



Child begging, as a manifestation of child labour in Dagbon of Northern Ghana, the perspectives of *mallams* and parents

Tufeiru Fuseini*, Marguerite Daniel

Department of Health Promotion and Development, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, P. O. Box 7807, 5020 Bergen, Norway



ABSTRACT

The existence of begging in Ghana is a historical phenomenon. In the past, it was interpreted in religious and geographical terms where the beggars in the capital city of Accra were said to be destitute Muslims coming from the northern sector of Ghana due to the poverty situation in the area. This study looks at the position of Islam on begging. It also highlights good ways of raising a child in *Dagbon* and why parents send their children to beg. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to explore the perspectives of *mallams* and parents regarding child begging in *Dagbon* and data were also collected through participant observation. Our study shows that there was a dichotomy of opinions between clergy participants (who stated that Islam does not support begging) and the parent participants (who believed Islam supported begging). The practice of child begging in *Dagbon* differs from how it is practiced elsewhere in West Africa. The role of the secular Ghanaian government regarding child begging, in spite of laws on compulsory education and a ban on child labour, is largely absent.

1. Introduction

Child begging, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), is a form of forced child labour¹ (IPEC, 2015). Milne (2015) argues that child labour is a global menace and that no country in the world is immune to the problem. Available records show that about 215 million children, the majority of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa (Mace, 2016), are child labourers in the world. Child labour infringes on the fundamental human rights of the child especially the rights to education, good health and mental and physical development (Unicef, 2004). The trade-off that occurs between schooling and child labour also applies in the case of child begging: begging disrupts time spent in school and reduces educational success (Fuseini & Daniel, 2018). In the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1990), a child is defined as ‘... every human being below the age of 18 years.’ The same definition is used in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and Ghana’s Children’s Act of 1998. We use this definition of a child throughout the article.

Child begging, although not widespread in Ghana, occurs in specific contexts and communities in some parts of Northern Ghana. The Northern Region of Ghana is dominated by Muslims with a high incidence of poverty. Samuel, Thomas, Christian, and Ezekiel (2013) note that about 74.0% of the population in the region are engaged in peasant farming and only 0.4% of the rural folk are into clerical or professional work or employment. Also, about 70% of the people in the region are

living below the poverty line (Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015). Alenoma (2012) reports that parents and guardians in *Tamale*, the capital of the Northern Region of Ghana, due to poverty, allow children to beg on the streets to get pocket money to go to school. Weiss (2007) reports that Muslim clergy (known as ‘*mallams*’) in the Northern region of Ghana view begging as a shameful act and that those who are practising it in the regional capital, *Tamale*, are trying to avoid the stigma that is associated with it from their communities. The clerics believe that the reason people beg is not due to Islam but rather because the alms that are given reinforce those in the begging business. They maintain that though it is embarrassing to see people begging, nothing could be done about it (Weiss, 2007).

In Ghana, both begging and child labour are illegal. Attempts to ban begging in Ghana can be traced back to the pre-independence era through the enactment of the Control of Beggars and Destitute Ordinance of 1957 to officially appease public resentments against the beggar population in the capital city of Ghana, Accra (Weiss, 2007). The Beggars and Destitute Act of 1969, the content of which did not depart from the 1957 ordinance, recaptured the state’s position on begging. Under the Beggars and Destitute Act (NLCD 392), section (2), begging is a criminal act in Ghana and offenders are to be prosecuted (G.O.G., 1969). Likewise, under the Children’s Act of 1998, child labour is illegal in Ghana (G.O.G., 1998). In spite of the legal position on child labour and begging in Ghana, studies have been done in relation to street children, begging and child abuse. For example, Kassah (2008)

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: fuseinitufeiru@yahoo.com (T. Fuseini), Marguerite.Daniel@uib.no (M. Daniel).

¹ The ILO defines the minimum working age as 14, but children aged 15 to 17 years may still be categorised as child labour if their work is physically or psychologically damaging (ILO, 2017).

reveals that some of the beggars in the capital of Ghana, Accra, are susceptible to abuse. In the Northern region of Ghana, research shows that children are involved in begging either directly where they themselves beg (Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015) or indirectly where they act as guides to adult beggars (Ahmed & Abdul Razak, 2016). See Fig. 1 below for the location of Dagbon.



Fig. 1. Map of Ghana Showing Dagbon.

1.1. Education, Islam and parental responsibility

Education is a key element that could create a pathway for people to liberate themselves from the grips of poverty and a safety net upon which the future of a country dwells. Educational success not only leads to an individual's economic status enhancement but to the development of their country at large. Magashi (2015) argues that lack of education leads to joblessness and pushes people into a despondent and debilitated situation rendering them inept. When children beg, it is usually at the expense of their education. Helleiner (2003) observes that begging affects children's academic pursuits because its combination with schooling invariably affects their success at completion. Ballet et al. (2010) contend that in some cases parents psychologically manipulate their children to continue to beg thus undermining their education. It can reasonably be argued that a child cannot decide to beg without the parent's consent. Therefore, if children are begging, the blame is put squarely on their parents because they can stop them from engaging in it if they so desire.

Muslim child beggars, known as *Talibes*, have been studied in several West African countries and the phenomenon is frequently linked to the desire of parents for their sons to be educated. The aspirations that parents have for their children are exemplified by the parents of the Muslim child beggars, under the tutelage of the *marabout* (Muslim clergy) in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal who indicated their preparedness to get better education for their children (Thorsen, 2012). Broader forms of education where children study both Islamic and secular education and other skills that will widen the children's future job prospects is what parents aspire for their children (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2015; Thorsen, 2012). However, according to Thorsen (2012), the cost of education sometimes serves as impediment to the achievement of higher education. Waite (2016) notes that the cost of education continues to increase even in the developed world like in America and the

poor are victims of these perpetual increases in academic expenditure. In Senegal, most *Talibes* left school for *Quranic* studies because their parents could not bear the cost of their education in secular schools. Taking proper care of the child especially in matters of both secular and Islamic education is a salient factor in Islam (Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015). Magashi (2015) reveals that other world religions advocate for the need to give the child proper education and the responsibility either from legal or moral perspective hinges on the parent.

