Educational Insecurity in Northwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the profound impact of banditry and kidnapping on the educational landscape of Northwest Nigeria. The region, which historically had been slow in its appreciation for formal education has, in the last two decades, been encouraged to embrace studentship through concerted efforts by government and private investors. However, this development has suffered premature death as the region has witnessed a surge in violent activities, particularly targeted at educational institutions and students. Using the qualitative method of research, this study illuminates the ways in which banditry and kidnapping have grievously disrupted the educational sector. The findings reveal a disturbing pattern of attacks on schools, abduction of students and teachers, and destruction of educational infrastructure. These incidents have created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, leading to widespread school closures and a significant decline in student enrolment. Moreover, the psychological trauma inflicted on the victims, including survivors and their families, has had lasting effects on the pursuit of education. The paper also explores the socio-economic consequences of disrupted education, including limited access to learning opportunities, reduced human capital development, and a weakened social fabric. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive security measures, community engagement, and policy interventions to safeguard educational institutions and ensure the right to education for all children in the region. This study serves as a clarion call for concerted efforts by government agencies, civil society organizations, and the international community to address the complex challenges posed by banditry and kidnapping in North-western Nigeria. Restoring a safe and conducive learning environment is imperative for the region's socio-economic development and the realization of the fundamental right to education.

Keywords: *Kidnapping, Banditry, Northwest Nigeria, Educational Disruption, Security*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Northwest Nigeria has witnessed a troubling escalation in violent activities, particularly targeting its educational institutions and students. The region, historically cautious in its embrace of formal education, had begun to witness a positive shift with increased efforts from government and private investors to promote learning opportunities. However, this promising trajectory has been abruptly halted by the pervasive menace of banditry and kidnapping (Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh, 2023).

Banditry, often synonymous with armed violence and criminality, has taken on a multifaceted form in this region. From armed robbery to cattle rustling, the activities of these criminal elements have not spared the educational sector. Coupled with the insidious threat of kidnapping, the toll on the region's educational landscape has been profound and far-reaching (Akinyetun, 2022). This paper delves into the intricate ways in which banditry and kidnapping have disrupted the educational security of Northwest Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study unveils a disturbing pattern of attacks on schools, abductions of both students and teachers, and the wanton destruction of educational infrastructure. These events have not only created an atmosphere of palpable fear and uncertainty but have also led to a significant rise in school closures and a marked decline in student enrolment.

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Furthermore, the psychological scars inflicted on the victims, ranging from survivors to their families, have left enduring impacts on the pursuit of education in the region. The consequences extend beyond the immediate disruption of schooling to encompass profound socio-economic implications. These include limited access to learning opportunities, diminished human capital development, and a weakening of the social fabric that binds communities together (Timothy, Ubong, and Gadu, 2019).

This study, therefore, serves as a poignant call to action for the implementation of comprehensive security measures, community engagement initiatives, and strategic policy interventions. Such measures are essential to safeguarding educational institutions and upholding the fundamental right to education for all children in Northwest Nigeria. The urgent need to address these complex challenges is underscored, emphasizing the necessity for collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and the international community.

Ultimately, the restoration of a safe and conducive learning environment stands not only as a prerequisite for the socio-economic advancement of the region but also as a vital step towards fulfilling the inalienable right to education for its populace. As the shadow of banditry and kidnapping looms large over Northwest Nigeria, the imperative to act decisively and collectively has never been more pressing.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This academic paper examines the impact of banditry and kidnapping on the educational system of Northwest Nigeria, highlighting the increasing violent activities targeting educational institutions and students. The study aims to understand how these criminal activities have disrupted the educational landscape, causing significant consequences for the region. Through the qualitative research methodology employed, this paper seeks to:

1. Uncover and clarify the disturbing pattern of attacks on schools, abductions of students and teachers, and the destruction of educational infrastructure by bandits and kidnappers.

2. Examine the resulting atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that has pervaded the educational sector in the Northwest, resulting in widespread school closures and a significant decline in student enrolment.

3. Investigate the lasting psychological trauma inflicted on the victims, including survivors and their families, and its impact on the pursuit of education in the region.

4. Explore the broader socio-economic implications of disrupted education, such as limited access to learning opportunities, reduced human capital development, and a weakening of the social fabric that binds communities together.

5. Highlight the urgent need for comprehensive security measures, community engagement initiatives, and strategic policy interventions to safeguard educational institutions and ensure the right to education for all children in Northwest Nigeria.

