EXPLORING INFORMATION NEEDS AND ACCESS CHANNELS FOR SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AMONG ALMAJIRAI IN NORTH WESTERN STATES, NIGERIA

*Manir JEGA and Abdullahi HUSSAINI

Distance Learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
*Corresponding Author: manirjega1@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the Information needs and access channels by Almajirai for Socioeconomic Empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria. Objectives included identifying the types of information needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North Western States, Nigeria, and identifying sources through which Almajirai access information for socioeconomic empowerment in North Western States, Nigeria. The research approach used for this study was a survey. The population was the Almajirai in Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna, Nigeria. However, three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents were drawn as the sample size for the study out of the total population of one million, four hundred and five thousand, four hundred and fifteen (1,405,415). The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. Data collected from the research questions were analysed using frequency and percentage. The study established, amongst others, that the major type of information needed by the Almajirai is religious Information. The majority of Almajirai access information mostly through their friends. The study concluded that Almajirai access and share information, mostly, among themselves through face-to-face interaction. It was recommended among others that Almajirai should be trained on the use of electronic media in order to access and utilise online information. They should also be taught the English language to enable them to effectively communicate and share information with people who do not understand Hausa language. This will break the language barrier that they face.

Keywords: Almajiri; Almajirai; Information; Socioeconomic; Tsangaya; Malam; Behaviour.

Introduction

Information is a fundamental and multifaceted concept that plays a critical role in various fields, including social, economic engagements, among others. It encompasses data, knowledge, and meaning and is integral to human cognition and communication. Understanding the concept of information is essential for managing, sharing, and utilising knowledge effectively (Floridi, 2011). Information is a concept that underpins various aspects of human communication, cognition, and knowledge management. It is the essence of data that has been processed and given meaning. According to Manning, Raghavan, and Schütze (2008), information is "data endowed with relevance and purpose." This implies that information not only carries raw facts but also carries significance and serves a specific objective or intention. In everyday life, information is communicated through various means, such as spoken or written language, images, charts, and symbols. It serves as the medium through which people share knowledge, make decisions, and interact with the world. Information is not limited to textual or digital forms; it encompasses the entire spectrum of human communication. According to Usman et al (2019), information plays a crucial role in empowering marginalised communities like the Almajirai, enabling them to make informed decisions and improve their socioeconomic status.

Almajirai, like other individuals in society, need access to, utilise, and share information. This is done through interaction with friends, colleagues, teachers, seniors, among others. These actions constitute information behaviour. Information behaviour is a multidisciplinary concept that encompasses how individuals and groups seek, acquire, use, share, and manage information in various contexts. It is central to the fields of library and information science, information retrieval, and information management, as well as to disciplines such as communication, psychology, and sociology. Understanding how people interact with information is vital in designing effective information systems, services, and policies (Wilson, 1999).

Wilson (2000) defined information behaviour as the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information (including both active and passive information seeking) and information use. Information behaviour is how people need, seek, manage, give, and use information. It could therefore be said that information behaviour describes the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular, how people seek and utilise information (Bates, 2005). In order to understand the Almajiri information needs and seeking behaviour, it will be interesting to know their information need, sources, access, sharing and utilisation in relation to socioeconomic empowerment. According to Olalekan and Dike (2020), understanding the information behaviour of marginalised groups like the Almajirai is crucial for designing effective strategies for their socioeconomic empowerment. By studying the information behaviour of Almajirai, researchers can identify their information needs, preferences, and challenges, thus facilitating the development of targeted interventions and policies to enhance their access to relevant information resources. This, in turn, can contribute to their empowerment by enabling them to make informed decisions, acquire new skills, and engage meaningfully in economic and social activities.

Statement of the Problem

Information needs and access for Almajirais are critical for influencing their behaviour. Of course, Almajirai needed and accessed information through many avenues, such as personal interaction, watching videos, listening to sermons, mentorship by seniors and Mallams, observing what is happening in the society and so on. With all these, they look socioeconomically downward, appearing as informants of begging, lack of good healthcare, walking barefoot and in tattered clothes, and malnutrition. These menaces affect millions of Almajirai everywhere they are found.

