Research Paper

Insecurity in Secondary School Education: A Solution to Sustainable Development in Northern Nigeria

Adamu Chidubem Deborah[1], Chinaza Uleanya[2]
[1,2]University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the causes of crime that exacerbate insecurity and hinder the sustainability of secondary education among teachers, parents and school administrators in Northern Nigeria. Three leading causes of insecurity challenges were examined, including school administrators' concerns about the safety of individuals and facilities, the need for well-trained and equipped security personnel to address security issues and the lack of employment opportunities for secondary school graduates in Northern Nigeria. The research questions were developed based on these causes. In order to facilitate questioning and observation of the phenomenon under investigation, a qualitative research approach grounded in the interpretative paradigm was used to collect data. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to purposively select three states in Northcentral, Northeastern, and Northwestern Nigeria and randomly select 36 parents, teachers, and school administrators. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with the 36 participants. The interview questions were structured around the three research questions, and the responses were thematically analyzed. The study's findings highlight the importance of the government leveraging modern technology, such as electric-powered fences and CCTV cameras, to address security challenges and promote sustainable development in education. This paper suggests incorporating an "Education for Sustainability" subject into the Nigerian secondary education curriculum, in addition to the current emphasis on "security management" proposed by previous researchers.

Keywords: *Education, Government, School administrators, Security challenge, Sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

There is an alarming level of insecurity in the secondary school system in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region. This has had a detrimental impact on the country's educational environment, hindering efforts to achieve sustainable development, which is crucial for advancing the area. The precarious situation is worrisome, as there are cases and incidences of secondary school teachers and students being abused, threatened, killed, raped, abducted, kidnapped, forced to marry their abductors, or forced to change their religion to Islam. Parents have lost trust in the government for not providing security to their school children. Thus, parents, students, teachers, and school administrators fear being in places of teaching and learning because they fear falling victim to the insecurity challenge. Terrorists and bandits are on a rampage for war against education in the region. However, there are incidences of children between the ages of 5 and 18 who are supposed to be in places of learning on school days and times but roaming the streets, begging for money, hawking, or farming.

Most girls between the ages of 12 and 16 who were married off to wealthy Alhajis (title given to a man who is a Muslim and has completed a religious journey to Mecca) already have children. Because of idleness, the boys are left with the option of constantly falling prey to bandits and

terrorists who recruit them into their gang. Lewis (2021) claims that Nigeria has the highest percentage of out-of-school children in Africa because of a combination of post-COVID-19 pandemic effects and insecurity. It has been seven years since the extremist group Boko Haram (BH) kidnapped 279 schoolgirls in Chibok. Sometimes, the administrators at the school or the parents of the kidnapped children are forced to give the captive students food and clothing. Over 100 girls are still being held captive, although the majority managed to escape or were later freed. Numerous children have been slain, sexually assaulted, coerced into "marriages," or abducted in large numbers into BH during subsequent mass kidnappings of schoolchildren in Nigeria. As a result, hundreds of schools have been closed, which has had terrible effects on the youth in an area already dealing with severe insecurity (Amnesty International, 2024). As a result of growing insecurity in Northern Nigeria, Premium Times (2021) reports that several schools have been closed indefinitely, indefinitely, with more than 61 students remaining in captivity months after their mass abduction. However, because of unrest in the area, a lot of homes and schools have been abandoned as children and their parents have fled in search of safety and humanity.

Establishing the political, social, economic, military, environmental, and cultural frameworks required for an individual's survival, way of life, and dignity is called human security. This includes safeguarding fundamental liberties, upholding human rights, promoting good governance, providing health care and education, and ensuring that every person has the opportunity and freedom to reach their full potential (Emina, 2020). Therefore, a nation that places a high priority on human security may be able to avoid expending significant resources and energy on combating violent crimes such as insurgency, militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, bombing, political assassination, banditry, student unrest, human trafficking, and other crimes that pose threats to the survival, stability, and security of the Nigerian States (Orhero, 2020). Realizing the need for education for Nigeria's youth, whose population is growing and who experience an alarmingly high unemployment rate, is essential for establishing human security in the country. This is because they are easily exploited as weapons of mass destruction. In this study, secondary school students between 12 and 18 comprise a greater percentage of youths in Northern Nigeria. Thus, if human security and the right to safety education are not provided, the learner may become interested in engaging in social vices harmful to the region's sustainable development.

Every country, including Nigeria, experiences insecurity due to a lack of human security. Human insecurity is a significant issue in Nigeria, the continent's most populous country, with 233,849,552 people as of September 2024 (Worldometer, 2024), alongside challenges like hunger, poverty, and corruption. Nigeria comprises 36 states and one Federal Capital Territory (FCT), each facing varying levels of insecurity. Although internal conflicts between farmers and herders in the western states may not be as prevalent, the southern and eastern states experience numerous incidents of insecurity, such as kidnapping, cultism, piracy, land disputes, electoral violence, and armed robbery. The 19 states in the North Central, Northeast, and Northwest regions of Northern Nigeria, along with the FCT, are plagued by more severe forms of insecurity, including insurgency, terrorism, banditry, ethnoreligious conflicts, abduction for ransom, communal clashes, cattle rustling, youth unrest, religious extremism, armed robbery, and other social vices. However, the level of insecurity in Northern Nigeria is particularly alarming compared to other regions, leading to a higher number of internally displaced persons and out-of-school children.