Accordingly, the study urges government agencies, civil society organizations, and the international community to address the challenges of banditry and kidnapping in North-western Nigeria. It aims to restore a safe learning environment for socio-economic development and the well-being of the young population. Through collaborative action and policy interventions, it aims to fulfil the inalienable right to education for all children in Northwest Nigeria amidst insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study is the qualitative investigative approach, focusing on detailed description, interpretation, and comprehension of the subject under scrutiny. This method places emphasis on questioning and observation to uncover a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon or circumstance being examined (Fossey et al., 2003). Specifically, this qualitative research adopts an interpretive paradigm, often referred to as a naturalistic approach. This approach seeks to delve into the subjective experiences of individuals involved, aiming to grasp the phenomenon from their perspectives. By immersing in the lived realities and viewpoints of those impacted by banditry and kidnapping in Northwest Nigeria, this research aims to unveil

the depth and complexity of the challenges faced in the educational sector due to these pervasive security threats (Busetto, et al., 2020).

This study is centered on the Northwest region of Nigeria, specifically examining the states of Kebbi, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kano, and Katsina. It aims to explore the various dimensions through which banditry and kidnapping have a detrimental impact on the educational environment in Northwest Nigeria. Through a combination of field research and an extensive review of relevant literature, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these issues affect the educational landscape of the region. This includes examining the disruptions to schooling, psychological effects on students and teachers, economic repercussions, and the broader societal implications of such challenges.

Research Design

The findings and empirical data presented in this article are drawn from research projections based on the ACLED Report covering from 2019 to 2024. This report was the result of assessments carried out using direct observation methods and a wide network of key informants. The aim was to gather comprehensive and representative data on kidnapping and banditry in the north-western part of Nigeria. In addition to the ACLED Report, data was also collected through interviews with forty-two students and teachers from various parts of the north-western region of Kebbi, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kano, and Katsina states. Six individuals were interviewed from each of these states, with a slight skew towards male participants (28 men, 14 women) due to their higher availability for interviews to gain insights directly from the affected stakeholders providing a deeper understanding of their experiences, challenges and perspectives.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process is a crucial part of this research, starting with the collection phase and continuing through reduction techniques. Reduction techniques involve eliminating invalid or irrelevant information and summarizing data at various aggregation levels to create a clearer dataset. Data presentation is a crucial step, involving the description and documentation of findings, including direct quotations from interviews and observations (Calzon, 2023). The data is examined concurrently with the collection of observational data, interview transcripts, and relevant documentation, allowing for a dynamic understanding of the information. The verification process ensures the accuracy and reliability of the findings by cross-referencing the data against participants' experiences and existing research literature. This rigorous approach is essential for deriving meaningful insights from the collected data and reaching accurate conclusions about the impact of banditry in the northern region of Nigeria (Côté and Turgeon, 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reveal a disturbing pattern of disruption and devastation inflicted upon the educational landscape of Northwest Nigeria due to the pervasive menace of banditry and kidnapping. The region, which had shown promising signs of progress in embracing formal education, has now been plunged into a state of fear and uncertainty. Banditry, often synonymous with armed violence and criminality, has taken on multifaceted forms, including kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling, and targeted attacks on schools.

The Impact of Banditry and Kidnapping

The educational landscape of Northwest Nigeria has been marred by the pervasive threat of banditry and kidnapping, posing significant challenges to the region's learning institutions and its students. This section probes into the profound impact of these security issues on education, shedding light on the disruptions, psychological toll, and socio-economic implications faced by the youth population in the region.

Table 1: Deaths from January-June 2023 and causes

S/N	Events	Number of deaths
1	Banditry	1,152
2	Terrorism	527
3	Unknown gun men	178
4	Cultism/armed robbery	150
5	Kidnapping	35

6	Sea robbery/piracy	5
7	Farmer/herder conflict	291
8	Election violence	49
9	Security agents	98

Author Created from ACGMP WATCH REPORT 2023

Table 1 shows that insecurity challenges in Nigeria between January; 2023 to June; 2023 that a total of 2,485 persons have been killed from across the country. The casualties include politicians, traditional rulers, traders, unknown gunmen, herders, farmers, fishermen, private citizens, bandits, terrorists and law enforcement officers. However, the table shows that 1,152 deaths are linked to banditry activities, which is the cause of the highest number of death in the country. This high number of deaths is taking place in the North West part of the country, confirming that banditry has caused huge casualties in this region of the country (Dada 2023).

Impact on Educational Activities

Kidnapping and banditry characterized by armed attacks, violence and abductions in northwest Nigeria, have adversely affected educational activities leading to the closure and disruption of schools. "Borrowing from the Boko Haram playbook, bandits across the North West region have perfect the act of targeting schools as source of lucrative ransom" (Osasona, 2022). Tanimu (2023) affirms that the escalating incidence of banditry, as evidenced by widespread kidnapping of students across all levels of education, has severely disrupted teaching and learning in the region, instilling fear among students. This ongoing situation has profoundly impacted the psychological health and well-being of other students in the area.

