

# THE ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION; HISTORY, STAGES, ANALYSIS AND ITS CRITICISM

## ABSTRACT

*The almajiri system of education is a social institution which is part of the social structure of northern Nigeria. The northern part of Nigeria before the coming of colonial masters had a centralized system of government designed and architected by Islamic philosophy. It is through this centralized system of government that the almajiri system education was born, to serve as a school for the teaching of the Holy Qur'an.*

## INTRODUCTION

To respond to the given question, it is important that we consider some key elements raised in the question like ALMAJIRI system of education, criticism of this system of education, and the family point of view of this social reality in Nigeria. This assignment work will try to limit it's discussion to; brief history of almajiri system of education, underlying factors responsible for heavy criticism of this system of education, effects of its failure on society, recommendation on how to restore this system of education back to it's glory days. Finally and most importantly to answer the question WHY the almajiri system of education has come under heavy criticism from the family point of view.

## DEFINITION OF TERM

ALMAJIRI SYSTEM is a system of Islamic education practice in northern region of Nigeria. Almajiri is derived from an Arabic word "al-muhajirun" meaning a person who leaves his home in search of Islamic knowledge.

## HISTORY OF ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

We can trace the history of almajiri system from pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial era.

**PRE-COLONIAL ERA:** This system of education started in Nigeria in a town named "KANEM-BORNO" which had a majority of its rulers widely involve in qur'anic literacy. More than 700 years later, the sokoto caliphate was founded by a revolution base on the teaching of Qur'an. Sokoto caliphate and Borno caliphate started running the almajiri system together.

During this pre-colonial era students used to stay with their parents for proper moral upbringing. All the schools available then were in a close proximity with the immediate environment of the students. Inspectors were introduced to go round the school and after inspection they report to

the Emir of the province all matters regarding the affairs of the school. The schools were funded by the community, parents, “zakkah”, “sadaqqah”, and sometimes through the farm output of the students.

**COLONIAL ERA:** The year 1904 brought a new twist to the almajiri system of education as the British invaded the northern part of Nigeria. During the invasion most Emirs were killed and others were disposed. The remaining Emirs lost control of their territories, and the fundamental control of the Almajiri. Boko (western education) was introduced. The British abolished the state funding of almajiri system. With no support from the community, Emirs and government, the system collapsed. The teachers and students had no financial support, so they turned to alms begging and menial jobs for survival.

**PRESENT DAY ALMAJIRI SYSTEM:** A report by The National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCWD), approximated the number of current almajiri to 7 million. The system now lack this good teachers and basic needs like proper clothing and shelter. Most of the almajiri do not graduate and are left with options of begging and menial jobs.

The almajiri students of nowadays are no longer the almajiri that it is meant to be. From the history of the educational system were individuals were cared by the then government, parents, community and even the rich people in the society. As of then, they were seen as a symbol of goodwill and they were seen as elite (EDUCATED) with the opportunity to participate in government. But the reverse is the case today. They are the opposite of what they were in the past. Now they turned to be begging on our street, robbers, and even sometimes higher killers among other criminal elements.

### **STAGES IN THE ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATIONS**

- **KOTSO:** These are under-age Almajiris, and their age started from ten (10) to twelve (12) they are like nursery pupils.
- **KOLO:** These are also unde-rage Almajiris whose age started from twelve (12) to seventeen (17) years. They can at least memories (3) hibz (chapters).
- **TITIBIRI:** These compose from seventeen (17) to twenty three years of age. They can read and write on slate board. And they can atleast memories half of the Holy Quran.
- **GARDDI:** In these times students from these categories can memorize the whole Quran without looking at the scriptures. And their age start from twenty three (23) to thirty (30).
- **ALARMMA:** Comprise students from thirty (30) to forty (40) years. In this situation student started writing their own Text or the Holy Quran for at least one time.

- **GWANI:** Students in this category are forty (40) to fifty (50) years of age, they can write their own Text at least one to five times.
- **GANGARAN:** In this category students can memorize the whole Quran and they know the translation of every verse of the Holy Quran.

## **UNDERLYING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRITICISM OF ALMAJIRI EDUCATION SYSTEM**

There are many factors that make the almajiri education to be criticized. To mention but a few:

- Rural Urban migration
- Early marriage
- Poverty
- Negligence (from government, religious institutions).
- Illiteracy
- High rate of divorce
- Inadequate/ lack of social welfare services.
- Colonization

1. **RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION:** majority of the Almajiri schools were located in the urban areas and as such many parents send their children to the cities without the necessary provisions like food stuff, clothing, etc. Leaving the children to cater for themselves. Another believes is that those who migrates to the city for almajiri education eventually turn to millionaires. This has trigger the influx of almajiri's in various cities in Nigeria.

