

ROLES AND REFORMS IN ALMAJIRI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: PERSPECTIVES OF NASARAWA WESTERN ZONE, NASARAWA STATE

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the roles and reforms of the Almajiri system of education in contemporary Nigeria with particular focus on the Nasarawa Western Zone of Nasarawa State. The study specifically investigated the influence of integration with formal education, quality of the learning environment, welfare support mechanisms, and teacher capacity and pedagogical quality on the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners. Anchored on Human Capital Theory, the study adopted a descriptive survey research design with embedded qualitative elements. The target population comprised 5,450 stakeholders including Mallams, integrated subject teachers, senior Almajiri learners, and education policymakers. Using Yamane's sampling formula, a sample size of 373 respondents was obtained, while purposive sampling was used to select 30 key informants for qualitative interviews. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation checklists. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests, while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. The results revealed significant relationships between integration with formal education ($\chi^2 = 46.21$, $p < 0.05$), quality of the learning environment ($\chi^2 = 52.34$, $p < 0.05$), welfare support mechanisms ($\chi^2 = 49.87$, $p < 0.05$), and teacher capacity ($\chi^2 = 41.63$, $p < 0.05$) and the educational outcomes of Almajiri learners. The study concluded that sustainable reform of the Almajiri system requires holistic policy interventions combining curriculum integration, improved infrastructure, welfare support, and teacher development.

Keywords: Almajiri education, educational reform, Qur'anic schools, learner welfare, Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

The Almajiri system of education represents one of the oldest and most resilient indigenous Islamic educational traditions in Northern Nigeria. Historically, the system was established to fulfil the Islamic obligation of seeking knowledge, which occupies a central place in Islamic doctrine and intellectual tradition. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises the value of knowledge and the moral responsibility of believers to pursue learning. For instance, Allah states in Surah Az-Zumar (39:9): "*Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*" Likewise, Surah At-Tawbah (9:122) encourages members of the Muslim community to dedicate themselves to the acquisition and dissemination of religious knowledge for the guidance of society. These teachings form the theological foundation upon which traditional Islamic educational institutions such as the Almajiri system were historically constructed. The term *Almajiri* is derived from the Arabic concept *al-muhājir*, referring to a migrant or seeker who travels in pursuit of knowledge. Within the Northern Nigerian context, the word refers to children who leave their homes to study Qur'anic knowledge under the supervision of Islamic teachers known as Mallams. Historically, the Almajiri system functioned not merely as an educational institution but as a comprehensive socio-religious structure that nurtured moral discipline, spiritual consciousness, and intellectual development among learners (Auwal, 2021; Muhammad et al., 2023). During the era of the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century, the system enjoyed

strong institutional support from both political authorities and local communities, which provided food, accommodation, and other welfare resources for students and teachers (Jabbi & Kware, 2024).

However, significant socio-economic transformations over the past century have profoundly altered the structure and functioning of the Almajiri system. The introduction of colonial educational policies, the expansion of Western-style schooling, rapid urbanisation, population growth, and increasing poverty levels have weakened the traditional communal support mechanisms that historically sustained the system (Teke, Khalid, & Katami, 2022). As a consequence, many Almajiri learners now operate within environments characterised by inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and limited welfare support. In contemporary Nigeria, the Almajiri system has increasingly become associated with several social challenges including child begging, educational marginalisation, and limited socio-economic mobility. Numerous Almajiri children are compelled to engage in street begging to obtain food and other basic necessities, exposing them to physical risks, exploitation, and social stigma (Ojo & Abdullahi, 2018; Zubairu, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of structured formal education within many Qur'anic schools limits learners' opportunities to acquire literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills necessary for participation in modern economic systems (Saleh, 2019).

