

Evolution of Almajirai Pupils' Literacy and Numeracy: Better Education Service Delivery for All Initiative in Kontagora, Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study assessed the influence of Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) in promoting literacy and numeracy among Almajirai pupils to reduce the number of out-of-school children on the Northern Nigeria streets. The study selected 10 schools as a sample from the available Almajirai schools that sat for a COHORT 1 examination in December 2020, which was conducted and supervised by the NSUBEB in Kontagora. A total of 1,136 Almajirai pupils participated and comprised 862 males and 274 females, and their 30 facilitators. Two standardized instruments were applied: a facilitators' questionnaire and a COHORT 1 Examination paper for Almajirai pupils. 3 research questions and 2 hypotheses were answered and tested, respectively. The result of the descriptive and inferential statistics on the data showed a significant difference in teaching Almajirai pupils numeracy and literacy. The researchers recommended that relevant teaching aids be procured, the facilitators' salaries be improved, and the cultural orientation of Almajirai pupils should be redesigned.*

Keywords - Almajirai pupils, Literacy, Numeracy, Service delivery, Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a right of every citizen in Nigeria, which is why 9 years of basic education is compulsory for every Nigerian child, irrespective of religion or cultural background. Education in Nigeria, as an indispensable tool and a process of systematic training and instruction, has been designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities, which provides every individual with the opportunity to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of the society (Ibrahim, 2015). This involves all round development of the individual in the area of social, moral and intellectual development (Osakwe, 2009). Universally, there have been pronouncements and declarations on the need to have all children educated, as reflected in the Education For All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focusing on educating all children. As a signatory to these declarations, Nigeria has about 13.5 million out-of-school children (Muhammad, 2019). There existed at the moment young adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills who have little hope of ever joining the formal workforce. Such young adults comprise the largest group of over 13 million Almajirai who formed the out-of-school children in Nigeria (Muhammad, 2019).

The out-of-school children in the country and, by implication, the Almajirai pose a fundamental challenge to attaining the notable international convention and protocols (Odumosu et al., 2013). Almajirai is pictured as a young boy sent by his parents or guardian from a particular community to a village or city, usually far apart, in search of Qur'anic knowledge. At the same time, Almajirci is the act of being Almajirai (Muhammad, 2019). Almajirai education intervention is an enrolment drive-free in which the main requirement is to sensitize the affected school or community for integration and modeling.



Figure 1. Out-of-School Children (Fieldwork 2024)

In view of the drive, the Federal Government of Nigeria made the formal declaration in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (FGN, 2004; 2008; 2014) that education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; as well as an instrument for national development and social change. By this pronouncement, it implies that basic education is compulsory.

The Goals of such Basic Education, as outlined in the educational policy, include:

- a) Provides the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement.
- b) It develops patriotic young people who are equipped to contribute to social development and perform their civil responsibilities.
- c) Inculcates values and raises morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour.
- d) Inspires national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socioeconomic background.
- e) Provides opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in society within the limit of the child's capability.

The above basic education goals show that education is a right, not a privilege; an Almajirai has the right to be educated, possibly through integration with a basic education programme to promote the literacy and numeracy of Almajirai. Several educational interventions have taken place in Nigeria in most of the six geopolitical zones in the country in order to promote literacy and numeracy in pupils and increase their retention capability. Among the educational intervention reforms in the country is the Ife six-year primary project launched in 1970. The programme covering the South Western States used the mother tongue as a medium for instruction or education for at least the first twelve years of the child's life. As posited by psychologists, the first twelve years are the most formative in a child's life; hence, mother tongue education for the child should be seen as a right, and its refusal should be viewed as a denial of the child's fundamental human right.

The major aim of formal education is to help the child develop his natural abilities by creating a necessary environment that will stimulate challenge and involve him/her physically, socially, intellectually and emotionally in the art of learning and doing. The school's job is to facilitate learning by creating a conducive environment for the child to discover things for himself or herself. To this end, the objective of primary education, for instance, is to develop the whole child through various activities. Yoruba was used as a medium of instruction, and English was taught as a second language from primary one to six in the Ife project.

Jerome Brunner emphasized the importance of the mother tongue for a child's development when he said:

"Man has the capability to receive and translate knowledge in a linguistic form. This permits man to convert knowledge into a form that renders it highly transformable. Language not only permits an enormous condensation of knowledge but permits us to turn the knowledge into hypothetical forms so that we may consider alternative without having to act them in the form of trial and error."

