

Scientific Approach to Formally Educating the “Alimajiris” for Sustainable National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

The security of life and properties is a cardinal obligation without alternative of any authority. The approaches required by the authority are simply inculcated and better practiced when individuals are exposed to security rudiments. Formal education has long played a reliable role in this regard. This paper presents the scientific perspective of advancing formal education on the ‘Alimajiris’ to earn sustainable security. Two research questions were answered. The study purposively selected 50 pupils who had once participated in ‘Alimajiri’ life as sample from a primary school. A 15-item questionnaire was used to gather data. The average weighted scores on each item were computed to arrive at decisions. The results showed that: the basis for ‘Alimajiri’ life style was due to traumatic conditions in the families; and sustainable security is boosted through formal education acquisition. It was recommended that government should carry out deserving national overhauling of the existing school structures and facilities for the intending influx of Nigerian children, and enforced restriction of illegal immigrant into Nigeria should be braced up among others.

Keywords: approach, behaviour, formal education, national security, policy

INTRODUCTION

It is clear these modern days that no nation can meet up with the present global security challenges if its citizens are insufficiently and or ineffectively formally educated. Formal education is all embracing as it intercedes in areas where nature injects a vacuum in knowledge acquisition. Maisamari (2005) extracting from Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stressed that education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can pull themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has been playing vital roles in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling the population growth. The kind and standard of education undertaken by a nation to some degree provides people with the searchlight for self-actualization, security and sustainable development. An excerpt from the working document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 2001 on the Draft for National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action, National Youth Submit indicated that about 33% of young Nigerians have no formal education, and this culminated into unemployment, socio-economic exploitation and socio-political deprivation (Kolawole, 2007).

Basically, not all the citizens have equal opportunity for formal education and this is a threat to sustainable national security and development especially in the North central zone of Nigeria where ‘Alimajiris’ flood every community like swarming bees. Education administrators and probably the government have given noticeable attention to educating physically challenged individuals by establishing “special schools” peculiar to their predicaments. This is in pursuance of the slogan ‘education for all by the year 2010’ of some years past. This vision 2010 was far from being actualized as these administrators have not taken notice of given similar special consideration to a set of able but idle young Nigerians in the Northern part of the country commonly knick-named ‘Alimajiri’. The ‘Alimajiris’ are simply a group of neglected children who converge in fifties or hundreds under an acclaimed ‘Mallam’ guardian who may either acquire a trace of western education or totally avoid it. These sets of children from the age of seven to about twenty-two years were found to be compelled to recite and memorize portions of the Qurian noisily under the fear of horsewhip most evenings in various forms of ugly wears. They go begging for food/alms routinely with a common composed slogan chanted all through for the rest of the day.

During the farming seasons, these sets of young Nigerians hired out in large number and packed in lorries become engaged in series of farm activities by few ‘well-to-do’ or title holders of the zone. This can

be compared relatively with child trafficking/labour in disguise in one's fatherland. Some other 'Alimajiris' could file behind a young female 'mansa' (cake) seller carried on the head by one of them. This group would often look forward to a figure in the society that would make a show of caring for the less privileged by buying such cakes in quantities for them to struggle forcefully for a share. Some 'Alimajiris' grow and develop to adult beggars while others turn to hawking kegs of water in wheelbarrows to satisfy the demands of nature the rest of their lives. Their female counterparts display a technically amazing but sometime embarrassing behavior. Dressed in their wrappers or skirts without tops but masked with 'hijabs' would queue up to a location where their coordinator would direct two of the flock to enter a yard or house to make request of items for life sustenance. Some of this category turned out to be 'karuwa' (prostitutes) while some partially destined were arranged out as gift in marriage to an unprepared husband who most often sent them packing in divorce after one or two issues. We need no conviction to argue that an individual who does not look ahead will always remain behind. During political or religion uproar, these sets of people receive directives from pot-bellied individuals to perpetrate bombarding havocs in the nation aspiring for sustainable development. It is on this premise that this paper examines the need to apply adequate scientific approach to educating the 'Alimajiris' in the North central zone in particular and probably other Northern States for sustainable security in Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2004) in the National Policy on Education has documented the philosophy that hinged on the possibility for all citizens 'to live in unity and harmony as one individual, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice'. One of the five main national goals stated in the policy proposes 'a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens which is re-emphasized by a clause [section 1, 5 (c)]: 'the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (p. 7)'. This culminated into putting all indispensable machineries in motion at establishing special schools to cater for such categories of individuals with special needs in this country and recently the experimentation of converging few 'Alimajiris' in special locations by a sample of Northern states government. Going by the security challenges in the country, the fact remains that the philosophy has not received absolute consideration. The research reported here is an important extension of the attention that could be accorded young Nigerians by the government in particular in order to

