



## The Challenges of Tsangaya Quranic Schools in Contemporary Societies: A Study of Kano State Nigeria.

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**Abstract:** *The Tsangaya system of education has been in existence, centuries prior to British colonizers, and it has been the source of moral and educational training, to northern Muslim dominant societies in Nigeria. Before the coming of the British colonial powers, in the year 1824, every family send their children to Quranic school, popularly known as makarantar allo meaning 'the slate school', (referring to the wood curved object that the Quran verses and chapters are hand-written and recited). Children daily go to the school from the comfort of their homes, and go back when the school hour is over. They live with their parents receiving moral upbringing and directions for further steps in life. But after the British colonialist took over the mantle of leadership of Nigeria, they frustrated the system through denying the schools its usual scholarships and financial backing. Post colonial governments of native Nigeria also did not give the Tsangaya education a deserved attention, and that continued until the present time. This paper seeks to examine the establishment, development and the challenges of the Tsangaya Qura'nic schools in Kano state, Nigeria, with the aim of exploring their problems which will give room for possible development of the Tsangaya Qura'nic schools.*

**Key Words:** *Tsangaya Schools, Colonial administration, Almajiri, State Treasury.*

### Introduction

The term *tsangaya* is a Hausa word referring to Qura'nic learning centre. It is usually used to be a locally built hut at the outskirts of the town, where the teaching and learning of Qura'nic education is observed. Shehu (2006) observed that *tsangaya* system has been in existence in northern Nigeria prior to the emergence of the British colonialist, in the eighteenth century. *Tsangaya* has its roots in some of African countries, such as Timbuktu (in Mali), Senegal, Ghana, Chad and Niger republic (Shehu, 2006).

Abdulqadir (2003), Hoechner, (2013), Jungudo (2014) observed that the *Tsangaya* system of education dated back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the strong Islamic empire of Borno take charge of Qura'nic literacy, under the ruler ship of El-Kanem. Seven centuries later another Islamic state

was founded in Sokoto, through Usman Danfodio revolution, establishing Islamic laws and teaching of the Holly Qura'n. The above two empires established what is presently known as the Almajiri educational system. The Danfodio revolution brought some improvement in the teaching and learning of the Almajiri schools, through establishing an inspectorate of Qura'nic literacy. The inspectors were given the privilege to report to the Emirs all issues pertaining the schools. The era has been regarded as the height of Quranic education in northern Nigeria (Abdulqadir 2003 and NCWD 2001).

### Origin of Qur'anic Schools

The Holy Qura'an is the last scripture sent to mankind through the prophet of Islam Muhammad (S.A.W). All Muslims trust that glorious Qur'an is the words of God and the final arbiter in all facets of life. Also Muslims worldwide believe the existence of four (4) Holy Scriptures, sent to mankind, the early Books are; Torah (Pentateuch the 1<sup>st</sup> scripture) for prophet Musa, Zabur (Psalm 2<sup>nd</sup>) for prophet Dawud, and Injeel (Bible 3<sup>rd</sup>) was given to prophet Isah. The fourth and the last Book is the Glorious Qur'an sent through the noble prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). The Holy scriptures are words of God that guide the human race on the injunctions of the Almighty God, this is done through the explanations and translations of the prophets sent on issues pertaining the life of their societies (Kalimatullah 2016).

The first Qur'anic school was established during the life time of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) where the first divine command instructs the prophet to read the Qur'an, It states "Read in The Name of Your Lord" (Qur'an 96:1) It was Angel Jibril that was given the responsibility of revealing and teaching the Qur'an to the prophet of Islam. The prophet learnt the Qur'an and taught his companions, the prophet's mosque of Medina was the first Islamic centre and Qura'nic school, where all religious activities were observed. The



prophet's companions in turn teach the Qur'an to other people in the society (Shehu, 2003).

Kalimatullah (2016) noted that Umar bn Khattab the second Khalifa (leader) after Abubakar, was said to be the first to instruct the setting up of Qur'anic schools with the aim of teaching the children the glorious Qur'an. Before that development, children learn the religious rites in the mosque, in the company of their parents. During this era, schools were established in different places, with the view to spread Islamic knowledge, and memorization of the Holly Qur'an.

### Nigerian Tsangaya Qura'nic Schools

According to the National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (2001) and Okugbeni (2013) the Tsangaya system of education has been in existence, centuries prior to British colonizers, and it has been the source of moral and educational training, to northern Muslim dominated societies in Nigeria. Before the coming of the British colonial powers, in the year 1824, every family send their children to Quranic school, popularly known as *makarantar allo* meaning 'the slate school', (referring to the wood curved object that the Quran verses and chapters are hand-written and recited). Children daily go to the school from the comfort of their homes, and go back when the school hour is over. They live with their parents receiving moral upbringing and directions for further steps in life (Kabir, 2012).

