

THE CHALLENGES OF TSANGAYA SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF BAUCHI EMIRATE

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Abstract

The Tsangaya system of education is an Islamic-based educational system that had existed for several centuries in Northern Nigerian Muslim communities before the coming of the British colonial masters. The system has been the source of moral and educational training and had produced leaders, scholars, businessmen, government functionaries with full support from the government. However, the arrival of the British colonialist with a new system of education made the system suffered utmost neglect from the government which continued even after the colonial period. The objective of this paper is to examine the origin, development and the challenges facing the Tsangaya school system in Bauchi emirate, Bauchi state Nigeria using Historical and phenomenological methods. The paper's findings among others revealed that the Tsangaya schools in Bauchi emirate had suffered a total neglect from both the government and other religious organizations and bodies. The paper recommends among other things that for the salvaging and resuscitation of the system there is need for the government at all levels to join hands with religious bodies and or organizations.

Keywords: *Tsangaya, Challenge, Bauchi Emirate, integration, almājiri*

A. Introduction

The word *Tsangaya*, according to Sidi et al. (2022), literally means Qur'anic learning center, popularly called in some places “*Makarantun Allo*” (referring to the wood-curved object on which the Qur'anic verses and chapters are hand-written and recited). It is usually a locally built shed on the outskirts of the town, where the teaching and learning of Qur'anic education are observed. Shehu (2006) asserted in his submission that the *tsangaya* system of education involves the entrusting of children (usually between the ages of seven and fifteen) by parents to a *mallam* (learned person or teacher) for the memorization of the Glorious Qur'an.

Pantami (2019) was of the view that the Hausa word *Almajiri* (Plural *Almajirai*) is derived from the Arabic word *Almuhājiri* (Plural *Almuhājirun*), which means one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (S.S.A.W.), who accompanied him during his hijrah from Mecca to Madina. The Arabic word *almuhjir* therefore had a special religious connotation in the early period of Islam. It meant a scholar who migrated from his home to another community in search of knowledge. Up to date, a pupil undergoing Islamic religious training is called *Almājjiri* in the Hausa language, hence the *Almājjiri* system of education. The schools are found mostly in the northern parts of Nigeria, with just a few in the southern part of the country (Fafunwa, 1977).

While Shehu (2006) opined that *the Tsangaya* system had been in existence in northern Nigeria prior to the emergence of the British colonialists, Ahmad (2022), Abdulqadir (2003), Hoechner (2013), and Jungudo (2014) traced the origin of the *Tsangaya* to the 11th century, to the Kanem Borno empire, and seven centuries later another caliphate was established, a sequel to the jihad of Usman Danfodio. (Yahaya 2018) The two empires established what is presently known as the *Almajiri* educational system.

During the pre-colonial era, the system was well organized and comprehensive; it was funded by the state from state zakat funds paid by individuals and was under the control of the emirs. An inspectorate of Qur'anic literacy was even established, where the inspectors were given the privilege to report to the Emirs all issues pertaining to the schools. In fact, the era, according to Abdulqadir (2011), has been regarded as the height of Qur'anic education in northern Nigeria. The *Tsangaya* schools also engaged in farming activities to supplement the efforts of the central government and host community. Advanced students further engaged in crafts and other activities as part of self-acquisition skills, such as cap making, gown embroidery, dying, e.t.c. (Gazzali 2005).

With the advent of colonial administration, however, the system lost government support and patronage. As the colonialists were not interested in the system, a vacuum was created with nobody to take on the responsibilities of the schools. As time went on, the *Tsangaya* Scholars took over the responsibilities and deemed it a moral and religious duty to educate these pupils for the sake of Allah. Although there was a scarcity of funds and an overwhelming number of pupils to cater for, the system continued to flourish with the support of the immediate community, and begging was still not the norm; instead, they resorted to odd menial jobs to make ends meet. (Habibu 2017). With the increasing level of poverty in the country, the care of the *Almajiris* became overwhelmingly heavy for the scholars, who were left with no choice but to send these little boys, who mostly come from far and near villages without provisions and other essential needs, to be moving to houses, streets, motor packs, restaurants, and other public places begging for food. Gradually, they become exposed to child abuse, neglect, health hazards, hawking, and other forms of social vices. Some of these scholars, according to Shehu (2006), even resorted to imposing on them what is called "*kudin sati*," a form of weekly fee for the lessons they received.

