Assessing socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into formal education system in Katsina state, Nigeria

Adekunle Thomas Olutola¹, Rafiu Ademola Olatoye², Garba Kofanaisa Adamu³

¹²Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria
³Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the socio-cultural factors affecting integration into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. There were 653 Almajiris purposively selected from twelve Almajiris schools in Katsina State. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled: "Almajiris socio-cultural factors questionnaire" (ASCFQ) with test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.88 was used to collect data for the study. Analysis of data was carried out using frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that most parents abandon their children in these informal Arabic schools. Most Almajiris (603, that is 92.3%) responded that their Mallams (Teachers) do not feed them. Therefore, the only means of survival is through begging and doing menial jobs. Based on these findings, it is recommended that all the identified socio-economic factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system should be addressed by the government. This can be done through public enlightenment campaigns and provision of incentives.

Keywords: Almajiris, Formal education system, Mallams, Socio-cultural factors, integration

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Corresponding Author:
Adekunle Thomas Olutola
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, Federal University Dutsin-Ma
PMB 5001, Katsina State, Nigeria
Email: aolutola@fudutsinma.edu.ng,olutolatola@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the right of every child in Nigeria and it is a means of transforming an individual’s life and potentials so that he or she can be useful for himself and the society. There is a wide gap between formal education and any other type of education. The formal education is different from education received by Almajiris (Out-of-school children in informal Arabic Schools) from their Mallams (Teachers). The issue of Almajiris has become an embarrassment to many people in the Northern part of Nigeria and to the entire nation. It has become a menace in Nigeria and needs urgent and serious attention. Almajiri education is a practice that President Jonathan described as ‘dangerous to national development’. In the recent time, Almajiri tradition has been a prominent topic in most national discourse [1]; it is a worrisome situation that needs urgent attention and lasting solution for the nation to develop educationally, economically, socially, morally and technologically.

Quranic schools have a seriously influential aspect of early childhood education in Northern Nigeria [2]. Almajiri is derived from Arabic word ‘Al-muhajirun’ meaning an emigrant or a seeker of Islamic knowledge [3]; Ayuba [4] asserted that Almajiri practice is religiously legitimized since the Prophet (S.A.W) was reported to have advised Muslims to travel in search of knowledge ‘even up to China’. Also, Almajiri refers to a traditional method of acquiring and memorizing the Glorious Quran in Hausa/Fulani land, where
boys at their tender ages are sent out to seek for Islamic knowledge [5]. Ibrahim [6] observed that Islam encourages people to seek knowledge but does not in any way promote begging or allowing children to be wandering on empty stomachs under the guise of searching for Qur’anic education. Hamza [7] opined that Almajiri of present time go to restaurants to wash plates and fetch water so that they will be given left-over foods. They are all over the streets, very dirty, hungry, and thirsty, and lack all kinds of necessities of life. Begging is the most discomforting aspect of the Almajiri system as it brings the pupils out of the supervision of the Mallams and gives them away to negative habits as they come in contact with morally deficient people such as prostitutes, cultists and terrorists [8]-[12]; that makes them become potential recruits for all sorts of vices including terrorism [13]. However, Sule [14] lamented that in Northern Nigeria, the problems of Almajiri manifested in various forms of social explosions like the Mai-tatsine crisis, Yan Daba Phenomenon, Area Boys, Yan Dukar Amarya incidences, and Boko Haram. Consequently, the Almajiri has become more of a social problem than a useful member of society [15].

