



**Tsangaya System and the Challenges of Islamic Education in the 21st Century:
Some Reflections**

***Dr. Mujahid Hamza Shitu**

Department of Islamic Studies

Federal University Gashua, Yobe State, Nigeria

****Muhammad Duku**

Department of Islamic Studies

Federal University Gashua, Yobe State, Nigeria

*****Dr. Fatih Tahir Usman**

Department of Religious Studies

Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria

Abstract:

Memorization of the Qur'an is the hallmark of Islamic education and a meritorious act of worship and servitude to Allah. The Prophet (pbuh) was reported to have said "the best among you are those who learn and teach the Qur'an". These religious verdicts and many others made Qur'anic schools a traditional feature of any Muslim society. Thus, the society attaches much respect to Qur'anic scholars, and sees the welfare of the Qur'anic schools as its responsibility for many ages. Colonialism and the subsequent modernization that came with it and the Western education, led to the relegation of the Qur'anic education to the background. The traditional schools also

resisted the forces of modernization which became its characteristic in other Muslim countries. Therefore, the tsangaya school system is marred by contempt in the society due to the challenges of feeding which led to street begging by Qur'anic pupils, lack of good shelter, medical care and lack of envisaged bright future. This paper surveys the challenges of tsangaya system of education, with the aim of proffering solutions to them.

Keywords: Qur'anic Education, Tsangaya Schools, Almajiri System, Child Labour, Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

Qur'anic memorization and scholarship is a religious duty in Islam, a Qur'anic scholar is considered in the Muslim societies as one of the most noble of men, and is accorded much honour and respect. This position is not given to a Qur'anic scholar without strong religious basis. It was reported from the Prophet (pbuh) that: "the people of the Qur'an are men of God and his special people".⁽¹⁾ The Qur'an itself describes its people as those who constantly rehearse it, combined that with the performance of daily *ṣalāt* and giving charity secretly as those whose acts are equated with commerce that never fails. Allah promised to give them more of his bounties and complete their rewards. The Qur'an went further to describe those who inherit the Qur'an, the *Umma* of Muhammad (pbuh), as a selected community among the servants of Allah, this is a superiority courtesy of the Qur'an, as contained in Surah al-Fāṭir 35/ 29-30; 32:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّن تَبُورَ (٢٩) لِيُوقِبَهُمْ
أَجْرَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (٣٠) ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ
وَمِنْهُمْ مُّقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ إِذْذُنَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ (٣٢)

These verses tell that reciters and experts on the Qur'an are chosen and dignified people before Allah, therefore, they should be accorded much honour and respect. The Qur'an further tells that the recitation of the Qur'an brings the mercy of God, people should therefore, be silent during its recitation so that they may receive the mercy of Allah that comes with that al-A'raf 7/204:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (٢٠٤)

The Prophet (pbuh) was reported saying: "experts on the Qur'an are on the day of resurrection together with honourable, pious and just angels (السفرة الكرام البررة). And whosoever, reads the Qur'an and finds it difficult gets double rewards".⁽²⁾ In another

tradition the Prophet (pbuh) says: “the noble men of my *umma* are memorizers of the Qur’an”.⁽³⁾ These merits of Qur’anic studies and its memorization as enunciated in the Qur’an and the prophetic sunnah are responsible for the much concern given to Qur’anic schools since the early days of Islam. People like Ubay b. Ka’b, Qays b. al-Sakan, Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī, Zayd b. Thābit and ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān, Mu‘ādh b. Jabal, Abū Dardā’, Sālim, Sa’d b. ‘Ubayd and Abdullah b. Zubayr all memorized the Qur’an during the life time of the Prophet (pbuh), this tradition continued from that time to the present time.⁽⁴⁾

Qur’anic school tradition came to Nigeria with the advent of Islam in the country, and this led to the prevalence of two major type of schools; the Makarantar Allo or “tablet-school”, which is basically for the beginners, and which system is the subject of this paper, and Makarantar –ilimi which is a higher school in which all types of Islamic sciences are being studied, it is an advanced type of school.⁽⁵⁾

It is however, pertinent to state that these schools survived through ages through dependence on charity or *sadaqah*, pupils are brought to a Qur’anic teacher without paying tuition and without making provisions for the feeding, clothing and healthcare of the pupils. This according to Fafunwa,⁽⁶⁾ has reduced the social status of Qur’anic teacher and his pupils to that of beggars, the teacher makes pupils to wander from house to house seeking for charity, so as to obtain the necessities of life. This further exposes the pupils to a lot of dangers and challenges. The term *al-muhājir* or emigrant (for the purpose of knowledge), which became adulterated to *almajiri*⁽⁷⁾ in Hausa has come to be used synonymously to a beggar and a pauper.