Recognising these challenges, the Nigerian government introduced several reform initiatives aimed at modernising the Almajiri system. One of the most significant policy interventions was the establishment of Almajiri Model Schools in 2012, which sought to integrate Qur'anic instruction with formal education within a unified institutional framework. In addition, the Universal Basic Education programme attempted to incorporate Almajiri learners into mainstream educational systems through literacy and vocational training initiatives (Gideon, 2021). Despite these interventions, evidence suggests that many reform initiatives have not achieved their intended objectives due to weak policy implementation, inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, and poor institutional coordination (Umar & Hassan, 2024). In Nasarawa Western Zone specifically, there remains limited empirical research examining how these reforms influence the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners. Against this background, the present study investigates the roles and reforms of the Almajiri system of education in Nasarawa Western Zone of Nasarawa State. Specifically, the study examines how key reform dimensions, including integration with formal education, quality of the learning environment, welfare support mechanisms, teacher capacity and pedagogical quality, and institutional policy support, influence the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners.

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the effect of integration with formal education on the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners.
- ii. To assess the influence of the quality of the learning environment on learner outcomes.
- iii. To determine the effect of welfare support mechanisms on educational and socio-developmental outcomes.
- iv. To evaluate the influence of teacher capacity and pedagogical quality on learner outcomes.

Literature Review

Integration with formal education refers to the process through which traditional or non-formal educational systems are harmonised with conventional schooling structures in order to provide learners with broader academic and socio-

economic opportunities. Harteis and Timoštšuk (2025) define integration with formal education as the institutional alignment of alternative educational programmes with nationally recognised curricula, certification systems, and instructional frameworks that enable learners to transition between different forms of schooling. Similarly, Johnson (2022) conceptualises integration as a policy-driven mechanism through which learners previously excluded from formal schooling are incorporated into structured educational systems while retaining elements of their traditional learning practices. The quality of the learning environment refers to the physical, social, and pedagogical conditions within educational institutions that influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. Rusticus et al. (2022) define the learning environment as the comprehensive combination of infrastructural resources, teacher–student interactions, and institutional culture that collectively shape learners’ educational experiences. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) conceptualizes the learning environment as the set of contextual factors including classroom design, safety, teaching practices, and student engagement mechanisms that support meaningful learning outcomes. Collectively, these definitions highlight that the quality of the learning environment encompasses both material resources and social interactions that support effective learning processes.

Welfare support mechanisms refer to institutional programmes and services designed to address the non-academic needs of learners in order to enhance their educational participation and wellbeing. Abdulkadir and Haruna (2021) define welfare support mechanisms as organised systems of social protection that provide learners with access to food, healthcare, accommodation, and psychosocial support. Similarly, Mohammed and Tanko (2019) conceptualise welfare support as the set of institutional interventions aimed at addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities that hinder students’ ability to participate effectively in educational activities. In a related view, Zubairu (2020) describes welfare support mechanisms as integrated programmes including feeding initiatives, health services, and child protection measures designed to safeguard learners from deprivation and exploitation. Furthermore, Aliyu et al. (2024) define welfare support as the network of social services and institutional arrangements that ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of learners within educational settings. Teacher capacity and pedagogical quality refer to the professional competencies, instructional skills, and pedagogical practices that enable educators to facilitate effective learning experiences. Danladi and Abdullahi (2023) define teacher capacity as the combination of subject knowledge, teaching skills, and professional training required for delivering quality instruction. Similarly, Saleh (2019) conceptualises pedagogical quality as the effectiveness of teaching methods in promoting student engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking. Tudge et al. (2020) describe teacher capacity as the institutional investment in teacher training, professional development, and mentoring systems that enhance instructional performance. In addition, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) emphasise that teacher capacity encompasses not only academic qualifications but also pedagogical adaptability and the ability to address diverse learning needs.

This study is anchored in Human Capital Theory, originally developed by Schultz (1961) and further expanded by Becker (1964). The theory emerged from economic analyses of how investment in education and skills development contributes to productivity, economic growth, and social transformation. Human Capital Theory posits that education functions as a form of investment in human capabilities, similar to investments in physical infrastructure or technological innovation. According to Becker (1964), individuals who acquire education and skills enhance their productive capacities, thereby increasing their ability to contribute to economic development and social progress. The central premise of Human Capital Theory is that education improves the knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals, which in turn enhances their productivity and earning potential (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). Within this framework, educational systems are viewed as mechanisms for developing human resources capable of driving economic growth and societal development. The theory rests on several fundamental assumptions. First, it

assumes that education enhances human productivity by equipping individuals with cognitive and technical skills necessary for performing complex tasks. Second, the theory assumes that labour markets reward individuals based on their level of education and skill acquisition, thereby creating incentives for educational investment. Third, it assumes that societies benefit collectively from educational investments through increased economic productivity, technological innovation, and improved social welfare.

