



## TSANGAYA SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ITS CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF AKKO LOCAL GOVERN- MENT AREA, GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In the pre-colonial Hausaland, the Tsangaya school system was an Islamic-based educational system which existed for several centuries and had produced leaders, scholars, businessmen, government functionaries among others. It has been the source of moral and educational training to muslim societies in Nigeria. Traditionally, in Hausa land Muslim communities before the coming of the British colonial masters, every family used to send their children to Qur'anic schools, popularly known as Tsangaya where the Qur'anic verses and chapters were hand-written and recited. But after the British colonialists took over the mantle of leadership of Nigeria, they frustrated the system by denying the schools its usual scholarships and financial backing. Post-colonial governments of native Nigeria also did not give the Tsangaya education the deserved attention and support and this continued until the present time. This paper examined the establishment, development and the challenges of the Tsangaya School system in Akko Local Government Area of Gombe state, Nigeria, with the aim of exploring its problems with a view to finding out how to give it room for possible development. The data generated were obtained through discussions, interviews, document analysis and personal experience. The paper reveals that the Tsangaya school system had operated from elementary to the advanced level and had its different pedagogy. Some benefits of the Tsangaya schools found in this study are: there is strong relationship between teacher and students, respect for knowledge from both sides, blending the teaching and learning activities, and availability of moral instructions required for the modern era. The inadequate number of qualified teachers, insecurity, accommodation and health care facilities are among the major challenges being faced by Tsangaya schools system in Akko Local Government Area of Gombe State, Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Tsangaya education, Almajiri, Akko.

### Introduction

The term *Tsangaya* is a Hausa word referring to Qur'anic learning centre popularly known as "Makarantan Allo" in some societies. It is usually a locally built shed at the outskirts of the town, where the teaching and learning of Qur'anic education is observed. Shehu (2006) observed that *tsangaya* system has been in existence in northern Nigeria prior to the emergence of the British colonialists. *Tsangaya* Schools have their roots in some of the African

countries, such as; Timbuktu (in Mali), Senegal, Ghana, Chad and Niger Republic (Shehu, 2006).

According to Abdulqadir (2003), Hoechner, (2013) and Jungudo (2014), *tsangaya* system of education dated back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the strong Islamic empire of Borno took charge of Qur'anic literacy, under the ruler ship of El-Kanemi. Seven centuries later, another Islamic state was founded in Sokoto, through Usman Danfodio revolution, establishing Islamic laws



and teaching of the Holy Qur'an. The above two empires established what is presently known as the Almajiri educational system. The Danfodio revolution brought some improvement in the teaching and learning of the Almajiri schools, through establishing an inspectorate of Qura'nic literacy. The inspectors were given the privilege to report to the Emirs all issues pertaining the schools. The era has been regarded as the height of Qur'anic education in northern Nigeria. (Abdulkadir 2003 & National Council for the Welfare of Destitutes NCWD 2001).

Similarly, Pantami (2019) further opined that *Tsangaya* School is a form of Islamic education and in Hausa the word *Tsangaya* literally means learning centre. The person who attends the school is called Almajiri, a Hausa word which is derived from the Arabic root word "*Al-muhajirun*", meaning an emigrant. It usually refers to a person who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. During the pre-colonial era, the *Almajiri* education system was established under the Kanem-Borno empire and later all over former Northern Nigeria. It was established as an organized and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. The *tsangaya* school system was funded by the then state treasury and the state zakat funds paid by individuals, and was under the control of the Emirs' System of Administration during the pre-colonial administration before the coming of the British. Since Islam encourages giving charity to student to take care of their welfare, the community as well had supported the Almajiris most of whom came from faraway places to enroll in the *tsangaya* schools. In return, the Al-majiris offered services such as; laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving, sewing etc. as charity to the community that contributed to their wellbeing; hence they reciprocated the kind of gestures the society offered to them.

### Origin of Qur'anic Schools

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

The first Qur'anic school was established during the life time of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) where the first divine command instructed the prophet to read the Qur'an, it states "Read in The Name of Your Lord" (Q: 96:1) It was Angel Jibril that was given the responsibility of revealing and teaching the Qur'an to the prophet of Islam. The prophet learnt the Qur'an and taught his companions. The prophet's mosque of Medina was the first Islamic center and Qur'anic school, where all religious activities were observed. The prophet's companions in turn taught the Qur'an to other people in the society (Shehu, 2003).

