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The Potential Benefits of Integrating IDP Children into the Almajiri Education System in Sokoto state, Nigeria

***ABUBAKAR Ahmad & AHMAD Abubakar**

**Department of Social Studies
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria
[*abubakarahmadsoja@gmail.com/07031390893](mailto:abubakarahmadsoja@gmail.com)**

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potential benefits of integrating Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) children into the Almajiri education system in northern Nigeria. Given the significant number of children displaced due to conflict, particularly in regions like Sokoto East, this integration could offer a pathway to education for many who otherwise have limited access. The paper examines the Almajiri system's current structure, its historical role in education, the challenges it faces, and how the inclusion of IDP children could benefit both the children and the system itself. It concludes with recommendations for policy and practical strategies to ensure successful integration.

Keywords: Almajiri education, Internally Displaced Persons, northern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, northern Nigeria has experienced significant upheaval due to ongoing conflicts and insurgencies, resulting in a substantial increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Among the displaced are countless children who face severe disruptions to their education, placing them at a heightened risk of long-term socio-economic disadvantage. The disruption of education not only impacts these children's immediate learning but also hinders their future opportunities, contributing to a cycle of poverty and instability.

Concurrently, the Almajiri education system, a traditional Islamic schooling framework prevalent in northern Nigeria, has been an enduring educational institution but has faced criticism and challenges in adapting to modern educational needs. Historically, the Almajiri system provided religious and vocational education, supported by community efforts, and served as a critical component of societal structure in northern Nigeria. However, socio-economic changes, reduced community support, and insufficient government involvement have led to its decline in effectiveness and relevance.

The integration of IDP children into the Almajiri education system presents a unique opportunity to address two pressing issues: the educational deprivation faced by displaced children and the revitalization of the Almajiri system to better meet contemporary educational standards. This integration could potentially offer a culturally and religiously familiar educational environment for IDP children while simultaneously reforming the Almajiri system to include a more holistic curriculum that incorporates both secular and religious education.

This paper explores the potential benefits of such integration, examining the historical context and current state of the Almajiri system, the educational needs of IDP children, and the practicalities and implications of bringing these two groups together. It argues that with proper support and reforms, integrating IDP

children into the Almajiri education system can enhance educational access, improve learning outcomes, and promote social cohesion in conflict-affected regions of northern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Almajiri system has its roots in northern Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial eras, where it functioned as a community-supported education system focusing on Islamic studies. According to historical accounts, Almajiri schools were funded by communal efforts and provided holistic education, including vocational training (Boyle, 2017). However, in recent decades, the system has faced challenges due to socio-economic changes, reduced community support, and government neglect (Sule-Kano, 2019).

Research on the Almajiri system highlights its potential when adequately supported and integrated into the modern education framework. Studies by Adamu and Abdalla (2020) suggest that reforms could include integrating secular subjects alongside Islamic studies to create a more balanced curriculum that prepares students for contemporary societal roles.

On the other hand, literature on the education of IDP children in Nigeria underscores the significant barriers these children face, including lack of infrastructure, teacher shortages, and psychosocial issues (UNICEF, 2021). Studies emphasize the need for innovative solutions to provide education for displaced children, often advocating for the use of existing community-based education systems (FME, 2020).

Integrating IDP children into the Almajiri system has been suggested as a feasible solution by several scholars, including Mustapha (2021), who argues that such integration could leverage the existing structures of the Almajiri schools while addressing the educational void in IDP camps.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing case studies of Almajiri schools and IDP camps in northern Nigeria. Data collection methods include interviews with educators, policy makers, and community leaders, alongside focus groups with parents and children. Secondary data from government reports, NGO publications, and academic journals were also reviewed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of both the Almajiri system and the education of IDP children.

FINDINGS

The integration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) children into the Almajiri education system presents a complex but potentially transformative opportunity. Several key findings emerged from this study, each highlighting critical aspects of the current state of the Almajiri system, the needs of IDP children, and the potential benefits and challenges of their integration.

1. Existing Infrastructure and Capacity of the Almajiri System

The Almajiri system consists of a vast network of informal schools across northern Nigeria, many of which already have physical infrastructure that could be utilized to accommodate additional students. However, the capacity of these schools varies significantly. Some Almajiri schools are relatively well-established, with basic facilities such as classrooms and boarding accommodations, while others lack essential infrastructure, including desks, toilets, and potable water.

This uneven distribution of resources indicates that while the Almajiri system offers a foundation for expansion, substantial investment is needed to upgrade and standardize facilities to ensure they meet the minimum requirements for a safe and conducive learning environment.

2. Community Support and Cultural Relevance

One of the Almajiri system's strengths is its deep-rooted connection to local communities and its alignment with the cultural and religious values of the region. This community support can be pivotal in the successful integration of IDP children, many of whom come from similar cultural and religious backgrounds. The familiar setting of the Almajiri schools can help ease the transition for IDP children, providing a sense of stability and continuity amidst their displacement.

