

Indigenous Knowledge Ecosystem and Socio-cultural Learning Structures in Informal Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria: Understanding the Almajiri Educational System in the Context of Educational Marginalization

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Abstract

This study examined the indigenous Knowledge ecosystem and socio-cultural learning structures in informal Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria. The objective of the study is to explore the Almajiri educational system within the context of educational marginalization. The study adopted a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design conducted in the densely populated Almajiri states comprising Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Niger, and Borno. A sample of 400 respondents was selected, and a return rate of 307 (76.7%) instruments was achieved. The findings showed that the Almajiri system remains an important indigenous educational institution sustained through the practice of Qur'anic recitation (277, 90%), memorization (265, 86%), and respect for elders (300, 98%). The study revealed that the system's educational aim has been weakened by poverty (Mean = 3.98) and parental neglect (Mean = 4.0). The triangulated findings further showed that the Almajiri system enjoys religious legitimacy and cultural acceptance, but the contemporary condition results in severe educational marginalization and child-rights vulnerability. Government reform efforts were found to be inconsistent (Mean = 2.31). The study established that the Almajiri educational system should not be viewed solely as an educational issue but as a multidimensional challenge involving the preservation of indigenous knowledge and child protection. It therefore recommends culturally sensitive reforms that integrate

Qur'anic education with formal education and provide welfare support for Almajiri pupils.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, Almajiri education, socio-cultural learning, educational marginalization, Northern Nigeria.

Background to the Study

Education is a universal fundamental human right that enables individuals and supports national development. Indigenous knowledge systems are crucial cultural assets which enable communities to sustain their identities and social institutions. In many African communities, traditional educational frameworks have historically supplemented formal education by providing community-based learning processes for the transmission of religious, moral and cultural information (Umar & Maaji, 2025). The Almajiri educational system is one of such indigenous educational institutions in Northern Nigeria. The Almajiri system of education is one of the oldest indigenous educational systems in Northern Nigeria, especially among the Hausa-Fulani Muslim populations (Abubakar & Ladan, 2026).

The system functions as a socio-cultural and religious institution in the transmission of Qur'anic knowledge and indigenous learning processes from generation to generation. Mohammed and Yusuf (2015) said that the Almajiri education system has existed for over 500 years and has immensely helped the spread of knowledge and the acceptance of Islam in Northern Nigeria. Children

traditionally attend Tsangaya schools where they receive Islamic knowledge and vocational discipline from Qur'anic teachers (Mallams) in structured socio-cultural instructional environments. But the Almajiri system has undergone substantial changes due to socio-economic and institutional disruptions, even as it has historical value and has contributed to Islamic education.

The Almajiri system operated in a well-organized socio-cultural environment where families and local communities shared the responsibility for the welfare and education of learners. Deteriorating local support systems and shifting family dynamics have transformed the system's functional realities. Originally sustained via communal assistance and joint responsibility, many Almajiri kids today find themselves in conditions of poverty, homelessness, neglect and social marginalization. Abubakar et al. (2025) found that the word "Almajiri," which previously meant someone who seeks Islamic knowledge, has become increasingly linked with children who wander the streets of towns and cities and beg. Similarly, Umar and Maaji (2025) described the modern Almajiri phenomenon as characterized by street begging, child labour, parental abandonment, child abuse, and institutional neglect.

The Almajiri system has become a national and international concern due to its consequences for social development and national security (Bayero & Inusa, 2025; Abubakar et al., 2025; Edinyang, Basse & Ushie, 2020). Indigenous knowledge systems view the Almajiri institution as a vital knowledge ecosystem that transmits Islamic teachings and social values from one generation to the next. Knowledge in the system is mainly spread through recitation of the Qur'an, oral teaching, memorization, observation, religious activities and teacher-pupil interactions. Recent studies show that today the system faces severe problems that weaken its efficacy and social legitimacy (Abubakar & Ladan, 2026; Abubakar et al., 2025; Bayero & Inusa, 2025).