Abdulkadir [16] stressed that the Almajiri system of education as practiced today in Nigeria is a complexly bastardized system compared to the form and condition under which the system was operating, and its output during the pre-colonial period. United nations international children education foundation (UNICEF), [17] added that Almajiris also serve as domestic servants or porters to other people and do odd jobs that are hazardous and detrimental to their health. Their basic rights to survival and development as well as protection are violated as they are exposed to all forms of violence, discrimination, abuse and neglect by parents or guardians. The empirical findings of UNICEF’s study further confirmed the fact that they are disadvantaged, discriminated against and are marginalized by members of the society who operate, patronize and condone the Almajiri system of education. Integration of Almajiris into formal education becomes necessary due to the problems and stigmatization faced by the Almajiris in the society and violation of Child Rights Act 2003 by their Mallams under the pretence of Quranic schools. In addition, this group of people is causing embarrassment to our dear nation (Nigeria). Formal Education is classroom-based and it is normally anchored by trained teachers. This type of education takes place in the formal school system using well-equipped classrooms and conducive teaching environment. But, the Almajiris find it difficult to go to formal education instead they prefer to be roaming about the streets in the name of seeking for knowledge. Therefore, this study investigated socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria.

Social-cultural factors, as used in this study, refer to the social and cultural factors that are considered as contributing to non-integration of the Almajiris into the formal education system. They researchers investigated some social-cultural factors such as culture, religion, economic situation, shelter, family background, peer influence, food quality and so on, that influence the effective integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State Nigeria. This study also examined the sociological and cultural factors that make Almajiris children neglect the modern schools built for them by the Federal Government and prefer begging for survival.

1.1. Statement of the problem

The roaming about the street and begging behavior of Almajiris has become a menace that needs to be tackled. This has made Nigeria to become one of the countries with the highest rate of out-of-school children in the world. The integrated Almajiris education is essentially designed by the Federal Government under President Goodluck Jonathan to integrate the Islamic school system into the formal system in order to provide quality education for this target population [18]. The policy framework of the Federal Government on integration of Almajiris into formal education focuses on rationalization of the existing traditional system of Islamic education with the view to addressing existing problems and challenges, consolidating achievements and expanding the opportunities for the growth and development of the system.

Also, the modern Almajiri Education models which seek to integrate effectively Islamic disciplines and conventional school subjects, instil values and morals, provide dual language competency in English and Arabic and cultivate a culture of educational excellence has been rejected by the Almajaris and their Mallams. Despite all efforts of the federal government of Nigeria (FGN) to integrate the Almajiris into the formal educational system, most of them have refused to go to formal education schools built for them by the FGN. Abdulkadir [19] noted that children who comprise this population fall into two broad categories: the more vulnerable are children aged 5 to 11. The other category is vulnerable youths, aged 12 to 26. Most of them are from the Hausa-Fulani-speaking ethnic groups and have little or no formal education [19]. As Thurston [20] argued, “the violent Northern Nigerian sect, Boko Haram draws some of its recruits from the Almajiris. As much as there are over 10 million uneducated youths in Northern Nigeria, there will always be a very high tendency for these youths to be used as instruments of violent extremism and ethno-religious conflict [21].
This is worrisome and has posed a great concern to FGN, elites in the Northern part of Nigeria and other stakeholders in the educational industry. The researchers investigated some socio-cultural factors such as culture, religion, shelter, family background, peer influence, food quality and so on that influence the effective integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria. This study empirically investigated the socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria in order to know the real problems of Almajiris and how to properly integrate them into the formal education. This is a worthwhile study, which needs urgent attention for Katsina State to develop in all sectors. Specifically, the study sought to find information on the: 1) Socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system; 2) Ranked order of the socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers adopted the descriptive research design in the study. All the learners in higher institutions in descriptive survey research design were adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all Almajiris in Nigeria while the target population was made up of Almajiris in Katsina State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Firstly, all the local government areas in Katsina State were divided into three using the existing geopolitical zones (Katsina Zone, Daura Zone, and Funtua Zone). Secondly, a purposive sampling technique was used to select two (2) local government areas from each zone because the Almajiris education system is more pronounced in some local government areas than the other. Thus, local government areas that are severely affected were chosen. Thus, a total of six hundred and fifty-three (653) Almajiris (Daura Zone 176, Katsina Zone 266 & Futua Zone 211) purposively selected from twelve (12) Almajiris schools (Arabic schools) participated in the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled “Almajiris socio-cultural factors questionnaire” (ASCFQ) was used to collect data for the study.

