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Reforming the Contemporary Almajiri System of Education: Lessons from the Sokoto Caliphate

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Abstract:

The Almajiri system, a traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria, faces numerous challenges, including poor living conditions, inadequate access to basic amenities, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. This paper examines the Almajiri system and draws lessons from the Sokoto Caliphate, a historical Islamic state in Nigeria, to propose reforms that can improve the system and provide a better future for its students. The study highlights the importance of effective classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and community involvement in ensuring a conducive learning environment. It also explores the Sokoto Caliphate's approach to education, which emphasizes the importance of Islamic values, vocational training, and social welfare. The paper concludes by recommending reforms that can help revitalize the Almajiri system and provide a more comprehensive education for its students.

Keywords: Almajiri, education, Sokoto Caliphate, children, students

Introduction

Almajiri was described by Sarkingobir et al. (2023) as follows:

“*Almajiri* is a Hausa language word which was derived from an Arabic word “*Almuhajir*” that in Arabic refers to someone who left his comfort home/ town and travelled to another place/ land/ country for the sake of Islamic religion propagation or relations. Particularly, in Hausa land *Almajiri* is mostly dubbing to youngsters 4-18 years old, adults, who leave their



families in pursuit for Islamic knowledge/ education in northern Nigeria and related parts of West Africa. *Almajiri* students are of different classes, namely, *Gardi* (adult), *Titibiri* (adolescent), and *Kolo* (infant). Their schedule of class sessions is performed in the morning (5-11:00 am), afternoon (2-4:00 pm), and the night (7:00-10:00pm), with a motive to ensure that children or Muslim adherents read and recite the Quran properly, children are inducted into the Islamic tenets, values, and morals, and children become versatile in Arabic and basic Islamic sciences to lay a foundation for further studies. Historically, migration for knowledge or religion has been an order of the day from the time of prophet Muhammad SAW, through the advent of Islam in the Africa continent. The system has been very smooth until the advent of Western colonialists. The introduction of Western education halts the funding of Islamic education by the government and wealthy individuals, and in turn leading to the fall of *Almajiri* system. Before colonialization *Almajiri* was an established, organized and comprehensive system of education funded by the state for learning principles, Islamic values, jurisprudence, and theology. *Almajiri* education was initially funded by the state through alms giving, treasury, under the control of Muslim leaders. Similarly, students have liberty to enrol in vocational and technical learning such as farming, fishing, tailoring, masonry, building, etc.; thus there is no any reason whatsoever for students to indulge in begging and other lowly behaviours. Nowadays, the *Almajirai* (singular: *Almajiri*) are boys and youngsters from primary-school age to early twenties who have come to cities and villages in northern Nigeria, including Sokoto state to study Quran. They do not stay at homes with their parents, instead they live with the teachers, who provides limited care and supervision over them. They learn to read and write Islamic knowledge but not western education, except in few of them. *Almajiri* hardly learn skills to economically sustain future life, older ones engage in menial work, petty trading, handicrafts, while younger ones sometimes do house help or in most cases begging. Sokoto is the second state with highest number of *Almajiri* in the North.

About nine thousand five hundred and fifty-one *Almajiri* are in Sokoto based on census. But the number can increase and the statistic might be underreported. *Almajiri* as a child has many rights, including the right to education, healthcare, love and care, adequate food and shelter, and clean environment. Despite these rights, they are spotted in every corner, street, junctions etc languishing helplessly. They are viewed as homeless, poor, neglected, maltreated children wandering the streets for begging and livelihood. *Almajiri* cannot afford healthcare services in most of the situations. It is reported that the conditions they passed touch their physical and psychosocial, psychological development and health, because the society and parents neglected them. They may serve as instruments for terrorism and juvenile delinquency.”

