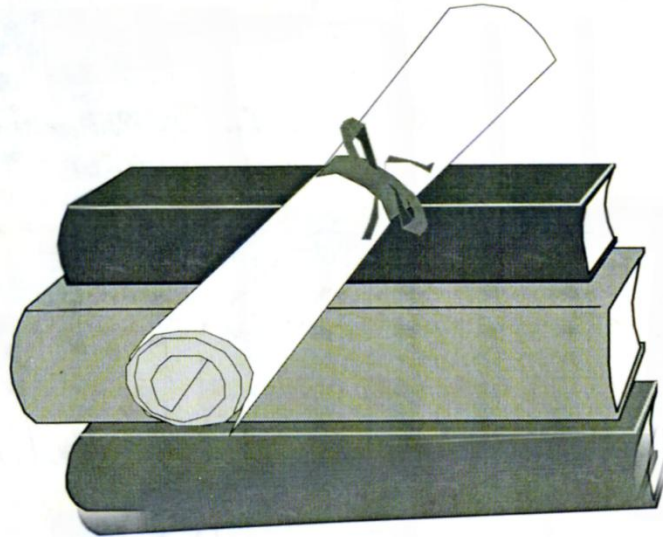


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Teachers and Parents' Assessment of the Inclusive Education of the Almajiri and Education for All in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This paper investigated Teachers and parents' assessment of the inclusive education of the Almajiri and Education for All in Nigeria. The population for this study consisted of all teachers (Mallams of the Almajiri School) and parents in the North-Western Geo-political zone of Nigeria; the target population was the teachers (Mallams) and parents of the Almajiri School, and also lecturers in Shehu Shagaria College of Education. 300 samples were randomly selected. The descriptive research survey type was employed; the instrument used was a 10-item structured researcher designed set of questionnaire, subjected to content validity with a test-retest technique of three weeks after the first administration to show its reliability. The two scores obtained were correlated using Pearson statistics for reliability index and resulted in 0.80; the hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The finding showed no significant difference in the assessment of teachers and parents on the objectives of the inclusive education of the almajiri and the achievement of education

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for all in Nigeria,. The study recommends that, the government should ensure adequate public enlightenment about the scheme so as to increase people's awareness. The teachers (Ulamas) should be carried along in the design of the curriculum; School Based Management Committee should also be formed. Finally, special Northern Nigeria Trust Fund should be created to fund the inclusive education of the Almajiri and this should be well supported by the Federal Government.

The Education for All (EFA) crusade means exactly what it says i.e. education should be made accessible and affordable to ALL. In other words, no person should be denied access to good quality education on account of age, gender, ethnicity, deformation, location or any other consideration. However, this non-denial of opportunities also translates into removal of all obstacles to the use of educational opportunities provided. These two tasks, i.e. providing opportunities and removing all the obstacles that will impede the use of those opportunities should be central to the EFA campaign.

Education is an inalienable human right – but across the world this right is being undermined by the impacts of inequality, a lack of political commitment and inadequate investment in education. The right to education is at the heart of the Education for All (EFA) programme and UNESCO's priority. It responds to the constitutional mandate of the Organization - ensuring "Full and equal opportunities of education for all" (emphasis added).

Traditionally, the task of providing educational opportunities for all meant that all should follow one lane that will ultimately terminate at the formal or regular school. Any individual who cannot fit into this monolithic structure called "school" would have to be shut out, dropped out and labeled a failure. In this case, being different from the expected norm is often looked at as a deficiency (UNESCO, 2004).

However, the EFA agenda is falling behind, as the current pace of progress is not sufficient to meet the EFA goals. The target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed in a large number of countries and the target of achieving free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all, which is a Millennium Development Goal agreed upon at the Millennium Assembly (2000), also seems unlikely to be attained by 2015.

Making good quality basic education accessible to all is an important objective of the EFA. 1 As regards the Dakar goal for universalizing free and compulsory primary education by 2015, the Joint Expert Group UNESCO, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

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(CESCR) on the Monitoring of the Right to Education has expressed its concern over the process of weakening the right to education – a process which needs to be reversed. As the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 (henceforth referred to as the GMR 2008) shows, countries facing conditions of fragility – especially those that suffer the consequences of poor administration and management of public funds or yet to be developed - call for particular attention, as over one-third of out-of-school children in the world live in such countries. These conditions continue to take a heavy toll, denying millions the right to education (Iechi and Yekorogha, 2013).