ASCFQ is designed for the Almajiris to collect relevant data for the study. It consists of two sections. Section A consists of personal information of the Almajiris such as name of land grid array (LGA), zone, gender, age and so on while section B contains socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria. ASCFQ contains sixteen (16) items and all items in ASCFQ were answered using a 2-point Likert scale format (YES or NO). Two experts in educational measurement and evaluation ascertain the face and content validities of the instrument (ASCFQ) while test-retest reliability was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. This shows that the instrument is reliable and suitable for the study. Frequency and percentage were used to analyse the data collected for the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Answers to research questions

In this study, ten (10) research questions were asked and answered using frequency and percentage based on the respondents answers to each research question.

Research Question One: When last did Almajiris see their parents or relatives?

Table 1 shows that 164 (25.1%) of the respondents’ have seen their parents and relatives from 1 day - 1 months, 225 (34.5%) from 2 months - 6 months; 98 (15.0%) from 7-11 months; 154 (23.6%) from 12 months to 2 years; and 12 (1.8%) from 3 years and above.

| Response        | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 day-1 month   | 164       | 23.1       |
| 2 months-6 months | 225     | 34.5       |
| 7 months-11 months | 98      | 15.0       |
| 12 months-2 years | 154     | 23.6       |
| 3 years and above | 12      | 1.8        |
| Total           | 653       | 100.0      |
Research Question Two: How regularly do Almajiris parents visit them?

Table 2 reveals that 54 (8.3%) Almajiris responded that their parents visit them once a week; 118 (18.1%) once in a month; 94 (14.4%) once in three months; 103 (15.8%); once in six months; 113 (17.3%) once in a year; 22 (3.4%) once in two years; 9 (1.4%) once in three years; 140 (21.4%) once in many years.

Table 2. Percentage showing almajiris responses to question 2

| Response                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Once a week               | 54        | 8.3        |
| Once in a month           | 118       | 18.1       |
| Once in three (3) months  | 94        | 14.4       |
| Once in six (6) months    | 103       | 15.8       |
| Once a year               | 113       | 17.3       |
| Once in two (2) years     | 22        | 3.4        |
| Once in three (3) years   | 9         | 1.4        |
| Once in many years        | 140       | 21.4       |
| **Total**                 | **653**   | **100.0**  |

Research Question Three: How regularly do Almajiris visit their parents?

Table 3 shows that 17 (2.6%) Almajiris responded that they visit their parents once a week; 28 (4.3%) once in a month; 52 (8.0%) once in three months; 159 (24.3%) once in six months; 315 (48.2%) once in a year; 13 (2.0%) once in two years; 6 (0.9%) once in three years and 63 (9.7%) once in many years.

Table 3. Percentages showing Almajiris responses to visiting their parents

| Response                  | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Once a week               | 17        | 2.6     |
| Once in a month           | 28        | 4.3     |
| Once in three (3) months  | 52        | 8.0     |
| Once in six (6) months    | 159       | 24.3    |
| Once a year               | 315       | 48.2    |
| Once in two (2) years     | 13        | 2.0     |
| Once in three (3) years   | 6         | 0.9     |
| Once in many years        | 63        | 9.7     |
| **Total**                 | **653**   | **100.0**|

Research Question Four: At what age do Almajiris start school?

Table 4 presents that 15 (2.3%) Almajiris responded that they started Almajiris school at the age of 1 month - 1 year; 102 (15.2%) 2-4 years; 339 (51.9%) 5-7 years; 144 (22.1%) 8-10 years; 40 (6.1%) 11-13 years; and 13 (2.0%) 14 years and above.

