

Strategies for Promoting Vocational Orientation and Skill Development among Street Kids of Northern Nigeria: Implications for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The menace of the 'Almajiris', pan-handing street kids, should be of the greatest concern to development planners interested in social economic growth and poverty alleviation in Northern Nigeria. In almost all major Northern Nigerian cities, hundreds of teenagers roam the streets during school hours, pan in hand, idle, begging for alms, making do with crumbs thrown at them. These hordes of unemployed and unengaged youth have helped to fill the ranks of the different insurgent groups, including Boko Haram, currently devastating parts of Northern Nigeria. These youths are known to seize on every political crisis to riot, loot and cause mayhem. This study seeks to identify strategies for promoting vocational orientation and skill development among this population. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative designs was used. Descriptive survey was the quantitative design employed. The study population comprised vocational teachers in TVET institutions in Northern Nigeria, vocational skill practitioners and street kids. 120 subjects were selected from the three groups using purposive sampling technique. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. A 40-item questionnaire developed by the researcher was the major instrument used for the study. The researcher and his assistants also took time to observe three groups of Almanjiris to gain insight into their motivation and lifestyles. The instrument was validated by three experts; two in vocational education and one in sociology. The research questions were answered with descriptive statistical instruments of percentage and mean ratings while the hypothesis was tested using the one way analysis of variance. The reliability test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83 using the Kuder Richardson formular. The findings revealed that seeds of vocational and entrepreneurial orientation can be built in the street kids using film shows, Quranic talks, and meal incentives among others. The paper posited that the poverty-bred insurgency currently infesting the region can be ameliorated if street kids are weaned away from the streets into vocational training and entrepreneurial engagements.

Key words: *Northern Nigeria, street kids, vocational skills, SD*

Introduction

The exponential increase in the number and activities of the Almanjiris, street kids of Northern Nigeria is one of the most serious concerns of political leaders and development planners in Nigeria. The endemic poverty, Boko Haram insurgency and the sundry security challenges of Northern Nigeria have been

variously linked to the street kids who swarm the thoroughfares and nooks and crannies of the major cities of Northern Nigeria. The crisis is particularly severe in the Northwest and Northeast where a sizeable proportion of school age children can be found on the streets, doing works above their ages or begging. The situation is most severe in the North East, which is the epicenter of Boko Haram, the insurgency group which, between 2010 and 2015 virtually laid the nation prostrate.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and it has the largest economy in Africa, valued at over 500 million US dollars. Northern Nigeria represents almost two thirds of the land mass and about 60 percent of the population (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2018). Northern Nigeria also has the highest population growth rate in Nigeria, fuelled by religion-inspired polygamy. Nigeria has 36 states, nineteen in the north, and seventeen in the south. The states are informally classified into six zones: Northwest, Northeast, North-central, Southwest, Southeast and South-south. According to the UNDP report of 2015, if Northern Nigeria had been an independent country, it would rank among the poorest in the world with life expectancy at birth, literacy rate, educational index and human development index below those of almost all countries in the world (UNDP, 2015). The preponderance of street kids in this region is both the cause and the repercussion of this gloomy landscape.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), the mean school ages for Northwest and Northeast are less than six years, compared with about eight for North-central, nine for Southeast, nine and a half for Southwest and ten for South - south. The gender inequality index also reflects a similar pattern of 0.75 for Northwest, 0.65 for Northeast, 0.60 for North central, 0.58 for South-south, 0.45 for Southwest and 0.40 for Southeast. According to Akibu (2015), street kids are children to whom the street, more than their homes have become the real home. They are children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who are not under the diligent supervision of responsible adults. Akibu attributes the street kid menace to dysfunctional families, poverty, aversion for schools, insecurity, retrogressive customs and practices and the Boko Haram insurgency.

The Almajiris are children sent out of the home to learn Quranic education under the care of a mallam but have become a means of financial gain by their foster parents who send them to the streets to beg and undertake menial jobs (Sanni, 2015). The Almajiris are exposed to health, physical and mental hazards. They are apathetic to social norm. They often exacerbate political or religious crises by turning peaceful protests to violent ones. They see street protests as opportunities to loot and destroy. They cause or aggravate breakdown of law and order by killing or setting people ablaze and vandalizing private properties. Most protests in Northern Nigeria were not violent until they were hijacked by the Almajiris. To the law enforcement agencies and protest planners, the fear of the Almajiris is the beginning of wisdom.