In fact, one of the most alarming aspects uncovered by this research is the targeted attacks on schools, which have become increasingly common occurrences in the region. On the one hand, bandits, seeking to instil fear and chaos, have not hesitated to storm educational institutions, disrupting learning environments and endangering the lives of students and teachers alike (Abdulrasheed et al., 2015). Data from this study reveals that due to bandit and kidnappers' activities, schools in the Nigerian northwest have been ransacked, classrooms vandalized, and educational facilities destroyed, rendering them unusable (Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh, 2023). This has not only disrupted ongoing education but also poses challenges for the eventual reopening of schools.

Figure 2: Areas of mass kidnappings and raids by bandit groups in north-west Nigeria

*Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2021)*

The table above reveals that Bandit operations have made the North West the epicenter of abductions in Nigeria. Data from ACLED (2024), shows that between 2019 and 2023, there were 662 recorded kidnapping-related events in the North West, about 169% more than the 246 events recorded in the North East during the

same period. The North West, therefore, have experienced notable year-on-year increases in kidnapping-related events from 2019.

Many teachers have fled these areas due to safety concerns or lack of support from authorities. This exacerbates the shortage of educators, further hindering efforts to maintain educational continuity (Ojewale, 2024; Mendenhall, Gomez, and Varni, 2018). Moreover, as a direct consequence of these security threats in the northwest of Nigeria, there has been a marked decline in school enrolment across the region. Consequently, the count of children out of school has risen from 10.5 million before the incidents in the north to around 20 million as of 2022, highlighting the significant impact of the crisis on enrolment numbers (Alabi, 2023). Parents, understandably concerned for the safety of their children, have been reluctant to send them to school, leading to empty classrooms and deserted campuses. Additionally, the fear of abduction has prompted many schools to shut down indefinitely, further exacerbating the educational crisis (Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh, 2023).

Abductions in Northwest Nigeria
1 January 2019 - 8 March 2024
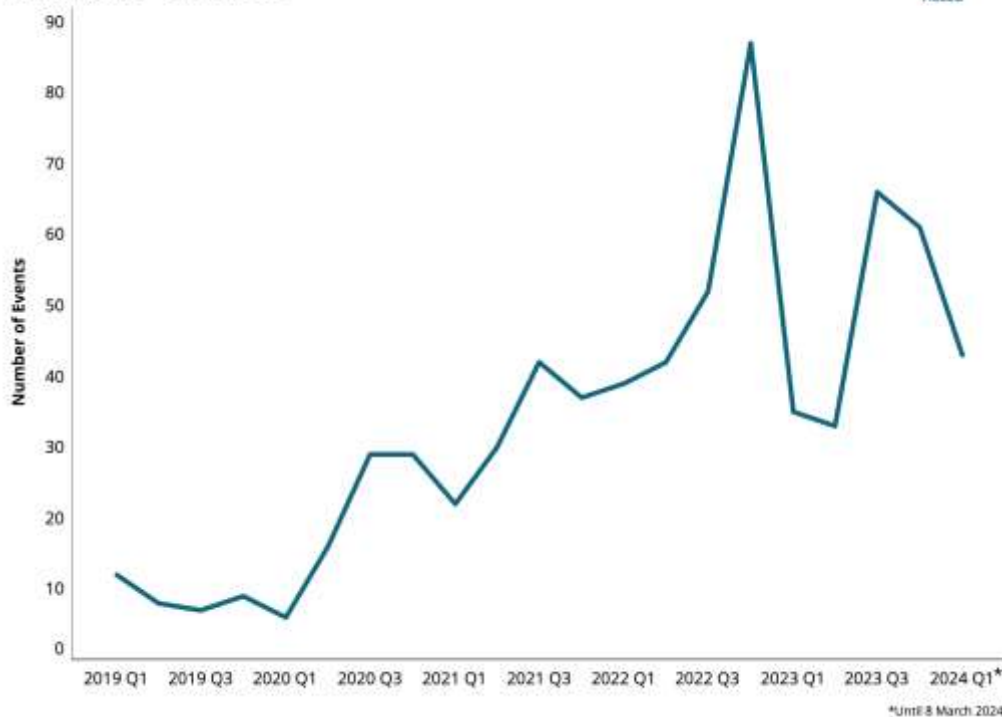
Figure 3: *Showing the number of the events of abduction in the Northwest region of Nigeria*

Source: ACLED (2024)

From the table above, there is a noticeable decline in cases of abductions from 2023. Over this period, kidnapping was the economic mainstay of armed bandit groups, replacing cattle rustling, which had provided the bulk of bandit revenues between 2011 and 2019, but which became less lucrative as cattle stock were depleted and herders relocated to safer areas, prompting bandits to seek alternative financing streams. Recently, to offset declining revenues from kidnapping, armed bandit groups have increasingly relied on the levying of farming communities and the artisanal gold mining sector (ACLED, 2024).