Before the British colonialism, the graduates of *ilmi* schools readily got employments as literate people in the courts of the ruling class to take charge of the administrative positions due to their knowledge of Arabic which was the vehicle of correspondences between Western Sudan and North Africa.⁽⁸⁾ Colonialism, westernization and modernization have erased the roles that the graduates of *ilimi* schools can perform in the modern society. This aggravated the challenges of the Qur’an scholars in the modern times, despite the fact that there had been much efforts towards modernization, it yielded a very little result. More so, some of the traditional Qur’anic scholars resisted efforts towards modernization.

This paper examines the challenges of the traditional tsangaya Qur’anic schools of northern Nigeria, to proffer solutions to the problems as part of social responsibility through addressing one of the major problems of the society.

Merits of Qur’anic Schools and Memorization

The merits of Qur’anic studies and memorization have been alluded to in this paper. The first revelation of the Qur’an is about the promotion of literacy and education, Allah commanded His Messenger, Muhammad (pbuh), to read in the name of His Lord and Creator (al-‘Alaq 96/1). The verse says:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١)

The verse establishes an educational policy for the masses, and calls for the spread of mass and robust education. The Prophet of Islam (pbuh) used all possible measures to encourage people to acquire knowledge and to strive in its pursuit, notwithstanding the distance to be covered in its quest. In Islam, seeking for whatever type of knowledge is considered a religious duty. The Prophet was reported saying: “if anyone pursue a path in search of knowledge, Allah will thereby make easy for him a path to paradise”.⁽⁹⁾ The Prophet said a lot in promoting the pursuit of Qur’anic education and the merits of Qur’anic scholars. The following prophetic sayings can be quoted in this regards among many others:

1. Ibn Mas‘ūd reported the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) making a remark that: “whosoever reads a letter from the book of Allah (i.e. the Qur’an), he has earned for it a reward, and each reward is given in ten manifolds, I will not say that Alif Lām Mīm is one letter, but Alif is a letter, Lām a letter and Mīm is also a letter”.⁽¹⁰⁾
2. Ibn Umar narrates the Prophet (pbuh) saying, “there is no justifiable envy except concerning two things, a man whom Allah has given the memorization of the Qur’an, who therefore stands rehearsing it (in prayer) day and night, and a man whom Allah has blessed with wealth and thus, he gives it out (in charity) day and night”.⁽¹¹⁾
3. ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb states that the Prophet (pbuh) said, “Allah will indeed elevate some people through this book (the Qur’an) and bring down some through it”.⁽¹²⁾
4. Abdullah b. Amr reports the Prophet (pbuh) saying concerning those who committed the whole Qur’an to memory (Ḥuffāz) that: “It would be said to the companion of the Qur’an (in the Hereafter), read and ascend in ranks, and recite with precision the way you do in the world, for your final abode is at the end of the last *āyah* you recite”.⁽¹³⁾

The Prophet (pbuh) was the first teacher of the Qur'an, and his success in proselytization was through the dissemination and teaching of the Qur'an. Whosoever the Prophet taught the Qur'an, readily accepts Islam. The Qur'an tells us this responsibility of the Prophet (pbuh) in Surah Naml 27/91- 93, that he was commanded to worship Allah, the Lord of the sanctified city of Makkah, and to rehearse the recitation of the Qur'an for the guidance of mankind, and the choice is left for man to accept or to go astray at his own desire:

إِنَّمَا أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ رَبَّ هَذِهِ الْبَلَدَةِ الَّذِي حَرَّمَهَا وَلَهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ (٩١) وَأَنْ أَتْلُوا الْقُرْآنَ
فَمَنْ اهْتَدَى فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ (٩٢) وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ فَتَعْرِفُونَهَا وَمَا
رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ (٩٣)