The Almanjiris' ages range from four to seventeen. They move in groups numbering between six and sixty members. At most times, they are not violent. They go about, pan in hand begging for food or alms. They appear meek, malnourished, ill-clad, ill-groomed and unlettered, but are adept in turning peaceful protests to violent ones. Almanjiris have been implicated in religious and political protests in which innocent people are set ablaze, beheaded or stabbed. The 2003 protest against the hosting of the Miss World Beauty Pageant in Nigeria readily comes to mind. At other times, Christian clergymen have been beheaded on suspicion of blasphemy and desecrating the Quran. It is also believed that they have often been tools for politicians and the Boko Haram insurgency.

It is self-evident that a nation cannot progress with 20 percent of its children out of school, roaming the streets, acquiring zero skills, fuelling insurgencies and waiting for the next crisis to wreak havoc. This study seeks to identify stakeholders' perception of strategies for promoting pre-vocational and vocational skill development among the vulnerable but dangerous street kids of Northern Nigeria.

According to the United Nations International Centre for Vocational Education and Training (2016), Technical and Vocational Education and Training is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work. Skills are vital for poverty reduction, economic recovery and sustainable development. Consequently, governments and all those concerned with development efforts throughout the world are paying closer attention to TVET than ever before.

The UNESCO Convention on TVE (1989) describes TVE as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life. TVET is further understood to be (a) an integral part of general education, (b) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; (c) an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship; (d) an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development; and (e) a method of facilitating poverty reduction. TVET is also defined as a type of education or training designed to prepare the learner to earn a living or increase his earnings (Amao-Kehinde, Nwagugo & Odumosu, 2010). It is a type of education in which technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applied to modern design, productions, distribution and services essential for success. It comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning for the world of work. Young women and men learn knowledge and skills from basic to advanced level across a wide range of institutional and work settings in diverse socio-economic contexts.

The New World Encyclopedia (2014) defines sustainable development as balancing the protection of the natural environment with the fulfillment of human needs so that the needs can be met not only in the present but also in the indefinable future. The term was prompted by global recognition of the close linkage between environmental health and human development as well as the need to alter social and economic policies to minimize the human impact on the planet.

The term sustainable development was first coined in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and came into general usage following the publication of the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission. The report cast sustainable development as economic and social growth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1987). The concept integrates social, economic and environmental policy and it perceives development as both a political and economic goal, while sustainability is conceived as an ecological goal. The document identifies the “independent and mutually reinforcing pillars” of sustainable development as economic development, social development and environmental protection.

The United Nations Division for Sustainable Development (2005) identifies several areas as falling within the scope of sustainable development. These include agriculture, biodiversity, capacity building, climate change, education and awareness, poverty, sanitation, technology, trade and environment, sanitation, water and waste among others.

Sustainable development is a TVET concern because while TVET is all about personal progress and national development, unbridled development portends danger to future generations and to mankind as a race (Kohama, 2012; Harry & Saliu, 2016). For instance, while logging is necessary for construction and other creative tasks, reckless logging could damage the ecosystem, impair biodiversity accelerate desertification and ultimately affect the quality of life on earth. These concerns have helped introduce in TVET, concepts like Green TVET characterized by activities like reforestation and environmental protection.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing number of Almanjiris, street kids meant to be in Quranic schools on the streets of Northern Nigeria is potentially a big threat to the socio economic progress, security and stability of the Nigerian state. The reality of having almost one quarter of school age children out of school poses grave danger to the nation’s economy both for the present and the future. The children are largely malnourished, not productively engaged and oblivious of the norms and morals needed to build in them creativity and civility for good citizenship. They are also implicated in arson, political violence and the Boko Haram insurgency. The Almanjiris are the exemplars of the Boko Haram philosophy that Western

Education is a crime. This state of affairs cannot be allowed to persist if Nigeria is to endure as a democratic, progressive state.