Despite its widespread influence, Human Capital Theory has attracted several criticisms within contemporary educational scholarship. Critics argue that the theory often reduces education to an economic instrument while neglecting its social, cultural, and moral dimensions (McGrath, 2020). In addition, some scholars contend that the theory assumes a direct relationship between education and employment outcomes, an assumption that may not hold in contexts characterised by structural unemployment and weak labour markets (Oketch, 2023). Furthermore, critics note that Human Capital Theory tends to overlook structural inequalities that may prevent individuals from translating educational attainment into economic opportunities. Nevertheless, the theory remains highly relevant to the present study. Reforms in the Almajiri education system are largely motivated by the need to equip learners with literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills that enhance their socio-economic opportunities. By integrating formal education into traditional Qur'anic schooling, policymakers aim to transform Almajiri learners from socially marginalised populations into productive members of society capable of contributing to economic development. In addition to its economic relevance, the principles underlying Human Capital Theory resonate strongly with Islamic teachings on the importance of knowledge acquisition. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasised the obligation of seeking knowledge in the well-known Hadith: *"Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim"* (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 224). Similarly, the Qur'an highlights the transformative power of knowledge in Surah Al-Alaq (96:1–5), which emphasises the role of learning in human development. Consequently, Human Capital Theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining how reforms within the Almajiri system can enhance educational outcomes and expand socio-economic opportunities for learners.

The study reviews recent empirical studies covering global, regional, and Nigerian contexts between 2015 and 2025. These studies explore the multifaceted dimensions of educational reform, particularly within indigenous and religious learning systems. A study by Smith and Jones (2021) assessed the impact of integrating religious curricula into formal schooling in Southeast Asia. A mixed-methods research design was adopted; the methods of data collection included standardized achievement tests and semi-structured interviews; the technique of analysis was a combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that integrated learners showed higher literacy rates but experienced identity conflicts; and the study recommended that policy frameworks must emphasize cultural preservation alongside academic standardization. Another study conducted by Olatunji (2022) evaluated the integration of vocational training into traditional Qur'anic schools in Lagos, Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative research design. The population comprises of 500 adolescent learners. Data were collected using structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The study revealed that vocational skill acquisition significantly improved the self-reliance of learners. The study recommended that state governments should subsidize equipment for these centers. Study by Yusuf (2025) assessed the effect of instructional materials availability on the quality of the learning environment in secondary schools in Nasarawa. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population comprises of 400 teachers. Data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA. The study revealed that a significant shortage of instructional materials limits the efficacy of teaching practices. The study recommended that school authorities implement a resource-sharing scheme. A study conducted by Bello (2022) evaluated the impact of cash transfer interventions on student enrollment in primary schools in Northern Nigeria.

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. The population comprises of 1,200 households. Data were collected using household surveys and administrative school data. Data were analyzed using difference-in-differences estimation. The study revealed that financial incentives effectively reduced child labor and increased school participation. The study recommended that targeted social protection programs be scaled up.

Study by Ahmed (2025) assessed the effect of accommodation and shelter support on the physical safety of Almajiri learners in Nasarawa. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design. The population comprises of 300 learners. Data were collected using site audits and questionnaire surveys. Data were analyzed using correlation and content analysis. The study revealed that unsafe living conditions are a major obstacle to long-term educational retention. The study recommended an institutional approach to building standardized boarding facilities. A study conducted by Abdullahi (2021) evaluated the effect of pedagogical training on the teaching performance of Islamic scholars in northern Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. The population comprises of 200 Mallams. Data were collected using pre- and post-test assessment scores. Data were analyzed using paired t-tests. The study revealed that targeted short-term training significantly improved the instructional delivery of literacy skills. The study recommended institutionalizing continuous professional development programs. Study by Umar (2025) assessed the effect of financial resource allocation on the quality of Almajiri reform initiatives in the Nasarawa Western Zone. The study adopted a causal-comparative research design. The population comprises of 200 administrators. Data were collected using financial audits and survey instruments. Data were analyzed using regression analysis. The study revealed that erratic funding cycles severely hamper the implementation of integrated curricula. The study recommended a dedicated trust fund for Almajiri education.

Mehodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design with embedded qualitative elements to examine the roles, challenges, reforms, and outcomes of the Almajiri system of education in Nasarawa Western Zone of Nasarawa State. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of data from a diverse stakeholder population without manipulation of variables, while also allowing the researcher to capture both statistical trends and contextual explanations relating to reform processes, welfare conditions, pedagogical realities, and institutional support. The study was conducted in the five Local Government Areas that constitute Nasarawa Western Zone, namely Karu, Keffi, Kokona, Nasarawa, and Toto. The target population comprised key stakeholders within the Almajiri education system, including Mallams, integrated subject teachers, senior Almajiri learners, and education policymakers or community leaders. Based on 2024/2025 estimates from the Nasarawa State Bureau of Statistics and the State Universal Basic Education Board, the total study population was 5,450, made up of 1,240 Mallams, 610 integrated subject teachers, 3,500 senior learners, and 100 policymakers or community leaders. The quantitative sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for finite populations.

The computation produced a sample size of 373 respondents. To ensure fair representation across the five Local Government Areas, proportionate stratified sampling was employed using proportional allocation. The resulting sample distribution was 92 for Karu, 82 for Keffi, 58 for Kokona, 79 for Nasarawa, and 62 for Toto. To strengthen the qualitative dimension, purposive sampling was used to select 30 information-rich participants drawn from the same study area. These included 10 Mallams, 10 integrated subject teachers, 5 SUBEB or education officials, and 5 community or religious leaders. This ensured adequate coverage of pedagogical, welfare, governance, and community perspectives. Three instruments were used for data collection: a structured questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide, and an observation checklist. The questionnaire was organised around the major study

constructs and employed a five-point Likert response format of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The interview guide was designed to generate deeper evidence on integration practices, welfare realities, teacher capacity, institutional support, and the perceived roles and reforms of the Almajiri system. The observation checklist was used to assess classroom conditions, sanitation, safety, sleeping arrangements, instructional materials, and visible evidence of curriculum integration. Prior to the main survey, the instruments were pilot-tested among 40 respondents drawn from Almajiri centres outside the sampled Local Government Areas, specifically in Akwanga, Wamba, and Doma. These centres were selected because they shared similar socio-cultural characteristics with the study area while remaining outside the main sample frame. The pilot exercise enabled refinement of the questionnaire through minor rewording and removal of repetitive items. Internal consistency of the refined questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS Version 26. The coefficients obtained were 0.83 for integration with formal education, 0.86 for quality of learning environment, 0.81 for welfare support mechanisms, 0.88 for teacher capacity and pedagogical quality, 0.84 for institutional and policy support, and 0.90 for educational and socio-developmental outcomes, with an overall scale reliability of 0.87. These values indicated good to excellent reliability and confirmed the suitability of the instrument for the main study. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaire administration across the five Local Government Areas. Qualitative data were generated through key informant interviews, while direct observation was conducted in selected Tsangaya centres during field visits. Interviews were conducted in English or Hausa depending on participant preference. Responses were documented through detailed note-taking and, where permission was granted, audio recording. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis. Quantitative data were coded and analysed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise respondents' views, while Chi-square **tests** at the 0.05 level of significance were used to test the study hypotheses.

