



THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL QUR'ANIC SCHOOLS IN ADDRESSING THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN CRISIS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: A HYBRID EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR INCLUSION

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Abstract

Out-of-school children in Northern Nigeria remain a significant challenge, with socio-cultural norms, economic hardship, and weak policy implementation contributing to the issue. Traditional Qur'anic schools (Almajiri system) continue to play a crucial role in education, yet they often operate outside the formal schooling system, leaving many children without essential literacy and numeracy skills. This paper explores the potential of integrating formal education into these traditional schools through a hybrid educational model. By incorporating literacy, numeracy, and vocational training into Qur'anic education, this approach respects cultural and religious values while ensuring children gain essential skills for modern society. Drawing from successful hybrid models in other regions, the study highlights the role of government, religious leaders, and NGOs in facilitating this transformation. Despite challenges such as resistance from traditional scholars, curriculum concerns, and financial constraints, the hybrid model presents a sustainable solution to reducing child poverty, street begging, and educational exclusion. The paper concludes by advocating for policy reforms and collaborative efforts to implement this inclusive educational strategy effectively.

Keywords: Hybrid Educational Model, Qur'anic Schools, Out-of-School Children, Northern Nigeria, Educational Reform

Introduction

The out-of-school crisis in Northern Nigeria remains a major barrier to the region's educational and developmental progress. With an estimated 18.3 million children not attending school, Northern Nigeria has the highest concentration of out-of-school children, largely due to poverty, cultural practices, insecurity, and inadequate educational infrastructure (UNICEF, 2024). Socio-cultural and religious factors, especially in the case of girls, contribute significantly to school dropout rates, with traditional education systems like the Almajiri system playing a key role in perpetuating the issue (Edukugho, 2022).

The Almajiri system, historically rooted in Islamic traditions, focuses on religious instruction but often lacks integration of essential skills such as literacy and numeracy. As a result, children in these schools are often left ill-prepared for modern economic opportunities, with many resorting to child labour and begging (Okafor & Oghene, 2020; Ogunyemi, 2022). Additionally, the absence of adequate government oversight contributes significantly to the out-of-school children crisis, as it limits access to educational opportunities and further reinforces the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in affected communities (Abdullahi, 2021; Shuaib et al., 2023).

A promising solution lies in creating a hybrid educational model that merges Qur'anic schooling with formal education. By integrating literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills into the Almajiri curriculum, this model respects the region's cultural values while equipping children with the skills necessary for the modern world (Ismail & Muhammad, 2022). Similar successful reforms in other countries demonstrate that combining religious instruction with formal education can effectively reduce educational exclusion (World Bank, 2021). This approach holds the potential to address the out-of-school crisis, provide equitable access to education, and drive long-term socio-economic development in Northern Nigeria.

Factors Contributing to Out-of-School Crisis in Northern Nigeria

The crisis of out-of-school children in Northern Nigeria is deeply rooted in several socio-economic, cultural, and institutional challenges that require urgent attention. Studies have shown that poverty, insecurity, early marriage, inadequate educational infrastructure, cultural beliefs, and weak government policies are among the major factors contributing to the increasing number of out-of-school children in the region (UNICEF, 2022; Abdullahi, 2021). Below are six primary and widely recognised factors contributing to the problem.

- i. **Socio-Cultural Resistance to Western Education:** In many Northern communities, there is a cultural preference for traditional Islamic education over formal Western schooling. This is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where the Almajiri system dominates, often leaving children out of the formal education system due to a lack of support for Western-style schooling (Abdullahi, 2021).
- ii. **Economic Pressures and Child Labour:** High levels of poverty compel many families to send their children into the workforce, either through street begging, informal labour, or domestic work. These children are often expected to contribute financially, leading to widespread neglect of formal education opportunities (Baba, 2016).
- iii. **Inadequate School Infrastructure and Resources:** A significant number of schools in Northern Nigeria lack basic infrastructure, such as classrooms, qualified teachers, and learning materials. This makes attending school impractical for many children, particularly in rural and remote areas where the nearest school is often far away (Jibril, 2020).
- iv. **Weak Government Policies and Implementation:** Despite the establishment of policies such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, weak implementation, inadequate funding, corruption, and poor policy monitoring continue to undermine efforts to address the out-of-school children crisis in Northern Nigeria. In many rural communities, educational interventions fail to reach vulnerable populations due to limited infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, and insufficient political commitment, thereby worsening educational inequality and school dropout rates (UNICEF, 2022; Abdullahi, 2021).
- v. **Religious and Parental Opposition to Education for Girls:** In many parts of Northern Nigeria, traditional and religious beliefs limit girls' access to formal education. Cultural norms often prioritise marriage and domestic responsibilities for girls over schooling, especially in rural areas, where educational facilities for girls are scarce (Edukugho, 2022).
- vi. **Migration and Almajiri System:** The Almajiri system involves children sent away from home to study Qur'anic teachings, often resulting in children being disconnected from formal schooling. These children frequently migrate to urban areas to beg for survival, further exacerbating their educational neglect (UNICEF, 2021).