It is the perception of this researcher that impartation of vocational orientation and skills can be the ideal strategy to rid the streets of Northern Nigeria of street kids. There is therefore the need to identify methods and instruments of creative engagement to wean the street kids from their indolence and retrogressive world views. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no such investigation has yet been empirically undertaken, hence the need for this study.

Research Questions

1. What techniques can be adopted to promote vocational orientation among the street kids of Northern Nigeria?
2. What vocational skills would be acceptable to the street kids of Northern Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of TVET teachers and artisans on the techniques which can be adopted to promote vocational orientation among street kids of Northern Nigeria

Research Methodology

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative designs was adopted. For the quantitative aspect, descriptive survey design was adopted, while for the qualitative aspect, the researcher, with the aid of two research assistants observed and interacted with three Almanjiri groups to gain insight into their motivation, perceptions, aspirations and lifestyles. The study population comprised vocational teachers in TVET institutions, vocational skill practitioners (artisans) and Almanjiris in Northern Nigeria. The population is not finite. Sixty vocational education teachers and 40 artisans were selected using multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques. The researcher also interacted with three groups of Almanjiris consisting of 26 street children, and two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire with two sections. The first section sought demographic characteristics of the respondents. These were used in the test of hypothesis. The second part consisted of 40 items seeking respondents' perceptions in line with the formulated research questions. This section was designed as a 40-item Likert-type instrument with rating scale of Strongly agreed, 4 points, Agreed, 3 points, Disagreed, 2 points and Strongly disagreed, 1 point. The instrument was validated by three experts including two in the field of TVET and one in sociology. The reliability test, conducted using the test-retest method yielded a correlation

coefficient of 0.83. The instrument was administered with the aid of two research assistants who understood the local Hausa language. Data collected were analyzed with mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance with t test. The result of the interaction with the Almanjiris are presented in narrative form,

Findings

Below are the results of the results obtained from the questionnaire:

Table 1 *Techniques for Promoting Entrepreneurship Orientation among Almanjiris*

| S/No | ITEMS | Mean | SD |
|------|--------------------------------------|------|------|
| 1. | Using Quranic schools | 3.93 | 0.48 |
| 2. | Embedding TVET in Quranic talks | 3.91 | 0.52 |
| 3. | Promoting TVET in mosques | 3.75 | 0.71 |
| 4. | Using meal incentives | 3.57 | 0.83 |
| 5. | Using sports gathering | 3.57 | 0.87 |
| 6. | Organizing community talks | 3.58 | 1.03 |
| 7. | Presenting role models | 3.55 | 0.78 |
| 8. | Using monetary incentives | 3.53 | 0.93 |
| 9. | Organizing seminars/workshops | 3.42 | 1.13 |
| 10. | Enacting stringent legislations | 1.67 | 1.07 |
| 11. | Using law enforcement agents | 1.32 | 0.87 |
| 12. | Forcing students to attend schools | 2.88 | 0.95 |
| 13. | Using forced apprenticeship | 2.73 | 1.12 |
| 14. | Using group counseling | 3.57 | 0.87 |
| 15. | Promoting TVET on billboards | 2.99 | 1.11 |
| 16. | Using radio and television | 3.33 | 0.88 |
| 17. | Giving rewards to parents | 2.93 | 1.02 |
| 18. | Encouraging parents education | 3.48 | 1.21 |
| 19. | Encouraging parent skill acquisition | 3.48 | 1.21 |
| 20. | Using door-to-door enlightenment | 3.37 | 1.09 |

Table 1 above shows that out of the twenty actions proposed as possible means of promoting vocational orientation among the Almanjiris, 8 were rated as strongly agreed, 10 as agreed one as disagreed and one as strongly disagreed. The items with strongly disagreed are those connected with using Islamic teaching and mosques for promoting vocational engagement among the street kids. These include using Quranic schools, embedding TVET promotion in Quranic talks, promoting TVET in mosques. Also favoured are using sports and role models to promote TVET, and organizing community talks.

Are Vocational Education Skills Appropriate for Street Kids of Northern Nigeria?