In surah al-Jumu'ah (110/2) Allah also describes the career of His Messenger (pbuh) among his unlettered people as to rehearse His āyāt (Qur'anic verses), to purify them and to teach them the Qur'an and the *ḥikma* (wisdom, i.e. sunnah):

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي
ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (٢)

The Prophet (pbuh) continued the teaching of the Qur'an in the Madinan period of his message, and at this period the number of Qur'anic scholars grew due to the expansion of Islam. The ahl as-Suffa were Qur'anic scholars who learnt the skills of writing, while they were provided with food and accommodation, they were approximately up to 900 companions of the Prophet (pbuh). The Prophet taught them the Qur'an, while Abdullahi b. Sa'īd b. al-'Aṣ, 'Ubāda b. as-Ṣāmit, and Ubbay b. Ka'b taught the people how to read and write.⁽¹⁴⁾ This tells about the essentiality of acquiring literacy skills along the learning of the Qur'an. This is the primary goal of Tsangaya educational system which is the objective of this paper.

The companions took after the Prophet (pbuh) in the teaching of the Qur'an. And from the life time of the Prophet, there emerged Qur'anic teachers such as Ibn Mas'ud, Khabbāb, Muṣ'ab b. 'Umayr, 'Ubāda b. Ṣāmit, 'Ubbay, Mu'āz b. Jabal etc. This led to the production of large number of Ḥuffāz memorizers of the Qur'an. Many of these memorizers continued to teach the Qur'an in Madinah and other provinces of Islam.⁽¹⁵⁾

The Development of Tsangaya School System in Nigeria.

According to Umbaru Dahiru, the original meaning of the word “Sangaya” in Kanuri cannot be ascertained, some scholars however, suggest that it has an informal Arabic derivation which is “*Musanghi*” meaning “those waiting to learn or given food”.⁽¹⁶⁾ Two Borno scholars, Sheikh Shariff Tijjani and Goni Njidda gave the meaning of *Musanghi* in Hausa as “*Masu jiran tsammani*”⁽¹⁷⁾ (those that are hopeful). The term sangaya or tsangaya (in Hausa; plural: tsangayu) is however, used to denote Qur’anic educational centres in Borno and in Northern Nigeria.⁽¹⁸⁾ Hoechner made a significant distinction on the meaning of tsangaya, that refers to only Qur’anic schools located in remote rural areas, while makarantun allo (tablet-schools) refers to schools located in urban and less remote areas, that accommodate both boarding and day students.⁽¹⁹⁾

The establishment of Qur’an studies centres in Nigeria began with the advent of Islam in Borno. It is the first region to witness the advent of Islam in the geographical entity that is now known as Nigeria. Borno developed the tradition of Qur’anic studies since the early days of Islam in the region. King Mai Umme Jilmi (ruled c 1085 – 1097) C.E), committed the whole Qur’an to memory. The establishment of tsangaya as an educational centre in Borno, which also serves as a place of settlement and abode of Qur’anic scholars is traceable to the period Mai Ali Gaji d. 909 A.H/1503 C.E., he encouraged the proliferation of the system to ensure the spread of literacy in the rural and urban parts of Borno.⁽²⁰⁾

The emanation of the tsangaya schools took 3 basic patterns in its early days, they are: one, a tsangaya could be established by a scholar independently in a city or village, and pupils will be received from various places. Second, there are tsangaya schools that were established through the aid of the kings, who will provide land and the means of sustenance for the Qur’anic teacher and his family. Third, there were tsangaya schools that developed due to conflicts between the Qur’anic teachers and the constituted authority, which led the scholars to establish their educational centres far away from the cities or abodes of the kings, for example, some scholars left Borno for as far as Hausa and Nupe lands.⁽²¹⁾