Table 4. Percentage showing Almajiris responses to question 4

| Response                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 month-1 year            | 15        | 2.3        |
| 2 years-4 years           | 102       | 15.6       |
| 5-7 years                 | 339       | 51.9       |
| 8-10 years                | 144       | 22.1       |
| 11-13 years               | 40        | 6.1        |
| 14 years and above        | 13        | 2.0        |
| **Total**                 | **653**   | **100.0**  |

Research Question Five: At what age do Almajiris graduate?

From Table 5, 1, 178 (27.3%) of the respondents’ will graduate between 10-13 years, 301 (46.1%) 14-16 years, 109 (16.7%) 17-19 years and 65 (10.0%) 20 years and above.

Table 5. Percentage showing Almajiris responses to age of graduation

| Response                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 10-13 years               | 178       | 27.3       |
| 14-16 years               | 301       | 46.1       |
| 17-19 years               | 109       | 16.7       |
| 20 years and above        | 65        | 10.0       |
| **Total**                 | **653**   | **100.0**  |
Research Question Six: Do Almajiris parents send money and materials to them?

Table 6 and Figure 1 reveal that, 266 (40.7%) Almajiris indicated that their parents send money and materials to them while 387 (59.3%) responded that their parents did not send money and materials to them. This shows that the majority of the Almajiris do not receive money and materials from their parents this may be the reason while they engage in dirty jobs and begging in order to survive.

Table 6. Percentages showing Almajiris responses to parents send money and materials to them

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes      | 266       | 40.7       |
| No       | 387       | 59.3       |
| Total    | 653       | 100.0      |

Figure 1. Pie chart showing the frequencies of how parents of the respondents send money and materials to them

Research Question Seven: Do Almajiris’ Mallams feed them?

Table 7 and Figure 2 reveal that 50 (7.7%) Almajiris indicated that their Mallams feed them while 603 (92.3%) responded that their Mallams do not feed them. This implies that the Mallams of Almajiris do not feed them, this may be the reason while they move around with plates begging for food and money.

Table 7. Percentages showing Almajiris’ responses to feeding by Mallams

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes      | 50        | 7.7        |
| No       | 603       | 92.3       |
| Total    | 653       | 100.0      |

Figure 2. Pie chart showing the Almajiris’ response to feeding from their Mallams (Teachers)

Research Question Eight: Do Almajiris work to earn some money?

Table 8 and Figure 3 reveal that, 513 (78.6%) Almajiris responded that they work to earn some money while 140 (21.4%) did not. This implies that the majority of Almajiris engage in menial jobs before they can earn money to take care of themselves.

Table 8. Percentages showing Almajiris responses to whether they work to earn money or not

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes      | 513       | 78.6       |
| No       | 140       | 21.4       |
| Total    | 653       | 100.0      |
Research Question Nine: What socio-cultural factors affect the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system?

Table 9 reveals that, 646 (98.9%) respondents say Yes to item 1 (My family does not have money to send me to a formal school, Family role) while 7 (1.1%) say No. 354 (54.2%) respondents say Yes to item 2 (My society do not like formal school (Societal influence) while 299 (45.8%) say No. 11 reveals that, 631 (96.6%) respondents say Yes to item 3 (I am poor, I cannot attend a formal school (Poverty) while 8 (1.2%) say No. 633 (96.9%) respondents say Yes to item 5 (I don’t have money to attend a formal school (Lack of finance) while 20 (3.1%) say No. Furthermore, Table 9 also reveals that, 282 (43.2%) respondents say Yes to item 6 (My religion prefers Almajiris system to formal education (Religious belief) while 371 (56.8%) say No; 347 (53.1%) respondents say Yes to item 7 (My culture prefers Almajiris system to formal education (Culture) while 306 (46.8%) say No; 553 (84.2%) respondents say Yes to item 8 (My parents are not educated, so I attend Almajiris school (Parental level of education) while 100 (15.3%) say No; 615 (94.2%) respondents say Yes to item 9 (I attend Almajiris school to learn Arabic (Religious perception) while 38 (5.8%) say No. Also, 21 (3.2%) respondents say Yes to item 10 (I attend Almajiris school because I want to marry early (Early marriage) while 632 (96.8%) say No; 100 (15.4%) respondents say Yes to item 11 (I attend Almajiris school because I like begging (Begging) while 553 (84.7%) say No; 646 (98.9%) respondents say Yes to item 12 (I do not know the importance of formal education (Ignorance) while 7 (1.1%) say No; 634 (97.1%) respondents say Yes to item 13 (If I have opportunity, I will not go to a formal school (Bad attitude) while 19 (2.9%) say No; 47 (7.2%) respondents say Yes to item 14 (If I have opportunity, I will go to a formal school (Good attitude) while 606 (92.8%) say No; 446 (68.3%) respondents say Yes to item 15 (I attend Almajiris school because many others are also there (Peer influence) while 207 (31.7%) say No and 10 (1.5%) respondents say Yes to item 16 (I don’t like Almajiris school (Personal perception) while 643 (98.5%) say No.
Research Question Ten: What is the ranked order of the socio-cultural factors affecting integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State?