According to Kenneth (2021), there are over 10 million Almajirai in Nigeria. This set of boys has no access to formal education. In spite of the efforts of both the Federal and State Governments to provide solutions to Almajirai challenges, the situation continues to linger and persist. For instance, President Goodluck Johnathan's administration, in a bid to address the challenges associated with the Almajiri system and get Almajari into formal schools to curtail the social vices associated with this demographic group, initiated the Almajiri Integrated Schools Program in 2012. However, the program proved ineffective as it failed to significantly address the challenges faced by the Almajiri system. Moreover, it remains unknown how many additional areas of information are needed and access channels of information by Almajirai, which are tied to their socioeconomic development, which will drastically reduce their underdevelopment, hence the reason for this paper. The paper focused on information needs and access channels for socio-economic empowerment amongst 'Almajirai' in North-Western States, Nigeria.

Research Questions
1. What type of information is needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria?
2. What source of information do Almajirai use to access information for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study
1. To identify the types of information needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria.
2. To identify the sources through which Almajirai access information for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria.

Review of Literature

Information plays a vital role in modern society, enabling individuals such as Almajirai and their communities to obtain the knowledge necessary for decision-making, problem-solving, and personal development. According to Wilson (2000), information access encompasses the ability to locate, retrieve, and utilise information resources effectively. In his seminal work, Wilson argues that information access is not merely about the availability of information but also about the individual's skills and strategies in accessing and making sense of it. Understanding the information accessed by Almajirai is essential for their socioeconomic empowerment in Nigeria's North-Western States. Furthermore, studies by Bates (2005) highlight the multifaceted nature of

information access, emphasising the importance of considering factors such as information literacy, technology infrastructure, and socio-economic barriers. Bates suggested that improving information access requires addressing not only technological challenges but also social and educational inequalities that limit individuals' ability to access and benefit from information resources.

Information Behaviour and Socioeconomic Empowerment of Almajirai

Information behaviour is a reality in the socioeconomic empowerment of Almajirai. Of course, Almajirai engage in accessing, sharing, and utilising information for their socioeconomic empowerment. For example, they are being informed by their colleagues, friends, seniors, on how to stay independent for means of livelihood. This information helps them to venture into occupations such as felling firewood and other menial jobs. Socioeconomic empowerment refers to the process of improving the social and economic well-being of individuals and communities, typically measured by indicators such as income, education, and health, among others (UNDP, 2020). It involves various policies and interventions aimed at reducing poverty, inequality and disparities in opportunities and promoting sustainable economic growth and social progress (World Bank, 2019). Socioeconomic empowerment is a multifaceted process that encompasses various dimensions, including economic growth, poverty reduction, and social progress (Jones & Brown, 2021; UNDP, 2020). Education is widely recognised as a crucial component of socioeconomic empowerment; it plays a pivotal role in improving human capital, fostering innovation, and promoting economic growth (World Bank, 2019).

According to Mustapha and Umar (2019), socioeconomic empowerment of Almajirai is crucial for improving their living conditions and integrating them into the broader society. Empowering Almajirai involves providing access to education, vocational training, health services, and economic opportunities. By addressing these key areas, Almajirai can develop the skills and knowledge needed to participate actively in the economy and society, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalisation. According to Smith et al. (2018), inclusive education policies that ensure equal access to education for all children, including Almajirai, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can contribute to reducing educational disparities and enhancing overall social and economic well-being. These policies may involve measures such as free or subsidised education, improved school infrastructure in marginalised areas, and financial assistance to students from low-income families.

Moreover, social cohesion and inclusive governance are recognised as important aspects of socioeconomic empowerment. The UNDP (2020) suggests that fostering social cohesion through inclusive policies, participatory decision-making processes and effective governance can contribute to building resilient and cohesive societies. Inclusive governance, characterised by transparency, accountability and participation, can ensure that the benefits of socioeconomic empowerment are shared by all members of society, including marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Almajiri Education System

The Hausa word Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word, المُهَاجِرْ "al-Muhajir," which refers to persons who *migrated* from one place to another. Colloquially, the term has expanded to refer to any young person who begs on the streets and does not attend a secular school. Almajirai (plural of Almajiri) are children, usually from poor rural backgrounds, who leave their hometowns to study Islamic education with malamai (teachers) of the Quran (Omeni & Akali, 2015). Most *malamai*, themselves, receive their training under the traditional almajiri school, otherwise known as tsangaya. They do not receive any salary but depend financially on the alms from the community and the work of their Almajirai. The Almajirai usually begin their studies between the ages of 3 and 12 years. They learn about the Quran in schools called tsangayu. When not engaged in learning the Quran, Almajirai in rural areas may work on farms, fetch firewood and water. However, the Almajiraithat reside in urban areas conduct small tasks like domestic chores, running errands, and fetching water (Aghedo & Surulola, 2013). Moreover, some Almajirai also attend secular schools concurrently, or switch between secular and Almajirai schools (Hoechner, 2014). Additionally, Almajiraibeg for alms and food out of necessity to survive (Omeni & Alkali, 2015).