As a strategy to curtail the menace of street begging by children and youth in the name of pursuing Qur'anic education, various governments decided to introduce what is popularly called the *called the Tsangaya* integration program with the establishment of Almajiri Integrated Schools (AIS) across the country, especially in the northern states. The aim of the program is integration, which is the merging of the western system of education with the Qur'anic system of education. The schools are to accommodate the *Almajiri's*. The purpose of the integration of the two systems of education is to provide educational opportunities for these categories of children to acquire traditional Qur'anic education and basic Western education so as to improve their living conditions and empower the *Almajiri* and their *Mallams*.

B. Discussion

1. The pedagogy of the Tsangaya schools

The Tsangaya school system has an unwritten syllabus that comprises lower and advanced levels of study and exists in five stages altogether. The elementary level was meant for learning recitation and writing, while the advanced level is the stage for the memorization of the glorious Qur'an as well as the ability to write it from the heart. According to Babajo (2018), there are five stages in the *Almajiri* Qur'anic School:

- **Babbaqu Stage:** This is a stage where pupils aged four to five are introduced to the basic rudiments of the Qur'an, where they are made to learn all the Arabic alphabets, recognize the vowels and diacritical marks, have the ability to form letters, and finally memorize about ten shorter chapters of the Quran. Pupils in this stage are in the range of 4 to 11 years of age and are referred to as 'Kolo'.
- **Farfaru Stage:** This is a stage where learners are introduced to the skill of mastering the reading of the glorious Qur'an, with emphasis on the recognition and identification of the distinction between words with similarities that are not easily identifiable. Students in this stage are mostly adolescents, usually between the ages of 12 and 16, and are referred to as 'Titibiri'.
- **Zube Stage:** This is a stage where pupils are made to copy and read the whole of the Qur'an in parts, from the last chapter to the top one, without the demand of memorization. The aim here was to make the recitation of the Holy Qur'an softer and flow better and to improve the writing skills of the learners. 'Gardi' which is for the students from 17 years,
- **Haddatu Stage:** This is an advance stage where pupils start the segment of memorization of the glorious Qur'an by heart. Initially, the pupil starts memorizing portions by copying them on slate and presenting them to the teacher and other experts for corrections and observation. After

completing this, the pupil could move to the sequential memorization until the completion of the whole Qur'an. Students in this stage, who are referred to as *Alaramma*, start at the age of 18 years.

- **Sātu Stage:** This is the final stage where the student writes parts of the Qur'an from memory without making reference to the written text of the Qur'an. The student reads out loud to the ears of the teacher and other experts around the teacher for orthography writing and recitation. When the writing and recitation are found spotless (clean), the student writes the whole Qur'an from the heart on sheets of paper, which serves as the final dissertation project. Students in this stage are called *Gangaran*, and they are in the range of 20 years and upward.

The above five stages go in line with the category of the pupils, which in most cases is based on their ages. The first category is called '*Kolo*' and consists of children aged between 4 and 11 years of age. This is followed by '*Titibiri*' comprising adolescents who are usually between the ages of 12 and 16, '*Gardi*' which is for students from 17 years, *Alaramma* from 18 years, and *Gwani* from 20 years upward. (Bambale 2003). At the end of every stage, students used to organize a ceremony for passing the stage successfully. Some used to invite their parents and relatives to jubilate with them, slaughter rams for the ceremony, and conduct the Qur'an recitation session (Takara in Hausa), especially for the fourth stage of *Haddatu*.

2. The advent of the modern *Tsangaya* system of education

As mentioned earlier, the *Tsangaya* system suffered the utmost neglect during the colonial period in the Northern States. The post-colonial period was not very different as the neglect and poor funding continued. Whereas enormous resources are expended to provide primary school education, Qur'anic education was considered a private affair of the parents. These phenomena lead Muslims to start thinking of shifting or reforming the system.

