Basic Education and the Rights of the Almajiri Child
The Rhetoric of Universalism in Nigeria

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List of Acronyms

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
ECD	Early Child Development
EFA	Education for All
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HFL	Hope for the Lonely
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPAD-UBEC	National Personnel Audit Data
NPC	National Population Commission
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programmes
UBE	Universal Basic Education
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Abstract

Despite the policy of a free and compulsory education, about 9 million school aged children in Nigeria are currently not served by this policy. This research is an attempt to make visible the experiences of school aged Muslim boys who are excluded from the mainstream school system. Drawing on qualitative field research and textual analysis, the study examined the ways in which they are excluded specifically looking at causal factors that structure their schooling/under-schooling. Research findings show that while this universal program of education has enabled access for some children, children from poor rural Muslim households are not able to enact their active citizenship through the rights to education. A limited focus of western-styled education, indirect costs and childhood construction amongst others were found in the study to have thrust these households into alternatives considered as 'free' for their children. The research findings therefore unveil the failure of the state to be responsive to the multiplicity of childhoods in the context where rural Muslim households desire both religious and western-styled education for their children. Ultimately, the study highlights the need for the state to provide meaningful education that takes account of the diversity of childhoods through broadening the present focus and content of western-styled education.

Keywords

Almajiri, western-styled education, Quranic education, ilimi boko, social exclusion

Introduction

As western-styled schooling increasingly becomes a standard exemplifying the notion of a global childhood, other learning systems in the broader education system are perceived as barriers to achieving this notion of childhood and the EFA goals. Thus, in this paper, I examined the factors that structure the exclusion of the Almajiri child from the mainstream western education system. I interrogate the 'universal' in state policies in its failure to take cognizance of the multiplicity of cultural contexts in which childhood is constructed. For as Sedel notes, western schools can be organised in a way that balances elements of local traditions and still provide meaningful education that enhances future chances of their pupils (2005:38). Through my study findings, I show how the failure of the public school system creates a space for poor rural Muslim households to resort to alternatives that alienates their children from the mainstream school system. This, as findings revealed increases the vulnerabilities that children from such households face as part of their childhood experiences.

Similarly, enrolment rates have tended to masks local realities and experiences of children outside the public school system. For those in the context of my study, western-styled education is still being seen as "white man's" education and one that undermines local variations. This again indicates the state's inability to sufficiently balance western schooling and other form of education to match the African experience (Nyamnjoh 2012:136, Easton et al. 1997:7, Marfo and Biersteker 2011:73). This research is centred on the Almajiris-commonly seen on the streets of northern Nigeria. They have a history of negativities associated with them and are seen as children in the wrong spaces. In this research, I argue that far from active exclusion (Sen 2000), as deliberate policies by the state to exclude people from participating in social processes as a right, both passive and self-exclusion were implicated. These, reinforced by religious ideologies and beliefs are the result of the study's analysis. In order to examine their exclusion, I ask the following question and hopefully answer: *In what ways are the Almajiris excluded from the western-styled basic education system in Nigeria?*

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 presents the background into the study, methodologies, rational, research questions and ethical considerations etc. Chapter 2 situates the Almajiri Quranic schooling and western-styled schooling within the triple education discourse in Nigeria. Chapter 3 discusses the conceptual and analytical tools under pinning the study. Chapter 4 presents key findings from parents on their perspectives on both systems of education and factors that structure the schooling of the Almajiri. Chapter 5 presents findings from the Almajiris on their view on both school systems and other mechanisms underlying their exclusion from western-styled school system and in Chapter 6, I give a synopsis of the study findings and its implications for policy.

Chapter 1 Preliminary Research Issues

1.1 Setting the Scene

[1]Indigenous forms of education in Nigeria were organised around culturally diverse groups in the north and the south of the country. These institutions based their education upon their tradition and culture before the advent of western-styled education (Imam 2012:1). Thus, both the south and the north developed early childhood education through various means; for the north, this was based on Quranic education while the south, had a traditional system related to inculcating respect for elders and knowledge in communal heritages (Ibid). These forms of education handed down through generations gave the child the necessary skills to fit into adult communal life. However, these systems especially for the southern parts of the country soon gave way to western-styled education brought on by the colonialists and christian missionaries.[2] This model of education was more receptive in the southern parts than in the north-an occurrence that has given rise to huge disparities in literacy and enrolment rates of pupils in western-styled schools till date (Imam 2012:182, Antoninis 2012:4). This is partly also due to the fact that Quranic education has long been in existence centuries before the introduction of western education and have evolved as "valued institutions of religious socialisation and social reproduction" (Nasir 2010:4)[3]. This scene consequently, showed a triple system of education in Nigeria before independence.

With several educational reforms down the line, after independence, the Nigerian state in the early 1970s, took over private and religious schools (both christian and muslim) from individuals and communities as education was regarded as a government venture and not a private enterprise (Imam 2012:188). The state through its policy emphasised equality of access for all citizens at all levels (Adiele 2006:26). However, despite these takeovers and efforts towards inclusion, some Quranic schools in northern Nigeria have continued to thrive outside the purview of the state by enroling more pupils of primary school age than western-styled schools (Nasir 2010:3, Nasir 2008:3). National level strategy by the state in 1999 re-introduced a free and compulsory western-styled education program for primary and junior secondary school aged children (UBEC. 2012b). The main aim of the program are to 'ensure a smooth transition from primary school to junior secondary school and for learners to remain in school long enough to acquire basic life skills (Moja 2000:5). Since implementation of the program enrolment rates have appreciated yet these figures have not captured the Almajiri boys who are underserved by this policy.

Thus, while the state's goal is to provide a universal system of western-styled schooling for all children as an inclusive policy, the reality on ground

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[1] Paraphrased text based on my essay in 4144-Social Policy Mapping Essay.
[2] End of quoted text

negates the achievement of this goal due to the number of Almajiri boys who are outside the mainstream school system. In this study, I focused on pupils of traditional Almajiri Quranic schools in the urban and rural areas in Gombe State-northeast Nigeria and examined the ways in which they are excluded from western-styled school system.

1.2   Framing the Research Issue

Education enhances the capabilities of an individual. It is a mechanism for enabling active citizenship; thus those who are denied the rights to education face the possibilities of limited chances in the future. UNESCO for instance argues that, meaningful education as a right is key to advancing social justice; as people who are marginalised in education face the prospect of bleak future chances which truncates their participation in social processes affecting them (2010:8). On that note, successive governments in Nigeria have at various times, introduced inclusive policies aimed at providing education as a fundamental right of every child. Since the operation of the present UBE program, it has recorded visible levels of enrolments. In 2010, the country recorded an 83.3% gross enrolment rate at the primary school level with male enrolment hitting 87.1% and female 79.3% (World Bank. 2013b). In 2009, in-country statistics by DFID also showed a gross primary school enrolment (though lower than the EFA targets) of 95% for males and 84% for females (2012:83).

Despite these figures, a large section of school aged children in Nigeria are not captured in this numbers as statistics show that over (9) million Almajiri boys are presently outside the mainstream school system (Ibrahim 2012, UBEC. 2012). Nasir writes that Quranic schools in northern Nigeria enrol more pupils of primary school age than the western-styled schools (2008:3). These schools owned by the Mallams are outside the purview of the state; and having no form of linkages with mainstream school system (Imam 2012:193, Nasir 2010:3). In contrast however, there are some Islamiyya schools that have successfully managed to offer their pupils both Quranic and secular education. These private institutions mostly serve children from wealthy homes and are able to both enhance their pupils' capabilities and enable a smooth transition to higher education. However, some owners (Mallams) of traditional Almajiri-Quranic schools have largely remained outside the mainstream school system

1.3   Rationale for the Study

Studies have been conducted on issues relating to the Almajiri child (Easton et al. 1997, Nasir 2010, Usman 2008, Hoechner 2012, Oladosu 2012). While their focus shows the extent of the literature done in this respect, their findings provided a point of departure for me to study the schooling of the Almajiri and inclusion/exclusion from western-style basic education system. Basic education has been described as that needed to build firm roots for literacy and numeracy and consolidate the foundations of learning how to learn Obayan (2000 cited in (Adepoju and Fabiyi 2007:7). Given the significance of this type and level of education in the early years of a child and the state's goal to provide it for all as part of promoting social justice, it is important to investigate the ways in which the Almajiris are excluded from it being citizens of the state. Also, western-styled education appears to have silenced indigenous and

religious forms of education that were dominant at its advent in the country. Thus the demands for a reform of the current content of education to weave in the African context and cultural heritages are rife in the literature (Pence and Nsamenang 2008:35). The challenge therefore for the attainment of the EFA goals in Nigeria seem enormous as children such as the Almajiris continues to experience marginalization in education.

With the seeming gender based religious undertones and other factors structuring their schooling, an intersectional analysis is thus imperative to examine how these have created identities for them as well as structure their schooling/under-schooling. This is due to the fact that these constructs are not autonomous but have at their intersection, people's identities and it is the combination of these that shape and influence people's experiences and the perception of self and others (Trahan 2011:12). With rights based approaches gaining support since the adoption of the CRC, there appears to be a gap between the realities of children and inclusive policies. Against this background, the study comes useful to raise implications of its findings for policy; taking into account local interests in relation to meaningful education into the policy making process. This research is relevant to development studies as it will hopefully bring more visibility and add to the body of knowledge on the role of universal policies in enabling access for some citizens while also constricting such for others.

1.4 Situating the Research

Gombe state is located in the north eastern part of Nigeria. It is one of the six states that form the north-east geo-political zone of the country. Presently the state has 11 local government areas (Akko, Balanga, Billiri, Kaltungo, Nafada, Gombe, Yamaltu/Deba, Dukku, Funakaye, Kwami and Shongom). Spread over a landmass of 20, 265 square kilometres with a population of over 2.4 million (Gombe. 2013, Gombe. 2013), the state is endowed with rich agricultural land; with about 80% percent of its citizens as peasant farmers involved in food and cash crops agriculture (Gombe 2006:2). A handful of the citizens are found in the state's civil service and other businesses. Christianity and Islam are dominant religions practiced with some indigenes practicing traditional African religion in the state. The study conducted in two rural Muslim communities, shows the Purdah system in place as women were seen indoors. The religious practice allowing men to marry more than one wife was common feature with the study communities.

Education is jointly provided by the state government and private individuals. The Gombe state Ministry of Education oversees the affairs of the state's universal basic education board and other private and faith based educational organisations. Pupils' enrolment rate in 2011/2012 in its 1, 600 public primary schools was 57% for males and 43% for females respectively. Its 276 junior secondary schools have an enrolment rate of 51% for males and 49% for females respectively (NPAD-UBEC 2012). Almajiri enrolment in the 2,124 Quranic schools in the state stands at 4.5% of the total enrolment of 2,711,767

in the northeast region of Nigeria (UBEC 2013).[4]. Gombe State is commonly referred to in Nigeria as the Jewel in the Savannah.

1.5 Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this study is to examine the factors that structure the schooling of the Almajiri child. To achieve this, the following research question is posed:

In what ways are the Almajiris excluded from the western-styled basic education system in Nigeria? This question has the following related sub-questions:

1. How do rural Muslim parents and teachers of Almajiri schools perceive both forms of education (Quranic and Western)?
2. What factors from their perspectives structure the exclusion of the Almajiri child from western-styled school system?
3. How do the Almajiris perceive these forms of education and what mechanisms shape their exclusion from western-styled school system?

1.6 Methodology and Research Strategy

This is a qualitative research that employs an extensive use of the primary data gained through adult and child-centered approaches. This approach is preferred to a quantitative one as the former values the depth of information over quantity and works at unravelling social complexities that forms part of the individuals through an understanding of their belief systems (O'Leary 2010b:113-4). The study also engaged with relevant secondary data through journals, books and government publications including: The 2008 National Policy on Education, the 2004 Universal Basic Education Act, the 2011 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Almajiri Education Programme, the Ministerial Report for the Implementation of the Almajiri Education Programme and the UBEC's National Personnel Audit Data for 2009-2012 showing enrolment rates for primary and secondary schools in that school year. Pre-existing relationships (built by the facilitating NGO) were leveraged upon to ease entry into study communities in order to hold the interviews with participants. This strategy was devised due to some unpleasant histories surrounding the advent of western-styled education in the region making it almost impossible to discuss such issues with total strangers.

