

FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR COMBATING TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education intertwines with social class and religion to make a complex pattern of human peaceful co-existence. This paper examined the functional role of education in conflict resolution in the Boko Haram- plagued regions in Nigeria. Functional education selects concrete and usable knowledge rather than the theoretical and abstract. Usable economic knowledge will economically engage youths, and thus provide alternative endeavors to terrorism. To carry out this study, structured interview was used to elicit information from one hundred (100) Almajiris in four Northern Nigerian states. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that most Almajiris who were more vulnerable to be used for fueling crisis were not predisposed to accepting Western Education. The study also found that most Almajiris aspire to economic prosperity. The study also established that most of the Almajiris hate the begging and scavenging life they live. The paper, therefore, recommended that Nigerian government should set up mass orientation programme for the Almajiris and provide functional education. It was also recommended that national consciousness should be included in most school subjects at the pre-basic education levels.

1. Introduction

Education intertwines with social class and religion to make a complex pattern of human peaceful co-existence. Education is one of the basic activities of all human societies for the continuance of a society depends upon the transmission of its heritage to the young. It is essential that the young are instructed in the ways of the group so that they will behave according to the accepted code of behavior of the group, thus shunning deviant behavior. Every society therefore establishes its own ways of socializing children to their norms and values (Ajere, 2013). The goals that the society sets for its educational system and how and what children are taught in school, depend on what they perceive as valuable to their society (Kobiowu, 2013). It is either through formal or informal education that individual receives knowledge and skills that could be used to improve their general standard of living in the society as a whole. Through the functional knowledge, schools produce the required manpower to oil the various sectors of the national economy (Bar-Tal, 2014; Webster, 2014).

Nigeria is a highly religious society. The chief religious beliefs of the people are Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. With the advent of Islamic traders and European missionaries' activities, the traditional religion was subdued by Islam and Christianity. The Northern part of Nigeria became islamically vibrant as a result of the Islamic Jihad that took place in 1804. The Jihad also extended its influence to some parts of South Western Nigeria (Obidi, 2005).

Islamization of Northern Nigeria gave rise to Islamic education and the quest for piety. The goal of Islamic education is to groom an ethically sound individual so as to be a responsible being in the society (Oladosu, 2010). The elementary Islamic level of education is called "Makaruta Allo", while it's secondary education is called Makarantan Ihmi. At the secondary school level, trainees often leave their families to settle with their teachers. This movement from home to their teacher is the Almajiri (Habib, 2008). The Almajiri schools were tuition free. Thus, both the teachers and students were sustained by voluntary donation and economic ventures such as trading, farming, fishing etc (Gabriel, 2013). But today, a visit to Northern Nigeria shows that most Almajiris are living a scavenging life style. Many of them are living in abject poverty. The Almajiris lives in abject poverty. Aljharem (2010) explained that poverty contributed to sending children to the street. Kumolu (2014) presented an interview granted to an Almajiri as follows- "at six, Abu noted that it was his mother who insisted he left (home) against his fathers wish". Since they were not under parental influence, they were vulnerable to the influence of religious fanaticism. Professor Idris Abdulqadir in his 21st convocation lecture of the Bayero University in 2013 averred that Nigeria practiced the bastardized Almajiri system. The programme lacks government support, pupils have to beg and scavenge for survival. These youths are therefore affected socially, emotionally and economically. With this state of affairs, they can be brainwashed with false illusionary doctrine, and co-opted into terrorist activities.

The Almajiri system has become an agent of threat instead of building the pious citizenry. The Almajiris were freely used by terrorist insurgents such as the Maitasine, Zangokataf and the current terrorist Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Almajiri schools have become breeding grounds for religious fanaticism, political thugry and terrorism (Gabriel 2013, Idris 2013, and Bartolotta 2013). A report had it that Nigerian military released some kids who confessed that they were paid N5000 each to burn primary schools and spy on soldiers (Alechenu, 2013).

