteen (18) years. The convention, which was held in 1989, set out various declarations that will improve the quality of life of children worldwide. This declaration was signed by some states including Nigeria. Some of these rights set out at the declaration include the right to education, health care, love and care, adequate food and shelter and living in a clean environment. Despite these constitutional rights, in almost every street, corner, junctions (especially in the north), are young, homeless, poor, neglected and maltreated *Almajiri* children seen roaming the streets begging for food and alms (Babangida, 1993). Basically, Qur'anic schools lack sufficient opportunity or suitable environment for those who wish to learn Qur'an; *Almajiris* depend on begging to earn for living (Garba, 1996). The environment under which the *Almajiris* learn is deplorably untidy. They learn while sitting on floor since most of the schools cannot even afford mats for such children to sit. They hang around restaurants, markets, shops, petrol stations and houses, most times sleeping on disused pieces of cardboard or bare floors (Iro and Surulola, 2013). The street urchins bemoan their fate as they watch other privileged children enjoy life with their parents (Olagunju, 2012; Loimeier, 2012). They live mostly in a congested classroom and cannot even afford most health services; thus they receive no treatment for many ailments and injuries although some buy medicine to treat themselves. Even where there should be free hospitals and health services because of their socially marginalized positions they cannot be treated (Perverz, 2005). The *Almajiris* in one way or another are endangering the health of the community by urinating and passing stools indiscriminately. This is because most of the *Almajiri* schools do not have toilet and bathroom provisions (Kabir, 2002). Some *Mallams* do not allow their children to mingle with the *Almajiris* to the extent that they allow their own children to attend formal school (Kabir, 2002; Report of Kano State Committee on *Almajiris*, 2012). The *Almajiris* are exploited by their *Mallams*, which include going to farm, fetching water for his domestic use, collecting fire wood and sometimes bringing even part of what they get from begging (Sulaiman, 1996). Oladipo (2012) opined that the *Almajirai* are even sexually abused by some *Mallams*, who are supposed to stand in locoparentis to them just as recently, one ritualist *Mallam* was caught in the act. Moreover, the *Almajiri* hears all kinds of embarrassing words and the practice is damaging to both the psychological and physical development of a child (Kabir, 2002; Report of Kano State Committee on *Almajiris*, 2012). The practice is common among polygamous, poor and uneducated families (Perverz, 2005). The *Almajiri* pupil owing to the weak institution

takes up street begging, as a means to an end. In the process, these young children come in contact with criminals and drug addicts (UNESCO, 2017). The system has over time become a breeding ground for criminality and insecurity, spawning youths who are significantly inclined to violence as a means of survival or making their voices heard (Loimeier, 2012). *Almajirai* are socially regarded as nuisance and are often chased away by decent people (Iro and Surulola, 2013). As a result of these social and economic deprivations, some *Almajirai* end up becoming commercial errand boys, hewers of wood, or fetchers of water (known locally as “mairua”). Yet many take to petty theft, thuggery, and peddling of hard drugs. Some find life too cruel and unbearable to be meaningful and commit suicide (Adofetekun, 2011). Alabe (2009) aptly described the *Almajiri* plight as thus: “As the system is currently practiced today, lots of the children never make it. Some are lost through violence on the street, some through child stealing, while others are lost through diseases and hunger. Those who make it usually complete the reading of the Holy Qur'an and eventually become traders, drivers and so on. Those who could not make it are condemned to menial jobs, since they have no skills at hand. They resort to wheelbarrow pushing, touting and so on. They remain as untrained armies available to anybody poised to ferment trouble.” These *Almajiris* have their own axes to grind against their parents, authorities and the society at large (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020).