Abubakar and Ladan (2026), as well as Umar and Maaji (2025), observed that Almajiri children are highly susceptible to exploitation, leading to recruitment into extremist activities. Despite various governmental interventions intended to reform or integrate it into formal education structures, the system continues to

exist across Northern Nigeria (UBE, 2012; Abubakar et al., 2025). These interventions include the establishment of Almajiri model schools under former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2012 and policy measures by Northern Governors to ban street begging (Abubakar & Ladan, 2026). This persistence indicates a remarkable degree of fortitude that cannot be fully explained by existing educational or policy perspectives alone.

Although numerous studies have examined the Almajiri system from the perspectives of security, poverty, and educational policy, limited attention has been given to understanding the institution as an indigenous knowledge ecosystem sustained through socio-cultural learning structures and informal knowledge dissemination processes. Existing interventions have largely focused on the issues and outcomes associated with the system while paying less attention to the indigenous instructional philosophies. Consequently, there is still insufficient empirical understanding of how indigenous knowledge practices and socio-cultural learning structures operate within the Almajiri educational system under conditions of educational marginalization.

Therefore, addressing the contemporary Almajiri crisis requires culturally sensitive, multidisciplinary approaches grounded in community-based reforms (Umar & Maaji, 2025). Against this background, this study surveys the indigenous knowledge ecosystem in informal Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria. Through exploring these dimensions, the study adds to current debates on indigenous education and sustainable educational reform in Northern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The Almajiri system of education in Northern Nigeria has increasingly become associated with educational marginalization and social exclusion. The traditional socio-cultural learning structures that once sustained the system through social support and moral discipline appear to have weakened due to economic hardship and parental irresponsibility. Many Almajiri children now live under harsh conditions characterized by street begging, child labour, homelessness, abuse, and denial of basic educational rights (Umar & Maaji, 2025).

Studies have examined the social, religious, and security implications of the Almajiri system (Abubakar & Ladan, 2026; Bayero & Inusa, 2025; Abubakar et al., 2025). However, limited attention has been given to understanding the system as an indigenous knowledge ecosystem sustained through socio-cultural learning structures and informal knowledge dissemination practices. Existing interventions have largely focused on abolishing or formalizing the system without adequately examining the indigenous community-based knowledge systems that explain its resilience despite sustained criticism and policy opposition.

The rising insecurity and child exploitation in Northern Nigeria have increased concerns about the vulnerability of Almajiri children to criminal recruitment and social manipulation. Existing literature shows insufficient empirical understanding of how indigenous learning practices and knowledge distribution processes operate within the Almajiri educational structure under conditions of educational marginalization. Therefore, this study intends to address this gap by examining the Almajiri system as an indigenous knowledge ecosystem and socio-cultural learning structure in Northern Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the Almajiri educational system as an indigenous knowledge ecosystem and socio-cultural learning structure within the context of educational marginalization in Northern Nigeria. Specifically, the research aimed:

1. To identify the indigenous knowledge practices embedded within the Almajiri educational system in Northern Nigeria.
2. To examine the socio-cultural learning structures that support knowledge transmission in informal Islamic schools.
3. To determine the perceptions of Almajiri pupils on indigenous learning practices.
4. To investigate the elements contributing to educational marginalization among Almajiri pupils in Northern Nigeria.
5. To examine the influence of financial and social challenges on the operation of the Almajiri educational system.

Review of Literature

The Almajiri educational system has remained one of the most debated educational and social

institutions in Northern Nigeria. Historically, the system served as an important mechanism for transmitting Islamic knowledge and cultural traditions. Mohammed and Yusuf (2015) observed that the Almajiri system has existed in Northern Nigeria for over 500 years and has played an important role in the understanding, spread, and acceptance of Islam across the region. Despite its historical value, contemporary scholarship has increasingly highlighted the challenges facing the Almajiri system. Abubakar and Ladan (2026) argued that although the system has traditionally contributed to children's moral development through Qur'anic instruction, it now faces considerable obstacles that weaken its effectiveness. Economic hardship and the decline of community support structures have altered the institution's founding objectives. The classic educational model has become associated with poverty, educational exclusion, and child vulnerability.