Due to my language limitations, I worked with two local assistants-male and female who spoke in the local Hausa language and are both Christian and Muslim and students of the state's tertiary institutions respectively. My choice of working with these two was informed by the need to avoid bias in the research process based on religious or personal beliefs. Secondly, beyond being Hausas in origin which clearly facilitated the process, these two are embedded in the system and offered useful insights into some nuances of the research subjects that maybe completely unknown to the researcher being an outsider.

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[4] See Appendix for socio-economic and cultural contexts of the study

Sources of data collections

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the main method of primary data collection with all interview guides for the communities translated into the local Hausa language. This was combined with observation studies of the Almajiris on the streets and in their schools/homes. FGDs were held with selected parents and the Almajiris. Key informant interviews with Mallams, government officials, Imams, civil society representatives, a former Almajiri and a principal of an Islamiyya secondary school. In summary, 60 respondents participated in the study.

Sampling methods

In seeking answers to the research questions, the study takes a qualitative approach through selecting a sample from which the most can be learned in understanding a phenomenon from the views of the participants (Merriam 2002:3). Thus, the parents, Mallams and the Almajiris were sampled purposively with the support of the Programme Officer of HFL (the facilitating NGO) and the communities' local facilitators (Muslims) who are local contacts for the NGO. Muslim parents who have sent a child (ren) as Almajiris and were willing to participate and share experiences were major criteria for selection. The Almajiris interviewed were selected from the Quranic schools visited with the aid of their Mallams and their willingness to participate in the study. Selected government officials and key civil society members were also sampled purposively based on their relevance to the subject area as well as their technical expertise in education and child-related issues. The snow-ball approach was used in reaching other key informants: Imams, the former Almajiri and the Principal. This was done in an attempt to gain some insider knowledge that goes beyond private experiences of beliefs and knowledge base of the primary gate-keepers (O'Leary 2010a:169). While it proved difficult to locate some of these key informants, I adopted this method to reach them.

Focus group discussions

FGDs were held with 10 parents each in the 2 study communities and 25 Almajiris aged 7-16 years selected with the aid of their Mallams at their schools. Discussions centred on their perspectives on the usefulness of both types of schooling systems and factors aiding their exclusion from western schooling. This is consistent with Laws et al's assertion that FGDs allow the researcher to gain "in-depth information about how people think about an issue and why they hold the views they do about certain issues" (2003:299)- emphasis added. The parents selected had common characteristics such as occupation, have an Almajiri as a child (ren), and were Muslims. The forums were disaggregated by sex with respect to religious beliefs in Islam. The discussions with mothers held in their homes owing to the Purdah system in place. In these forums, I played the role of an observer largely observing the mood and intensity with which certain statements were made and the body language of participants. The discussions ran between 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Observational studies

My observation studies were participatory as a non-Muslim woman. During these studies, I worked closely with my male research assistant due to language barrier to listen in on street conversations around the Almajiris. With security concerns, I developed a strategy to eat my meals around the spots where they can be found while also observing them. This made them and others around to get accustomed to my presence in the areas and I was able to reduce much of my presence as an outsider. Through this method, children are less likely to alter their behaviour significantly as they become familiarised with the observer's presence Shaffer (1993 cited in (Christensen and James 2008:16). This 'participatory' approach allowed me also to note activities and behaviour patterns of the Almajiris on the streets. In these studies, I was also limited due the position of women in core north of Nigeria in terms assessing certain places such as sitting in on-going Quranic classes. My fieldwork also coincided with the Muslim Ramadan fasting period (July 6th-August 7th) which starts daily at 5:30am-6pm. Hence, the observation studies were conducted from mornings to late evenings so as to compare pupils' activities patterns during the fast and after the breaks in the evening.

In-depth Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with 4 governmental officials, 2 civil society representatives, 1 principal of an Islamiyya Secondary school, 1 former Almajiri, 5 Mallams of selected Quranic schools and 2 Chief Imams of the dominant sects in Islam (Izala and Darika)5. These interviews usually ran for about 45 minutes to 1 hour 10 minutes depending on interesting angles that came up in the discussions. These interviews were voice-recorded having gained the verbal or written consent of the respondent. These interviews were conducted in the offices of the government officials and the civil society representatives including one of the Imam. Other key participants such as the Mallams and the Principal were interviewed at their schools, whereas for one of the Imams, we met at his house to hold the interview.

Life-stories and Drawings

Emerging issues from the FGDs with the Almajiris formed the basis of the life-story approach. Areas of narratives included experience sharing of their lives in the school and on the streets, perception of western-styled education vis-à-vis the Quranic education and parental decision concerning their choice of school. The use and reliance on one type of data collection method in research with children has been said to lead to biases, thus multiple strategies are now been advocated for in research with children (Morrow 2008:52, Einarsdottir et al. 2009, de Carvalho, Maria João Leote 2013, Punch 2002). With the provision of loose sheets of paper, pencils, erasers and crayons, boys between ages 10-13 participated in drawing objects of interest to them. Punch has argued for the advantage of using drawings in research with children as it allows

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5 Izala and Darika are major sects within Islam

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them to be creative and gives a sense of agency over their lives (2002:331). She argues further that drawings of children are rich illustration of how children see their world (ibid). Drawing as a research tool for children has also been seen as a meaning-making process; drawing analyses from the marks made on paper and the narratives that accompany those drawings (Einarsdottir et al. 2009:218). These drawings were analysed in an attempt to understand their perspectives on their lives as well as engaging them as active participants of the research process.

1.7 Reflexivity and Positionalities

As a southerner and from an 'educationally advanced' part of my country, a lot of assumptions about the northern people (Hausas) and their perceived lack of interest for western-styled education are dominant narratives in the south of the country. Undertaking a study in this area means engaging with these biases and how my multiple identities and those of my research team may affect the research process. This line of thinking is consistent with ethical dilemmas researchers conducting fieldwork face in the research process and therefore warrants their reflexivity during the study. Reflexivity in research involves a reflection on self and representation and examining power relations and researcher's accountability in data collection and interpretation in the research process (Sultana 2007:376). Increasingly, researchers working with children and young people are constantly called to reflect on the impact of their identities on the methodology, quality of findings and interpretation of data and most importantly, power issues between them as adults and child participants considered as minors.

A great deal of attention is being received on research ethics with children and how they differ from those of adults (Morrow 2008:49, Punch 2002:323). Early childhood centres have been noted as sites of power and dominance of adults over children (Ebrahim 2010:5). To assess the Almajiris, we first gained the consent of their teachers (Morrow 2008:54). By reason of his influence as older and been their teacher instructing them to gather for the group discussions, the power scale was shifted in our favour as most of the children readily obeyed. This situation makes them powerless having no choice to decline but to assent to participate in the discussions. Having gained entry, I introduced myself as a fieldworker, working in the areas of access of children and education in Northern Nigeria. This was done to bridge the gap between me a middle class educated Christian woman and the Almajiri children as much as possible. Even with this, I can't assume these relationships were fully equal yet the method of introduction helped a great deal to build the trust necessary for a smooth interaction (Sultana 2007:378). Research with children raises questions that require specific considerations, largely because of the different constructions of childhood (Morrow 2008:58) and in the context of this study is one where "children should listen when adults are talking"[6]. To further bridge the power gap having gained entry, we try to build up some connection through small informal talks by asking the children how they were faring with their studies and coping with the on-going Ramadan (fast). These generated

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[6] This quote is commonly used in Nigeria when most adults are scolding children.

some interests as Punch underscores the importance of building rapport with children in research (2002:329). Yet, despite this approach, some especially the younger ones in the rural areas were still reserved. However, with other children participating, they gradually joined in the discussions.

In bridging the insider-outsider gap, my positionality was both of merit and demerit. Beyond every day greetings in the local language and dressing like a Muslim woman, I was acutely aware of my outsider status in the community interactions as I have a limited knowledge of the local language. However, these sessions were facilitated by my research team and the community facilitators. The positionalities of my research team are of significance in the study. Preliminary field preparations included trying to get a Muslim organisation to aid the study all to no avail. With fruitless efforts and limited time frame for fieldwork, I came across Hope for the Lonely-a Christian organisation (with Muslims as part of its Board members) in Gombe city. This organisation works in areas around children, youth and adults considered as disadvantaged in social processes education inclusive. My research assistants were also educated up to the tertiary levels. I chose to work with these to mitigate language barriers that may arise between me and a non-English speaker in the process of translation and transcribing. I consider it imperative to also have a Christian assistant so as to avoid the possibilities of religious bias which may arise when working with people of same religion; thus, maintaining a balanced view of the process.

1.8   Research Scope and Limitations

The study aimed to gather data in two communities-Shela in the south (dominated by Christians) and Kupto in the north (dominated by Muslims) of Gombe State. While this was achievable to a large extent, the Almajiris in Shela could not be accessed as we were repeatedly told they were unavailable having gone out of the community. With fruitless communication, I arranged for Almajiris in the city with the support of my research team. This was done to overcome the limitation created by the unavailability of the Almajiris in Shela community. Other critical limitations faced included the current insecurity with regards to the activities of the Boko Haram group and the Ramadan7. Bombings, kidnappings etc have greatly increased the security consciousness of the locals particularly during my observation studies. Staying in a place to observe for long hours and becoming a constant figure on the street posed a great limitation as residents sometimes looked at us suspiciously and asked questions but for the intervention of my research assistant who reassured them that we were waiting for someone or waiting to eat. The Ramadan fasting also entailed limited mobility of the Almajiris on the streets as they were indoors most of the time. This initial limitation was overcome by an extension of the fieldwork beyond the fasting period.

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[7] A 30-day period of fasting for Muslims all over the world usually from July-August

1.9 Ethical Consideration

All study participants and informal discussants in this research have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. With regards to children and a working definition of a child as individuals less than 18 years of age, consent was first sought from each Mallam (standing in loco parentis) for the Almajiris. Verbal consents were given before conducting the interviews with them and their pupils. For the child participants, their assent to participate was gained after we share the purpose of the study with them and their role in the process. Assent is the gaining of children's agreement within concrete situations in the research process Cock (2006 cited in (Ebrahim 2010:4). Gaining the assent of children is distinct from giving consent as children are considered as minors and are unable to give their consent (Ibid); thus, the consent-seeking from their teachers. In addition, I prepared a confidentiality and consent form for government officials; civil society etc detailing the nature of the study, assurances of confidentiality and seeking informed consent. These were usually administered before the start of each interview.

Chapter 2 Overviews of the school systems

This chapter provides brief overviews of the Quranic and Western-styled school systems as a follow up discourse on the triple education systems (Islamic, Indigenous and Western-styled) in Nigeria before independence. This background is necessary to aid an understanding of choices of schooling for children especially for the Almajiri child. This overview is based on secondary data.

2.1 The Almajiri-Quranic School System: A Guarded Heritage

Figure 2.1A Rural Quranic School (Makaranta/Tsangaya) in Northeast Nigeria

Source: Field data

Quranic/Islamic education in Nigeria is offered in three types of schools. The first is the traditional form where pupils (boys) travel to distant places to learn under the tutorship of a teacher (who himself is a product of such schools). Secondly, there are non-boarding Quranic schools whose pupils learn for a few hours and return home (commonly found in the south-west of Nigeria and charges a small fee) and lastly the Islamiyya schools that combine both Quranic and western-styled education subjects in their curriculum. This study however, is concerned with the first type known as the Almajiri school system.