The National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCWD) (2001) described the population of the *Almajiri* in Nigeria as seven million children (McLean, 2020). According to Abdulkadir (2010), children who comprise this population fall into two broad categories: the most vulnerable are children aged 5 to 11 years old, and vulnerable youths who are those of age range between 12 to 26 years old. Conservative estimates put the number of people who have died in *Boko-Haram* related conflicts at over 3,600 (Osumah, 2013). Most of the victims are innocent civilians, including men, women and children, who have been killed in such public places as worship centers, schools, markets, and relaxation spots (LeVan, 2013). Apart from inflicting serious injuries and permanent disabilities on people, violent youth attacks in the caliphate North have also led to the internal displacement of thousands within Nigeria and a large flow of refugees into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Soria, 2012). Indeed, various other studies have also implicated the *Almajiri* system in several urban revolts in northern Nigeria (Agbibo, 2013; Imobighe, 2012). Indeed, the use of social miscreants as cannon fodder has a long history in northern Nigeria, as shown by the *Maitatsine* urban revolts which broke out in Kano in 1980 and spread to Maiduguri and Kaduna in 1982, Jimeta-Yola in 1984, and Gombe in 1985 (Iro and Surulola, 2013). Muhammed Marwa, who led the *Maitatsine* uprising that

claimed over 5000 lives, obviously the precursor to BH terrorism, had exploited the dwindling economic situation of northern Nigeria in the early 1980s by recruiting foot soldiers from the *Almajiri* system (Loimeier, 2012; Winters, 1987). Street urchins who were unable to afford the basic necessities of life became diehard patriots of the Islamic sect and Marwa. The *Maitatsine* preached that killing was compulsory and they believed they would go to heaven if they killed *arnas* (infidels) (Elaigwu, 2005; Falola, 1998). However, according to historical records, most of those people killed during such *Maitatsine* crisis are Muslims of the north, more especially those residing in Kano State.

The *Almajiri* menace, seems to be one of the consequences of a terrible youth bulge syndrome. Apart from being the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria also has the highest birth rate on the continent (Aluaigba, 2009; Iro and Surulola, 2013). High levels of illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty accompany this explosive youth demographic cohort in the North. As noted by theorists of youth bulge, societies of such nature are prone to violent conflict. One of the core drivers of violent conflicts in northern Nigeria is widespread illiteracy engendered by poor education. The early exposure to Western education gave the southern region an edge over the North in administration and employment. The wide educational imbalance between the North and South has existed since colonial times when formal education was introduced into the country by European Christian missionaries (Iro and Surulola, 2013). While the missionaries were given a free rein and allowed to establish schools in southern Nigeria, British administrators strictly restricted their activities in the northern region as part of a policy of indirect rule that allowed emirs there to remain in power as figureheads while in fact serving as agents of the British (Osaghae, 2002). The documentation of the educational imbalance between the regions prior to independence in 1960 was recorded. By 1957, the northern region, which had over 16.8 million people (based on the 1952 census), had only 3,643 secondary school enrollments, whereas the southern region, with only 13.2 million, had 28,208 secondary school enrollments (Iro and Surulola, 2013). A 2009 survey carried out by the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) indicated that the enrollment of pupils into Quranic schools tripled that of formal schools in Sokoto and Zamfara States. A similar trend was observed in a survey conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF in 2008, which revealed a total pupil enrollment of 514, 264 in Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara states. When these figures are compared with the total number of 54,434 public primary schools across the country, it becomes clear that Quranic schools have a commanding presence in the North (Olagunju, 2012). However, Iro and Surulola (2013) added that the scope of curriculum in Quranic schools is myopic, as it does not include such orthodox subjects as mathematics, English, social

studies, and basic science. Perhaps it is because it has become an avenue for imbuing the youth with skills that are not needed in the labor market that many people have concluded that *Almajiri* culture has outlived its importance (Iro and Surulola, 2013). Indeed, the *Almajiri* population according to Aluaigba (2009) has grown exponentially, and a large majority has been unable to turn their education into productive jobs, thereby turning them into "social misfits" who pose a security risk.