Therefore, the *tsangaya* or Qur'anic schools were set with the aim of teaching the children the glorious Qur'an; learn the religious rites in the company of their parents or guardians. In these days, schools are established in different places, with a view to spreading Islamic knowledge, and memorizing the Holy Qur'an.

### *Tsangaya* System of Education in Northern Nigeria

According to the National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (2001) and Okugbeni (2013), the *tsangaya* system of education has



been in existence for centuries; prior to British colonization. It has been the source of moral and educational training to northern Muslim dominated societies in Nigeria. Before the coming of the British colonial powers, in the year 1824, every family sends their children to Qur'anic school, popularly known as "*Tsangaya*" or "*Makarantar Allo*" meaning 'the slate school', (referring to the wood carved object that the Qur'anic verses and chapters are handwritten and recited). Children go to the school daily from the comfort of their homes, and go back when the school hour is over. They live with their parents receiving moral upbringing and directions for further steps in life (Kabir, 2012).

Qur'anic schools predate British colonialism in Nigeria, and most parts of West African states, the schools programme went through couple of modifications especially during the El-kanemi dynasty.

According to Abdulkadir, (2003), NCWD (2001) and Odumusu (2013), the current trends nowadays where you see the Almajiris begging on the streets and in some other public places in Northern Nigeria had never been a sign of the early Almajiri practice in the area.

However, the present *tsangaya* school system, though funded, is not over dependent on the state. The students were at liberty to acquire vocational and occupational skills in between their Islamic lessons and some were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, tailoring and small businesses. But with advent of colonial administration, the system lost its supports because the colonialists were not interested in the system but rather promote the western System of Education. This therefore led to the collapse of Almajiri school system. A vacuum was created with nobody to take the responsibilities of the *tsangaya* schools. As time goes on, the *tsangaya* scholars took over the responsibilities because they deemed it as a moral and religious duty to educate these pupils for the sake

of Allah. Although there was scarcity of funds and overwhelming number of pupils to cater for, the system continued to flourish with the support of the immediate community and begging was still not a norm instead they resorted to odd menial jobs to make ends meet (Habibu, 2017).

With the increasing level of poverty in Northern Nigeria, the care of the Almajiri became overwhelmingly heavy for the scholars who were left with no choice but to send these little boys out to beg from the good will of the society. To make ends meet, some of these scholars began to impose on the Almajiris what is called "kudin sati", a form of weekly fees for the lessons they received. They were reassured that to beg was better than to steal. These pupils rush into the society with no bearing moving from street to street, house to house, and vehicle to vehicle. They were everywhere in markets, car parks, restaurants, university gates in the name of begging. They became a burden, as well as, nuisance to the society. It is really sad when you see these Almajiris, hungry, malnourished, sick and rushing for flies' infested leftover food, searching through trash can for little morsels, just to stay alive. They consume all kinds of food, fresh or stale (Bashari 2019).

### **Organizational Settings of *Tsangaya* Qur'anic Learning System in Hausa land**

Though unwritten, the Almajiri Qur'anic Schools in Hausa land have their syllabus which comprises of lower and advanced level of studies which exist on five stages altogether. The elementary level was meant for learning the recitation and writing while the advanced level is the stage for the memorization of the glorious Qur'an, as well as, the ability to write it from the heart.

According to Babajo, (2008) there are five stages in the Almajiri Qur'anic School include:

- i. *Babbaqu Stage*: In this stage, Qur'an is introduced to the pupil at about the ages of four/five years old. At this stage, a child is

- made to recite about ten shorter chapters of the Holy Qur'an by heart (memorization), learn all the Arabic alphabets, recognize all the vowels and diacritical marks and have the ability to form letters and read.
- ii. *Farfaru Stage*: At this stage, dictation is introduced to the learner, to groom the pupil the ability to master the writing from the reading of the teacher. Emphasis is given in the recognition and identifying the distinction between the similar words that are not easily identifiable.
  - iii. *Zube Stage*: In this stage, the pupils are made to copy and read the whole of Qur'an in parts from the last chapter 'Naas' to the top one 'Baqaraa' and 'Fatiha' without the demand of memorization. The aim here was to make the recitation of the Holy Qur'an softer and flow well and to improve the writing skills of the learners.
  - iv. *Haddatu Stage*: Mostly it is the boarding students or hard working pupils that reach and continue with this advanced level. At this point, the pupils start the segment of memorization of the glorious Qur'an by heart, whereby two steps are involved. Initially, the pupils start memorizing portions by copying it on slate and presenting it to the teacher and other experts for corrections and observations, if a mistake is discovered the pupil takes the slate back and represents it again in two to three days until the writing and reading is perfected, before assuming the next portion. The teacher is at liberty to ask a pupil to reduce the volume when it is considered to be too large for the pupil's capacity. After completing this, the pupil could move to the sequential memorization until the completion of the whole Qur'an.
  - v. *Satu Stage*: This is the final stage and the overall segment of the Qur'anic school. At this point honesty of the pupil is a very important factor. This is the stage where the student writes parts of the Qur'an from

