



THE IMPLOSION OF NATIONAL SECURITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE DELIVERY OF QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The paper examines the complex relationship between national security and the delivery of quality education in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic. Anchored on Social Conflict Theory and Human Capital Theory, the study explains how persistent insecurity reflects underlying social inequalities and power struggles, while simultaneously undermining education as a critical investment in national development. Nigeria's deteriorating security environment marked by insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and ethnic conflicts has significantly disrupted educational access, damaged infrastructure, and endangered the safety of students and teachers. Using qualitative research methods and analytical approaches, the study assesses the impact of security threats such as Boko Haram, kidnappings, and armed violence on educational outcomes, particularly in northern Nigeria. The findings reveal that prolonged insecurity has contributed to declining educational standards and deepened the education crisis by weakening human capital formation. The paper concludes by proposing policy-oriented recommendations aimed at addressing security challenges and safeguarding education as a vital tool for sustainable national development.

Keywords: Education, Insecurity, Security, National Security and Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, with an estimated population of over 220 million people according to the World Bank (2023), has faced significant challenges in its educational system over the years. Many of these challenges have been exacerbated by the deteriorating national security situation. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has enjoyed relative political stability under the Fourth Republic; however, this period has also been marked by an escalating insecurity crisis. From insurgency and terrorism in the northern parts of the country to kidnappings and ethnic violence across different regions, Nigeria has struggled to maintain its educational infrastructure, let alone improve the quality of education. This situation has created a vicious cycle: insecurity disrupts education, while the absence of a well-educated populace undermines the country's capacity to effectively address its security challenges (Olugbemi, 2021).

The educational sector is undeniably a pillar of national development, and its success is closely linked to national security. In a secure environment, education can thrive, providing a solid foundation for economic growth and social progress. However, in situations of pervasive insecurity, the delivery of quality education is severely hindered, resulting in poor educational outcomes and a loss of human capital. In Nigeria, national security challenges such as terrorism, kidnapping, and ethnic clashes have had far-reaching implications for the education system, contributing to declining

educational access and quality (Adebayo, 2019). For instance, the insurgency led by the terrorist group Boko Haram has resulted in the destruction of schools, abductions of students, and a drastic reduction in school enrollment, particularly in northern Nigeria.

One of the most visible impacts of insecurity on education is the destruction of educational infrastructure. Schools in conflict-prone areas have become direct targets of violent attacks, leaving classrooms, libraries, and other critical facilities damaged or completely destroyed. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), over 1,000 schools were destroyed in northeastern Nigeria between 2014 and 2020 as a result of Boko Haram's insurgency (UNICEF, 2020). The destruction of educational facilities severely disrupts academic activities, forcing many students to miss classes or examinations due to persistent instability. In addition, insecurity compromises the quality of education when schools operate under makeshift conditions or when teachers are unwilling to work in high-risk environments.

Beyond infrastructure, the safety of students and educators remains a major concern. Insecurity has made school attendance increasingly dangerous, particularly in northern Nigeria. A notable example is the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, by Boko Haram insurgents (Olugbemi, 2021). This incident attracted global attention and underscored the vulnerability of students in conflict zones. Since then, repeated school abductions have heightened fear, leading to

declining enrollment and attendance, especially among female students. As parents become reluctant to send their children particularly girls to school, gender disparities in education have widened in northern Nigeria (Adebayo, 2019). Furthermore, the psychological impact of insecurity on students and teachers cannot be overstated. Constant exposure to violence, fear of abduction, and threats to life adversely affect students' mental health and academic performance. Teachers are also frequent targets of attacks or are compelled to abandon their profession due to unsafe working conditions. According to the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), over 200 teachers were killed in insurgent attacks between 2015 and 2020, exacerbating the shortage of qualified educators in affected regions (NUT, 2020).

Concept of National Security

National security is a broad concept that encompasses the protection of a nation's citizens, institutions, and territorial integrity from internal and external threats. According to the National Security Strategy of Nigeria (2019), national security involves the maintenance of a stable environment in which economic, social, and political development can occur without interference from violence, terrorism, or other forms of destabilization. It is an essential pillar for the smooth functioning of a country's governance, economy, and social systems.