The organization of a tsangaya has the Sayyina as the head of the school, he is the overall head who is in charge of running the affairs of the school, he appoints a deputy who will assist him in the running of the school, he could be either Goni or Uban Tsangaya, he must have spent much time in the school, and have much knowledge of the

tsangaya and its students.⁽²²⁾ Ahmad Yahaya listed the hierarchy of the structure of a tsangaya school in Hausa land, the lowest is Kolo, a newly admitted student, the next is Tittibiri, an adolescent student who has grown up but has not made considerable progress in the Qur'anic studies. Gardi is a matured young adult, he must have substantial memorization of the Qur'an. Malam is someone who has learnt the whole Qur'an and can recite it fluently, but has not memorized the whole text. Alaramma has learnt and memorised the whole Qur'an and can write the whole Qur'an from memory. Gwani is an expert in terms of recitation, writing and memorization, he rarely makes mistakes. The Gangaran is the highest rank which is attained by a scholar of the Tsangaya system of education in terms of erudition.⁽²³⁾ Hoechner gave age categorization of the hierarchy of almajirai in the tsangaya system, children between seven and eleven are called kolo, adolescents between twelve and eighteen years of age are called titibiri, while older ones who assists the teachers is called gardi (pl. gardawa).⁽²⁴⁾

This school system has produced thousands of Qur'anic teachers and scholars in Nigerian who had risen to prominence. Dahiru mentions more than 25 prominent Nigerian scholars of the Qur'an in Borno and Hausa land that were produced through the Tsangaya system in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁽²⁵⁾ Many of them even took the path of modernization of the system, and obtained qualifications in modern schools up to tertiary education.

Nevertheless, the system is faced by many challenges, and the Nigerian government has made some efforts to integrate the Qur'anic schools with the modern system of education. Due to the challenges and problems faced by this system of education, millions of almajiri school pupils roaming the streets of northern Nigeria are considered by the government and the international organizations including the UNICEF as out of school children.

The government over the years have tried to establish the almajiri model schools throughout Northern Nigeria, to enable the Qur'anic scholars obtain some aspects of Western education, so as to integrate them with those who obtained only Western type of education. Amoo in 2018 tries to list all the tsangaya schools which are supported by the Federal Government of Nigeria in all parts of Nigeria including some southern states of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo, Rivers and Edo.⁽²⁶⁾ There are an aggregate number of 157 of this type of schools all over Nigeria. Yobe State has schools of this type, including in Gashua. Others are at Buniyadi, Gaidam, Nguru, Damagun and

Damaturu. The investigation by these researchers however, suggests that not all the schools have begun to function well. Furthermore, this meagre number of 157 schools cannot cater for more than 10 million almajiris in Northern Nigeria. In 2015 Amma Khursa estimated the number of tsangaya schools pupils in Borno and Kano states as over 2 million pupils, while the number of the schools are given as not less than 29,000 in Borno and 26,000 schools in Kano State.⁽²⁷⁾ There are however, different figures on the actual population size of the almajirai in Northern Nigeria. Journalists, bloggers and even government agencies give different figures. Universal Basic Education Commission UBEC estimated the number of Qur'anic students to be 9.5 million in 2010, and that more than 8.5 million of them are in the northern part of the country.⁽²⁸⁾ Higher figures were estimated of the almajirai between 2011 and 2012 by Nigeria's media outlets, which include 'exaggerated' figure of 20 million 'child beggars' in northern Nigeria alone.⁽²⁹⁾ Hoechner arrived at 12 million boys that are 'theoretically eligible to become almajirai' in northern Nigeria in 2011- 2012, taking into consideration, the population of Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin.⁽³⁰⁾

There had been other efforts to salvage the situation of the tsangaya schools and their pupils by governments and non-governmental organizations. These include the attempts to integrate the system with modern educational system. Some state governments in northern Nigeria have established taḥfīz (memorisation of the Qur'an) secondary schools to accommodate leavers of tsangaya schools, to equip them with modern education along with what they have learnt at the traditional schools. Katsina State for instance established the taḥfīz section of the Sir Usman Nagogo College of Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1992. The Islamic Centre Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria, is another centre which accommodate leavers of tsangaya schools, the centre was established in 1993. It has a *tajwīd* (refinement of recitation) section, purposely for those who memorised the Qur'an in the tsangaya traditional schools, and have intention to learn proper way of reciting the Qur'an. This section was established in 1997. The efforts of Sheikh Tahir Usman Bauchi Foundation in modernizing the tsangaya system in many states of northern Nigeria and in providing solutions to its challenges is noteworthy.