increase the tentacles of accomplishment of the objectives of the policy. This present study is an in-depth examination of 'Alimajiri' life style and the concomitant effect of the application of scientific approach to acquisition of their formal education for sustainable national security.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (1) What is the basis for 'Alimajiri' life style?
- (2) How can the 'Alimajiris' be incorporated into the sustainable national security agenda?

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The public primary school pupils in Niger State constituted the population of the study while the sample was made up of 50 pupils purposively selected from Universal Basic Education (UBE) primary school in Kontagora who have one time or the other passed through 'Alimajiri' life experience. The sample comprised 30 males and 20 females sorted from primary 3 to 5 of the school. The instrument used for the study was an adapted questionnaire referred to as Formal Education of 'Alimajiris' Questionnaire (FEAQ). It consisted of a fine-tuned 15-item statements of 5-point Likert Scale format with strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) and weighted as 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for undecided, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree respectively. No biodata was requested to give total room for unreserved freedom of choice. The items in the questionnaire solicited for responses that could help in addressing the research questions. It was administered on 20 randomly selected primary 4 pupils from Rimaye primary school in Kontagora and the reliability index obtained from split-half was 0.63. This value assured the certainty of its usability for the purpose it was meant for.

The selected pupils were moved to a separate classroom with the permission of the head-teacher and an interpreter was appointed from among the school teachers to guide the pupils to respond appropriately to the items. The questionnaire was distributed to the pupils and after reading an item and translated into their Hausa dialect the pupils were instructed to tick an option as it occurred to them. The responses gathered from the pupils were used for data analysis which in turn was interpreted and used in answering the research questions.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The frequencies of the responses on each of the items were obtained. A non-parametric statistics of simple average weighted scores of the frequencies of the responses were computed and translated qualitatively to address the questions asked in this study.

Decisions on the items were reached from the deduction of the average weighted scores (AWS), such that a decision for strongly agree was taken for AWS that ranged between 4.5 and 5.0, agree decision has AWS ranged between 3.5 and 4.4, undecided decision has AWS ranged between 2.5 and 3.4, disagree decision has AWS ranged between 1.5 and 2.4 while strongly disagree decision has AWS ranged between 0.5 and 1.4. The results of the computation are as presented on table 1.

Table 1: AWS Analysis of Responses on Items in FEAQ

S/N	Item	Frequency					
		SA	A	U	D	SD	AWS
1.	The religion of the people encourages prolific child-birth	5	6	0	1	1	3.5
2.	Some parents are jobless	9	4	0	0	0	4.1
3.	Not many parents can cater for the needs of a large family	5	4	1	2	1	3.2
4.	Divorce is rampant in our community	6	6	0	1	0	3.7
5.	Recitation of the 'Qurian' under 'Mallam' alone is better than formal education	6	4	1	1	1	3.4
6.	Some 'Alimajiris' have no identity	7	4	0	1	0	3.5
7.	Some children become 'Alimajiris' due to lost of parents	6	5	1	1	0	3.7
8.	Formal education add better experience to 'Alimajiri' life	7	3	0	2	1	3.5
9.	'Alimajiris' trust their custodians wholeheartedly	5	5	1	2	0	3.5
10.	Religion leaders can help 'Alimajiris' embrace formal education	6	3	0	1	3	3.1
11.	Birth control is needed for families to manage their resources	3	2	1	3	4	2.4
12.	Formal education of the 'Alimajiris' is the responsibility of local government council	6	5	0	2	1	3.7
13.	'Alimajiris' need special schools	3	2	1	2	5	2.3
14.	Only government can provide necessary materials for the formal education of 'Alimajiris'	10	3	0	0	0	4.1
15.	'Alimajiris' can carry out any instruction without looking back	8	1	1	2	1	3.5