memory without making reference to the written text of Qur'an. The student reads out loud to the hearing of the teacher and other experts around the teacher for orthography writing and recitation. When the writing and recitation are found spotless (clean) the student writes the whole Qur'an from the heart on sheets of paper, which serves as the final dissertation project.

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

#### **Tsangaya School System in Akko Local Government Area of Gombe state**

The *Tsangaya* or *Almajiri* schools (Learning centres) are predominantly found in Akko Local Government Area and they are also called Makarantun Allo (slate school).

The *tsangaya* or *Almajiri* school system is as old as Islam in Nigeria, dating back to over a millennium ago, according to scholars. Prominent education Professor, Fafunwa even wrote in his book, "History of Education in Nigeria" that when the British colonialists arrived in the country, they met over 25,000 Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria (Abdussomod 2018). Back then, Arabic language was fluently spoken among learned, students could thus read and write using *Ajami* script before the introduction on Western education.

In the pre-colonial times, the *Almajiri* and their teachers (Mallams) benefitted from both governmental and communal support as the teaching and learning took place. While the Emirs give grants to *Tsangaya* schools, communities welcomes and host the *Almajiri* from time to time.

According to Yakubu (2019), the *Tsangaya* school system is not something new in Akko Local Government Area of Gombe State. The pre-dominant people in the area were muslims and it comprises number of tribes which include; Fulani, Tangale, Jukun, Wurkun among others. For that, Almajiri school system become the only school system people inherited from their fore fathers and early prominent scholars in the area. It is the oldest school system in the history of Nigerian Muslims as well as Akko Local Government Area. According to elders of Akko, the *Tsangaya* schools were available in the area even during the lifetime of Shehu Usman bn Fodio and parents used to send their children to these schools for learning Qur'anic knowledge and morals. The *Tsangaya* schools were normally run by *Mallams* who opened the schools and voluntarily taught pupils in their respected communities. Some migrated with the pupils for the purpose of teaching and learning. These type of schools usually had no specific building as a school nor organization that handled their affairs. Writing in these schools involved using a pen which locally called *al-kalami* with locally prepared ink called *ta-wadda* and on a wooden slate known as *allo*, and the places of learning in this type of knowledge included the teacher's parlor, verandah, courts yard, house frontage, under tree shades or inside the mosque. *Mallams* were the ones who provided the places of learning for their students and accommodation. They solely received donations from rich peoples and charity. Parents often volunteer gifts and small amount of money paid by the pupils.

Traditionally, students of *tsangaya* schools in Akko Local Government Area were enrolled in the system averagely from the age of 7 and start as beginners to the time when they memorized the whole Qur'an and become Alaramma (well Qur'anic Reciter) after passing several stages in their *tsangaya*. After completion, the *Mallam* returned the graduated students to their parents and the graduation ceremony will then

be organized by the parents as a form of ceremony (walimah) popularly known in Hausa land as "Bikin Saukar Karatu".

Among the most popular and oldest *Tsangaya* schools in Akko Local Government Area are:

1. *Tsangayar Malam Galadima Tumburwa*: The school is situated at Wuro Bade under the supervision of Alaramma Malam Muhammadu Galadima Abani who migrated from Tumburwa of defunct Borno Empire. He established the school around 1920s in Wuro Bade and gathered community children teaching them Qur'anic education and Ibadats. Many learned scholars from this *tsangaya* were identified in the area and it led to the establishment of many *tsangaya* schools in Kashere and nearby communities.
2. *Tsangayar Malam Gangaran*: The school is situated at Kumo town under the supervision of Malam Muhammad Goni Gangaran na Kumo. He was an old, gentle and scholarly man who established the school purposely to help children with poor background across Kumo town and nearby communities to learn Qur'an and how to worship Allah. The school was established around 1930s as claimed by Goni Dan Inna of Kumo town. This led to the establishment of various Qur'anic schools in the area and some of them are still in existence.
3. *Tsangayar Modibbo Mohammadu Bula*: The school is situated in Gona town Under the supervision of Alaramma Modibbo Muhammadu who was friendly and a learned Qur'anic teacher who use to teach children of the community on how to read and write Qur'anic verses day and night. The *Tsangaya* was established around 1930s in Gona town which led to the establishment of various Qur'anic schools in the town and nearby communities and some of them are still in existence.

