

## TOWARDS INTEGRATING ALMAJIRI EDUCATION INTO BASIC EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

MUHAMMAD SHEHU HUSSAIN, ABDULLAHI UMAR ALHASSAN AND ISAH M. NAHOGA KAMBA

---

### Abstract

*This paper dwelt on integrating Almajiri Education into basic education. The objective of the paper discussed integration of Almajiri Education into basic education as a strategy for achieving Millennium Development Goals. Basic Education and United Nations Millennium Development Goals were explained. In addition previous attempts made for integrating Quranic education into modern curricula, an attempt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in south western part of the country were also discussed. Lastly, the use of traditional community authorities, establishment of ajami study centres in colleges of education and Universities, embarking on sensitization and mobilization of all stake holders as well as the establishment of agencies that would coordinate the activities of Almajiri education as good strategies for enhancing the integration processes.*

### Introduction

Education is an age long practice and also part of the Islamic injunctions because the religion of Islam has emphasized in seeking knowledge generally even if it means going to China to acquire it (NMEC, 2008). No nation desirous of rapid, social, economic, political and technological advancement can afford to neglect the provision of functional education to the citizenry. Education has been found to be a potent instrument for the development and transformation of any society. Islamic educational system had played a pivotal role in the transmission of moral and religious values, discipline and enhanced literacy in the society (Dukku, 2006).

The Quranic schools enroll a number of pupils called *Almajirai* (sing *almajiri*). The *almajirai* are well known as "knowledge seekers" who are mostly children and youths migrating from one

town to another for the purpose of seeking knowledge from Mallams. These types of schools existed among the Muslim communities in the world over for they provide the Muslim child or adult with the requisite knowledge and basic tenets of the belief and practice of Islam. In Nigeria Quranic schools have been the most elementary or basic educational level of engendering the Islamic faith among the children. However, while every Muslim child is expected to enroll into a Quranic school at some stage, Quranic schools vary in their mode of operations (Dukku, 2006). In its efforts to ensure the integration of *Almajiri* schools, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan came to Sokoto State to launch the opening of one of the model *Almajiri* Integrated School in the federation, however presently similar schools were either built or the building is taking place in whole Northern Part of the Country in order to ensure completion of such

schools for the integration schools to commence in earnest

The Word “*almajiranci*” or “*Almajiri*” have originated from the word *Muhajirun* meaning emigrant or it has its root from the holy flight of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) from Mecca to Medina in the year 622 AD. those who migrated from Mecca to Medina are called *Muhajirun*.

### What is Basic Education?

Basic Education according to the Jomtein Declaration and Framework of Action on Education For All (EFA) is not defined in terms of years of schooling, neither is it limited to formal schooling. It sees education in its broadest sense as a close articulation of the formal, the Non-formal and the informal approaches to and mechanisms for awakening and all-round development of the human potential. The broad aim is to lay the foundation for all life-long learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning-to-learn, self awareness, citizenship and life skills.

Thus, Basic educational opportunity for all Nigerians is a legal, a moral and social necessity. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is designed to ensure sustainable life-long learning and acquisition of functional literacy programme. This indicates clearly that the basic education is for all Nigerian children of school age, youths and adults irrespective of ethnic, religious, or socio-economic background.

### The United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium declaration was endorsed in September, 2000 by 189 member countries of the United Nations (UN). The declaration set out the agenda for International policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; identifying four interlinked areas of programmatic action those are subordinate to the overall goal of ensuring future global security.

- Peace, security and disarmament
- Development and poverty reduction.
- Protection of the shared environment.
- Human rights, democracy and good governance (Enuku, 2006).

In order to put the declaration into effect, a working group composed of the UN, the World bank, the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and other international organizations drew up the road map in 2001 (FME/UNICEF, 2008).

The road map contained eight goals which have become the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and were broken down into 18 specific targets which can be measured by means of 48 indicators (FME/UNICEF, 2008).

### Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

#### Goal 1

Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger:  
Reduce by half the proportion of people living less than a dollar a day.  
Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

**Goal 2**

Achieve Universal primary Education:  
Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.

**Goal 3**

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women:  
Eliminate gender Disparity in primary and secondary Education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015

**Goal 4**

Reduce child mortality rate among children under five by two thirds  
Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate amongst children under five

**Goal 5**

Improve Maternal Health:  
Reduce by half the maternal mortality ratio.

