

AL-MAJIRI EDUCATION: A SOLACE TO SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Nana Aishat College of Education, IlorinEmail: garbahussain555@gmail.com & zakariyahakorede@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Despite the fact that the Al-majiri system of Quranic education was aimed at training future erudite scholars that would be a faithful and pious man that will be useful for the propagation of Islam and the development of society in general. Today the word Al-majiri in Hausa has gradually acquired a completely different meaning; it is more or less referred to as beggars, or destitute roaming the streets in towns and cities. The system has over time become a breeding ground for militants, criminals and terrorists. This paper aimed to view al-majiri education: a solace to self-reliance and national development. The paper examines the Overview of Al-majiri Education System, Aims of Al-majiri Education and the fall of the al-majiri education system. The paper also discussed the security implication of al-majiri education, al-majiri educational and vocational education, importance of vocational education and later examines al-majiri education a solace to self-reliance and national development. Finally, the paper has drawn a conclusion and recommendations on the need for government to provide basic education especially for the al-majiri youth and not only in literacy, but in vocational skills in order to promote self-reliance and self-sufficiency, enlightenment campaigns, should be mounted in the media on the importance of welcoming al-majiri education by the youth, parents and even the malams and so on.

INTRODUCTION

Education, as it is acknowledged all over the world, is the key that unlocks the door of development. Knowledge serves as the pedestal on which a nation's social cohesion and economic development depend. No nation can therefore be expected to achieve greatness if the youth (greatest asset and successor generation) therein cannot access quality education. This is even more understandable in today's knowledge-driven world. Despite this acknowledgement, nearly ten million children are reported to be roaming the streets of Nigeria, without access to education, particularly in the

northern part of the country (NMEC, 2011). Therefore, these thousands of youths who could have become greatest assets and promising future generation would not have turn to militants, criminals and nuisance to society if they were give vocational education on which they can rely on for their living. Vocational education is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO,

2001). Given the security challenges confronting Nigeria and its avowed goal of eradicating illiteracy in the country by 2020 of every child count, positive measures must be put in place immediately. One of such measure is the restructure of the Al-majiri system of education to meet the demands of modern system of education.

Overview of Al-majiri Education System

Al-majiri is an Arabic word derived from the plural word al-muajirun (people who leave their home for religion purpose). It is an educational system that has long history in Nigeria dated back to the 11th century under the leadership of the Kanem-Borno rulers (Abdulqadir, 2003). The young children are called the "Al-majiri" (a student who leaves his parents for Quranic education). They come mostly from rural areas to urban centres for the purpose of acquiring Quranic education. They are sent to study Qur'an under the care of a malams (Teacher of the Quranic School) or Alaramma (Teacher of the Quranic School who memorizes all verses of the Quran) who mostly comes from other villages (Ibrahim, 2008). Though this system of Quranic education was aimed at training future scholars for the propagation of Islam. Today the word *Al-majiri* in Hausa has gradually acquired a completely different meaning; it is more or less referred to as beggars roaming the streets in our towns and cities. They include young pupils who left the comfort and protection of their parents and relations at a very tender age for the purpose of Quranic education (Ya'u, 2001). It usually refers to a person who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in search of Islamic knowledge. It is a reflection of the Islamic concept of migration which is widely practiced especially when the acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient. Imam Shafi, the chief proponent of migration, is quoted as extending this migration concept to business, among other things. He likened it to a precious stone which he

said is nothing unless it is mined and transported away from its soil. This, he summarized 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, knowledge, good manners and friendship with the famous". (Danbuzu 2012:1).

Abdulqadir, while presenting the 21st convocation lecture at the Bayero University, Kano noted that in the pre-colonial era, pupils lived with their parents for moral upbringing while the al-majiri schools were located within their immediate environment (Abdulqadir 2003). These schools were maintained by the state, communities, and parents and were supplemented by teachers and pupils through menial jobs. Since Islam encourages charity to wayfarers and to students, the communities often supported these al-majiris most of whom came from far-away places to enroll in the schools. The al-majiris in return offered services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving, and sewing to the community that contributed to their well-being. Al-majiri teachers and their pupils were reported to have freely provided their community with Islamic education in addition to the development of Ajami (reading and writing of Hausa language using Arabic alphabets). Based on this system, which is founded upon the teaching of Quran and Hadith, the then Northern Nigeria was educated in a complete way of life, including governance, customs, traditional crafts, trades and even modes of dressing (Abdulqadir, 2003).