On the other hand, in 2020 and 2021 alone, kidnappers have targeted 20 schools in the region, leading to the abduction of around 1,436 students and the loss of 16 lives (Gulumbe, 2023). About 200 children remain missing. Specifically, from December 2020 to February 2021, 768 students were kidnapped, including 344 from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara; 80 from Islamiyya School, Mahuta, Katsina; 27 from GSS College, Kangara, Niger State; and 317 school girls from Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe,

Zamfara State (Akinwotu, 2020). In March 7th 2024, bandits attacked Kuriga in Chikun Local Government Area, Kaduna State, and reportedly abducting at least 280 students and teachers from two schools after firing at individuals. Speaking about his horrifying experience, one of the teachers, Abdullahi said, "I resumed school today (Thursday) at exactly 7:47am. I entered the acting principal's office and signed. All of a sudden, the acting principal asked me to look at my back and when I turned, we discovered that bandits had surrounded the school premises" (Isenyo, 2024).

Table 2: Number of Incidents due to Kidnappers and bandits activities between 2013 and 2023 on the scale of 0-5

| S/N	Incidents	Scale
1	Abductions	4.5
2	Violent attacks	3.5
3	Sexual violence	2
4	Property destroyed	3
	Total	**13**

Author created from the report of Ojewale (2024)

In the kidnap case of 7th March 2024 in Kaduna, Fatima Usman, a mother of one of the kidnapped school children, mentioned that all of her children were among those taken. Abdulahi, on the other hand, stated that 17 of his children were among the abducted individuals (Reuters, 7th March 2024). The victims of this perturbing experience stayed in captivity for 18 days before regaining their freedom and had to receive psychological support and medical attention. Additionally, the Sokoto State government stated that 17 other school children who were kidnapped on 9th March 2024 were later rescued after a period of two weeks in captivity (Asadu, 2024). In addition to the horror of being abducted, girl students including minors were sexually violated (Ojewale, 2024).

As a result of the threat of attacks by bandits and abductions, state governments in the region have had to close down over 618 schools in the area (Osasona, 2022). The reasons for this are not far-fetched; the first is safety concerns: schools become targets for bandits seeking ransom, loot, or to spread fear within communities (Sanchi, Alhassan, Ajibade, and Sabo, 2022). Consequently, authorities have temporarily or permanently shut down schools to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and staff. In some instances, families fleeing violence may relocate to safer areas, resulting in the displacement of students, even up 10,000 students as have been experienced in Zamfara State (Global Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2022). This disrupted their education as they struggle to find new schools or face obstacles accessing education in their new location, due to the increasing insecurity posed in the region (Ojo, Oyewole & Aina, 2023).

a. Psychological Impact on Teachers and Students

The psychological toll inflicted upon the victims of these crimes cannot be overstated. Survivors of abductions or bandits' attacks, as well as their families, grapple with fear, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Bvindi (2018) avers that kidnapping and banditry have significant psychological implications for both students and educators, affecting the learning process in different ways. Amaeze (2017) has also affirmed how, depression being an emotional state is usually accompanied with poor self-worth, self-concept, self-efficacy, low self-worth and a state of dissatisfaction with self, environment and others. Duza Danjuma a 23-year-old student stated that there were times he had to hide inside ceiling and suffered the thought of the possibility of being burnt alive in the house and how every gunshot sounded like death. Accordingly, there is no gainsaying that exposure to violence and insecurity can cause trauma among students, leading to fear, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating in class. The constant threat of attacks has created a hostile learning environment, inhibiting students' ability to learn effectively. Additionally, the psychological distress caused by banditry in the region has disrupted students' cognitive processes, impairing their ability to retain information and engage in academic activities. This has also resulted in academic regression and hinder long-term educational attainment (Alagbe, 2021).
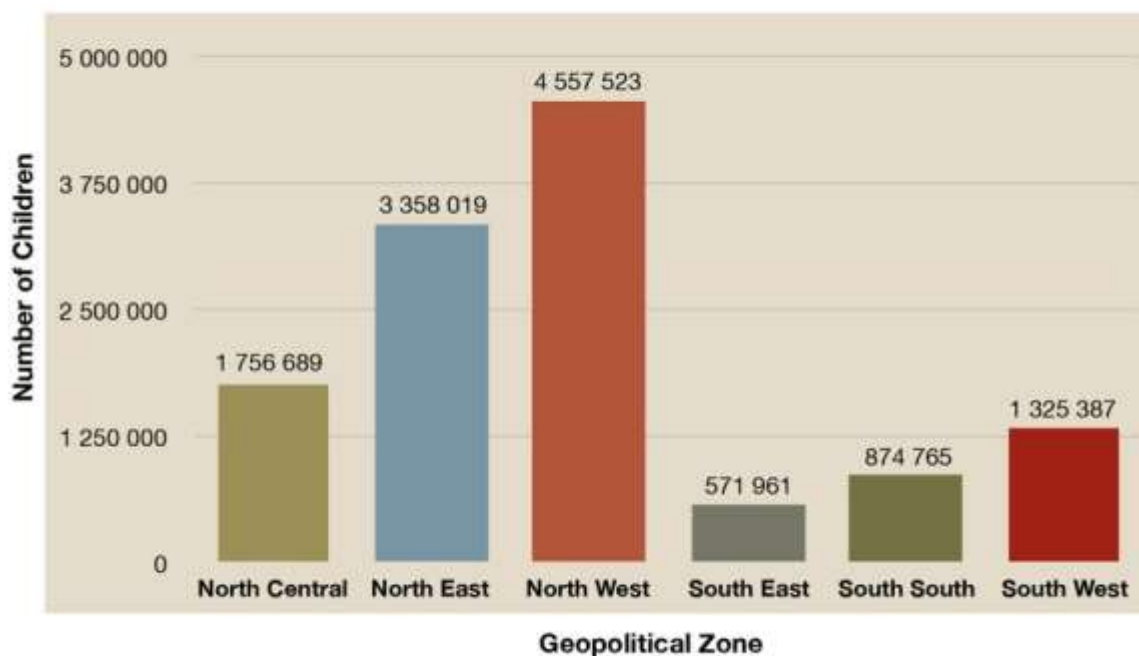
Figure 4: Number of Children not in School, by Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria

Source: ACCORD (2022)

In Northwest Nigeria, violent and criminal banditry have exposed pupils and students to be susceptible to emotional distress including depression, anger, and feelings of helplessness, which can further impede their learning and overall well-being (Tanimu, 2023). Similarly, Barde Jatau an educator, in an emotional way expressed how they as educators have struggled with their own emotional challenges, affecting their capacity to support students effectively. The ripple effect of these is loss of trust in institutions, including schools and educational authorities by pupils/students and parents (Mendenhall, Gomez, and Varni, 2018). Students have lost confidence, and justifiably so, in the ability of schools to provide a safe and conducive learning environment, leading to decreased attendance and participation. The constant threat of violence and the uncertainty of safety have created an atmosphere of pervasive fear, leading to a decline in mental well-being among students and educators alike.

b. Socio-Economic Impact on Communities

The impact of banditry and kidnapping extends beyond the immediate disruptions to schooling. The socio-economic implications are profound, with communities experiencing a loss of productivity, diminished human capital development, and a weakening of the social fabric. The closure of schools not only deprives children of their right to education but also hampers their future prospects, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and vulnerability (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2009; Kanu 2017). Makama Judith a resident of Erena village in Shiroro stated that the socio-economic life of the region is in jeopardy. She explained that this is so, because that Erena is the food production hob of the region, where grains were hitherto usually sold for as little as 150 Naira per *mudu* (the local grain measure). However, because of the banditry attacks, many had to forcefully leave the region for safety thereby bringing the productivity to its knees. The immediate consequence of this is that the cost of grains has gone to as high as 500 t0 600 Naira per *mudu*. For her, this is quite devastating beyond just socio-economic injury. Hunger and starvation is soon on the way if nothing urgent is done in this regard.

c. School Closures and Disruptions

Schools in the northwest region of Nigeria have been forced to close temporarily or indefinitely due to security threats, causing significant disruptions in the academic calendar and examination schedules. Barde Jatau an educator from Daza averred that because armed groups have attacked schools through by shootings, bombings, and abductions, many lives were lost. Jatau expressed how the fear of such attacks has made "The principal of Fuka school wrote to the ministry of education that the place was under attacks and that they should shut down the schools." He further lamented that the school is as yet not opened.

For Dalong Christiana the insecurity has forced many families to flee their homes, while teachers have also been displaced, with some schools facing shortages of teaching staff and that these factors all contributed to the disruptions of educational. More, armed groups have targeted and destroyed school buildings, furniture, and other educational facilities, leaving many schools in disrepair and lacking basic infrastructure. State governments' resources have been strained by the need to address security challenges, leading to reduced budgetary allocations for the education sector.

State governments, federal government, and other stakeholders have taken various measures to address the impact of insecurity on education in the region, such as increased security presence around schools, establishment of safe schools initiatives and programs, provision of alternative learning centres for displaced students, reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged school infrastructure, deployment of more teachers to affected areas, increased budgetary allocations for the education sector, and collaboration with communities to strengthen school-based security. However, these efforts have had limited success in fully mitigating the impact on educational activities. More comprehensive and sustained interventions are needed to address the root causes of insecurity and ensure uninterrupted functioning of the education system in the northwest region of Nigeria.

d. Declining Enrolment and Attendance

Insecurity in Nigeria's northwest region has significantly impacted school enrolment and attendance, exacerbating the education sector's challenges. The security threats have led to a decline in student enrolment, with parents and guardians increasingly reluctant to send their children to school due to fear of safety (Ogunode, et. al., 2022). The frequent attacks on schools, kidnappings, and general climate of insecurity have eroded families' confidence in the education system's ability to protect their children, resulting in a sharp drop in enrolment.