Qur'anic schools predate British colonialism in Nigeria, and most parts of West African states, the schools program went through a couple of modifications especially during the Elkanemi dynasty. In this era the Qur'anic educational system was referred to as 'Tsangaya' system, and was based on the doctrine of migration (Hijra). In pre-colonial era, Quranic schools have been considered to be the responsibilities of government, state treasury through Zakat fund (Alms received from the rich people), parents of the pupils and people in the communities also readily supported the Almajiris who came from faraway towns. In return the teacher and his pupils engaged in helping the community through cultivating their farms, laundry, gardening, weaving, sewing, and so on as their contribution to the society for patronizing them. That had been the way of the Tsangaya school system; begging in the streets and public places had never been a chore of the early Almajiris (Abdulqadir, 2003; NCWD 2001; Odumusu et al., 2013 ).

### Organizational Settings of Tsangaya Qur'anic Learning System

Though unwritten, the Almajiri Qur'anic School has a syllabus which comprises of lower and advance level of studies. There exist five stages altogether. The elementary level was meant for learning the recitation and writing while the advanced level is the stage for the Memorization of the glorious Qur'an as well as the ability to write it from the heart. Babajo, (2008) observed that there are five stages in the Almajiri Quranic School includes:

- i. Babbaqu Stage: In this stage Qur'an is introduced to the pupil at about the ages of four/five years old, at this stage, a child was made to recite about ten shorter chapters of the Holly Quran by heart, learn all the Arabic alphabets, recognize all the vowels and diacritical marks and have the ability to form letters and read.
- ii. Farfaru Stage: At this stage dictation is introduced to the learner, to groom the pupil the ability to master the writing from the reading of the teacher. Emphasis is given in the recognition and identifying the distinction between the similar words that are not easily identifiable.
- iii. Zube Stage: In this stage the pupils are made to copy and read the whole of Qur'an in parts from the last chapter 'Naas' to the top one 'Baqaraa' without the demand of memorization. The aim here was to make the recitation of the holly Qur'an softer and flow well and to improve the writing skills of the learners.
- iv. Haddatu Stage: Mostly it is the boarding students or hard working pupils that reach and continue with this advanced level. At this point the pupils starts the segment of memorization of the glorious Qur'an by heart, whereby two steps are involved, initially the pupil start memorizing portions through copying it on slate and presenting it to the teacher and other experts for corrections and observations, if a mistake is discovered the pupil take the slate back and represent it again in two to three days until the writing and reading is perfected, before assuming the next portion. The teacher is at



liberty to ask a pupil to reduce the volume when it is considered to be too large for the pupil's capacity. After completing this, the pupil could move to the sequential memorization until the completion of the whole Qur'an.

- v. Satu Stage: This is the final stage and the overall segment of the Qur'anic school. At this point honesty of the pupil is a very important factor. This is the stage where the student writes parts of the Qur'an from memory without making reference to the written text of Qur'an. The student reads out loud to the hearing of the teacher and other experts around the

teacher for orthography writing and recitation. When the writing and recitation are found spotless (clean) the student writes the whole Qur'an from the heart on sheets of paper, which serves as the final dissertation project.

The above five stages go in line with the category of the pupils which in most cases was based on their ages. The first category is called 'Kolo' which consist children aged between 4 and 11 years of age. Followed by 'Titibiri' comprising adolescents who are usually between the ages of 12 to 16 and 'Gardi' is for the students from 17 years and Alaramma from 18 years and Dangaran from 20 years upward (Odumusu et al., 2013; NCWD, 2001).

Class	Title	Age	Lesson
Babbaku	Kolo	4-11	Arabic alphabets
Farfaru	Titibiri	12-16	Joining the alphabets to make a word
Zube	Gardi	17-18	Ability to read the Qur'an texts
Haddatu	Alaramma	18-20	Memorization of the Glorious Qura'n
Satu	Dangaran	20-above	Memorization and ability to write the whole Qura'nic chapters and verses from heart.

Table 2.4 Grade and the curriculum of Almajiri school system. Source NCWD (2001).

