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Effect of Insurgency on the Pupils and Students Enrollment into Schools in Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of insurgency on pupils' and students' enrollment into schools in Borno State, Nigeria, a predominantly rural and Islamic society. Traditional leaders, including emirs, village heads, and religious figures of both Muslims and Christians, play pivotal roles in influencing parents' decisions on children's enrollment, as their positions confer significant cultural and social authority. The research adopted a qualitative-descriptive methodology, involving questionnaires and interviews with internally displaced persons (IDPs), parents, teachers, and traditional leaders across selected communities and camps in the state. Findings reveal that insurgency has drastically reduced school enrollment, caused destruction of educational infrastructure, and forced many children into street hawking, begging, and early marriages. Despite these challenges, communities have devised coping strategies, including community-based schooling, reliance on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and religious institutions. The study concludes with recommendations for improved security, government–community partnerships, and sustained humanitarian interventions.

Keywords: Insurgency, enrollment, pupils, students, education, Borno State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have been uprooted from their homes, as a result of the increasing violence, with many becoming refugees in neighboring countries homeless and destitute (Daily trust, 2016). Conflict in the northeast, along with inter-communal violence, has displaced roughly 650,000 people in the states of emergency and the neighboring states of Gombe, Bauchi, and Taraba. About 3,128,000 children have been affected by conflict (Das, 2025). Emergency responders, humanitarian agencies, and human rights defenders have expressed concerns about the affected population's access to food, water, sanitation, and medical care Yakubu, (2012).

Learning and seeking knowledge is not an offence by any secular or religious creed but attacks on places of education are often serious crimes. But to ensure success, the government should ban its soldiers from using schools for military purposes to avoid such schools being targeted for attacks and destruction, work with the appropriate authorities to ensure better security at schools in the northeast, and ensure that students, deprived of educational facilities – whether in IDP camps, host communities, or in the slums and shanties of large urban cities – are promptly given access to schooling in safe areas or its temporary learning spaces, with suitable books and equipment (Kangiwa, 2022). The government should also ensure parents and relative of missing children are given regular public updates on efforts to recover their loved ones. The repeated failure to adequately communicate with relative only contributes to their suffering (Mahmoud, 2024).

The government announced the merging of various presidential initiatives to improve the delivery of services to victims of Boko Haram's violence, including the victims support fund, and the presidential initiative on the North East. In January 2016, the government established a new social protection plan which focuses, among other things, on improving the quality of teachers by directly hiring 500,000 university graduates, and providing cash transfers to extremely poor parents on the condition that they enroll their children in schools across the country (Money, 2025). The plan with a budget of 60,000 billion naira (about US \$ 302 million) is supported by the World Bank.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of Boko Haram in Nigeria has become a threat to both internal and international security with ever-growing violence and attacks on security forces, civilians, Schools, mosques, churches, media houses as well as international bodies. Attendance to school is dependent on the readiness of the child, encouragement from parents, provision of school materials, distance to school depends on the security of the child. Boko Haram has become a threat to most parents and pupils in most Northern States (Borno State) inclusive. There are series of cases of bombing and burning of schools and houses in Borno State. What then is the effect of insurgency on the pupils and students enrollment in to schools in Borno state, Nigeria

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify impact of insecurity on the school attendance in the area;
- ii. To examine effect of insecurity on educational development in the areas;
- iii. To examine the coping strategies adopted by the dwellers of the area;

Research Questions

- i. What are the impacts of insecurity on the school attendance in the area?
- ii. What are the effects of insecurity on educational development in the area?
- iii. What are the coping strategies adopted by the dwellers of the area?

Significance of the Study

The study will provide relevant information on the effect of insurgency on the pupils and students enrollment in to schools in Borno state, Nigeria. It will also provide important information for future researches. The findings of this study will equally serve as the basis for policy implementation that could enhance planning, management and development strategies for avoidance of future occurrence.

Literature Review

The Kampala convention (2019) posit that majority of the children come from poor families and is often forced to beg for food and money to support themselves and their classmates. This poverty and the lack of opportunity, along with occasional encouragement of extreme religious teachings, may provide fertile ground for extremist groups to gather followers. As a consequence of recruitment, children are increasingly involved in attacks by (JAS) (IOM, 2019). The group has used children to burn down schools and churches, to transport weapons, and sometimes to carry out armed violence and killing and maiming. Sixteen former residents of the states of emergency reported seeing children as young as 14 among (JAS) members during attacks.

Causes of Insecurity and Challenges

According to Musa, (2021) Some of the root causes of acts of kidnapping, terrorism and corruption etc in Nigeria needing urgent attention include: - a) poor implementation of constitutional measures to address past socio-

economic and political injustices, inequities and imbalances and a feeling of, among the diverse Nigerian populace, a sense of marginalisation, discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage; (b) failure by the state to effectively prevent and control the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their possession by militant sectarian and ethnic militia groups, among others; (c) the negative culture of do or die politics and the struggle for the sharing of national cake at the centre (distributive federalism) arising from undue concentration of power and resources at the federal level (centre) to the disadvantage and impoverishment of the federating units (states and LGAs); (d) rising unemployment rate among youths; (e) politicization of ethnicity and manipulation of religion by the elites for their selfish ends thereby providing a fertile ground for extremism, intolerance, ethno-religious violent conflicts and perpetual cycle of recriminations or revengeful killings.