School closures have disrupted the academic calendar, causing many students to be unable to attend classes regularly. Families were forced to relocate or keep their children at home for extended periods, leading to inconsistent attendance. The displacement of large numbers of people has also directly affected school attendance, as students who have been uprooted face significant challenges in accessing education in their new locations. According to Nicholas Sunday, a 19-year student families who have migrated from their homes would only allow their children enrol into schools where they are sure they would be safe. But most of them have relocated into safe interior regions where schools are not available and this necessarily reduces the degree of school enrolment.

The decline in enrolment and attendance has far-reaching consequences for the education sector in the northwest region, undermining efforts by state governments and other stakeholders to improve educational outcomes. The loss of instructional time and disruption to the learning process has contributed to a decline in academic performance and widening educational disparities between affected areas and other parts of the country.

e. Teacher Shortages and Absenteeism

Insecurity in the northwest region of Nigeria has led to a significant teacher shortage crisis, resulting in high levels of absenteeism and acute shortages in the education sector. Targeted attacks by armed groups have created an environment of fear and uncertainty among the teaching population, leading many teachers to be reluctant to continue working in volatile areas (Sanchi et al., 2022). Duza Danjuma indicated how most of the teachers in their village school leave in the safe township areas, who came on daily basis. However, when the

insecurity matters became a serious danger and threat to life, they understandably kept off their duties, even though he believes that they still claim their salaries from the government authorities. In the words of Makama, "Nobody wants to die, so we understand why they don't report to work."

Besides, the displacement of large numbers of people due to insecurity has also contributed to the teacher shortage crisis, as families flee their homes and teachers are forced to relocate in their thousands, leaving behind schools and communities they once served (Christopher et al., 2013). Duza in his statement also indicated how this also has resulted in a significant loss of experienced and qualified teachers, leaving many schools understaffed and struggling to maintain adequate teacher-to-student ratios. Frequent school closures and disruptions to the academic calendar have negatively affected teacher attendance and retention, leading to high turnover rates. The shortage of teachers has had a cascading effect on the quality of education and student learning outcomes, with overcrowded classrooms, inability to provide individualized attention, and lack of specialized subject-matter experts contributing to a decline in the overall standard of education in affected areas.

f. Infrastructure Damage and Destruction

The ongoing insecurity in the northwest region of Nigeria has significantly impacted the physical infrastructure of schools, exacerbating the challenges faced by the education sector. Armed groups have targeted the destruction of school buildings, classrooms, and other essential educational facilities, leading to overcrowding, compromised learning environments, and a decline in the quality of education (Christopher et al., 2013). The damage to essential facilities such as laboratories, libraries, and computer labs has limited the ability of schools to offer specialized and innovative educational programs, deprived students of access to necessary tools and resources (Sanchi et al., 2022). The destruction of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities has compromised the health and well-being of students and staff, increasing the risk of communicable diseases and hampering efforts to maintain proper hygiene standards. While lamenting these damages, Makama stated in tears that the damages include educational facilities, homes, shops, churches and on few instances, even mosques.

The loss of safe and secure school premises has had a detrimental effect on the overall learning environment, undermining students' ability to focus on their studies (Goke, 2019). State governments and stakeholders have attempted to address the issue through interventions such as reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged schools, provision of temporary learning spaces, and the deployment of mobile classrooms and learning centers. However, the scale of destruction and persistent security challenges make it difficult to keep up with the demand for safe and functional educational facilities.

g. Inequitable Access to Education

The insecurity in the northwest region of Nigeria has significantly impacted the equitable access to education, exacerbating existing disparities and creating new barriers for marginalized communities. The most affected areas, such as Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, and parts of Kaduna, have experienced severe disruptions to educational activities, leading to significant learning losses and reduced access to education for children in these areas (Sanchi et. al., 2022). The fear and uncertainty created by security threats have led many parents and guardians to prioritize their children's safety over their education, widening the educational divide.

The displacement of large numbers due to insecurity has disproportionately affected marginalized groups, such as women, girls, and children with disabilities. Dalong affirmed Displaced families often struggle to enrol their children in new schools, facing challenges such as language barriers, lack of documentation, and limited resources. This has led to a higher risk of these vulnerable groups being excluded from the education system altogether.