The first shift from strict *Tsangaya*, according to Shehu (2006), is the establishment of *Makarantar Allo* (of the *Zaure* type), usually populated by children in the neighborhood and supported by the famous '*Kudin Laraba*', a token given to the Mallam by each child. The less ambitious Mallams find this very supportive and are usually content with the proceeds. The teaching and learning methods are similar to those in typical *Tsangaya* schools. In some cases, some dosages of *figh* lessons are casually incorporated. These types of schools are surely great in number and are spread in urban and rural areas across the whole of Northern Nigeria. (Shehu 2003)

Later, *Islamiyyah* schools started to spring up. The first documented in history, according to Kabo, as cited in Shehu (2003), is the one founded in Zaria in 1956 by a group of NEPU activists. These *Islamiyyah* schools continued to gain popularity and acceptance in all nooks and corners of Northern Nigeria, largely operating in *Soraye* (the entry rooms in local houses) in the urban and rural neighborhoods. However, *Tsangaya* School's sill flourished as some people still cherish them and would always prefer to take their children and wards to them than the so-called book schools.

3. The integration of Tsangaya Schools

This concern for reform in *Tsangaya* education continued to grow and later exploded into seminars, conferences, and workshops usually organized in the major northern Nigerian cities. Besides seminars, advocacy and philanthropic groups and organizations also started to be formed with the aim of assisting the *Tsangaya* schools and their pupils in a number of ways, some of which include material assistance, vocational training, etc. The *Almajiri* Initiative in Sokoto is one example in this regard, formed sometime in the year 2000 (Shehu 2006). However, in the 1980s, some Islamic organizations, such as Islamic Education, *Jama'atu Izalatl Bid.ah*, and many others, started establishing model Islamic primary schools. The scope of integration and awareness kept growing rapidly in many cities and towns in northern Nigeria.

The latest trend in integration efforts is the establishment of *Tahfeez* schools at the primary level and Integrated Islamic Secondary Schools, which have not only gained tremendous and overwhelming acceptance in society but have come to be seen as a source of reformation and a means of integrating western education with Islamic or Qur'anic education. Not only Islamic organizations have shown interest in the integration of *Tsangaya* with western education, but local and international NGOs and donor organizations such as UNISEF, USAID, and UNESCO have been advocating, funding, and researching the project.

In the same vein, many state governments in the North and other federal institutions like Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Education Tax Fund (ETF), the Northern Education Research Project (NERP), etc. also made several attempts and introduced programs for the successful implementation or takeoff of the integration project. (Shehu 2003) The Federal Government of Nigeria, in its measures to ensure that the Qur'anic school or *Tsangaya* education is integrated into western education, introduced an Almajiri Education Programme where a model *Tsangaya*/Almajiri model school was established in various parts of the country, with most of them concentrated in the northeast and northwest of the country. After the construction of the schools through UBEC, the federal government handed them over to their host states through the SUBEBs. The schools were categorized into three models, with each model having a varying degree of support and interventions.

- **Model I schools** involve the integration of traditional Qur'anic schools within their original locations. There are 101 Model I schools in the country. Statutory facilities provided are a block of two classrooms and furniture, an administrative block including offices, stores, and toilets, and a hostel block with pupils' lockers. Others are a recitation hall with a store and furniture/mats, VIP toilets, a borehole with an overhead tank, a guest house, and external walls and fencing.

- **Model II schools** are quite larger than Model I schools and were meant to accommodate more pupils. The 18 Model II schools spread across Nigeria were built to serve a group of Qur'anic schools within their respective states. In addition to them, there are 36 others funded through the (tertiary) Education Trust Fund. Statutory facilities in such schools are two blocks of six classrooms, an administrative block consisting of five offices, a library, toilets, a computer room, two laboratories, and two workshops. Others are staff quarters to accommodate up to 10 members of staff, a hostel block, toilets and laundry, a recitation hall, a hand pump, and a motorized borehole with an overhead tank. Both Model I and Model II schools were also provided with beds and bedding, with 50 in each Model I school and 100 in each Model II school. Other infrastructure, such as classrooms, pupils' furniture, and teachers' furniture, was also provided in each of the schools.
- **Model III schools** are pre-existing Islamiyyah and *Ma'ahad* schools supported in terms of rehabilitation and the provision of additional infrastructure. Documents from the UBEC and the Federal Ministry of Education did not explicitly state details of such supports as they did for the two other models. One of the documents merely gave the number of Model III schools supported by the Federal Government of Nigeria all over the nation as 138 (Amo 2019).