The Bayero University, Kano, Yobe State University Damaturu and recently Federal University, Dutsin- Ma Katsina State, Nigeria have established Centres for Qur'anic Studies these centres are contributing to the development and modernization of tsangaya schools, by offering different courses for the products of the tsangaya schools and by issuing them certificates.

The Challenges of Tsangaya School System in the 21st Century Nigeria

Qur'anic schools all over the world have advanced and accepted reforms and modernization of the school system, most of the schools offer certificates of expertise in Qur'anic studies alongside modern education, thus, providing opportunities for their products. The major problems that the tsangaya school system is facing in Nigeria include:

1. Feeding of Pupils and Provision of Sustenance

The larger percentage of students of tsangaya schools depend on charity through begging for left over foods from houses in the community where the school is situated. Most parents bring their wards to the schools without providing adequate source of feeding. The head of the school does not reject students despite not having enough sources for sustaining them. The belief is that teaching the Qur'an and learning it is an act of worship, thus it is an endeavour in the course of Allah (fi sabīl Allah).

The teachers sometimes, depend on the students who engage in street begging to pay a weekly fee normally paid on Wednesdays (Kudin Laraba). Some of the Qur'anic students of the tsangaya engage in hard labour to get in return, food and money to pay the weekly fees. In many cases, many of the pupils of the tsangaya are under age, yet, they engage in labours that are beyond their ability.

Many parents also, take their wards to Qur'anic schools with the belief that leaving a life of hardship, difficulty and hunger will make a pupil humble, righteous, patient, having life experience and a blessed life.

2. The Problems of Shelter and Accommodation

Most Tsangaya schools have the problem of good shelter. Hundreds or more pupils sleep in very tight rooms, sometimes in open spaces, thus, subjected to different hazards. During harmattan, many students of tsangaya go out in the very cold weather seeking for alms, and are exposed to very harsh weather conditions. When they return to their schools, they do not have adequate shelter, they therefore, depend on burning of firewood all night to feel warm throughout the night. The Hausa Service of the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) recently aired a report on how almajirai pay sums between 20 to 50 Naira for a sleeping space on a daily basis in the city of Kano, Nigeria.⁽³¹⁾

3. Lack of Adequate Medical Care and Healthy Living

Majority of the tsangaya schools do not have provisions for toilet facilities, students live in very dirty environments, they have no proper clothing and are prone to communicable disease. The pupils are not provided with proper medical care in the situation of illness. The left-over foods which the students of tsangaya schools depend on are sometimes not healthy for consumption. According to Hoechner, skin diseases have become the trademark of the almajirai due to the frequency of infection and infestation of communicable diseases, most tsangaya schools lack adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities.⁽³²⁾

4. Exposure of Children to hard labour and vulnerability to crime

As stated earlier, teachers of tsangaya schools do not receive salaries, therefore, they live on the support of local communities. Some of them nonetheless, engage in farming, animal husbandry and trading. The pupils work as farmhands for their teachers, and also for others to earn living in rural areas, they also collect firewood for sale.⁽³³⁾ In urban areas older pupils wash cloths, carry loads and some engage in handicraft. This researchers have noticed many that are engaged in repairs of shoes and as labourers at building sites. Younger ones serve as domestic workers in various houses and are being sent on various errands so as to get constant food, while many others beg.

Many pupils of Qur'anic schools become vulnerable to crime due to hard conditions they find themselves, some are introduced to sale of drugs in the street. In the aforementioned BBC report, a young boy narrated how he was almost introduced to taking of drugs at the sleeping place.

Hoechner who worked and did research among the Qur'anic school children, confirmed that they face many abuses on daily basis.⁽³⁴⁾ Moreover, there are stereotyping of the almajirai by the media, development workers and policymakers.⁽³⁵⁾ These class see them as easy recruits for violence in the region. It is however, pertinent to note that pupils of the tsangaya schools were never confirmed to be part of violent clashes in the north, and do not have any affinity whatsoever with terrorist organizations.