The Almajiri phenomenon has attracted considerable local and international attention due to its implications for education, child welfare, and national development. Bayero and Inusa (2025), Abubakar et al. (2025), and Edinyang, Basse, and Ushie (2020) noted that concerns about the growing number of Almajiri children and their living conditions have made the issue a major public policy challenge. Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and an essential instrument for economic and social development (Abubakar, 2025; Bayero & Inusa, 2025). The circumstances in which many Almajiri children live raise concerns about their opportunities for inclusive education.

The literature reveals changing social perceptions of the Almajiri system. According to Abubakar et al. (2025), the term "Almajiri," which originally referred to an aspirant of Islamic knowledge, has gradually acquired a negative connotation and is now commonly associated with begging activities. This transformation reflects the deterioration of the traditional support mechanisms that previously sustained the system. Umar and Maaji (2025) further observed that contemporary Almajiri education is characterized by street begging, parental abandonment, and institutional neglect, contributing considerably to the educational marginalization and social exclusion of Almajiri children.

Scholars have linked the Almajiri system to broader legal and security issues, rather than to educational concerns alone. Abubakar and Ladan (2026) and Umar and Maaji (2025) emphasized that the vulnerability of Almajiri children exposes them to violations of child rights and recruitment into extremist and criminal networks. These concerns are more pronounced amid rising insecurity along Nigeria's northern axis. Sunday and Doris (2020) argued that the increasing prevalence of electoral violence and other social vices has further worsened the conditions of vulnerable children, including those within the Almajiri system.

Various policy strategies have been introduced to address the Almajiri system phenomena. Mohammed and Yusuf (2015) reported that the Nigerian Senate passed the Almajiri Bill in 2008, which proposed the registration of Tsangaya schools and the establishment of a National Commission for the Eradication of Child Destitution. The Federal Government of Nigeria initiated programs to integrate formal education into the Almajiri system, and some Northern Governors of the federation pursued policies to restrict or abolish it (UBE, 2025). Abubakar et al. (2025) noted that despite sustained internal and external pressures, the Almajiri system continues to operate, demonstrating considerable resistance to change.

Existing studies have extensively examined the educational and policy dimensions, with limited attention on how the indigenous knowledge ecosystem can sustain the Almajiri system. The literature presents a considerable

knowledge gap that the current investigation aims to address.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the philosophical assumptions of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to provide an understanding of the Almajiri educational system as both a socio-cultural institution and an indigenous knowledge ecosystem. The theory was also used in the studies of Enem, Benson, and Igbokwe (2020), who investigated libraries' participation in corporate social responsibility activities. Their study, based on the theory's assumptions, established that community development supports education and provides information services that improve public perception. According to the SIT, people classify themselves into groups based on common beliefs that influence their behaviors and perceptions.

The Social Identity Theory holds that the Almajiri system survives partly not because it is an educational institution but as an emblem of religious identity. Attempts to abolish the system are frequently seen as threats to the group identity, which contributes to resistance and fortitude. This theory supports the study's assumptions because the Almajiri system relies heavily on indigenous learning practices rather than formal educational structures. The theory, therefore, provides an appropriate explanation for the persistent relevance and stability of the system despite modernization pressures.