The Potential of Traditional Qur'anic Schools

Traditional Qur'anic schools, also known as *Almajiri* schools, have been a cornerstone of education in Northern Nigeria for centuries, offering spiritual and moral guidance to generations of children. Despite the rapid expansion of formal education systems in the region, these schools continue to thrive due to several key factors that resonate with the cultural and religious values of the society. Their enduring presence highlights the significant role they play in the educational landscape, especially in areas where modern schooling infrastructure is limited.

Traditional Qur'anic schools remain highly popular in Northern Nigeria for several interrelated reasons. Firstly, they are deeply integrated into the cultural and religious traditions of the region, offering an education that is closely aligned with Islamic values and teachings, which many families view as essential for their children's spiritual development. In many rural areas, where formal schools are few or non-existent, Qur'anic schools provide the primary educational opportunity for children (Ibrahim, 2019). Secondly, the flexibility of these schools is a key factor in their popularity. Unlike the rigid structure of formal education systems, Qur'anic schools allow students to learn at their own pace, balancing their religious education with family responsibilities, which is appealing to many parents (Nwachukwu & Ahmed, 2020). Thirdly, these schools are seen as essential for preserving Islamic traditions and values, offering not only religious education but also moral guidance, which is highly valued in Northern Nigerian society (Sulaiman, 2018). Additionally, Qur'anic schools are more accessible and affordable compared to formal education institutions, especially for impoverished families who struggle with the costs associated with enrolling children in formal schools (Musa, 2021). Lastly, the communal living arrangements within Qur'anic schools, where children often live with their teachers and peers, foster a strong sense of community and belonging. This communal aspect reinforces the deep-rooted acceptance of these schools in the region, making them more than just places of learning, but integral parts of the social fabric (Ibrahim, 2019). Thus, despite the challenges they face, Qur'anic schools remain a vital and enduring feature of Northern Nigerian society.

The Hybrid Model: A Practical Solution

The concept of integrating formal education with Qur'anic schooling as a hybrid educational model has received increasing scholarly attention as a practical strategy for addressing the out-of-school children crisis in Northern Nigeria. Various scholars have emphasised the need for combining literacy, numeracy, vocational training, and modern teaching approaches with traditional Qur'anic education in order to create a more inclusive and functional educational system (Ibrahim, 2020; Musa, 2021; Sulaiman, 2019; Nwachukwu & Ahmed, 2020). Drawing from these perspectives, the following components represent key elements that could define an effective hybrid educational model.

Integration of Basic Literacy and Numeracy

A central element of the hybrid model is the incorporation of foundational skills in literacy and numeracy within Qur'anic schools. This would involve training Qur'anic teachers to teach basic reading, writing, and mathematics alongside religious texts. Introducing these subjects at an early stage helps bridge the gap between religious and secular education, ensuring that children are well-rounded and equipped for future opportunities in both the religious and formal job markets (Ibrahim, 2020).