### The Challenges of Tsangaya Qur'anic Schools in Kano State, Nigeria

Tsangaya Qura'nic schools in Nigeria, particularly in Kano state are in dire need of redress. The schools housed million of what can be termed as out of school children. The children are isolated from their parents, at their early life time (4 years and above), where they are brought into a new environment and lack all the basic needs of life, like food, shelter, toilets and basic health facilities. Children beg for food on the streets or from house to house, they have no hostel to sleep, neither do they have a place for conveniences.

The present challenges of the Tsangaya system of education started with the invasion of the British colonial powers. When they captured the territories they killed those emirs who refused to willingly surrender to the British colonial army, some emirs were deposed. Consequently, the emirs lost the powers to control their territories and accepted the new terms of reference to serve the colonial powers as figure head traditional rulers. The control of the Almajiri school system was also lost, eventually the funding of the Almajiri system was stopped on the basis that the schools were religious bodies and

therefore they deserve no funds from the government (Taiwo, 2013 and NCWD, 2001).

Abdulqadir (2003), Odumusu et al., (2013) and NCWD (2001) pointed out that when the Tsangaya system could not gather support from the colonial powers, the people of the community and the disabled emirs, the system collapsed. The British colonial powers introduced their formal education and funded it accordingly. The Almajiri pupils and their teachers were forced to look for other means of survival whereby they resorted to begging and doing other menial jobs to survive. This reason is without doubt the beginning of the present predicament of the Almajiri system of education in Nigeria.

Kabir, (2012), Hoechner (2013), Odumusu et al., (2013) and Tufeiru (2016) observed that the fundamental problem facing the Tsangaya pupils is the absence of food, indecent accommodation and health facilities, as well as parents deprivation, some of whose parents stay hundreds of kilometers away from the school. Almajiri's consolation is embedded in the belief that all tragedies encountered during this school system would amount to exalted rewards in the hereafter (Heaven).



In the opinion of Yusha'u, Tsafe, Babangida and Lawal (2013) and Shehu, (2006) there was no organized procedure, in the enrollment of the pupils of the almajiri school, unless the eccentric procedure of handing over pupils to the teacher, who would then continue to oversee the academic development of the child. Also amazing is the fact that, under this system, one teacher can register 100-200 pupils under his custody with no support from the government, parents or the society, and has no plan for food, shelter or health care facilities. Under this condition, the only alternative option left for them, is to take to the streets. Almajiri system has been relegated and abused, to the extent that the pupils roam the street picking remnants of contaminated leftover food from the garbage (Yusha'u et al., 2013 P. 12).

Muhammad (2013) and Otu (2006) argued that most of the almajiris are dropped at their boarding school without provisions; their parents gave them puny stipend that would hardly last for a week, but expected them to live in the school for years. This is what is gradually exposing them to child abuse, secret cults, health hazards and other sort of social vices. Hoechner (2013) and Yusha'u et al (2013) supported the view and laments that, since the parents of the almajiris are dominantly poor, they used to feel relieved by sending their children to the almajiri boarding school where the children struggle to take care of themselves.

Early Qur'anic education has been an essential part of the socialization process of every child. Parents enroll their children with a community based Qur'anic School, whereby at graduation, a child is expected to master the ability to recite the Holly Qur'an, read and write Arabic scripts.

#### **The State of Qura'nic Schools in Other Muslim Countries**

The students of the Qura'nic schools in Indonesia enjoy the same treatment with the conventional schools, because they are recognized institutions by the state. Muhammad & Hashim (2014) posits that those who memorize the Holy by heart (Huffaz) are certified by the government of Indonesia, and therefore employable in schools and mosques. Unlike what is obtainable in Nigeria where the Qura'nic schools are not certified by government and the graduates could not be employed.

In Malaysia, Qura'nic schools popularly referred as Ma'ahad Tahfeez Alquran, also receive some funds from the government and the Zakat administrators for running the institution. Islamic religion is recognized by the government in Malaysia, where state is involved in the provision of infrastructures

and development of religious rites. Tahfeez al Qura'an schools are built and run by the government (like the Quranic school in Jitra, Kedah, Selangor and many other places). Densemite and Yusoff (2013) observed that Qura'nic schools fall under the category of bodies that could access zakat fund in Malaysia.

The sultanate of Darussalm, Brunei has Islam as an official religion, Quranic schools enjoy the full fledge state intervention. Establishment and maintenance of the religious institutions are the responsibility of government. Eloquent structures were raised for Islamic schools, including the Tahfeez al Qura'n institutions such as hostel accommodations, classrooms, toilets, playground, and mosques. Yousif (2000) stated that some of the renowned Islamic institution in the Sultanate includes;

- i. Sultan Hajj Hassanal Bolkihah Tahfeez al Qura'n Institute.
- ii. Brunei college of Islamic Studies (Ma'ahad).
- iii. Religious Teachers Training college.