Almajiri was considered as an abundant system or legacy pioneered by Sokoto Caliphate. Bashar (2025a) elucidates Sokoto Caliphate as follows:

“Sokoto Caliphate is the region that covers the entire olden Hausaland, and other related areas; which was led as a result of jihad struggle performed by Shehu Usman Danfodiyo in the 19th century. The Sokoto Caliphate had its capital at the present Sokoto town, Sokoto state, Nigeria. The olden Sokoto Caliphate regionally span major parts of present Nigeria, and other areas in Niger Republic, Chad, Mali, and Cameroon. The leaders of this great Caliphate were eminent in terms of many aspects such as scholarship, political leadership based on Islam, economics, and social management policies as attested by their write-ups on several occasions. Noteworthy, the Sokoto Caliphate was built in order to imitate the *Khilafa* system started by the Caliph Abubakar (the friend and follower of Prophet Muhammad SAW). Thus, the said system was established after dethronement of the Gobir or Hausa leaders in 1808 or thereabout. The Sokoto Caliphate lasted for about a century, before the coming of the Europeans, and the Caliphate was solely on Islamic *Sharia* that ensures justice, education, and rationale to all without inequalities. If this system is to be uphold, the problem being faced by *Almajiri* today (such as lack of sanitation, shortage of water) will be fully remedied.”

The Almajiri system, a traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria, has been a subject of controversy and debate in recent years. Despite its rich history and cultural significance, the system has been criticized for its poor living conditions, lack of access to basic amenities, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The Almajiri system, which originated in the 19th century, has been an integral part of Nigerian society, particularly in the northern regions. However, the system has faced numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of effective regulation (Yaqubu & Nasarawa, 2018).

Education is a fundamental right that is essential for the development of any society. However, in Nigeria, the Almajiri system, which caters to millions of children, has been plagued by problems such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, and a lack of access to basic amenities. This paper examines the Almajiri system and draws lessons from the Sokoto Caliphate's emphasis on education and social welfare to propose reforms that can improve the system and provide a better future for its students.

Classroom Management and Factors or determinants of effective classroom management

Classroom Management (CM) is a major key in the conduct of classroom learning and instructions. The importance of classroom management is to manipulate the classroom to prevent chaos or disturbance or disorder that affect learning. Therefore, the importance of classroom management cannot be overemphasized. Classroom Management (CM) is a parcel of classroom administration that is concern with the proper coordination of human and material resources so that effective learning could be prevailed in a peaceful atmosphere. Classroom Management is also dubbed as the manipulation of knowledge of the teacher (about subject matter), materials, and techniques that ensure that learners achieve goals without major interference (Adzongo & Olaitan, 2019). The objectives of classroom management are to ensure conducive learning avenue that is devoid of chaos. The followings are some benefits of classroom management:

- Classroom management is essential to ensure that classroom learning prevails effectively.
- Classroom management help in checkmating unnecessary interferences in learning activities
- Classroom management facilitates proper arrangements and utilization of materials and human resources that support optimum learning outcomes
- It helps in developing good characteristics in learners because it instills discipline
- It helps in facilitating an ideal learning environment that support learning activities

- It helps in facilitating an economical and real learning instructions that end up achieving goals and objectives (Zainuddin & Hardiansyah, 2023).

Verily, good classroom management is required for better learning outcomes. The major factors that are involved in classroom management involve the teacher factors, student (learner) factors, and the environment factors (Sharma, 2017). The teacher is a major key in classroom management. He/she is the principal administrator of the resources to ensure classroom management is achieved with utmost objectives. The teacher plan and deliver the teaching or lesson or instructions, and ensure discipline. According to contemporary teaching methodologies, a teacher should have the authority, dignity, consistency, firmness, wise, and efficient (Hazarika & Nasrin, 2020).

Characteristic of teacher in Sokoto Caliphate

There are several etiquettes that a teacher should master and follow in the discharge of his work, therewith, several Sokoto Caliphate literatures disclosed these codes. Sheikh Abdullahi Gwandu reported that, a teacher should be able to teach where the learners could access him, hear him, and see him. A teacher should be disciplined at home and in the classroom or teaching medium, he should be flexible, serious and composed, a teacher should restrict questions (from students) while delivering the instructions (lesson or lectures), so that he can answer after the lesson. A teacher delivers lessons after a through preparation and planning. It is a duty of the teacher to stop (halt) students that answer questions without permission, because it is an unethical and lead to chaos (Mafara, 2009). Other core values of a teacher listed by Sheikh Abdullahi include:

- Adhering to proper dress code by the teacher
- Shunning slanders or backbiting facilitated by students
- Shunning any form of arrogance in his/her conduct
- A teacher should eat wisely be eating along with his students or friends by maintaining personal hygiene (such as washing/cleaning hands before and after eating meal), eating without malnutrition (undernutrition or overnutrition). The eating pattern should be balanced to encourage proper learning and teaching.
- A teacher should avoid sexual harassment of any woman or girls. H should minimize private interaction with the opposite gender (Mafara, 2009).