The results on the educational needs of the 'Alimajiri' and to answer research question one, as

indicated on table 1 shows that the basis for any child in the North central zone of Nigeria to become and live a life of an 'Alimajiri' was closely related to stressful conditions in the family. The responses to this effect showed that there was agree response in such areas as: existence of prolific child-bearing with average weighted score (AWS) of 3.5; joblessness of the parents with AWS of 4.1, separated parents with AWS of 3.7, early loss of parent(s) with AWS of 3.7, lack of identity with AWS of 3.5; whereas undecided response was recorded for lack of care for large family with AWS of 3.2 as well as for relying on Quranic recitation to be considered as better without formal education with AWS of 3.4. These results as revealed from items 1 to 7 in the questionnaire would mean that the child would fall short of the opportunity to learn the generally acceptable behaviours and may develop attitudes that are deviant. These findings corroborated the position of Obani (2006) who maintained that a child in a society similar to the area under the present study would be deprived of getting needed care and attention and would not have good morals to imbibe.

Unless this matter is addressed pragmatically, it is just a postponement of malicious day and it is already being manifested in some locations of the Northern part of the country. These children could be among those arranged as warlords who seemed cankerwormic in the society and when they gun people down on the roads, they were taken to be armed robbers. Salifu (2009) reacting to the situation of Nigerian child opined that "the country belong to them too and they are not given necessary care, should they eat sand, those at the helms of affairs steal all the money and leave nothing for them... if the money was transparently given to the state and local governments, many children/graduates would be cared for or employed per year". From the foregoing, it presupposes therefore that the philosophy of science that accentuates the use of scientific methods as a common approach in solving problems be applied. This can be done only if the government and educational administrators examine the roles and functions of science in everyday life and design a unique work-plan that would enable all children to be pulled out from disadvantaged areas by increasing commonality of approach to solving problems and advancing an enabling environment that provides opportunities for value reorientation and recognition of competence level.

The second question asked in this study can as well be answered from the result of the analysis of items 8 to 15 as presented in table 1. The 'Alimajiris' can be incorporated into the sustainable national security development. The pupils' responses provided the basis for this assertion. The results showed that the pupils agreed to opinions such as: formal education add better experience to the 'Alimajiri' life with

AWS of 3.5, 'Alimajiri' custodians can be employed as assistants to work with qualified subjects teachers with AWS of 3.5, local government council were to take over the responsibilities of the 'Alimajiris' with AWS of 3.7, Government has the responsibility of providing all the necessary materials for the formal education of the 'Alimajiris' with AWS of 4.1 and that 'Alimajiris' can carry out any instruction without caring a damn of the consequences with AWS of 3.5. However, the pupils could not decide on some specific opinions such as: whether re-orientation of religion leaders would encourage 'Alimajiris' to embrace formal education with AWS of 3.1. The pupils nonetheless showed disagreement in such areas as: the need to control birth for families to be able to manage resources adequately with AWS of 2.4, and the need to establish special schools for the 'Alimajiris with AWS of 2.3.