Table 10 reveals that out of 16 socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system listed above; religious perception ranked first followed by parental level of education which is ranked second; good attitude ranked third, followed by societal influence; culture; religion; belief; peer influence; bad attitude; home background; early marriage; lack of finance; personal perception; poverty; family role and begging.

Table 10. Mean and ranked order of socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system

| Item | Socio-cultural factors | N | Std. Deviation | Mean | Rank |
|------|------------------------|---|----------------|------|------|
| 9.   | I attend Almajiris school to learn Arabic (Religious perception) | 653 | .23429 | 1.9418 | 1st |
| 8.   | My parents did not have western education, so I attend Almajiris school (Parents’ level of education) | 653 | .36040 | 1.8469 | 2nd |
| 15.  | If I have opportunity, I will go to a formal school (Good attitude) | 653 | .46566 | 1.6830 | 3rd |
| 2.   | My society do not like formal school (Societal influence) | 653 | .49861 | 1.5421 | 4th |
| 7.   | My culture prefers Almajiris system to formal education (Culture) | 653 | .49940 | 1.5314 | 5th |
| 6.   | My religion prefers Almajiris system to formal education (Religious belief) | 653 | .49571 | 1.4319 | 6th |
| 11.  | I attend Almajiris school because many others are also there (Peer influence) | 653 | .36040 | 1.1531 | 7th |
| 14.  | If I have opportunity, I will not go to a formal school (Bad attitude) | 653 | .25865 | 1.0720 | 8th |
| 4.   | My family cannot afford formal education (Home background) | 653 | .18057 | 1.0337 | 9th |
| 10.  | I attend Almajiris school because I want to marry early (Early marriage) | 653 | .17659 | 1.0322 | 10th |
| 5.   | I don’t have money to attend a formal school (Lack of finance) | 653 | .17244 | 1.0306 | 11th |
| 13.  | I do not know the importance of formal education (Ignorance) | 653 | .16821 | 1.0291 | 12th |
| 16.  | I don’t like Almajiris school (Personal perception) | 653 | .12289 | 1.0153 | 13th |
| 3.   | I am poor, I cannot attend a formal school (Poverty) | 653 | .11099 | 1.0123 | 14th |
| 1.   | My family does not have money to send me to a formal school (Family role) | 653 | .10306 | 1.0107 | 15th |
| 12.  | I attend Almajiris school because I like begging (Begging) | 653 | .10306 | 1.0107 | 16th |
3.2. Discussion of findings

Based on the data collected, the findings of this study revealed that majority 225 (34.5%) of the respondents have seen their parents and relatives from 2 months - 6 months while 140 (21.4%) Almajiris responded that their parents visit them once in many years. This means that these Almajiris did not have parental care. Three hundred and fifteen, 315 (48.2%) Almajiris responded that they visit their parents once in a year. The findings of the study is supported by Abdulmalik [22] which noted Almajiris find themselves in peculiar circumstances, lacking the protection of secure family relationships, having been separated from their parents as early as 3 years of age. Gommen [23] noted that these children are dumped in Almajiri schools because Islamic education is free; and in most cases, some of the parents never show up again, let alone cater for their children.