Azubuike (2014) reported that the Nigerian Navy stated that Boko Haram insurgency is out to break the 'unity' of Nigeria. This resulted to the series of attack on innocent Nigerians through bombing, and robbery. Religious extremism is responsible for terrorist activities in Nigeria and in other parts of the world. States like the United States of America, China, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Israel just to mention a few had suffered from terrorist attack. Thus no nation could ensure the safety of her citizens without collaboration with the international community. Zumve, Ingyoroko and Ukuva (2013) stated that Nigeria has become a theatre of genocide, bloodshed and insecurity for the past three years due to the carnage activities of terrorist group. The question arising from this report is that, who is exterminating whom? Terrorist activities is not aimed or targeted at a particular ethnic group. The Boko Haram, though an "Islamic" terrorist organization have targeted both Muslim and Christians alike. Both the northerners and southerners are suffering from terror attack. Therefore, a case of genocide cannot be established. The United States Department of Defense saw terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or intimidate governments or society in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological" (Omolade, 2013). Book Haram activities in Nigeria fits into this definition of terrorism. Thus, it will not be out of place to refer Boko Haram activities in Nigeria as terrorism. Their activities are multinational in nature as they extend to Cameroon, Niger, Sudan, and also has a link with the Al-Qaeda. What seem to be the major aim of Boko Haram leaders is to establish Islamic state in Nigeria (Bartolotta,2013).

The theory of categorical terrorism pointed out that, while targeting complicitous civilians can accomplish a variety of goal for the terrorist organization, such attacks are meant to convince the population to stop supporting, or to proactively demand change in government or governmental policy (Ahokege, 2014). Some schools of thought have traced the root of Boko Haram insurgent in Nigeria to politics. This position was supported by a former Minister of Finance, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, who lamented that a northerner should have completed late President Yar'Adua's term. Although this yarning is unconstitutional, as the 1999, Nigeria constitution provides that the Vice President should succeed a late president (The Punch, 9th August, 2014). The attack on educational institutions also is targeted at discouraging western education. The initial ideology spread by the group was that western education is evil (Farouk, 2014). The need for a peaceful coexistence of the various ethnic groups in multi-ethnic societies requires recognizing the principle of equal status and treatment of the other groups without superiority "coexistence is a state of mind shared by societal members who recognize the rights of other groups to exist peacefully as a legitimate equal partner".

Functional education could be a veritable instrument for providing alternative endeavor for the Almajiri youths that were usually enlisted as terrorist fighters. It is widely recognized that poverty and illiteracy are inartistically interrelated and education is one potent way of empowering the poor. Through functional education, the all round development of basic skills and the use of these skills in societal improvement and economic liberation of trainees is emphasized. It is important to say that learning may happen at any stage and age. Thus, learning content should be relevant to individual needs. Education of deprived youths should be geared towards preparing them for self independence and for the transformation of the society (Ezeaku, 2007)

Although the Nigerian government has started the reform of the Almajiri education, there is the need to investigate whether the Almajiris themselves appreciate the need for western and vocational education, and whether they perceive education as a tool for economic survival. This study therefore examined whether functional education could be used to combat terrorism, and promote peaceful co-existence among people with divergent beliefs in Nigeria.

2. Method

The study adopts descriptive survey design. This method was adopted because the study covers a large area of land and the sample was drawn from different communities in four states namely, Nasarawa, Kano, Kaduna and Zamfara states.. The population for the study comprised of all Almajiris in Northern Nigeria. Snowball sampling was used to select 100 Almajiris (25 each) in Nasarawa, Kano, Kaduna and Zamfara states. Structured interview was used to elicit information from the sampled respondents. The researcher used a trusted interpreter in the interview process. The questions were written down to ensure objectivity. This was to ensure that all the respondents were asked the same question in the same order. This is to ensure that responses are reliably aggregated. The data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and cone chart).

3. Research Questions

- 1) Do the Almajiris prefer living outside their family home?
- 2) Do the street kids' economic conditions expose them to terrorism?
- 3) What is the attitude of the Almajiris to Western Education?