Between 2009 and 2018, insecurity significantly impacted education in Northern Nigeria, destroying approximately 1,500 schools in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states (Punch, 2021). Unfortunately, this worrying trend has continued in recent years. For example, as of September 2023, 723 schools had to close their doors across nine states—particularly in Zamfara, Sokoto, and Borno—due to ongoing insecurity and community displacement (Vanguard, 2024). The consequences of these disruptions are evident in the national school enrollment data. Nigeria

currently has the unfortunate distinction of having the highest number of out-of-school children globally, with over 10.5 million children not receiving an education, exacerbated by escalating insecurity and socioeconomic difficulties (Reuters, 2024). In Katsina State alone, nearly 100 schools remain closed because of these threats, leaving thousands of children without access to formal education (INEE, 2023). These alarming statistics highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to create safe learning environments and to mitigate the long-term effects of insecurity on education and regional development. In response to these pressing challenges, this study specifically focuses on Northern Nigeria, where human insecurity has been a persistent concern over the past two decades. The region has drawn international attention, as the impacts of insecurity have severely disrupted primary, secondary, and tertiary education. During periods of crisis, students, parents, and teachers are frequently targeted, with Northern Nigeria experiencing some of the most acute effects.

For the past 20 years, human insecurity has been especially prevalent in Northern Nigeria, sparking a global discourse as it affects primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. During security crises, parents, students, and teachers are often targeted, particularly in Northern Nigeria. It is evident that in this region, many parents are afraid to send their children to school, and the children themselves have lost interest in attending due to fears of being abducted for ransom, killed, raped, forced into marriage, or converted to Islam by abductors. This raises concerns about the sustainability of secondary education in Northern Nigeria. This study aimed to identify the causes of crime worsening insecurity and hindering the sustainability of secondary education among teachers, parents and school administrators in Northern Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1) Do school administrators in Northern Nigeria show significant concern regarding the safety of human life and facilities?
2) Does the government deploy well-trained and equipped security outfits to manage the security of secondary schools in Northern Nigeria?
3) Are secondary school students meaningfully engaged after graduation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review represents the theoretical core of an article. The purpose of a literature review is to "look again" what other researchers have done regarding a specific topic. A literature review is a means to an end, namely to provide background to and serve as motivation for the objectives and hypotheses that guide one's own research. A good literature review should not merely provide a summary of previous relevant research; the researcher is also expected to critically evaluate, re-organize and synthesize the work of others.

Cases of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria Schools

Many incidents and cases of insecurity exist in primary and secondary schools in Northern Nigeria. Abdullahi and Terhemba (2014) documented insecurity incidents at numerous schools in several states in Nigeria and beyond. For instance, Cable (2021) reported that on December 11, 2020, 344 male students from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State, were kidnapped from their hostels. Two weeks later, on December 20, 2020, 80 students from the Islamiyya School in Mahuta, Kaduna State, were abducted. Additionally, on February 17, 2021, 27 students from GSS College in Kagara, Niger State, were kidnapped. Subsequently, on February 26, 2021, 279 females were abducted in Zamfara State. Furthermore, on March 11, 2021, 39 students from the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Afaka, Kaduna State, were also abducted (Premium Times, 2021). Gulumbe (2023) reported that kidnappers targeted 20 schools in Zamfara in 2020 and 2021, resulting in the kidnapping of approximately 1,436 students and 16 fatalities.

There are still more than 200 children missing from these attacks. Additionally, Akinwotu (2020) stated that 768 students were abducted between December 2020 and February 2021, and various schools were targeted. These incidents have led to significant disruptions in the education sector, with thousands of students and teachers displaced from schools in states like Yobe, Kaduna, Adamawa, Katsina, Borno, and Zamfara. The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) reported that over 1,000 educators have been forced to leave Northern Nigeria and relocate to other parts of the country (Amnesty International, 2013). Moreover, in 2017, the UN highlighted that the conflict between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces had destroyed 1,500 schools, leading to the loss of at least 1,280 teachers and students (UN General Assembly and Secretary-General report, 2017).

The Causes of Insecurity in Nigerian Schools

Akor et al. (2021), Suleiman & Umar (2024), Ogunode et al. (2021), and Sadiq et al. (2020) identified various causes of insecurity in Nigerian schools. These include school administrators' lax attitude toward security, the lack of a comprehensive school security policy, incompetent security guards, poor building design, remote school locations without proper security measures, overcrowded classrooms, lack of permanent security guards, unemployment, and poverty leading to recruitment by BH commanders. Nnamdi (2021) also found that schools lack adequate security measures, making them vulnerable to attack. The belief that kidnapping students will attract media attention and government intervention, as well as the possibility of ransom payments, has also fueled school attacks. Reports of ransom payments and prisoner releases to halt attacks have surfaced but have not curbed the mass abductions (Ogunode et al., 2021). All these factors contribute to the insecurity of schools.