Islam has established views on poverty, begging and alms. Though poverty is a deeply rooted issue throughout Muslim countries across the globe (Clarke & Tittensor, 2014), Islam discourages begging because it is an undignified profession (Bhat, 2015; Soemitra, 2014). Religion has an influence on begging but Islam frowns upon the use of children to beg for the sustenance of their families. It also discourages the involvement of children in works that affect them physically, mentally and psychologically (Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015). Muslims are admonished to work to earn a living rather than beg (Adebayo & Hassan, 2013; Bhat, 2015; Wilson, 2013). Offering alms to the poor is an important pillar in Islam (Budiman, Mohd Amin, & Adewale, 2015; Olanipekun, Brimah, & Sanusi, 2015; Weiss, 2004; Zoumanigui, 2016) to the extent that people, including those who are not Muslims, use any means to become beneficiaries of that benevolent gesture as in Ethiopia, where non-Muslims put on Islamic attire to solicit for alms (Abebe, 2009).

Societies and religious scholars share the blame of the incidence of begging in the communities as they remain aloof with regards to offering assistance to the children who are staying with the *mallams* and are without any alternative means of survival except begging (Magashi, 2015; Omeni, 2015). Magashi (2015) argues that the religious scholars' strict adherence to obsolete religious traditions that are not in tune with our current social and economic order is also a factor. The author further notes that Sunni Muslims have admitted that child begging is an unacceptable practice in Islam declaring it as anti-Islamic because it dehumanises the children. Delap (2009) argues that in most situations some *Quranic* teachers ride on the back of the teachings of humility and charity as found in the Quran and therefore force their students to go and beg. This implies the complicity of some *mallams* when it comes to Muslim child begging. However, it is argued that the *mallams* cannot be blamed entirely for allowing the children to beg because their services as *Quranic* teachers to the children are free as the children's parents do not pay for their education. The *mallams* or *marabouts* sometimes depend on charity or on the magnanimity of individuals because they are economically incapacitated to cater for the needs of these children who are staying with them (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2015; Magashi, 2015; Thorsen, 2012).

Educational achievement in Northern Region of Ghana is low. A report based on 2010 census data shows that illiteracy for 11 years and above stands at 62.5% and with the exception of three districts, over 50% of the people in all the districts in the region have never attended school (Samuel et al., 2013). The authors further reveal that in the Northern region, only 19.5% of the people are literate in English and a Ghanaian language. In the district where the research was conducted, a less than 5% literacy rate was recorded (Samuel et al., 2013). This is a clear sign of literacy deficits which has implications on the children's academic endeavours. The higher a parent's educational level, the higher the likelihood of his children attaining higher education and the vice versa (Antoninis, 2014).

1.2. Cause-benefit analysis of child begging

Poverty is a cause of children's involvement in begging (Abebe, 2008; Bukoye, 2015; Delap, 2009; Fiasorgbor, Mangotiba, Caroline, & Francisca, 2015; Magashi, 2015; Thorsen, 2012). However, it is argued that the main factors for people's involvement in begging are ignored in areas where these beggars are found and policy makers, the media and the clergy do not properly capture this issue in their discourses

(Scarboro, Ay, Aliyu, Ekici, & Uylas, 2013; Swanson, 2007). Swanson (2007) cites Ecuador as an example where the descriptive language associated with beggars include child exploitation, child delinquency, idleness and deceitful manipulation of public to stir up their sympathy. In Turkey, 'liars', 'dishonest', 'shameless' and 'lazy people' are the discourses used against beggars (Scarboro et al., 2013). This stance by the society regarding the issue of begging perpetuates the problem because efforts will not be put in place to tackle the root causes to stop it except to enact laws that criminalise it.

Although begging by children is criticised by advocates of child rights and rights-based organisations, some argue that it yields benefits to the children in relation to their educational advancement (Stones, 2013; Swanson, 2010). Begging has also been the means through which children can boost their trade acumen and financial autonomy (Abebe, 2008; Stones, 2013) and sometimes a means to survival (Kaushik, 2014) or a form of economic relief to the family (Scarboro et al., 2013). Additionally, the involvement of children in begging teaches them humility (Omeni, 2015). Milne (2015) notes that the discourses used by researchers, child rights activists, agencies and organisations in describing the plight of children are framed by adults and therefore contestable. These discourses are not in tune with the position of the children whose voices are seldom heard in matters that involve them. What is even more problematic is the attempt to generalise child rights as the basis for these descriptions.

Parents have a significant influence on whether or not their children engage in begging and yet there is paucity of literature that reflects the perspective of parents on child begging. Likewise, Muslim clergy may be in a strong position to guide parents regarding religious education and yet, on the issue of the trade-off between child begging and education, clergy voices are largely missing from academic literature. The aim of this study is to bring to the fore the position of Islam on child begging and to throw more light on parents' perspective on good ways to raise children in *Dagbon* and why children are allowed by their parents to engage in begging at the expense of their education.

2. Methodology

This article is an extraction from a wider qualitative study (Fuseini, 2016) with data collection conducted from July to September 2015 at "Tingsheli", a *Dagomba* community in the Northern Region of Ghana. "Tingsheli" is a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the participants. Of all the surrounding villages in that area of *Dagbon*, *Tingsheli* is virtually the only community where children from most homes engage in begging, and within the community it is only Muslim boys who are begging.

2.1. Participants and data collection

Data collection was conducted by the first author, a native *Dagbani* speaker, so there was no need for an interpreter. The wider study involved six parents, three *mallams* and eight children. The ages of these children ranged between 10 and 14 years. In this article, only data from the *mallams* and the parents who were purposefully sampled are used. The *mallams*, included one from the village where the research was conducted. The rationale for his inclusion was to get a background opinion on the phenomenon of Muslim *Dagomba* child begging in the area. The second was an elderly *mallam*, selected to expatiate on Islam and its historical link to begging in general, and the third *mallam* was one with a firm knowledge of the *Hadith* and Islamic jurisprudence. All six parent participants, were illiterate and four of them had children who were regular beggars. A young *mallam* was the gatekeeper to access the community; he identified the potential participants. He contacted the parents and the *mallams* and informed them about the research. They signed the consent forms with the first author when he met them. The gatekeeper played a significant role in organizing meetings especially with the *mallams*.