4. Results

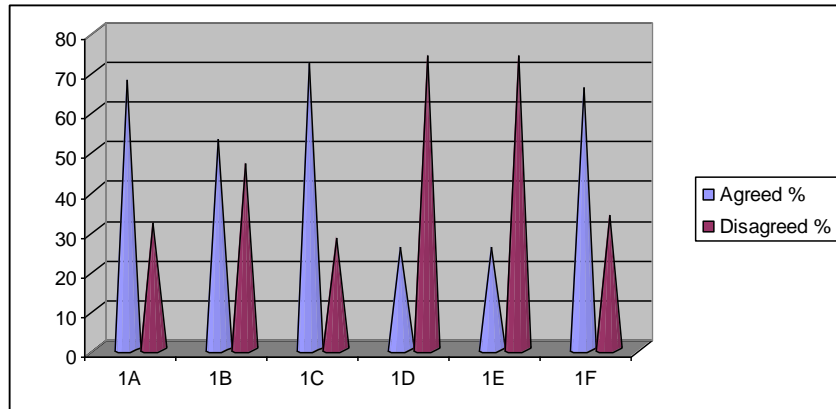
The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of simple percentage and bar charts.

Research Question 1: Do the Almajiris prefer living outside their family home?

Table 1 showing the type of habitation the Almajiris personally

	Items	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
A	Children should live with their parents until they attain position of adulthood	68	68	32	32
B	Informed consent is needed before a child be sent out of home to live with others	53	53	47	47
C	Children should be sent to Koranic schools in the town where their parents reside	72	72	28	28
D	I have feeling for family ties	26	26	74	74
E	I have deep affection for my parents	26	26	74	74
F	Parents should raise their children	66	66	34	34

Figure 1



From Table 1 and figure 1, it is clear that most Almajiris did not appreciate living outside their parents' home. The table showed that most children's consent was not sought by their parents before they were sent out to learn, where they later became beggars. The findings of the study also reveal that most Almajiris lacked natural affection 74% of them disagreed that they have feeling for family ties and affection for their parents. This corroborated the position expressed by Kumolu (2010) that children were forced by their parents to leave home for the Almajirihood. 66% of the respondents agreed that they would have preferred to be raised by their parent.

Research Question 2: Do the street kids' economic condition expose them to terrorism?

Table 2 showing whether economic condition exposes the Almajiris

	Items	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
A	I like economic freedom	85	85	15	15
B	Monetary inducement can expose you to join violent groups	76	76	24	24
C	I can die for my faith	88	88	12	12
D	I scavenge for survival	92	92	08	08
E	I respect the positions of our Koranic teachers	100	100	0	0
F	Some Almajiris join terror groups	67	67	33	33

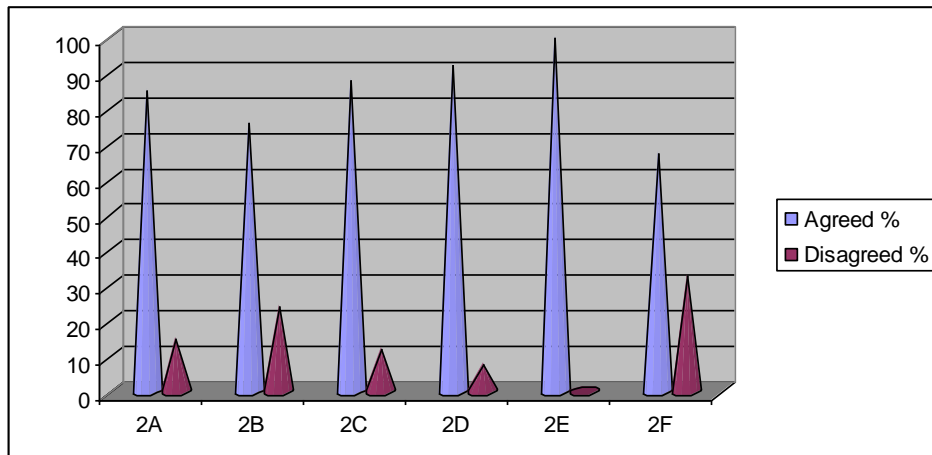
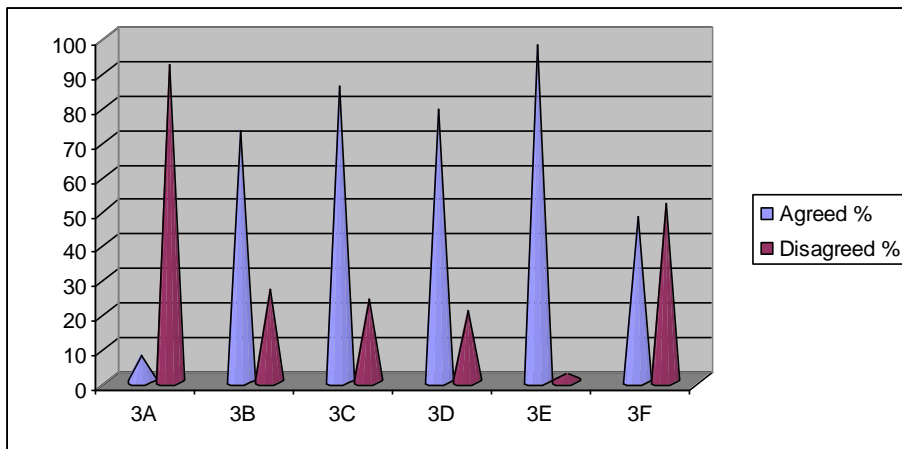