According to Fafunwa (1989), children were involved in practical farming, ceremonies, rituals, storytelling, local history, poetry, proverbs, the environment (local geography, plants and animals) drumming, acrobatics, and dancing, which indeed constituted indigenous education in the form of integrated experience in that it combined physical and intellectual training with character building. The aim, the content and indeed the method of indigenous education are interwoven; they were not divided into separate compartments as is in the case with the western education system, and of course, the medium of education was the child's mother tongue throughout. It is also universally agreed that a child learns best in his or her mother tongue. Yet, of all the continents and people of the world, it is only in Africa and other few ex-colonial countries that formal education is offered in a foreign language to the child.

The Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) past project is another available educational intervention. The project was launched in collaboration with the Nigerian Ministry of Education and affiliated agencies in the Northern Nigerian States of Katsina and Zamfara; FHI 360 implemented the RANA pilot project funded by the Department for International Development through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The project aimed to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy instruction for girls and boys in primary grades 1-3 in approximately 200 schools in the two states. These schools and states formed a subset of UNICEF's Girls Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3), the impact of which RANA expects to enhance by using gender-sensitive methodologies in four major components of the education system: teacher professional development, teaching and learning materials, involved communities and sustainable government ownership (FHI 360, 2015)

Ogara (2021) conceived conventional education as an educational system that involves physical interaction between students and their teachers within the confines of a school and under the roof of a classroom. In such a conventional educational setting, there is face-to-face live interaction between learners and instructors who are physically present in the same place. Almajirai education, according to Sunday et al. (2020), in contrast, is a movement to acquire Qur'anic knowledge with no laid down channel or procedure for admission (entry) except the unconventional way of handing over one's ward to the supposed instructor known as Malam.

A lot of differences exist between Almajirai education and conventional education. Just as Sunday et al. (2020) reveal in their study, in the Almajirai system of education, there is no classroom required, no fixed timetable, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient teachers (Malam) who are semiliterate, inadequate commitment or support, no salary structure, no fixed examination, no age barrier, no supervision required, no good methodology of instruction, and no design rules for discipline. In the Conventional Western system of education, however, it is supervised by designated officials, the classroom is required for the teaching and learning, instructional materials are required, there is financial support from the government, there is a salary structure, there is an age factor consideration before entry, there is normal or approved way of discipline, it is pre-determined and pre-planned, it is time-bound and regulated by routine, it follows the systematic curriculum and qualified teachers impart it.

A. Statement of the Problem

Almajirai Education in Nigeria has serious implications for an individual's later development. Almajirai Education faces a lot of challenges and disgrace, such as lack of good food or nutrition, shelter, good water supply, constant flogging, hawking, begging and above all, lack of access to basic education. Almajirai is seen daily carrying plastic bowls, dressed in tattered clothes and mostly without shoes, begging for "kudin tawadiya", the ink they would use to write on their slate called "Allo" in Hausa. With their future bleak, Almajirai constitutes the highest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, which is dominantly found in the Northern part of the country. They have always been prone to be used by the ritualists, cultists and politicians as thugs to perpetuate their evil acts. However, they have the right to be integrated into basic education programmes in the country. Consequent upon this, this article examined the impact of Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) in promoting literacy and numeracy among Almajirai pupils in Kontagora, Niger State.

II. METHODS

The researchers adopted a quasi-experimental design that permitted the assessment of the influence of Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) in promoting literacy and numeracy among Almajirai pupils in Kontagora local government of Niger state. The research population targeted for the study comprised 54 registered Almajirai Schools under the BESDA programme in Kontagora local government of Niger State. 10 Schools were randomly selected from the 54 registered Almajirai Schools that sat for the cohort 1 examination in December 2020. A total of 1,136 Almajirai from the selected schools comprising 862 males and 274 females exposed to BESDA and the examination were involved in the study and their 30 facilitators.

A. Instrument

The instruments used for data collection in the study include the results obtained by Niger State Universal Basic Education Board, Minna (NSUBEB) Better Education Service Delivery For All (BESDA) Broad sheet for cohort 1 examination, year 2020, and a questionnaire for the facilitators that solicited respondents bio-data in its section A while section B reflected on five (5) themes; impact of numeracy and literacy, access to basic education, enrolment, teaching aids and allowances. The response options on the items under each theme were in accordance with the 4-point Likert scale format of strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Having pilot-tested the questionnaire on an equivalent but small size, after validation through experts who offered their in-depth plausible ideas, the data gathered were set for reliability test with a Guttman split-half, which yielded a 0.79 index. The index assured the researchers that the instrument would measure the expected variables in the study. The questionnaire was administered to the facilitators of BESDA while the cohort1 examination was offered by the Almajirai exposed to BESDA in six (6) clusters with a control. The following pictures are the specimen class sessions during the study.



Figure 2. Specimen Class Session (field work 2024)

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1: What is the impact of teaching Almajirai pupils' numeracy and literacy?