These results quantitatively revealed that it may not be difficult for the 'Alimajiris' to be accorded educational intervention as advocated in some other quarters for a similar group - the 'Koma' people in Adamawa State in particular. May be this was why a few states in the North experimented on converging a few 'Alimajiris' in some locations to accord them formal education intervention. As this seemed to be taking the bull by the horn, some connotation of politicking ensued as the finding of the present study has revealed. It is not any special location that would score the goal; instead it is the application of scientific approach that can ensure general reliable means to accommodate the vagabonds'. Madueke and Okoh (2007) has got it on record that government has built schools for the physically challenged and exceptional children, took care of the educational needs of the nomads and the migrant fishermen and established a commission (National Commission for Nomadic Education, NCNE) for it. This is mainly because, as observed by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC, 2007), in entrenching an atmosphere of hope and harmony on the internecine riverine communities in Ondo state that without given them the attention they deserve now, the children would continue to be denied education, a situation considered disastrous in their communities to their future and the well-being of the society. The restoration of schools by the NDDC in the state has no doubt paid off, as the children in those communities now have the opportunity to acquire promising knowledge for personal development and societal benefit.

A pragmatic policy not necessarily a special school but some related support services are needed to enable these children (Alimajiris) benefit from formal education and to participate in the life of the school. This will effectively make them transmit from 'Alimajirism' to primary school experience and progressively to increase in knowledge at the higher

education institutions. This is realizable only if the provisions of the resources by the states affected in fulfillment of the objectives of their duties ensure an equitable treatment of every child. The educational objective that would turn the tide is such that ensures that 'Alimajiris' in all the areas where they thrive have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, as well as appropriate education as done by their peers who are not 'Alimajiris'. This function of the government can only yield dividend of sustainable development and transforming into boosting sustainable security if a unit/board of management of schools saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that teachers holding qualifications from recognized institutions and the 'Mallams' of the 'Alimajiris', as co-mobilizers are aware of the importance of identifying and inculcating in the children future realities of self-actualization. This in line with Jibowo (2005) on the training needs of English teachers pinpointed such factors contributing to effective English language teaching to include: the availability of the goal, the depth of the training of the teacher and the collaborators as well as the motivation received and the provision of suitable instrumental materials. Nothing short of these can bridge the gap between the 'Alimajiris' and their counterparts in the school system. Everyone should learn a lesson from the popular dictum from Akinpelu (2003) that compares the anecdote of the 'Alimajiris' as: *'the negligence of the medical profession can be conveniently buried, and forgotten, with the cadavers; but the negligence of the teaching profession live on to haunt their clients and indeed the entire society of which the teacher is a part (p. 7)'*. Transcribing this dictum to the situation in the Northern Nigeria would mean that the present large scale care free attitude of the authority that be about the 'Alimajiris' in terms of possibly enforcing the entire 'Alimajiris' to embrace formal education is detrimental to national development and sustainable security. Thus, the researchers herein advocated the declaration of a state of emergency on total overhauling and expansion of all school structures and facilities in the Northern zones. It is believed, the government can display the uncommon if a 5-year work-plan containing regular monthly allocation for Primary School Overhauling Funds (PSOF) to Local Government Authorities is developed and reliable monitoring agency involving the immediate community as well as regular inspection and evidence of on the spot assessment of progress on the purposeful utilization of such funds is reported to the government.

COST IMPLICATIONS

All children need to be loved, valued and cared for by their parents in order to have good learning experiences and develop a sense of security and a positive self-image early in life. To avail a child such fortune, the fact remains that a birth control measure

is not only necessary but required to be institutionalized, constitutionalized and enforced. This will enable parents not to shy away from their primary responsibilities of initiating and developing the child in the moral values acceptable to the general society.

The problem of behavior maladjustment manifested by the 'Alimajiris' has not received the adequate attentions it deserves in the Northern zones of Nigeria. At present, it is not seriously recognized as a problem. It is more or less neglected by educational administrators or the government, little was it known that this group of young Nigerians or 'intruders' so called 'Alimajiris' have acquired, developed and manifested behaviours deviated from socially acceptable norms. Such behaviours can be penciled down as hindering their progress and the progress of other people they parasite on for the necessities of life in addition to indulging them into several public entropy among others.

