

Influence of Parental Financial Status and Social Protection on the Almajiri Practice in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State Nigeria

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Abstract. *This study investigates the impact of parental financial standing and social protection measures on the practice of Almajiri in Jalingo Education Zone. Guided by two research objectives and hypotheses, the study employed an ex-post facto research design. A sample of 667 respondents, comprising men and women, was selected using a multi-stage sampling approach, which included stratified random sampling, the 2% sampling formula, and accidental sampling techniques. Data collection was carried out using a researcher-designed instrument titled Parental Variables, Social Protection, and Almajiri Practice Scale (PVSPAPS). The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed by experts, yielding reliability coefficients of .88, .80, and .79 for the parental variables, social protection, and Almajiri practice sub-scales, respectively. The null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a significance level of 0.05. The findings of the study revealed that parental financial status and social protection measure significantly influences Alimajiri practice in the Jalingo Educational Zone of Taraba State. It recommends that the government should enhance school-based feeding programmes to better engage Almajiri children in education. This should involve periodic review and supervision of existing Almajiri schools to ensure the effectiveness of such interventions.*

Key words: *Parental Financial Status, Social Protection, Almajiri Practice, Jalingo Education Zone.*

Introduction

The Almajiri system of education is deeply embedded in Islamic tradition, which emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge as a fundamental religious obligation. In this context, it is believed that acquiring Islamic knowledge not only spiritual enlightenment but also facilitates the attainment of worldly success, thereby making other life pursuits easier for the individual [1]. Traditionally, children were sent to Tsangaya, or Quranic schools, under the supervision of knowledgeable teachers known as Mallams, to learn and memorize the Quran and Islamic principles. This practice was

originally intended to serve as a means of religious education and moral development, providing children with a foundation for both spiritual and societal growth.

However, over the years, the practice has deviated significantly from its original purpose, evolving into a complex social issue marked by neglect, exploitation, and societal neglect. The current state of the Almajiri phenomenon has become a source of national embarrassment and concern, especially in Nigeria's northern regions where it is most prevalent [2]. The practice has taken on a different dimension children who are supposed to be in Quranic schools for religious learning are instead often abandoned, exploited, and turned into street beggars. Many are sent out to beg for sustenance and survival, rather than receiving proper Islamic education, which leads to their social marginalization and increased vulnerability. This transformation of the Almajiri practice has profound negative implications for the children involved and for society at large. Instead of acquiring the intended religious knowledge, many of these children are subjected to harsh living conditions, physical abuse, and forced labour. They are often neglected, deprived of basic needs such as proper nutrition, healthcare, and psychosocial care. Their lives are characterized by extreme poverty, poor hygiene, and exposure to environmental hazards; yet, paradoxically, some develop a remarkable immunity to illnesses due to their harsh living conditions [3]. Their physical appearance often reflects neglect many rarely bathe or eat nutritious food, and their survival depends on charity, begging, or scavenging.

The psychological and social consequences of these conditions are equally alarming. Many children grow up with low self-esteem, feelings of rejection, aggression, and hostility towards society. Their exposure to violence, neglect, and the absence of parental guidance significantly impacts their mental health, often leading to behavioural problems, delinquency, and involvement in social vices. Social psychologists suggest that children deprived of love, guidance, and proper care at a tender age are more likely to develop antisocial behaviours, which can perpetuate cycles of violence and instability within communities.

Research studies have highlighted the influence of parental economic status on the Almajiri system. For instance, Gregory conducted a study involving 466 parents from three northern states, revealing that over 56% of respondents agreed that financial hardship compelled parents to send their children to Almajiri schools [4]. Similarly, Johnson used a comprehensive survey involving 564 respondents and found significant correlations between parental occupation, social status, and economic capacity and the attitude towards Almajiri practice [5]. These studies indicate that poverty and lack of social mobility are key drivers that push families to entrust their children to the Almajiri system as a means of survival or social acceptance.

Beyond economic factors, social protection mechanisms defined by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development as policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability are crucial in addressing the root causes of the Almajiri phenomenon. These mechanisms include labour market interventions, social insurance, and targeted social assistance that aim to shield individuals and families from risks such as unemployment, sickness, disability, and old age [6]. However, the Nigerian government's expenditure on health, education, and social welfare remains insufficient, and the implementation of social protection programs is often weak or inconsistent [7]. This gap leaves vulnerable children unprotected and perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Legal frameworks such as the Child Rights Act, which enshrines children's rights to protection, education, and welfare, have been enacted; however, their enforcement is weak, especially in the northern states where religious and cultural practices often take precedence over statutory laws [8]. The rise of the Almajiri children on the streets, begging in markets, hotels, and motor parks, underscores the failure of policies meant to protect vulnerable children. The ongoing insecurity, poverty, and social injustice further exacerbate their plight, making it difficult for the government and civil society to enforce child protection laws effectively.