Henceforth, various attempts were made by many individuals including the authorities to check this *Almajiri* issue. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 2012 made an attempt to integrate *Almajiri* education into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme (UBE Commission, 2012). The former Emir of Kano, Muhammad Sunusi Lamido II, had condemned the parents of the *Almajiri* pupil who abdicated their social responsibility (Bayo, 2020). Eventually, the Northern State Governors in 2020 during the corona virus pandemic unanimously proscribed the *Almajiri* practice and evacuated the children to their parents or States of origin (Guardian, 2020). Similarly, the Southern State Governors intercepted invasion of *Almajiri* pupils into the region and shifted them back to the north (Punch, 2020). Prior to this ban on *Almajiri* practice in 2020 by the northern states, a report from Legit on August, 2019 disclosed that the then current Governor of Kano State Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje has alleged that out of the total number of the *Almajiri* children roaming the streets of Kano State, 90% of them are majorly foreigners. In an attempt to stem the ugly situation surrounding this system of education, Governor Ganduje has introduced compulsory free education during his tenure (Sunday and Doris, 2020). He called on educational experts and professionals who specialized in basic education, some in science and technical education, and some in assessment and quality control in education, some in examination management while some have come from *Almajiri* schools (Legit, 2019; Sunday and Doris 2020). Sunday and Doris (2020) opined that the above report is however a good attempt to ending religious extremists and other social vices in Nigeria, but the approach failed to address the issue from the root. Even at post-independence in 1960, several committees were instituted in northern Nigeria to address the issues surrounding the decaying *Almajiri* system of education. One of the common most prominent recommendations made by most of such committees was to include the system in the mainstream of the State education programme (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020).

During the post-independence period numerous suggestions were also presented on how to address this *Almajiri* issues. As for Sebastine and Obeta (2015), *Almajiri* system should be transformed to suit socio development progress as according to these researchers; this will help to reduce the possibility of it serving as a mobilization center for security threat agents, and to

resuscitate the core value and objection of *Almajiri* School. In as much as, *Almajiri* system could represent northern belief or culture; it should be transformed to avoid abuse of the vulnerable *Almajiri* pupils to perpetuate violence in the nation (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). It is crucial that this integration of modern education into the *Almajiri* school system be preceded and followed through public sensitization campaigns, preferably in local languages and involving *Mallams*, Muslim clerics, and local community leaders (Iro and Surulola, 2013). Bukar (2011) however, suggested that *Almajiri* students should be imparted with relevant skills so that they can take care of themselves. This will improve the standard of living for not only the *Almajiri* pupils but also that of the immediate society through poverty alleviation, elimination of street begging, child abuse, idleness, banditry and kidnapping among other social vices threatening the peaceful coexistence of the populace (Anugwom, 2002; Aliyu *et al*, 2020). However, as suggested by Iro and Surulola (2013), issuance of certificates will enable the graduates to get employment in government and private sectors, thereby reducing poverty and reliance on alms, which make the youth vulnerable. Yusuf and Oboshi (2020) stated that, in order to prevent the *Almajiri* pupil from unwholesome abuse, it can be enforced firstly, through good governance, and by ensuring that parents are responsible for their children upkeep as provided in the Child Right Act 2003. It was noted that *Almajiri*-related insecurity is fallout from the governance crisis, especially the privatization of public resources by the ruling elite that has led to poor education, unemployment, and mass poverty leading to the projection of suggestion that both the citizens and civil society groups should be engaged in monitoring the monthly revenues allocation given to all States in the federation, including those in the North, so as to ensure that such revenues are put to good use (Iro and Surulola, 2013). However, most of these recommendations were unfortunately not implemented largely because there was no political will to actually reposition the *Almajiri* system of education (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020).

2.2 Concept of *Almajiri* School

Since the 11th century, Quranic teaching has been a medium of Islamic education in the country (Iro and Surulola, 2013); the task which the *Almajiri* schools obviously took the front position in delivering in the North. Every year, usually after harvest, people inhabiting a particular neighborhood would gather their children, mostly school-age males (from age six upward), and hand them over to an Islamic scholar (*Mallam*). The *Mallam*'s purpose was to teach the children the basics of Islam and how to write and recite the Arabic alphabet (Oladosu, 2012). In order to escape the distractions of life, the *Mallam* would take the *Almajirai* out of the city to a camp where they were taught self-reliance as well as discipline (Iro and Surulola, 2013). Even though, in Nigeria today, the

Hausa people use the word to refer to both a student and a beggar, the *Almajiri* system of education involved entrusting number of children into the care of a “learned” person, a *Mallam* with whom they migrate to different settlements where it is assumed that a conducive learning environment for the study of the Holy Quran exists (Sebastine and Obeta, 2015). However, as for Sule (1994), *Almajiri* School sometimes has an average population of 180 pupils under the control of one *Mallam/Alaramma*; they use one local small class room which has normal capacity of 50 pupils or less for about 180 pupils. Hence, Hannah (2018) concluded that the school environment is usually unfriendly, overcrowded and unhygienic.