#### **Pre-Colonial Tsangaya Qura'nic Schools in Nigeria**

The Qur'anic educational system which was believed to be in existence in Kano State- Nigeria, in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, can be said to be the backbone of socialization and educational development. Before the advent of the British colonizers, people in northern Nigeria can read and write Qur'an, Arabic language, as well as use Arabic letters to communicate in their local dialect. In the pre-colonial era, Islamic religion was more prominent in the political and social life of Muslims, and Qur'anic education has been more relevant (Muhammad, 2013; NCWD 2001; Odumusu, 2013). Muhammad (2013) and Kabir (2012) agreed that in most parts of West Africa, the Qur'anic schools precede the coming of the colonialists. Historians agreed to the formation of Qur'anic institutions to be at the beginning of the eleventh century (Odumusu et al., 2013).

#### **Colonial Tsangaya Qura'nic Schools in Nigeria**

There is a political dimension for maintaining as custodians of the Qur'anic schools (Emirs and the Sultan) as figureheads, as opposed to the role of executive leadership style they were used to. The emir's power to issue state grants and approve all the expenditures was taken over by the British resident commissioner, through a secular system which does not consider Qur'anic schools together with their respected teachers in any way as part of state responsibilities. Most of the emirs were either



killed or deposed and replaced with the British representatives (Shehu, 2003; Abdulqadir, 2006 & NCWD, 2001). Consequently, the Qur'anic teachers and their Almajiris had to look for an alternative way for survival, for they lost all the privileges under the colonial administration.

The duty of running the education was transferred to the Resident commissioners. Tax was also introduced generally and the Qur'anic teachers were forced to pay the tax, which they were not paying in the past. Thus made the teachers to be moving from one place to another, to avoid the tax, because staying a complete year in one place, would warrant paying of tax. Thus made the Qur'anic teachers and their pupils to be moving from one place to another, hence Qur'anic literacy was greatly affected (NCWD, 2001).

The abolition of *Zakat and Mahren* (state treasury) which was the economic strength, (source) of the Qur'anic teachers' was a serious blow to the system. Mahren was state bank where all the government wealth collected from the community are kept for running the affairs of the state. Qur'anic education was sabotaged by the British colonial administrators when they refused to assist or finance the Tsangaya Qur'anic education, as argued by Shehu, (2003) and they relegated the use of Arabic alphabets to inscribe the local language (Ajami) as a means of communication in Hausa, by replacing it with the English alphabets and Roman figures. This dealt a serious blow to the Tsangaya teachers who were considered as the most educated elite, because of their services to the public and the government. By thus changing the written form of Ajami as means of public and government communication, traditional scholars were consequently rendered officially illiterate and therefor redundant (NCWD, 2001).

It was argued that missionaries were the first to import the formal education in Nigeria, where they combined it with the Bible (Christianity), which made the people of the northern Nigeria to desperately reject the secular education, in the early period. Odumusu et al., (2013) and NCWD (2001) posit that the colonialists using their power, established and imposed the new system of education, with the intent to rival Qur'anic education. The newly introduced system straight away obtained fame and superiority, because it enjoyed government backing. The graduates of the formal schools took the center stage in management, statesmanship, social work and institutions. This was the beginning of the failure and regression of the Almajiri Qur'an educational

system and that of Islamic studies (Abdulqadir, 2003).

### **Nigerian Contemporary Tsangaya Qura'nic Schools**

Currently, the Quranic Tsangaya schools are fully private institutions. The graduates of these Qura'nic schools are the ones opening and running the institutions in their personal intuition and resources. There is no certificate to attest to the mastery of the subject matter or procedure of testing the knowledge of the prospective Qura'nic teacher, before he embark teaching the Holy Qura'n.

NCWD (2001) asserts that the Qur'anic schools lost official patronage, and its graduates were gradually made redundant. Graduates of the British schools were the only ones employed and paid efficiently in government offices. Arabic ceased to be the official language while Roman alphabets were introduced as a substitute. Within a short period of time the whole northern Muslim communities were termed illiterate (Shehu, 2006; Kabir, 2012).

Kabir, (2012) further observed that, the policies targeted the traditional Qur'anic Schools and substituting them with the secular education. This led to protests, people began to give out their children in trust, to the Qur'anic school teachers in other villages, or its outskirts to teach them Qur'an. Consequently the Qur'anic school teachers travel, with their pupils in search of a conducive place to settle, and teach their pupils in a different environment.