Given this complex background, it is vital to understand the influence of parental financial status and social protection on the practice of Almajiri in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State. Exploring these factors can provide insights into the socio-economic and policy-related barriers that sustain this

practice. It can also inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing the number of children involved in Almajiri practices, ensuring their access to quality education, healthcare, and social support systems. Addressing these issues is crucial not only for the well-being of the children but also for promoting social justice, national development, and the realization of children's rights in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study was to find out:

1. Parental financial status influence on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.
2. Social protection influence on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant influence of parental financial status on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.
2. There is no significant influence of social protection on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.

Research Methods

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design, which involves analysing variables that have already occurred without any direct manipulation [9]. This design was suitable because the variables such as parental financial status, social protection, and Almajiri practice are existing conditions that cannot be controlled or altered by the researcher. The primary aim was to observe and analyse these pre-existing factors and infer their relationships, enabling generalization to the broader population. The target population comprised all men and women aged 18 and above residing within the Jalingo Education Zone of Taraba State, comprise of 33,366 individuals across six LGAs. The distribution is as follows: Lau (5,298), Karim-Lamido (2,776), Jalingo (10,274), Yorro (5,884), Zing (5,332), and Ardo-Kola (3,802). Using stratified random sampling, the zone was divided into six strata (LGAs). A 2% sample from each stratum was determined, resulting in a total of 667 respondents. Due to logistical challenges, accidental (convenience) sampling supplemented the process, with respondent's selected based on judgment and specific criteria relevant to the study.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire titled Parental Variables, Social Protection, and Almajiri Practice Scale (PVSPAPS), developed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B included 28 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. To ensure the instrument's validity, it was reviewed by two experts from the University of Calabar, and a pilot test was conducted with 40 parents outside the study area. The reliability coefficients, determined through Cronbach's Alpha, were 0.88 for parental variables, 0.80 for social protection, and 0.79 for Almajiri practices, reflecting high internal consistency. The data analysis involved inferential statistics, with hypotheses tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to assess the significance of the relationships among variables, providing a thorough understanding of how parental financial status and social protection influence Almajiri practice in the zone.

Result and Discussion

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of parental financial status on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.

Table 1: One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Influence of Parental Financial Status on Almajiri Practices in Taraba State

Parental financial status	N	\bar{x}	SD		
Low	22	23.32	3.39		
Moderate	372	26.71	4.27		
High	108	28.04	8.62		
Total	502	26.81	5054		
Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	f	P
Between groups	434.194	2	217.097		
Within groups	14963.686	499	29.987	7.240	.001
Total	15397.880	501			

The independent variable in this study is parental financial status, categorized into high, moderate, and low levels, while the dependent variable is Almajiri practices. Descriptive analysis revealed that 22 parents fell into the low-status category, 372 into the moderate category, and 108 into the high-status category. The mean scores for Almajiri practices were 23.32 for low-status parents, 26.71 for those in the moderate category, and 28.04 for high-status parents. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether there are statistically significant differences among these groups regarding parental financial status and its influence on Almajiri practices within the Jalingo education zone. The results, summarized in Table 10, indicated a significant effect ($F = 7.240$, $p < .05$), with the p-value of 0.00 being less than the significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which posited no significant influence of parental financial status on Almajiri practices, was rejected. A post hoc analysis using Scheffe's test was performed to identify specific group differences, with the detailed results presented in the corresponding table 2

Table 2: Post hoc test using Scheffe's on the influence of parental financial status on Almajiri practice

Variables		Mean difference	P	Remarks
Low	Moderate	-3.389	0.019	Significant
	High	-4.719	0.001	Significant
Moderate	Low	3.389	0.019	Significant
	High	-1.330	0.086	Not significant
High	Low	4.719	0.001	Significant
	Moderate	1.330	0.086	Not significant

The mean difference is significant at .05 level

Table 2 indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the low group and both the moderate and high groups, whereas the difference between the moderate and high groups is not statistically significant.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence of social protection on Almajiri practice in Jalingo Education Zone.