The Almajiri system, which has roots in Islamic tradition, has been a longstanding and integral part of Northern Nigeria's cultural and educational landscape. This concept has been the focus of scholarly inquiry and policy

discussions, particularly in the past two decades. The Almajirai system can be traced back to the historical spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria. It was established as a means of providing religious education to children, often from poor or rural backgrounds. The primary goal was to ensure the preservation of Islamic knowledge and culture. The Almajirai were expected to memorise the Quran and become custodians of religious traditions (Smith, 2015). According to Yusha'u (2013), almajirai are categorised into 3 classes:

    a) Kolo (infant) 2-11 years.
    b) Titibiri (adolescent) 12-18 years.
    c) Gardi (adult) 18 and above.

While the Almajiri system continues to have strong religious and cultural significance, it faces several challenges, particularly in the realm of education. A significant portion of Almajirai education is focused solely on religious studies, with limited emphasis on other subjects such as mathematics, science, and language arts. This narrow educational focus can hinder the Almajirai's access to broader educational and socio-economic opportunities (Brown, 2017). One of the most pressing issues associated with the Almajirai system is the phenomenon of child begging. Many Almajirai are forced to beg for their daily sustenance, and this practice is inextricably linked to poverty and economic challenges. Begging not only hampers their socio-economic development but also exposes them to the risks of exploitation, abuse, and neglect (Abdul, 2016).

Types of Information

Information type refers to the categorisation or classification of information based on its characteristics, content, purpose, or format. In various contexts, information can be classified into different types to facilitate organisation, retrieval, and communication. Understanding information types is crucial for effective information management, decision-making, and knowledge sharing across diverse domains. For example, Bates (2005) discusses the concept of "information types" in the context of information-seeking behaviour. Bates identifies several information types, including factual information, conceptual information, procedural information, and strategic information. Factual information consists of objective data or facts, while conceptual information involves abstract ideas or theories. Procedural information pertains to step-by-step instructions or guidelines, and strategic information relates to long-term goals or plans. By recognising these different types of information, individuals can tailor their information-seeking strategies to meet specific information needs effectively. Various types of information can be used in academic writing, including primary sources, secondary sources, and tertiary sources. Primary sources are original materials that provide firsthand information, such as interviews, surveys, or historical documents (Hartley, 2019). Secondary sources are works that analyse or interpret primary sources, such as scholarly articles or books (Hartley, 2019). Finally, tertiary sources are compilations of information based on primary and secondary sources, such as encyclopedias or textbooks (Hartley, 2019).

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research methodology using cross-sectional survey research design. The respondents are Almarai in Almajiri schools in Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna, Nigeria. Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna were the study targets due to their tradition as centres of Qur'anic learning among others. The population of this study is one million, four hundred and five thousand, four hundred and fifteen (1,405,415) almajirai in the states of Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna. The sample size for this study came from the population of Almajirai schools in Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna States, Nigeria. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table, a sample size of the study 384 was selected for the study using a random sampling technique.

The researcher used simple random sampling to select respondents, where every respondent had an equal chance of being selected. Also, the researcher used a proportionate sampling technique to come up with sizes based on the proportion of each state. Here, the state with the largest population has the largest samples, the state with a moderate population has moderate samples, and the state with the lowest population has the lowest samples. Closed closed-ended questionnaire was used for collecting data on Information Behaviour by Almajirai for Socioeconomic Empowerment in some North-Western States of Nigeria. The data collected was presented and analysed using descriptive statistics in order to obtain the relevant answers to the research questions. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to analyse the data collected. Fifty per cent (50%) of the response rate

was used as the benchmark for this study. This means any finding that starts from 50% is considered significant. Three hundred and forty-nine (349) copies of the questionnaire were duly filled, retrieved and found worthy for the analysis.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Type of information needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North Western States, Nigeria

S/N	Type of information needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western states, Nigeria	States Studied						Total	
		Kebbi		Sokoto		Kaduna			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Religious Information	53	15.2	75	21.5	25	7.2	153	43.8
2	Political Information	11	3.2	18	5.2	4	1.1	33	9.5
3	Financial Information	7	2.0	14	4.0	3	0.9	24	6.9
4	Historical Information	12	3.4	19	5.4	5	1.4	36	10.3
5	Social and Cultural Information	22	6.3	42	12.0	8	2.3	72	20.6
6	Market Information	10	2.9	17	4.9	4	1.1	31	8.9