The destruction of school infrastructure has also had a more severe impact on resource-constrained communities, leaving students in impoverished areas or rural locations at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers in more affluent or urban areas. Teacher shortage and absenteeism caused by insecurity are more acutely felt in remote and underserved communities, where they often struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers. State governments and stakeholders have attempted to address these disparities through various interventions, such as the establishment of alternative learning centres for displaced students, financial support

and incentives for teachers in high-risk areas, and prioritization of infrastructure reconstruction in affected communities. However, the scale and persistence of security challenges have made it difficult to achieve meaningful and sustainable progress in ensuring equitable access to education.

h. Decreased Educational Outcomes

The insecurity in the northwest region of Nigeria has significantly impacted educational outcomes, leading to significant disruptions to the academic calendar and loss of instructional time for students. Frequent school closures, attacks on educational facilities, and displacement of students and teachers have led to significant learning gaps, making it difficult for students to cover the full curriculum and acquire necessary subject-matter knowledge and competencies (Ogunode, et. al, 2022). Disruptions to examination schedules have also negatively impacted educational outcomes, as students have been unable to sit for crucial national and regional exams within scheduled timeframes, delaying their academic progression and jeopardizing their opportunities for further education and employment. According to 22-year-old Victor Isaiah, children who were known with the mantra of wanting to be medical doctors, nurses, lawyers are known to be generally quiet about it because the education that they saw was their stepping stone have been stifled. The declining enrolment and attendance rates have further exacerbated the issue of diminished educational outcomes, with fewer students actively engaged in the learning process. The shortage of qualified teachers and high levels of absenteeism have directly impacted the quality of instruction and the learning environment.

Religion and Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

In some climes such as Mali, the rise and growth of banditry have been linked to religious extremism fostered by sectarian religious organizations (Kanu and Dyikuk, 2018). This situation has been exacerbated by the inadequacy of state institutions in delivering essential services (Kanu and Ushe, 2018). The combination of weak state structures, insurgency and lawlessness has driven more pastoralists towards religious extremism, contributing to the increase in bandit activities in northern Mali (Rosenje and Adeniyi, 2021). This is not surprising because as Gustafson (2017) avers, "There are always individuals who justify their immoral behaviour on the basis of traditional, religious or cultural codes and loosely apply ancient teachings, out of context, into a modern-day setting."

In this connection, it has been argued that aside the complex interplay of economic, political, and social factors, activities of bandits in northwest Nigeria has some religious undercurrents often playing a role. In their study, Ojo, Oyewole and Aina, (2023) reveal that ethno-communal and religious forces are significant triggers of kidnapping and armed banditry in north-west Nigeria, because most Nigerians, rather than state-centric nationality, identify primarily based on communal, ethnic and religious identities. In this connection, Rosenje and Adeniyi (2021) have observed that the Northwest Nigeria region comprises various ethnic groups, with the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani being notable, often known for their pastoralist way of life. It is often claimed that kidnappers and bandits originate from these groups, and some may exploit religious beliefs for recruitment or to justify their criminal actions. Kanu and Agbo, (2023) have argued that leaders or recruiters of kidnappers and bandits might employ religious sentiments to attract support or validate their activities, portraying them as a form of resistance against perceived injustices, meanwhile, Barnett et al. (2022), have previously argued in the same line.

It has also been argued that although primarily based in the northeast, the influence of Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist group, has extended to parts of the northwest. Osasona (2022) asserts that "One clear area of convergence between bandits and terror groups in the region is the adoption of the Boko Haram strategy of mass adoption of school children to fund criminal operations." This influence can contribute to the radicalization of individuals and recruitment into banditry. Therefore, there is increasing speculation that the armed bandits have ties to the Islamist Boko Haram insurgents. While the insurgency is primarily focused in the northeast, Boko Haram along with its allies such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, have maintained a significant presence and carried out documented attacks in the northwest (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina, 2023). Barnett, Rufa'i and Abdulaziz (2022) have, therefore, stated that, "Though these two conflicts are distinct,

Nigerians fear that the insurgencies will overlap and jihadis will cooperate with bandits in a classic example of a 'crime-terror nexus' or possibly convert the bandits (who are mostly Sunni Muslim) into jihadists themselves."

While not all instances of violent and criminal banditry in northwest Nigeria are explicitly tied to religious factors, the region's complex socio-political landscape often sees religion as well as the potential influence of Islamist extremist groups like Boko Haram intersecting with other issues such as poverty, marginalization and conflict. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to address and mitigate banditry in the region (Kanu, 2017).

This notwithstanding, the important question here is: is there any tenet in Islam or Christianity that promotes violence, criminality or any form of banditry? A cursory look at the two predominant religions in the region, reveals that crime and violence as perpetrated by bandits do not truly represent the tenets of any of these religions. Barnett et al., (2022) clearly show that the activities of bandits have no connection to religious obligations. In fact, in Islam, banditry is categorized among crimes known as Hiraabah as contained in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:33) of the Qur'an. As Hiraabah, therefore, banditry in any colouration is recognised in Islam as a criminal offence that elicits death penalty. The said Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:33) states that such criminal and violent actors should "be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment."