- i. **Incorporation of Vocational Training:** To address the skills gap and prepare children for practical life, vocational training should be included in the curriculum of Qur'anic schools. Vocational skills such as tailoring, carpentry, agriculture, and IT training could be introduced, providing students with marketable skills that will improve their socio-economic mobility (Afolabi & Oba, 2024). This approach not only reduces the tendency for children to engage in street begging or child labour but also helps equip them for employment or entrepreneurship (Abdullahi et al., 2026; Musa, 2021).
- ii. **Community-based Learning:** In the hybrid model, learning should be structured in a way that promotes community involvement. By creating a curriculum that incorporates community-based projects, children will learn not only academic and vocational skills but also develop a strong sense of responsibility and social cohesion. Community leaders and elders can serve as mentors, helping to further integrate the Qur'anic schooling system into broader societal goals (Sulaiman, 2019).
- iii. **Blended Learning Approach:** The hybrid model could integrate modern technology alongside traditional Qur'anic education. Digital platforms, radio programs, or mobile applications can be used to support learning, particularly in remote areas where formal schooling infrastructure is minimal. By using e-learning tools, Qur'anic students can have access to supplementary resources that would enrich their education and expose them to a wider range of subjects (Nwachukwu & Ahmed, 2020).
- iv. **Capacity Building for Qur'anic Teachers:** A successful hybrid model hinges on the effective training of Qur'anic teachers. Teachers must be equipped with the skills to teach both religious and secular subjects. This training would cover pedagogical methods for integrating literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills with Qur'anic studies. This approach ensures that teachers are not only imparting religious knowledge but are also capable of delivering a more holistic education to their students (Musa, 2021).
- v. **Government and Policy Support:** The implementation of the hybrid model requires strong government support in terms of policy and funding. Governments need to provide incentives and resources to both the Qur'anic schools and teachers, such as training programs, textbooks, and teaching materials. Additionally, policy reforms should address the inclusion of Qur'anic schools in the national education system, allowing these schools to be recognised and supported under formal educational frameworks (Ibrahim, 2020).
- vi. **Role of Religious Leaders and NGOs:** Religious leaders play a critical role in the success of the hybrid model. Their endorsement and active participation are essential in ensuring community acceptance and involvement. Religious leaders can advocate for educational reforms that maintain the sanctity of Qur'anic teachings while also embracing secular education as a means to enhance the community's welfare. Furthermore, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide financial support, training, and resources to help integrate modern educational practices into Qur'anic schools.

Examples of Hybrid Models in Other Countries:

Here are five countries that have successfully implemented a hybrid approach to education:

- i. **Bangladesh:** The country has integrated formal subjects like mathematics and science into madrasas (religious schools), allowing students to pursue both religious and secular education simultaneously (Islam, 2019).
- ii. **Indonesia:** In Indonesia, many Islamic schools have incorporated vocational training alongside traditional Islamic studies. This has helped students gain practical skills while continuing their religious education (Ali, 2020).
- iii. **Pakistan:** In Pakistan, there has been an ongoing effort to integrate modern education, such as literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, into madrasas. The government has worked with NGOs to provide training and resources to bridge the gap between religious and secular education (Zaman, 2021).
- iv. **Egypt:** Egypt has successfully integrated vocational education into its religious schools, allowing students to learn skills like carpentry, tailoring, and agriculture while continuing their religious studies. This hybrid model has helped students become more economically self-sufficient (Farouk, 2020).
- v. **Malaysia:** Malaysia has developed a hybrid education system in its Islamic schools by combining religious education with subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies. The system also includes vocational training to ensure students are well-prepared for both spiritual and practical life (Ismail, 2019).

These countries provide successful examples of how hybrid education models can be implemented to integrate both religious and secular elements, resulting in more holistic and inclusive educational systems.

Challenges and Counterarguments

The hybrid model of integrating formal education with Traditional Qur'anic Schools faces several challenges and counterarguments, many of which stem from resistance to change and logistical constraints. The following are some of the challenges and counterarguments the model is facing:

- i. **Resistance from Religious Scholars and Traditionalists:** A significant challenge to implementing the hybrid model is the resistance from some religious scholars and traditionalists who believe that combining secular subjects with Qur'anic education dilutes the authenticity of religious teachings. These stakeholders often fear that the inclusion of secular education may lead to the secularisation of the religious curriculum, undermining the spiritual foundation of the schools (El-Sheikh, 2021).
- ii. **Concerns Over Curriculum Dilution and Secular Influence:** Many critics argue that adding secular subjects like mathematics, science, and language to Qur'anic education could lead to the dilution of the religious content that forms the core of these institutions. These critics contend that Islamic values and teachings could be overshadowed by the emphasis on formal education (Nasr, 2020).
- iii. **Financial and Infrastructural Constraints:** One of the most pressing challenges to implementing a hybrid educational model is the lack of sufficient funding and infrastructure. Many Qur'anic schools, especially those in rural areas, are under-resourced, with inadequate facilities, textbooks, and trained teachers. Integrating formal subjects like literacy and numeracy would require additional resources, including funding for new materials, teacher training, and classroom construction (Aminu, 2021).
- iv. **Limited Political Will and Policy Support:** The Nigerian government has struggled with the political will to reform the education system in a way that includes Qur'anic schools. While some reforms have been proposed, inconsistent policy implementation and a lack of government commitment hinder meaningful progress (Olawuyi, 2020). In many cases, there is a lack of coordination between educational authorities and religious leaders, further complicating efforts to adopt a hybrid model.
- v. **Cultural and Social Barriers:** In some communities, there may be cultural and social resistance to formal education, especially for girls. These communities may prefer to maintain the status quo, where children, particularly boys, are sent to Qur'anic schools to learn religious teachings rather than pursue

