

## Implications of Boko Haram Insurgency on Basic Education in Borno State, Nigeria

BY

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### Abstract

This research investigated the implication of the Boko Haram insurgency on basic education in Borno State, Nigeria. Continuous violent attacks by the group have resulted in the destruction of school buildings, the displacement of both teachers and pupils, and significant interruptions in the teaching and learning process. A qualitative research design was employed, with a case study approach adopted to gain deeper insight into how the insurgency has affected the educational sector. The study population consisted of 54 stakeholders, including education secretaries and school inspectors across the 27 local government areas of the state. From this pool, nine participants were purposively selected—three from each senatorial zone—based on their availability, accessibility, and direct involvement or knowledge regarding basic schools and the insurgency's consequences. Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews (KIIs), which were suitable for eliciting comprehensive accounts and perspectives from respondents. Data were analyzed thematically, with manual coding supported by NVivo software to enhance accuracy and reliability. The findings indicated that the insurgency has gravely weakened basic education in Borno State, manifesting in the destruction of facilities, the killing and abduction of teachers, loss of academic time, displacement of learners, and prolonged school closures due to insecurity. The study concluded that these disruptions have undermined children's educational foundation in the state, posing a serious threat to long-term human capital development. It was recommended that government and stakeholders urgently rehabilitate damaged schools, provide adequate security for staff and students, offer psychosocial support, and adopt alternative learning strategies to ensure continuity of education during periods of conflict.

**Keywords:** *Boko Haram insurgency, basic education, insurgency.*

### Introduction

Since the 2009 uprising of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria, the crisis has grown into the region's longest-running and bloodiest conflict, with education emerging as one of its principal casualties. What began as a single Islamist movement has splintered, most notably into Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), magnifying the scale of devastation across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. Persistent insecurity has uprooted entire communities,

levelled public infrastructure and paralysed schooling, producing what the International Crisis Group (2019) calls one of the world's most intricate humanitarian emergencies. Central to the sect's worldview is a rejection of Western-style learning, branded "haram." This doctrine has translated into systematic assaults on pupils, teachers and school buildings, rupturing every layer of the educational ecosystem. The damage is multidimensional: shuttered classrooms, mass kidnappings, torched facilities and deep

psychological wounds that collectively erode human-capital formation.

UNICEF (2023) reports that more than 1,500 schools have remained closed since 2009, keeping roughly one million children out of class. Many sites are still unusable because of destroyed classrooms, missing furniture, stolen textbooks or the continued displacement of both staff and learners. In Borno State alone, 900 schools were razed between 2009 and 2020 (Odo, 2021), drastically shrinking the supply of safe learning spaces.

Kidnapping has become a signature tactic. The 2014 abduction of 276 girls from Government Secondary School, Chibok, provoked global outrage and the viral #BringBackOurGirls campaign (Zenn, 2020), yet it was only one episode in a wider pattern. Hundreds of other students and educators have since been seized for ransom, forced recruitment or servitude. The pervasive fear of abduction—especially for girls—has pushed many parents to withdraw their children from school altogether, driving down enrolment rates (Salihu & Ahmed, 2022).

Survivors carry invisible scars. Displaced pupils frequently exhibit anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, conditions that undermine concentration and retention (Abdulrasheed et al., 2021). Yet mental-health services in the affected states are virtually non-existent, leaving these children without therapeutic support. Teachers, meanwhile, endure chronic stress and the real risk of assassination. Over 600 educators were killed in Borno between 2009 and 2021, and countless others have fled, stripping schools of qualified personnel (Yusuf, 2022).

The cumulative result is a steep drop in learning outcomes. National examination data (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023) show that pupils in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe score roughly 40 % below the national average in literacy and numeracy, widening the educational divide between the conflict zone and the rest of Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates how Boko Haram's insurgency has reshaped the delivery, access and quality of basic education in Borno State.

## Statement of the Problem

The ongoing conflict has crippled primary and lower-secondary schooling across Borno State, forcing thousands

of schools to shut and leaving countless children displaced and untaught. Beyond the immediate harm, this erosion of learning threatens future skills formation, deepens poverty and exposes young people to manipulation or recruitment. Efforts such as the Safe Schools Initiative and various non-formal learning schemes exist, yet chronic violence, underfunding and logistical hurdles blunt their reach. Critically, the literature devotes far more attention to universities and colleges than to the day-to-day realities faced by primary and junior schools. Precisely because reliable data on how often, and in what ways, these foundational levels are targeted remain scarce, the present research narrows its lens to the specific impact of insurgent activity on basic education in Borno State.

## Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to assess the Boko Haram Insurgency and its implications on basic education in Borno state. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Ascertain the nature of Boko Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state.
- ii. Determine the frequency of Boko Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state
- iii. Determine the effect of Boko Haram attacks on Basic Education in Borno state.