4. *Tsangaya* Schools in Bauchi Emirate

Bauchi emirate comprises the Alkaleri, Bauchi, Darazo, Ganjuwa, and Toro governments. Being a predominantly Muslim area, the people of the area followed the same pattern of *Tsangaya* Qur'anic schools that are common in most northern Nigerian towns, as discussed earlier. According to Ya'u (2022), it is estimated that there are not less than five hundred *Tsangaya* schools across the seven local governments that are made up of the Emirate. The most popular and oldest among them include:

- The *Tsangaya* of Mallam Garba Gwanki, Bauchi.
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Ya'u Dan Daudawo Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Dauda, Jahun Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of Alaramma Sani Dan Jajere Bakin Kura Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Adamu Gudun, Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Ahmadu Sabon Fegi Gubi
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Sani Mai Zube, Jahun Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Adamu Dan Dabirai, Bauchi
- The *Tsangaya* of Malam Adamu Mai Mangoro, Kafin Madaki
- The *Tsangaya* of *Alaramma* Mallam Yusuf Daudawo, Darazo
- The *Tsangaya* of Mallam Tasi'u Alkaleri
- The *Tsangaya* of Mallam Lawal Limamin Kirfi
- The *Tsangaya* of Mallam Mato Gumau, Toro.

As can be seen, each *Tsangaya* school is named after its founders, who are normally the proprietors of the schools. In line with the tradition earlier discussed, pupils are enrolled in the system averagely from the age of 7, and after passing through the stages and upon completion of memorization of the glorious Qur'an, students are normally returned to their parents, and a graduation ceremony, popularly known as *Saukar Karatu*, is usually organized by the parents as a mark of appreciation and gratitude to Allah. Beside these, there are four model *Tsangaya* schools built by the federal government in Bauchi Emirate through its *Tsangaya* schools integration program.

- *Tsangaya* Model School, Buzaye Bauchi LGA (Model 1)
- *Tsangaya* Model School Dungulbi Bauchi L.G.A. (Boarding ETF)
- Model Almajiri School, Darazo LGA (Model II)
- *Tsangaya* of Mallam Māto Gumau, Toro LGA.

5. The challenges facing *Tsangaya* School in Bauchi Emirate

The major challenges facing the *Tsangaya* schools in Bauchi emirate are not different from those facing those facing other areas or towns in northern Nigeria. Such challenges include;

1) Lack of recognition

One of the most pervasive problems of the *tsangaya* schools, in our view, is the lack of recognition by the different tiers of government. The system does

not occupy any meaningful position in the educational policy of the state or the nation at large, and therefore those that pass through it are not considered to have undergone any education at all. This is contrary to the pre-colonial period, when the products of these schools were recognized and employed by the state as teachers, judges, administrators, and other public servants.

2) *Lack of support and funding*

Perhaps due to the lack of recognition from the government and the public in general, none of the tsangaya receive any form of funding from the various governments. They are all either funded by community and individual efforts or not funded at all. In most of the schools, there is a shortage of food, shelter, and health facilities. Even the integrated tsangaya schools built by the federal government are no longer being supported by the government. Given the poor state of funding for the tsangaya schools, it is no wonder that the Almajiri pupils are roaming about the street picking contaminated leftover food from the garbage and engaging in all manner of manual jobs in order to cater for their needs.

3) *Lack of Opportunities for Products of the System*

As a result of a lack of recognition of the system, the products of the tsangaya schools do not have the opportunities that the products of the secular education system have. There are no plum career opportunities. Indeed, there are no working opportunities at all. The products of the tsangaya system usually end up with only two options: either to return to their schools and become teachers or to take up menial jobs as petty traders, laborers, or thugs.

4) *Welfare Problems*

The welfare problems, especially those faced by the students of tsangaya schools (almajirai), are multifarious.

First, they are generally homeless with no accommodation. In many schools, as mentioned earlier, there is no infrastructure other than the house of the *alaramma*. The *almajirai* sleep in the outer rooms of the *alaramma's* house, in

congested rented stalls, or in uncompleted buildings. Only in very few cases, such as the *tsangaya* schools under the Sheikh Tahir Usman Bauchi foundation, where houses for the *almajirai* are provided, are they overcrowded.

Secondly, most of the *Almajirai* have to beg in order to get food. The disadvantages of begging *Almajirai* are numerous. In addition to wasting away a large chunk of their time, which they could have used in their Qur'anic studies, begging also exposes them to all sorts of deviant behavior and immoral practices. It also undermines the image of Muslims and portrays Islam as a religion of poverty, backwardness, and filth.

Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, most of the *tsangaya* schools in *Almajirai* have no form of healthcare facility whatsoever. When they become sick, their *alaramma* does not have the financial capacity to take them to hospitals or even buy drugs for them. Therefore, at best, they are given herbal medicine.

Fourthly, most of the *almajirai* do not enjoy other basic necessities of life such as clothing, shoes, and bedding materials. This is why they are always seen barefooted and in tattered clothes; thus, most of them live in perpetual dirt, with the resultant increased risk of disease.

5) *Inadequacy and neglect of the Tangaya integrated schools*

The inadequate number of newly constructed model *tsangaya* schools is also another challenge for the *tsangaya* schools in the area. According to Ya'u (2022), the introduction of the *Tsangaya* model schools did not solve the challenges facing the *Tsangaya* schools in the area because, according to him, considering the number of *Tsangaya* schools in the emirate (which according to him are over 500), four *Tsangaya* model schools are grossly inadequate. Our investigation shows that out of the four *Tsangaya* model schools in Bauchi emirate, only that of Buzaye in Bauchi local government is properly functional. Poor or lack of maintenance of the existing schools, non-regular payment of salaries and allowances, improper medical facilities, and the and the absence of

a feeding program, among others, are some of the problems that bedeviled the smooth running of the schools.

In view of the foregoing explanations on the challenges and conditions of Tsangaya/Qur'anic schools in Bauchi Emirate, the following measures are hereby recommended as a solution for effective sustenance and integration of the *Tsangaya*/Qur'anic schools in Bauchi Emirate.

- Given the enormity of the problems discussed above and the dire need to address them squarely, all the tiers of government should join hands in conjunction with Islamic organizations and renown philanthropists to find consistent ways that would help in the complete financing and administration of the *Tsangaya* Qur'anic schools. It is our belief that the government alone cannot adequately fund the *Tsangaya* schools.
- A baseline study should be conducted to determine the location, size, staff strengths, facilities, and problems of the Qur'anic schools for proper planning. In this direction, a special agency saddled with the task of running the *tsangaya* schools should be established by the Bauchi state government.
- Studies have shown that most teachers consider western education an impediment to the teaching and learning of the Qur'an as well as other Islamic sciences, whereas in truth, all subjects taught in western education have their roots in the Qur'an. Therefore, the easiest way to convince such teachers is to develop a curriculum that incorporates the Qur'anic perspective. In other words, when teaching any topic, relevant verses or verses of the Qur'an should be cited as references.
- Entrepreneurial skill acquisition Programs for products of Qur'anic schools in tailoring, carpentry, shoemaking, Islamic calligraphy, electrical installation, and computers. This will provide job opportunities for the products of these Qur'anic schools.

- The government should launch a sensitization campaign on the need for wealthy individuals and society in general to adopt the Islamic mechanisms of zakat, waqf, and sadaqa with a view to salvaging and re-positioning the tsangaya schools. In the same vein, donor agencies and NGO's, especially from Muslim countries, should be contacted for possible intervention and collaboration in the tsangaya schools scheme.
- The government should duly recognize the products of the tsangaya schools and create employment opportunities for them as teachers in government schools to teach the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an to students.
- The government should widely consult the stakeholders of the tsangaya program, especially the *alarammomi*, and massively sensitize and mobilize them and society in general using all available means, such as media houses and social media.

C. Conclusion

The traditional arrangement of the Tsangaya Qur'anic schools in Bauchi North Senatorial District is not different from what is obtainable in other Tsangaya schools in other states in Northern Nigeria. It has been clearly explained in the write-up that the tsangaya system in Bauchi emirate Nigeria, including the schools that comprise it and the curricula being used, as well as the teachers and students of the system, are facing a lot of challenges. These challenges vary from the poor physical infrastructure that exists in most of the schools to limited curricula to the lack of recognition of the system down to the very deplorable welfare conditions of the Almajirai. Unless these challenges are promptly addressed, they are likely to have disastrous consequences for the development of the state in general. The paper has given broad recommendations on how these problems could be addressed. While all stakeholders have important roles to play in solving these problems, the role of the government in collaboration with the rich and other voluntary donor agencies is very critical.

Needless to say, there is a need for strong political will on the part of the various arms and levels of government, which should translate into good policy formulation, appropriate legislation, proper funding, and strong implementation.

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