The EFA and basic education campaigns present a paradigm shift in the sense that current emphasis is not on getting all learners to school but to getting schools to reach out to all learners (Oxenham, 2006). This means that school must respond to and make provisions for diversity in the learning needs of children; schools must be inclusive. Children in special circumstances and alternative outlets for the acquisition of basic education that have hitherto been excluded from the formal school by some of the practices described above must be made part and parcel of an inclusive learning network if EFA goals are to be realized.

Qur'anic school system is one of the alternative learning outlets that the Universal basic Education (UBE) programme is attempting to bring into this learning network for the delivery of basic education. Pupils of this school system are known as "the almajirai" (sing = almajiri) and have suffered exclusion from participating in formal primary education and its associated benefits for too long. This paper examines the effectiveness of the giant step taken by the present administration to include the almajiri into the formal education system.

The Almajiri System of Qur'anic Education

The Almajiri system is age long and practiced in several countries which include Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to mention a few. It is an Islamic practice designed to produce youths who, with the fear of God, would lead their respective societies.

Although the Almajiri Qur'anic education is narrowed to the teaching of Islam and the spiritual development of Muslims, it is also a form of education that helps build the individual Muslim particularly on the tenets of the Islamic religion and also on how best to fit into the society in which he or she finds himself. The *Almajiri* School are religious schools pursuing an exclusively religious mandate i.e. teaching pupils to memorize the Holy Qur'an by heart as part of the general socialization process of developing in each child an Islamic personality. In the process, the pupils acquire some literacy and numeracy skills in Arabic (Baba, 2008).

In Nigeria, the Almajiri system started in the 11th century, as a result of the involvement of Borno rulers in Qur'anic literacy. Seven hundred years later, the

Sokoto Caliphate was founded principally through an Islamic revolution based on the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. These two empires run similar Qur'anic learning system which over time came to be known as the Almajiri system.

However, in recent times, the Almajiri system in Nigeria has been receiving wide spread criticism. It is seen as not adequately preparing the child for future challenges like achieving gainful employment, competing favorably with children from other religious backgrounds, etc. The system, over the years, has bred a veritable source of a silent but ready army of youths commonly referred to as "street urchins or hoodlums. In fact, a close look at the Almajiri system as practiced in Nigeria today shows a complete shift from the essence of the system. This educational system failed to make adequate provision to take care of these children (youth).

It is worthy to note that no nation achieves greatness if its youths, who are its greatest assets and successor generation, have no access to quality education. This is even more real in today's knowledge-driven world. Unfortunately, and in spite of the best efforts of government, the goal of providing access to quality education has not been fully realised in Nigeria (Abdulqadir, 2003). The fact that the majority of these children do not attend conventional schools makes the situation quite worrisome.

The present government under President Jonathan, in fulfilling his campaign promise, said the desire to inaugurate modern Almajiri system of education was borne out of his conviction that Nigeria children must have equal access to quality education across the country. Indeed, from his affirmation, one would discover that there has been an existing gap in educational system among children from the northern part of the country and the rest of the regions (Muhammed, 2011). The first Almajiri School was established in Sokoto where these children are quite many, as a pre-emptive strategy for reducing the number of Almajiris on the streets.

But today, it is absolutely unattainable because their number instead of decreasing has increased from the initial 9.5 million to 10million in the recent data given by the minister of education. In Gombe alone, though there is no actual data of the number of these children in the street, the sight of them in the busy places like markets, mechanic workshops, and at bus stops begging shows that the number is on the rise.

The Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out teachers and parents assessment of the inclusive education of the Almajiris and Nigeria's aims of achieving education for all. Specifically, the study intends to examine;

1. The reasons for the increase in the number of Almajiri children despite the effort of the federal government to keep them off the streets.