Focus group discussion was the method chosen to get the opinion of the parents on child begging. It generates a lot of information within a short period, particularly concerning social norms and practices (Green & Thorogood, 2014; Morgan, 1996). Two focus group discussions were used, one with fathers and another with mothers. The basis for the split was that, during the first author's stay in the community, he realised that all the women participants were in their marital homes and the male participants were either their husbands' younger or elder brothers whom culturally, they must accord respect. It was therefore not appropriate putting the men and the women together based on *Dagbon* cultural dynamics. The cultural values of research participants must be taken into consideration because the sensitivity of information is culturally specific and the composition of a group has an effect on the kind of information that will be generated (Green & Thorogood, 2014). Green and Thorogood (2014) note that cultural factors can limit the views of some participants especially women's voices can be marginalised. In Rwanda for example, women who were in a focus group discussion with men talked less because of tradition, Coreil (1995). Green and Thorogood (2014) contend that flexibility in approach is required when using natural groups. The first author had to approach the entire process in a manner that would elicit rich information that was required from the women as participants. If the purpose of the research was to understand group dynamics on how dominance of a particular group emerges and how marginalised ones are silenced, then, it would have been appropriate putting the women and the men together (Green & Thorogood, 2014). Therefore, it became apparent that splitting the group into two was the best option and that produced the needed information because the women had absolute liberty to express their views without any hindrance.

A female research assistant was employed to conduct the focus group discussion with the females. The justification for this was that, since the first author was a man, the same issue of cultural and religious consideration was likely to arise thereby inhibiting the manner the women might have expressed their views. In Zimbabwe, because of the sensitivity of the information and for cultural reasons, female research participants were assured of non-inclusion of males in the focus group discussion and female research assistants were recruited to moderate the discussion (Munodawafa, Gwede, & Mubayira, 1995). Questions such as 'what are the good ways of raising a child in *Dagbon*?', 'what is the importance of education?' and 'why do you allow your children to beg?' were tabled during the focus group discussion.

Also, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three *mallams* in the *Dagbon* area to get their opinions on Muslim child begging. According to Green and Thorogood (2014, p. 96), semi structured interviews "produce rich, detailed accounts from the perspectives of the interviewees". They were asked about the position of Islam on begging, how to raise a child according to Islam and why begging is prevalent in Muslim communities in *Dagbon*.

Participant observation was also used by the first author to get a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. He lived for three months in the area, observed when children went out begging and engaged in informal conversations with adults and children in addition to the formal data collection. Observations were recorded in field notes.

Responses from all the participants were audio-recorded with participants' permission before being transcribed, translated and analysed. In the transcribed documents, only pseudonyms were used so the identities of the participants could not be traced. Data were analysed using Attride-Stirling (2001) thematic network analysis through the use of open code, which is computer software that facilitates the coding of raw data. The transcriptions of the parents and *mallams* went through six stages of analysis. These included coding, generating basic themes such as "learning of vocational skills", "doing good to others" and "engage in income earning activities". The basic themes were categorised into organising themes such as "acceptable practices in Islam" and "unacceptable practices in Islam"; these organising themes were then grouped into global themes like "voice of Islam" and "child

Table 1
Summary of data analysis showing global, organising and basic themes.

Global themes	Organising themes	Basic themes
The voice of Islam on child begging	Acceptable practice of Islam	Doing good to one another and children Educating the child Earn own living through skills
	Unacceptable practices	Begging, especially by children, condemned Irresponsibility by parents in providing for the child's needs
	Exceptional circumstances for begging	People in destitute circumstances Being an orphan
	Forms of assistance in Islam	Zakat – rich give to poor Sadaqqa – voluntary giving Ramadan
Education and child upbringing in Dagbon	Education	Islamic religious knowledge and principles Secular – ‘English’ Schools Vocational skills like farming
	Parental aspirations and importance of education	High parental expectations Education of younger generation important for community
	Challenges of education system	Poor resources in schools High cost of schooling
	Causal factors of child begging	Poverty Tradition in the area “Giving the child to the mallams”

education and parental responsibility” (see Table 1 below for more details). Explaining the links and interpreting the patterns were the final two steps.

2.2. Ethics

Permission was first sought from the Norwegian Social Sciences and Data Services (NSD) before the research was conducted in Ghana. Clearance was also obtained from the Ministry of Children, Gender and Social Protection of Ghana. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and content of the consent forms was translated into *Dagbani* and read to all of them before they signed the consent forms. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided and were also told that pseudonyms would be used in place of their names and the name of the community throughout the work for anonymity purposes. All participants were told they could decide not to answer a question if they did not want to and could also withdraw from participation any time they wished. The research was carried out during the farming season and since all participants of the research were peasant farmers, a convenient time was chosen so that they did not lose farming hours.

3. Findings

Findings are presented following the structure that emerged from data analysis – see Table 1 above. The two global themes reflect the input of the *mallams* – the voice of Islam on child begging – and the input of the parents – education and child upbringing in Dagbon. Each has four organising themes.

3.1. The voice of Islam on child begging

The issue of child begging in *Dagbon* is a complicated phenomenon that touches on Islam. The views of the Muslim clergy in *Dagbon* were collected for a thorough understanding of the version of Islam on child begging.

3.1.1. Acceptable practices in Islam

The Quran, according to the *mallams*, emphasises the doing of good to one another and the rights of children are taken seriously by Islam, so acceptable practices that are geared towards a better upbringing of the child are prescribed. The prominent thing that needs to be done is to provide the child with what he eats, drinks and wears and train him on

the principles of Islam, the responsibility of which rests on the father. They noted that child upbringing is of prime importance in Islam to the extent that, it outlines a hierarchical structure of responsibility to cater for a child's needs.

“In the event that the father dies without appointing someone to take care of the child, then it is the grandfather who takes up the responsibility. If the grandfather is not there the responsibility goes to the senior paternal uncles down to the child's brothers and then to the maternal side.” (Mal-3).