## Research Question

The following research questions were generated to guide the study:

- 1) What is the nature of Boko Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state?
- 2) What is the frequency of Boko Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state?
- 3) What are the effect of Boko Haram attacks on Basic Education in Borno state?

## Review Literature

### Basic Education in Borno State, Nigeria: A Brief Conceptual Discription

Basic education refers to the foundational level of formal education, typically comprising early childhood care, primary education, and the first three years of junior

secondary education. In Nigeria, basic education is structured under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which aims to provide free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 15 years (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2013). The success of this system is crucial for national development, yet it has been severely undermined by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's North-East, particularly in Borno State.

### **Structure and Importance of Basic Education in Nigeria**

Basic education is critical for literacy, numeracy, personal development, and preparation for higher levels of education and future employment. It equips children with the necessary life skills to contribute meaningfully to society. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) emphasizes that this level of education should be inclusive, equitable, and accessible regardless of gender, location, or socioeconomic status (UBEC, 2017). However, these objectives are increasingly unattainable in insurgency-affected areas like Borno.

### **Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on Education in North-East Nigeria: A Focus on Basic Education in Borno State**

The Boko Haram insurgency has had a devastating impact on education in Nigeria's North-East region, particularly in Borno State, which remains the epicenter of the conflict. The group's violent opposition to Western education—epitomized by its name, which loosely translates to “Western education is forbidden”—has led to widespread attacks on schools, abductions of students and teachers, and the displacement of communities. These activities have severely undermined access to and the quality of basic education.

**i. Destruction and Closure of Schools:** The insurgency has resulted in the widespread destruction of educational infrastructure. According to UNICEF (2020), more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed across the North-East, with Borno State experiencing the greatest loss. The attacks not only demolished physical structures but also instilled fear among educators and learners. As of 2017, over 57% of schools in Borno were non-functional due to

insecurity and lack of facilities (UNICEF, 2017). This destruction has led to a significant decline in school attendance and enrollment.

- ii. Access and Enrollment Decline:** The Boko Haram insurgency has created an unsafe learning environment, leading to widespread school closures and declining student enrollment. In Borno State, many children are unable to access education due to displacement, fear of attacks, or destruction of school facilities. As of 2020, over 1,400 schools were closed or destroyed in the North-East, with Borno being the worst affected (UNICEF, 2020).
- iii. Teacher Shortages and Loss of Educational Personnel:** The region has seen a sharp decline in the number of available teachers due to the violence. Over 2,295 teachers have been killed and more than 19,000 displaced since the insurgency began (UNESCO, 2018). In Borno State, many qualified educators have either fled or refused postings in insecure areas, resulting in severe human resource deficits. The absence of teachers affects the quality of instruction, increases student-teacher ratios, and contributes to poor learning outcomes.
- iv. Quality of Education:** Even when schools remain operational, the quality of education suffers due to a shortage of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms in IDP camps, and inadequate learning materials. Teachers are frequently displaced or reluctant to serve in insecure areas, which disrupts learning continuity and contributes to poor educational outcomes (Adewale, 2021).
- v. Gender Disparities and Targeted Attacks on Girls:** The insurgency has exacerbated gender inequality in education. Girls are often targeted for abduction and forced marriage by insurgents, as seen in the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping. As a result, families are increasingly reluctant to send their daughters to school due to safety concerns (UNESCO, 2018). This fear has contributed to a drop in female enrollment and retention in basic education in Borno State. Girls face increased barriers to education due to cultural norms and safety concerns. The abduction of schoolgirls by Boko Haram, most notably the Chibok incident in 2014, has led to widespread fear and

reluctance among families to send daughters to school. This has widened gender disparities in basic education access and completion rates in Borno (UNESCO, 2018).

- vi. **Displacement and Interruption of Learning:** The insurgency has caused the displacement of over two million people in the North-East, including hundreds of thousands of school-aged children (UNHCR, 2020). Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps often lack adequate educational facilities, forcing children to go months or years without formal learning. In Borno State, displaced students are often crowded into temporary learning centers with limited resources and insufficient instructional time (Adewale, 2021).
- vii. **Psychosocial Effects and Trauma:** Many children in Borno State have witnessed violence, lost family members, or survived attacks, leading to post-traumatic stress and emotional instability. These psychosocial impacts severely affect children's ability to concentrate and perform in school. Teachers are often ill-equipped to handle trauma-related issues, and schools lack trained counselors and support systems (Omeje & Ahmed, 2014). Exposure to violence and trauma significantly affects children's ability to learn. Many students in Borno suffer from psychological distress, and there is limited capacity within the education system to provide necessary psychosocial support (Omeje & Ahmed, 2014). This hinders learning retention and overall academic performance.
- viii. **Stalling of Educational Development Goals:** The cumulative effect of the Boko Haram insurgency has stalled progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education. In Borno and other conflict-affected areas, rebuilding destroyed infrastructure and restoring normal academic calendars remain ongoing challenges (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2020).