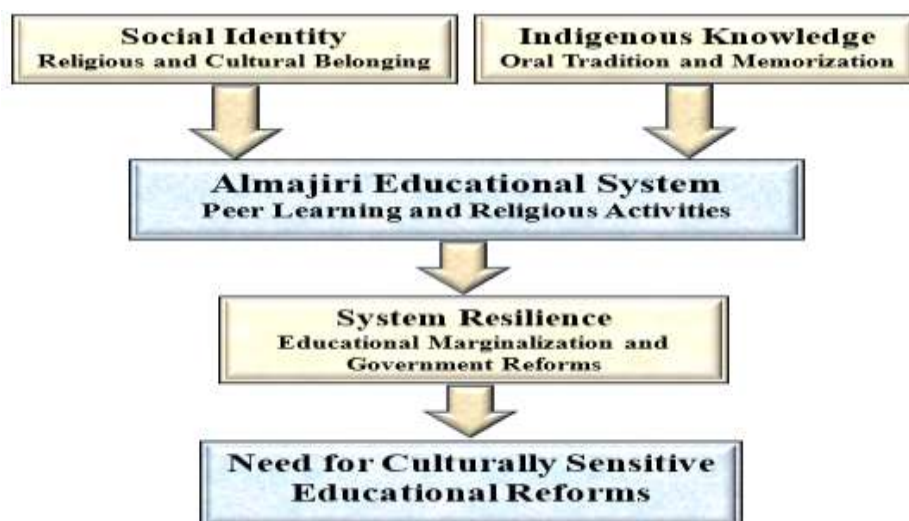


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**Methodology**

This study adopted a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design to offer an in-depth understanding of the indigenous knowledge ecosystem and socio-cultural learning structures within the Almajiri educational system in Northern Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The population of the study comprised an

estimated 4,493,200 Almajiri pupils and their Mallams across five selected states based on documented distributions of Tsangaya schools. These states include Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Niger, and Borno (Amuda, 2021; Isiaka, 2015; Yusha'u, 2013). Taro Yamane's (1967) table of sample size determination was used to determine the sample size. The table reveals that, for a population of $\geq 100,000$, the Sample Size is "400" at $\pm 5\%$ Precision Level, with a 90% Confidence Level and $P=0.5$. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted, thus

Table 1: Sample Size

S/N	States with Predominant Al-Majiri	Al-Majiri Population	Formula for Sample Size	Sample Size Taken
1	Kano State	1,600,000	$\frac{1,600,000 \times 400}{4,493,200}$	142
2	Sokoto State	1,100,000	$\frac{1,100,000 \times 400}{4,493,200}$	98
3	Kaduna State	824,200	$\frac{824,200 \times 400}{4,493,200}$	73
4	Niger	580,000	$\frac{580,000 \times 400}{4,493,200}$	52
5	Borno	389,000	$\frac{389,000 \times 400}{4,493,200}$	35
	Total	4,493,200		400

Data Analysis and Findings

The instrument was developed in English, which not all respondents understood. It was translated into each respondent's native language (Hausa or Fulani), and their responses were transcribed and translated back into English. A total of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, and 307 (76.75%) were returned filled and found useful for the study. Ordinal items on the instrument were measured on a 4-Point Likert Scale of 'Very High Extent (VHE)', 'High Extent (HE)',

'Low Extent (LE)', and 'Very Low Extent (VLE)', while the nominal variable was measured using 'Practising' and 'Not Practising'.

Objective One: To identify the indigenous knowledge practices embedded within the Almajiri educational system in Northern Nigeria.

Table 2: Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Almajiri Educational System

S/N	Items	Practicing	Not Practicing	Decision
1	Qur'anic recitation is the major method of knowledge transmission	277 (90%)	30 (10%)	Accepted
2	Oral teaching methods used by Mallams during instruction	253 (82%)	54 (18%)	Accepted

3	Storytelling is used to teach moral values and religious principles	77 (25%)	230 (75%)	Rejected
4	Learning through observation and imitation	65 (21%)	242 (79%)	Rejected
5	Learning through memorization	265 (86%)	42 (14%)	Accepted
	Decision			Significant

The findings show that Qur'anic recitation is the most dominant indigenous knowledge practice, with 277 respondents (90%) attesting to its use, while only 30 respondents (10%) indicated otherwise. This suggests that the passing on of knowledge in the Almajiri system is mainly centered on the recitation and mastery of the Qur'an. Similarly, oral instruction methods employed by Mallams were acknowledged by 253 respondents (82%). The high acceptance of learning through memorization (265 respondents, 86%) further demonstrates that rote learning is an essential element of the educational process. Narration as a means of transmitting moral values and religious principles was rejected by the majority of respondents, with only 77 respondents (25%) affirming its use and 230

respondents (75%) indicating otherwise. Learning through observation and imitation was rejected, as only 65 respondents (21%) reported practising it, compared to 242 (79%) who disagreed. The data show that the indigenous knowledge ecosystem of the Almajiri educational system is significantly characterized by Qur'anic recitation, oral instruction, and memorization, which function as the principal mechanisms for knowledge preservation and transmission.