Impact of Insecurity on the Education System of Nigeria

The BH insurgency has severely impacted Nigeria's education system, resulting in the loss of teachers and learners, as noted by Idowu et al. (2021). This has also led to a shortage of qualified teachers and extensive damage to educational facilities. The attacks forced the relocation of teachers and students to Northern Nigeria, disrupted the academic calendar, and caused various other challenges. Olowoselu et al. (2014) found that the fear of violence has deterred teachers, students, and school administrators from attending schools, affecting the planning, organization, coordination, funding, and assessment of educational activities. In addition, Akintunde and Selzing (2016) highlighted that an insecure learning environment negatively impacts students' learning abilities, leading to stress and trauma that impairs cognitive functions. Insecurity has also affected enrollment and school attendance, with parents withdrawing their children from classes and, in extreme cases, schools closing permanently (Ameh, 2015). Attacks on schools have resulted in loss of life and damage to school infrastructure. Thus, Ezirim et al. (2023) report that due to parental concerns about violence, some secondary schools remain closed today. Others have had their facilities destroyed, their boarding structures changed to daytime attendance, and some boys' schools have converted to mixed-gender settings.

Scholarly works have highlighted the potential consequences of cyberattacks on educational institutions. Ogunode et al. (2021) noted staffing shortages, reduced educational quality, infrastructure damage, institution closures, increased educational spending, educational waste, encouragement of overseas education, internal student displacement, inadequate funding, and decreased private investment in education as some effects of cyberattacks. Ajani (2021) found that the aftermath of the BH attacks negatively impacted education planning and sustainable national development, leading to high dropout rates, enrollment declines, and decreased teaching quality. Many teachers are reluctant to accept jobs due to safety concerns that affect the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel. The harmful effects of BH attacks on schooling, including loss of

education, early pregnancies, and marriage, have also been documented (GCPEA, 2018). These attacks have long-lasting effects on students' psychological well-being, disrupting instruction and deterring some from returning to school. The utilization of schools for military purposes and the mistreatment of captives further compounds the negative impact on students (Ajani, 2021). This study is grounded in social structure theory and anomie theory to explain how criminal activities contribute to insecurity in secondary school education and hinder sustainable development in Northern Nigeria.

Halliru (2012) introduced the Social Structure and Anomie (SSA) theory in the social sciences, emphasizing the role of deviant behaviour in criminality. Merton (1957) highlighted the impact of societal structures, institutional norms, and cultural goals on norm-violating behaviour. The SSA theory explores how individuals cope with environmental stresses and the disparity between culture and social structure. The theory posits that society should provide resources for its members to achieve cultural objectives, such as material success. According to Omonijo et al. (2017), the anomie theory examines how members of specific social groups are more susceptible to environmental stresses and how this can lead to abnormal behaviour. However, when society fails to support these objectives, individuals may resort to criminal activities such as kidnapping and banditry. The key component of the anomie tradition is how individuals cope with the demands of their environment, showing how people cope with the disparity between culture and social structure in society. Thus, society should offer sufficient resources for individuals to achieve these cultural goals (Omonijo et al., 2017). Unfortunately, society places less emphasis on how members can achieve these goals, putting them at risk for crimes such as kidnapping, property vandalism, insurgency, and more. The SSA concept identifies three typologies – revolt, retreatism, and innovation—that explain how individuals adapt to the gap between societal expectations and structural barriers in Nigeria. Innovation can drive individuals to commit criminal acts to overcome obstacles in achieving material success, while retreatism leads to distancing from society due to a lack of resources. Rebellions seek to significantly alter social structures, often resulting in violent conflict and instability.

In the current study, the revolt typology of the SSA addresses situations in which out-of-school children become more powerful than the security outfit employed by the government by adopting the use of arms and ammunition to cause insecurity. Retreatism addresses the rejection of employment by schoolchildren after graduation because they can become richer if they engage in banditry and receive ransom payments. Innovation, on the one hand, addresses a situation when the government finally solves the challenges of insecurity in the country and provides employment for the youths to start a new one. However, they still commit crimes to become richer. Merton's theory on Social Structure and Anomie suggests that when individuals cannot access legitimate ways to pursue socially accepted goals, such as earning money, they may resort to "innovation." This could involve using creative but illegitimate methods, like robbery, to make ends meet (Merton, 1938). In Northern Nigeria, the persistent issue of unemployment is driving some young people toward "rebellion." They are not only rejecting societal goals and means but also constructing their frameworks that justify violence and criminal behaviour (Alemika, 2013; Merton, 1938).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research approach within the interpretative paradigm (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The premise behind this design's appropriateness is its assumption that, despite the existence of a singular reality, individuals in society perceive and comprehend reality differently, allowing them to interpret it in ways that align with their own perspectives. Furthermore, the design allows researchers to use a small sample size as a case study

to represent a given population.

The study population consisted of all teachers, students, and school administrators in Northern Nigeria. Demographic characteristics such as age, location, and experiences of teachers, parents, and school administrators that align with the study were considered to determine and select the most relevant sample for this study. The sample consisted of 36 respondents from three states in Northcentral, Northeastern, and Northwestern Nigeria, comprising teachers, parents, and school administrators who experienced high cases of insecurity between 2012 and 2024. The researchers adopted a multistage sampling technique for the study.