Table 1. Impact of Teaching Almajirai Numeracy and Literacy

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Decision
Impact					
1. Teaching Almajirai pupils numeracy and literacy is important.	23(76.7)	7(23.3)	-	-	Disagreed
2. Almajirai pupils readily accept western education.	-	1(3.3)	21(70.0)	8(26.7)	Agreed
3. Society benefits most if Almajirai learn numeracy and literacy.	1(3.3)	1(3.3)	16(53.3)	12(40.0)	Agreed
4. The immediate society contributes immensely to the education of the Almajirai pupils.	4(13.3)	10(33.3)	10(33.3)	6(20.0)	Agreed
5. Numeracy and literacy serve as a basis for the Almajirai to further their education.	1(3.3)	2(6.7)	15(50.0)	12(40.0)	Agreed
Access					
6. Almajirai have full access to western education.	4(13.3)	6(20.0)	15(50.0)	5(16.7)	Agreed
7. Standard classes are available in the Almajirai schools.	7(23.3)	15(50.0)	6(20.0)	2(6.7)	Disagreed
8. Basic education is compulsory for Almajiri pupils.	1(3.3)	2(6.7)	14(46.7)	13(43.3)	Agreed
9. BESDA programme helps to reduce the number of out-of-school children.	1(3.3)	1(3.3)	14(46.7)	14(46.7)	Agreed
10. The absence of schools and teachers denies Almajirai access to western education in certain localities.	2(6.7)	1(3.3)	10(33.3)	17(56.7)	Agreed
Teaching Aids					
16. The government should provide relevant teaching aids to Almajirai schools.	1(3.3)	-	19(63.3)	10(33.3)	Agreed
17. Instructional materials can effectively enhance the understanding of Almajirai pupils.	1(3.3)	-	13(43.3)	16(53.3)	Agreed
18. Almajirai schools usually procure relevant and adequate learning materials for the schools.	3(10.0)	5(16.7)	16(53.3)	6(20.0)	Agreed
19. The facilitators use local materials as teaching aids.	2(6.7)	1(3.3)	15(50.0)	12(40.0)	Agreed
20. Instructional materials help the Almajirai to retain information/knowledge in their brain longer.	1(3.3)	1(3.3)	13(43.3)	15(50.0)	Agreed

It is shown in Table 1 that the respondents disagreed on exposing Almajirai to Numeracy and literacy (30/100%). However, there existed an agreement on acceptance of western education readily (29/96. 7%);

society benefits most with Almajirai learning of numeracy and literacy 28/93.3%). The immediate society contributed to Almajirai pupils' education (16/53.3%), and numeracy and literacy were the basis for Almajirai to further their education (27/90.0%).

RQ 2: How adequate are relevant teaching aids fully provided to Almajirai schools for effective teaching and learning?

Table 1 reveals that all the respondents agreed that the teaching aids, government are responsible for providing relevant teaching aids to Almajirai schools (29/96.6%); instructional materials can effectively enhance the understanding of concepts taught to Almajirai pupils (29/96.6%); Almajirai schools usually produced relevant and adequate learning materials as teaching aids (27/90.0%) and instructional materials helped Almajirai to retain information/knowledge in their brain longer (28/93.3%).

RH 1: There is no significant difference in teaching Almajirai Pupils numeracy and literacy.

Table 2. ANOVA on the impact of teaching Almajirai Pupils Numeracy and Literacy

(a) ANOVA by school

Source of	Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Kimiya	Between Groups	161552.319	6	26930.387 667.67	40.359	.000
	Within Groups	732658.772	1098			
	Groups Total	894241.091	1104			
	Total					
Karatu	Between Groups	17403.036	6	29005.339 590.824	49.093	.000
	Within Groups	648724.638	1098			
	Groups Total	822756.673	1104			
	Total					
Lissafi	Between Groups	163059.730	6	27176622 820.002	33.142	.000
	Within Groups	900362.717	1098			
	Groups Total	1063422.447	1104			
	Total					

Table 2(a) shows a significant difference in the impact of teaching Almajirai Pupils numeracy and literacy. According to schools on Kimiya, $F_{(6,1098)} = 40.359$ at $\alpha = .000$; on karatu, $F_{(6,1098)} = 49.093$ at $\alpha = .000$ and on Lissafi, $F_{(6,1098)} = 33.142$ at $\alpha = .000$ respectively. The hypothesis was, therefore, rejected.