2. **EARLY MARRIAGE:** early marriage and polygyny is a traditional practice in many rural setting especially in northern Nigeria. As it is well known that the dominant occupation in rural settlement is farming, children of these farmers get married at teenage age because at early stages of marriage there is enough food to feed the family. But as the size of the family increase, the portion of land cannot sustain the ever increasing population of the family. As such, the husband device a method of reducing the dependent ration of the, by sending the male children to Almajiri schools. Which in most cases are far away from their homes.

3. **POVERTY:** many families where this almajiri students are from, face harsh economic and financial disadvantage. They are poor and In need of support. The same factor is attached to the "mallam" the teacher who the parents send their children to for Qur'anic education. This makes the almajiri to engage in begging, menial jobs, trade social vices for food, susceptible to all forms of abuse, and infected with personality disorder, moral degradation and psychological trauma.

4. **NEGLIGENCE:** in contemporary Nigeria, negligence has been seen by some scholars as a factor responsible for the spoilt system of almajiri education. This negligence is of two dimensions – negligence from the government, and negligence from Islamic religious institutions. The negligence from the government is that it has failed to make laws and regulations on how a proper and well organized system of almajiri education should be, like what was obtainable in Pre-colonial Nigeria. Also negligence from Islamic religious institutions is that they have failed to recognize, prioritize, and check mate the activities of the almajiri schools. They are less concerned about the moral discipline and character shaping of the almajiri's, less concerned about knowledge taught in the school wither pure or corrupt.

5. **ILLITERACY:** as the saying goes “illiteracy is a disease” it is indeed. Many fathers of these almajiri students are illiterate both in Islamic and western education. As such, they abandon their parental responsibilities to the society without feeling remorseful for their actions.

6. **HIGH RATE OF DIVORCED:** this is one of the biggest threat to family institution. It is a succeeding factor of the aforementioned factors i.e. poverty and illiteracy. Mothers are always the best care givers in every family of different societies. In Islam the male partner ( husband) always exercise divorce in marriage, therefore causing family disintegration and broken home. This is evident in northern Nigeria and a contributing factor to the ever growing almajiri population.

7. **INADEQUATE/LACK OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES:** Social welfare services found in many developed western societies charge with the responsibility of child care, provisions of health services and good education are lacking or inadequate in Nigerian society.

8. **COLONISATION:** The invasion of Nigeria by the colonial masters has successfully and immensely annihilated the organized system of social patterns which the almajiri system is a part in pre-colonial Nigeria and replace it with western style which is alien to our indigenous way of thinking.

#### **REASON OF CRITICISM THE ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION**

The family operates as the backbone of every society right from the earliest form of man to modern contemporary set out. The family performed several roles and serve as an important and

indispensable machinery for both formal and informal social control. As such, the family performed the following functions in the society.

- Regulations of sexual activity.
- Procreation and socialization of children.
- Gives material /economic and financial security.
- Emotional support.
- Social class placement.

Some sociologists argued that the family has lost a number of its functions in modern industrial society. Institutions such as business, political parties, welfare organizations, cult groups, gangs and so on, now specialized in performing functions formerly performed by the family (Haralambos and Holborn 2013)

Talcott Parsons argued that the family has become on the “macroscopic” level almost completely functionless. It does not itself, except here and there, engage in much economic production. It is not a significant unit in the political power system. It is not a major agency for integration of the larger society. Its individual members participate in all these functions, but they do so as individuals not in their roles as family members (Parsons 1955)

Correlating this to the almajiri system of education and going by what is evident today in our society, the families which the almajiri students are from, perform only two functions among the aforementioned functions which are regulation of sexual activity and pro-creations. This means that the families of the almajiri students have lost a number of its functions such as socialization of the children, material /economic and financial security, emotional support, social class placement. This is why the almajiri system of education has come under heavy criticism from the family point of view.

## RECOMMENDATION

- **Government Intervention:** Government should intervene in the almajiri education through provisions of infrastructure, incorporate the education system into federal ministry of education and employ inspectors to properly checkmate the activities of the almajiri system of education.
- **Public Enlightenment and Sensitization Programs:** There should be an enlightenment program(s) in the rural areas on early marriages, birth control as well as orientation of family functions.
- **Establishment of Welfare Services:** Social and child welfare services should be established both by the government and (NGOs) to curb the menace.

## CONCLUSION

The portrayal of the almajiri system of education both in Nigeria and else where is far from positive. Those who criticized the system are observers and scholars, Muslims and Christians, indigenous and non indigenstress that the almajiri system as it is being presently practiced has outlived it's usefulness, not providing a chance at an adequate future for almajiri.

## **REFERENCE**

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