In stage one, the researchers used a purposive sampling technique to select two Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each of the Northcentral, Northeastern, and Northwestern States of Nigeria, where secondary schools have high cases of insecurity (totalling six LGAs). In phase two, two communities where secondary schools have been attacked by insurgents, abductors, and kidnappers were purposively drawn from the six LGAs (making 12 communities). At stage three, one school was deserted because of insecurity and was purposively chosen from each of the 12 communities (amounting to 12 schools). Finally, in stage 4, the researchers randomly selected three teachers, parents, and school administrators (one each) from each of the 12 schools (bringing the sample size to 36). Respondents were chosen to encourage dissenting opinions to ensure that the conversations covered the whole spectrum of scope, experiences and explanations on the subject of insecurity in secondary education in Northern Nigeria. The sample selection format is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Communities selected and participants interviewed:

Geopolitical Zone	States	LGAs	Communities	Interviewed Participants
Northcentral	Plateau	Jos North	Naraguta, Kamang, and Rarung	Teacher, student, School administrator (3 participants per community = 9)
		Barkin Ladi-Foron	Nasarawa Area	Teacher, student school administrator
Northeast	Borno	Bama-Gulumba	Jaburi	Teacher, student school administrator
		Jere	Jere, Kash-Kash, and Dusuman	Teacher, student School administrator (3 participants per community = 9)
Northwest	Zamfara	Gusau-Wonaka	Kamari II/Marna, Lilo/Limanchi, Magajin Gurbi, and Dan Hili	Teacher, student, and school administrator (3 participants in each community = 9)
		Zurmi-Kwashbawa	Shiyar Marafa and Yar Yara	Teacher, student, or school administrator
Total: 3	3	6	12	36

Source: Compilations by author from fieldwork

To gather the necessary information for the study, unstructured, in-depth interviews were scheduled with selected teachers, parents, and school administrators. The interview questions focused on specific incidents related to major causes of insecurity, such as the lack of attention to security issues by school administrators, the absence of a comprehensive school security policy for emergencies, the incompetence of security guards, structural flaws in school buildings, the lack of permanent security guards in secondary schools, the Education Ministry's failure to conduct security inspections, and the unemployment and poverty faced by graduates of Northern Nigerian secondary schools. The questions were written in both Hausa and English to ensure open communication. The author and two field assistants conducted the interviews. However, adjustments to the sample were necessary in the qualitative study to account for emerging themes and insights identified during the data collection process. Teachers suggested consulting local law enforcement and security personnel for additional perspectives. As data saturation was achieved, it was determined that additional interviews would unlikely yield substantial new insights. Throughout the participant selection process, autonomy, confidentiality, and adherence to ethical standards were strictly maintained, with participants requesting that their identities, along with the names of their children and schools, remain confidential due to security concerns. Extensive interviews were conducted to enhance the reliability, validity, and neutrality of both data collection and analysis. Concurrently, the research questions were further refined to facilitate a more comprehensive and in-depth investigation.

Furthermore, the researchers employed a transcriber responsible for accurately translating the respondents' comments into English verbatim. The transcription process unfolded in the following manner: the recorded audio (responses) was saved and compiled, and feedback for in-person interviews was collected using the voice recorder app "Rev Voice Recorder," which enabled the researcher to order transcripts of the interviews directly from the app. Subsequently, the responses were organized into distinct themes based on the questions asked, the respondents' communities and their answers. To achieve the study's main objective and address the three research questions, thematic content analysis was applied to the analysis of the unstructured interviews.

Providing a firsthand analysis of the incidents and causes of insecurity from 2012 to 2024 targeting educational facilities, teachers, parents and school administrators in Northern Nigeria, the methodology employed in this study is of utmost importance. It contributes significantly to academic and policy works. Law enforcement and security agencies can gain valuable insights into the variations in the spatial distribution, extent and intensity of attacks, and potential strategic responses by mapping out cases and causes of insecurity by insurgents, kidnapers, and abductors. Furthermore, by offering a scientific understanding of the topic of insecurity, this methodology enhances the connection between theory and practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Results
The results of the study, which were generated from interviews, are presented below based on the three research questions guiding the study.

Research Question One
Do school administrators in Northern Nigeria show significant concern regarding the safety of human life and facilities? Responses from teachers, parents, and school administrators showed that school administrators, including principals and vice principals, are keen and eager in managing both human and material resources of the school. However, they are incapacitated by the provision

of poor security facilities such as fences around the school compound, windows and doors used to protect classrooms and offices and security guards. According to the participants, the infrastructural facilities of schools in Northern Nigeria are in poor condition. Some responses from the interviewed parents, teachers, and school administrators both principal and vice principal are presented below:

"I am just an ordinary principal. There are no living and property protection measures when there are no safety measures. For instance, our school fence is dwarfed and broken, and some classrooms and offices do not have doors and windows. I do not know whether to call them insurgents or bandits. They come in troops and are well equipped with sophisticated weapons."
– Participant One (School administrator: principal)

Participant Two Stated, (School administrator: Vice principal):

"In the area of safety of the lives of students and members of staff, the principal is doing his best. In most cases, the principal collaborates with the community's vigilante to send signals to the school anytime they suspect insecurity movements by persons or groups." - Participant Two (School administrator: Vice principal)

Participant Three Provided,

"A group of armed men attacked the school in February 2024." They started shooting at people nearby. Two staff teachers were shot. One patient died instantly, while the other suffered severe injuries. We were all inconsolable. What actions could we have taken as school officials? Yes, nothing at all since we are powerless." - Participant Three (School administrator: principal)