He explained that the rationale for this structure is to ensure that there is no vacuum created in terms of who should take the responsibility of taking care of the child at any point in time.

Another acceptable practice that was mentioned by the *mallams* was the need to educate the child. They stated that knowledge acquisition is particularly important when it comes to the proper way to raise a child.

“Let him seek knowledge on Islam and secular educations (knowledge of the moment). When a child is engaged in all these he will not think of begging.” (Mal-1)

By their narrations, Islam places high premium on child education. Additionally, the *mallams* stated that learning of vocational skills is acceptable in Islam and all the past prophets had some professional skills through which they earned their living. They indicated that God has created man in a manner that he does not have to depend on others. That means teaching children vocational skills will make them become economically independent in the future. Involvement of children in income earning activities is also encouraged in Islam, they asserted. This may however not be acceptable in current national debates on children because it will then be described as child labour which contravenes the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The *mallams* noted that a man who went to prophet *Muhammed* to beg was advised by the prophet to work to sustain himself economically instead of engaging in begging.

“The prophet made the man bring one of his two blankets which he auctioned to one of his disciples and gave the money to the beggar to go and buy an axe. The man bought the axe and brought it to the prophet. Then he fixed it for him and asked him to go to the bush to gather firewood for sale. That, according to the prophet, was better than begging.” (Mal-2).

According to the *mallams*, the prophet did that to exemplify the fact that begging was a bad practice in Islam and to give a signal to people

to as much as possible strive for financial independence rather than resort to begging. The *mallams* stated that the category of people who can beg excludes children. Some sections in the Quran talk about begging and those sections relate to our attitude towards those who beg and how God sees begging. The *mallams* noted that God admonishes us to be kind and tolerant to those who come to us to beg. He however praises those who are poor but can conceal their poverty without resorting to begging.

3.1.2. Unacceptable practices in Islam

The participant *mallams* reported that Islam strongly condemns begging in general more especially when it involves children. The prophet of Islam stated that each parent is considered a shepherd, the *mallams* observed. That parents are caretakers of the children they give birth to and must provide all their needs. The *mallams* opined that when the parents meet God in the hereafter, it will be very difficult for them to tell Him that they allowed their children to be involved in begging instead of raising them in accordance with the principles and dictates of Islam. All the three *mallams* refuted the claim that it is poverty that pushes these children into begging because some of them beg to spend the money they receive on luxuries.

Parental irresponsibility in catering for the needs of their children is also discouraged by Islam the *mallams* stated. They observed that child begging is a great mistake on the part of their parents and completely deviates from Islamic jurisprudence and a clear case of sheer irresponsibility. According to Islamic practice, the *mallams* observed that if the economic situation becomes so bad, it is the parent who ought to resort to begging to take care of the child. In such circumstances, the child should not know that taking care of him is through begging because it has psychological implications on him. The *mallams* revealed that the religion is associated with begging especially child begging because of historical antecedents. In the past, there were two reasons behind Muslim child begging. One of them was when they were to buy Islamic reading books to graduate from reading on slates. That, in such situations, the *mallam* did not have money so he would ask the child to go and beg to get money to buy the books.

"If you know you cannot take care of a child then you do not have to bring him onto the earth because once you give birth to a child his responsibilities are on you and there is no excuse for not meeting his needs." (Mal-3).

The second reason children begged in the past was the payment of a small amount of money to the *mallam* when a child was to move to another level of learning the Quran. It was meant to motivate the *mallams* and to show appreciation to them for teaching the children Quran and Islamic knowledge. The *mallams* however argued that it is not acceptable in Islam to subject children to emotional or physical torture.

"At age ten, you can issue threats to him. For example, you can tell him that if he does not go to school, he will be beaten but you are not going to beat him, just the issuance of threats for him to know that you are serious about what you are telling him. He will then know that if he doesn't abide by what he is told to do he may be beaten." (Mal-3).

3.1.3. Exceptional circumstances for begging.

Though Islam speaks strongly against begging, the *mallams* noted that there are exceptional circumstances under which a Muslim can beg. One of them has to do with people in destitute conditions. They explained that the religion allows people in extreme hardships to seek assistance from others. According to the *mallams*, in such state of complete impoverishment, one can beg to solve the pressing needs. However, the *mallams* cautioned that there shall be three witnesses to testify that really, the person is poor. The existence of the exceptional circumstances indeed creates a paradox in relation to Islam's position on begging. Another exceptional circumstance under which a Muslim

can beg is when the person is an orphan, which was captured in the responses from two of the *mallams*. However, the way the religion has structured the responsibility process of who should be in charge of taking care of a child, it will be extremely hard for a gap to be created such that there is confusion as to who is to be responsible in taking care of the child, the *mallams* noted. It is highly unlikely for a child to have no family relation from both the maternal and paternal sides. So, begging by orphans is a remote possibility. Moreover, a person who is being hit by a calamity like committing manslaughter, can resort to begging to pay compensation to the family of the deceased when neither he nor his family has such money. In such circumstance, he can beg to get money to compensate the bereaved family.

"A person who has committed manslaughter can beg to compensate the bereaved family. Highly indebted person can also beg if he does not have readily available option of settling the debt. Apart from these, those who beg are swallowing hell fire when they spend their gains" (Mal-2)

Apart from these categories of begging which are situational in outlook, any form of begging is unacceptable, the *mallams* noted.

3.1.4. Forms of assistance in Islam

The *mallams* outlined measures that are put in place to safeguard the incidence of begging among Muslims and one of these is Zakat. Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam where the rich are mandated to give part of their earnings to the poor in the society yearly. *Sadaqqa*, which is voluntarily giving anything valuable to the needy in society, is another measure the religion encourages because it cushions those in difficult economic conditions, the *mallams* maintained. People should not go to others to beg but rather they should be identified and given the alms. Additionally, the *mallams* stated that *Zakatul-Fitr*, which is a form of charity given at the end of the month of *Ramadan* is also another measure adopted by Islam to help the poor in the society. It is to be given, preferably, a day prior to *Idul-Fitr*.

"Zakatul- Fitr is meant to give the poor in the society who might have gone out on the day of Id to beg to have some enjoyment in their homes". (Mal-1).