Almajiri School is usually situated either in the mosque premises or *tsangaya*. It could also be situated outside the *Mallam's* house usually under shade due to the absence of definite classrooms; built for shelter, as well as proper sitting and writing facilities like board and chalks; the *Almajiri* children use slate as reading and writing materials (Ya'u, 2001). As pictorially described by Janguza (2018), a typical *Almajiri* School, comprises of a teacher called '*Alaramma*' or '*Mallam*' sitting either under a tree, his parlor or veranda, with his students in semi-circle, with them each a wooden slate; holding it and reciting the verses of holy Qur'an based on one's ability. The teacher is often assisted by one or more of the pupils who were considered brighter or older or even both (Janguza, 2018).

The idea of *Almajiri* education particularly in the northern part of Nigeria, begin as a movement to enquire Qur'anic knowledge (Muhammed, 2010), with no laid down channel or procedure for admission (entry) except the unconventional way of handing over wards to the supposed instructor known as *Mallam*. It is the place of the instructor (*Mallam*) to indoctrinate the ward to the Islamic teachings and religious way of life. This was a rewarding experience for highly educated and successful “sheikhs” and *Mulks* holding positions of judges and teachers who could mould the minds of the young ones by teaching them how to become righteous and exemplary in their future lives (Sunday and Doris, 2020). Often, when there was shortage of food, the Quranic teacher would send the pupils out to solicit for food from residents around and the food would be brought back to the camp for all to eat. This practice of soliciting for food by the *Almajirai* became often known as “*Almajiranchi*”; a practice meant to make them strong and to prepare them for life's struggle (Iro and Surulola, 2013). The *Almajiri* pupil, under the supervision of the *Mallam*, is giving the opportunity to learn to take decisions, learn morals and also acquire knowledge both within the setting of *Almajiri* School (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020). In fact, the *Almajiri* schools produced eminent jurists, Islamic scholars and religious reformers in the past, when their numbers remained within manageable limits (Iro and Surulola, 2013). The pedagogy of the *Almajiri*

school is basically rote memorization of the Qur'an which made Mustapha (2014) to draw conclusion that there is no substantiated evidence to establish that there is radicalizing content in the *Almajiri* curriculum (Yakubu, 2017).

Quranic schools were basically of two types with the first one being for children who would learn to recite the Quran in this school where a child gets enrolled by the age of five. It is often referred locally to as “slate school” (*Makarantar Allo*) because children start learning to recite the Quran inscribed on a slate. These types of schools are uncountable as a result hardly can a child whether male or female grow up without attending the slate school, until of course recently when it is being depicted in the most gruesome picture. This attitude of branding the school with all sorts of epithet drives away most of the educated element of the society. The second type of school is the one in which they learn to memorize the Qur'an. These schools are few compared to the first one it mostly found in the Borno enclave. At advanced level however, there is the Maa'hid ad-Dini Religious Institutions which is popularly known as Sangaya. Sangaya is an educational institution with its own physical entity that could be situated either in a town or a completely independent settlement, detached from other members of the society, and could be best compared with the modern University system, which is established for the purpose of learning having its professors and students around (Umar, 2013; Yakubu, 2017). *Sangaya* is usually established by a scholar or scholars with resident students within their vicinity (Yakubu, 2017).