Equally, Sayudi & Boyd (1974) described the simple way of classroom management applied by Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo disclosing the following: Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo used to prepare before delving into the class or learning environment. The entry behavior is by greeting the class and instructing them to keep quiet and ultimately the class begins. He takes his time elucidating subject matter, he is not displaying angriness or proudness despite the illiterates

around him. Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo asked them to health question till at the end of the instruction (explanation), he talks loudly for everyone to listen.

Characteristics of a student (learner) in the Sokoto Caliphate

Sheikh Abdullahi disclosed that most of the characteristics codes of teachers are supposed to be ethically maintained by the students, but more additions are as follows:

- A student or learner should have the main objective of seeking knowledge instead of any form of corruption or worldly flamboyant gain
- A student should shun begging especially from the wrongdoers
- After paying attention to worship, a student should pay much heed to learning, discussion, educational debate (quiz) or defense
- A student (learner) should be busy learning in every blessed day (Muahammad Shareef, 1998; Mafara, 2009).
- **The role of family in teaching and learning in Sokoto Caliphate**

In Sokoto Caliphate system the culture signifies the importance of family in modifying the behaviors of people and the upbringing of young ones (Kuna, 1998; Maihula, 2025). There are some roles that should be uphold by the parents for the young ones to be successful, some of these roles are listed as follows:

- Ensuring that young ones are disciplined. Discipline include food eating behavior codes, dress code, and the major role of ensuring that young ones are busy learning.
- Ensuring that young ones have adequate and proper sleep pattern
- A young one should be taught to respect everyone
- Young ones should be taught to shun begging
- Preventing young ones from bad friends
- Physical exercise or play is an important aspect of child development. Therefore, holidays, and breaks are significant in learning
- A young one is trained at home on how to respect his teacher and elders or seniors
- Young ones are rewarded for committing a good job or behavior
- Young ones are punished for committing a wrongdoing or misdeed
- A youngones is taught on proper eating pattern (Marannawa & Marnona, 2007).
- A father (husband) should treat his wives with equity, and avoid harming her (them), be receptive (patient-full) with her manners, call her to order in case if misdeed, teach her, and feed her appropriately (Dan Fuduye, n.d.; Marannawa & Marnona, 2007).
- **Nature of the learning environment in Sokoto Caliphate**

The learning environment in Sokoto Caliphate varies according to prevailing conditions. Basically, learning occurs at schools, homes, rooms, mosques, and other congregational

gatherings. The essence of these different learning settings is to take education to the all and sundry. Children and youngsters, and wives are taught at home, mosques, and schools. Adult are taught at schools, mosques, markets, and other fields (Abba et al., 2017; Ayama, 2018; Adam, 2023).

Problems affecting Almajiri in Northern Nigeria

Here are some tips about the problems facing Almajiri schools:

Poor living conditions

The Almajiri students are often living in horrific condition (Taiwo, 2013). Most of the schools are overcrowded, inaccessible to healthcare and battling with poor waste disposal menace (Hussain, 2015; Sarkingobir et al., 2020).

Neglected by the government

Most if the Almajiri are not having any form of formal education, therefore, are more prone to a bleak future. Previous efforts made by governments were insignificant and left the problems unresolved. Since the governments are refusing to fund the Almajiri system or properly reform the system, the graduates of Almajiri schools are not readily employed by employees, despite the hectic conditions they traverse to reach the level of graduation (Taiwo, 2013; Umar & Abdulkarim, 2014; Yaqubu & Nasarawa, 2018).