National security threats in Nigeria can be classified into several categories, including terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and ethnic and religious conflicts. The most significant

threat to national security in recent years has been the Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009. This militant group's attacks, particularly in the northeastern regions, have led to the loss of thousands of lives, the destruction of infrastructure, and the displacement of millions of Nigerians. In addition to Boko Haram, banditry and kidnappings, which have escalated in the north-central and north-western parts of the country, further destabilize the nation's security landscape (Adebayo, 2019). These security challenges affect every sector of society, including education, by creating an unsafe environment for learning, hindering the free movement of citizens, and diverting national resources toward military and security efforts rather than development.

Quality Education

Quality education, as defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), refers to education that provides equitable access to learning, fosters critical thinking, and equips students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in society. In the context of Nigeria, quality education includes not only academic instruction but also a conducive learning environment, access to necessary resources, trained and motivated educators, and a curriculum that prepares students for personal development and national contribution. The importance of quality education cannot be overstated, especially in a developing country like Nigeria. According to Adebayo (2019), quality education is a major determinant of social mobility, economic growth, and the overall well-being of a nation's population.

Insecure environments, however, severely hinder the delivery of quality education. Research has shown that schools in conflict zones often face infrastructure damage, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a lack of educational resources, all of which compromise the quality of education being provided (Olugbemi, 2021). The World Bank (2020) also emphasizes that the safety of students and teachers is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of education systems. In areas where insecurity is pervasive, the quality of education suffers as students are unable to attend school regularly, and teachers are either absent or unwilling to work in dangerous conditions. In the Nigerian context, quality education is further undermined by high levels of poverty, inadequate funding for schools, and systemic issues such as overcrowded classrooms and outdated curricula. However, the presence of insecurity compounds these challenges, leaving the education system struggling to meet the needs of the population.

The Fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic refers to the period of democratic governance in Nigeria that began in 1999 after the end of military rule. The Fourth Republic has been marked by a return to civilian rule, with periodic elections, the formation of political parties, and the establishment of democratic institutions. However, this period has also seen numerous challenges, particularly with respect to national security. Since the return to democracy, Nigeria has been plagued by a range of security concerns that have

significantly hindered its socio-economic development, including education.

One of the key issues in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been the increasing power of non-state actors, such as Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and bandit groups, which have destabilized the country and created a sense of insecurity in several regions. This state of insecurity has had far-reaching consequences for governance and national development. In the educational sector, the rise of violent non-state actors has created an environment where schools are under constant threat of attack, students live in fear of abduction, and teachers are often subjected to violence or forced to flee their posts (Adebayo, 2019). Consequently, despite efforts to improve the education system, the negative impact of security threats has left lasting scars on the delivery of quality education.

The Nexus between National Security and Education

The link between national security and education is well-established in the literature. National security, in its broadest sense, is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of all sectors, including education. Education systems thrive in peaceful environments where students can attend school without the fear of violence or disruption. On the other hand, the lack of security leads to the destruction of school infrastructure, the interruption of academic activities, and the displacement of students and teachers (Olugbemi, 2021).

In Nigeria, insecurity has significantly undermined the education system in several ways. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has led to the closure of schools in areas affected by the insurgency, with thousands of students forced to abandon their education (UNICEF, 2020). Furthermore, the constant threat of violence has made it difficult for schools to function properly, with many students opting out of education altogether. In the northern regions, where insecurity is most rampant, enrollment rates in primary and secondary schools have dramatically decreased in recent years, with girls being particularly vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage (Adebayo, 2019).

National Security as a Prerequisite for Education

National security can be understood as the protection of a country's citizens, institutions, and borders from internal and external threats that undermine its sovereignty and stability. In a secure environment, institutions such as schools can operate without interference from violence, conflict, or terrorism. National security, therefore, ensures that educational systems function optimally by providing a safe space for students and educators. This is crucial for both the short-term goals of educational access and the long-term development goals that education aims to achieve.