The *Almajiri* curriculum centres mainly on the reading and writing of holy Quran and on *tafsir*; which simply implies the interpretation of holy Qur'an, *hadith*; which is concerned with the words, actions and approvals of Prophet Muhammad PBH, and *tawhid*; which focuses on the oneness of Allah SWT, in addition to other branches of Islamic studies. According to Oladosu (2012) this deficiency in science-oriented subjects and in modern information, communication and technology as well as entrepreneurial skills development negatively affects the students in the labour market after graduation, making many of them unemployable. However, in an opposite view Yakubu (2017) opined that it is actually not in startling that the Islamic education system could not be able to succumb or fit in to the transformation and modernization which is the main feature of the present day civilization. In over eleven thousand verses, nearly twenty percent of the Qur'an stands as references to natural phenomena. It can therefore be discerned that Islam is a religion of scholarship. The words of the Quran have been a source of awe for both Muslims and non-Muslims for the past many centuries and have driven countless people to revert to Islam. This book of divine truths contains laws of metaphysics, religious beliefs and worship, morality,

facts about afterlife, psychology, sociology, epistemology, history, human relationships, and more, without any contradictions. The book essentially covers all topics that are pertinent for humans to live a practical and peaceful life. The book also sheds light on scientific facts that have been discovered only recently. These include facts related to space, geology, biology, and much more (Yakubu, 2017).

On 2nd November of the year 2013, the then president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan performed a symbolic launching of the 64 newly completed and furnished *Almajiri* schools in Sokoto State; signifying a laudable achievement in the development of the basic education subsector in that part of the country. The 64 schools commissioned are located in Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Rivers, Kogi, Niger, Katsina, Taraba and Nasarawa States (Media Trust, 2013; Isiaka, 2015). The integrated *Almajiri* schools are to offer the following core subjects, English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies together with Hausa, Computer, Physical and Health Education (PHE), and Handwriting under formal system of education with Agriculture, Trade, Commerce, Handcraft, Mechanic, Vulcanizing and Islamic Calligraphy among others as vocational skills of their 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 studies which include Qira'atul (recitation of) holy Qur'an, *Tahfeez* (memorization of holy Qur'an), *Tajweed* (accurate pronunciation or recitation of holy Qur'an), Arabic (understanding of the language), Islamic Studies, *Tawhid* (monotheism), *Hadith* (sayings, traditions and approvals of Prophet Muhammad PBH), *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence or law) and *Sira* (biography of Prophet Muhammad PBH) (Yusha'u *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, national guidelines for the development and integration of the *Almajiri* education into basic education were developed and printed to guide the states, local governments and nongovernmental organizations, which may collaborate with the federal government on the project to meet its objectives and sustainability (Isiaka, 2015). The guidelines have three models. Model One focuses on the integration of traditional Tsangaya- Qur'anic School into the formal education system within its original location. In Model two, model boarding *Almajiri* schools involving the establishment of model boarding schools to serve a group of *Tsangaya*/Qur'anic schools within a given location. Model Three is the integration of basic education in established Islamiyya and Ma'ahad schools (MediaTrust, 2013). According to Isiaka (2015) a total of 125 *Almajiri* model schools were under construction in 27 states of the Federation, out of which over 80 have been completed and the remaining ones were in their final stages of completion. The completed schools were handed over to the state governments to facilitate

enrolment and employment of teachers to man them. However, like any other innovations in education, there has been verbal report on some issues revolving around on availability of relevant curriculum in school, inadequacy of well trained and qualified teachers, poor funding, inadequacy of infrastructure for learning, poor sanitation, lack of adequate sensitization and mobilization, among others (Isiaka, 2015).

2.3 Objectives of *Almajiri* Education in Nigeria

Sebastine and Obeta (2015) highlighted the motives for *Almajiri* Education in Nigeria as designed during the formulation, as follows:

1. To ensure that children read and recite the Quran.
2. To ensure children become fully inducted into Islamic moral values in all behavior.
3. To ensure children become as knowledgeable in Arabic language and basic Islamic sciences as a foundation for further studies.

2.4 Category of *Almajiri*

Adetoro (2010) classified *Almajiri* students into three different categories and are as follows:

1. *Kolo* (infants - age 5 – 15 years) who engage in street begging
2. *Titibiri* (Adolescent – age 16 - 21years) who always lead the *kolo* in street begging and
3. *Gardi* (Adults – age 22 years and above) who engage in intensive and laborious service such as struck-pushing forewords as means of livelihood.

He further explains that *kolo* and *titibiri* always form bulk of the *Almajiri* children that are sent away from home mostly, coming to Nigeria from the neighboring countries like Chad, Niger, Cameroon, Mali, and among others those children are entrusted into the care of unpaid and untrained Islamic Qur'anic teacher called *Mallam* (Adetoro, 2010).

3. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Discussion

This study sourced its data from the realm of literature concerning the historical development and challenges encountered by *Almajiri* system of education in Nigeria. Through the historical review of the developments and threats experienced by *Almajiri* system of education in Nigeria, this study was able to identify certain elements that might have been part of those currently existing factors playing important role in sustaining *Almajiri* Education throughout this period of long lasting battle between *Almajiri* schools and certain members and non-members of the community including both the authorities and social groups. These possible factors are those variables which are expected to have direct effect on the move to the rehabilitation of *Almajiri* educational system in Nigeria; once manipulated or

controlled. These elements were extracted from various studies available on the literature, and then discussed herein. For example, Perverz (2005) clearly stated that *Almajiri* practice is common among poor families. The rise of street begging according to Zakir *et al* (2014), is because majority of *Almajiris* rely on begging for food and money at major streets and junctions where people gather for day to day activities. Yusuf and Oboshi (2020) inferred that the *Almajiri* system gives the parents the legitimacy to transfer the economic and spiritual responsibilities to a *Mallam*. Yusuf and Oboshi (2020) made it clear that the challenging economic situation in the country pressurized many people in the rural areas belonging to Hausa-land to move to the urban communities so as to better their livelihoods and this makes the practice of *Almajiranci* widespread amongst low-income rural parents, bearing further negative consequences on the welfare of innocent children entrusted to a *Mallam* who would take them to impart a proper Islamic education. These and various other utterances of scholars led to suspicion of the presence of some elements of economic factor in association to the persistency of *Almajiri* educational system in Nigeria. Moreover, the association of both Borno Islamic Empire and Sokoto Caliphate in the propagation of *Almajiri* system of education as reported by Ifijeh & James (2012) led to suspicion in the involvement of the element of religion with this system of education. These two empires were among few of the greatest Islamic communities happened to the northern Nigeria. In addition, Yusuf and Oboshi (2020) provided more hint by stating that *Almajiri* system is a tradition of the Prophet of Islam which they considered as the view point of Muslims of northern Nigeria. Yakubu (2017) also stressed that, the *Almajiris* parading the streets of Nigerian cities are mostly if not all children of the Muslims of northern Nigeria. Sebastine & Obeta (2015) shaded more light on the possible interference of religious entities with *Almajiri* education as they described the fact that, after the British colonialists abandoned the funding or sponsorship of *Almajiri* schools, the responsibility of these schools was then taken over by the local scholars who deemed it a moral and religious duty to educate these pupils for the sake of Allah. However, Abdulkadir (2010) affirmed that most of *Almajiri* are from the Hausa-/Fulani-speaking ethnic groups and have little or no formal education. The practice is common among uneducated families as stated by Perverz (2005). In *Almajiranci* (*Almajiri* practice), poorer families send their children away from home to seek for knowledge through an Islamic education originally sourced from the holy Qur'an, with traditional teachers (Muslim scholars) locally known as *Mallams* serving as the children's guardians (Abdulkadir, 2010). These might serve as an indicator towards expectation of the involvement of the educational factor in the *Almajiri* affairs since from all indication, the parents wished to expose their children to Islamic education. On the political elements, Yusuf and Oboshi (2020) opined that