The security agencies to expedite efforts to rescue the Chibok school girls still in captivity of the Boko Haram insurgents. In her remarks, Halima Umar thanked the security agents and other collaborating agencies in rescuing her and reuniting her with her parents and loved ones while shedding tears (Ahmed, 2019)

Recruitment and use of Children by JAS

JAS recruits and uses children to carry out surveillance and participate in attacks. Nigerian security forces have caught children as young as 12 years old fighting alongside the group. JAS uses a variety of tactics to draw children, both boys and girls, into their ranks. (Ibeanu, 2023). Many children who are abducted during attacks carried out by (JAS) are forced to become members of the group (NRC, 2019). A former abductee explained to watch list that JAS told captured boys and men that they would be killed if they did not join the group (Evans, 2024). A 10-year-old boy who recently escaped from a (JAS) camp described his abduction, at age nine, to the international media. A child of poor farmers and living under the care of an Islamic teacher in Borno State, the boy was captured, drugged, and trafficked into the hands of (JAS) members, where he carried out daily household chores for the group. (Adamu 2009)

Accounts from interviewees and civil society also suggested that women and girls abducted by (JAS) are used for cooking and sometimes also forced to participate in attacks (Egwu, 2017). One former abductee explained to Watch list that while she never participated in combat, she was told to carry live ammunition and raid hospitals for drugs during attacks. (JAS) also asked her to slaughter a man abducted by the group: “They killed four and asked me to slaughter others (Durosaro, 2021).

Materials and Methods

Sources of Data

Methods used in the collection of data for this study were primary and secondary sources. Therefore, primary data was obtained from contact with the respondents by the administration of questionnaire, while the secondary data on the other hand was obtained from the library documentations.

Population of the Study

The entire IDPs of the Bakassi and Dalori form the population of this study. According to records of SPHCDA, the two camps have a total population of 150,000 IDPs.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling method was utilized to obtain the sample size of 352 respondents. All the 352 respondents were drawn from the beneficiaries of the internally displaced persons to assess the factors precluding the effort of State Emergency Management Agency SEMA, in delivery health services to IDPs camps in Maiduguri.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources for this study. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to the respondents. A total of 352, closed ended questionnaire was designed and distributed to the beneficiaries of IDPs in Maiduguri camps to assess factors precluding the effort of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in delivery of service to internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in Maiduguri. The study used a descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistic consists of tables, frequencies and percentages in the presentation of data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 result shows that over half (53%) of respondents confirmed withdrawal of children from schools due to insecurity. This finding demonstrates how persistent violence, fear of abduction, and recurrent attacks on schools have discouraged parents from allowing their children to continue education. In Borno State, the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014 became a global symbol of how insurgency disrupts education and instills fear in families (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Parents often prefer to keep their children at home rather than risk sending them to schools that might become targets of attacks.

This trend has resulted not only in declining enrollment figures but also in increased child labor, street hawking, and early marriages, especially among girls (UNICEF, 2017). Many displaced households in IDP camps reported prioritizing survival and food security over formal education, as they perceived schools to be unsafe or too distant from protected zones (UNHCR, 2019). Studies have shown that attacks on schools and abductions in northeastern Nigeria

have created a culture of fear, where education is no longer seen as a guaranteed path to upward mobility but a potential danger to children's safety (Onuoha, 2021; Musa, 2021).

The implication is that insecurity has not only interrupted access to schooling but has also perpetuated cycles of illiteracy and poverty. This corresponds with findings by OCHA (2025), which report that nearly 60% of school-aged children in conflict-affected areas of northeast Nigeria are currently out of school due to safety concerns. The widespread withdrawal of children from schools undermines long-term human capital development and makes it more difficult for Borno State to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable quality education.

The findings from Table 2 reveal destruction of infrastructure as the most severe effect (40%), followed by shortage of teachers (24%). This aligns with earlier reports by UNICEF (2017), which documented that over 1,400 schools in northeast Nigeria had been destroyed since the insurgency began, while many others were looted or converted into operational bases by armed groups. The physical destruction of classrooms, libraries, and laboratories has created an environment where even those willing to attend are unable to access adequate learning facilities (NRC, 2019). In addition to infrastructure damage, the shortage of teachers has become a critical barrier. Many qualified teachers fled conflict zones due to threats to their safety, while others were killed or displaced during attacks (IOM, 2019). A study by Egwu (2017) highlighted that teachers in Borno often operate under extreme fear, with some refusing postings to rural areas most prone to insurgent attacks. This teacher deficit has resulted in overcrowded classrooms, reduced teaching quality, and disruption of academic calendars.