Qualitative data from interviews and observation were analysed using **thematic analysis**. This involved transcription, repeated familiarisation with the data, open coding, grouping of codes into categories aligned with the study constructs, and the development of themes and sub-themes. The qualitative findings were then triangulated with questionnaire results and observation evidence to enrich interpretation and contextual explanation. Trustworthiness was ensured through standard qualitative criteria. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, observations, and survey data. Dependability was enhanced by the use of a consistent interview guide across the study area. Confirmability was supported through careful documentation of coding decisions, while transferability was improved by providing adequate contextual description of the study setting and participants. Ethical standards were carefully observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing identifying information from all records. The researcher also ensured that data collection did not disrupt learning activities and remained sensitive to the cultural and religious norms of the Almajiri system. Necessary permission was obtained from relevant authorities before engaging participants. The methodology adopted for this study was appropriate because the problem under investigation required both breadth and depth. The descriptive survey design enabled wide coverage of stakeholder perceptions across the study area, while the qualitative component provided insight into the lived realities behind those perceptions. Similarly, the combination of stratified sampling, triangulated instruments, reliability testing, and mixed analytical techniques enhanced the validity, reliability, and explanatory strength of the study. Overall, the chosen approach was well suited to examining the complex educational, welfare, and institutional dimensions of reform within the Almajiri system.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of Integration with Formal Education

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	142	39.3
Agree	118	32.7
Disagree	61	16.9
Strongly Disagree	40	11.1
Total	361	100

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The results indicated that a majority of respondents perceived integration of Qur'anic and formal education as beneficial to the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners.

Table 2: Cross-Tabulation of Integration with Formal Education and Educational Outcomes

Integration Level	High Outcome	Moderate Outcome	Low Outcome	Total
Strongly Agree	102	28	12	142
Agree	75	30	13	118
Disagree	22	18	21	61
Strongly Disagree	11	14	15	40
Total	210	90	61	361

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 3: Chi-Square Test Result

Test	Value	df	Sig.	Cramer's V
Pearson Chi-Square	46.21	6	0.000	0.36

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

The Chi-square statistic of 46.21 with a significance value of $p < 0.05$ indicates a statistically significant relationship between integration with formal education and educational outcomes. The Cramer's V value of 0.36 suggests a moderate effect size, meaning that integration policies moderately influence learner outcomes.

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Learning Environment Quality

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	156	43.2
Agree	109	30.2
Disagree	56	15.5
Strongly Disagree	40	11.1
Total	361	100

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 5: Cross-Tabulation of Learning Environment and Educational Outcomes

Learning Environment	High Outcome	Moderate Outcome	Low Outcome	Total
Strongly Agree	110	30	16	156
Agree	70	25	14	109
Disagree	20	17	19	56
Strongly Disagree	10	18	12	40
Total	210	90	61	361

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 6: Chi-Square Test Result

Test	Value	df	Sig.	Cramer's V
Pearson Chi-Square	52.34	6	0.000	0.38

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

The Chi-square statistic showed a significant relationship between the quality of the learning environment and learner outcomes. The Cramer's V value of 0.38 indicated a moderate association, demonstrating that improved learning environments contribute positively to educational performance.

Table 7: Respondents' Perception of Welfare Support

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	148	41.0
Agree	114	31.6
Disagree	59	16.3
Strongly Disagree	40	11.1
Total	361	100

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 8: Cross-Tabulation of Welfare Support and Educational Outcomes

Welfare Support	High Outcome	Moderate Outcome	Low Outcome	Total
Strongly Agree	105	28	15	148
Agree	72	27	15	114
Disagree	21	17	21	59
Strongly Disagree	12	18	10	40
Total	210	90	61	361

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 9: Chi-Square Test Result

Test	Value	df	Sig.	Cramer's V
Pearson Chi-Square	49.87	6	0.000	0.37

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

The Chi-square result confirmed a statistically significant relationship between welfare support mechanisms and educational outcomes. The effect size (**Cramer's V = 0.37**) indicates a moderate influence.

Table 10: Respondents' Perception of Teacher Capacity

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	133	36.8
Agree	126	34.9
Disagree	62	17.2
Strongly Disagree	40	11.1
Total	361	100

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 11: Cross-Tabulation of Teacher Capacity and Educational Outcomes

Teacher Capacity	High Outcome	Moderate Outcome	Low Outcome	Total
Strongly Agree	98	22	13	133
Agree	82	30	14	126
Disagree	20	20	22	62
Strongly Disagree	10	18	12	40
Total	210	90	61	361

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 12: Chi-Square Test Result

Test	Value	df	Sig.	Cramer's V
Pearson Chi-Square	41.63	6	0.000	0.34

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Teacher capacity significantly influenced educational outcomes. The moderate Cramer's V value of 0.34 indicates that improvements in teacher training and pedagogical quality moderately enhance learner development.