Insecure environments, however, impede educational activities by threatening the safety of students, teachers, and school infrastructure. In the context of Nigeria, the

ongoing insurgency by groups like Boko Haram, banditry, ethnic violence, and religious extremism have all significantly disrupted the education system. Terrorist attacks and violence in conflict zones have led to the closure of schools, displacement of communities, and a general breakdown of the education system, making it nearly impossible for children to access education in some parts of the country (Olugbemi, 2021). For example, since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency, over 1,000 schools have been destroyed, and more than 1,000 teachers have been killed or displaced, further exacerbating the country's educational crisis (UNICEF, 2020).

The Cycle of Insecurity and Education Disruption

The relationship between national security and education is often cyclical. Insecure environments lead to disruptions in education, which in turn creates a less educated population that is ill-equipped to contribute to the country's development and security. This, in turn, creates more insecurity, perpetuating the cycle. For example, in the northern parts of Nigeria, where insurgencies and banditry have become rampant, millions of children are out of school due to the closure of educational institutions, fear of abductions, and the displacement of families (UNICEF, 2020). These children, deprived of education, may become vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups or may be left without the skills necessary to secure employment, thus perpetuating the cycle of

insecurity. The government's focus on addressing security issues often diverts resources from the education sector, creating a situation where both security and education suffer (Olugbemi, 2021).

Moreover, the long-term effects of this cycle are severe. As future generations grow up without access to quality education, they remain ill-prepared to tackle the complex socio-political and economic issues facing the country. This perpetuates the underlying causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity, which in turn create fertile ground for instability and conflict.

The Role of International Organizations in Mitigating the Impact

International organizations such as the United Nations (UN), UNICEF, and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an important role in mitigating the effects of insecurity on education in Nigeria. These organizations have provided emergency education services, built temporary learning spaces, and advocated for the protection of students and teachers in conflict zones. For example, UNICEF has launched several initiatives to provide education to displaced children and ensure that educational activities continue even in the most insecure regions (UNICEF, 2020). The role of international partners is crucial in supplementing the efforts of the Nigerian government. In areas where national security is weak, external support can help to ensure that educational opportunities are not completely lost, even amidst the chaos of insecurity. These organizations also offer

expertise in creating alternative education models, such as e-learning platforms and mobile schools, which are essential in conflict-affected regions.

The Impact of National Security Issues on Education in Nigeria

National security issues in Nigeria have had a profound and multifaceted impact on the educational system, affecting everything from school infrastructure to student enrollment and the overall quality of education. The deterioration of security, fueled by insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and ethnic conflicts, has disrupted education at all levels. In this section, the impact of national security issues on education in Nigeria is examined in detail, with a focus on how these issues have disrupted educational access, destroyed infrastructure, endangered the safety of students and teachers, and led to a decline in educational quality.

Disruption of School Activities and Closure of Schools

The most immediate and visible impact of national security issues on education in Nigeria is the closure of schools and disruption of academic activities. The ongoing insurgency in the northeastern states, particularly by Boko Haram and its splinter group, ISWAP, has led to the forced closure of thousands of schools. In 2014, the Boko Haram insurgency took an alarming turn when they kidnapped 276 girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State. This event brought global attention to the threats faced by

students in conflict zones and caused widespread fear among parents, who began to pull their children out of school. As a result, the academic calendar has been disrupted repeatedly, with many schools forced to close temporarily or permanently due to security concerns (Olugbemi, 2021).

According to a report by UNICEF (2020), by 2020, over 1,000 schools were either destroyed or severely damaged in the northeastern region alone, where Boko Haram and other armed groups operate. In regions affected by banditry in the northwest, schools have similarly been attacked, with armed groups targeting schools and abducting children for ransom. These attacks have led to school closures, which further exacerbates Nigeria's already low educational attainment levels. The closure of schools deprives children of their right to education and exacerbates the problem of out-of-school children, which is a critical issue in Nigeria.

Destruction of Educational Infrastructure

Insecurity in Nigeria has resulted in the widespread destruction of educational infrastructure, especially in conflict zones. Schools in regions affected by insurgency, banditry, and ethnic violence have been targeted for destruction, either through direct attacks or as collateral damage during military operations. In the northeast, for example, Boko Haram insurgents have targeted schools for bombing, looting, and occupying (Adebayo, 2019). According to UNICEF (2020), thousands of classrooms, libraries, and other educational facilities have been destroyed, making it difficult for

students to access safe learning environments.