since the *Almajiri* system is considered by people of northern Nigeria as a tradition of the Prophet of Islam, Northern leaders in the bid to continually align with the Islamic brotherhood (*Ummah*), would not want to be seen to be spearheading the proscription of a tradition instituted by the Prophet of Islam. However, Sunday and Doris (2020) on contrary opinion stated that political elites saw *Almajiri* system as a weapon for rigging of elections to their favour, making the leadership positions difficult for opponents to secure; through the use of the wandering *Almajiri* pupils to incite crisis during the election period (Yusha'u *et al.*, 2013). These two points made, simply explain why there might be no political will to proscribe the *Almajiri* system, which in turns, makes the presence of political elements suspicious. The word "*Almajiri*" is an adulterated spelling of the Arabic word "*Almuhajir*," which refers to a person who migrates for the purpose of learning or for the sake of propagating Islamic knowledge (Iro and Surulola, 2013). Ibrahim (2008) observed that most of the beggars usually migrate to the city from rural areas for the purpose of life sustainability. They come mostly from rural areas to urban centers for the purpose of acquiring Qur'anic education. They are sent to study Qur'an under the care of a *Mallam* (Teacher of the Qur'anic school) or *Alaramma* (Teacher of the Qur'anic school who memorizes and writes all verses of the Quran) who mostly comes from other village (Garba, 1996). Only the presence of suitable weather condition, uniformity in spoken languages (having a common language of communication) and similarity in cultural norms and values could have easily guarantee the existence of such a social setting. This led to the expectation of the association of geographical elements with *Almajiri* education in Nigeria. The continued existence and patronage of the *Almajiri* system of education in northern Nigeria is attributed to value attached to it in the socio-cultural and religious settings of the communities in northern Nigeria (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020). This value percept is derived from collective action framework. The collective action framework was first muted in the mid-1960s (Olson, 2002). It is a discourse on the existence of common interest in the society which is usually driven by collective action. The collective action on this regard is any form of organized sociopolitical or religious act carried about by a group of people in order to address their needs (Medina, 2007). Above all, there are conservative parents who believe that children learn faster when they are away from home (Yusuf and Oboshi, 2020). Hence, socio-cultural factor could be part of these important factors. Moreover, *Almajiri* pupils were said to have come mostly from rural areas to urban centers for the purpose of acquiring Qur'anic education. The children are sent to study holy Qur'an under the care of a *Mallam* (Teacher of the Qur'anic school) or *Alaramma* (Teacher of the Qur'anic school who memorizes and writes all verses of the Quran) who mostly comes from other villages (Garba, 1996). This is simply an evidence to continuous practice of rural –

urban migration which might resulted from the developmental imbalance between rural and urban communities leading to lack of basic social amenities, equipments and facilities as well as the problems of the lack of skilled workers in villages. On this note, the environmental factor might be strongly expected. Finally, on the legal factors, Perverz (2005) opined that the practice of *Almajiri* education is common among polygamous, families. Sunday and Doris (2020) emphasized that parents take advantage of this begging practice to give birth to children they cannot carter for and eventually go to mosques and drop them there at the ages of 2 years. It is observed that majority of these children are dropped in the school at night and are transported to other parts of the world in the night which make these children difficult to trace their home background but choose to embrace whatever life offer to them by begging or participating in menial labour just to make ends meet (Sunday and Doris, 2020). Legally these might both serve as certain indicators to freedom of practicing religion as well as freedom of living in whichever part of the country a citizen prefers in addition to lack of restriction in number of children or wives. These might have influence on the persistency of *Almajiri* education in Nigeria.

However, since some, if not most of these claims are having contrary opinions from other researchers' point of view, these elements can only be justified through a field survey in which real data has to be collected from certain individual members of the affected community.

3.2 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study testifies to the fact that *Almajiri* system of education was originally meant to accustom children of Muslim who represent the dominant inhabitants of the northern Nigeria, with the sufficient foundation of Islamic tradition and knowledge for such children to be able to successfully compete and fit into the immediate community, and to prepare them for the life challenges amidst different societies. The system was running smoothly during pre-colonial period but it had no other choice than to collapse and transform into its current state of agony, beginning from colonial era, due to insufficient or absolute lack of funding from the authority. Today, funding may of course still remain the major problem of *Almajiri* education in Nigeria, however, there must have been certain other elements that contribute to the undesirable situation with this system of informal education. It is necessary for the authority to firstly identify such elements, and then sincerely and objectively work towards resolving those issues faced by *Almajiri* system through, rehabilitation rather than via making attempts to eliminate the system. According to the findings of this research, the contemporary problems encountered by *Almajiri* education today, can actually be resolved but only if all

the major factors causing such negative effects are put into consideration; during the prescription period.

3.3 Recommendation

This research recommends the need for conducting further research on the basis of a field survey that gathers data from the community members in order to discover or validate those factors that resulted in the persistency of *Almajiri* system of education in northern Nigeria.

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