Almajiri-Quranic schools evolved as an institution highly revered and noted for moral and spiritual education. These schools enjoyed support in pre-colonial times as valued institutions for religious socialization and social reproduction (Nasir 2010:3, Awofeso et al. 2003:314). At that time, host communities readily gave alms and accommodation (Hoechner 2012:160) wherever the Mallams and his pupils settled as a form of religious obligation to these bearers of religious knowledge. Quranic education thus began as a form of education meant to introduce young Muslim children to the Holy Quran as the main text of the curriculum administered through memorization and rote learning at an

elementary level (Ibid). This system of education involves pupils (boys) travelling to distant places to acquire Quranic knowledge whereas in some cases, parents simply send their male children to the Mallams. An important feature of this system of education is that it is restricted to boys, girls attending these schools are not considered as Almajiris and they only attend those Quranic schools near their homes and for shorter periods of time (Awofeso et al. 2003:314). The curriculum of these schools consists of teaching and learning the 60 chapters of the Quran with enrolment rates of 25-500 (ibid) pupils. This curriculum is delivered in the original word and language of God, with emphasis on the religious duties of Islamic life (Easton et al. 1997:10). From my field studies, pupils of these schools are usually between 6-17 years. Owners (Mallams) of these schools do not charge fees for their services and there are no grading systems in such schools (ibid). Nasir writes that the establishment and management of such schools do not require any formal training than the experience of having attended one himself (2010:7). Thus, graduates of the school system are free to start their own schools.

My interactions with Mallams reveal that graduation of pupils would mostly depend on the ability of the pupil to grasp the complete chapters of the Quran which in most cases could extend for years. The traditions, structure and functions of these schools collectively constitute what is generally regarded in northern Nigeria as the Almajiri heritage (Awofeso et al. 2003:313). The objectives of the system include moral training cutting across respect for elders, shunning alcohol, dishonesty, lies, developing good habits and the development of a pious man that will be useful to the society (Yusha'u et al. 2013:128). The school system is categorised into three classes:

- Gardi (adult) who engages in some labour-intensive services for a means of livelihood.

- Tiribiri (adolescent) and Kolo (infant) who both beg for alms/food (Ibid-127).

The flexibility of the school system from interactions with Mallams lies in the individualised system of teaching where pupils learn at their own pace once they enrol at the school. There is also a strong linkage with the religious culture in the rural north of the country where younger one kneels before elders in greeting and in discussions.

2.2 Western-styled School System in Nigeria

The western-styled school system is presently structured on a 9-3-4 system where the first 6 years is spent in primary school, first 3 in the junior secondary, 3 years in senior secondary and the last 4 in tertiary institutions. The basic school system inclusive of early childhood is offered through private daycare and few public ECD centres. The first 9 years of basic school system is based on a policy of free and compulsory for every school aged child.

Figure 2.2 A simplified version of the western school system in Nigeria

Age	Stages in the school system	Curriculum in the Basic School System
18-	**Tertiary** Universities/Polytechnics/Mono-technics Public/Private	**Curriculum in the Basic School System** English Mathematics One Nigerian Language Basic science/Tech Social Studies Creative Arts CRS/Islamic studies Physical/Health Education Civic Education Computer studies/ICT French Language *Agricultural Science *Home Economics *Arabic Language *Business Studies
15-17	**Senior Secondary** Public/Private	
6-14	**Basic school system** Primary-Junior secondary Public/Private	
0-5	**Early childhood** Private/ Public	

Researcher's construction adapted from (Nwangwu et al. 2005) Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis. * Are subjects offered as electives.

For the purpose of my study, I use the term western-styled education and schooling as one provided by both public and private providers with a western content; while still keeping in view other forms of formal education like Quranic education as argued by (Anderson-Levitt 2005:991). This chapter has presented an overview of both school systems to aid in the study's analysis. The next chapter presents the conceptual and analytical frameworks underpinning for the study.

Chapter 3 Conceptual and Analytical framework

This study seeks to examine the ways in which the Almajiris have been excluded from mainstream school system. To do this, I will employ a conceptual framework through which the experiences of the study participants can be understood and analysed. The following concepts come useful for this analysis: Childhood, Vulnerability, Poverty and Social Protection, Social Exclusion and Discourses surrounding the Almajiris.

3.1 Childhood

Childhood refers to the biological period in the early years of life before the onset of adulthood. It is characterized by rapid physiological and psychological development and represents the beginning of the process of maturation to adulthood (James and James 2008:22). Childhood is understood by societies in different ways and this understanding varies significantly around the world and across cultures (Save the Children. 2007:6) emphasis added. This notion of childhood understanding within a particular context deals with how societies makes sense of the upbringing of children which in turn influences the way children in those contexts see themselves and develop along those lines of institutional thinking. Great care is exercised by different cultures in investing and transmitting value systems and traditions that have stood the test of time in early childhood development of children (Okwany et al. 2011:1, Nsamenang 2006:3). Notwithstanding, dominant narratives of childhood appear to have overshadowed the multiplicity of childhood experiences across societies carrying with them normative assumptions. These assumptions are heavily influenced by western ideologies of the 'good' childhood.

Childhood needs to be understood within the context that it is located. Without this, as argued by Boakye-Boaten, the world of children may be misinterpreted and can lead to misconceptions (2010:105). African pattern of childcare has been argued to be different from western models with its organisational patterns different from western ideologies (Pence and Nsamenang 2008:21). Indigenous childhood in the socialization process of many African societies is centered on training children to become honest, humble, respectful, obedient, well-behaved and self-disciplined members of their societies (Imoh 2012b:123). This concept will facilitate an analysis of the perception of adults in the study in relation to their understanding of childhood and how this influences the choice of schooling for their children.

3.2 Vulnerability

Conceptually linked to vulnerability in the literature is the concept of poverty (Cheney 2010:5) While this linkage is typically discussed in reference to how households and individuals are likely to be poor, there is a clear line of difference between these concepts. The distinguishing factor between these two is the presence of risks-the uncertainty of future wellbeing (Chaudhuri 2003:3). Vulnerability here refers to exposure to contingencies and stress, and the difficulty in coping with them; connoting defencelessness and insecurity in

the face of risks (Chambers 2006:33) emphasis added. These risks, shocks or hazards faced by vulnerable individuals or households may take the form of environmental, socio-economic, physical and political (Naudé et al. 2012:5). These could range from the loss of livelihood options, death of a parent, acute or chronic poverty, disease, drought, flood, and weak policy contexts amongst others. Reducing the likelihood of facing these risks and stresses is critical for most vulnerable households as they employ a number of strategies to reduce the impact of such risks on them. These strategies according to authors could range from reducing meals, withdrawing children from school and/or engaging in child labour, sale of productive assets/informal sector engagement etc. in a bid to reduce and cope with these risks (Chaudhuri 2003:4, Barrientos 2007:2). These strategies have their adverse effects both on the household and on the children.

Vulnerability affects both children and adults. However, the impact on children is more distinct owing to the fact that they have little or no resources to fall/depend on when faced with risky situations. Child vulnerability has been categorised into two-child specific ranging from unequal power relations to lack of voice and child-intensified such as those affecting large populations like famine (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2009:109). Vulnerability and risks thus differs between adults and children.

The World Bank sees child vulnerability as a downward spiral where each shock leads to a new level of vulnerability, and each new level opens up for a host of new risks (2005). In other words, the probability of a child experiencing a negative outcome rises with each shock. This study adopts a working definition of a vulnerable child as one who lacks parental and other institutional care and whose 'access to basic social services is threatened'[8]; and who have to fend for himself. Vulnerable households on the other hand are those faced with socio-economic threats and employ a number of context specific strategies to reduce their risks. The concept is used to examine how households mitigate poverty given the socio-economic context of the study.

3.3 Poverty and Social Protection

Poverty can be regarded as both a process and a product. As a process, it can be conceptualised as on-going or recurrent inability to lead a sustainable life in terms of meeting one's basic needs materially; and also seen as chronic poverty (see (Chaudhuri 2003:2). As a product, it results from the consequences of lost opportunities, limited life chances to enhance one's status and needs. Within the context of Africa, it has been associated with rural predominance, insufficient access to social and economic services and few opportunities for formal sector engagement (Kempe 2005:22). Its multi-dimensional nature has been highlighted by (Laderchi et al. 2003:244, Fukuda-Parr 2006:7) yet dominant in its discourse is the income or monetary approach in identifying and designing social policies for the poor. Children are at higher risk of poverty because they are dependent on the distribution of resources within their

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[8] Patrick Gatobu-MA Thesis 2011

households and communities (Okwany 2010)[9]. Children in poverty are likely to face developmental challenges including physiological ones and truncated life chances resulting from the behavioural responses to risks and stresses adopted by vulnerable households (Chaudhuri 2003, Barrientos 2007). These strategies are likely to keep them trapped in poverty (Ibid) thus the need for social protection. Social protections are those programs designed with the aim of reducing the risks faced by poor households and to provide additional alternatives to boost their incomes. They can take the form of cash and non-cash transfer programmes and may be targeted (child focused or for the aged) or universal. Both poverty and social protection are used here to examine how poor households appropriate the free education policy.

3.4 Social Exclusion

The social exclusion discourse is commonly framed as the denial of rights and entitlements (enjoyed by all) to a section of the populace. Thus, it is underpinned by marginalisation and non-participation in social processes such as 'economic, social and cultural life, and in some ways the alienation and distance from mainstream society' Duffy (1995 cited in (Klasen 2001:414). Social exclusion is seen as the experience of being locked out of participation in social life by certain groups (Kabeer 2000:84). The richness of the concept added by Sen is through his categorization into two distinct forms-active and passive forms of exclusion (Sen 2000:14). Active exclusion may be intentional such as deliberate policies by the state aimed at excluding particular groups in the society from guaranteed rights while passive forms of exclusion "is a more subtle form in which there is a lack of awareness of the needs of groups by governments and other institutions" (Okwany 2010:137). In other words, state policies may be designed on the basis of assumed needs of their beneficiaries.

In relation to education, it is seen as the non-participation of school-aged children in the mainstream education systems; which may follow from a multiplicity of factors. Klasen sees social exclusion in education as when the process of education fails to promote access and equal participation (2001:423). Though not explicitly defined in the 2004 UBE policy of Nigeria the term "special groups" is used to define the Almajiris and other seemingly disadvantaged groups in the policy. This therefore connotes the possibilities of being outside the mainstream school system and state's efforts at inclusion through universal policies. The claim that children are excluded in education is aptly argued by (Tomasevski 2003) that the continuous massive violation of education as a right is seen in the exclusion of children who lack access to their rights to, within and through education. Similarly, non-enrolment, passivity, absenteeism, repetition and dropping out have been identified as signs and symptoms of an intricate web of education-related factors that play out in a process of being and becoming excluded on an individual and social level (Bernard 2001:4). The lack of a basic education has long-term consequences. UNESCO (2010:8) for example points to the various barriers that people who

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[9] Being lecture note for 4311 in 2010

are excluded in western-styled education are likely to face; most of which are diminished life chances.

Social exclusion is most often tied to poverty in the literature, yet its 'multidimensional nature shows that it is much broader than material poverty' (UNICEF. 2006:7). This thinking suggests that processes of impoverishment alone may not serve as a necessary condition for exclusion. Thus, social exclusion may be voluntary or caused by the interaction of factors working together. The dimensions of social exclusion can take the form of relativity (comparing the circumstance of a group with another at a given time and place), agency (as the act of some agent resulting to exclusion) and dynamics (exclusion based on bleak future prospects and not essentially on present circumstances) (Ibid). The relationship between education, capability enhancement and social exclusion is seen where the acquisition of 'capability' (ability to achieve/freedom, (Saito 2003:18) fails to translate into freedoms for the individual. Through the role that education plays in expanding the capabilities of a person (Saito 2003:25, Walker 2005:107), it may then be argued that when education fails to equip the child with the necessary skills set, the possibility of creating social exclusion in adulthood are very high (Klasen 2001:437). The coping strategies adopted by poor households when faced with shocks and risks can also result into social exclusion. The removal of children from school as a way of reducing vulnerabilities in the household and the generational issues that emerge from living in an adult-mediated space can structure the choice of services for children.

Based on a focus on rights to education, schooling and social exclusion, the school as a place where education is transmitted to the young has been critiqued for its role in excluding pupils (Klasen 2001:427, Farrell 2007:154, Samoff 2007:420). Farrell sees 'schooling (western-styled) as a long-term process in which children may be sorted at many different points and in several different ways [operating] as a selective social screening mechanism' (2007:155). This may have led Walker to argue for an equitable education system through schools where each child's agency and autonomy should be developed (2005:108). Farrell through his model of educational inequality examines schooling and education on the basis of equality. The equality of access (the odds that children of different social groupings will get into the school system), equality of survival (the chances of children of various social groupings staying and completing a cycle of study), equality of output and outcome (the chances of children of same social groupings learning same thing at the same level at a defined point and the possibilities of living relatively similar lives subsequent to schooling (2007:156). These are discussed in relation to the school systems in Nigeria.