Objective Two: To examine the socio-cultural learning structures that support knowledge transmission in informal Islamic schools.

Table 3: Socio-Cultural Learning Structures

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Decision
1	Respect for elders and teachers strengthens learning	300 (98%)	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.98	Accept
2	Peer learning plays an important role in knowledge sharing	255 (83%)	52 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.83	Accept
3	Religious activities promote discipline and social interaction	307 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.00	Accept
4	Parents maintain regular communication with Mallams	10 (3%)	55 (18%)	160 (52%)	82 (27%)	1.88	Reject
5	Cultural norms and traditions influence teaching and learning	10 (3%)	50 (16%)	165 (54%)	82 (27%)	2.66	Accept
	Total					3.27	Significant

The results show that socio-cultural learning structures have a major role in supporting knowledge transmission within informal Islamic schools (Mean = 3.27). Respect for elders and teachers (Mean = 3.98), peer learning (Mean = 3.83), and participation in religious activities (Mean = 4.00) were strongly endorsed as central to the educational

process. However, parental communication with Mallams was rated low (Mean = 1.88), indicating limited parental involvement in the learning process. The acceptance of cultural values and traditions (Mean = 2.66) illustrates the influence of indigenous socio-cultural values.

Objective Three: To determine the perceptions of Almajiri pupils on indigenous learning practices.

Table 4: Perceptions of Almajiri Pupils on Indigenous Learning Practices

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Decision
1	Indigenous learning practices promote moral development	300 (98%)	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.98	Accept
2	Traditional teaching methods help pupils understand Islamic teachings	40 (13%)	105 (34%)	40 (13%)	122 (40%)	2.21	Accept
3	Indigenous learning practices encourage discipline	50 (16%)	40 (13%)	101 (33%)	116 (38%)	2.08	Accept
4	The Almajiri system contributes positively to community moral values.	4 (1%)	30 (10%)	143 (47%)	130 (42%)	1.70	Reject
5	It preserves indigenous religious knowledge.	15 (5%)	150 (49%)	40 (13%)	102 (33%)	2.25	Accept
	Decision					2.44	Significant

The findings show that Almajiri pupils generally hold positive perceptions of indigenous learning practices (total Mean = 2.44). The strongest perception was that indigenous learning practices promote moral development (Mean = 3.98), standard teaching methods improve knowledge of Islamic teachings (Mean = 2.21), encourage discipline (Mean = 2.08), and preserve indigenous religious knowledge (Mean = 2.25). However, the view that the Almajiri system contributes positively to community

moral values was rejected (Mean = 1.70), indicating concerns about its broader social impact.

Objective Four: To investigate the elements contributing to educational marginalization among Almajiri pupils in Northern Nigeria.

Table 5: Factors Leading to Almajiri Educational Marginalization

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Decision
1	Poverty contributes to the increasing number of Almajiri children.	301 (98%)	6 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.98	Accept
2	Lack of parental care affects the educational development of Almajiri pupils.	307 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.00	Accept
3	Almajiri pupils have limited access to formal education opportunities.	19 (6%)	60 (20%)	81 (26%)	147 (48%)	1.84	Reject
4	Social discrimination contributes to the marginalization of Almajiri children.	150 (49%)	150 (49%)	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	3.47	Accept
5	Government neglect affects the welfare of pupils in the Almajiri system.	50 (16%)	10 (3%)	133 (43%)	114 (37%)	1.99	Reject
	Decision					3.05	Significant

The findings show that educational marginalization among Almajiri pupils is alarming (Total Mean = 3.05). Poverty (Mean = 3.98) and lack of parental care (Mean = 4.00) emerged as the most significant factors, suggesting that economic hardship and family

neglect contribute substantially to children's participation in the Almajiri system. Social discrimination was also identified as a major contributor (Mean = 3.47), respondents rejected the notions that limited access to formal education opportunities (Mean = 1.84)

and government neglect (Mean = 1.99) considerably contribute to marginalization.