Table 2 Vocational Skills Appropriate for Street Kids

| S. No | ITEMS | Mean | SD |
|-------|-------------------------|------|------|
| 1. | Plumbing | 3.53 | 0.89 |
| 2. | Carpentry | 3.77 | 0.97 |
| 3. | Bricklaying | 3.90 | 0.79 |
| 4. | Welding and fabrication | 3.66 | 1.04 |
| 5. | Printing | 2.73 | 0.94 |
| 6. | Qur'anic scholarship | 3.95 | 0.42 |
| 7. | Islamic Teaching | 3.95 | 0.42 |
| 8. | Farming | 3.83 | 0.97 |
| 9. | Auto mechanic | 3.86 | 1.02 |
| 10. | Ceramic work | 3.58 | 1.13 |
| 11. | Vulcanizing | 3.55 | 0.95 |
| 12. | Panel beating | 3.53 | 0.97 |
| 13. | Telephone technician | 2.66 | 0.83 |
| 14. | Goldsmith work | 3.79 | 0.68 |
| 15. | Blacksmithing | 3.66 | 0.83 |
| 16. | Commercial Motorcycling | 3.47 | 1.13 |
| 17. | House painting | 3.41 | 1.17 |
| 18. | Sculpturing | 1.86 | 1.22 |
| 19. | Word Processing/Typing | 2.28 | 1.16 |
| 20. | Driving | 4.87 | 0.88 |

Table 2 shows that in the opinion of the respondents, almost all vocational occupations would be appropriate for the street boys of Northern Nigeria. The predominance of Islamic thought in Northern worldview remains evident in their preferences. The most highly desirable vocations are driving, Quranic teaching and Islamic scholarship at Mean of 4.87, 3.95 and 3.95 respectively. However, building vocations, vulcanizing and panel beating are similarly favoured. Only scholarship related vocations like word processing (mean: 1.87) and printing (mean: 2.73) are relatively disfavoured by the respondents. Other favourably regarded occupations include blacksmithing (mean: 3.66), goldsmith work (mean: 3.79) and farming (mean: 3.83). The respondents however rejected sculpturing (mean: 1.86) probably because of its negative connotations in the Islamic world.

Test of hypothesis

Table 3 Comparison of Mean Ratings of TVET Teachers and Artisans on Techniques for Promoting Vocational Orientation among Street Kids of Northern Nigeria

| Respondents' | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|------|------|------|-------|--------|----------|
| Occupation | N | Mean | SD | Df | t.cal | t.crit | Decision |
| TVET Teachers | | 60 | 3.25 | 0.98 | 96 | 0.964 | 2.01 NS |
| Artisans | 38 | 3.29 | 1.01 | | | | |

The result in Table 3 shows that the tcal (0.964) is less than the table value (2.01) at 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of TVET educators and artisans on the ideal techniques for promoting vocational orientation among the street kids of Northern Nigeria.

Report of Interactions with the Almanjiris

The researcher's interactions with three groups of Almanjiris in Kaduna, Kaduna State, Bida, Niger State and Bauchi, Bauchi State confirms that most of the children are between 7 and seventeen. They go out in groups, each with a leader and their mission was to beg for food and alms. The schools are often too populated for the resources of the Islamic scholar who is supposed to mentor and feed them, hence the need to resort to begging for food and alms. They are poorly fed, badly clad and look unhealthy. They do not obey standard rules of hygiene as they bathe at distant intervals, almost never clean their teeth which almost uniformly have become red or brown for lack of care. The children generally have faith in Allah, in their Islamic leader and in their Quranic school teachers. In spite of their situation, they look forward to a brighter future. They are sanguine that Allah will make a way for them. Each person knows one or two people who started like them but are now comfortable. Most of them would be willing to learn a trade if their teacher agrees. Twelve out of the 20 people studied have an idea of the trade they would prefer to enter, given the chance. They all looked forward to being comfortable someday. Only two of the street kids looked forward to attending modern (non-Islamic) schools someday.

Some of the children in Kaduna are from distant towns, far away from their parents. They expressed no dissatisfaction with the care they were receiving and were apparently not dissatisfied with their lots.