Social exclusion also plays out at the institutional level. Institutions here can also be understood as "complexes of norms and behaviours that persist overtime by serving some socially valued purposes Uphoff (1986 cited in (Narayan et al. 2000:8). Kabeer sees them as a distributive system for resources both symbolic and material such that institutional rules are also rules of access and membership (2000:87). This concept is employed to analyse both school systems, the experiences of the Almajiris and the perceptions of parents on education systems that structures their choice of schooling for their children. The concept will also be used to analyse how the Almajiri school system as an institution creates space for its pupils for meaningful integration in the society.

3.5 Discourses surrounding the Almajiri and the politics of labelling.

Useful for this study's analysis are the discourses surrounding the Almajiri child. As Downe argues, 'there is a need to understand naming processes and what they reveal about cultural constructions of identities in discussions of children and child research' (2001:166). The name Almajiri typically connotes a pupil of an Almajiri Quranic School; a boy in search of knowledge in distant places. This concept of travelling to far places is linked to the Prophet Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina (Yusha'u et al. 2013:125). This name however, has overtime acquired negative connotations. For instance, in the north, the name 'Almajiri' takes the following forms: a person irrespective of gender begging for alms from house to house as a result of some deformity, miscreants, children between the ages of 5-15 who attend informal religious schools who roam about with the purpose of getting some assistance or a child who engages in some form of labour to earn a living (Ibid, (Oladosu 2012:1821). Childhood constructions in various contexts create and recreate identities for children through attaching meanings to identities and labels.

These identities and labels can in themselves reinforce processes of exclusion from meaningful participation. (Retzlaff 2005:609, Alex and Whitty-Rogers 2012:1) writes that the very act of labelling is a political one that includes and excludes. As a discursive category of children, they are seen as invaders and children in the wrong places. These discourses take the form of a violation of rights within the ambits of the principles of the CRC specifically the non-discrimination of children. Similarly, norms and cultural practices also structure childhood experiences and constructions. Through religio-cultural norms and practices, children from poor rural Muslim households face a state of burdened childhood where boys are mostly sent to the Almajiri schools while most girls are married off at an early age. This was found in the study to be sustained through a process of socialization and an inter-generational transmission of beliefs and religious practices. This short discourse is necessary for understanding the context of the study. The next chapter presents study findings from the perspectives of parents.

Chapter 4 Schooling and Childhood: Voices from the North

This chapter presents key findings on the perception of Muslim parents and Mallams on both school systems. The findings are analysed based on their narratives and those of other key informants within the context of the UBE policy. As a follow-up, the factors structuring the schooling and exclusion of the Almajiris are also presented herein.

4.1 Constructing and reconstructing childhood through Schooling

A culturally responsive school system: the agency of parents

The perceptions of parents on Quranic education were largely based on religious beliefs and moral education (sharing and respect to elders etc.) that is taught in Quranic schools. A similar trend linked to this thinking was observed on the streets as pupils moved in groups and shared their alms collectively. The main difference between the schools and the western-styled ones was said by the parents to be the responsiveness of Quranic schools to their religious beliefs. For them, this aspect constitutes an important part of the upbringing of children and a main reason for enrolling their children in them. This moral component of the Almajiri Quranic school system has been described as accounting for the high preference by parents as it is perceived to be lacking in the western-styled schools (Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012:111, Karu 2011:14). Farell also argues that non enrolment of pupils in schools may also be based on religious grounds (2007:158). Quranic education was likened by the Mallams as "light' that shines on its pupils; expanding their realms of knowledge with or without western schooling. Gender norms were also said to be obtainable in Quranic schools as children are taught in classes disaggregated by sex which contrasts sharply with the western-styled schools. This global culture of co-educational western schooling is one that shifts boys and girls from a gender-segregated world to a gender-mixed world (Anderson-Levitt 2005:995). In this context, she argues further that the sex of the people with whom a child interacts with, has a powerful influence in developing the child's personality (2005:994). My interview with a Principal of an Islamiyya school confirmed the importance of moral education that Muslim parents lay on the schooling and education of their children owing to its decline in the larger society.

This moral decadence as cited by the principal leads some parents to withdraw their children from western-styled schools into the Quranic/Islamiyya ones. The withdrawal of children may also be seen as a way of protecting the child from imbibing foreign cultures or to avoid gender mixing amongst other factors that have been raised by scholars (Bourdillon et al. 2010:116, Hoppers 2000:6). Exclusion based on agency (UNICEF. 2006:7) is seen in the parents' choice to seek an alternative learning system that reflects their core values; which in this case is religious based. FGDs with Almajiris in the city also revealed the agency of parents in this regard as seen in 8 year old Mohammed:

**Figure 4.1 An Almajiri taken from the western-
styled school**

*"I am a Came-
roonian and my father
took the decision to bring
me here (Gombe) Back
home, I was already in
Primary 3. Getting ilimi
Boko (western education)
helps you to know
strange places and you
will not get lost. With it
you can engage in busi-
ness and make money
but I am not aware that
government is trying to*
make it free and compulsory".

Source: Field data with consent of Mallam and assent from Mohammed

However, study findings also show that the Islamiyya schools are most-ly attended by children from middle-class to wealthy households. As stated by the principal, poor households like those of the Almajiris are unable to afford its tuition fees. This situation as I argue points to a classed society where poor households resort to the Almajiri schools with possible unfilled desires for western schooling for children while the middle-classed households are able to afford giving their children both western and Quranic education.

Constructions of childhood: between the state and the parents

The perception of schooling and the social construction of childhood permeated narratives in the FGDs with parents and in policy documents. Be-tween the state and study participants, the divergence is fairly differentiated. Through the UBE policy, the state sees childhood as one constitutive of west-ern-styled education (Imoh 2012a) through the provision of education for all. The Almajiris in this policy are classified as "special group" as the policy sees their inclusion as one essential to the attainment of the EFA and MDG goals (UBEC 2004, UBEC 2011). Yet, the notion of a problematic childhood is not lost through the use of the term "special" in this policy. Through this notion, it may be argued that the state see their exclusion as an aberration to the global childhood. Nonetheless, parents on the other hand view childhood as one constitutive of learning the Quran in the formative years of a child sometimes through the Almajiri schools. According to them, learning the Quran at home gives room for un-seriousness by the child. One father also revealed other rea-sons for enrolling the child in such schools:

> Sending a child in some cases is punishment, like for stubborn children. It is good you take him far away, let him experience the hardship of life. That will also make him to stay and do the reading.

With these views, I argued that besides the education taught in the Almaji-ri schools, they have also doubled as corrective systems in shaping ideologies about schooling and childhood. Last stated that families of the Almajiris are mindful of the educational value of a certain degree of hardship for the moral

upbringing of their children (2000 cited in (Hoechner 2012:160). Religio-cultural norms is thus seen in this study as one underlying childhood construction and schooling associated with a level of hardship in the process of becoming an adult that will be morally upright. The nature of education in a particular society depends in part upon how childhood is viewed in that society (Ansell 2005:128). Furthermore, between the state and the Mallams of Almajiri schools, there exists a tension on the construction of childhood in the literature. While the state aims to stop the Almajiris from going to the streets based on the notion of a good childhood, some Mallams have question such moves by the state (Yusha'u et al. 2013:130). One Mallam in this study was of the opinion that such acts by the state lacks fair justice in the absence of institutional care for the children. Through these views as teachers of the Almajiri schools, a linkage can be made to the way they perceive childhood and the Almajiri schooling as one associated with lack and children as competent actors fending for themselves.

The narrow conceptions of western-styled education and schooling

On the perception of parents on western-styled education, its significance was emphasized in all discussions. Participants underscored this in relation to its role in the advancement of most western nations. This notion of education for social and economic advancement has been highlighted by authors (Adala and Okwany 2009:21). Yet, some parents felt that after the acquisition of Quranic education, western-styled education can easily be understood by their children. Such positions can be argued for as a way of strengthening core values of Quranic education in the child's formative years before the introduction of western-styled schooling. This view is supported with Ansell's claim of cultural imperialism that western knowledge pre-dominates in its schools at the expense of local knowledge (2005:145). This shows that western knowledges are emphasised more in its schools.

Similarly, an important reason for these views on western-styled education came up in my interaction with one of the Imams. According to him, parents fear that western schooling may alienate their children from learning the Quran. He also highlighted the narrow focus of western education as teaching only the means to be wealthy whereas parents want an education that is also morally relevant to their children. These fears of parents confirmed the views that western-styled schooling serves to crowd out local knowledges (Anderson-Levitt 2005:999). With such beliefs, western-styled education and schooling have not meshed local values central to early child's development. This is the void that Islamiyya schools try to fill by combining Quranic and the western-styled education for their pupils. The histories surrounding the advent of western-styled education have thus served to silence local variations of education. This thinking has led to the increased calls for reforms of educational policies in African countries since gaining independence; owing to their failure in drawing inspiration from the continent's heritage (Nyamnjoh 2012:136, Pence and Nsamenang 2008:21). Western-styled education according to Nyamnjoh is tailored to be competitive internationally (Ibid-137). While the Nigerian education system is modelled after the British school system, this study's findings present sufficient evidence for its adaptation to the Nigerian situation.

The proliferation of Almajiri schools in the rural areas as seen on the field can be described as an attempt to fill in the missing 'moral education' in western schooling .This attempts as argued by authors leads to the increase in shadow schooling where non-state actors attempt to fill in missing components in education; this they argued ultimately leads to the marginalisation of children from mainstream education (Adala and Okwany 2009:8-9). The narrow conception of the rights to education as western schooling and its failure to provide a meaningful education experience has been critiqued by (Hoechner 2012:156, McCowan 2010:513). Rights to education are mainly discussed within the scope of access to western schooling; yet this model of schooling rooted in western conceptualizations of education lacks the local content. Education as argued by Hoechner is not an autonomous entity operating in isolation of other social processes (Ibid), thus, findings point to the need for western-styled education to balance with indigenous forms of knowledges.

Evident in the interactions with parents was the segregative nature of western-styled schooling where admission into tertiary institutions is only possible for children from wealthy homes. Their view matches those of scholars who see western schooling as a sorting mechanism; enhancing the status of some pupils to be socially and economically mobile while for the poor ones, it ratifies the propensity for them to remain poor (Nasir 2010:9, Anderson-Levitt 2005:996, Klasen 2001:427, Farrell 2007:154, Samoff 2007:420, Adala and Okwany 2009:6). However, parents still regarded the acquisition of both forms of education often highlighting the spiritual task placed by God to educate the child-Western/Quranic during the FGDs. A younger Mallam who is a product of both school system was of the view that the situation is not one of either/or but that both forms of education are important in early child development.

4.2 Patterns of exclusion: people, process and the problems

Fee-free schooling beyond the reach of the poor: the space for social protection?

In view of the free school policy provided by the state and the positive disposition towards it by the parents, they however, raised issues around its cost implications. While the policy is free in principle, its costs implications is seen by parents to provide a leeway for alternatives considered as 'free' and backed by religious beliefs. One father strongly asked:

> Western schooling[10] is expensive but the Quranic is free; so you see, I must not wait till I get money before I can send my child to such schools, I can just send him to Quranic school; or will you feed your home or pay a child's school fees if you are in poverty?

Within a context of poverty and the desire for meaningful education for children, the public school system is perceived in this study to have denied access to children from these households. The cost of western-styled schooling continues to be prohibitive for poor households (Bourdillon et al. 2010:116).