Objective Five: To examine the influence of financial and social challenges on the operation of the Almajiri educational system.

Table 6: Influence of Socio-Economic and Security Challenges

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Decision
1	Economic hardship affects the operation	300 (98%)	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.98	Accept
2	Insecurity negatively affects the safety of Almajiri pupils.	140 (46%)	113 (37%)	54 (18%)	0 (0%)	3.28	Accept
3	Child begging exposes Almajiri pupils to social and security risks.	307 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.00	Accept
4	Terrorism and violence disrupt learning activities	307 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.00	Accept
5	Lack of government support affects the sustainability	30 (10%)	50 (16%)	211 (69%)	16 (5%)	2.31	Accept
	Total					3.51	Significant

The findings reveal that socio-economic and security challenges considerably impact the operation of the Almajiri educational system (Total Mean = 3.51). Economic hardship (Mean = 3.98) was identified as a major factor affecting the system's functionality, insecurity negatively impacts the safety of Almajiri pupils (Mean = 3.28), while child begging (Mean = 4.00) was unanimously recognized as exposing pupils to social and security risks. Terrorism and violence (Mean = 4.00) were found to severely disrupt learning activities. The acceptance of the lack of government support (Mean = 2.31) further suggests issues with the system's sustainability.

Qualitative Findings

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were gathered to support the quantitative data from 18 Mallams (coded as MM to ensure anonymity) who agreed to participate in the research. The focused discussion reveals a complex educational structure that persists despite severe economic and social pressures and policy neglect.

Traditional Role of the Almajiri System within the Community

Theme One: Moral and

Character Formation

Participants emphasized that the system traditionally focused on moral upbringing and character development.

"The Almajiri system was the main way children learned the Qur'an and Islamic values that produced scholars, judges, and community leaders before modern schools came." (MM3, Kano)

"Parents sent children to learn humility and self-control through the Almajiri system, which is disappearing today." (MM7, Kaduna)

"The training was not only about reading the Qur'an but also about becoming a responsible member of society." (MM15, Niger)

Theme Two: Community-Based Educational Support System

Many respondents indicated that local communities historically supported Almajiri schools through food donations, shelter, and communal care.

"The community provided food and protection for their children in the olden days." (MM1, Borno, MM2 Borno, MM11, Sokoto)

"The system was designed to teach religion, discipline, and obedience to Allah and was never designed for begging." (MM11, Sokoto)

"The traditional support system has weakened because people themselves are struggling economically." (MM9, Kano)

Effects of Government Reforms on Informal Islamic Schools

Theme Three: Incomplete and Unsustainable Reforms

Participants generally viewed government interventions and reforms as commonly ignoring the perspectives of Mallams and local communities.

"Government officials come and register schools, make some promises, but nothing changes after that." (MM5, Kaduna)

"Many integrated schools built by the government are now abandoned or not functioning properly." (MM13, Sokoto)

"Policies are made in offices without consulting those of us who understand the system." (MM4, Kano, MM1, Borno, MM2 Borno, MM11, Sokoto)

Reasons for the Persistence of the Almajiri System

Theme Four: Deep Religious and Cultural Legitimacy

Participants overwhelmingly identified religion and culture as the primary factors sustaining the system.

"People continue to support the system because they believe Qur'anic education is compulsory for every Muslim child." (MM11, Sokoto)

"This system is part of our identity, which cannot be removed without providing an acceptable alternative." (MM8, Kaduna)

"Western education alone cannot replace religious instruction in our communities." (MM9, Kano, MM12, Niger, MM11, Sokoto)

Theme Five: Poverty-Induced Educational Choices

Economic hardship compels many parents to rely on the Almajiri system.

