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Stakeholders' Perceptions, Benefits, and Challenges of the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme: A Cross-State Comparative Analysis

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Abstract
This study investigated stakeholders' perceptions, benefits, and challenges of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP) across three States in Northern Nigerian employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected with structured questionnaires tagged "UBE- Almajiri Integrated Education Questionnaire for Teachers (UBE-IAEQT)" while the qualitative data were gathered with a structured instrument named "In-depth Interview Schedule on UBE-Almajiri Integrated Education for Parents and Community Leaders (IdS-AIEPCL)". The population included parents and community leaders directly residing in the communities and teachers working where the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme operates. A multi-stage purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents across the three Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each State where Integrated Almajiri Education Programme was implemented resulting in a total of nine LGAs. The quantitative data were analysed using a one-way ANOVA. For the qualitative data, one category of stakeholder was selected in each Local Government Area across the three States. The findings revealed stakeholders' positive perception of the goals of the (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP) in Adamawa, Gombe, and Taraba States with challenges in terms of funding, corruption among others. There was a significant difference among the three States in teachers' perception of the goals of IAEP ($F(2; 44) = 7.67$; $p<0.05$). The study recommended children enrolment in UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme where applicable, since it provides comparable alternative to Western education. It also advocated for increased government funding while blocking existing loopholes that encourage bribery and corruption.

Keywords*:* Almajiri Education, Educational integration, Stakeholder Perceptions, Social Inclusion, Universal Basic Education.

Introduction
The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme in Nigeria

signifies a significant government initiative aimed at integrating the traditional Almajiri Islamic system with formal secular education. The Almajiri system, rooted in Islamic scholarship since the 11th century in Northern Nigeria, has been criticised for its informality and marginalisation, with associations to street begging due to inadequate formal support and recognition (International Policy Brief, 2023; Oni et al., 2021). The UBE Act of 2004 laid the foundation for reforms, gaining momentum from 2013 through targeted policies to synchronise spiritual and secular learning (Amoo, 2019; UBEC, 2024).

This initiative seeks to address educational exclusion by providing spiritual and basic literacy through a blended curriculum for Almajiri children, promoting social equity and inclusion (Oni et al., 2021). Traditionally, Almajiri children, mostly from poor backgrounds, receive Islamic education under Mallams, facing acute poverty and exclusion from mainstream opportunities. The Federal Government's introduction of Almajiri Model Schools (AIMS) was intended to deliver lifelong skills, literacy, and numeracy, aligning with national education policy (Amoo, 2019; Oni et al., 2021).

Despite its promise, implementation has faced obstacles such as inadequate planning, limited funding, weak stakeholder collaboration, and ambiguous curriculum integration (Amoo, 2019; Muhammad, 2024). These factors undermine progress, with only about 15% of out-of-school Almajiri children accessing model schools, and many states failing to replicate the initiative, thus perpetuating disparities and exclusion (Oni et al., 2021). The programme's effectiveness is also hindered by limited stakeholder support, especially among parents, community leaders, and Mallams, leading to low enrolment and minimal behavioural change despite significant government investment (Muhammad, 2024).

This study is grounded in Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which argues for the involvement of all affected parties in decision-making. In education, this means engaging parents, teachers, and community leaders to ensure programme inclusivity and sustainability. The theory underpins the study's analysis of stakeholder perceptions and the comparative evaluation of benefits and challenges across states. Effective stakeholder engagement is shown to drive value creation, while disengagement perpetuates implementation gaps and undermines educational outcomes.

Statement of the problem

There is limited understanding of how parents and community leaders perceive the goals of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme across the Northern States in Nigeria, whereas these stakeholders are very important to the success of the programme. This gap complicates efforts to assess the programme's effectiveness and tailor policies to improve the educational outcomes for Almajiri children in the States. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of parents and community leaders regarding the goals of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme in Nigeria.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The study was guided by the following research question and hypothesis:

1. What are the perceptions of parents and community leaders about the goals of UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme?

Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant difference among the three States in the perception of teachers about

the goals of the Integrated Almajiri education programme.