Some of them knew people who had joined the Boko Haram. They expressed dread and hatred for Boko Haram. Some of them did not believe that non-Muslims (Aruna) were genuine human beings and would be willing to attack them if so convinced.

The study shows that TVET teachers and artisans were of the opinion that vocational orientation can be built into the children mainly by exploring their Islamic orientation and background to spread the gospel of vocational engagement. They also agreed that sporting activities, role models, television and radio broadcasts should be used to inculcate vocational orientation in the children.

The respondents indicated that the street children should be willing and able to find creative engagement in different vocations. However, they indicated that the street kids would fit in more easily in Quranic or Islam-related vocations. These street kids need attention. They need orientation. They look forward to a better future but do not know how to seek it. They are willing to accept the directions of their Islamic teacher so long as the instruction is couched in religious terms. While they abhor Boko Haram, they subscribe to its basic philosophy that western education is abominable. Adequately mentored, they are potentially willing tools in the hands of insurgent and malcontent statesmen and politicians.

Discussion and Implications for Sustainable Development

The results on research question 1 show that the respondents are of the opinion that vocational orientation can be inculcated in the street kids by using religious platforms for that purpose. Also, they believe that role model, sports events, bill boards and the electronic media, among others can be employed to orientate the kids away from their current indolence to creative engagement. This is in line with the position of Harry and Saliu (2016) that education should be employed as a major instrument of skill acquisition and vocational orientation, self-reliance and sustainable development. The finding suggests that in respect of the street kids of Northern Nigeria, religion and religious engagement could be primed as an instrument for promoting vocational thinking.

The results of the second research question show that in the opinion of the respondents the Almanjiris would be willing and able to learn virtually all vocational skills, especially those which are not overly bookish or computer-reliant. Mallick (2014) citing the Indian experience states that all skills are valuable and every society should ensure that there are enough practitioners of each different vocational skills. This indicates that given the proper orientation, street kids should be able to use almost any vocational discipline to source for livelihood

The result of the engagement with the street kids suggests that they are still malleable. They are not yet lost if government and the larger society can pay adequate attention to them. However, government and the general society needs to move fast if they are not to become willing tools for the next insurgency. Agrafioti and Kalligeris (2015) believe that the youths should be engaged early to serve as instrument of sustainable development.

The result of the test of hypothesis was also predictable in finding no significant difference between the opinions of TVET teachers and artisans on the strategies which should be employed to promote entrepreneurship orientation among the street kids of Northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

With the study completed and results presented the following conclusions are drawn: The street kids of northern Nigeria can be creatively engaged and transformed into productive members of the society if the right instruments and techniques are employed to wean them out of their current indolent and destructive life patterns. The religious institution which largely created the problem in the first place can be transformed into its panaceas. Government and society needs to pay attention to the problem, identify the interests of the kids and use these to re-educate them, ignite ambition in them and introduce them to saleable vocations which can serve as their sources of livelihood for the long term.

The study indicates that there may be no vocation too elevated or too lowly for the street boys to engage in. All they need is education and information. Even the street kids have ambitions. They also want to live in big houses and ride long cars if only they know how. The challenge for government and other stakeholders in societal stability is to fashion out imaginative policies and strategies to positively engage the children before they are recruited into Boko Haram or its succeeding insurgency outfits.

Recommendations

With the conclusion presented, the following recommendations are proffered:

Government should pay closer attention to the problems of the Almanjiris of Northern Nigeria. At the moment, no one appears to be doing anything to address the matter and the problem is not abating. It is a time bomb approaching its zero hour.

The Civil Society should also be involved in finding solution to the problem. Promising Almanjiris should be discovered, pulled out of the morass, and used as role models for others.

The traditional media and even the new media appear to be playing the ostrich by burying their heads on the issue of street kids of Northern Nigeria. The press should not allow a new Shekau (Boko Haram leader) to emerge from the ranks of the street kids before focusing on the problem.

The private sector should not ignore the budding crisis. Factories and supermarkets are often among the first targets of irate street kids. There is the need for industry to get involved in resolving the compounding problems of street kids of Northern Nigeria in the interest of sustainable national development.

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