## Methodology

### *Research approach*

The inquiry follows a qualitative, single-case orientation in

order to examine how armed conflict has reshaped basic education in Borno State, Nigeria. A bounded case design is well-suited to disentangle intricate social processes because it permits close inspection of contextual conditions and first-hand accounts from people who live and work in the affected areas. By foregrounding individual narratives, the strategy illuminates the meanings that local actors attach to disrupted schooling.

### *Participants and sampling frame*

Altogether, 54 officers qualified for inclusion namely, the education secretary and the school inspector attached to each of the 27 local-government areas. From this pool, nine informants were deliberately chosen, three from every senatorial zone, using purposive (non-random) criteria: physical accessibility, willingness to participate, and demonstrable familiarity with the condition of primary and junior schools since the insurgency began. Concentrating on these seasoned officials maximises the depth and

trustworthiness of the evidence collected.

### *Data collection procedures*

Information was obtained through two complementary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews allowed open-ended yet guided conversations that steered toward emergent topics. Second, key-informant interviews were held with senior education functionaries who hold strategic oversight of basic schooling in the state. Both sets of interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### *Data treatment and interpretation*

A systematic thematic analysis was performed. Transcripts were read repeatedly, line-by-line and codes were assigned manually, and NVivo software was used to organise the codes into broader patterns. Themes were subsequently refined through constant comparison until they captured recurrent ideas about the ways in which violent attacks have altered educational access, infrastructure, staffing and learner well-being. The final presentation of findings is arranged around these salient themes, directly addressing the study's aims and guiding questions.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the impact of Boko

Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state?

The Boko Haram attacks in Borno state over the years have had a devastating impact on the education system especially at the elementary levels, disrupting access to education and poor enrollment, especially for young people. Teachers have been threatened and in some cases killed. Schools have been damaged and destroyed, and often transformed into shelters for Internally Displaced People (IDP). Few of the schools that are in operation in communities where there were less or no case of Boko Haram attacks in the state are overcrowded and largely unable to meet the needs of the host population and the IDPs.

Key Informant Interviews with the respondents revealed that:

*"...since these bad boys started attacking schools in our communities and abducting both students and teachers, many teachers have resigned and some that had their ways demanded to be transferred out of this place to a safer place."*

Another respondent revealed that:

*"...the insurgent' attacks on basic schools have created fear in the minds of both parents and pupils. Most parents and guardians have become more afraid to send their children to school; this has affected student's enrollment over the years"*

Another respondent asserted that:

*"You see, at the peak of this insurgency our communities are over overcrowded, schools were closed completely because before the attacks reached us here, most of the IDPs from other parts of the state where the attacks started ran to this place taking shelter in the schools. In fact, I can count many primary schools that had been closed for over two academic sessions"*

**Research Question Two:** What is the frequency of Boko Haram attacks on Basic schools in Borno state?

Attacks by Boko Haram group on basic schools in Borno state have been too frequent and callous due to their ideological opposition to western education. From the KII held the interviewees responded that:

*"...Boko Haram attacks on basic schools in Borno State happen quite regularly, though not every day. If it doesn't*

*happen this week here, you will hear that it has happened somewhere else within the state"*

Another respondent asserted that,

*"... Sometimes these attacks occur every week or month, especially when during school hours. The frequency of the attacks seems to spike when government or the military started boasting that they have defeated Boko Haram."*

Another respondent noted that,

*"...While it might not be a constant threat that is being experienced daily, the risk is definitely ongoing and serious. We have many instances where our female students and teachers were attacked and kidnapped during school hours in some communities within the State."*

**Research Question Three:** What are the Nature of Boko Haram attacks on Basic Schools in Borno state?

Boko Haram employed diverse tactics in unleashing terror on Basic schools in Borno State over the years, which include abduction of school children, mass shooting and killings, displacement, violent attacks on communities and destruction of infrastructures. Key Informant Interview with the respondents revealed that:

A respondent reported that:

*"Boko Haram sect has been carrying out its ruthless activities against schools in this state. They have been bombing schools and abducting school children."*

Another Respondent reported:

*You see. Kidnappings and abducting school teachers and students are the most frequent attack, but they happen enough to be a serious concern. It is a tactic that Boko Haram uses to disrupt aid delivery and intimidate both the workers and the local communities.*

Furthermore, a respondent reported noted that:

*From what I know, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are planted in schools and suicide bombing is also another tactics Boko Haram uses against schools in Borno state. I think the goal is to create chaos and completely destroy western education in this country.*