(b) ANOVA by sex

Source of	Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig
Kimiya	Between Groups	1527.655	1	1527.655 809.350	1.888	.170
	Within Groups	892713.437	1103			
	Groups Total	894241.091	1104			
	Total					
Karatu	Between Groups	3650.182	1	3650.182 742.617	4.915	.023
	Within Groups	819106.492	1103			
	Groups Total	82256673	1104			
	Total					
Lissafi	Between	161.256	1	161.256	.167	.683

	Groups Within Groups Total	106361.191 10634221.447	1103 1104	163.972		
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Table 2(b) on sex shows no significant difference in the impact of teaching numeracy and literacy between male and female Almajirai pupils. Kimaya, $F_{(1,1103)} = 1.888$ at $\alpha = .170$, and Lissafi, $F_{(1,1103)} = .167$ at $\alpha = .683$) but a significant difference existed on karatu, $F_{(1,1103)} = 4.915$ at $\alpha = .023$). While Kimya and Lissafi accepted the hypothesis, it was rejected by Karatu.

It is found in this study that teaching Almajirai pupils numeracy and literacy impacted their education and possibly provided an opportunity to access and enrolment into public Western basic education with adequate and relevant teaching aids that boost retention of concepts learned. As contained in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (FGN; 2004, 2008 and 2014), education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background or any peculiar individual challenges, the pronouncement by the government in the National Policy of Education (NPE) therefore makes basic education compulsory. It shall be free, universal, and qualitative, and Almajirai pupils will benefit equally. This became imperative as Muhammad et al. (2013) in their study had proposed that the Millennium Development Goal (MDGS) have eight (8) cardinal goals, one of which is meant to "Achieve universal primary education which assures and ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling".

A difference existed in the style adopted in facilitating Almajirai pupils on numeracy and literacy in their various locations. Though expected, only one (Nagwamatse) school showed little strength on Kimiya over the control, and three others (Nagwamatse, kudu and yamma) displayed a better performance on Karatu over the control. In contrast, three other schools (magajiya, kudu and yamma) performed better than the control on Lissafi. This might be due to the methodology effect of the facilitators or the orientation of the Almajirai, whose minds have been polluted by embracing Western education. As pointed out by Odumosu et al. (2013), Almajirai are known to be sent out to a far place from their homeland in search of Qur'anic knowledge only, so one cannot rule out the possible conflict associated with a change of environment and strange association and instruction. The facilities used as instructional materials and methodologies would have to be thoroughly tailored to make the learners feel at home if adequate integration is the aim, as in the views of Muhammad (2020). This requires that a public enlightenment campaign be conducted in order to sensitize and convince the general public of the importance of integration of Almajirai education into Western education.

It was found that both male and female Almajirai pupils did not do better altogether in Kimiya and Lissafi when compared with the control. This could result from the culture that hinders free interaction between males and females in a social setting. Thus, the pupils could not acculturate cross-fertilization of ideas to boost their learning in the areas considered. Islam is against the mingling between males and females but upholds gender segregation. The objective of the restrictions is to keep such interaction at a modest level. According to Islamic teaching, men are not permitted to touch any part of the body of a woman, whether she is a Muslim or non-Muslim. Others have ruled that Muslim men and women who are not immediate relatives may not, for instance, socialize to exchange pleasantries with one another with a handshake and any form of physical contact (Khalid, 2002).

In Qur'an, surah 33 (Al-Ahzab), ayat 59, The Almighty Allah says: O prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves (part) of their outer garments. That is more suitable for them to be known and not be abused, and ever is Allah forgiving and merciful. It is on the premise of such verses that the Allarammas and Malams did not allow free mingling between male and female students in the class during the BESDA classroom interaction, and that was why male students (Almajirai) and female students (Almajira) were separated in different classes.

IV. CONCLUSION

In view of all the findings, it was found in this study that there was a significant difference in teaching Almajirai pupils regarding school and sex on the areas considered. However, there was not a significant difference in access and teaching aids. This could be due to the working tool (i.e. curriculum) adopted by BESDA in addition to implementation, probably because it was far above the level of the pupils. Without adequate orientation on the part of the body coordinating BESDA, the facilitators may not do justice to the objectives on which the project was programmed. If thorough monitoring of the funds released by the international communities is observed, facilitators will be encouraged to teach. The future of Almajirai pupils could be bright, thereby paving the way for their integration into the compulsory basic education programme of the government, concomitantly indirectly helping to reduce the association of Alimajirai to all forms of vices in society.

The following recommendations were proposed for consideration in the study:

1. BESDA should provide Almajirai Schools with relevant and adequate/sufficient teaching aids for facilitators to use in all the schools.
2. BESDA should reexamine their curriculum in a bid to ensure it is actually comprehensible by the level of the Almajirai pupils and the facilitators involved.
3. Organizers of BESDA should provide facilitators with a course implementation workshop to help them adopt similar methodologies in their activities.
4. The cultural orientation of Almajirai pupils should be redesigned so that they can embrace Western education with a free/liberal mind alongside interaction with identified and laid down guides by the adults.
5. A public enlightenment campaign should be conducted in order to sensitize and convince the general public of the importance of integration of Almajirai education into Western education.

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