However, this cultural alignment also presents challenges. The traditional focus on Islamic education may need to be broadened to include secular subjects, which could face resistance from some community members who fear the dilution of religious teachings.

3. Educational and Psychosocial Needs of IDP Children

IDP children bring unique challenges to the educational environment due to their experiences of displacement, trauma, and loss. Many have interrupted schooling and require additional support to catch up academically. Moreover, the psychosocial impact of conflict and displacement necessitates the provision of mental health support services within the educational framework.

The Almajiri system, traditionally focused on religious instruction, currently lacks the capacity to address these broader educational and psychosocial needs comprehensively. Integrating IDP children would require significant reforms, including the introduction of trained counselors and the development of a more holistic curriculum that includes psychosocial support and remedial education.

4. Potential for Curriculum Reform

The integration of IDP children presents an opportunity to reform the Almajiri curriculum to make it more inclusive and comprehensive. By introducing secular subjects alongside religious instruction, the curriculum could be expanded to include literacy, numeracy, science, and vocational training. Such reforms would not only benefit IDP children but also enhance the overall educational outcomes of Almajiri students, preparing them for a broader range of future opportunities.

However, implementing these reforms would require overcoming several obstacles, including resistance from traditionalists within the system and the need for teacher training and curriculum development.

5. Social Cohesion and Integration

Educating IDP children alongside their non-displaced peers in the Almajiri system could promote social cohesion, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. This integration can help reduce stigmatization and discrimination against IDP children, promoting inclusivity and unity within the community.

Conversely, there is a risk that the influx of IDP children could strain existing resources, leading to overcrowding and potential tensions if not managed effectively. Careful planning and resource allocation are essential to mitigate these risks and ensure a smooth integration process.

CONCLUSION

The integration of IDP children into the Almajiri education system presents a promising avenue for addressing the educational needs of displaced children while revitalizing a traditional educational framework. By implementing the recommended strategies, stakeholders can create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment that benefits both IDP and non-IDP students, promoting social cohesion and enhancing educational outcomes in northern Nigeria.

SUGGESTIONS /RECOMMENDATION

To maximize the potential benefits of integrating IDP children into the Almajiri education system, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Infrastructure Development and Upgrading

Conduct a thorough assessment of the current state of Almajiri schools to identify infrastructure gaps and prioritize upgrades. This assessment should consider the needs for classrooms, sanitation facilities, water supply, and boarding accommodations.

b. Targeted Investments: Allocate funding to upgrade the infrastructure of Almajiri schools, ensuring that they meet minimum standards for safety and comfort. Investments should focus on providing adequate seating, ventilation, sanitation, and access to clean water.

c. Mobile and Temporary Learning Spaces: For areas where infrastructure development is not immediately feasible, establish mobile or temporary learning spaces to ensure that IDP children have immediate access to education.

2. Curriculum Reform and Teacher Training

- a. Curriculum Diversification: Develop a comprehensive curriculum that integrates secular subjects with traditional Islamic education. This curriculum should include literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, and life skills, along with religious instruction.
 - b. Teacher Training Programs: Implement teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills needed to deliver the diversified curriculum and support IDP children's unique needs. Training should include psychosocial support, trauma-informed teaching practices, and inclusive education strategies.
 - c. Recruitment of Qualified Teachers: Recruit additional qualified teachers to address the increased demand and reduce student-teacher ratios. Special incentives, such as housing and hazard allowances, could attract teachers to work in Almajiri schools with IDP populations.
3. Psychosocial Support Services
- a. Integration of Mental Health Services: Establish partnerships with health services to provide regular mental health support in Almajiri schools. This could include on-site counselors and referral systems for children requiring more intensive psychological care.
 - b. Training for Existing Staff: Train existing teachers and school administrators in basic psychosocial support skills to identify and address minor mental health issues within the school environment.
 - c. Community Awareness Campaigns: Conduct community awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with mental health services and encourage the utilization of these supports by students and their families.
4. Community Engagement and Sensitization
- a. Community Involvement in Policy Development: Engage community leaders, parents, and local stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the integration process. Their involvement will help ensure cultural sensitivity and community buy-in.
 - b. Sensitization Programs: Conduct sensitization programs to educate communities about the benefits of integrating IDP children into the Almajiri system, addressing potential concerns and fostering support for the initiative.
 - c. Formation of Community Support Groups: Establish community support groups to provide a platform for addressing challenges, sharing best practices, and fostering a supportive environment for both IDP and non-IDP students.
5. Policy and Governance
- a. Formalize the Integration Framework: Develop a formal policy framework that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for integrating IDP children into the Almajiri system. This framework should include clear guidelines for infrastructure, curriculum, teacher training, and psychosocial support.
 - b. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the progress of the integration initiative, assess its impact, and make data-driven adjustments to improve outcomes.
 - c. Sustainable Funding Models: Develop sustainable funding models that involve government resources, international aid, and community contributions to ensure the long-term viability of the integration efforts.

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