**Goal 6**

Combat HIV/AIDs, Malaria and other killer diseases:  
Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS  
Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

**Goal 7**

Ensure Environmental Sustainability

**Goal 8**

Develop a Global partnership for Development

However, in the course of this paper goal two relates to our discussion. Access to education has been the prime objective of the Nigerian government especially since the middle of 1970s when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in 1975. Following this burst of educational activity brought in the wake of plethora changes, some positive, others problematic *Almajiri* Education has never been taken into cognizance. Barely three years to the dead line for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals has a lot that need to be done in terms of implementation of the integration.

A more disturbing situation is the growing number of children who are out-of-school. In 2007, it was estimated that about 8.3 million children were out of school (NMEC/UNICEF, 2008). While the current census estimates a significant number of school age that are out of the formal schools system. It is particularly unnerving that more than 60 percent of the out of school children are girls residing in the northern part of the country. An undesirable trend is also being observed in the fact that many children are dropping out of formal school system due to poverty or parents apathy to education without achieving permanent literacy, thereby compounding the illiteracy problem of the country (MLA studies, 2004 for primary and non-formal education centres)

**Integration Attempts**

The idea of integrating Qur'anic education with modern school curricula started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the south western part of the country as Muslims parents' response to the

Christian Evangelical nature of early public education process that interfered with the Muslim parents religious upbringing of their children. In a bid to protect their religious and cultural identity while at the same time enjoy the utilitarian benefits of modern education. Muslim parents through a number of Islamic NGOs such as the Jama'atul Nasril Islam, Islamic Education Trust amongst others.

The concept of integration connotes the infusion of the elements of basic education i.e. Western literacy, numeracy and life skills in addition to the Islamic religious education within the Qur'anic system. The proponents of integration insist that it is an opportunity for the child to make the best out of both sides i.e. he/she would build his/ her spiritual base as per that would enhance the quality of his/her life on earth.

These *Almajirai* are mostly children who roam about the streets in search of food with no adequate shelter, toilets facilities and remained excluded from the formal school system. This is a major challenge in the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as well as Education For All (EFA). Thus there is the need to address the problem if they are to gain access to basic education which would cater for their material and spiritual needs as well as provide them with an avenue that enables them to occupy their rightful places in a modern society.

*Almajiri* child stand a better chance of accessing basic education through integration of the Qur'an education with some elements of formal education. Our attainment of MDG barely three years to the target year (2015) is very crucial if

we are to achieve our goal (Dukku, 2006)

In a survey conducted by an NGO on the *Almajiri* State Education Account in 2009 in Kano State the findings revealed that this segment of the population is totally neglected with very little care or attention from either the government whether Federal, State and Local government and private. It has been observed that these types of learners are mostly on their own in terms of feeding, shelter, and even medical care as there is no body that is taking care of them. Even the Mallams or the teachers shave no payment either as salary or allowance. They often rely on alms and this makes their lives very difficult.

However, many studies had revealed that the *Almajirai* and their Mallams are in deplorable social conditions and their teachings /learning environment is not conducive for learning (Dukku, 2003 cited in NERP, 2003 and Junaid et al 2004). Many scholars had debunked the notion and asserted that begging was not known to be associated with the Holy prophet but that the prophet was known to have discouraged begging and encouraged hard work and self-reliance. Over the years both the State and Federal government's agencies came up with a series of alternatives for the education of *almajirai* and the alternatives usually based on themselves on some form of integration with western education. The integration is seen as a way of bridging the gap for *almajiri* who does not attend conventional western schooling (Adamu, 2011)

Integration connotes the strengthening of the existing *almajiri* schools to

accommodate the introduction of basic education element of western literacy, numeracy, Literacy For Empowerment(LIFE) and Vocational skills subjects into curriculum. The focus is on the system of integration where the Islamic education system would imbibe / absorb certain modern schools subject (Dukku, 2006). Consequently the integration process should seek to achieve the following major goals:

To enhance the existing condition of the *almajiri* child and his Mallams for better performance.

To improve the teaching and learning environment in the *almajiri* education and to strengthen their capacity.

To expand the curriculum of *almajiri* education to accommodate modern school subjects of literacy, numeracy, Literacy For Empowerment (LIFE) and vocational Skills.

To provide access to basic education to *almajiri* education in the spirit of UBE, EFA and MDGs.