Table 1 represents the types of information needed by the Almajirai for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria. The majority of respondents, 153(43.8%), feel that Religious Information is essential for their socioeconomic empowerment. This suggests that a significant portion of the Almajirai prioritise religious knowledge and teachings as essential for their socioeconomic empowerment. This is in line with the study of Mukhtar and Suleiman (2018), who found that Almajirai have a variety of information needs, including those related to religion, education, health, and social issues. A considerable number of respondents (72, or 20.6%) indicated a need for social and cultural information. This suggests that understanding social norms, cultural practices, and community dynamics is deemed important for socioeconomic empowerment among the Almajirai. A smaller proportion (9.5%) of respondents expressed a need for political information. This indicates that while some Almajirai recognise the importance of understanding political processes and systems, it is not as significant a priority as social and cultural information. However, other types of information, such as Financial Information 24(6.9%), Historical Information 36(10.3%), and Market Information 31(8.1%), were mentioned by smaller proportions of the respondents.

Table 2: Sources of information Almajirai use to access information

S/N	Sources of information Almajirai use to access information	States Studied						Total	
		Kebbi		Sokoto		Kaduna			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Religious Books as an information source	28	8.0	46	13.2	14	4.0	88.0	25.2
2	Political rallies	6	1.7	3	0.9	2	0.6	11.0	3.2
3	Internet and Online Sources	0	0.0	1	0.3	1	0.3	2.0	0.6
4	Mass Media	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3	2.0	0.6
5	Social Media	1	0.3	7	2.0	3	0.9	11.0	3.2
6	Face-to-face Interaction	59	16.9	94	26.9	22	6.3	175.0	50.1
7	Film Show	8	2.3	11	3.2	2	0.6	21.0	6.0
8	Tea Joint	9	2.6	15	4.3	2	0.6	26.0	7.4
9	Drama	3	0.9	8	2.3	2	0.6	13.0	3.7

Table 2 represents the sources of information Almajirai use to access information for socioeconomic empowerment in North-Western States, Nigeria. The most common source of information for Almajirai is Face-to-face Interaction, with more than half of the respondents, 175 (50.1%), relying on direct personal interactions. This is in agreement with the study by Mukhtar and Suleiman (2018), who indicated that Almajirai rely on face-to-face interaction through informal sources of information, such as friends and family members, and have limited access to formal sources of information. Religious Books as an information source also play a significant

role, with 88 (25.2%) of respondents using them. This highlights the importance of religious texts in providing knowledge and guidance to the Almajirai. Other sources, such as Film Show 21(6.0%), Tea Joint 26(7.4%), and Drama 13(3.7%), contribute to the overall information source but are utilised by smaller proportions of the population. Mass Media, Social Media, Internet and other online sources are insignificant to the overall information source accessed by the Almajirai. The table provides valuable insights into the preferred sources of information for the Almajirai community.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is concluded that Almajirai in the study had an established information behaviour. Their information behaviour is unique to them based on their motive of religious study. Their information needs and sourcing were done the way they operate in terms of religious study, searching for food, and engaging in menial jobs, which particularly determine their socioeconomic gains to empower themselves. They access and share information, mostly among themselves. They face a lot of challenges in accessing, utilising and sharing information, ranging from the volume of the information available to them, language barrier, technological barrier, social barrier and so on. The reason for these could be due to their marginalised status.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Almajirai in Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna States should be encouraged to seek financial information as the one needed also. This, if accessed, will play an important role in empowering themselves socio-economically. This is because socio-economic engagements such as shoemaking, farming, and trading cannot be carried out without knowing the financial implications, which information is necessary to achieve. This information can be from sources such as senior colleagues, Mallams, among others. Therefore, senior colleagues, Mallams, Community leaders and other relevant stakeholders should contribute to providing information to Almajirai to empower them socio-economically.

2. Policy makers should provide Almajirai with access to basic technology, including computers and the internet, to help them explore innovation. Pairing this with teaching digital literacy could encourage their interest in using information for innovation and creativity. Adding creative problem-solving activities and workshops to their educational programs can help Almajirai explore new ideas. This could be done through arts, crafts, or hands-on projects that encourage them to create something new, thereby enhancing their engagement with information in a productive way.

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