Food insecurity

Food is a vital component for healthy life. The Almajiri children need balanced diet more than the adults. However, due to poverty and negligence, large portion of the Almajiri are facing food insecurity challenges. Almajiri come from Hines with insufficient food, instead they rely on begging. Foods earn from begging may not be hygienic or nutritious, the food is mostly a remnant or leftover from homes or restaurants. The food they eat can also be a deteriorating leftovers that deemed to be discarded (Mohammed & Yusuf, 2015; Muhammed et al., 2022; Miya et al., 2023). Bashar (2025b) elucidates Almajiri's problem like this:

“Nowadays, Almajiri education in the Northern Nigeria and beyond is abandoned to the gallery, therewith, there is no funding, the students are facing a lot of challenges. Challenges of Almajiri education in the current Hausaland (former Sokoto caliphate) are many. There is possibility lack of food security, security, sanitation finds, care, monitoring.”

Insecurity

The nature of Almajiri schools allow the owners (*Mallams*) to enroll overpowering number of students, therefore, unable to guard them properly. The students have to wander to beg or seek for food. The parents left their wards with the teachers for over a long period of time without providing sufficient provision, visitation or support. This allow the children to wander the streets and intermingle with the bad eggs in the society. Some of the Almajiri students face

greater risk of being recruited by bad elements into social vices such as drug abuse, theft, political thuggery, and other crimes (Amzat, 2008; Gomnont & Esomchi, 2017; Teke et al., 2020).

Sokoto Caliphate and it's features of educational system

Sokoto Caliphate operates based on Shariah which is a law that provides positive guidance, that prevent people from wrongdoings (such as murder, adultery, assault, rape, stealing, and other forms of crimes) (Lemu, 2005). The Shariah deals with concepts involving moral conduct and faith, acts of worship, family and personal relationships, businesses and economic activities, social and politics, crime and punishment, international relations, and mil affairs. The followings figures based on the tactics of Sokoto Caliphate abide by Shariah and facilitates children's education:

Family and moral conduct

Sheikh Abdullahi descriptions signifies the pivotal role of family in educating the young ones. Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo 's initial fate of education was from his mother, then his father and after this pioneer remodelling he was sent out to learn. Likewise, Sheikh Abdullahi learnt alot from his brother Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo and his relatives before going outside for learning. In a nutshell the family should educate the young ones and take them to schools afterwards. Sheriff & Altine (2018) aver that learning was the most important thing in the view of Usman Danfodiyo, among his teachers were his paternal and maternal uncles. Marannawa & Marnona (2007) stated among the functions or duties of a father over his family is to provide feeding, education (especially to the wife), and moral upbringing of the members.

Educational norm

Sokoto educational system argues that all the life stages of human must be beclouded with education and learning. The Caliphates idea is a Muslim starts learning from birth to the time of death. Therefore, the first school is the mother, the father, and the immediate members of the family or surrounding. That is why many of the key figures of the Caliphate such as Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo, Sheikh Abdullahi, Caliph Bello, Caliph Abubakar Atiku, and Sultan Muhammad Maiturare acquired major part of their education from family or relatives. Education is mandatory for all as per as Sokoto Caliphate is concern (Sheriff, 2016). In light of these, the Yantaru system was championed by Nana Asmau. The Yantaru system takes education to the grassroots women folk (such as old women, very young girls, and married women) by the women agents (trained for that educational extension services) (Boyd & Last, 1985; Bawa, 2019). The Sokoto Caliphate utilized lecture method, discussion, field work or field trip, and other relevant teaching methods to educate the public and ensure education for all. There is vivid utilization of Zakat, and other public funds to fund education of the poor (especially children by paying teachers who opted for wage, any teachers of the teachers relied on trading or entrepreneurship for living). The use of schools, mosques, markets, lecture halls. And other public gatherings to communicate educational messages is an indication of the

commitment of Sokoto Caliphate in achieving education for all (Kaura, 2009; Sheriff, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Business and economic life

Sokoto Caliphate listed in its own literatures forms of business and entrepreneurship struggled that are lawful and enjoin citizens to engage while ask citizens to shun corruption and evil practices (Tilli, 2024). There were markets, raw materials, economic system and money (Abubakar & Yandaki, 2022). Marannawa & Marnona (2007) reiterated some of the duties of a Muslim upon others, including giving any financial assistance or support to a fellow Muslim just for the sake of Allah SWT. The people are enjoined to seek for livelihoods for working or engaging in form of trade or transaction. Mafara (2009) disclosed some of the duties or responsibilities of student as cited by Sheikh Abdullahi Danfodiyo in his book *Lubab al-Madkhal*, including the seeking for economic support to facilitate his education. In this vein, an (adult) student should have job that will Sid him with money to support his education. It was equally disclosed that begging is prohibited for any students because the proceeds of begging are unhygienic.