### **Specific Programmes**

Basic literacy (equivalence of junior primary school administered in local language)

Post literacy ( equivalence of senior primary school administered in English Languages)

LIFE skills (e.g. personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, self actualization e.t.c.)

Vocational skills (e.g. cap making, type and dye, tailoring e.t.c.)

### **Emerging opportunities**

Recently, some Mallams, parents and *almajiris* have started accepting the

integration of basic education into *almajiri* schools.

With the integration there will be permanent centres with improved facilities e.g. water, toilets and good ventilation;

*Almajiri* will be taught LIFE skills such as trade for income generation and sustainable development;

Sokoto state government had replaced so many buildings of *Almajiri* schools with modern ones and established a Religious Ministry (Zaid, 2012), international development partners are also partnering the government direction.

### **The need for communication strategy**

Many studies have shown that for any meaningful impact to be achieved in the areas of behavioral changes, special attention has to be paid to the issue of communication, right from the stage of conception of the programme (Dukku, 2006)

Changing behavior to facilitate full integration requires more than disseminating information about its goals and objectives. Community dialogue, theatre for development, mass media for development, continuous advocacy and social mobilization are imperative thus, clear, concise and accurate information is vital to combat misinterpretation, fears, rumours and myths. Trust in authorities is crucial and must be earned. Mass media is an effective means of disseminating messages.

### **Challenges for the Integration**

Problem of the *ajamization*

Lack of confidence

Lack of centres for the *ajami* studies

Lack of publishing *ajami* literary  
Lack of acceptance of integration by  
stake holders.  
Lack of state agencies to coordinate  
*ajami* studies

### Strategies for the Integration process

The process of *Almajiri* Education integration could be done through the following strategies:

The *almajiri* is already literate in Arabic script, if not in Arabic, therefore there is the need for the *ajamization* of knowledge since the idea of basic education is about literacy. *Ajami* is the Arabic script domesticated for non-Arabic languages in Northern Nigeria (Adamu, 2009). There is the need for a paradigm shift to re-channel secular education of *almajiri* into *ajamized* knowledge (Adamu, 2011). This will be more accepted by even the *almajirai* and their Mallams.

There is the need to build confidence through the use of traditional community authorities. This is necessary in order to overcome certain pockets of resistance by some Mallams.

Establishment of centre for the *ajami* studies at Universities and Colleges of Education.

Publishing classical *Ajami* literacy materials.

All the participating states should embark on a sensitization and mobilization of all stake holders; parents, NGOs, teachers, Community leaders as well as the *Almajirai* themselves towards accepting the integration.

States to establish agencies that would coordinate the activities of the *almajiri* education (Adamu, 2011).

### Conclusion

The present *almajiri* education does not provide basic element of formal and vocational skills education as such are out of the formal system. Therefore *almajirai* do not have the broad opportunities to improve their lives, their families' and society at large. Basic education is however considered "one of the best investments" for human, social and economic development.

### References

Adamu, A.U. (2011). *Almajiri, media and educational alternatives*. a discussion paper presented for journalist on *almajiri* held on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, Kano.

Adamu, A.U. (2009). The significance of *ajami* manuscript resources for the development of new knowledge in Nigeria. Commissioned paper presented at a 2- day National Conference on Exploring Nigeria's Arabic/*Ajami* Manuscript for the Development of New Knowledge, held at Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University, Kaduna, on 6<sup>th</sup> - 7th May.

Dukku, M.G. (2006). Curriculum integration and the challenge of educating the *almajiri* child in Nigeria *adult education in Nigeria*. (12): 279-288

Enuku, U. E. (2006). Prison education and the millennium development

- goals. *Adult Education in Nigeria*. (12); 28-36
- National Commission for Mass Literacy (2008). *Communication strategies for the integration of Basic Education into Qur'an Education*. Abuja. NMEC
- National Commission for Mass Literacy (2008). *National benchmark for non-formal education Integrating Basic Education into Qur'an Schools in Nigeria*. Abuja. NMEC
- National Commission for Mass literacy (2008). National blue-print for adult and non-formal education in Nigeria. Abuja. NMEC
- Northern Education Research Project (2003). Report of the pre-summit workshop on integration, Arewa house, Kaduna
- Zaid, A.I. (2012). The Roles of Stakeholders in the Integration of *Almajiri* Qur'anic schools into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Sokoto State. *Sokoto Educational Review*, 13 (1): 266-277.