5. Parents' Abdication from their Responsibilities

The position of the sharia about childbearing is unambiguous that parents should be responsible for their children, and that children should not be exposed to danger and harm. The Qur'an in al-An'ām 6/151 and al-Isrā' 17/33 categorically warned against killing of children for the fear of poverty. The child's welfare is the responsibility of both

parents, the father is however, saddled with the responsibility of providing sustenance for the mother and child (cf. Surah al-Baqara 2/233).

Nonetheless, it is disheartening that a major challenge of the tsangaya/ almajiri system is that parents evade their responsibilities of providing proper care to their children by sending them to Qur'anic schools without provision of sustenance. This act has continuously led to the population growth of the almajirai in the society.

Due to religious and ethnic pluralism in Nigeria, some non-Muslim citizens of Nigeria emotively hold that government revenues should not be wasted on 'undeserving' northern Muslims who could not control giving birth to children they cannot cater for. Proponents of this idea argue that spending government resources on almajiri model schools is counterproductive, Hoechner⁽³⁶⁾ quoted some views in this line from the page of a Nigerian newspaper, *the Punch*, that establishing modern schools for almajirai, without curtailing their 'mass production' in the North is an endorsement of parents' recklessness and irresponsibility, thus, the advocates of this view suggest the use of contraceptives and population control for ameliorating the challenges of the almajiri system.

6. Lack of Certification

One major challenge of the products of the traditional tsangaya school is that they are not licentiate to take employments, or to set for further studies in formal schools, and are not employable in the formal sector, because of their lack of modern education. Some have nonetheless, gone to obtain qualifications on formal schools and have succeeded and risen to prominence.

It is however, pertinent to state that traditional tsangaya schools provide their students with entrepreneurial skills to earn incomes in addition to Qur'anic scholarship. Many students learn cap making, embroidery, cap washing and some become shopkeepers for others, and learn trading. Many great businessmen have emerged from traditional Qur'anic schools. The most prominent of whom was late Sheikh Ishaka Rabiu of Kano, he modernised the school he inherited from his father, and set up endowment foundation to cater for the Qur'anic schools, he established many Qur'anic schools for different categories of people. Before his demise, he has made considerable progress to establish a university of the Qur'an, al-Tanzil University. The process is still ongoing.

7. Resistance to the Force Modernization

Many scholars and teachers of the Qur'an have embraced the reforms brought by modern developments and have made provisions to make their schools compatible with modern school systems. They take care of the aforementioned challenges, the students do not go out to beg on the street, their sustenance is adequately provided for, and some aspect of western education are taught with the Qur'anic studies.

There are however, a very large number of Qur'anic scholars who still vehemently reject the forces of modernization. They strongly believe that the schools should remain in the old system, despite the problems the system is facing, they see embracing reforms as deviation from the system inherited from ancestors.

The major reason for the resentments against modern 'Western' education in some parts of northern Nigeria is related to the history of the introduction of Western education after the coming of European colonialists. The Muslims had their own system of Islamic education, which provided administrators, judges and educationists, even the colonialists praised the educational system. Frederick Lugard, the Governor General of Nigeria, wrote in 1919, that the system had produced 'mallamai', people learned in Arabic and the Qur'an from whose rank the colonial authorities selected its officers of the native authorities and judges.⁽³⁷⁾ Islamic education greatly helped in the progress of Islam in many places before the coming of the Europeans. The Christian missionaries who were saddled with the provision of western education by the colonial authorities, therefore, sought for ways to counter the progress of Islam through the use of literacy in English to convert people to Christianity.⁽³⁸⁾

Fafunwa quoted S.F. Graham who accurately describes the missionaries as evangelists first and educationists second.⁽³⁹⁾ Rev. James Johnson of the Church Missionary Society CMS in the late 19th century said about the missionary use of education to convert Muslims to Christianity that: "our desire is to get as much as we can of our religion into Mohammedan scholars before they leave schools."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Adam al-Ilori highlighted how Muslim children were forced to accept Christianity in Yoruba land, they were forced to change their names to Christian and pagan names to get educated. He listed prominent Muslim children that were converted to Christianity through the missionary schools in early 20th century.⁽⁴¹⁾

The same efforts were made by the missionaries in northern Nigeria, Walter Miller (d. 1952) of the Hausa Party of the CMS' Sudan Party came to Nigeria in 1899, he was the most enthusiastic missionary in northern Nigeria, and he designed the subjects of instruction to be exclusively for evangelistic purpose.⁽⁴²⁾ The Muslims thus, developed antipathy against the missionary education, this is responsible for the backwardness in term of modern education that is still witnessed in some Muslim societies.