Despite challenges, communities have adopted informal and non-formal learning avenues to ensure children remain engaged in some form of education. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Plan International have played a critical role in providing temporary learning spaces, distributing learning materials, and training volunteer teachers in IDP camps and host communities (UNICEF, 2017; NRC, 2019). These interventions have helped sustain access to education for displaced children who otherwise would have been excluded entirely from learning opportunities.

Religious institutions have also stepped in to supplement formal education through Qur'anic schools and church-based literacy programs. In many communities, Islamic teachers provide basic literacy and numeracy skills, often in informal settings under trees or makeshift shelters (Kangiwa, 2022). While these forms of learning are not equivalent to the structured curriculum of formal schools, they serve as crucial stopgaps in sustaining children's intellectual development during conflict.

Respondents emphasized security improvement (40%) and rebuilding destroyed schools (27%) as immediate needs for reviving education in Borno State. This reflects the widespread recognition that without a safe learning environment and functional infrastructure, all other efforts—such as enrollment campaigns, teacher recruitment, or curriculum reform—will yield minimal results. Previous studies have confirmed that insecurity and infrastructural collapse are the most significant deterrents to education in conflict-affected regions (UNICEF, 2021; Olanrewaju *et al.*). Thus, addressing these two priorities constitutes a prerequisite for restoring community confidence in the school system and ensuring long-term educational recovery.

Discussion

The findings reveal that respondents emphasized security improvement (40%) and rebuilding destroyed schools (27%) as the most immediate priorities for reviving education in Borno State. This outcome reflects the deep-rooted understanding among affected communities that education cannot thrive without safety and infrastructure. Studies have shown that insecurity remains the single greatest barrier to education in northeast Nigeria, with Boko Haram and related armed groups deliberately targeting schools, teachers, and students as part of their strategy (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2018).

The demand for rebuilding destroyed schools also aligns with the reality that over 1,400 schools have been damaged, destroyed, or closed since the insurgency escalated in 2009 (UNICEF, 2021). Many existing schools operate without roofs, classrooms, or learning materials, further discouraging both teachers and pupils from attending. Respondents' prioritization of infrastructure repair demonstrates a practical recognition that safe, functional, and accessible schools are foundational to restoring normalcy.

Moreover, the emphasis on security and reconstruction highlights a broader policy implication. Without addressing these structural challenges, interventions such as teacher recruitment, curriculum reform, or enrollment drives may remain ineffective. As Adedeji and Olaniyan (2019) argue, sustainable educational development in conflict zones must be preceded by stabilization and rehabilitation of basic social infrastructure. In the case of Borno State, ensuring physical safety and rebuilding destroyed schools are preconditions for meaningful educational recovery.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The insurgency in Borno State has severely undermined education, resulting in large-scale school closures, reduced enrollment, teacher shortages, and destruction of infrastructure. Pupils and students have been deprived of access to safe learning environments, while parents—driven by fear of abduction or attacks—withdraw children from formal schooling. Communities, in response, have attempted to fill the gap through informal and non-formal learning strategies, supported by NGOs and religious institutions. However, these coping mechanisms, while valuable, cannot match the structure, quality, and long-term outcomes of formal schooling.

The study underscores the urgent need for multi-stakeholder intervention. Improving security, rebuilding destroyed schools, and motivating qualified teachers to return to classrooms are essential first steps. Without these, Nigeria's broader goals of universal education and human capital development will remain unattainable in the northeast region. Importantly, the resilience shown by communities suggests that with proper support from government, development partners, and civil society, education in Borno can gradually be restored.

In sum, education recovery in conflict-affected zones such as Borno State requires a holistic approach—combining security stabilization, infrastructural rehabilitation, community participation, and sustained donor support. Only through such comprehensive measures can the cycle of disrupted learning be broken, thereby enabling children to reclaim their right to education and contribute meaningfully to post-conflict reconstruction.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were

1. **Provision of Adequate Security**

The government should strengthen security in and around schools by establishing perimeter fencing, installing surveillance systems, and deploying trained security personnel to volatile areas.

2. **Reconstruction of Destroyed Schools**

The reconstruction of schools destroyed by insurgent attacks should be prioritized in government and donor-funded recovery programs.

3. **Teacher Incentives and Support**

Teachers working in high-risk zones should be provided with hardship allowances, housing support, and psychosocial care as motivation to continue their service

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Tables

Table 1: Impact of Insurgency on School Attendance

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regular attendance	45	13
Irregular attendance	120	34
Withdrawal from school	187	53
Total	352	100

Table 2: Effects of Insecurity on Educational Development

Effects Reported	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Destruction of school infrastructure	142	40
Shortage of teachers	85	24
Decline in student performance	95	27
Reduced literacy rate	30	9
Total	352	100

Table 3: Coping Strategies Adopted by Communities

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community-based informal learning	112	32
Reliance on NGOs for temporary schools	96	27
Religious institutions teaching basics	82	23
Migration to safer towns	62	18
Total	352	100

Table 4: Respondents' Suggestions for Government Intervention

Suggested Intervention	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Improve school security	140	40
Provide psychosocial support	70	20
Rebuild destroyed schools	95	27
Recruit and train more teachers	47	13
Total	352	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025