4. *Tsangayar* Malam Abdullahi BBC: The school is situated in Anguwan Tumburu of Kashere town under the supervision of Alaramma Malam Abdullahi BBC. The school was established in the early 1960s at Anguwan Tumburu Kashere with the aim of educating children of the community on how to learn Qur'an and general knowledge. This *tsangaya* was among the popular *tsangaya*'s in Kashere town and its function led to the establishment of various Qur'anic schools in the area and some of them are still in existence. Many scholars and experienced persons graduated from this school.

These schools faced a number of challenges which include adequate building to accommodate the students, shortage of qualified teachers and health facilities for both the teachers and students among others. The challenges were addressed through community goodwill and support, enduring civilizational endeavour, government and non-governmental donations among others.

#### ***Tsangaya* (Almajiri) Model Schools available in Akko Local Government Area**

The Federal government of Nigeria revealed that there are over 9 million Almajiris in Nigeria as out-of-school-children. Thus, it put up measures to ensure that products of the system were given Western education. This led to the construction of *Tsangaya*/Almajiri Model schools in various parts of the country as part of attaining the purpose of Universal Basic Education.

After the construction of the schools through UBEC, the Federal Government handed them over to their host states through the SUBEBs. A list of the schools got from UBEC shows that there were 157 Almajiri Model Schools altogether with most concentrated mainly in the Northeast and the Northwest of the country.

The Federal Government considered three models of its construction and equipment of the Almajiri schools, namely Model I, Model II and

Model III. Each model of the Almajiri Education Programme has varying degree of support and interventions.

**Model I** schools involve the integration of traditional Qur'anic school within its original location. There are 101 Model I schools in the country. Statutory facilities provided are a block of two classrooms and furniture, an administrative block including office, store and toilets, and a hostel block with pupils' lockers. Others are a recitation hall with store and furniture/mats, VIP toilets, a borehole with overhead-tank, a gate house, and external works and fencing. (Abdussomod 2018).

**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 6 classrooms, an administrative block including 5 offices, a library, toilets, a computer room, 2 laboratories and 2 workshops. Others are a staff quarters to accommodate up to 10 members of staff, a hostel block, toilets and laundry, a recitation hall, one *Mallam's* residence, a hand-pump borehole, and a motorized borehole with overhead tank. Others are VIP toilet, kitchen and dining, external works and fencing and a gate house. Both Models I and Model II schools were also provided with beds and beddings with 50 in each Model I school and 100 in each Model II school. Other infrastructures such as classroom pupils' furniture, teachers' furniture were also provided in each of the schools. (Abdussomod 2018).

In Akko Local Government Area, there were no such kind of schools built by federal government, as such, the people are yet to benefit from such kind of project even though Akko Local Government Area is among the areas with high population of *tsangaya* and

*Almajiris* in the State, as well as, North-Eastern zone.

**Model III** schools are pre-existing Islamiyah and Ma'ahad schools supported in terms of rehabilitation and provision of additional infrastructure. Documents from the UBEC and the Federal Ministry of Education did not explicitly state details of such supports unlike 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 in all over the nation as 138 schools (Abdusomod 2018).

Again, in Akko Local Government Area there is only one (1) such type of school built by federal government and is located at *Tsangaya* Alaramma mai Babbar *Tsangaya*, Unguwar Tsohon gari Kumo town, Akko Local Government Area in Gombe State.

### **The Challenges of *Tsangaya* School System in Akko Local Government Area**

The *Tsangaya* (Almajiri) schools in Nigeria, particularly in Akko Local Government Area required urgent attention. The schools housed thousands of almajiris who are always tagged as out-of-school children. Some of these children are isolated from their parents at their early age (4 years and above), where they are brought into a new environment without basic needs of life such as food, shelter, toilets and basic health facilities among others.

Children beg for food on the streets or from house to house. They have no hostel to sleep, neither a place for normal conveniences.