Table 3: One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Result on the Influence of Social Protection on Almajiri Practices in Taraba State

Social protection	N	\bar{x}	SD		
Low	47	25.89	4.60		
Moderate	375	26.56	4.31		
High	80	28.75	9.50		
Total	502	26.84	5.54		
Source of variation	SS	df	MS	f	Sig
Between groups	363.895	2	181.948		
Within groups	15033.985	499	30.128	6.039	.003
Total	15397.880	501			

The independent variable in this study is social protection, categorized into high, moderate, and low levels, while the dependent variable is Almajiri practices. Descriptive statistics revealed that 47 respondents fell into the low social protection category, 375 into the moderate, and 80 into the high category. The mean scores for Almajiri practices were 25.89 for the low, 26.56 for the moderate, and 28.75 for the high social protection groups. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences among these three categories. The results, summarized in Table 4, indicated a significant effect ($F = 6.039, p < .05$). The p-value of .003 was less than the significance level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis that social protection has no influence on Almajiri practices in the Jalingo education zone of Taraba State. Since the ANOVA confirmed differences among the groups, a post-hoc test was subsequently performed, with detailed results presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Post-hoc Analysis Using Scheffe's on the Influence of Social Protection on Almajiri Practices

Social protection		Mean difference	P	Remarks
Low	Moderate	-0.664	0.737	Not significant
	High	-2.856	0.019	Significant
Moderate	Low	0.664	0.737	Not significant
	High	-2.193	0.005	Significant
High	Low	2.856	0.019	Significant
	Moderate	2.193	0.005	Significant

The mean difference is significant at .05 level

Table 4 revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in Almajiri practices between the low and high social protection groups, as well as between the moderate and high social protection groups, indicating that variations in social protection levels are associated with differences in the practices. However, the analysis showed no significant difference between the low and moderate social protection groups, suggesting that the level of social protection in these two categories does not substantially influence Almajiri practices. This implies that the most notable variation in practices occurs when comparing high social protection to the other groups, highlighting the potential impact of higher social protection on reducing or altering Almajiri practices.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of hypothesis one demonstrated that parental financial status has a significant impact on the practice of Almajiri. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, indicating that parental economic conditions are a key factor influencing whether children are sent to Almajiri schools. To further explore where these differences lie, Scheffe's post-hoc test was conducted. The results showed that there are significant differences in parental financial impact when comparing the low-income group with both the moderate and high-income groups. However, there was no significant difference between the moderate and high-income groups, suggesting that beyond a certain point, increased parental income does not markedly change the likelihood of practicing Almajiri. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Gregory, who found that over half of the respondents believed that financial constraints influenced their decision to send children to Almajiri schools [4].

Similarly, Johnson established that parental occupation, social status, and financial stability significantly shape attitudes toward Almajiri practices, based on statistical analyses like ANOVA and t-tests [5]. Furthermore, Isiaka identified systemic challenges in integrating Almajiri education with Nigeria's broader Universal Basic Education system, citing issues such as insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and ineffective planning and supervision, which hinder progress [10].

In hypothesis two, the results indicated that there are significant differences between the low and high social protection groups, as well as between the moderate and high groups, suggesting that higher levels of social protection are associated with better outcomes or perceptions related to social support systems. However, no significant difference was observed between the low and moderate social protection groups, implying that the increment from low to moderate protection might not be sufficient to produce noticeable changes. These findings are in line with Zubairu and Abdulkadir, who examined social protection initiatives in Kano State aimed at providing a minimum standard of living and reducing multidimensional poverty and inequality [11]. Their study emphasized that social protection efforts help prevent shocks such as unemployment, sickness, and illiteracy, which can lead to social exclusion. The study also found no significant differences in perceptions of the social protection system based on gender, or between poor and vulnerable groups, or between the most vulnerable women and children, indicating a general perception of the system's acceptability across different demographics. Nonetheless, there was a notable correlation between social protection programs and poverty levels, suggesting that these initiatives do have an impact on poverty alleviation.

An important question raised by these findings is whether social protection policies effectively support or strengthen the Almajiri school system. To explore this, Lawan conducted a comprehensive review of social protection policies and their role in poverty reduction in northern Nigeria from 2005 to 2015 [12][13][14]. The results indicated that these policies have not been significantly effective in reducing poverty in the region. This raises concerns about the extent to which social protection initiatives are integrated with or supportive of the Almajiri educational system, and whether they are sufficiently designed to address the root causes of the practice. Overall, while there is evidence that parental financial status and social protection efforts influence Almajiri practices and perceptions, the effectiveness of current policies in reducing poverty and supporting the educational system remains questionable [15][16][17].

Conclusion

The findings indicate that parental financial status and social protection initiatives significantly influence Almajiri practices in northern Nigeria. Lower income increases the likelihood of children entering Almajiri education, while higher social protection correlates with better perceptions and outcomes. However, the overall impact of social protection on reducing poverty is limited. To address these issues effectively, targeted policies that improve economic conditions, enhance social safety nets, and strengthen the educational system are necessary for sustainable change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, researcher recommended the follows for consideration:

1. **Provide Financial Support to Parents:** Implement programmes like microfinance and vocational training to improve parents' income, reducing their need to send children to Almajiri schools due to economic hardship.
2. **Improve Social Protection Policies:** Revise and better integrate social protection programmes with education initiatives to effectively support vulnerable families and reduce poverty-related issues related to Almajiri practices.

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