Finally, the *mallams* mentioned *Kafaara*, which is atonement for a bad deed committed against God, as another measure to curb the occurrence of begging within the Muslim community. This must be given to the needy ones among Muslims. For example, deliberately missing one of the days of fasting in the month of *Ramadan* is disallowed in Islam and the culprit must make *kafaara*. In honouring *kafaara*, one was to set a slave free in the past but now, one can use money and give it out as alms. According to the *mallams*, all these measures are prescribed in the religion to guard against begging.

3.2. Education and child upbringing in Dagbon

Parents commented on their aspirations for their children, the importance of education and factors that might cause begging to occur.

3.2.1. Education

The parent participants believe that there are several ways by which the child can be raised properly. The parents noted that Islamic and secular education are important to the child in *Dagbon* because when the child attains both the religious knowledge by learning the Quran and the principles of the religion and combines it with secular education, it inures to his benefits and the family. *Awabu* and *Abiiba*, who were mothers indicated that as a parent, you must advise the child all the time and let him attend both the Arabic and English schools.

"In the morning you have to tell him to go to Islamic school after closing then he goes to English school that is the way it is." (*Abiiba*, a mother).

The parents also noted that another way by which a child can be raised in a good way is to train him to acquire skills that will earn him a

living in the future. They stated that as they were farmers, what they do is to let the children learn how to farm and to acquire the different farming skills. In their opinion, sending the child to school is not enough unless you do something for the child to benefit from his education.

"... some children, you enrol them into Islamic and secular education, but you do not do anything. What you know is to just put them there. They will gain some knowledge but after coming from school they roam aimlessly which derails their academic progress." (Sheini, a father)

This implies that parents should not just put their children in school, but they have to ensure that they monitor them closely after school. Additionally, they stated that as parents, it is highly important to give the child peace of mind by being patient in your dealings with him. They stressed that if you are too temperamental when training the child, it will affect him.

"A child needs patience from you the parent when you are training him in life. If you shout at him all the time it confuses him". (Abiiba, a mother)

It therefore means that the parents know that behaviours such as shouting at a child will have emotional effect on him which can affect his learning and that will have a negative impact on his future development.

3.2.2. Parental aspirations and importance of education

The parents noted that they have high expectations of their children with the hope that the children should one day become greater scholars in both Islamic and secular education and occupy high positions so that their toils do not end on rocks.

"Our hope is for the children to become scholars in two domains, religious and English. These days, knowledge in these two areas is significant. If you are not in either of these, then life will be difficult for you. If you have the religious knowledge or secular knowledge, then you have created a vast gap between you and poverty." (Sheini, a father).

The importance of education has not eluded the minds of the parents in *Dagbon* and they enumerated a lot of benefits that go with it. They stated that previously, whenever a letter was sent to them, they had to send it to remote places to be read for them but now they have students in the village who can read their letters. It appeared that all the participants had knowledge about the existing educational system and how government stresses on child education.

"Nowadays we don't send our letters elsewhere to be read for us. Any time a letter comes, you just call a student here in the village and he reads for you". (Nyazaa, a male parent).

Also, through education, developmental projects can be brought to a community. They observed that if a person is educated, he can get developmental projects for his or her people. That people, who have acquired education, have done a lot for their communities. For them, education really changes the lives of people and they fully embrace it for their own benefit if not now but soon. They also narrated that education is so important that those who are educated even farm more because they have money to buy farm inputs to get good harvest.

3.2.3. Challenges of the educational system

Though the parents were aware of the importance of education, they however expressed concerns about the current educational system. They lamented that sometimes government does not honour its promises regarding educational matters in terms of provision of books and furniture.

"For example, sometimes they tell you that they will give you furniture to replace the broken ones, but you don't get them. Also, they will say they will distribute books and uniforms, but you don't get them. All these are problems." (Gagbundoo, a father).

The high cost of education makes the parents feel that the current educational system is money driven and those who are poor will find it difficult educating their children. Sometimes the children write examinations and pass but because of the exorbitant school fees they do not progress further, they observed. For the parents, the government must do something about the escalating school fees.

3.2.4. Causal factors of child begging in *Dagbon*

The parents in *Dagbon* are aware of the good ways to raise a child and aspire for their children. They are also aware of the importance of education. However, there are reasons for the children's engagement in begging instead of attending school regularly. One of the factors responsible for the children's involvement in begging is poverty. The parents see themselves as poor so allowing the children to beg gives them some economic relief.

"My opinion on child begging is that it gives us some relief. Sometimes you will be struggling but when the child goes to beg and comes back you get some relief because it can feed you and the child". (Asana, a mother).

The issue of poverty being one of the reasons the children beg however became a contentious issue among the male participants as some disagreed with the assertion that poverty was the cause of child begging in the area. They argued that there are some people who are well to do but they allow their children to go to beg as a move to amass wealth.

"There are interested in cheating and want to get things cheap because some of them store their farm produce to be sold when prices are high and rather depend on what the children get from begging and some of the children often beg for themselves" (Gagbundoo, a father).

All the men in the focus group discussion had one voice which was that the children were motivated to beg because of their self-gains. The parents (fathers) noted that what reinforces the children, and makes it impossible for them to stop the practice, is buying of mobile phones, bicycles, movies and other things. They admitted that some of the children are from poor homes whom they know but that majority of them take it as business so they cannot stop it. When the children came to the school for the research activity, the first author noticed that two of them were holding mobile phones. He asked them whether those phones were theirs and their responses were in the affirmative.

"These days begging is at a different level where you see a child who has finished begging at a particular village, he brings out a phone from his pocket and calls a friend to know where he is." (Gagbundoo, a parent).

Understanding the influential factors of begging in *Dagbon* becomes more complicated as it also has to do with tradition, so some children beg because it is a tradition of the area. For them, once you are a Muslim, you are free to beg if you wish even if the situation does not call for begging as prescribed by the religion.

"When you see a child begging then he is from a Muslim community and this community they have been doing it since time immemorial". (Awabu, a mother)

"We are still in begging because it is a tradition of this area and we benefit from the kindness of people through begging. A Muslim cannot say you do not benefit from begging". (Asana, a mother).