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[10] Considered as western education and locally called *ilimi boko*

Equally important is the argument that the difference in the abilities of individuals to convert resources into functionings[11] differs; thus the provision of equal command on resources does not translate to equal opportunities for all Sen (1995 cited in (Saito 2003:24). This goes to show that the provision of free education for all does not translate into equality for all children especially those from poor households. A breakdown of the various costs in western-styled schooling borne by most parents in both public and private formal schools in the 2009-2010 school years is given thus:

Table 4.1 Schooling costs for 2009-2010 school year

Tuition	School Development Levy	Parent Teachers Association fees (PTA)	Exam fees
Boarding fees	School Uniforms/clothing	Books and Supplies	Transport
Food	Private tutoring	Furniture/ tools	Other fees

Source: 2010 DHS Nigerian EdData Survey. (National Population Commission 2011:104)

Given that tuition fees (as posited in the UBE policy), boarding and private tutoring may not be applicable to parents in the context of my study, however, other costs listed above were commonly cited by parents as reasons for not enrolling their children in western-styled schools. One Mallam remarked:

> I am just a farmer, if I put my children in formal schools, how do I sustain them through it? Even money for uniform becomes a problem and if I am not able to keep up, he will still have to drop out and go back to farming. But we really want them to go to the western schools.

While the state directs all parents in the UBE policy to ensure the enrolment of their children for western-styled schooling, its role (as the main duty-bearer) in reducing the burden of such tasks for poor parents was missing in its policy[12]. This claim is consistent with Tomasevski's who stated that when such cases arise, the state should stand in place for such parents as a way of securing the rights to the education of children (2005:8). The state official on basic education however defended its position on the free services:

> The State provides everything and is abiding by this. Some parents maybe buying some materials for their kids. I don't know how far one would expect government to go in providing free services. If you stretch the meaning of free, somebody has to be responsible somewhere and parents have to prepare their children. Parents have to ensure the child is ready to learn. Free is free in the sense of basic things such as infrastructure and instructional materials.

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[11] Functioning-various things a person may value doing or being Sen (1999 cited in Walker 2005:104)

[12] See Appendix for UBE Policy assumptions

This lack of a consensus on the meaning of 'free' in services provided has been a contentious issue (Ibid:3). In such situations, social protection plays a role in guaranteeing the rights to western-styled schooling and education as participants continually stated the need for the state to alleviate their sufferings. Child-focused social protection have been found to boost school enrolment and retention in countries such as in South Africa through the Child Support Grant (Case et al. 2005:479) and other Latin American countries.8 I suggest their usefulness in this context to free up resources for Muslim poor households to invest in the extra costs of western-styled schooling.

However, the financial burden of social protection on the lean resources of most developing countries has been highlighted by Pat et al (2005 cited in (Slater 2011:253-4). Yet, he still asserts the possibility of an affordable social protection package for such countries (Ibid). Namibia with its Basic Income Grant is a close example. At the moment, according to the official, the persuasive method is being employed through local stakeholders to promote western-styled schooling in the communities. Consequently, in the end, as Wilson argues, user fees in western-styled schooling limit opportunity to those who are able to pay (2004:19). Affirming the importance of food as key in early childhood development through interviews with the official, the school feeding programmes as stated in the UBE policy are currently not implemented in the state despite having an active agricultural sector. School feeding program as a form of non-cash social protection have been successful in countries like India and Brazil. They have motivated parents to send their children to school rather than keeping them at home to work or care for siblings World Food Programme (2010 cited in (Yunusa et al. :106). In Nigeria, Kano State in the north and Osun State in the South-west have consistently recorded high enrolment and transition rates in the western schools (Yunusa et al. :107, Dantiye. 2013). These states have as one of the roots of their success the free mid-day meals in western schools.

Coping mechanism for the poor: the role of the State

In Nigeria, the highest fertility rates have been found in the northern states (Nwangwu et al. 2005:20). The total fertility rate in north-east Nigeria (geo-political zone of the study) has been put at 7.2 per woman (National Population Commission 2009:53); while the south has its fair share of large families, the north tended to be cited due to poor living standards. Most participants in the FGDs had family sizes ranging from 5-35 while older fathers had families larger than the younger ones. With regards to the family size and factors debarring from enrolment, one father gave his reason for opting for the Almajiri system:

> The household size influences my choice of sending my children to the Quranic schools. This is so because it reduces spending. The Mallams we send our children to receive no dime from us because of the cordiality between us and them.

My findings are also consistent with those of Sule that Almajiri schooling provides a space for some parents to send children to these schools as a means of reducing the responsibilities of childrearing (2002 cited in (Yusha'u et al. 2013:129). The risks that are likely to be faced by such households are mitigated through the enrolment of the Almajiris and proliferation of these schools

in the rural north. Furthermore, as western-styled schooling is replete with cost implications in spite of a free universal policy, the Almajiri schools in contrasts are perceived by poor parents as 'free' and without costs and thus enrol their children in them. This again speaks to the inability of the state to provide education for all that is truly free. This then creates a space for poor rural households who desire both forms of education to be pushed out of the mainstream education system. The inability by the Mallams to cope with high enrolment further creates risks for their pupils in such schools. The effect of state policies such as SAP in the early 1980s also had their impact on poor families-Almajiris and their teachers inclusive as they try to develop means of coping with the situation (Hoechner 2012, Yau 2000:161). In this regard, I argue that universal state policies are not culturally sensitive to the contexts in which they are located- religious and socio-economic.

Institutional bias and rights to education

Within the social exclusion discourse is the role of institutions put forward by Kabeer (2000). One exclusionary practice within institutions is the mobilisation of bias through beliefs, values etc. to systematically benefit persons or groups at the expense of others. (Kabeer 2000:91-2). The Almajiri heritage is regarded as an institution organised around stakeholders-parents, Mallams etc. An underlying need to protect their place at the institutional level was revealed during the interviews with Mallams. With planned integration programs by the state, Mallams frequently enquired from us during the interviews about their continued teaching in the Almajiri schools. This anxiety reveals as I argue a need to continue to maintain autonomy over the school system.

Similarly, an ideological reason as cited by some Mallams as reasons for being outside the state's purview, was that such relationship connotes being paid for a heavenly duty. This according to the Mallams leaves no option than to do the biddings of the state. It may also be argued that Mallams perceive their role as sacred and that such linkage with the state is deemed as non-spiritual. Compulsory education was also an issue raised by one Mallam. For him, there is a need for dialogue between the state and them to resolve critical areas in the policy such as compulsory western-styled schooling. Beyond trying to retain autonomy, the possibility of a compromise between the state and the Mallams may be in view given favourable disposition by some as findings have shown. Parental consent was cited by Mallams if their pupils were to be allowed to attend western-styled schools.

High investment, low returns in western styled schooling

Despite the proclamation of a free western school system, a lack of trust in state policies and programs was raised by parents. Through interactions, they highlighted the corruptive trends in state policies even as they reiterated their implicit good. Adala and Okwany also have emphasised the inherent difficulty in implementing state policies (2009:18). These views by the parents show the loss of hope in the state's ability to deliver on its promises and on the rights of its citizens. Interviews with a CSO representative indicated the practice of some school Heads in western-styled schools in keeping instructional materials provided by the state from their pupils; based on the notion of avoiding mishandling by pupils. Other personal experiences are books

given by the state that are found in small bookshops marked as 'NOT TO BE SOLD'.

Furthermore, graduates of western-styled schooling were previewed by participants as lacking in ransformative skills even after going through all stages in the system. This is consisted with claims by Hoppers that western schooled pupils still lacked basic skills (2000:7). Its curriculum was criticized by participants as not being transformative to guarantee employment. With a 23.9% unemployment rate in 2011 in Nigeria, (Nwachukwu. 2013), the possibilities of investing in western schooling by from poor Muslim parents may be regarded as a waste of lean resources. Responses from the state official on basic education indicated the need for increased returns on investment. By enabling their pupils to gain meaningful jobs, this he asserts will be strong incentives for such parents to invest in it for their children. However, when parents consider the low returns on investing in western-schooling, their consideration for the Almajiri system tend to make some sense to them on the basis of acquiring moral education.

Problematic transition in the western-styled school system

The structure of the basic school system in western schooling is organized in a way that schooling may likely be truncated through transition in the system. From an initial 6-3-3-4 model, Nigeria recently moved into the present 9-3-4 UBE system. Nevertheless, not much seems to have changed in the structure of education in the country other than the proclamation of a smooth transition from primary to junior secondary devoid of costs. Parents in the study area however, stated that the system is still based on costs with implications for progression. A parent commented:

> When you send your child to primary school and was informed that he had successively passed his exams and has to go to the next school (junior secondary) and you don't have 10,000 Naira (50 Euros) to send the child to the school with, he will definitely end up going to the farm and you won't be encouraged to send the second child to even the primary school because it will just be a waste of time.

The present structure of western-styled schooling has been described as favouring an elimination based system of schooling (Adala and Okwany 2009:2) as it does not translate into retention and completion of the process

The graphs below shows the enrolment rates for pupils in the 6 geopolitical zones in the country in the 2011-2012 school years.

Figure 4.2 Pupils Enrolment in UBE Primary schools by geopolitical zones for 2011/2012 (million)
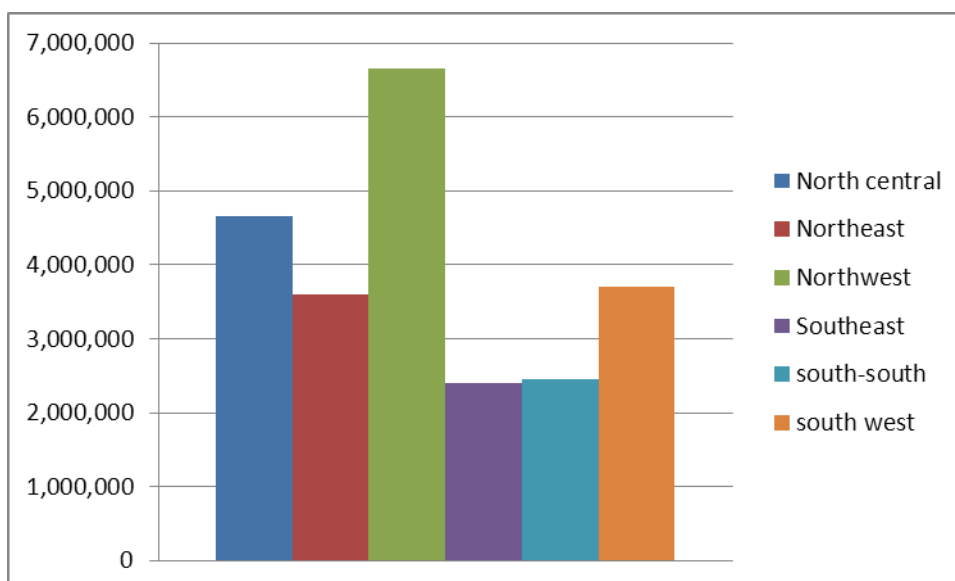
Note: Gombe State is located in the Northeast geopolitical zone

Figure 4.3 Pupils Enrolment in UBE Junior Secondary schools by geopolitical zones for 2011/2012 (million)
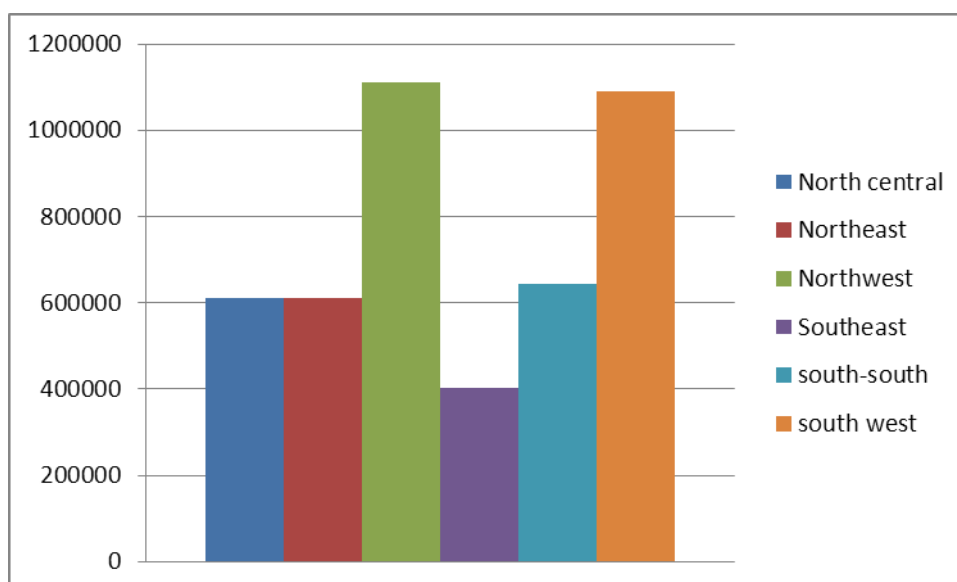
Comparatively, zonally, enrolment rates show an increase in primary school enrolment especially for the 3 geopolitical zones in the north when compared to other zones. These trends point to high enrolment into primary schools at the early stages of western-styled schooling. However, transition

from primary into junior secondary schools is stalled in the north central and north east zones when compared with zones in the south. Imam for instance finds that pupils do not go into senior secondary may be attributed to lack of resources to pay the fees and other charges (2012:200). The rate of dropping out of western-styled school system is an indication of the inherently exclusionary nature of the system where pupils are unable to complete a full cycle of study. Ansell also asserts this trend in 3rd world countries where enrolments begins at high rates but problematic beyond the first year at such schools (2005:132). The inability of the policy to equalize all children is further revealed in a regional analysis where attendance rates are higher for children from wealthy homes, Christian homes, those in the urban areas and those from the south while their counterparts in the northeast region in Nigeria have a sporadic attendance (Lincove 2009:476). On the other hand, acquiring just basic education may also be meaningless in a context where pupils move beyond that level as argued by McCowan (2010:514). These findings therefore points to the needs for 1) eliminating barriers that may obstruct progression in the system and 2) creating opportunities for pupils to aspire higher in western schooling.