Way forward and conclusion

This paper has so far, delved on the merits and benefits of Qur'anic education to the society, and that it is the hallmark of all Islamic learning. The memorization of the Qur'an and its proper learning are vital for the sustenance of the Muslim community and its virtues. The traditional tsangaya system is faced with many challenges. There are about 10 million students of tsangaya schools roaming the streets of Nigeria, begging for alms, they do not have sources of sustenance, no medical care and no good shelter. The term *almajiri* which is from the Arabic *al-muhājir* which means an emigrant (for the sake of knowledge) has become synonymous with beggars and paupers that people looked down with contempt. This does not befit the exalted status of a Qur'anic scholar and the respect he ought to be accorded in the society just as it is done in other Muslim societies.

The support for Qur'anic education from the government is not adequate. There is need for more supports for the schools in terms of provision of amenities and continuous support for the sustenance of the teachers and students, though there are many government agencies and Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the field working on the integration of the Qur'anic education with western education. However, there are a large number of students and the results of efforts geared towards ameliorating the enigma are not quite yielding.

The recommendation to the colonial authorities that educating Muslims along western lines must be combined with Qur'anic education is still relevant to the contemporary discourse. When Sir E.P.C. Girouard, the Governor General, received a report in 1889 on the Muslim antipathy to Western education, due to its combination with Christian evangelism, and schools with combined curricular were established in 1896, these were highly successful in southern Nigeria.⁽⁴³⁾ The same thing was done in parts of northern Nigeria, especially with the establishment of Nassarawa Central Schools in Kano in 1910.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Joining Islamic education with science and vocational skills to achieve proper human development and progress, which will lead to success in this world and

hereafter is essential in solving the backwardness and challenges that the tsangaya system is facing. The Muslims through philanthropy of *waqf* can finance sustainable educational activities that are far reaching and beneficial to humanity, without losing religious and cultural values. Thus, Muslim organizations in Nigeria should setup *waqf* foundations for almajiri education and not to rely on governments alone to take charge of that. Parents must also be responsible for the upkeep and the education of their children by providing sustenance and paying tuition fees in the Qur'anic schools.

It is necessary that academics and Islamic scholars who had passed through the traditional tsangaya system be engaged in a campaign for re-orientation of tsangaya scholars on the need for reforms and inclusion of other subjects in Qur'anic schools. This will enable the products of the schools to go further in obtaining higher qualifications in modern schools. They can do better in addressing the challenges facing the system more than foreign organizations and donors that are in the field today.

Abject rural poverty in Nigeria and in some other sub-Saharan countries in Africa is also responsible for the continuous hindrances in solving the challenges of the tsangaya and almajiri educational system. Holistic approach in addressing poverty in the North will drastically solve the almajiri problem, schools with dual curricular should be situated in rural areas to prevent the migration of almajiris to other areas, since their needs could be satisfied within their domains. Hoechner reviewed the view that the system plays roles in re(reproduction) of poverty, by jeopardizing the children's opportunities to acquire economically useful skills.⁽⁴⁵⁾ This argument does not stand, the system promoted the vocations and trades that were known in the past, what it requires now is the modernization and inclusion of modern entrepreneurship skills into it.

Notes and References

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⁽²⁾ Muslim bin Ḥajjāj al-Naisābūrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Mugnī, 1998, Vol. 1, p 400, no. 789 (244).

⁽³⁾ Tirmidhī, Muhammad bin 'Īsā bin Saurah. *Sunan at- Tirmidhī*. Muṣṭafā al-Bānī al-Ḥalbī, nd, Vol. 5, p 171, no, 2904.

