REFORMATION OF THE ALMAJIRI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA THROUGH THE MAQASHID AL-SHARI’AH PARADIGM

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Abstrak


Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Almajiri, Maqasid as-Shari'ah, Reformasi, Nigeria
Abstract

The Almajiri phenomenon is one of the pandemic matters affecting Muslims in the North, specifically Nigeria as a nation. It depicts a condition whereby children of school age, ostensibly enrolled to study under Mallams, roam about the streets in tattered clothes, begging, scavenging, and doing all sorts of odd jobs. While Islam places a high premium on education, emerging issues about the Almajiri system of education have heightened the need to re-examine the concept from the perspective of the essence, purpose, goal, and objective of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari’ah). To this extent, the practice of the Almajiri system of education as obtainable in Nigeria should be subjected to the balance of Maqasid as-Shari’ah to ascertain its acceptability and fecundity. This paper therefore attempts to assess and appraise the Almajiri educational system in Nigeria to reform its operation and recommend steps towards attaining the overall educational goals of Islam as enshrined in the Shari’ah. The researcher adopts both historical and narrative research methods in the work. This article finds a strong correlation between the Almajiri system of education and Maqasid as-Shari’ah. The research concludes that there is a dire need for Nigerian Muslims to adopt the Maqasid as-Shari’ah as the guiding principle for the reformation and operation of the Almajiri educational system, particularly in the northern part of the country.

Keywords: The Almajiri Education, Maqasid as-Shari’ah, Reformation, Nigeria

A. INTRODUCTION

The word The Almajiri emanated from the Arabic word “Al-Muhajirin” which came as a result of Prophet Muhammad’s migration from Makkah to Medinah. From the Islamic perspective, the word was first used by the Prophet (SAW) to indicate those of his companions who migrated with him for the sake of Islam from Mecca to Medina, (Muhajirun). However, the name Muhajirun later came to refer to those knowledge seekers who move from one place to another in search of knowledge, like the Qur’anic school teacher and his pupils. In this vein, the Prophet is quoted as having said:

عن أنس رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم.

“The search for knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, male and female” (Al-Tirmidhi, 1980).
عن أبي هريرة -رضي الله عنه- قال: قال رسول الله -صلى الله عليه وسلم-: مَن سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فيه عِلْمًا، سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ له به طَرِيقًا إلى الجَنَّةِ.

“He who seeks a path in search for knowledge, Allah eases for him a path towards Jannah through it” (Al-Tirmidhi, 1980).

عن عثمان بن عفان -رضي الله عنه- قال: قال رسول الله -صلى الله عليه وسلم-:

خَيْرُكُمْ مَن تَعَلَّمَ القُرْآنَ وعَلَّمَهُ.

“The best of you is he who understands the Qur’an and teaches it” (Al-Bukhārī, 1981).

In another tradition, he (SAW) is reported to have said:

“Go in search of knowledge even to China” (Wali”al-Din, 1997).

The above sayings of the Prophet (SAW) do not discriminate against age, gender, or status; rather, they confirm that the search for knowledge, as far as Islam is concerned, knows no geographical, social, or religious boundary. To corroborate this Islamic stand on seeking knowledge, the Prophet also said:

“Wisdom (knowledge) is the lost property of the believer, wherever he has it, he grabs it.” (Al-Tirmidhi, 1980).

These and many other similar Prophetic traditions, no doubt, propelled Muslims of all ages to go in search of knowledge. For instance, particularly in the northern part of Nigeria, children sent from their homes and entrusted into the care of Islamic teachers to learn Islamic studies are referred to as the Almajiri. Therefore, the Almajiri system of education in Nigeria dates back to the 11th century as a result of the involvement of the Borno rulers in Qur’anic literacy. Seven hundred years later, the Sokoto Caliphate was founded principally through an Islamic revolution and ran a Qur’anic learning system similar to that of the Kanem-Borno empire, which over time came to be known as the Almajiri system of education.

An objective investigation and analysis of the laws and tenets of the religion of Islam, from a vantage position, will not only bring to the fore, the necessity of its legislation for human metaphysical fecundity but also give credence to its relevance in ensuring the general mundane well-being of the
entire mankind (Ar-Raysuni, 2005). To this extent, the Islamic laws (Shari’ah) make more sense when the rationales behind their provisions guide and form the basis for Muslims’ endeavors, such as the educational system. Islam places a high premium on seeking knowledge; in fact, it is the right of every child; and a key to transforming his/her life and making him/her a responsible member of society. Without education, children are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and play productive roles in society. Therefore, it is pertinent to subject the Almajiri educational system in Nigeria to socio-religious assessment to ensure its reformation and conformity with the Maqasid as-Shari’ah. This, no doubt, will go a long way toward achieving the goals of education in Islam.