4.3 Conclusion

The perception of parents on western-styled education and schooling has been presented as positive and desirable yet seen as lacking in moral content. The influence of moral education as findings show also constructs childhood in the context. Schooling costs, institutional bias, amongst others were found in the chapter to be barriers to western schooling. These were analysed against some assumptions in the UBE policy. Though the policy is not necessarily exclusionary in itself as an inclusive policy as observed by parents in the FGDs; however is has failed to 'prepare disadvantaged children to be integrated in social and economic life of adult society' through its practices (Klasen 2001:423) mine emphasis. The next chapter presents findings from the perspectives of the Almajiris and other mechanisms structuring their schooling.

Chapter 5 Almajiris: at the intersection of the global and local notions of childhoods

In this chapter, I present findings from the perspectives of the Almajiris on their perception of both forms of education and factors shaping their exclusion from the public school system. Their views are matched with other findings from field data gained through the various methods. Through an intersectional approach, I analyse how different social categories work together to define people's experiences and thus creating identities for them.

5.1 Learning on the margins

Perspectives on school systems: exploring the tensions

On the perception of Quranic education by the Almajiris, this was linked to its significance in spiritual knowledge as study participants commonly used the words "God', 'heaven', 'respect' and the 'hereafter' at various points in their narratives. However, perceptions on western-styled schooling and education revealed some sharp and diverse responses. These responses point to some form of tension on how children view the system differently. Younger Almajiris for instance described western education as thus:

> What you do and benefit from on earth

> I see the people (pupils of western-styled schools) but I don't know of the school

Older Almajiris on the other hand linked western schooling to its significance as they reiterated that it was an important element of education. Despite these responses, they stated that acquiring this form of education will only be possible after Quranic schooling. Through this view, I take the position that this thinking by the older Almajiris may be due to some perceived inadequacies encountered while engaging with the wider society. This dimension of exclusion is seen when people compare their situation relative to those of others at a given time and place. (UNICEF. 2006:7). My studies on the field reveal how most youths engaged in informal jobs have limited communication in English especially when dealing with non-indigenes. When asked why they were not attending western-styled schools, older pupils revealed that while there is the desire to, school costs and more importantly 'responsibilities' in the mornings that needed to be taken care of prevents participation in western schooling. Thus, it can be inferred that while they desired western education, certain factors limit their agency to participate to enrol and participate in the school system. Yet, while they expressed unhappiness over this, the preference for Quranic schooling over the western was evident in their narratives:

> These responses also show the clash between school schedules in both school systems. While the UBE policy stipulates 6-16 years, children within this age bracket are also sent out to the Almajiri schools. Yet again is the class schedule for both systems as western schooling typically takes place between 8am-2pm in Nigeria, while the Almajiri schooling also goes on at about the same time. The perceptions of children though similar to the adults in terms of Quranic schooling, older Almajiris were more inclined to acquiring it.

Children's needs: a reflection of adult's interests

The power of adults over children was evident as part of the factors structuring schooling for the Almajiris. The participation of children in decision making processes concerning them was largely weak or non-existent in the study findings. This was evident from the narratives of some of the Almajiris who indicated how relatives; particularly their fathers were instrumental to their enrolment in the schools. As children living in a context where they take instructions from adults and have to leave home at an early age, this then reveals that they were considered incapable of voicing preferences and opinions. These views about children have been argued as prevalent within the African context (Chirwa 2002:160). The power of the adult takes the form of decisions over the child. This thinking also suggests that adults do not regard children not as equals. Parents may be right in this regard that children attend schools as argued by (Purdy 1994:224); however, the type of schooling is often not agreed with the child in question. The notion that children should be 'seen and not heard' illustrates adults disregard for children's opinions (Ansell 2005:5). The case of a 13 year old Almajiri in one of the FGDs depicts the position of children in adult mediated contexts:

> I was brought here since I was 7 years and have spent about 6 years now. My father took the decision to come here and I felt bad because I was going to leave my parents. I have not seen them since then until this year (2013). I cried seriously when I was brought here. I really like to participate in formal schooling because it is good to have both; and because when you do, you will be able to secure a job in government and feed your children. Anywhere you enter, nobody will disrespect you.

Within this group also are those pupils who expressed their happiness over their parent's decisions to enrol them in the school. Based on this, I argue that in such contexts with strong adults' influences, children may have been socialized to expect such dominance over them. As argued by Punch, they are used to having their lives dominated by adults and not treated as equals (2002:324). Similarly, within the school as a place of early child development is the dominance and powers of adults as argued by (Ebrahim 2010:5). On one occasion on the field, we were denied access to children despite being around at the time of our visit. Preferring to speak with us on their behalf, the Head Mallam justified his position that adults are more competent to articulate issues than children especially when it relates to the Mallam and the Almajiri.

Children tended as authors have pointed out, to be seen as "human becoming' than social actors with their opinions (Downe 2001:166, Ansell 2005:137, White 2002:1096). This line of thinking in the construction of children as weaker has also shaped the Almajiris perception of their agency or lack of one. At various points in our interaction with them, they reiterated that their teachers are more knowledgeable and his viewpoints represent their voices. Lack of voice and asymmetrical power relations between adults and children (James and James 2008:69, Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2009:109) saturated our interactions with the pupils. Resulting from the tender ages when they leave home to the Almajiri school, children may be unable to voice their preferences for or against such decisions.

Constricted curriculum

Three schedules of classes were identified through my observation studies and with in-depth interviews conducted with selected Mallams. The first session starts after the 5:30 am morning prayer and goes on till 10 am, second session at 2:30 pm in the afternoon and runs to about 6 pm, and the 3rd session starts from 8:30 pm to continue recitation till 10 pm. Curricula development in these schools is at the behest of the Mallam which in most cases is based solely on reading, writing, recitation and memorization of the Quran. Findings showed in the schools visited that teaching and learning consisted of learning only the Quran without additional basic western-styled subjects in literacy and numeracy amongst others. This mode of teaching has been criticised as de-emphasising critical thinking approach; based on a single curriculum of Quran (Usman 2008:64-5). However, there are also critics who have defended the school system against being judged purely on utilitarian terms since it is a religious school system (Easton et al. 1997:1). Yet, evidence from this study indicates a need for a reform of the school system curriculum. Such an approach to learning for children in their formative years as I argue not only constrains their choices in later life but also places them in exclusionary positions relative to their contemporaries in the western-styled schools. The restricted curriculum of these schools has been argued by scholars as insufficient enough to earn them a place in the educational, political and socio-economic configurations of modern Nigeria (Imam 2012:199, Nasir 2008:3). Findings also showed that some Almajiri schools in the city have an expanded curriculum which includes learning other religious books of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (Hadiths) yet beyond these extra subjects, western-styled subjects were absent in the curriculum. Interactions with one of their teachers buttress these claims:

> The only thing we teach them to prepare them towards the future and their development is the farming and rearing of animals. That is the only thing we know and as such that is what we can teach them

These are however not structured trainings and were consequent most times upon the livelihood options of the teacher. In other words, some farmer teachers tended to engage their pupils for farming while others do not. Furthermore, FGDs with mothers in one of the study communities indicated that children have also been taken away by some Mallams in the past on a pretext of learning the Quran but were found to have used their pupils as labourers in some distant farms. Critiquing this finding, I recognize that similar observation has been made against the western-styled school system where some teachers are known to engage their pupils in domestic work (Bourdillon et al. 2010:116). Yet, in the case of the Almajiri, the chances of engaging in the formal employment beyond providing religious services as I argue as limiting. This assertion is aptly stated by Klasen that sufferers of social exclusion in education in childhood stand more risk of being poor and unemployed for longer than others (2001:437). Informal interaction with residents revealed that graduates of the school system are mostly concentrated in the informal sector. Imam notes that when the Almajiris complete their studies, they usually remain in the cities taking up menial jobs such as truck pushing etc. (2012:199). Saito's argument on the importance of expanding future freedoms of the child is apt in this discourse (2003 cited in (Walker 2005:107). Thus, I state that parents of the Almajiris did not focus on the future livelihoods of their children but rather on the present which is learning the Quran and moral education.

The Almajiri School: their pupils and the Street

The Almajiri school system is one that is increasingly coming under public scrutiny as one overdue for institutional reforms owing to the decadence that has marred the system (Oladosu 2012:1821, Yusha'u et al. 2013:127). Though starting out with laudable beginnings, the loss of support enjoyed by the teachers and their pupils has resulted into routines in the school system that sustains a system of begging at scheduled breaks in between class sessions. Beyond the lean curriculum, this institutionalized begging associated with the school system is one that is problematic for pupils' development. For instance, in one of the study communities, we could not gained access to the Almajiri as their Mallam said they were out for other 'activities' outside the community. One Mallam supported this tradition of child begging in the school system:

> The first thing an Almajiri must face is hunger. A student that leaves his town to school in another town must go hungry. The Almajiri advantage is that he can beg but you as a western-styled school student cannot beg.

This view is in line with James and James's assertion that what constitutes risks and protection in relation to children is socially constructed and aiding an understanding of childhood constructions (2008:140). However, in my interviews with the Imams, it was revealed that the present system of begging associated with the school is not acceptable in Islam. It may also be argued that given the socio-economic context of this study, Mallams may encourage their pupils to go out in search of means of sustenance as one of the Mallams I interviewed had up to 200 pupils. Thus, pupils have to struggle for survival through the school. This practice beyond taking the time that may possibly be invested in western-styled schooling, it also has implications for the way their pupils perceive the street both as an obligatory place to source for alms to sustain the practice of giving back to their Mallams but also as a place to source for food for themselves (Usman 2008:64, Yusha'u et al. 2013:127, Ebigbo 2003:101). According to Khalid, one of the main charges levelled against these schools is that it subjects its clients to a condition of begging (2000 cited in (Yusha'u et al. 2013:128). FGDs with the Almajiris showed that younger ones amongst them are also caught in this tradition as one participant said about the street:

> A place where you look for food and bring for the Mallam and he will be happy with you

This constrains their pupils caught between the need to fulfil basic physiological need (food) and pressure to fulfil obligations to teachers. The views of the Mallam quoted above also suggest a construction of childhood that may be associated with hardship in the process of growing up. This view is consistent with those scholars who state that the school system is so designed to brace pupils up for hard times and encourage a tradition of empathy for the needy (Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012:111, Karu 2011:15). This tradition was also observable on the streets.