Aims of Al-majiri Education

Al-majiri system of education is associated with *Quranic* Education and predates western system of education in fact, in most parts of the Northern Nigeria. *Quranic* system predates even the Usmanu Danfodiyo

Jihad (Sule, 2002). The aims and objectives of *Quranic* system of education are to produce a faithful and pious man that will be useful to the society in general. Ja'afar (2008) declared that the Al-majiri systems of education are two types. This includes the intellectual and moral types of training of pupils and students. The intellectual objectives are of two types depending on the kind of enrolment in the school. Thus, the intellectual objective for pupils/students enrolled under the domestic type is mostly restricted to expose them to reading and writing of Glorious Qur'an only. As for those enrolled in the boarding, the aim is mostly at producing future teachers and professionals in various fields, such as Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), Sirah, (Prophets biographical life), Hadith (sayings and practices of Prophet (S.A.W.) among others. While the second objective of the Al-majiri system which is the provision of moral development of the pupils can be achieved through different means. These according to Ja'afar (2008) include the teaching of good habits, manners like eating, drinking habit, greetings, respect for elders, relatives and neighbours, proper dressing, etc.

Furthermore, pupils are also taught to shun away from the forbidden acts such as telling lies, deceitfulness, alcoholic drinks, adultery, gambling and dishonesty among others through admonition and preaching. Dahiru (2011) observed that since the goals of *Quranic* schools are infused, the complete knowledge of the *Quranic* and Islamic education is a way of absorbing moral values and spiritual sanctity for the individual here on earth and in the hereafter. He therefore itemized the following as specific objectives of Qur'an education.

- i. Ensure that children read and recite the Qur'an,
- ii. Children become fully inducted into Islamic moral values in all behaviours,
- iii. Children become as knowledgeable in Arabic language and basic Islamic sciences as a foundation for further studies.

Abdullmalik (2008) stated that in Islam, education is conceived as a process of self-discipline which involves physical, mental and spiritual training of man. It aims at producing well disciplined, highly skillful and responsible human beings who are conscious of their duties to Almighty Allah and commitments to the service of their society. According to Sule (2002) the main aim and objective of *Al-majiri* education is to enable one to live a life of good Muslim, who obeys Allah (SWT), benefits himself and his society.

The fall of the Al-majiri Education System

The British invasion and colonization of Northern Nigerian in 1904 has been identified as being responsible for the extinction of the al-majiri system. Colonizers killed and deposed those emirs who resisted foreign rule as the subjugated lost control of their territories and were forced to accept the new role of these men as mere traditional rulers (Dambuzu 2012). With the British withdrawal of state funding for al-majiri schools, emirs lost fundamental control of al-majiri system and it collapsed. Disregard for the al-majiri system in favour of western education ignited animosity and antagonism from the malams (Quranic school teachers), the pupils and Northern Nigerian society at large. There was much fear that western education, which is of Christian-European origin, would make graduates losing their Islamic identity and embracing anti-social behaviours that negate the values and principles of Islam.

Overwhelmed with the burden of caring for the al-majiri, the teachers (malams) had to send pupils out to beg and even charged weekly fees for the lessons given. The al-majiris' were made to fend for themselves by begging for alms in order to settle their expenses. Today, they roam about barefooted in dirty and tattered clothes; looking pale, with flies pecking at their cracked lips and dried faces which are filled with rashes or ringworm. They sleep on worn-out mats in uncompleted

buildings. As many as fifteen can be found sleeping in one small room where there are no windows for cross-ventilation and the walls are so cracked, they look as though they might cave in (Dambuzu 2012). Once on the street, survival becomes difficult for them. Some have become victims of violence, while others have suffered via abduction, disease and hunger. Those who are unable to escape the street, resort to menial jobs like wheelbarrow pushing, touting and so on. They remain an untrained army available to anybody poised to foment trouble. Abdulqadir (2003) contends that there is today a conspiracy of silence between parents, authorities and society at large. For the parents, he says, this system provides an outlet for the excess of children at home. For the authorities, it is a relief to not have to budget for the education and welfare of approximately seven million *al-majiri* scholars. Despite the ignorance or disinterest of most citizens, the *Al-majiri* system in recent years has become a fertile ground for radicalizing children for misguided missions and hence a detriment to the country security, and its image

The Security Implications of Al-majiri Abuses

The abuse of the *al-majiri* has a number of implications for Nigeria as well as for the country's immediate neighbors. As noted earlier, the abuse of the children makes them extremely vulnerable to do-or-die politicians, desperate business men, and clerics with religious bigotry (Imobighe, 2012) promise better life opportunities. The system has over time become a breeding ground for militancy, criminality and terrorists (Loimeier, 2012), spawning youths who are significantly inclined to violence as a means of survival or making their voices heard.