Methodology

This study utilised a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Specifically, a convergent parallel design was employed, whereby quantitative data were collected with structured questionnaires tagged "UBE- Almajiri Integrated Education Questionnaire for Teachers (UBE-IAEQT)". The qualitative data were gathered with a structured instrument named "In-depth Interview Schedule on UBE-Almajiri Integrated Education for Parents and Community Leaders (IdS-AIEPCL)". The population included parents, community leaders and teachers working where the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme operates.

A multi-stage purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents. Three Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each State where Integrated Almajiri Education Programme was implemented were purposively selected, resulting in a total of nine LGAs. For the qualitative data, one parent who was a member of the PTA executives in the schools in each Local Government area was purposively selected resulting in 9 parents. One community leader from each Local Government in the school location was randomly selected resulting in 9 community leaders across the three States. For the quantitative component, out of the 60 questionnaires distributed to teachers, only 54 which were found useful were analysed using a one-way ANOVA.

Results

Research question 1: How do parents and community leaders perceive the goals of the Integrated Almajri Education programme?

The first interview question was to investigate how familiar the respondents were with the Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP). From all the States, Adamawa Taraba and Gombe State all the respondents were familiar with the education programme. The perception of all the respondents interviewed across the three States, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba State showed a positive attitude toward the goals of the Integrated Almajiri Education Programme.

The next interview question asked if IAEP offers effective solution to the challenges faced by the Almajiris children. All the respondents across the three States, Adamawa, Taraba and Gombe, agreed that IAEP offers effective solution in addressing the challenges faced by the programme. For instance, Mr A a community leader with National Certificate in Education (NCE) in Adamawa State said: *"Some of the atrocity performed by the Almajiris is due to lack of education".* This was also supported by Mr E a community leader with NCE who said: *"the programme would bring Almajiri back to their school and not on the street."*

From Gombe State Mr G who is a parent and a degree holder agreed and said: *"the programme addresses the behavioural and educational challenges in line with religious beliefs".* Mr. I who is a parent from the Gombe State with NCE agreed and said: *"It will give them enough exposure and additional knowledge to balance their religious misconceptions."* Mr J the last interviewee in Gombe State a community leader and a degree holder also agreed and said: *"It will help them to know more about the social way of life and for job opportunity."*

Respondents who were interviewed in Taraba State also supported Mr. L a community leader in Taraba State with NCE said: *"Yes, because it will make them literate and give them opportunity like other children".* Mr G a parent who is a degree holder in Gombe agreed and said: *"Because it will provide them with knowledge of Western education".* Mr J, the last interviewee in Gombe State a community leader who is a degree holder also said: *"It will take them out of the street".*

The next interview questions were to investigate: First, how important it is for a child to have access to education in terms of reading and writing; second, promotion of social integration into the mainstream society; and third, the impact of the programme on the well-being of the Almajiri children. The first interviewee Mr A community leader with NCE in Taraba State agreed that is it important for the child to have access to formal education. He said: *"children will be educated and know how to take care of themselves".* This perception highlighted Oni et al. (2021), that the UBE programmes is not only focussing on increasing academic access but it also aims at fostering social equity and community integration, essentially for the marginalised children such as the Almajiri.

Mr. C parent with NCE from Adamawa State agreed that a child needs to have access to formal education. He said: *"The programme helps to improve children's way of thinking and equips them with necessary skills".* The respondents in Gombe State also supported the view. Mr. F a graduate community leader said: *"It will assist the child to bridge the gap between now and the future".* Mr G a parent who is a degree holder from Gombe State agreed to this. He said: *"It is of utmost importance because it fits into our socio-cultural and religious ways and it contributes to the child's social integration".* Mr J, a community leader from Gombe State holding a degree certificate said: *"It is important for their future and will help them to relate with both Muslim and non-Muslims."*

Mr L from Taraba State who is a community leader with NCE supported seeing the importance of children's access to formal education. He said: *"it will make the child compete favourably with his peers and expose him to other realities that are different from those provided by Islamic education".* Mr M. a parent who is a degree holder from Taraba State accepted the importance of access of child to formal education. He said: *"it will make my child know other things outside Islamic religion".* Mr N, a community leader with degree certificate from Taraba State also agreed. He said: *"it will increase and improve children's standard of education and create ways of making the future brighter for children".*

All the respondents agreed that the programme avails children the opportunity to have access to education, particularly in reading and writing. The most common view among them was the privilege to change the perception of educators and make these children more relevant in society. Apart from availing access to formal education, the programme helps brings social integration of beneficiaries into the larger community.