B. RESEARCH METHOD
The study is qualitative in nature and employs a library study approach model as the main research method. This involves collecting various relevant sources in documentation as well as secondary sources in the form of books, journals, ebooks, articles, websites, and others (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The primary sources of information are local surveys, annual reports, documentation, reports, and raw data on Almajiri from the Ministry of Education, Central Statistical Offices, and Nongovernmental organizations while the secondary resources are articles from national and international journals especially congruent with Maqasid al-Shari’ah, and Internet. Once collected, the data is processed by reducing, presenting, and analyzing the discussion using content analysis techniques, and finally, verifiable conclusions are drawn so that they can be accounted for.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Reality of Almajiri in Nigeria

The Almajiri is a Hausa word meaning immigrant children in search of Qur’anic education. The Qur’anic School is the pre-primary and primary level of traditional Islamic education. It is an institution whose origin can be traced to the prophetic period of Islamic education. Historians have traced the Almajiri system of education to the beginning of the 11th Century, largely
promoted by leading lights of Islam who were determined to spread Islamic knowledge and learning, long before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of British Nigeria.

The *Almajiri* system as an education enterprise recorded unprecedented success in the pre-colonial epoch in Northern Nigeria. Apart from the free tuition given to the *Mallam* (teacher), which enables him to provide for the pupils whose population may be as large as the teacher can accommodate, he can cater for feeding and accommodation for his wards free of charge with the support of the community and some well-meaning members of society. The fortunes of the *Almajiri* system, however, suffered setbacks when the British colonialists considered it religious education which should not be promoted with state funds; though the same state funds were later used to propagate Christianity. With the lack of funds to finance the scheme, the whole project began to collapse; while the teachers became helpless, their pupils now turned into beggars (Shittu & Olaofe, 2015). Meanwhile, the government has made efforts to refurbish the system through various organs, such as the National Programme for Nomadic and the National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCWD), so that over 10 million indigent children can be rehabilitated and provided with formal education (Ibid.).

In 2013, Goodluck Jonathan’s administration established a few Almajiri Model Boarding Schools, the first being Almajiri Model Boarding School in Gaggi, Sokoto state, to integrate the *Almajiri* system into the mainstream educational system in the country. In his inaugural speech, President Jonathan stated that “our administration believes that the time has come for the nation to build on the moral foundations of the traditional system by providing the *Almajiri* with conventional knowledge and skills that will enable them to fully realize their creative and productive potential.” Although the program was meant to remove the *Almajiri* from the streets, less than five percent were captured (Abaro, 2016).

The *Almajiris* are found mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria. They are usually between the ages of seven to fifteen. Originally, the idea was for these children to be sent out of their homes to learn Qur’anic education traditionally under the care of a *Mallam* (Qur’an teacher). However, this system changed, and the children are now left to wander about the streets
and beg for alms to sustain themselves and even their mallams (Obioha, 2009; ThinkQuest, 2010). They neither receive Islamic education nor Western education. The practice of the Almajiri system has been found to lead to child abuse in the sense that these children are exposed to laborious work at a tender age (between 6 to 17 years). The system has also deprived the affected children’s necessities of life and plunged them into poverty and its attendant evils as they grow up without any skill. They are a common sight in the Northern states, including Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Gombe, Kaduna, Plateau, and Sokoto. According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Education in 2009, Kano State alone harbors 1.6 million Almajiris in some 26,000 Madrasas (Qur’an study centers). Sokoto, Kaduna, Niger, and Borno states are home to approximately 1.1 million, 824,200, 580,000, and 389,000 of the Almajiri pupils, respectively.

According to Abdullahi (2011), Nigeria’s Almajiri has been denied every single right enshrined in the Child Rights Convention. Undoubtedly, they are products of a failed education system and impoverished homes. They are deserted or are turned out of their parents' homes as early in life as age five or six, to live with and memorize the Quran from teachers in local Madrasas. Also called Makaranta Alo (Arabic schools), the Madrasas are mostly dilapidated “dormitories” constructed from rotten corrugated roofing sheets or inferior bricks. The pupils’ learning materials are torn fragments of paper with portions of the Qur’an or small wooden slates known in the Hausa dialect as “Alo” used to write down verses of the Qur’an to be memorized.