In this case, what qualifies a person to beg is being a Muslim not the economic circumstance. This belief makes begging a justifiable venture because their grandparents and their parents were also beggars, legitimising the status of the children as beggars.

Additionally, the parents noted that giving the children to *mallams* was also part of the reasons the children are begging. In this situation, it is not the parent (father) who sends the children directly to beg but they are put in conditions that compel them to become beggars. People continue to give their children to the *mallam* for Quranic studies.

"In the olden days during the advent of Islam, when a child was given to a mallam to be taught Islamic education, the teacher had his knowledge but did not have food that was enough for him and the child. In such situation he would ask the child to go and beg because the mallam knew that the people were kind." (Mal-1.).

So, for purposes of learning the Quran, a parent gives his child to the mallam even if he goes and engages in begging. Mothers of these children claimed that the inability of the fathers to give the children pocket money to go to school is also a reason for allowing the children to beg. Since the mothers do not have money to give to the children, they connive with the children to go to beg so that the money they get is kept for them by their mothers and when they are to go to school, they (mothers) take some and give to the children.

"As they are going to school, it does happen that some days you don't have money so what he gets from begging will be what you keep and give some to him daily to go to school." (Abiiba, a mother)

"Really, they go to beg on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. The rest of the days if you want them to go and beg they will not agree but we are praying that conditions become better for us economically so that they concentrate on their education rather than begging." (Awabu, a parent).

The number of days used by the children to beg as stated by the parents was also discovered during the first author's fieldwork as a participant observer. It is the school days that the children use to go to beg (Monday, Thursday and Friday). The number of days spent by the child in begging is more than the days he is in school.

4. Discussion

In exploring the position of Islam on child begging in Dagbon, Northern Ghana, we will discuss three salient issues that emerged from our findings. Firstly, there was a dichotomy of opinions between our clergy and our parent participants. Secondly, the practice of child begging in Dagbon differs from how it is practiced elsewhere in West Africa. Thirdly, the role of the secular Ghanaian government related to the issue of child begging, is largely absent.

4.1. Dichotomy of opinions: Mallams vs. parents

Our clergy participants were very clear that Islam does not support begging and it is against the principles of the religion to allow children to beg. Other researchers have also observed that there is no link between Islam and begging because the religion discourages it (Bhat, 2015; Soemitra, 2014; Victor, 2011). It is dehumanising and therefore un-Islamic and an act of illegality in the face of Islam (Sharif & Bao, 2013; Soemitra, 2014). Child begging is therefore a violation of the principles of Islam.

Some of the parents, particularly the women, believe that the qualification to beg is the religion and their economic condition: a Muslim is a beggar and once they are poor Muslims they cannot do away with begging. If the parents are holding these views, it is probably because they have never had any contrary version that child begging or begging in general is illegal or unacceptable in Islam and in Ghana. The mallams, in opposition to this assertion, averred that begging prevails in societies because some parents and governments have reneged on their responsibilities. Magashi (2015) argues that claims by some people that the impoverishment of parents justifies their action of allowing the children to beg is debatable because some do it out of ignorance.

Ironically however, the very people whose interest the economic mitigating measures, such as *zakat* and *saddaqa* purport to serve, point at Islam and poverty as pre-requisite qualifications for the children's involvement in begging. Indeed, poor economic circumstances of parents or guardians are mostly the underlying reasons for children's involvement in begging (Abebe, 2008; Bukoye, 2015; Delap, 2009; Fiasorgbor & Caroline, & Francisca, 2015; Magashi, 2015; Thorsen,

2012). Nevertheless, a reflection must be made on the conditions that a person must meet to be qualified to beg under Islamic practice. There is the question of whether the parents are even aware of these conditions. This then poses a task on the Dagbon clergy and government to disseminate information about the stance of Islam and the state on begging especially child begging.

4.2. Difference in practice: Dagbon vs. other areas in West Africa

Most child beggars in Dagbon live with their parents – in Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Nigeria they live with *marabouts/ mallams* AND the **Muslim Clergy** in Dagbon believe child begging is not supported by the principles of Islam – elsewhere in West Africa the Muslim clergy expect children in their Islamic schools to participate in begging.

Islam's role in child begging was highlighted by the mallams when they revealed the historical link of child begging to Islam in Dagbon of Northern Ghana. The Islamic teacher was the reservoir of religious knowledge and people, desirous of giving their children religious knowledge, would give the children to the mallam for religious training. He was not paid a dime but depended on people's magnanimity for survival. With many children in the house, he had no other option than to allow the children to go out to solicit for people's kindness through begging. The explanation then is, since the mallam, who was seen as more knowledgeable, did not see anything wrong in sending his students to beg, it opened the door for people to think that Muslim child begging was an acceptable practice and children who were not in the same situation as the Islamic students, were pushed out by their parents to go and beg. This could be why it is only boys who are involved in begging in the area because girls were never given out to the mallams for religious studies. Therefore, this current act of child begging in the area can be traced to what pertained in the past during the Islamic school system under the mallams.

The historical link between Islam and begging as described here by the mallams resonates with that of Einarsdóttir, Boiro, & Geirsson, (2010) where the mallam in Dagbon is akin to the *marabouts* in Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau who also allow their students to beg in the streets (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2015; Thorsen, 2012).

However, it is imperative for a clarification to be made here that the historical link of begging to Islam in Dagbon, as given by the mallams, has nothing to do with this current child beggars in the area. These children, unlike their colleagues in Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, are living with their parents not the mallams and the parents allow or sometimes force them to engage in begging.

Some people have argued that in some cases, the child beggars make personal gains from the begging (e.g. possess mobile phones) or contribute to family welfare – in other areas they beg for/on behalf of the clergy. The idea that begging contributes positively to some aspects of children's lives cannot be overlooked. However, there is the critical issue of voice where consideration must be given to the children's voices in making decisions on matters that directly involve them so that decisions that are taken truly reflect the perspectives of the children rather than reflecting adult's priority concerns.