The street: naming, shaming and empathy

As a follow-up on the school's culture, the Almajiri are seen from my findings in this study to be locked in an intricate web of ridicule, name calling and empathy. Field observation showed how they are chased away by some adults

when begging for alms. One restaurant owner, with whom I interacted informally, confirmed that this is connected with the way they are perceived and treated by adults in public places as "dirty-looking children". According to her, food vendors experienced low patronage in shops where they are found. Similarly, Hoecher found the negative effects of being an Almajiri through the narratives of her study participants as they expressed how they were perceived as beings of lesser status (2012:162). I assert that the present connotation of the name and being pupils of Almajiri schools alienates them from meaningful integration in the society. Earlier findings by Usman revealed how they were bullied; suffered unwelcoming attitudes from pupils of western-styled schools in earlier efforts at integration by the state (2008:67-8). My in depth interview with a former Almajiri revealed that although certain benefits are derived from children being on the streets i.e. being streetwise, knowing places and people etc. However, according to him, the disadvantages of being on the streets far outweigh the advantages. Child kidnapping are among other calamities that befall children on the streets as he noted. In all discussions, the Almajiris voiced their sadness over the rejection and ridicule they constantly face on the street.

Reconstructing the 'Almajiri' in the pupil

On the meaning of the name, interactions showed that younger Almajiris lacked an awareness of the meaning of the name with only one pupil who gave his meaning of the name as:

> One that does not have parents in a town except his Mallam

Older Almajiris on the other hand aged 12-17, were more knowledgeable of the meaning of the name as one of them expressed smiles when explaining the meaning to me:

> The, 'al' means 'Allah', the 'ma' means 'Mohammadu' and the 'ji' means 'Jibrilinu' the Angel. The meaning of this Almajiri is something in the dark, you have to really search for it before you get the meaning and if you say you will change the meaning, God will not be happy with you

Despite the negative connotation around the name Almajiri, older pupils are actively reconstructing and attaching much importance to what they represent in the real sense. This is also consistent with an earlier finding on how the Almajiris have sustained a positive outlook despite the negativities surrounding them (Hoechner 2012:163). Field findings also revealed some form of resilience in their engagement with the street as they have managed to locate particular places such as restaurants, car packs, gas stations where they go without being rejected. A possible reason for this may be the consideration for the loss of support owing from being far from home.

Children's drawings: unearthing abilities within

Figure 5.1 A house and a car (Ibrahim)

> If I ever attend formal school, I will study how to draw and design houses. I love to draw houses!

Figure 5.2 A house with flowers. (Haruna). Arabic inscription: in the name of Allah the most Beneficent, most Merciful

These drawings are by 13 year old Ibrahim and 10 year Haruna.[13] Ibrahim eagerly told us about his love for drawing particularly for houses which informs most of his drawings. Haruna, on the other hand was the only pupil who agreed to draw while his peers declined. These drawings points to the

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[13] These pupils have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities

possibilities of handling both Quranic and western-styled schooling by the Almajiris if given the chance. Yet, these drawings also reflect the need to expand their hidden capabilities beyond learning only the Quran. Other subjects in western-styled schooling that encourages pupils' creativity like the Creative Arts and Culture subject are missing in the curriculum of the Almajiri schools visited.

Furthermore, the fact that these pupils have not attended western schools and are able to draw buttresses my argument that the Almajiri schools have also aided exclusion; through their constricted curriculum. The discourse of drawings as meaning making recognises the importance of context in children's drawings (Einarsdottir et al. 2009:218). They assert that the drawing process moves discourse from representation to recognising the intentions and purposefulness in the drawings (Ibid). Understandably, these pupils are housed in poor living conditions; there is therefore the possible need to have a better apartment, space to play which is indicative of the stage of their lives especially for the younger ones. In most drawings collected from participants, drawings of houses stood prominently. I argue that as pupils are continually exposed to the elements thus; taking refuge in nearby shelters is a form of protection as narrated by one pupil in the city. Also, while I listened to Haruna discuss his drawing, an appreciation of aesthetics was evident in his narrative. He said:

> This is the kind of house I see in the city whenever I go out to beg. They are usually beautiful with flowers surrounding them
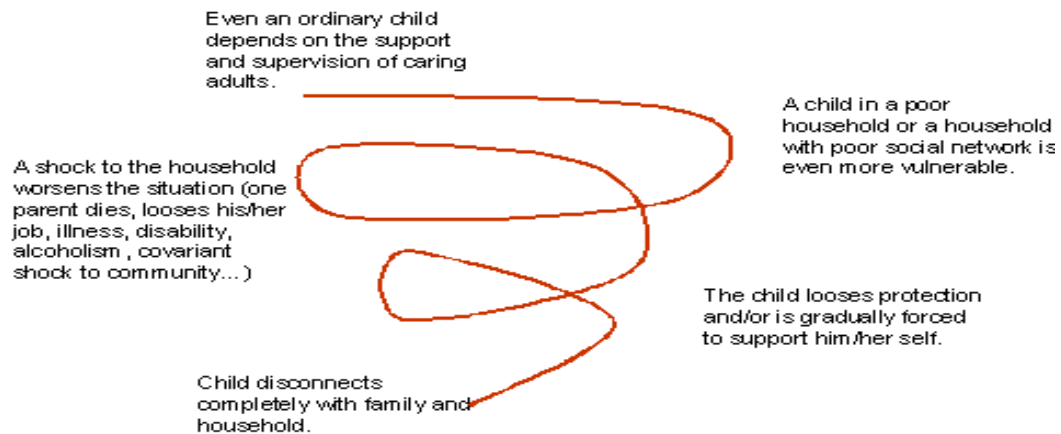
This point to the fact that they also have an appreciation for beautiful scenery as seen in the flowers he used in decorating his drawing. While most children expressed more preference for Quranic education, the desires for western-styled schooling and education were never silenced in their narratives. Ibrahim for instance, expressed his desires for an alternative learning system so as to perfect his artistic skills for drawing and designing houses.

5.2 Intersectionality of disadvantages for the Almajiris

Vulnerabilities and Gendered dynamics

The concept of vulnerability comes useful in the analysis of the intersections of disadvantages facing the Almajiri child. Study findings show that children are enrolled in the Almajiri schools for various reasons. An important reason is one linked to enrolment based on reducing risks as poor households (Yusha'u et al. 2013:129). While this act as I argue mitigates risks at the home front, it increases the risks and vulnerability of the child resulting from leaving home. Chaudhuri argues that the short-term risk-mitigating strategies of households can constrain the life chances of their children (2003:5). This thinking has been argued by the World Bank as leading to a downward spiral in child vulnerability (2005). The increasing loss of support for the Almajiri results in a downward spiral of their vulnerability:

Figure 5.3 The Downward Spiral of Child Vulnerability

Even an ordinary child depends on the support and supervision of caring adults.

A child in a poor household or a household with poor social network is even more vulnerable.

A shock to the household worsens the situation (one parent dies, looses his/her job, illness, disability, alcoholism , covariant shock to community...)

The child looses protection and/or is gradually forced to support him/her self.

Child disconnects completely with family and household.

Source: the World Bank (2005)

Shocks for the Almajiri in this case ranges from leaving the protective closure that family provides, lacking care in the Almajiri schools due to high enrolment. Going to the streets further exacerbates their conditions health wise. A common feature with most participants in the FGDs was the presence of various skin infections. My position is that the loss of support from parents and other caregivers increases their levels of vulnerability. As children, they lack resources to fall back on when faced with hazards. Gender and religious dynamics also play out in the household as norms and beliefs require boys to be sent out to these schools. While the boys go to these schools, the girls are married off at an early age. This assertion is consistent with the work of scholars that young girls from Muslim households in the north are married off in early adolescence due to religious beliefs of preventing pregnancy before marriage (Easton et al. 1997:9, Nasir 2010:6, Ebigbo 2003:101) A possible reason why boys are preferred for such rigorous schooling can be linked to gendered constructions where boys are naturally perceived to be stronger while girls are seen as weaker.

Terrorism and the rights to and through education

The insecurity created by the Boko Haram group in the northeast of Nigeria, venue of the research was observed on the field as interfering with the rights to western-styled education. With an ideology based on an avowed hatred for western education for Muslims, the access and participation of children in its schools are adversely affected. Bombings of schools and western related structures have all but succeeded in creating an uncertainty about life in the study areas. Findings also showed that their beliefs and influence are increasingly permeating children spaces. A group of 9-12 year olds gave their perception on this:

> Boko Haram people are now everywhere and will not condone such (western-styled schooling), which is why we are sacred of joining

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Linked to this thinking by are views of some others on western education:

> Western Education (ilimi Boko) only ends here! If you die or after death, it won't salvage you!

While the goals of Quranic school system have been highlighted as including a complete knowledge of the Quran as a way of gaining spiritual sanctity here on earth and in the hereafter (Yusha'u et al. 2013:128) the views of these pupils may also reflect a system of indoctrination where some pupils may be taught to reject western styled education. By the same token, some scholars have made a linkage in terrorist attacks in Nigeria between the Almajiris and the Boko Haram group (Awofeso et al. 2003:317-8, Yusha'u et al. 2013:129). Their claim explains the argument by Klasen that socially excluded children are a threat to the society through the generation of social disruption (2001:422).

The implications of terrorism and insecurity on the rights to and through education are diverse. Apart from being a threat to the state in its efforts at promoting education for all, teachers in the north of Nigeria are increasingly being targeted at. Thus, as I argue further when children (including the Almajiris) desire to attend western-styled schools, prospective teachers are afraid to take up teaching jobs or resume in schools for the in-service ones. The insecurities created consequently produce a situation of competing priorities where more funds in the national budget are then devoted to defence leaving a negligible proportion for education. As education is seen as a means to secure other rights, the Almajiri's rights to education are grossly affected following from the multiplicity of disadvantages facing them. Education can only thrive in a context devoid of violence where every child can participate meaningfully in learning processes. Through an intersectional linkage of weak voice, poverty, risks, lack of care amongst others, the schooling and exclusion of the Almajiris from western-style school system are structured.

Figure 5.4: The linkages of Intersectional disadvantages
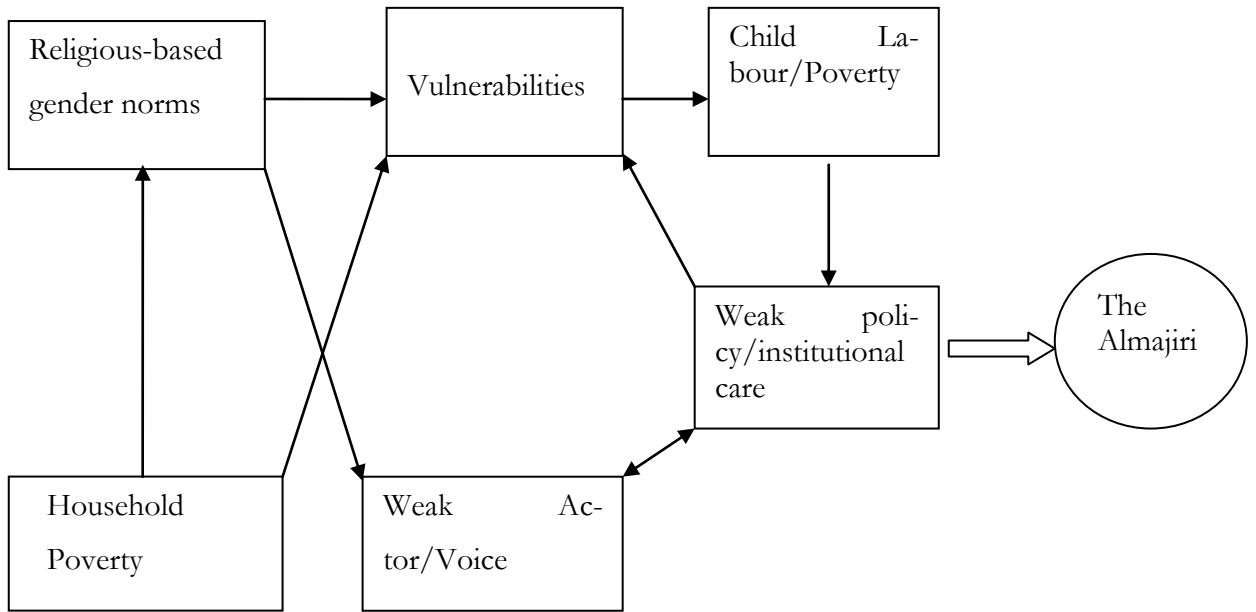
The child is embedded in a strong anti-western ideological context

Source: Researcher's Construction

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented key findings on the experiences of the Almajiris and mechanisms structuring their schooling and exclusion from western-styled school system. Their perception on both school systems was also examined. While a few of the younger pupils have limited knowledge of western-styled education, older pupils are aware of its apparent benefit resulting from inter-personal relationship with others. As part of factors shaping their schooling and under-schooling, constricted curriculum, gender-based norms, risks and a strong adult mediated space were implicated in the findings. The ideologies of Boko Haram and consequent insecurities were seen through study findings to have impacted on the rights to education and schooling in the region. The next chapter gives a synopsis of study findings and their implications for policy.