Research question 2: What are the benefits and challenges of the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme?

The next question investigated the benefits of the Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP) and identifies some of its challenges. The first interviewee was from Adamawa State, a community leader with NCE. He agreed that the IAEP offers potential benefits for the children. He said: *"By training the children, they can become independent in the future".* He also identified limited funding as a major challenge facing the programme. Mr B who is an NCE holder and a community leader also supported that there are potential benefits. He said: *"it develops the child's all-round education".* He also identified limited funding and lack of support and cooperation from parents and guidance as the challenge for the successful implementation of the programme".

Mr C, a parent also agreed that there are potential benefits, but the biggest challenge faced was stigmatisation from the parents and people around them. Mr F from Gombe State who was a community leader and a degree holder supported that there are benefits from the programme. He said: *"the programme offers self-employment and makes the children less dependent".* He added

that, *"the programme is faced with the challenge of bribery and corruption among the officials"*. Mr. I, a parent with NCE in Gombe State also agreed and said: *"it equipped them with the basic knowledge that are useful in solving life problems"*. He identified a lack of support from parents and guidance, and inadequate trained teachers as the challenge faced by the programme.

Mr K who is a parent and a graduate agreed that there are benefits from the programme. He identified the need for attitudinal change and easy acceptance in the society. In addition, he noted lack of funding resources as a major challenge to the programme. Mr M, a parent who is a degree holder from Taraba State admitted that the IAEP add potential benefits to the life of Almajiri children. He said: *"The education received encourages the children to make remarkable impacts in the society."* He also identified limited funding as a problem militating against the programme.

The last interviewee in Taraba State, a community leader who is a degree holder agreed that IAEP has potential benefits. He said*: "it provides opportunities for the child in the world of work"*. He identified stigmatisation surrounding the Almajiri children as the major challenge facing the programme.

Some of the respondents who participated in the study expressed their satisfaction with the programme, citing its ability to provide quality education to their children and wards, thereby improving their chances of getting a better life. This reason may emanate from the tangible outcomes experienced by some of the programme's beneficiaries.

Testing of Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference among the three States in the perception of teachers about the goals of the Integrated Almajiri education programme.

Table 1: Summary of Analysis of Variance showing Difference among the States in their Teachers' Perceptions of the Goals of IAEP

Variable	States	N	Mean	Std.D	F	DF	Sig.	Remark
Teachers' perceptions of the goals of IAEP	Taraba	15	22.600	7.827	7.672	2;44	.001	Significant
	Gombe	14	31.000	6.469				
	Adamawa	18	30.667	5.821				
	Total	47	28.192	5.821				

Source: Author's Compilation.

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference among the three States in the teachers' perception of the goals of IAEP ($F_{(2; 44)} = 7.67$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis stating that "There is no significant difference among the three States in the perception of teachers about the goals of the Integrated Almajiri education programme is rejected. The significant variation observed in teachers' perceptions across States in this study supports the earlier observations by Oni et al. (2021) about irregular implementation and stakeholder engagement across Nigeria's regions. This has always contributed to disparities in educational outcomes within national programmes. The mean scores shows that Gombe teachers had the highest perception mean score (31.00) followed by Adamawa teachers (30.67) while Taraba had the lowest perception mean score (22.60). The inter-state variation in teacher perceptions as pointed out in this study is a reminiscence of Itasanmi and Oni's (2020) findings that emphasised how regional disparities influence the reception of educational programme.

Discussion of Findings

The study affirmed significant positive perceptions of the goals of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP) among parents and community leaders

in Adamawa, Gombe, and Taraba States. These stakeholders recognised that IAEP has the potentials to address the lingering educational and social challenges militating against Almajiri children. These positive perceptions resonate with previous findings by Oni et al., 2021 which emphasised that community stakeholders' support is important to both the success and sustainability of any educational reforms directed towards marginalised groups such as the Almajiri. The submission in agreeing with the goals might be because of the perception of the importance of education by the community leaders and parents. This is in tandem with the argument of Oni et al., 2021, who emphasised on UBE's role in addressing educational inequities. The Educational access, literacy, and social integration that are being promoted by the programme enhance the key principles of inclusive education that is necessary to bridge the long-standing equity gaps.