Table 2 and figure 2 showed that most Almajiris aspires for economic prosperity as 85% of them desired economic freedom. This buttress the position of Aljharem (2010) that most of them desire to become great men in the future, but that their poverty status inhibits their ability to achieve their aims. 76% of the respondents agreed that monetary inducement (due to their poverty status) could make them join violent groups. As 92% of them agreed that, they scavenge for survival. While, 67% agreed that the Almajiris were vulnerable to joining terrorist organizations. The position of Idris (2013) and Gabriel (2013) that the Almajiris were vulnerable for recruitment into terrorist organizations was confirmed.

Research Question 3: What is the attitude of the Almajiris to western education?

Table 3- showing whether the Almajiri’s wish to accept western education and economic ventures.

		Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
A	I prefer Western Education to Islamic education	8	8	92	92
B	I like to learn a trade/ vocation(s)	73	73	27	27
C	Learning a trade will make me to be economically self reliant	86	86	24	24
D	I do not like begging for food	79	79	21	21
E	I want to be prosperous	98	98	2	2
F	Western Education is evil	48	48	52	52



From table 3 and figure 3, it is clear that the Almajiris overwhelmingly supported Islamic system of education have 92% of the respondents agreed that they prefer Islamic education. In contrast, 48% of them agreed with the Boko Haram ideology that Western Education is evil. This showed that this category of street kid can easily be conscripted to carry out terrorist activities against educational institutions and Christian places of worship. This is in agreement with the report of Farouk (2014) that the Boko Haram terrorists recruit the vulnerable youths promote their ideology that western education is evil and corruptive. Alechenu (2013) reported that these vulnerable kids were offered ₦5000 (about \$30) to burn educational institutions, and to spy on soldiers. 86% of the kids agreed to learn trade/vocations, while 98% want to be prosperous and 79% of them did not want to scavenge for food and clothing or survival.

5. Recommendations

In order for functional education to serve as a tool for reducing terrorist activities and social violence in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward.

- There is the need to integrate into school curriculum at all levels, an articulated programme of violence resolution and prevention. Such programmes could make our youths their brothers’ keeper.
- Both the Federal and the concerned state governments should evolve strategies that would endear functional education into the hearts of parents and the Almajiris (children). Religious leaders and teachers should be trained in this direction, through seminars, workshops and mass media campaign.
- Tactical approach should be adopted by international broadcasting stations (in their Hausa service broadcast) to project the benefit of entrepreneurial and vocational training for economic liberation. This would subtly open the eyes of potential recruits for violent activities to other means of survival.
- The ongoing Almajiri educational reform should extend to all the states and local governments of the affected states. Koranic Education should be readily made available in all public schools. This will discourage parents from sending their juvenile out of town for the search for knowledge.

- Agriculture and cooperative societies should be empowered to provide funds and imputes to rural farmers. This will reduce the level of poverty in the affected societies, and also enable parents to be economically viable to take care of their children.
- Both local and international donor agencies should provide funds and materials for the urgent re-habilitation needs of street children in Northern Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

Functional education as a tool can re-focus the value of learners, so as to bring about sustainable peace in a multi-ethnic and cultural diverse society like Nigeria. Functional education will engender cooperation and mutual dependence in a diverse-religious society. The effective training of the potential source of recruit by terrorist will cease to exist, thus peace and tranquility will prevail. The overall success of functional education would translate Nigeria's troubled region to a society where the human life and dignity is respected and preserved.

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