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2. Teachers' assessment of the inclusive education of almajiris to be able to achieve the objectives of education for all.
3. Parents' assessment of the inclusive education of almajiris to be able to achieve the objectives of education for all.
4. The difference in the teachers and parents assessment of the objectives of the inclusive education of the almajiri and the achievement of education for all in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study

1. What are the factors responsible for the increase in the number of the Almajiri (out of school children) despite the efforts of the federal government to keep them off the street?
2. How do teachers assess the inclusive education of almajiris to be able to achieve its stated objectives?
3. How do parents assess the inclusive education of almajiris to be able to achieve its stated objectives?
4. Is there any difference in the teachers and parents assessment of the objectives of inclusive education of the almajiris and the achievement of education for all in Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

1. There is significant difference in the assessment of teachers and parents on the objectives of the inclusive education of the almajiris and the achievement of education for all in Nigeria.

Methodology

This is a descriptive research of a survey type. The population for this study encompassed all teachers (mallams of the almajiri schools) and parents in the North-Western Geo-political zone of Nigeria. The target population for the study was all the teachers (mallams of the almajiri schools) and parents of the children in the Almajiri School including also lecturers in the Shehu Shagari College of Education. A sample size of 300 were randomly selected. A researcher-designed set of questionnaires was the instrument used to elicit the needed data from the respondents. The items were ten in number. Each respondent made a tick (✓) against the appropriate option in each questionnaire item.

The questionnaire was subjected to content validity with a test-retest technique of three weeks after the first administration to show its reliability. The scores obtained in the two administrations were correlated using Pearson r statistics for the reliability index and resulted in 0.80 which the researcher adjudged reliable. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and Hausa language for easy acceptance by the community.

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A descriptive statistical analysis was employed to analyze the data that were collected for the study. Mean was employed to answer the research questions using 2.5 as the bases to determine the strength or otherwise of the statement. The hypothesis was tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research question one: What are the factors responsible for the increase in the number of the Almajiri (out of school children) despite the efforts of the federal government to keep them off the street?

Table 1: Mean Scores of Teachers and Parents on the Factors Responsible For Increase in the Number of Almajiris in the Streets

S/N	Items	Teachers mean	Parents mean	Remarks
1	Poor socio-economic status of family is responsible for increase in the number of Almajiris	3.23	2.82	Agree
2	Illiteracy on the part of parents is responsible for increase in the number of Almajiris	3.16	3.64	Agree
3	Lack of interest in Western Education among some families in the Northern Nigeria caused increase in Almajiris	3.12	3.00	Agree
4	Ineffectiveness of the poverty alleviation programmes in the country is responsible for increase in the number of Almajiris	2.95	3.00	Agree
5	Negative parental attitude constitute a challenge to the inclusive education of the almajiris in northern Nigeria.	2.53	2.96	Agree
6	Religion and cultural factors are responsible for increase in Almajiris	3.22	3.33	Agree
7	Insufficient fund in the education sector could not constitute a challenge to the inclusive education of the almajiris.	3.01	2.76	Agree

The table above shows that the mean scores of both teachers and parents range between 2.76 to 3.64 which are higher than the accepted mean score, this is an indication that the above listed challenges are responsible for the high number of almajiris outside the inclusive system despite federal government's efforts.

Research Question two: How Do Teachers Assess the Inclusive Education of Almajiris to be Able to Achieve its Stated Objectives?

Table 2: Mean scores of how teachers and parents Assess the inclusive education of the almajiris to be able to achieve its objectives

S/N	Items	Teachers mean	Parents mean	Remarks
1	The present practice of the inclusive education of the almajiris would create conducive and organized learning environment that will ensure <i>Almajirai</i> acquire both <i>Qur'anic</i> and Modern Basic Education	2.13	1.55	Not able to
2	The present inclusive education of the almajiris operate an integrated curriculum that promotes the study of Al-Qur'an and basic education subjects.	0.58	1.47	Not able to
3	The practice in the present inclusive education of the Almajirai provides adequate opportunities to acquire knowledge and vocational skills needed for self-reliance and being a useful member of the communities.	1.55	2.98	Not able to

Data in table 2 shows mean score between 0.58 to 2.13 less than the accepted mean score of 2.50. This implies that the practice of the present inclusive education would not be able to achieve its main objective since both teachers and parents of the Almajiris assessed it low.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the assessment of teachers and parents on the objectives of the inclusive education of the almajiri and the achievement of education for all in Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test Showing Differences in the Assessment of Teachers and Parents