Muhammad, (2013) argued that a single teacher was scheduled with the bunch of responsibilities, as the sole proprietor of the Qur'anic school, to setup, control, and run them, with the obligation of feeding, shelter and clothing of the pupils reverted to him. Initially, the children were made to work in the teachers' farm, but later farming became a difficult task, and the little payment that the teacher receives through the weekly donations from the children's parents could not take care of the enormous responsibilities rested on the teacher. Pupils were made to pay daily stipends for their lessons; to get the little fees the pupils have to carry out some menial jobs in public places and markets, Hotels etc. The Almajiri pupils thus neither acquire their educational obligations, as well as their material demands. They often grow up into illiterate adults, poverty ridden, and uncreative (Shehu, 2006; Hoechner, 2013 & Odumusu et al., 2013).



	Formal Schools	Almajiri Schools
Student's Accommodation	Established Structures with classrooms and offices.	Lessons are run in a small room, under the tree, open space and uncompleted buildings.
Subjects taken	English, Maths, Computer, primary science, IRK, Arabic, Social Studies, Physical and Health Education, civic education	Qura'nic Recitation
Wages and Salaries	Government Responsibilities	Donations, Charity, Handouts
Teacher's Educational Qualification	Minimum Qualification of National Certificate in Education (NCE).	No restrictions on paper qualification
Teaching Guideline	Curriculum, Scheme of work, teacher's lesson plans.	Categorization of Qura'nic chapters into units.
School fees	Officially free, but recurrent expenses for learning materials and uniforms are paid by parents.	Free
Levels and duration of Study	Six years from primary one to six.	Five stages. No specific time for graduation.

Table 2.2 *Distinction between Formal primary and Tsangaya Qura'nic School.* Source NCWD (2001).

### Policy Implications and Recommendations

The British colonialism had negatively affected the smooth running of the Qura'nic schools after it introduced the formal education system in Nigeria. The Tsangaya schools that used to be under the state custody were replaced with a Christian based curriculum. That made people in Northern Nigeria who are predominantly Muslims, to vehemently reject the system. The Qura'nic teachers were rendered jobless, their ability to read and write in Arabic alphabets became irrelevant. They no longer have the respect and prestige they used to have under the traditional monarchy. This made them to flee to other parts of the country to make a living with their disciples.

Nigeria got independence from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960, native leaders were elected and appointed from within the country. Having the mantle of leadership at hand did not bring positive changes in the way the Qura'nic schools were treated under colonial administration. The native leaders did not make any significant move to salvage the failed Qura'nic schools, through amending the federal constitution and proposing a new bill that will permanently address the plight of the Almajiri schools. Up till now the Qura'nic

schools continue to produce unemployable graduates, with less or no skills at all for befitting life standard.

The establishment of new Almajiri Tsangaya schools in Nigeria was meant to change the traditional system of the Quranic institution, through provision of solid infrastructures, for the schools, with trained and qualified teachers. The curriculum is also mixed with conventional subjects like English, maths and computer. Graduates of the new Qura'nic schools would be more relevant and would drive significant respect from the society. Under this system every Qura'nic school must register with the newly established Quranic board and get approval before strating the school activities. This paper recommends that:

Governments at all levels (Federal, State and Local governments) should put heads together to find the consistent ways that would help to reverse, to the complete financing and administration of these Tsangaya Qura'nic schools. Through creating avenues that will enhance popular economic growth, suppress the poverty level among the rural dwellers who are the people patronizing the Tsangaya Qura'nic schools.



The constant Public awareness campaign is necessary in an effort to educate the parents that dumps their children in Tsangaya Qura'nic schools, so that they can take good care of them and enroll them in the nearest modern Tsangaya/formal institution system.

Governments, other stakeholders and individual philanthropist should endeavor to build multiple modern Qura'nic Tsangaya schools in all the local government areas of Nigeria with special reference to northern region where the Tsangaya schools are needed the most, where the students and graduates of Tsangaya schools should be taught relevant formal education and skills, so that they can be employable graduation.

### Conclusion

The traditional arrangement of the Tsangaya Qur'anic school presently makes their product irrelevant or unemployable because the curriculum of the Almajiri school contains only the recitation and memorization of the glorious Qur'an, despite the various Arabic and Islamic studies subjects, nor does it contain the formal education subjects. The problem in the Almajiri's lifestyle is their exposure to various social and physical dangers. Psychologically, the living condition manifests in the children a sense of mediocrity, overdependence on immediate society, rejection from other children and all sorts of negative socioeconomic and psychological tendencies.

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