The destruction of school buildings and facilities not only disrupts learning but also incurs high costs in rebuilding efforts. With the limited resources available to the government, rebuilding destroyed schools becomes a prolonged process, and in many cases, schools are forced to function in temporary or makeshift accommodations. This lack of proper infrastructure further undermines the quality of education provided to students. For example, in Borno State, many schools now operate under trees or in tents, with inadequate materials, affecting the quality of education that can be imparted (Olugbemi, 2021). The destruction of schools also exacerbates the already existing disparity between rural and urban education systems. In rural areas, where infrastructure was already weak, the destruction of schools further deepens educational inequalities, leaving children in conflict-affected regions with little to no access to formal education.

The Safety of Students and Teachers

The safety of students and teachers is one of the most concerning effects of insecurity on education in Nigeria. The abduction of students has become a widespread phenomenon in recent years, particularly in the northern regions of Nigeria. The abduction of the Chibok girls in 2014 was one of the most high-profile cases, but it is far from an isolated incident. According to the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), over 200 teachers were killed between 2015 and 2020 as a result of attacks by insurgents,

bandits, and other armed groups (NUT, 2020). These attacks, which also include the kidnapping of teachers, leave educators in fear for their lives, prompting many to abandon their posts or refuse to teach in conflict zones. The psychological impact of insecurity on students and teachers is profound. Students, especially in the north, live in constant fear of being abducted, killed, or caught in crossfire during terrorist attacks. In areas where the security situation is dire, attendance rates are low, as parents hesitate to send their children to school for fear of their safety (Adebayo, 2019). The trauma associated with living in a war-torn or conflict-affected area often leads to mental health issues, which further affect students' academic performance. In some cases, entire communities have been displaced, with children forced to abandon their education due to lack of access to schools and safety concerns. The threat of violence also affects teacher retention and performance. Teachers in conflict zones face the constant threat of attacks, which affects their ability to focus on their work and provide quality education to students. Many teachers have been displaced or have fled to safer regions, contributing to the shortage of qualified educators in conflict-affected areas. As a result, the quality of education suffers due to the lack of qualified and motivated teachers, further deepening the educational crisis in these regions.

Decline in Enrollment and Attendance Rates

The insecurity caused by national security issues has contributed to a decline in school enrollment and attendance rates, particularly

in regions affected by terrorism and banditry. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), enrollment in schools in the northern regions has dropped significantly due to the persistent insecurity (NBS, 2021). For instance, in the northeastern states, where Boko Haram has a strong presence, many schools have been forced to close, leading to a dramatic reduction in student enrollment. In some cases, children are unable to attend school regularly due to safety concerns, and in others, entire families have fled conflict zones, leaving behind displaced children who are unable to continue their education (UNICEF, 2020). The fear of abduction and violence has also led to a significant drop in female enrollment, especially in conflict-prone regions. In some areas, girls are particularly vulnerable to abduction by insurgents, who target them for forced marriages or sexual exploitation. As a result, many parents have chosen to keep their daughters at home, further exacerbating the gender gap in education. According to Adebayo (2019), the insecurity in the northern regions of Nigeria has led to a dramatic increase in the number of girls out of school, contributing to the already low female literacy rates in the country. The drop in enrollment and attendance rates not only hampers the educational development of children but also has long-term implications for Nigeria's human capital development. A generation of children growing up without access to education due to insecurity will be ill-equipped to contribute to the nation's economic and social development.

Economic Consequences of Educational Disruption

The economic consequences of educational disruption due to insecurity are far-reaching. Education is widely considered one of the key drivers of economic growth, and any disruption in the education system has long-term implications for the economy. According to the World Bank (2020), education plays a critical role in poverty alleviation, social mobility, and economic development. Insecurity, by disrupting education, deprives individuals of the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the economy. The loss of educational opportunities results in a less skilled workforce, which in turn hinders the country's economic growth. Moreover, the cost of rebuilding destroyed schools and providing security measures to protect educational institutions diverts funds away from other essential sectors such as healthcare and infrastructure. This allocation of resources to address the security crisis exacerbates existing development challenges, particularly in regions already suffering from poverty and underdevelopment (Olugbemi, 2021).