The study found that the stake holders were satisfied with the programme for the benefits it offers. This aligns with Oni et al.'s (2021) position that integrated educational initiatives can enhance significant improvements in beneficiary well-being and community development when adequately implemented. Nevertheless, the study identified some challenges faced by the programme which include inadequate funding, stigmatisation by parents, insufficient teacher training and corruption by some government officials in programme implementation. While the challenge of stigmatisation may be abated through advocacy, the problem of bribery and corruption mentioned by community leaders remain the major ill on which other challenges thrive.

Essential resources which are expected to be allocated to critical areas such as teacher training and supply of facilities are diverted thereby compromising the quality of education delivered and sustainability of the UBE Integrated Almajiri Education Programme (IAEP) despite government efforts (Muhammad, 2024; Oni et al., 2021). This systemic challenge leads to stakeholders' distrust and reduces parental and community engagement, which are crucial for programme survival and success. This again is the reason for social resistance and limited behavioural change among learners.

The study showed significant variations in teachers' perceptions across the three States considered in the research with more positive views from Adamawa and Gombe when compared with Taraba. This state-based disparity is an indication of inconsistent programme implementation as well as varying stakeholder engagement as echoed by Oni et al. (2021), who observed a similar dichotomy in the execution of the UBE programme in Nigeria as affecting educational outcomes. To address these disparities would require context-specific strategies tailored towards implementation and stakeholder mobilisation to local realities.

The dual role of IAEP on synchronising formal education with the already existing cultural-religious values emerged as being vital to community acceptance. Community leaders cited the balance between Western education and Islamic traditions as important to alleviating parental resistance. This support Itasanmi et al's (2019), view that cultural relevance plays a major role in acceptance of educational innovations.

The study found that respondents agreed that among the consequential benefits of IAEP is that it reduces antisocial behaviour and improves livelihood prospects thereby linking social and economic empowerment to IAEP. This connection affirms Oni's (2023) argument that community-led education can reduce poverty through literacy and skill acquisition hence, the impact of IAEP is not limited to academic achievements but extends into enhancing societal transformation. The findings resonate strongly with Stakeholder Theory, which posits that the

interests of all parties involved in or affected by an organisational action must be acknowledged and managed for success (Freeman, 1984). The result showed that the positive perceptions of the stakeholders towards the IAEP reflected the importance of inclusiveness leading to programme acceptance and effectiveness as posited by Stakeholder Theory. The challenges identified in the study reiterated the theory's emphasis on ethical responsibility and long-term value creation through mutual benefits among stakeholders.

In a comparative sense, the study replicated other integrated educational programmes targeting marginalised or informal education systems. For instance, in India, integration of traditional religious schooling with formal education (like Madrasah reforms) required deliberate community involvement and cultural sensitivity for enhanced acceptance and reduced resistance (Azim Premji Foundation, 2016). Likewise, collaboration of communities and policy makers helped to foster inclusiveness and educational equity in Afro-Brazilian religious education incorporation into the mainstream schools (Lopes & Gallart, 2013). Consequently, reliance of IAEP's on stakeholder perceptions and the identified challenges is in tandem with global trends and established theory which advocated for inclusiveness, context-sensitive and participatory approaches to education reform.

Conclusions

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme in Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba States in Nigeria was a successful programme with literacy reduction potential bringing the street children to school. However, the government should do more to ensure continuity by blocking the loophole that this study has identified, since the programme is already supported by the stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. Community leaders, parents and teachers should use every avenue to encourage children to enrol in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Integrated Almajiri Education Programme since it provides comparable alternative to Western education.
2. Teachers should show more professionalism in their duties and be more committed without compromising the laudable intention of the government.
3. Government should increase funding and incorporate mechanism to checkmate bribery and corruption that limit the impact of the programme.

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