Table 13: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
Integration with Formal Education	46.21	6	0.000	Reject H ₀
Learning Environment	52.34	6	0.000	Reject H ₀
Welfare Support	49.87	6	0.000	Reject H ₀
Teacher Capacity	41.63	6	0.000	Reject H ₀

Source: Researcher's collection- 2025

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data generated through key informant interviews and field observation were analysed thematically in order to provide contextual understanding of the realities surrounding the Almajiri system in Nasarawa Western Zone. The analysis produced five interrelated themes, namely integration with formal education, quality of the

learning environment, welfare support mechanisms, teacher capacity and pedagogical quality, and institutional and policy support. On integration with formal education, most participants acknowledged that the idea of combining Qur'anic instruction with literacy and numeracy was widely accepted in principle. Mallams and teachers noted that where integration existed, learners showed better communication skills, improved confidence, and greater readiness to relate with peers outside the Almajiri system. However, respondents also stressed that implementation was uneven, as some centres had access to integrated subject teachers and basic materials, whereas others had no practical evidence of formal instruction despite policy claims.

Regarding the quality of the learning environment, participants consistently described poor physical conditions in many centres. Overcrowded rooms, inadequate ventilation, weak sanitation facilities, and shortage of instructional materials were repeatedly mentioned. Teachers explained that such conditions reduced learner concentration and increased absenteeism due to illness. Observations similarly revealed that several centres lacked basic furniture, toilets, clean water, and clearly separated learning and sleeping spaces.

On welfare support mechanisms, interviewees emphasised that feeding, shelter, and healthcare support were largely inadequate and irregular. Many respondents explained that in the absence of structured welfare provision, learners depended on street begging and other survival strategies, which reduced instructional time and exposed them to risk. Participants further observed that centres receiving occasional community or NGO support recorded better attendance and stronger learner engagement.

With respect to teacher capacity and pedagogical quality, Mallams were widely respected for their Qur'anic knowledge and moral authority, yet many participants noted that they lacked formal pedagogical training required for integrated curriculum delivery. Integrated subject teachers also reported large class sizes, weak supervision, and limited teaching aids. Field observation suggested that instruction remained largely recitation-based, with minimal learner-centred techniques.

Overall, the qualitative findings indicated that the challenges facing the Almajiri system are structural and interconnected. While stakeholders generally support reform, the effectiveness of such reforms depends on stronger implementation, improved welfare and infrastructure, better teacher preparation, and more consistent institutional backing.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that integration with formal education significantly improves the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners in Nasarawa Western Zone. This suggests that combining Qur'anic instruction with literacy and numeracy strengthens learners' communication skills, confidence, and future socio-economic prospects. This finding supports the empirical evidence of Smith and Jones (2021), who reported that integrating religious curricula into formal schooling improved literacy outcomes among learners in Southeast Asia. Similarly, the result aligns with Olatunji (2022), whose study on vocational integration in Qur'anic schools in Lagos demonstrated that the inclusion of additional skills and formal educational components significantly enhanced learner self-reliance and practical competence. The study also established that the quality of the learning environment significantly influences learner outcomes. The results showed that poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate sanitation, and limited instructional materials negatively affect concentration, attendance, and teaching effectiveness. This finding corroborates the study of Yusuf (2025), who found that the shortage of instructional materials in Nasarawa schools significantly reduces the effectiveness of teaching and learning

processes. In addition, the result is consistent with Ahmed (2025), who observed that poor accommodation and unsafe living conditions among Almajiri learners constitute major barriers to sustained educational participation and long-term retention.