Maqashid al-Shari’ah and its Relevance to the Almajiri Educational System in Nigeria

Maqashid al-Shari’ah consists of two words: “Maqashid” and “Shari’ah”. Term Maqashid (Singular maqsad) etymologically can mean a purpose, objective, principle, intent, and goal. While Shari’ah can mean rules or religious rules. Thus, etymologically, Maqashid al-Shari’ah simply means the objective of religious rules. Auda defined Maqashid al-Shari’ah with a principle arranged to answer the form of the question of “why” related to rules stated by religion mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah to fulfill all interests of humans either in the form of opening the means of Maslabah and closing the means of mafsadah. In other words, Shari’ah is predicated on the benefits of
the individual and the community and is designed to facilitate the improvement and perfection of the conditions of human life on earth. Therefore, it is clear that Maqashid al-Shari’ah is an esoteric knowledge in ushul fiqh or Islamic law that tries to search for the objective or meaning of rules stated in the Qur’an and Sunnah so that all human needs can be well fulfilled.

It should be emphasized that other Muslim scholars defined maqāṣid to be a method or foundation for formulating the result of law determination. For example, Al-Ghazali succeeded in formulating the five pillars of law determination in the Islamic world. These five pillars can also be called the five human rights: preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. For Al-Ghazali, Usul Fiqh should guarantee the continuation of these five pillars because essentially Shari’ah has the objective of ensuring their continuation. In addition, Imam Ibn Taymiyah developed the method of Maqashid al-Shari’ah by expanding its purposes to wider targets such as securing and ensuring the fulfillment of contracts, preserving the bond of brotherhood, respecting the rights of neighbors, honesty, trust, and the purity of morals.

Coincidentally, Auda developed the concept of Maqashid al-Shari’ah for a bigger objective, such as being applicable in the Islamic education system. According to him, Shari’ah should be applied in Islamic education to explicitly emphasize on guarding the mind in essence guarding what has been there. Auda called this developing human resources. Therefore, the mission and vision of the Islamic education system have to be able to develop human resources to an optimum level, so that they can obtain an open, broad, dialogic, and tolerant horizon of thinking.

Maqashid al-Shari’ah is relevant to The Almajiri education in Nigeria in that it can be the basis for reforming educational practices such as those found in the Almajiri system. Maqashid al-Shari’ah encompasses five overarching principles that address the emergent issues of the Almajiri system (Ghofur 233):
**Figure 1.** Interplay of *Maqashid al-Shari`ah* with the Almajiri Educational System

**Imperative of *Maqashid al-Shari`ah in the Almajiri* Educational System**

1. **Preservation of Religion (Hifz al-Din) in The Almajiri Education**

Preservation of religion (*Hifz al-Din*) in the *Almajiri* education focuses on nurturing and strengthening the religious beliefs and practices of the *Almajirai* within the *Almajiri* education system. Here are some strategies to achieve this objective:

- Qur’anic Memorization: Emphasis should be placed on the memorization and recitation of the Quran as a central aspect of the *Almajiri* education. The teacher should provide structured Qur’anic learning programs that systematically guide students through memorization, *Tajwid* (proper recitation), and understanding of the Qur’anic verses.
Islamic Studies Curriculum: The government should develop a comprehensive Islamic studies curriculum that covers various aspects of Islamic faith, including theology, jurisprudence, ethics, and spirituality. They should also ensure that the curriculum is age-appropriate, engaging, and relevant to the daily lives of the almajirai.

Character Development: The government should incorporate teachings on moral values, ethical behaviour, and character development into the educational curriculum. Students should be encouraged to imbibe Islamic virtues such as honesty, compassion, humility, and generosity in their interactions with others.

Spiritual Guidance: Mentorship and spiritual guidance from qualified Islamic scholars (mallams) who can serve as role models and mentors for the almajirai should be provided. The Mallams should also offer regular religious lectures, sermons, and counseling sessions to address spiritual needs and concerns.

Integration of Faith into Daily Life: Opportunities should be created for students to apply their religious knowledge and beliefs in practical ways in their daily lives. They should be encouraged to participate in communal prayers, Islamic rituals, community service projects, and other religious activities that reinforce their faith.