Respondents	No	Mean	Std.	df	t-test	Sig(2-tail)	Decision
Teachers	21	3.00	1.64	298	0.14	0.21	Not Rejected
Parents	279	2.58	1.46				

P=0.05

Table 3 shows that t-value= 0.14 with P-value= 0.21 > 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. By implication, there is no significant difference in the assessment of teachers and parents on the objectives of the inclusive education of the almajiris as regards the achievement of education for all in Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings from the study show that no significant difference existed in the assessment of both the teachers and parents on the inclusive education of the almajiri and education for all. This findings is in agreement with the work of Hamza (2009) where different categories of stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and non-governmental organisation) see the Poor socio-economic status of family, Illiteracy on the part of parents, parental lack of interest in Western Education, ineffectiveness of the poverty alleviation programmes, negative parental attitude towards western culture, religion and cultural factors and insufficient funding are responsible for the increase in the number of the Almajiris. Funding is considered a strong determinant in the implementation of any policy or programme, if such programme is properly funded with other logistics in place there is every possibility that positive responses could be achieved. Proper funding depends on budgetary allocation. A breakdown of the budget showed that N345.091bn (82 per cent) was allotted to recurrent expenditure while a meager N55.056bn (18 per cent) was for capital expenditure. N317.896bn was proposed for personnel cost and N27.192bn was for overheads. Nigeria spends less than 9 per cent of her annual budget on education, far below what other African countries spend on education. Botswana spends 19.0 per cent; Swaziland, 24.6 per cent; Lesotho, 17 per cent; South Africa, 25.8 per cent; Cote d'Ivoire, 30 per cent; Burkina Faso, 16.8 per cent; Ghana, 31 per cent; Kenya, 23 per cent; Uganda, 27 per cent; Tunisia, 17 per cent; and, Morocco, 17.7 per cent. The question remains what should Nigerians expect from the inclusive education. How would this fund be able to provide conducive learning environment and vocational skills that will enable almajiris to be self- reliant and useful to their communities.

In another finding, it was revealed that the inclusive education (Almajiri School) is a welcome development, but it would not be able to keep a large number of children off the street. This is because the almajiris in the immediate community where these schools are located are not adequately considered for enrollment, as well as the mallams not employed. For instance Gagi village where the President lunched the first

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inclusive education school, the almajiris were not adequately considered in enrolling. The Government did not consider the almajiris in Gagi as well as instructors recruited to teach in those schools are not from there, too, thereby hindering the almajiris access to inclusive education.

The study revealed that many parents are still reluctant to allow their children to be enrolled in the Almajiri School; their main complaint is about the credibility of the teachers employed by the government to teach the almajiris. The capability to impart knowledge is one thing and good character of the teachers is another, but positive attitude could be put up if parents are sure of the teachers' characters.

Conclusion

Despite efforts by the present administration, a large number of almajiri children of school age still do not have access to formal education. Barely two years ago, President Jonathan took a bold step by establishing almajiri schools, yet, today the sight of almajiri clutching plastic plates, begging for alms in every nook and cranny of the northern states still persists.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following measures were recommended

- a. There is need by the government to ensure adequate public enlightenment on the scheme as some people are still skeptical about the policy and its impact.
- b. There is the need for government to empower and carry the Al-majiri school teachers (Ulamas) along in the design and teaching of the school curriculum. There is no need for government to build big schools equipped with chairs and tables before the scheme took off. What is important is to empower the Ulamas and create the right environment for teaching and learning."
- c. Also recruitment of teachers to teach in the almajiri schools should be from the residents of the immediate community where the school is located.
- d. There should be State government education inspectors assigned to monitor how the money is spent to run the program adequately. Most especially feeding, shelter, compensation of teachers and provision of health care service for the students in these inclusive schools.
- e. School Based Management Committee should form adequate monitoring team for the activities in the school (SBMC).
- f. Finally, special Northern Nigeria Trust Fund should be created to fund the inclusive education of the Almajiri and this should be well supported by the Federal Government.

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