Indeed, the case of *al-majiri* boy by name Usman Musa demonstrates the evil consequences of manipulation. On July 9, 2010, the 19-year-old was arrested by the police for attempting to assassinate the late emir of Kano with a gun during a Juma'at service at

the Kano Central Mosque. The late emir of Kano is one of the most prominent Muslim leaders in Nigeria. On interrogation, the *al-majiri* confessed that he was only doing the bidding of his *malam*, who also gave him the weapon and some charms. He added that a week earlier, he had deposited the sum of one million naira which he and his *malam* had robbed from an Igbo trader (Abuh, 2010). Furthermore, confessions of children arrested in connection with Boko Haram terrorism provide insights into the vulnerability and radicalization that lead them into violence. Some of the 35 children released in May 2013 confessed to be *al-majiri*. One of them admitted that they were paid about \$30 each by some politicians and rebel leaders to spy on troops, vandalize properties, maim and kill non-Muslims: "We were given a keg of petrol by our bosses to set some schools ablaze, which we did within Maiduguri and we were paid N5000" (Alli, 2013).

Another *al-majiri* "child soldier" said: We were taken to Damaturu. We watched out for the soldiers at their units and reported back to them Boko Haram. We were reporting when soldiers were at ease or enjoying themselves and when they were off guard, and we were paid for doing that (Alli, 2013). Conservative estimates put the number of people who have died in Boko Haram related conflicts at over 10,600 (Osumah, 2015). Most of the victims are innocent civilians, including men, women and children, who have been killed in such public places such as worship centers, schools, markets, and relaxation spots. A sizable number of security personnel have also been killed as a result of carefully planned and executed attacks on security formations such as police stations and soldier barracks. Media houses have also been bombed, as well as the U. N. office in Nigeria's federal capital territory, Abuja (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). But the Nigerian government and the Muslim community saw the *al-majiri* menace coming. A former permanent secretary in the Ministries of Water Resources, Science and Technology, and Education in Jigawa state had in 2010 alerted the nation to the danger of the Quranic students when he stated that “we are only grooming them as future terrorists not only in Nigeria, but in the whole of Africa” (Umenne, 2010). Indeed, various studies have also implicated the *al-majiri* system in several urban revolts in northern Nigeria (Agbiboa, 2013; Imobighe, 2012). However, 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. Muhammed Marwa, who led the Maitatsine uprising which claimed over 5000 lives, obviously the precursor to Boko Haram terrorism, had exploited the dwindling economic situation of northern Nigeria in the early 1980s by recruiting foot soldiers from the *al-majiri* 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 Maitatsines preached that killing was compulsory and they believed they would go to heaven if they killed *arnas* (infidels) (Elaigwu, 2005; Falola, 1998).

Al-majiri Education a solace to self-reliance and national development

To mitigate widespread insecurity in the sprawling north, effective and quality education is necessary. Since there is a deep-seated disdain for Western education in the region compare to other regions in the country, the *al-majiri* education system should be refurbished, and core subjects such as mathematics and English should be added to the curriculum together with relevant business and technical subjects. The Northern state-owned schools

should partner with National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and be made to assume this responsibility because it already conducts national examinations in these subjects.

The *malams* with knowledge of vocation(s) and other experts should be employed in teaching these vocational courses. The inclusion of the *malams*, whom the *al-majiri* and their parents are already used to, will make the families receptive. However, the Islamic scholars will have to go through the necessary retraining for curricular and pedagogic reasons. It is crucial that the incorporation of modern education into the *al-majiri* school system be preceded and followed through by public sensitization campaigns, preferably in local languages and involving *malams*, Muslim clerics, and local community leaders. All these will ensure that the policy does not suffer the same fate as the *al-majiri* model education program. Considering the premium on certificates in Nigerian society, it is important that graduates of the new system be given certificates by NABTEB after they have satisfied the requirements set out by the reform. The 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. Also, the monthly revenues allocation to all states in the federation, including those in the North, should be monitored by citizens and civil society groups to ensure that such revenues are put to good use. As noted, *al-majiri*-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. Though corruption is prevalent in all sectors and areas of Nigeria, it is worse in the northern region. Therefore, civil society groups and enlightened individuals everywhere in the country should scrutinize revenue allocation to the North to reduce diversion. But for pervasive corruption, the North should not be underdeveloped since its political

elite have dominated Nigerian leadership more than their counterparts in the South. Obviously, oil revenue allocations to the region have been largely mismanaged.