Cultivating a Positive Learning Environment: Efforts should be made to foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment that respects and celebrates Islamic values and practices. Promote inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual respect among students, regardless of their backgrounds or differences (Mohammed, et al, 2023)

2. Preservation of Intellect (Hifz al-Aql) in the Almajiri Education

Preservation of Intellect (Hifz al-Aql) in Almajiri education focuses on nurturing intellectual development, critical thinking skills, and knowledge acquisition among al-majirai within the Almajiri education system. Here are strategies to achieve this:

Wholistic Curriculum: The government must develop a curriculum that encompasses not only Islamic studies and Qur’anic memorization but also academic subjects such as mathematics,
science, language arts, and social studies. They should also provide a well-rounded education that stimulates intellectual curiosity and fosters a thirst for knowledge.

- Experiential Learning: The Mallams should incorporate hands-on, experiential learning activities that engage students actively in the learning process. They should also use experiments, projects, field trips, and interactive discussions to deepen understanding and encourage critical thinking.

- Problem-Solving Skills: The Mallams should emphasize problem-solving skills and analytical thinking in the curriculum. They should also present students with real-life scenarios, case studies, and challenges that require them to analyze, evaluate, and propose solutions using logical reasoning and creativity.

- Technology Integration: The Mallams should integrate technology into the educational experience to enhance learning opportunities and digital literacy skills. They should also provide access to computers, tablets, educational software, and internet resources that support research, collaboration, and self-directed learning.

- Literacy and Numeracy: Literacy and numeracy skills development should be prioritized alongside Qur’anic memorization and Islamic studies. The Mallams should also implement structured literacy programs that teach reading, writing and comprehension skills as well as numeracy programs that build mathematical proficiency.

- Critical Inquiry: The Mallams should encourage students to ask questions, explore diverse perspectives, and engage in critical inquiry. They should also teach them how to evaluate information critically, distinguish fact from opinion, and make informed decisions based on evidence and reason.

- Teacher Training: Professional development opportunities should be created for teachers to enhance their instructional practices and pedagogical approaches. The government should equip them with strategies for promoting intellectual development, facilitating inquiry-based learning, and supporting diverse learning needs (Umar, 2021).
3. Preservation of Lineage (*Hifz al-Nasl*) in the *Almajiri* Education

Preservation of Lineage (*Hifz al-Nasl*) in the *Almajiri* education focuses on safeguarding the family structure, promoting family values, and ensuring the continuity and stability of future generations within the *Almajiri* education system. Here are strategies to achieve this as maintained by Adamu (2020):

- **Family Engagement:** *Almajiri* education should be made to foster strong partnerships with families by involving parents, guardians, and extended family members in the educational process. It should also provide opportunities for family participation in school activities, parent-teacher conferences, and community events to strengthen familial bonds and support students' academic and emotional well-being.

- **Cultural and Heritage Education:** *Almajiri* education should be made to incorporate teachings on family values, cultural heritage, and traditions into the curriculum. This is done by teaching students about the importance of family ties, respect for elders, and the role of family in Islamic society, instilling pride in their lineage and heritage.

- **Parenting Education:** Parenting education programs and workshops that provide guidance and support to parents in raising and nurturing their children should be offered. Doing this will provide resources on positive parenting practices, child development, communication skills, and conflict resolution to empower parents to create supportive and nurturing family environments.

- **Marriage and Family Life Education:** *Almajiri* education should be made to integrate teachings on marriage, family life, and parenting into the curriculum to prepare students for their future roles and responsibilities as spouses, parents, and members of the community. The curriculum should cover topics such as marital relationships, child-rearing practices, family finances, and conflict resolution strategies to promote healthy and stable family dynamics.

- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Adopt an interdisciplinary approach that integrates teachings on lineage, family, and social relationships across various subject areas, including Islamic studies, social studies, and
language arts. Explore historical narratives, literature, and cultural artifacts that celebrate family heritage and lineage, fostering a sense of belonging and identity among students.

- Community Support Services: Collaborate with community organizations, religious institutions, and social services agencies to provide support services and resources to families in need. Offer counselling, mentoring, and referral services to address family-related issues such as marital conflicts, parenting challenges, and economic hardships, promoting family stability and well-being.

- Role Modelling: *Hifz al-Nasl* entails using the Almajiri system to serve as positive role models for students by demonstrating healthy family relationships, strong moral values, and respectful behaviour in personal and professional interactions. Teachers and staff should be encouraged to embody the values of *Hifz al-Nasl* (preservation of lineage) in their own lives and interactions with students, fostering a culture of family-oriented values within the school community (Adamu, 2020).