From the findings of this study, 339 (51.9%) 5-7yrs Almajiris responded that they started Almajiri school at the age of 5-7yrs while 301 (46.1%) Almajiris responded that they will graduate between 14-16yrs. The findings of Abdulkadir [19] supported the findings of the study, he opined that children who comprise Almajiris population fall into two broad categories: the more vulnerable are children aged 5 to 11. The second category are vulnerable youths aged 12 to 26. Moreover, 387 (59.3%) Almajiris responded that their parents did not send money and materials to them; 603 (92.3%) responded that their Mallams do not feed them while 513 (78.6%) Almajiris responded that they work to earn some money. This shows that the majority of the Almajiris do not receive money and materials from their parents and their Mallams do not provide food for them which make lives difficult and they work to earn some money. This may be the reason while they engage in menial jobs and move round with their plates begging for food and money so they can survive. The findings are in agreement with Adamu [24] which revealed that these children roam on the streets for the purpose of getting alms; and they engage in some forms of labour to earn a living. Furthermore these children usually go hungry, engage in hazardous and odd jobs in exchange for food, and are exposed to the elements on the streets [22], [25].

The findings revealed that all the 16 socio-cultural factors (Family role; Societal influence; Poverty; Home background; Lack of finance; Religious belief; Culture; Parental level of education; Religion perception; Ignorance; Bad attitude; Good attitude; Peer influence, Personal perception) affect the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system. The findings are supported by Isiaka [26] who revealed that the Almajiris educational system is being adversely affected by some problems such as insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor planning and supervision and poor public enlightenment programme. In addition, out of fourteen socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system; religion perception ranked first, parental level of education ranked second; good attitude, ranked third; societal influence ranked fourth and culture ranked fifth. Abubakar-Abdullateef [27] observed that Almajiri pupils had a significantly higher proportion coming from polygamous homes, and had fathers and mothers with lower education.

4. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the socio-cultural factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in Katsina State, Nigeria. All the factors (Family role; Societal influence; Poverty; Home background; Lack of finance; Religious belief; Culture; Parental level of education; Religion perception; Ignorance; Bad attitude; Good attitude; Peer influence, Personal perception) affect the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system in varying degrees. The findings of this study generally reveal the poverty and agony of the Almajiris. It reveals a lack of parental care and hazards they are exposed to on a daily basis. There is an urgent need for the government and relevant education stakeholders to tackle the problem of Almajiris (out-of-school children) in Katsina State and Northern Nigeria in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All the identified socio-economic factors affecting the integration of Almajiris into the formal education system should be addressed by the government. This can be done through public enlightenment campaigns and provision of incentives. Adequate incentive should be provided by the government if they want the Almajiris to go to formal schools. Government should help the Mallams to provide shelter and food for the Almajiris in order to eradicate begging activities of Almajiris in the society. Regular orientation should be given to Mallams on how to take care of the Almajiris in order to improve their well-being.
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**BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS**

Olutola, Adekunle Thomas PhD. is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria. He holds a PhD. Degree in Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation. His areas of research interest are: Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation, Science Education, E-learning, Validation and Standardization of Achievement Tests, Orcids No: 0000-0002-5958-793X.

Olatoye, Rafiu Ademola PhD. is a Professor of Educational Evaluation in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria. His areas of research interest are: Educational Evaluation, Science Education and E-learning.

Garba K/Naisa Adamu PhD. is an Associate Professor of Soil Geography in the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State Nigeria. He is interested in Soil and Water Analysis and Management, Fadama Farming System as well as Effects of the Environment on the Soil and Water Qualities.