Participant Four stated the following

"Four masked shooters stormed the school in March 2024 and made their way straight to the examination office." They fired at everyone in the room, opening the fire. Three people were dead in an instant. One person was injured. It's terrible. We were compelled to ask the students to return home and close the school promptly. We were closed during that whole time. We could only protect both human life and the school's infrastructure to that extent." - Participant Four (School administrator: Vice principal)

Participant Five (Teacher) responded that

"In schools, security refers to more than just people's physical, mental, and emotional well-being." It also refers to continuous education in settings that support learning and character development, both of which are components of the right to education. School authorities are unable to accomplish this." – Participant Five (Teacher)

Participant Six (Teacher) said:

"It is the duty of the federal and state governments to find ways to effectively safeguard citizens and punish offenders." School administrators are not the only ones who need to protect students' lives and school property. It must start with the government." – Participant Six (Teacher)

Participant Seven (Teacher) decried:

"The principal of my school is doing her best to provide a safe and productive learning environment for students. Unfortunately, the principal is powerless in the hands of terrorists." - Participant Seven (Teacher)

Participant (Teacher) eight bemoaned the fact that in 2018, when he was in class, a terrorist attack occurred. When they returned, they destroyed the principal's motorcycle, the school office, and students' notebooks. They all ran away to protect themselves. Terrorists wage a war against the dissemination of knowledge. School administrators are not exempted.

Participant Nine (Parent) cried:

"How can a group of individuals declare war against education? They call themselves terrorists. My question is, are they more powerful than the government? The government should find and bring them to the book. School administrators are very helpless where these people are." - Participant Nine

The respondent Ten (Parent) bemoaned:

"I reside in Jangebe LGA of Zamfara State with my family. In the community, 317 students from secondary schools were kidnapped on February 26, 2021. Indeed, fear has caused a significant decline in school attendance as children like my son refuse to go to school even if their parents forced them to do so. Administrators at schools are powerless to keep the school secure." – Participant Ten

Participant Eleven (Parent) lamented that

"*School administrators are doing their best to provide security for the school. But their best is not good enough. The government should do the needful. My 15-year-old boy who sustained an injury while escaping mass abduction at his school constantly told me that he would not go back to the boarding school. According to him, he would rather become a day student at another school." –* Participant Eleven

Participant Twelve (Parent) grieved:

"The safety of children is of utmost importance, and it is the responsibility of the Nigerian government to ensure that the kidnaping, intimidation, and murder of schoolchildren do not pose a further threat to the educational sector of the nation." For instance, the security guard at the school is an older adults man without arms." – Participant Twelve

Research Question Two

Does the government deploy well-trained and equipped security outfits to manage the security of secondary schools in Northern Nigeria? The majority of the participants mentioned that the government has failed in its capacity to provide schools with good security outfits. According to the participants, while the government prioritizes the payment of ransom for the release of abducted school children, it undermines the safety of students. Below are some responses of the interviewees:

Participant Thirteen (School administrator: principal): decried:

"*I don't know, probably I should say that the Nigerian authorities are insensitive to the insecurity in Northern Nigeria." They must provide protection for schools and children. Acts against educational institutions are illegal under international law, and the government is required to ensure that these acts are thoroughly investigated and that those who may have carried them out are held accountable in open courts without the threat of a death sentence.*" - Participant Thirteen (School administrator: principal)

Participant Fourteen (School administrator: principal) lamented:

"*In most our neighborhoods, schools lack adequate security, guards, and protection. Security personnel have long advised the authorities to protect our schools since intelligence reports have indicated that bandits will target schools in several of our localities. The government was unable to comply.*" - Participant Fourteen (School Administrator: Principal)

Participant Fifteen (School administrator: Vice principal) bemoaned:

"*At one point, the army, police, vigilantes, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) created a joint patrol to guard schools in the Isa communities of Sokoto State. We made the local administration aware of our need for more patrol cars and routine fueling. The chairman pledged his administration's support, but they have not provided us with a car or any other forms of help despite their word. That is how the operation came to an end.*" - Participant Fifteen

Participant Sixteen (School administrator: Vice principal) grieved:

"*It is horrifying how much terrorism exists in Riba and other areas of Danko-Wasagu L.G.A. in Kebbi State. The majority of those terrorists are from the bush in Zamfara State, which borders Bukkuyum L.G.A. Because it is home to all of the infamous terrorists who have been targeting our communities in Danko-Wasagu, Sakaba, Gumi, Bukkuyum, and other locations in Kebbi and Zamfara States, this forest is extremely dangerous. What use do the forests serve? The woodlands must be transformed by the government into different types of agriculture, infrastructure, industry, or urban habitation.*" – Participant Sixteen

Participant (Teacher) seventeen regretted:

"*It is common knowledge that the militants who commit acts of terrorism in Northwest Nigeria confine the kidnaped students to an adjacent forest." By permitting forests to remain, the government is not offering us security.*" – Participant Seventeen

Participant Eighteen (Teacher) said that

"*The government does not supply our schools with security personnel who have received the necessary training." Most people are afraid to reveal security risks and attacks. For instance, reporting the horrific occurrences to security officials is hampered in Kandarawa village in Bakori, L.G.A. of Katsina state because of the prevalent fear.*" – Participant Eighteen

Participant Nineteen (Teacher) reported:

"Maybe the terrorists are working with the government. The government claims they do not know them. Yet, they pay ransom for the release of abducted students. They should track them and bring them to the book. Students and teachers are victims of terrorism in this area. Many abductions have not been reported. An 11-year-old child was abducted by bandits on his way to school last month. The students are the worst victims of the attacks as compared to their teachers and other school workers. Attacking students tend to generate more outcry and panic among people; perhaps that is why students are often targeted." – Participant Nineteen

Participant Twenty (Teacher) said that

"When it came to the June 2013 National Examinations Council (NECO) in Bama L.G.A. of Borno State, Boko Haram issued a warning to students about attending the schools. Parents removed at least 80% of the students from my school. Consequently, a significant decrease occurred in the number of applicants who took the examination. To stop the terrorists, however, neither the government nor the security personnel took any action." – Participant Twenty

Participant Twenty-One (Parent) lamented that

"There is no safety in schools.cWe do not believe the government when they say they will protect our children because they are unreliable." – Participant Twenty-One

Participant Twenty-Two (Parent) decried:

"A few of our children will undergo examinations soon." They cannot continue because the government has not taken any action to guarantee that our children will arrive safely at school even when schools are closed." – Participant Twenty-Two

Participant Twenty-Three (Parent) lauded:

"Why do terrorists not occasionally attack schools?" Security features like CCTV cameras, high fences with secure gates, strong structures with good doors and windows, and fit and knowledgeable security personnel are among the things that the government has neglected to provide schools. Education and the safety of both people and material resources are not given much thought by the government. That is regrettable." – Participant Twenty-Three

Participant Twenty-Four (Parent) affirmed:
"There is a lack of a comprehensive school security policy to guide action in times of crisis as well as the non-execution of security duties by incompetent guards that provide security in schools." The government must take up the responsibility of securing the lives of our school children. It is terrible!" – Participant Twenty-Four

Research Question Three

Are secondary school students engaged meaningfully after graduation? In seeking an answer to the above question, responses from the participants revealed that there are no gainful employment opportunities for secondary school leavers in Northern Nigeria. Most participants

provided information that there is menial or laborer jobs available to youths. Some of the employment available for them include shoeshining and cobbling, well digging, Okada (motorcycle) riding, pure water selling, cutting of hair and fingernails, among others. The participants also provided information that secondary school graduates do laborer jobs such as picking stones and carrying gravel at construction sites. According to the participants, modern textile companies in the cities of Kano used to provide employment to young school leavers, and most of them worked for picking cotton. The industries are no more operational today. Many girls in the north are married off against their wish to rich men immediately after they complete secondary school education. According to the participants, the impoverished condition is not sustainable for the young persons in the north because they become vulnerable to bandits and terrorists.

Respondent Twenty-Five (School administrator: principal) stated:

> *"This is a really pitiful situation." After school, no meaningful skill opportunities are available for secondary school graduates, except menial jobs. I was devastated by Umar's situation. He had a strong academic background and a lifelong ambition to work as an aircraft engineer. Regretfully, the bandits managed to enlist him."* – Participant Twenty-Five

The respondent Twenty-Six (School administrator: principal) reported that
> *"Education here is not as serious as it is in Eastern and Western Nigeria." Here, students rarely receive scholarships for postsecondary education. The majority of students come from impoverished homes. They join their parents to do farm work after secondary school."* – Participant Twenty-Six

The respondent (School administrator: Vice principal) revealed that

> *"There are no industries for students to join after high school." In the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, we had several modern textile factories in the cities of Kano. Most secondary school leavers were hired to pick cotton and other jobs. But today, these factories are no longer operational. The situation has created more unemployment for youths in that category."* – Vice Principal

The respondent (School administrator: Vice principal) stated:
> *"Yes, the majority of students are employed after completing secondary education." However, their employment is not gainful. You only see them getting busy, but they do not do any meaningful thing. Some of them are into shoeshining and cobbling, hawking, and searching for persons to cut their nails and hair. As a result, they become vulnerable to bandits and terrorists who recruit them to join their camp."* – Vice Principal

The respondent (teacher) stated:
> *"Some students are well-behaved and perform well in school." They have good dreams and aspirations. However, society is not sustainable for them to achieve their dreams. One of my male students who fit into this description ended up working in a construction site as a laborer where he picks stones and carries gravel. Still on that job, he has a family now. It is not sustainable."* - Teacher

The respondent (teacher) 30 said:
> *"Secondary school leavers in the North are not meaningfully employed." Their kind of*

employment cannot sustain them daily. Again, some of them are eager to go into agriculture. However, as you can see, because of the topography of the soil, they need mechanized agriculture. It's too expensive. For instance, irrigation or water pumping is too expensive. These boys end up working as laborers on some Alhaji's farms. In my opinion, the government can own farms and get them employed." – Respondent 30

Respondent (teacher) thirty-one declared that

"Their kind of employment after high school is not meaningful." It exposes people to danger and makes them vulnerable to crime. Some of them go into okada (motorcycle) riding for business without safety helmets. Some are into a well-digging business. They barely make good money because the business is over-flooded by youths." – Respondent 31

Respondent (teacher) 32 disclosed that

"For most girls, their employment after high school is marriage." Unlike in the East and West, postsecondary education for the girl child in the North is not encouraging. Amina used to be the most outstanding student among her classmates in my school. Unfortunately, against her wish, she was married off to a wealthy Alhaji immediately after her secondary education." *– Respondent 32*