"Many families simply cannot afford school materials, feeding, and transportation." (MM6, Borno)

"Parents send children away because they cannot provide for them at home." (MM17, Sokoto, MM9 Kano)

Impact of Insecurity, Poverty, and Social Change on the Almajiri System

Theme Six: Extreme Poverty and Child Vulnerability

All participants identified poverty as the most serious challenge facing Almajiri children.

"Poverty has transformed the system from education into survival."

"Children spend more time looking for food than studying."

"Idle and hungry children become easy targets for criminals and extremist groups."

Theme Seven: Street Begging and Child Exploitation

Respondents conveyed concern over widespread child begging and exploitation.

"Many children are exposed to trafficking, drugs, and dangerous influences on the streets." (MM5, Borno)

"The image of the Almajiri child today is associated with suffering and neglect." (MM11, Sokoto)

"Some children are manipulated because they lack protection and guidance." (MM15, Kano)

Theme Eight: Breakdown of Traditional Community Support Networks

All participants observed that urban growth and economic decline have weakened communal responsibility.

"People no longer support Almajiri schools like they used to."

"Modern life has reduced the communal values that sustained the system for generations."

Reforms for Improving the Almajiri System

Theme Nine: Integration of Islamic and Formal Education

These were the most dominant recommendations among respondents. "Government should combine Qur'anic education with modern subjects instead of trying to abolish the system."

"Children should learn religion, science and vocational skills together."

Theme Ten: Social Welfare Support for Almajiri Children

Respondents strongly advocated for welfare interventions.

"There should be feeding programs and decent accommodation for the children."

"No child should be forced to beg in order to survive."

"Government should register and monitor schools rather than criminalize them."

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study confirm that the Almajiri system remains both an indigenous knowledge ecosystem and a site of serious educational marginalization. Quantitative findings showed that Qur'anic recitation, oral teaching, and memorization were the dominant indigenous knowledge practices. This was supported by the interview responses, which described the system as a traditional institution for preserving religious identity and community-based learning. This finding supports Mohammed and Yusuf (2015), who argued that the Almajiri system has existed in Northern Nigeria for over 500 years and has contributed considerably to the spread and acceptance of Islam.

However, the findings show that the system's earliest educational and moral purpose has been severely weakened. This partially refutes the traditional ideal of the system as a purely moral institution and supports Abubakar and Ladan (2026), who noted that although the system traditionally contributed to moral and intellectual development, contemporary challenges now compromise its effectiveness. The socio-cultural learning structures identified in the study also support the literature (Abubakar & Ladan, 2026; Abubakar et al., 2025; Bayero & Inusa, 2025). Respect for Mallams and peer-learning norms are important structures that sustain knowledge transmission in the Almajiri system. Interview data further revealed that religious legitimacy, cultural identity, and community acceptance explain why the system continues to survive despite criticism and reform efforts. This corroborates Abubakar et al. (2025), who observed that the Almajiri system continues to operate despite internal and external pressures, government reforms, and attempts at abolition.

The quantitative and qualitative findings uphold the literature on marginalization and vulnerability. Poverty, lack of parental care, social discrimination, economic hardship, child begging, insecurity, and violence were identified as major challenges. The qualitative data described the current situation as one in which children spend more time struggling for survival than learning. This supports Umar and Maaji (2025), who described the contemporary

Almajiri condition as characterized by street begging, parental abandonment, child abuse, labour, and institutional neglect. It corresponds with Sunday and Doris (2020), who linked the deteriorating condition of vulnerable children in Nigeria to insecurity and other social vices. The findings further expand the discourse in literature by showing that the Almajiri crisis is not only an educational problem but also a humanitarian emergency. The interview responses revealed that homeless and unsupervised children are vulnerable to abuse and possible recruitment into criminal or extremist networks. This supports Abubakar and Ladan (2026) and Umar and Maaji (2025), who linked the Almajiri situation to child rights violations and broader public concerns. The findings therefore strengthen the argument that education remains a fundamental human right and a driver of social development, as emphasised by Abubakar (2025) and Bayero and Inusa (2025).