4.3. The 'absent' role of secular government in Ghana

Although our focus was the position of Islam on child begging, this is situated within context of the Ghanaian educational and legal frameworks. It is surprising that our participants hardly mentioned the educational and legal contexts and implied that the government of Ghana does little to enforce compulsory schooling or the prohibition on child labour and begging. What ought to be noted however is that even if Islam has penal measures against those found culpable of the act of child begging, their prosecution will not be possible because of the secular status of Ghana. What is worth understanding however, is that the country's laws also prohibit begging and through that, sanctions could have been applied to control it. The problem is about

enforcement of the laws that seek to protect children. This has been a major challenge in Ghana because of the dormancy of the laws. What pertains in Ghana is related to what happens in other African countries like Senegal and Nigeria where the state is seen not to be doing enough to enhance the welfare of children (Ekong, 2016; Zoumanigui, 2016). This poses a challenge to governments to prioritise issues about children's rights to protect their future.

Religious, global, continental and national positions on child begging are very clear but they are either being ignored or people are acting on a tide of ignorance. This is because, from a religious point and from the various Conventions, Charters and Acts, it is obvious that begging is illegal from the global, African and Ghanaian context. The reason is, it is exploitative, hazardous and more importantly, interferes with the educational pursuits of the children involved (Fuseini, 2016). Note that Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), charges states to guard against the involvement of children in exploitative economic activities and to ensure that they are immune from performing hazardous works that have the potential to interfere with their education. While article 11 of the ACRWC stresses on the need to make education at the basic level universally free and compulsory for all children, article 15 admonishes that children should be protected from all elements of economic exploitation. Ghana being a signatory to the Charter means adhering to the dictates of its content. The Beggars and Destitute Act (NLCD 392), also criminalises begging with incarceration consequences. In practice, however, there is a missing link between the contents of the ACRWC and the Children's Act which both emphasise children's education on one hand and what really pertains on the other hand. The notion of "free" education as found in the ACRWC and Act 560 is seldom achieved in practice and needs to be properly redefined because part of the reasons for child begging in Dagbon is to cater for their academic costs. As noted by (Akyeampong, 2009), that the cost involved in children's education in Ghana covers things that the government does not provide and even if they are provided, the policy framework for the provision is ineffective.

4.4. The complicity of Islam in child begging

Though Islam prohibits begging, the *mallams* in our study clearly outlined exceptional circumstances when begging is allowed. In the literature, this permissibility leverage given to some Muslims to beg is also captured (Poonawala, 2015; Quadri, 2013). It appears Islam is complicit in the issue of begging or child begging because of the exceptional circumstances as expressed by the *mallams*. It creates a window of opportunity for people to engage in begging because there is no mechanism in place to really determine their economic circumstances. Once their economic conditions cannot easily be determined, the grounds are safe for all manner of people to go into begging. This explains why people who are not even Muslims feign their real doctrinal identities through the use of attire associated with Islam to negotiate their way into begging. Abebe (2009) reports that in Ethiopia people who are non-Muslims dress in the *hijab* to attract the attention of potential donors. This is because *zakat* and *sadaqqa* are encouraged in Islam but there are no regulatory processes in place to check who gives and who takes.

The difficulty with the exceptional circumstances under which begging is allowed is that they create a paradoxical situation where the distinction between who qualifies to beg and who is not, is shrouded in complexity. As much as the religion gives room for some people to beg, it also recommends Muslims to endeavour to eschew laziness and to work to earn a living through their toils instead of resorting to begging (Bhat, 2015; Wilson, 2013). This is exemplified by the *mallam's* recounting of the prophet's advice to a man who came to him to beg and whom he gave an axe to go and gather firewood to sell – and is also reflected in the literature (Adebayo & Hassan, 2013; Soemitra, 2014). This is a clear case of how begging is abhorred in the religion. So, the fact that the religion gives some people the opportunity to beg based on

their economic circumstances does not mean universal applicability of the act where any Muslim can jump into the fray of begging without recourse to the laid down principles that govern the act in Islam. Therefore, the encouragement of *sadaqqa* and *zakat* by Islam should not be misconstrued to mean the religion's endorsement of begging (Victor, 2011).

4.5. Approach to insolvency in Islam and the reality in Ghana

The *mallams* in this study enumerated the economic mitigating measures such as *Zakat*, *Sadaqqa* and *kafaara* meant to curb the incidence of begging among Muslims. Also, in Dagbon, there are mechanisms in place to assist the poor and the vulnerable in the society (Weiss, 2007). This epitomises the kindness culture of the Dagombas expressed by the *mallams*. The author reveals that Dagbon traditional system of support comprises six components: to help strangers, to give to passers-by, to assist needy households, to share yields of harvest, to assist women and to offer help during farming season. One of the interventions which is significant yet muddy is *Zakat* which is obligatory in Islam (Budiman, Mohd Amin, & Adewale, 2015; Clarke & Tittensor, 2014; Scarboro et al., 2013; Zoumanigui, 2016). It is a laudable measure aimed at reducing economic hardships and possibly, the practice of begging within the Muslim community. Though good economic intervention, there is lack of clarity, especially in the Ghanaian context, in relation to how it is regulated. There is no mechanism in place to monitor how it is given to the potential beneficiaries and how it is utilized to ensure that it really takes people out of their economic predicaments. Additionally, how to identify the needy to whom *zakat* is given in Ghana is a matter of an individual's discretion rather than the principle of real need. It is therefore argued that the use of *zakat* as a poverty alleviation strategy is defective and does not lead to the improvement in people's lives the reason for which it is meant (Thorsen, 2012). There is therefore the need for the Muslim community to institutionalise *zakat* by establishing a national treasury for an effective financial administration to prevail in the Islamic environment in Ghana. Instead of being rhetorical in extolling the virtues of *zakat*, the Muslim community should rather be looking at its practical application and sustenance (Weiss, 2004). It is plausible to argue that the existence of *zakat* as instituted by Islam as an economic safety net would have solved the problem of Muslim child begging if it was well structured. That would have allowed the children to attend school regularly. Al-Qardawi (1999) states that *zakat* is meant to bridge the gap between the destitute and the rich in society and to reorganise the needy economically. But as much as there exist people in the streets, at corners in towns and in the countryside begging, it shows that *zakat's* existence is not yielding the desired outcomes in Ghana. The parents' position regarding begging relates to Scarboro et al. (2013) who indicate that *zakat* and begging are fundamentally bound. The authors note that as *zakat* gives economic relief to the beggar, it also serves a religious function where it enables Muslims to fulfil a religious obligation.