Chapter 6 Concluding Reflections: pathways for Policy

In this study, I set out to achieve an objective: to examine the factors that structure the schooling of the Almajiri child based on the notion of being outside the mainstream school system. The main question was to examine the ways in which the Almajiris were excluded from the western-styled schooling in Nigeria. In this chapter, I present a synopsis of the study findings and their implications for policy.

6.1 Homogenizing childhoods: silencing local variations

My findings have shown that in an attempt to provide EFA, the western-styled school system and its policy overlooks variation in learners' needs without taking due account of the multiplicity of contexts and childhood constructions. Lacking in moral content and associated with costs, it has created a developmental space for other non-state actors to provide the missing components; thereby exacerbating the marginalization of children from the mainstream school system. Findings also revealed that the Almajiri schools under laid by religious ideologies, increases the vulnerability of its pupils to risks in the pursuit of an education that is culturally relevant. While extra schooling costs were inherent in a supposedly free western school system, the state as the main duty bearer excluded children from poor households in the absence of social protection. Findings showed that rural Muslim parents were constrained in their duty as non-state actors to ensure access, retention and completion of western-styled schooling for their children. The lack of an oversight and coordination between the state and teachers of Almajiri schools in this study was found to be problematic from a rights based perspective leading to the exclusion of their pupils from active citizenship. Finally, there was however, no evidence to show that rural Muslim parents are against western-styled education.

6.2 Weak policy contexts: the constrained space for children's agency

The strength of the rights of children, their agency as well as enabling policy context was also investigated in the study. Child participants were found to be embedded in a strong adultist society where their needs are largely determined by the interests of adults. Their participation and agency in decision making processes are considered insignificant; thus seen as lacking voice or agency of their own. My findings also showed that the Almajiri school system considered as 'free' has become a risk-mitigating mechanism some poor households; thereby compromising the right to basic western-styled education. While the Almajiris placed a preference on Quranic education, the desire for western-styled education was evident in most of their narratives. However, parental choice tended to constrain their agency. Insecurities and the ideologies of fundamental Islamist groups were found in the study to be a threat to the

rights to education and through education. Both childhood constructions and religious beliefs systems were key factors found to have structured the schooling and exclusion of the Almajiris from western-styled schooling.

6.3 Implications for Policy

The implications for policy of my findings raise key concerns about the nature of universal approaches to social provisioning. While providing education for all children is a necessary step in the right direction, there is also the need for flexibility, diversity and specificity in the policy making process. Western education needs to take cognizance of indigenous forms of education in the context where it is given. I argue that local variations in the constructions of childhood with regards to non-harmful cultural practices and belief system are to be considered in ensuring that indigenous groups who tended to fall outside government's plans are captured. The narrow articulation of western-styled schooling and education, as study revealed, has only served to reinforce the exclusion of rural Muslim parents who yearn for an education that leans more on the moral upbringing of their children. Yet, the significance of a basic western education in early childhood was never undermined in my findings. Saito argues that when western-styled education emphasises 'competitiveness' its pupils are less likely to acquire capabilities that will enhance their freedoms (2003:27). Also, my findings have shown that the underlying reasons for enrolment into the Almajiri schools are under laid with religious beliefs. However, I take the position that these schools should not be seen as the sole provider of moral education for Muslim children as other Quranic/Islamiyya schools have successfully combined both forms of education in their curriculum. This situation I argue only serves to reinforce a class based society. Thus, my position is that there is a need for social protection for poor households who trade-off the rights to basic education for religious education. This, I assert will free up resources for a meaningful education for their children. Compulsory education policies I suggest should also be matched with appropriate provisions to enable their implementation by non-state actors. Furthermore, I state that a void is being created through the state's incapacity to provide free and meaningful education. This has provided an opportunity for non-actors to provide low quality schooling; thus pushing the attainment of the EFA goals further. Moreover, without providing a thriving policy context and the regulation of Almajiri schooling, children and particularly the Almajiris will continue to suffer exploitation, low relevance to the wider society and informality (in employment); as non-state actors have taken advantage of the narrow content of western-styled education and the prohibitive cost implications for poor households.

Despite noticeable enrolment rates, the right to education has been closely associated with access to western schooling. A focus on having more children in schools as against providing quality life-long education continues to make western-styled schooling unattractive to learners. In this regard, my findings point to a need to address the present focus of western education in this context in order to meet up with the diversity of learners needs. The problems of the western school system is not solved by fleeing into alternatives but rather, it is one that calls for a restructuring of the very nature and content of learning Odora (1996 cited in (Hoppers 2000:8). Thus, I argue with scholars who have

asserted that western education should move beyond literacy and numeracy towards useful skills and knowledge for lifelong learning (Adala and Okwany 2009:21, UNESCO 1990:7). With this in place, I affirm that the integration between a culturally relevant education and the acquisition of meaningful western schooling that guarantees high returns on investment becomes a win-win situation for rural Muslim children.

In this study, I take the position that the UBE policy has homogenized all children. While it have may guaranteed a pathway for upward socio-economic movement for some; it has reinforced the exclusion of others. It is equally important to note that in designing inclusive policies, there is the need for adequate resources and focus to be given to those children who are likely to fall outside the mainstream. There is therefore the need to look within, to draw strength from and to encourage a system of continuous dialogue between local people and policy-makers and implementers. The political will to do this across board will guarantee that the 'universal' in social policies becomes a reality for the marginalized.

Finally, what opportunities therefore exist for a meaningful integration of western-styled schooling with local knowledges? This from my findings needs to be explored further.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Social-Cultural and Economic Contexts of the Research Site

It is essential that account is taken of the political, economic and socio-cultural factors in examining nations' educational system and their enabling policies Green (1997 cited in (Imam 2012:183) mine emphasis. Nigeria has a population of 168 million and close to half of that number are children within the 0-14 age bracket (World Bank. 2013a). Absolute poverty rates in 2010 indicate that over half of the population (60.9%) are living in poverty (NBS 2010:5) with most of the country's poor located in the northern part of the country (Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012:110, NBS 2010:4, BBC. 2013). Structural adjustment programs in the early 80s also impacted on the economy and especially on the education sector. Through the loss of revenue, the state shifted part of the burden of funding education by transferring primary education to the lower arms of government (Imam 2012:192). Thus, school fees were reintroduced resulting from the reduced funding from the state and the (Ibid; (Adala and Okwany 2009:6). The northern part of the country especially has been witness to terrorist-related attacks linked to the Boko Haram Islamic fundamental group. According to Adibe, the group derived its name from a strong opposition to western education or lifestyle as it believes this has a corrupting influence on Muslims (2012:48). Most attacks by the group are targeted at western-related structures such as schools, churches, banks, Police Stations etc. Particularly, the northeast region of the country has witnessed the highest rates of attacks by the group.

Appendix 2 Excerpts from the 2004 UBE Policy

- Every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal education for every child of primary and secondary school age

- Every parent shall ensure that his child/ ward attends and completes his:

    a) Primary education

    b) Junior secondary education by endeavouring to send the child to primary and junior schools

- Stakeholders in education in a Local Government Area shall ensure that every parents or person who has the custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him in relevant sections of the Act.

- A parent who contravenes these duties commits an offence and is liable:

    a) On first conviction, to be reprimanded

    b) Second conviction, to a fine of N2,000 (10 Euros) or imprisonment for a term of 1 month or both and

    c) On subsequent conviction, to a fine of N5,000 (25 Euros) or imprisonment for a term of 2 months or to both

- Services provided in public primary and junior secondary school shall be free of charge

- Services that should be provided free of charge are books, instructional materials, classrooms, furniture and free lunch.

- A person who receives or obtains any fee commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding N10, 000 (50 Euros) or imprisonment for a term of 3 months or both.

- Basic education means early childhood care and education and nine years of formal schooling (western-styled)

- A child or ward means a person of primary and junior secondary school age who is between the age of 6 years and 16 years whether disabled or not.

- A parent in relation to any child means the person who has the lawful custody of the child and includes a guardian or a person having the care and custody of the child

Source: (UBEC 2004:2-12)

Appendix 3 Reflexivity with Adults

The influence of my identities as a student studying overseas played out on a number of occasions in my interactions with some adult participants. Having decided to meet with us (me and one of my research assistants) at his house, one of the key informants-an Imam, made some concerted efforts to ensure we were comfortable. Being a Hausa by tribe and vast in speaking the local language; he insisted that he would discuss in English. At various points when he missed a word or was trying to articulate his sentences, he switched between both languages to make his point. Inward, I had an urge to correct him those times. Yet, I never did. On reflection later, I discovered that the influence of the space and authority (in most African societies)[14] of adults over younger ones may have influenced (being a product of such upbringing) and stopped me from correcting him being an elderly person. However, I respected his wishes to discuss in any language he felt comfortable with by not interrupting the process.
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[14] You can never correct your elder!

Appendix 4 Map of Nigeria showing Geo-political zones
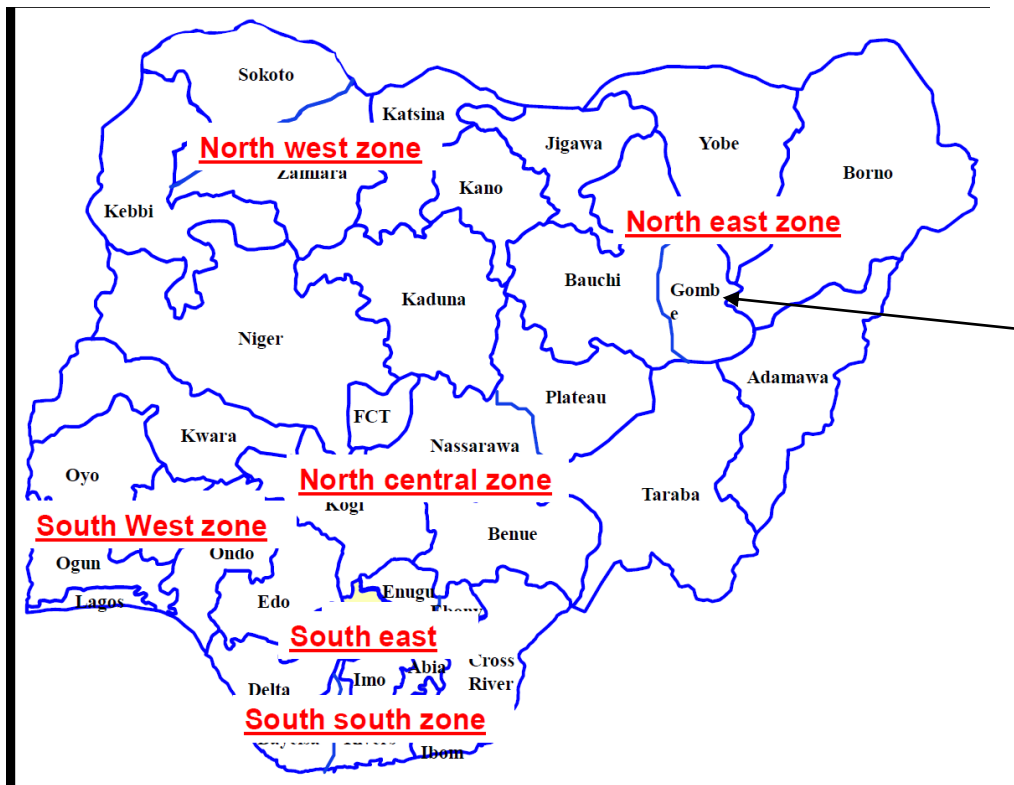
Gombe State is located in the Northeast zone

Source: http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2415/8/17/figure/F1?highres=y

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