Compared to many researches highlighting the number of challenges faced by these *tsangaya* schools generally in Northern Nigeria. The following are the major challenges facing *tsangaya* schools in Akko Local Government Area in particular;

1. Adequate number of buildings meant for their school system, shortage of food, shelter and health facilities. As a result of this, the pupils roam the street picking remnants

of contaminated leftover food from the garbage.

2. Parents' deprivation: These are pupils whose parents stay hundreds of kilometers away from the school and live neither communicating with their children nor their teachers regarding the welfare of their children and progress of their studies.
3. No organized or formal procedure of pupil's enrollment in most of the Almajiri schools unless the eccentric procedure of handing over pupils to the teacher, who would then continue to oversee the academic development of the pupils.
4. No specified students-teacher ratio; under this system. One teacher can register 100-200 pupils under his custody with no support nor supervision from the government, parents or the society.
5. Inadequate number of newly constructed model *tsangaya* schools in the area, lack of maintenance of the existing ones, non-regular payment of salaries and allowances, improper medical facilities, absence of feeding programme, poor supervision of the existing schools and number of staffs, lack of specific budget for the system, absence of proper seminars, training and workshops are among others.

### **Conclusion**

The British colonialism which introduced formal education had negatively affected the smooth running of the Qur'anic schools (*Tsangaya*) in Nigeria. This made people in areas which are predominantly Muslims to vehemently reject the system. The Qur'anic teachers were rendered jobless; their ability to read and write in Arabic alphabets became irrelevant. They no longer have the respect and prestige they used to have under the traditional monarchy. This made them to flee to other parts of the country to make a living with their disciples. Nigeria got independence from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960; native leaders were elected and

appointed from within the country. Having the mantle of leadership at hand did not bring positive changes in the way the Qur'anic schools were treated under colonial administration. The native leaders did not make enough significant moves to salvage the failed Almajiri schools, through amending the federal constitution and proposing a new bill that will permanently address the difficulty of the *Almajiri* schools. Up to now, the *tsangaya* schools continue to produce unemployable graduates, with less or no skills at all for befitting life standard.

The establishment of new Al-majiri *tsangaya* schools in northern Nigeria was meant to change the traditional system of the oldest *tsangaya* schools through provision of solid infrastructures for the schools with trained and qualified teachers. The curriculum is also mixed with conventional subjects like English, maths and computer science. Graduates of the new commissioned *tsangaya* schools would be more relevant and would drive significant respect from the society. Under this system, every *tsangaya* school must register with the newly established board of *tsangaya* schools and get approval before starting its legal operation.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested:

1. Governments at all levels (Federal, State and Local governments) should come up with more effective means of funding and managing the *tsangaya* school system in Nigeria and Akko Local Government Area in particular.
2. There is an urgent need to sensitize and mobilize all stakeholders with a view to ensuring effective implementation of *tsangaya* school integration.
3. Governments, other stakeholders and individual philanthropists should endeavor to build multiple modern *tsangaya* schools in all the local government areas of Gombe State with special reference to Akko Local Government Area where the *tsangaya*

schools are needed most, where the students and graduates of *tsangaya* schools should be taught relevant formal education and skills, so that they can be employable after graduation.

4. The *tsangaya* centres should be made to be an Enhanced Learning Schools (ELS) to avoid radicalization and recruitment into terror groups and should be made centers of countering violent extremists so as to attain a peaceful society.
5. The scholars of the *tsangaya* schools should be trained to serve as teachers of all kinds of government educational institutions as well as Islamic Education teachers.
6. There should be a serious need for all the arms of government to provide a salary scale for *tsangaya* school teachers so that they do not push the students out to beg and they don't borrow or collect the student's money. This can make the teachers and the community build trust in the system. It will also give the *tsangaya* students confidence and hope in learning.
7. The *tsangaya* schools should be made skills acquisition centers. Skilled personnel should be employed to train the students in different trades, businesses and they should also be given small amounts of money on completion to start up their own business.
8. Nigerian government in collaboration with Bauchi State government should extend the Federal Government School Feeding Programme (SFP) to *tsangaya* schools for proper feeding of the students. This is another important strategy to keep them away from the disaster of begging in the streets, motor parks and hotels.
9. The standard curriculum to be used in the *tsangaya* model schools should be reviewed in order to integrate learning of the Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence as among the key subjects taught in the schools. This will give the project acceptability in the society.





10. The three arms of government, as a matter of necessity, should regularly organize the professional training, workshops, seminars and awareness to both the *tsangaya* school teachers and students as well as the parents and entire members of the communities.

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