The study also reveals a contradiction in government reform efforts. There were attempts, such as the 2008 Almajiri Bill, the 2012 Federal Government formalization initiative and decisions by Northern Governors to ban the Almajiri system, which the study highlighted as being inconsistent or imposed without adequate consultation. This supports Umar and Maaji's (2025) position that tackling the crisis requires culturally sensitive reforms, historical perspective, and multisectoral collaboration.

The triangulated findings show that the Almajiri system persists because it is culturally legitimate and religiously valued, but its present condition is deeply worrisome. Reform should not destroy the indigenous knowledge system; rather, it should rescue Almajiri children from neglect while protecting the cultural and religious values that make the system meaningful.

Theoretical Implications of the Study

The findings of this study contribute substantially to understanding the Almajiri educational system within the broader discourse on indigenous knowledge systems. The study argues that the Almajiri system functions as an indigenous knowledge ecosystem sustained through Qur'anic recitation and community-based learning structures. It disputes the dominant

perspectives that view the Almajiri system solely as a social problem.

The study reinforces the assumptions of Socio-Cultural Learning Theory, which claims that learning occurs through social interaction, cultural practices, and participation within communities. The acceptance of peer learning and respect for teachers as important learning structures confirms that knowledge acquisition within the Almajiri system is socially and culturally mediated. This expands current theoretical discussions by showing how informal Islamic schools function as communities of practice in which learning is embedded within social relationships. The study adds to theories on educational marginalization and social exclusion by demonstrating that parental neglect and child vulnerability considerably influence the educational experiences of Almajiri pupils.

Practical Implications of the Study

The study recognizes that the Almajiri phenomenon is not purely an educational matter but a multidimensional phenomenon. The pragmatic consequences suggest that efforts to abolish the Almajiri system are unlikely to succeed, as it remains deeply embedded in the religious and cultural fabric of Northern Nigerian communities. Policy interventions ought to focus on reform and integration rather than elimination.

The study highlights the strong need to combine Qur'anic education with formal education curricula. Such integration would enable Almajiri pupils to acquire literacy and vocational skills whilst maintaining their religious education. The study shows the need for stronger parental responsibility and community participation in the education and welfare of Almajiri children.

Conclusion

This study examined the indigenous knowledge ecosystem and socio-cultural learning structures within the Almajiri educational system in Northern Nigeria in the context of educational marginalization. The research disclosed that the Almajiri system continues to function as an important indigenous educational institution through the use of Qur'anic recitation, oral instruction, memorization, and religiously grounded learning practices. The study shows that socio-cultural learning structures, such as peer

learning and religious activities, play important roles in facilitating knowledge transmission within informal Islamic schools.

The study concludes that the contemporary Almajiri system operates under conditions of severe educational marginalization characterized by social discrimination and exposure to exploitation. The system remains resilient because of its community acceptance, but its traditional support structures have weakened considerably due to economic hardship and changing social realities.

The study concludes that the Almajiri phenomenon should not be viewed solely as an educational problem but as a multidimensional challenge involving indigenous knowledge preservation and national security. The Almajiri institution persists because it continues to fulfil important religious and educational functions within Northern Nigerian communities.

The Almajiri system can be sustained through culturally sensitive reforms that preserve the positive aspects of the indigenous Islamic educational tradition. The strategy will address the socio-economic conditions that expose children to exploitation and educational exclusion.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered:

1. Federal and State Governments should develop and implement policies that integrate Qur'anic education with formal education curricula
2. Government agencies responsible for child welfare should set up comprehensive child protection programs for Almajiri pupils
3. All Tsangaya schools should be registered and supported through an appropriate regulatory framework.
4. Regular training programs should be organized for teachers in the Tsangaya schools on modern instructional techniques, child rights, and vocational instruction.
5. Religious institutions and civil society organizations should intensify public enlightenment campaigns aimed at promoting parental accountability and communal ownership of children's education.

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