Zakat and other alms to fund education

Sokoto Caliphate pay sufficient attention to the sources of wealth by laying foundations that incite the people to look for wealth. The land management in the state exhort the people to farm and other actively participate in trading activities (Islahi, 2011; Islahi, 2012). Basically, the land management in the Caliphate involves the following statements:

- Every citizen is allocated a land to farm for his family. The land is obtained through rent or free allocation or relations. There is mutual relationship between the cropping system and the animal keeping, and water bodies, pastures are available to feed and rear animals. The wealth is utilized in the personal expenditures and contributions to Zakat and Waqf, and other alms or donations.
- Professional development. In this course young ones are trained by the elders on ways to farm or rear animals or engage in entrepreneurship and technological innovations such as blacksmithing, wood carving. This in turn contributes to the general economic pool.
- Land management allocated land for the generality (managed by the state) with a view to use the citizens to farm and store the proceeding for the bulk of the general treasury. This fund is pooled to provide state-funded services to the whole and the poor (Chafe, 1992; Yusuf et al., 2021).

The Islamic public system under Sokoto Caliphate father wealth into the treasury for the benefits of all members of the society (Hanafi, 2024). The sources of wealth for the treasury are briefly highlighted here. Sokoto Caliphate has its system of collecting wealth from the collective economy in order to serve the public. Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo in his writings listed the sources of treasury wealth to any Islamic state. The sources are as follows:

- *Ushr*- It is 1/10 that should be collected from appropriate wealth such as Zakat for vegetation produce or crops.
- *Jizyah*- It is a wealth that is collected from the wealthy non-Muslims that living in the territory of Muslims. This revenue is collected from adults, therewith, those who are poor are exempted. It is for the security and other social services delivered to them by the Islamic state.
- Revenue or Kharaj- This is a wealth collected by the Islamic state for the purpose of serving the whole
- *Fai'un*- This is another wealth obtained by the leader (Caliph) without war or battle
- *Wafrun*- This is another wealth obtained for the state.
- Wealth without certain owner
- Inheritance without heirs (Dan Fuduye, n.d.).

However, the utilization of the treasury should be done with the principles of justice. One of the uses of the treasury should be channeled to all ways that ensure security of the state. Teaching and training of young ones is a certain path of security of the country. The wealth of treasury is also utilized in paying wages and salaries of workers such as judges and construction of public or social amenities such as mosque, trading and entrepreneurship centers, and ensuring social development that help the poor (Bashar, 2025c).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Almajiri system, a traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria, faces numerous challenges, including poor living conditions, inadequate access to basic amenities, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The Sokoto Caliphate, a historical Islamic state in Nigeria, provides valuable lessons for reforming the Almajiri system. The Caliphate's emphasis on Islamic values, vocational training, and social welfare can be used to improve the system and provide a better future for its students. The study highlights the importance of effective classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and community involvement in ensuring a conducive learning environment. It also explores the Sokoto Caliphate's approach to education, which emphasizes the importance of Islamic values, vocational training, and social welfare. To revitalize the Almajiri system, the following reforms are recommended:

1. Government funding: The government should provide adequate funding for the Almajiri system to improve infrastructure, provide basic amenities, and support teachers.
2. Curriculum reform: The curriculum should be revised to include vocational training, Islamic values, and social welfare.
3. Teacher training: Teachers should be trained to provide effective classroom management, and to emphasize Islamic values and vocational training.

4. Community involvement: The community should be involved in the management of Almajiri schools to ensure accountability and provide support.
5. Monitoring and evaluation: The government should establish a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that Almajiri schools are meeting standards.

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