The *mallams* have however stressed that *zakat* is given through proper identification of those living in real destitution. They ought not to come to the rich to beg. This also complies with Dagbon customary economic arrangements where those in poor financial circumstances are identified by neighbours and offered assistance (Weiss, 2007). Therefore, it is evidential in this context that, parallelism exists between begging and *zakat*.

One-point worth clarifying is the destitution status that qualifies a person to beg under the principles of Islam. Ghana is a secular country and its laws are supreme over any other enactment from either cultural or religious perspectives. The destitute status of a person is a relative term and people may portray themselves as being in the realm of destitution but that must be in conformity with who is legally recognised as a destitute by the country's laws. Under the Beggars and Destitute Act 1969, the outstanding characteristics of a person to be recognised as a destitute include; being homeless and wandering about, having no

permanent residence and employment, insufficient means of sustenance and being defective, abandoned or neglected (G.O.G, 1969). By these defining features of who a destitute is under Ghanaian law, the qualification of the child beggars as destitute, the reason for their begging, is contestable. This is because the children are staying with their parents, being physically fit, not rejected or abandoned and not qualified to seek employment (Fuseini, 2016). There may be reasons that are given by these people to deem themselves as destitute but lay interpretations are not legal representations.

4.6. The Dagomba parent and the child

Abubakari and Iddrisu (2013) indicate that the future status of the child is of great importance to the *Dagombas*. Obviously, the dream of every parent will be to see his children attaining greater status and achieving something in life. It was therefore not surprising that the parents in this study had a lot of aspirations and expectations for their children. They believed that their future life's stability will be determined by what the children will be in the future. Consequently, their aspiration is that the children attain higher academic laurels in both Islamic and secular education. Fiasorgbor and Caroline, & Francisca (2015) opine that child education is a clarion call by Islam for all Muslims to adhere to and that negligence by parents in their children's education becomes a responsibility issue. The *mallams* in this study also stressed that education is an important obligation of the parent to the child. For the parents, education is an aspiration for their children – it is not understood as compulsory under law. Likewise, begging is seen as legitimate under Islam – not as illegal child labour. For the parents, Islamic understanding is much more highly rated than secular law. In fact – do they even know about the law? Ironically, these expectations and aspirations of the parents are not in conformity with the conditions in which the children find themselves. The children engage in begging to the detriment of their academic endeavours. The ILO clearly stipulates that schooling and child labour are incompatible and that a negative correlation is established between child labour and educational achievement (IPEC, 2015). Begging, which is a form of child labour, and the desires of the parents for the future prosperity of their children are contrasting dimensions as begging cannot lead the children to the destination of sound economic and intellectual advancement which is the wish of the parents.

Abubakari and Iddrisu (2013) further observe that *Dagomba* parents exhibit instinctive tendency of expressing affection to their biological children. All the children in this study were living with their parents and yet they were begging in hostile environments and to the detriment of their academic pursuits. The current conditions of these children are in contrast to parental love and therefore diverge from the findings of the authors. Therefore, it can be conjectured that such kind of affection dwells under sound economic circumstances but not an insecure one as being experienced by some of the parents in Dagbon.

The philanthropic gesture with regards to the economic interventions by the *Dagombas* as unveiled by Weiss (2007) is unquestionable and a genuine sense of empathy but may underly the reason for child begging in Dagbon. They are informal, non-regulatory and voluntary customary economic practises and people in dire economic circumstances, and being aware of this open handedness by *Dagombas*, will place the burden of access on the child to invoke the sympathetic emotions from the public to reap the benefits of the Dagbon altruistic culture.

The female participants articulated that part of the reason for the children's involvement in begging is due the fact that their fathers do not give them money to go to school. So, they beg to get pocket money to go to school. Though the male participants noted that the children were begging for their selfish gains, the assertion by the women participants corroborates the findings of Alenoma (2012) who indicates that part of the reason for the street child beggars existence in Tamale was to beg to get pocket money to go to school the following day.

4.7. Limitations

Increasing the number of participants in the focus group discussions could have enhanced a thorough discussion of the issues but, even with the small number, saturation was reached. Coincidentally, all the *mallam* participants were from the *Ahlul-Sunna* sect of Muslims. Though they constitute majority of the Muslim population in Ghana and the Northern region, it would have been appropriate if all the various sects of Muslims in the area were captured to get their perspectives on Muslim child begging. This would have made the findings more representative of the position of Islam on child begging.

5. Conclusion

This article set out to explore the position of Islam on child begging, giving voice, in particular, to the clergy and parents. The article has illustrated that according to the Muslim clergy child begging or begging in general is discouraged by Islam. All the three *mallams* who were interviewed held this position of the unacceptability of begging in the religion. However, from the explanations of the *mallams*, a Muslim can beg under certain circumstances which include people in destitution, orphans, the highly indebted and those involved in calamities. This creates a lacuna and makes it easy for people to fall into this category and qualify to be beggars.

The clergy perspective on child begging differed to practice by Muslim families in Dagbon. Parent participants, while aspiring to a good education for their children, sent them out to beg to contribute to the household economy. However, the desires of the parents and their action of allowing the children to beg are diametrically opposite to championing the course of better education for the children because begging is far from being a determinant of a child's academic success. One major reason that makes the parents to send the children to beg is poverty. Indeed, the Northern region is one of the poorest regions in Ghana. It has few economic and employment opportunities and most of the people are engaged in subsistence agriculture. The fact however is, child begging is not an escape route from poverty but rather, it perpetuates it.

From legal, cultural and religious perspectives, it is not children who should provide for themselves and the family the basic needs such as food. However, what pertains in *Dagbon* is responsibility reversal where parental responsibility is exchanged with the children's dependency on their parents. So, the children then become 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' and their families being direct beneficiaries of their toils.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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