Furthermore, Sahara Reporters on February 23, 2021 reported that in the presence of Governor Bello Matawalle of Zamfara State, "As part of previous amnesty agreements, many bandits have sworn on the Qur'an that they have repented from banditry." As reported by Global Gist also on February 9, 2021 "Notorious Bandits Commander, Daudawa, Others Repent, Swear with Quran." The argument here is that if the Qur'an, which is the Holy Book in Islam makes banditry illegal, how is it that they repent from it using same Qur'an? This argument that the Holy Book does not teach banditry in Islamic tenet is substantiated by Professor Ishaq Akintola, an Islamic human rights activist and leader of the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC), on 26th June 2021, who stated that "Nothing can extenuate the crimes committed by bandits. We should not look for excuses for them. Rather we should educate the Nigerian public on the position of the Shariah regarding banditry. We should also let the bandits know the gravity of their crimes and the 'kabiirah' status of their sins."

Moreover, if by any chance they are Christians, the Bible is clearly averse to violence and banditry related crimes. Some texts such as Exodus 20:15, Proverbs 1:10-16, 1 Timothy 6:9-10 and Matthew 7:12, among others, condemn banditry, theft, violence and the exploitation of others for personal gain. Christianity promotes justice, compassion and the importance of living in harmony with others. For instance, Exodus 20:15 prohibits theft, while Proverbs 1:10-16 speaks against banditry related crimes:

> My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, 'Come along with us; let's lie in wait for innocent blood, let's ambush some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; cast lots with us; we will all share the loot'— my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into evil, they are swift to shed blood.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that the claim that banditry is motivated by religions is false; rather, perpetrators are criminally and maliciously using religion to promote their nefarious activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these findings, this study serves as a poignant call to action for comprehensive security measures, community engagement initiatives, and strategic policy interventions. It is imperative that government agencies, civil society organizations, and the international community collaborate to address these complex challenges. Efforts must be made to safeguard educational institutions, provide psychosocial support for affected individuals, and create safe learning environments for children.

Beyond this, improving the availability of high-quality education, vocational training, and skill development initiatives are crucial. This equips individuals with the necessary knowledge, abilities, and certifications required to obtain steady employment and explore diverse avenues for achievement. Similarly, the importance of promoting community involvement, engagement, and empowerment through local initiatives, grassroots organizations, and inclusive decision-making processes cannot be overstated. These efforts address community grievances, foster social unity, and lay the foundation for sustainable progress (Wainwright, 2023).

More so, this paper recommends that dealing with the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to banditry is crucial for preventing recruitment and effectively combating criminal activities. In this connection, a key approach involves implementing focused poverty alleviation programs that offer economic prospects, vocational education, and financial assistance to marginalized communities. By lessening their vulnerability to recruitment by bandit groups, such efforts can significantly reduce criminal activities. This may also involve encouraging sustainable livelihoods and income-generating ventures through initiatives like microfinance, small business aid, and agricultural projects, empowering individuals to pursue legal and sustainable means of livelihood (Kanu, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The profound impact of banditry and kidnapping on the educational sector of Northwest Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The insights gleaned from this research highlight the immediate necessity for interventions aimed at safeguarding the basic right to education for every child in the area. Restoring a secure and favourable learning environment is not only crucial for the region's socio-economic progress but also for the holistic well-being and future opportunities of its youthful populace.

As the threat of insecurity casts a long shadow over Northwest Nigeria, the urgency to take firm and united action has never been more critical. It is imperative that stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, and the international community, come together to implement effective measures that ensure the safety and educational prosperity of the region. Failure to do so not only jeopardizes the present but also imperils the future of an entire generation.

To address the teacher shortage and absenteeism, a multi-pronged approach is required, combining enhanced security measures, improved working conditions and support for teachers, and long-term strategies to develop and retain a robust and capable teaching workforce. Addressing the issue of diminished educational outcomes requires a comprehensive and long-term approach that combines enhanced security measures, increased investment in the education sector, and the implementation of innovative strategies to support student learning and well-being.

To address the issue of infrastructure damage and destruction, a comprehensive and long-term approach is required that combines enhanced security measures, increased investment in the education sector, and the implementation of innovative strategies to ensure the resilience and sustainability of school infrastructure. This may involve the adoption of disaster-resistant construction techniques, diversification of learning spaces, and community-based initiatives to protect and maintain educational facilities.

Addressing the issue requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying security challenges and restores a sense of safety and confidence among families. This may involve increased investment in school security, community-based initiatives to ensure student and teacher protection, and targeted support and resources for displaced families and their children.

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