formal education. The belief that religious education is more important than formal schooling, coupled with entrenched gender roles, can undermine efforts to implement the hybrid model (Ahmed, 2019).

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for reform, and addressing these counterarguments with a clear understanding of the benefits of a hybrid model can pave the way for a more inclusive educational system in Northern Nigeria.

Why the Hybrid Model Is the Best Approach

The hybrid model of education, which integrates both formal education and traditional Qur'anic schooling, is a promising solution to the crisis of out-of-school learning in Northern Nigeria. It offers a balanced approach that aligns with the region's cultural and religious values while addressing the pressing need for formal education. Below are key reasons why the hybrid model is the best approach to tackle the educational challenges faced by Northern Nigeria:

- i. **Respect for Cultural and Religious Values:** The hybrid model is rooted in respect for the deep cultural and religious traditions of Northern Nigeria. By integrating Qur'anic education with modern literacy and numeracy, the hybrid approach ensures that children continue to learn about their faith while also gaining essential secular knowledge. This approach addresses the concerns of religious communities who fear that secular education might dilute their cultural and spiritual identity.
- ii. **Preparation for Both Religious and Secular Opportunities:** One of the greatest advantages of the hybrid model is that it provides children with the ability to succeed in both religious and secular spheres. While they continue to receive an education that is grounded in religious values and practices, they are also equipped with essential life skills such as literacy, numeracy, and vocational training. This dual approach increases the chances of children securing better jobs, improving their economic prospects, and being able to participate in both their religious communities and the wider society (Ahmed, 2019).
- iii. **Reduction of Child Poverty and Street Begging:** A significant long-term benefit of the hybrid educational model is its potential to reduce child poverty and the prevalence of street begging. Many children in Northern Nigeria are sent to Qur'anic schools primarily because of economic hardship, with some even forced to beg for survival. By incorporating vocational skills, formal education, and literacy training into Qur'anic schools, children are better equipped to support themselves and their families.
- iv. **Improved Social Integration and Community Building:** The hybrid model can foster greater social integration by bringing together different groups within the community, such as religious leaders, educators, and parents, all working towards a common goal of improving education. This model promotes collaboration between religious institutions, formal educational systems, and local communities, which is essential in creating a more cohesive and supportive environment for children.
- v. **Addressing Gender Disparities in Education:** The hybrid model can be particularly beneficial in addressing gender disparities in education. In many traditional settings, girls are often disadvantaged in terms of access to formal schooling. By incorporating religious education, which is more acceptable to some families, and combining it with secular subjects, the hybrid model provides an inclusive approach that encourages both boys and girls to stay in school. It allows girls to receive an education that respects their cultural and religious values while also equipping them with skills that are critical for their future (Nashit, 2021).

The hybrid model presents a viable solution to the educational crisis in Northern Nigeria. By respecting cultural and religious values while promoting essential education, it prepares children for both religious and secular opportunities, ultimately reducing poverty and social inequality.

Conclusion

The hybrid educational model, combining Qur'anic education with formal schooling, offers a practical solution to the out-of-school crisis in Northern Nigeria. This approach maintains cultural and religious values while addressing the need for literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, preparing children for both spiritual and socio-economic success. The hybrid model also presents a sustainable way to reduce child poverty, begging, and

inequality, fostering greater community empowerment. For success, collaboration among policymakers, religious leaders, and educators is essential. Policymakers should integrate Qur'anic and formal education into national strategies, while religious leaders advocate for the model's benefits.

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