Respondent (parent) 33 responded that

"There is nothing for my son in this local community." He has finished secondary school since last year. We do not have the money to send him to a postsecondary education. If he stays here, he may join the bandits. So, my husband and I sent him to Lagos State to join his uncle in his business." – Respondent 33

Respondent (parent) thirty-four replied that

"With prayers and our faith in God, our daughter has finished her secondary education in the Jere community of Borno State." We do not want her waste in the North. She gained university admission in Osun State, Western Nigeria. We're relocating with her. We are afraid of staying in the North." – Respondent 34

Respondent (parent) thirty-five responded that

"My son is 24 years old." He did not start school early. He managed to complete his final secondary school examination. My son is very well-behaved and intelligent. We know he will do well in the examination. But there is no money to send him to a higher education institution. He's hawking pure water on the street for now. We are afraid that he might become prey for bandits and terrorists." – Respondent 35

Respondent (parent) thirty-six claimed that

"It is terrible!" My husband and I are great mechanized farmers. Our children will join us in farming. From our farm proceeds, we will be able to produce three university graduates. The last child insists on becoming a great farmer like us. It is quite pathetic that the herder-farmer clash in Jos has shattered his dreams and aspirations. He is doing secondary education. There's nothing here for him anymore. He has joined one of his brothers in the Eastern Nigeria." – Respondent 36

Discussion

The findings from the study are based on three research questions. First, the study reveals that a lackadaisical attitude or inadequate concern toward the safety of human life and school

facilities is one of the major causes of insecurity that hinders the sustainability of secondary school education in northern Nigeria. School administrators both principals and vice principals are not insensitive to broken, dwarf, or non-existent fences protecting the school buildings; classrooms and offices are protected with rickety, broken doors and windows, and inexperienced, old, and hungry-looking security guards staffing the school. The reason terrorists and bandits gain easy access to unleash attacks and counterattacks in secondary schools in northern Nigeria is that schools are not adequately protected. While schools lack security or protection for human lives and school facilities, terrorists and bandits are well-armed with sophisticated weapons and ammunition for war against students, teachers, and every living thing they encounter in the school. This situation is not sustainable for educational development, as parents, teachers, students, school leaders and other stakeholders fear primary and secondary education in the region in twenty years.

This result corroborates reports by Gulumbe (2023), The Cable (2021), Akinwotu (2020), and Abdullahi and Terhemba (2014), regarding the occurrences and instances of insecurity in elementary and secondary schools in the following states: Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, Kaduna State; Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State; Islamiyya School, Mahuta, Kaduna State; GSS College, Kagara, Niger State; and Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State. The study by Ezirim et al. (2023), which claims that terrorists and bandits have killed, raped, kidnapped, or abducted schoolchildren and destroyed school infrastructure, while parents are against sending their daughters to boarding school, was also supported by this finding. However, a lack of care for the protection of people and property has been recognized as one of the reasons for insecurity in schools by Akor et al. (2021), Manga (2020), Ogunode et al. (2021), and Sadiq et al. (2020). Furthermore, Akintunde and Musa (2016) and Abubakar et al. (2022), stated that an insecure school environment affects students' learning. The results of this study support Nnamdi's (2021) assertion that schools typically have inadequate security, few or no fences to keep people out, and underqualified security officers working in these buildings.

Second, the study reveals that the government, both present and past, is neither proactive nor eager to implement security measures to combat terrorists and bandits who threaten the sustainability of secondary education in northern Nigeria. The government of Nigeria has prioritized paying ransom to terrorists and bandits for abducting or kidnapping schoolchildren rather than using modern technology to track and prosecute them. The government claims to be ignorant of the hideouts and the origins of the terrorists and bandits. However, citizens claim that while terrorists have made the Sambisa Forest of Borno State, Nigeria, their territory, bandits are present in the Northwest region of the Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Jigawa, and Zamfara states of the country. Schools, students, and teachers are not safe in northern Nigeria as terrorists and bandits have declared war against the government and education. As the government has failed in its capacity to address insecurity challenges, access to education in Northern Nigeria has become risky for parents, teachers and students as they bear the brunt.

While schools remain deplorable, parents and teachers have lost hope that the government and security authorities will provide security for schoolchildren and their teachers. The findings of the current study corroborate the work of Ogunode et al. (2021), who assert that there have been unsubstantiated accusations that a ransom was paid to free members of an armed gang from custody to stop these attacks, but have yielded nothing as numerous kidnapings and abductions persist. Additionally, this study concurs with the works of Ajani (2021), Ogunode et al. (2021), Idowu et al. (2021), Ameh (2015), and Olowoselu et al. (2014), who outline the negative effects of terrorist and bandit attacks, such as the deaths of teachers and students, high dropout rates among students, enrollment declines, quality declines in teaching, extensive damage to school buildings, academic experts leaving communities facing challenges with human insecurity, disruptions to the

academic calendar, and internally displaced people. This study's findings also call into question the mandate and vision of the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools (NPSSVFS). The ineffectiveness of the NPSSVFS highlights the urgent need to intentionally implement alternative policies to ensure safety and security for schools and children (PM News, 2024). However, the nation's capacity to effectively plan for education and pursue sustainable national development is hampered by human security issues.