4. Preservation of Property (*Hifz al-Mal*) in the Almajiri Education

Preservation of Property (*Hifz al-Mal*) in Almajiri education is vital for teaching *Al-Majirai* about responsible stewardship, financial literacy, and economic empowerment. The following are strategies to achieve this:

- Financial Literacy Education: Financial literacy education should be integrated into the curriculum to teach students about budgeting, saving, investing, and avoiding debt. *Hifz al-Mal* should incorporate practical lessons and activities that help students develop money management skills and understand the importance of financial independence.

- Entrepreneurship Training: in deference to *Hifz al-Mal*, the *Almajiri* system should be made to provide entrepreneurship training that equips students with the knowledge and skills to start and manage businesses. Workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs that teach students about business planning, marketing, and financial management should also be offered.
Vocational Skills Development: Vocational skills training programs that prepare students for employment and entrepreneurship in various trades need to be offered. Similarly, hands-on training in fields such as carpentry, agriculture, tailoring, and mechanics to equip students with practical skills for income generation should be provided.

Community Development Projects: Students should be engaged in community development projects that promote economic empowerment and sustainable development. They should also be encouraged to identify and address local needs through initiatives such as community gardens, small-scale businesses, or environmental conservation projects.

Entrepreneurial Mentorship: Students need to be connected with successful entrepreneurs and business professionals who can serve as mentors and role models. Consequently, they are provided with opportunities to learn from their experiences, receive guidance, and gain insights into starting and growing businesses.

Career Guidance and Counselling: Offering career guidance and counseling services can help students explore their interests, strengths, and career options. They should be provided with information about vocational training programs, job opportunities, and higher education pathways to support students in making informed decisions about their future (Auta, 2021)

D. CONCLUSIONS

Reforming the Almajiri education system in Nigeria through Maqasid al-Shari‘ah requires a holistic approach that addresses not only educational needs but also social, economic, and cultural aspects to uplift the students and communities involved. This approach aims to create a system that not only educates but also empowers and protects the rights and dignity of the Almajiri students. Consequently, it will go a long way in addressing short-term challenges and attaining long-term goals. To this extent, the following are suggested:
Policy Support: Advocate for government policies that prioritize Maqasid-based education and allocate sufficient resources for its implementation. This may include integrating Maqasid principles into national education frameworks and providing funding for teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure improvement.

Capacity Building: Continuously invest in the capacity building of teachers, administrators, and policymakers involved in the Almajiri education. This includes ongoing training programs, workshops, and professional development opportunities focused on Maqasid-based pedagogy, curriculum design, and leadership skills.

Community Engagement: Foster strong partnerships with communities, parents, and religious leaders to garner support for Maqasid-based education initiatives. Engage in regular dialogue, consultations, and outreach activities to ensure that the education system reflects the values and aspirations of local stakeholders.

Research and Evaluation: Conduct research and evaluation to assess the impact of Maqasid-based reformation efforts on student outcomes, teacher practices, and community engagement. Use data and evidence to inform decision-making, identify areas for improvement, and measure progress toward achieving Maqasid objectives.

Innovation and Adaptation: Encourage innovation and experimentation in Maqasid-based education approaches, including the use of technology, alternative teaching methods, and flexible learning environments. Embrace adaptive management principles to adapt strategies based on feedback and changing circumstances.

Promotion and Advocacy: Raise awareness about the importance of Maqasid-based education through advocacy campaigns, media outreach, and public relations efforts. Highlight success stories, best practices, and positive impacts to inspire broader support and momentum for the cause.

Collaboration and Networking: Collaborate with other organizations, both within and outside the education sector, that share similar goals and values. Build networks, alliances, and partnerships to leverage
resources, expertise, and collective action in advancing Maqasid-based reformation efforts.

- **Long-Term Sustainability**: Develop long-term sustainability plans that ensure the continuity and institutionalization of Maqasid-based education initiatives beyond short-term projects or funding cycles. This may involve establishing dedicated institutions, endowments, or mechanisms for ongoing support and governance.

Finally, by implementing the recommendations, stakeholders can work together to sustain and advance Maqasid-based reformation efforts in Almajiri education, ultimately contributing to the holistic development and well-being of affected students and communities.

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