Furthermore, since many arrested *al-majiri* members of Boko Haram have confessed to being sponsored, the government should muster the required political will and bring sponsors of violence to book. Religious clerics who preach hatred and intolerance should be monitored and cautioned. If they persist in inciting the youth against the government and society, they should be tried openly and fairly in the courts and appropriate punishment meted out to them. This will serve as deterrence to others and so check the culture of impunity among conflict entrepreneurs. Lastly, the government needs to ensure that the Nigerian business environment is conducive to investment. Apart from pervasive insecurity, Nigeria suffers from abysmal infrastructural decay. For example, the electric power supply is epileptic. And a weak infrastructure serves as a disincentive to investors because it increases the cost of doing business in a country. Thus, when the government at all levels provides the necessary infrastructure and ensures an appreciable degree of political stability, investors will be attracted into the country, including the northern region. This will boost youth employment and alleviate poverty and ultimately increase the opportunity costs of rebellion.

Al-majiri Education and Vocational Education

Vocational Education according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2001) is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technical and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Marry al-majiri education with vocational education for al-majiri youth will afford them opportunity to learn

their religion education as want by their parent and at the same time get involve in one vocation of their choice that will lead them to productive citizen later in life. According to UNESCO's document, "Revised Recommendation concerning Vocational Education, Vocational Education is further understood to be:

- An integral part of general education;
- A means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work;
- An aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for a responsive citizenship;
- An instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development;
- A method of facilitating poverty alleviation.

Importance of Vocational Education to Al-majiri Youth

Vocational education is increasingly recognized to be central to both the origins of vocational development and challenges and to the prospects for successfully dealing with them (Alam, 2009). Decision makers at all levels in the northern part of the country and Nigeria as a whole, need timely, reliable access to knowledge generated by technical and vocational education to introduce rational policies that reflect a better global understanding of complex technical, economic, social, cultural and article issues concerning the northern youth and society at large.

Vocational education is a right and, as such, should receive priority in the allocation of both northern state resources and national resources. It should become very necessary not to only keep technical education bound to the role of manufacturing skilled manpower but also to economic development of the youth and global economy. Hallak (1990) argues that vocational education is also linked to human resources development and that this has an impact on more than just economic growth, but also an impact on the wider

development of individuals and societies. According to him, it contributes to:

- (a). Individual creativity, improved participation in the economic, social and cultural roles in society.
- (b). Improved understanding of an individual and their respect for others, thus promoting social cohesion and mutual understanding
- (c) Improvement in health and nutrition.
- (d). Improved chances of economic development.
- (e). Improved technological development.
- (f). Socio-cultural change.
- (g). Democracy and equality
- (h). Ecological development/quality of life (increasing people's awareness of their environments).

CONCLUSION

Inability of successive government in Nigeria both military and civilian to encourage and enforce al-majiri education as pose serious challenges to the security of this country because of the exposure of the so called youth to neglect and lack of basic needs of livelihood such as food, cloth, shelter and basic education from their parents and government due to abject poverty on the part of the parent and corruption and diversion of public fund on the part of the government. On the other hand, education is complete way of life if given to the citizens; it will help in proffering solutions to problems that affect them. Al-majiri education should be promoted and geared towards social, economic and above all youth employment which will lead to peaceful co-existence in the country. Therefore, all hand must be on deck to curb youth unrest and violent action which are regarded to be the fastest growing branch of organized crime in the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to resolve the problems enumerated earlier and improve the quality of citizens in this country the following are considered as recommendations.

- Government should provide basic education especially for the al-majiri youth and not only in literacy, but in vocational skills in order to promote self-reliance and self-sufficiency
- Enlightenment campaigns should be mounted in the media on the importance of welcoming al-majiri education by the youth, parents and even the malams
- Traditional and religious leaders need to put heads together on how to sensitize their youth on the importance of al-majiri education
- Parents should, as a matter of top priority, adequately socialize their children and assist them to acquire basic skills and vocation with which they can earn a living
- A collective and co-operative effort should be made by national and international community to curb the problem

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