Third, this study shows that secondary school graduates in Northern Nigeria are not employed meaningfully. The majority of male graduates become vulnerable to recruitment by bandits and terrorists into their gangs, and females are married off to wealthy Alhajis against their will. The human security challenges in Northern Nigeria have rendered the region impoverished and unsustainable for youths. Farming was a principal occupation in the Northcentral region, especially among youths. Unfortunately, farmer-herder clashes have significantly disrupted farming activities as unknown gunmen continue to abduct, kidnap, kill, and rape farmers. As a result, most youths in that region are unemployed and are turning to banditry and terrorism. This situation has led to cyclical unemployment among secondary school graduates as they face downturns in farming and other business activities due to insecurity. The anomie theory of Merton (1957) describes how environmental influences can foster deviant behaviour and how individuals in particular social segments are more susceptible. This aligns with the SSA theory of Halliru (2012) in the social sciences, which shows how criminality is actively influenced by aberrant behaviour.

Therefore, highlights the propositions of the revolt, retreatism, and innovation typologies of the SSA theory that children raised in an unhealthy environment full of insecurity may turn to carrying arms and ammunition, becoming more powerful than the government, reject legal employment after graduation, and turn to crime. The current study's findings support the study of Omonijo et al. (2017), who assert that a society should adequately provide for its people's achievements if it places a high value on the cultural environment for success attainment and social mobility. However, when northern Nigerian youths are frustrated with how to sustain human lives and education for national development, they turn to banditry and terrorism.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified the causes of crime that exacerbate insecurity and hinder the sustainability of secondary education among teachers, parents and school administrators in Northern Nigeria. These causes include school administrators being aware of the vulnerable nature of school facilities but being financially incapacitated to fund them, the government's failure to proactively implement security measures to address security challenges in schools, prioritizing ransom payments to bandits and terrorists for abducting students and teachers over utilizing modern technology to identify and prosecute them, and a high level of cyclical unemployment among high school graduates. Consequently, while parents, students, teachers, and school administrators blame the government for its insensitivity and incompetence in addressing security challenges facing education in Northern Nigeria, the government and security authorities assert that they are doing their best. However, according to education stakeholders, these efforts have only resulted in ongoing incidents of rape, kidnapping, abuse, threats, forced marriages between abducted school children and their captors, and coerced religious conversions. The study has questioned the effectiveness of the NPSSVFS as it failed to provide safety and security to school children. As a result, the education stakeholders in this study have lost faith in the government's ability to provide a safe and secure learning environment that protects students and teachers from harm while teaching and learning in schools. Consequently, there are concerns that secondary education in Northern Nigeria will not be sustainable in the next twenty years. Considering these findings, recommendations have been proposed to address the situation.

Recommendations

A comprehensive and timely approach is needed to address the ongoing insecurity affecting secondary school education in Northern Nigeria. The following policy recommendations are divided into short-term and long-term solutions that can have an immediate impact while promoting sustainable development.

To address the immediate risks facing schools, several practical measures can be implemented quickly. Installing CCTV cameras and constructing sturdy fences around school premises would help deter potential attackers while enabling closer monitoring of suspicious activities. Alongside these physical upgrades, deploying trained security personnel, especially in high-risk areas, would provide a visible layer of protection. Schools should also establish emergency response systems, including dedicated hotlines, rapid-response protocols, and regular evacuation drills, to ensure preparedness in crisis situations. Engaging local communities through vigilance programs would further strengthen security by fostering collaboration between schools, parents, and law enforcement.

For lasting change, deeper interventions must tackle the underlying drivers of insecurity. Investing in agricultural development and food security could alleviate rural poverty, reducing the economic pressures that make young people vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Job creation initiatives, particularly in industrial and technical sectors, would provide alternative livelihoods to unemployed youth, steering them away from violence. Expanding access to quality education, including vocational training, would equip young people with marketable skills, improving their long-term prospects. At the systemic level, strengthening governance, ensuring justice, and promoting accountability would help rebuild public trust and address the grievances that fuel instability. Together, these measures could create a more secure and prosperous future for affected communities.

These recommendations highlight the pressing need to meet SDGs 4 and 16 in Nigeria. Achieving quality education (SDG 4) goes hand in hand with fostering peace, justice, and robust institutions (SDG 16). With this in mind, this study provides valuable and actionable insights for policymakers, education leaders, and security agencies dedicated to building safe and inclusive learning spaces in the area.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study addresses how insecurity impacts secondary education in Northern Nigeria, but several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample consisted of 36 respondents from three Northcentral, Northeastern, and Northwestern states. These participants, including teachers, parents, and school administrators, were chosen due to their direct experiences with significant insecurity between 2012 and 2024. As a result, the study may be influenced by sampling bias, primarily reflecting the perspectives of individuals in high-risk areas. We did not gather input from stakeholders in regions with lower levels of insecurity, potentially restricting the generalizability of our findings to the entire Northern Nigerian context. In future research, it would be advantageous to incorporate a broader range of settings to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

In addition, this study proposed several policy-driven solutions, primarily technology-focused strategies such as installing CCTV cameras and establishing emergency alert systems. However, the study did not explore the effectiveness of these measures in practice. Therefore, conducting a follow-up study would be beneficial in evaluating the efficacy of these security measures once implemented. This would provide concrete evidence of their impact on school safety and their role in ensuring continued access to education in conflict-affected areas.

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