Theoretical framework

The Social Conflict Theory, primarily associated with Karl Marx, explains social phenomena in terms of tensions and conflicts between different groups in society, often driven by disparities in power, resources, and access. This theory is relevant for understanding the impacts of national security issues on education in Nigeria,

where violence, insecurity, and conflict exacerbate social divisions. In the Nigerian context, the conflict between militant groups such as Boko Haram and the Nigerian government has created a society fragmented by religious, ethnic, and political tensions, which manifest in insecurity and violence.

Social Conflict Theory suggests that these tensions disrupt the societal equilibrium, leading to a breakdown in social institutions, including education. According to this theory, the education system is not only affected by conflicts but can also serve as a battleground for power struggles. For instance, the education system in the north of Nigeria has been a focal point in the insurgency led by Boko Haram, whose leaders have specifically targeted schools, particularly those that promote Western-style education, which they view as contrary to their ideology (Adebayo, 2019). This conflict between the state and non-state actors has directly and indirectly undermined the delivery of education, contributing to the decline in enrollment and educational quality in regions affected by insecurity.

The Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment in people's knowledge, skills, and abilities, which in turn contributes to their productivity and, by extension, the economy's growth and development. The theory suggests that a well-educated population is a critical factor in national development, as it produces the necessary human resources to drive economic growth, innovation, and societal progress (Becker, 1994). In the Nigerian

context, the deterioration of national security hampers the development of human capital. The increasing insecurity, particularly in northern Nigeria, has led to the disruption of education, depriving many children and youths of the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to contribute to the economy and society. The displacement of families due to insurgency, such as that seen with Boko Haram, results in a loss of human capital, as children are forced to abandon their education or miss out on key learning opportunities due to security threats (Olugbemi, 2021).

Conclusion

National insecurity in Nigeria is a multifaceted crisis that has far-reaching consequences on the country's development, stability, and the well-being of its citizens. The persistent threats of terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and ethnic violence have undermined the nation's efforts to achieve sustainable growth, peace, and prosperity. Addressing this insecurity requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that includes strengthening security forces, enhancing intelligence gathering, addressing the root causes of violence, and promoting social cohesion among diverse communities. Equally important is the role of good governance, the rule of law, and community engagement in fostering peace and stability. By empowering local leadership, strengthening judicial systems, and ensuring that all citizens feel included and represented, Nigeria can begin to heal the divisions that fuel insecurity. Furthermore, investing in education, economic development, and

poverty alleviation will reduce the vulnerability of marginalized populations and provide alternatives to extremist ideologies. The success of these efforts hinges on collaboration between the Nigerian government, security agencies, traditional leaders, and the international community. Regional cooperation, in particular, is crucial given the transnational nature of many of the security threats faced by the country. With sustained commitment and a unified approach, Nigeria can break the cycle of insecurity and create an environment where peace, security, and development thrive. Ultimately, the solution to national insecurity in Nigeria is not solely a matter of military intervention but also a matter of addressing the deeper socio-economic issues that give rise to violence and unrest. By taking bold, decisive actions in these areas, Nigeria can pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future for its people.

Recommendations

1. The federal government, through the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, and security agencies, should invest in training, funding, and modern equipment, while intelligence agencies coordinate with regional and international partners to improve intelligence gathering and threat response.
2. The federal and state governments, in collaboration with the private sector and development partners, should promote economic development, job creation, youth empowerment, education, and social

protection to reduce poverty, inequality, and incentives for criminal or militant activities.

3. The executive, legislature, and judiciary, supported by anti-corruption agencies, should strengthen transparency, accountability, and judicial reforms to ensure swift justice, effective prosecution, and increased public trust in legal institutions.
4. State and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and traditional leaders should expand community policing and lead local peace-building and conflict-resolution initiatives.
5. The federal government, civil society organizations, and religious and community leaders should promote inclusive national dialogue and implement de-radicalization and reintegration programs to strengthen unity, peace, and social cohesion.

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