## Discussion of Findings

### Impact of Boko Haram Attacks on Basic Schools in Borno State

The study revealed that Boko Haram insurgency has had



devastating effects on basic education in Borno State, including school closures, destruction of facilities, decline in enrollment, teacher resignation, and the use of schools as shelters for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These disruptions have weakened educational access and human capital development. This finding aligns with UNICEF (2020), which reported that attacks on schools in northeast Nigeria have denied millions of children access to safe learning environments, thereby deepening educational inequalities. Similarly, Garba (2023) emphasized that the destruction of schools, coupled with parental fear of sending children to classrooms, has led to reduced enrollment and long-term socio-economic consequences. Olanrewaju and Omotosho (2019) also noted that schools in insurgency-affected areas are often converted into IDP camps, preventing regular teaching and learning. In the same vein, Okoli and Iortyer (2014) stressed that the Boko Haram insurgency has severely undermined educational foundations in the northeast, thereby perpetuating poverty and insecurity in the region.

#### **Frequency of Boko Haram Attacks on Basic Schools in Borno State**

The study found that Boko Haram attacks on basic schools are frequent and sporadic, occurring weekly or monthly across different communities. The frequency intensifies whenever security agencies or government claim progress against insurgents, creating an atmosphere of persistent fear and insecurity. This corroborates the work of Alao and Atere (2019), who reported that Boko Haram attacks are often unpredictable but recurrent, leaving schools and communities in a state of constant uncertainty. Ibrahim (2017) similarly observed that the regularity of attacks sustains a cycle of displacement, school disruption, and loss of confidence in the education system. Akinbi and Olagunju (2020) further argued that the persistent and sporadic nature of insurgent attacks keeps communities vulnerable, as education is continually interrupted. Likewise, Maiangwa (2017) contended that Boko Haram's strategic targeting of schools reflects its ideological opposition to western education, thereby ensuring the continuation of frequent attacks as part of its broader terror campaign.

#### **Nature of Boko Haram Attacks on Basic Schools in Borno State**

The study established that Boko Haram employs violent tactics such as abductions, mass shootings, bombings, use of IEDs, arson, and suicide attacks on schools. These methods aim to instill fear, displace communities, and destroy the foundations of western education in the region. This finding is consistent with Human Rights Watch (2016), which reported that Boko Haram systematically abducts school children and teachers to create fear and obstruct educational access. Similarly, Oduola (2021) noted that the sect uses abductions and bombings as tools to weaken education and enforce its anti-western ideology. Okechukwu (2019) highlighted that schools in Borno and neighboring states have been primary targets of violent attacks, with kidnappings used as a bargaining tool for ransom and propaganda. In agreement, Anyadike (2015) explained that the insurgents deliberately attack schools to symbolize resistance against western education and to disrupt the socio-economic development of affected communities.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study established that the Boko Haram insurgency has gravely undermined basic education in Borno State through persistent attacks that result in school closures, destruction of facilities, teacher displacement, and declining enrollment. The recurrent and unpredictable nature of these assaults has instilled fear in parents, pupils, and teachers, thereby eroding confidence in the education system. Beyond the immediate disruption of learning, the insurgency perpetuates cycles of poverty, radicalization, and underdevelopment at both community and national levels, while threatening Nigeria's broader human capital growth and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Therefore, restoring safe and resilient schools is not only essential for the recovery of affected communities but also critical for Nigeria's long-term peace, stability, and socio-economic advancement.

#### **Recommendations**

1. **Strengthen School Security:** The government, in collaboration with security agencies and community vigilante groups, should enhance the protection of basic schools through the deployment of trained security personnel, installation of perimeter fencing, surveillance equipment, and community-based early warning systems to safeguard students and teachers.

2. **Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Schools:** Federal and state governments should prioritize the rebuilding of destroyed schools, provision of adequate classrooms, and rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure, ensuring that displaced schools are relocated from IDP shelters back to functional learning environments.
3. **Support and Retain Teachers:** Incentives such as hazard allowances, psychosocial support, and professional development opportunities should be provided to motivate teachers working in insurgency-affected areas. Additionally, special recruitment and training programs should be introduced to address the shortage of qualified teachers in Borno State.
4. **Community Engagement and Sensitization:** Local communities and religious leaders should be actively engaged in promoting the importance of education and encouraging parents to send their children back to school despite insecurity. Community-based education initiatives can help rebuild trust in the education system.
5. **Alternative and Flexible Learning Approaches:** Non-formal education strategies such as mobile schools, temporary learning centers, and digital/virtual learning platforms should be scaled up by government and NGOs to ensure continuity of learning for displaced children and those unable to access conventional schools.
6. **Psychosocial and Trauma Support:** Both students and teachers affected by insurgency-related violence should be provided with counseling and psychosocial interventions to help them cope with trauma and reintegrate into safe learning environments.

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