⁽⁴⁾ Abdullah Ibn Fūdī. *Farā'id al-Jalīlah wa Wasā'it al-Fawā'id al- Jamīlah*. Abdul 'Alī bin 'Abdul Ḥamīd (ed.), Beirut: Dār al- Fikr, 1981, p 71

⁽⁵⁾ A Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: NPS Educational Publishers, 1995,p 48

- (6) *Ibid.*, 49
- (7) Almajiri is the singular, while almajirai is the plural of the term in Hausa, they are all boys and pupils of the tsangaya schools and makarantun allo. Girls do not participate in this system, except as day students who come to study from their homes on daily basis.
- (8) Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, 49.
- (9) Tirmidhī, vol. 5, p 28, no. 2646.
- (10) Tirmidhī, vol.5, p 175, no 2910.
- (11) Muslim bin Ḥajjāj al-Naisābūrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Vol. 1, p 407, No. 267 (815)
- (12) Muslim bin Ḥajjāj al-Naisābūrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Vol. 1, p 407, No. 269 (817)
- (13) Abū Dāwud, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash‘ath al-Azdī as- Sijistānī. Kitāb as- Sunan. Beirut: Mu’assasatu ar-Rayyān, 2004, vol. 2, p 273, no. 1459.
- (14) M.M. Al- ‘Azamī. *The History of the Qur’anic Text*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003, pp 61-2
- (15) *Ibid.*, p60
- (16) Umbaru Dahiru. *Qur’anic Studies in Borno: Developments in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Maiduguri: ED-LINFORM Services, 2010, p 31.
- (17) *Ibid.*
- (18) *Ibid.*, p 31
- (19) Hannah Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria: Everyday Experiences of Youth, Faith, and Poverty*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p2, n 3.
- (20) *Ibid.*
- (21) *Ibid.*, pp 32- 3
- (22) *Ibid.*, pp 33-4
- (23) Ahmad Yahya. “Tsangaya: the Traditional Islamic Education System in Hausaland”. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4 (1) (2018) 1-14
- (24) Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria*, p2.
- (25) Umbaru Dahiru, pp51 ff.
- (26) Abdussomod Amoo. “List of Tsangaya (Almajiri) Model Schools across Nigeria” <https://educeleb.com/list-of-tsangaya-almajiri-model-schools-across-nigeria/> accessed 01/03/2019.
- (27) Amma Ahmad Khursa, “Memorandum of integrating Islamiyya Curricular into government Schools as Lasting Solution to the Almajiri Problem in the North”, 20th July, 2005, p3; cf. Amma Ahmad Khursa, “Solution to the Almajiri Problem in the North”, *Daily Trust*, 15th September, 2016, p
- (28) Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria*, p59.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p 60.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p 61.
- (31) “Yadda Almajirai ke Biyan Naira 20 Domin a Basu Wurin da zasu yi Bacci” , https://web.facebook.com/watch?ref=search&v=735962244052675&external_log_id=13c052ad-399f-48a4-a9dd-2d1317422ccc&q=Yadda%20Almajirai%20ke%20biyan%20naira%2020
- (32) Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria*, p 3.
- (33) Observations at various tsangayu at Nguru and Gashua in Yobe State. Cf. Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria*, p2.
- (34) Hoechner, *ibid.*, p2

⁽³⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, 42ff

⁽³⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p62.

⁽³⁷⁾ G.O. Gbadamosi, "The Establishment of Western Education among Muslims in Nigeria 1896- 1926", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 4/1, 1967, 92.

⁽³⁸⁾ E. Dada Adelowo. "Mission Education Among Yoruba Muslims of Nigeria: A Brief History" *Religions: a Journal of Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions*, Vol. 10, 1986, p69- 70.

⁽³⁹⁾ Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, 62.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ T. G. O. Gbadamosi. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841- 1908*, London: Longman, 1978, p128

⁽⁴¹⁾ Adam Abdullah Al-Iloriy. *Al-Islam al-Yawm wa Ghadan fi Najjiriya*. Cairo: Maktabatu Wahbah, 1985, p59ff

⁽⁴²⁾ Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, 62.

⁽⁴³⁾ G.O. Gbadamosi, *The Establishment of Western Education*, 102ff.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 98ff.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria*, p6