The position of the 'Mallams' as residual of religion knowledge is a factor held in high esteem in the North, as such, a national reorientation is necessary. This will help transform their injunctions gradually into national matter which could further boost the convictions for absorbing the 'Alimajiris' into formal school system and progressively eradicate habitual begging by these able children.

The traditional rulers categorized into: the 'Menguas', district heads and the Emirs may be involved in the re-orientation crusade of the Northern culture in transmitting the 'Alimajiris' to formal school system. The 'Jumats' service where large number of worshipers gather from within and neighbouring settlements would provide an enabling forum for disseminating the objectives of the educational intervention.

Although, checkmating emigrants from Niger Republic in particular may seem unrealistic going by the fact that there are scores of illegal inlets to Nigeria at the Northern boundary through which they can trek in, yet the governments of both countries could work out modalities at regulating the excesses. This would enable the Federal or State governments concerned to give adequate educational attention to the citizenry by way of absorbing into the existing structures the idle ones and in no little measure will this go in bringing about sustainable security as it were, absorbing the 'Alimajiris' into the school system would affect a positive engagement of the minds of these young Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

'Alimajirism' is probably a culture of certain part of Northern Nigeria in which the membership is independent of the size of the family. A family with two kids may send the children into 'Alimajiri' life,

whereas, another polygamous family with large size may not have a single child bestowed to 'Alimajiri' culture. 'Alimajiri' does not arise because the parents were not rich but higher figure of cases were due to poverty. 'Alimajiris' commonly moved aimlessly begging for things to eat using the same words chanted as: "*Alimajiri, enuo, sa'daka, sebilillahi, enuo, sa'daka, enuo...*". This careless habit exposes the children to a variety of hazards such as poisoning, rituals, trafficking and labours among others. It is sad to the marrow that there were speculations that large number of public office holders have blocked the skillfully or certified graduates from gainful employment after the rigorous academic exigencies. Those who are to implement the policy that would make funds available in and out have forged names or slotted the names of their children who were yet to complete schools on the pay rolls in most establishments. And when screening exercises to fetch 'ghost workers' were advocated, such atrocities were protected and covered by inviting swindlers and or recalling the children from schools to show counterfeit credentials, whereas, vibrant young promising graduates roam the streets joblessly. This act is nothing less than a threat to national security but has usually been handled with frivolity. A thorough research into such security threatening habit is beyond the scope of this study and requires a national consideration. A nation whose future depends on the degree of grooming which today's young ones receive cannot pretend to understand that having conceived rogues, the resulting birth would be a turn in the flesh of all and sundry. The manner of siphoning the national treasury in disguise by the public office holders at the detriment of the wellbeing of future general public is tantamount to perforating national security sort of. Considering a work-plan for using such public funds for advancing the 'Alimajiris' formal education and absorbing the skillful minded young graduates into the workforce and ensuring provision of unlimited opportunity to practice the skills profitably would go a long way at truncating their being engaged alternatively as tools by the scoundrel or villain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) There should be birth regulation and parents should be gainfully employed either by self or into public service.
- (2) Marriage course should be included in some subjects like civic education from primary school level and the constitution should stipulate the appropriate maturity age limit (say at least 20 years) when marriage for the female should occur.
- (3) A critical check on illegal immigration is crucial at the country's borders in order to eliminate or eradicate unidentified migrants that foment societal tensions.

- (4) More NGOs should spring up to take up the caring of the orphans.
- (5) Government should enforce the transformation of the existing 'Alimajiris' and their custodians to the existing school system and prohibit or abrogate any attempt for resuscitation.
- (6) Local Government Council should rise up to their responsibilities in ensuring that Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a right of every Nigerian child and must do everything possible to accord them this right.
- (7) Government should expand and improve on the standard of the existing school facilities through special intervention to cater for the influx of the 'Alimajiris' that may follow.

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