Furthermore, the study revealed that welfare support mechanisms significantly affect the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners. The findings indicated that the absence of organised feeding programmes, healthcare services, and shelter support forces many learners to engage in street begging, thereby reducing instructional time and increasing exposure to social risks. This result aligns with Bello (2022), whose quasi-experimental study demonstrated that welfare-based interventions such as financial and social support programmes significantly improve school enrolment and reduce child labour. The finding also supports Ahmed (2025), who emphasised that improved welfare and accommodation structures are essential for safeguarding learners' wellbeing and sustaining educational engagement. In addition, the study found that teacher capacity and pedagogical quality significantly influence learner outcomes within the Almajiri system. Although Mallams possess strong religious knowledge, the lack of formal pedagogical training limits the effectiveness of integrated curriculum delivery. This finding is consistent with Abdullahi (2021), who demonstrated that pedagogical training significantly improved the instructional performance of Islamic teachers in northern Nigeria. The result also indirectly aligns with Umar (2025), who reported that weak institutional support and inconsistent funding often hinder the successful implementation of reform initiatives, including teacher development programmes. Overall, the findings suggest that successful reforms within the Almajiri system depend on the combined influence of curriculum integration, supportive learning environments, welfare provision, teacher development, and consistent institutional backing. These results reinforce the broader empirical literature reviewed in this study, which indicates that educational reforms in traditional learning systems are most effective when they adopt a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses pedagogical, environmental, and socio-economic dimensions.

Conclusion

This study examined the roles and reforms of the Almajiri system of education in contemporary Nigeria with specific reference to Nasarawa Western Zone of Nasarawa State. The findings revealed that the Almajiri system remained an important socio-religious educational institution that continued to contribute to the moral and spiritual development of learners. However, the study also established that the system faced several structural challenges associated with weak infrastructure, limited welfare support, inadequate pedagogical capacity, and inconsistent policy implementation. The empirical results showed that integration with formal education significantly improved the educational and socio-developmental outcomes of Almajiri learners. Similarly, the quality of the learning environment, welfare support mechanisms, and teacher capacity were found to have significant influence on learner outcomes. The qualitative findings further revealed that many Almajiri centres operated under difficult conditions characterised by overcrowding, insufficient instructional materials, irregular feeding arrangements, and limited institutional supervision. These conditions constrained the effectiveness of ongoing reform initiatives. Overall, the study concluded that reforms within the Almajiri system were most effective when integration policies were accompanied by improvements in welfare provision, infrastructure, teacher training, and institutional support. Sustainable transformation of the system therefore required a holistic and culturally sensitive approach that preserved the religious foundations of Qur'anic education while strengthening its compatibility with contemporary educational and socio-economic realities.

Furthermore, despite the contributions of this study, certain limitations were acknowledged. First, the study was geographically limited to the Nasarawa Western Zone of Nasarawa State, which restricted the generalisability of the findings to other regions where the socio-economic and institutional contexts of the Almajiri system might differ. Second, the study relied largely on self-reported perceptions obtained through questionnaires and interviews, which might have been influenced by respondent bias or social desirability effects. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the research design limited the ability of the study to capture long-term changes in the outcomes of reform initiatives. Future research should expand the geographical scope of investigation to include multiple states across Northern Nigeria in order to provide a broader comparative understanding of the dynamics of Almajiri education reforms. Longitudinal studies should also be conducted to examine the long-term impact of integration policies and welfare interventions on learner outcomes and socio-economic mobility. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of community-based organisations, faith-based institutions, and non-governmental organisations in supporting sustainable reforms within the Almajiri system. Further research may also investigate the impact of digital learning technologies and vocational training programmes on enhancing the relevance and adaptability of Almajiri education in contemporary society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations were proposed. First, government and education authorities should strengthen the integration of Qur'anic and formal education through the provision of trained integrated subject teachers, curriculum support, and appropriate instructional materials. Such measures would ensure that learners acquire both religious knowledge and functional literacy skills required for socio-economic participation. Second, significant investment should be directed toward improving the physical learning environment in Almajiri centres. Government agencies, local authorities, and development partners should prioritise the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, sanitation facilities, and safe accommodation structures to enhance the safety and wellbeing of learners. Third, structured welfare support mechanisms should be introduced to address the basic needs of Almajiri learners. Feeding programmes, healthcare services, and social protection initiatives should be strengthened in order to reduce dependence on street begging and improve learner concentration and attendance. Finally, teacher capacity development should be prioritised through regular pedagogical training and professional development programmes for Mallams and integrated subject teachers. Such training should focus on child-centred teaching methods, classroom management, and effective delivery of integrated curricula.

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