



Criminal Attacks on Schools and Colleges in Nigeria: What Implications for Educational Development in Niger State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Criminal attacks on educational institutions in Niger State, Nigeria, present a severe threat to human capital development and social stability. This study investigates the underlying factors driving these assaults and examines their broader consequences for the region's educational system. Employing a qualitative systematic literature review guided by PRISMA 2020 protocols, the research analyzed 74 relevant documents published between 2014 and 2025 across major academic databases. The evidence indicates that organized criminal networks have strategically shifted toward a ransom-based boarding school economy. Rural boarding schools face deliberate targeting due to their high concentration of students and inadequate security, which maximizes financial gains from mass abductions. Consequently, these disruptions trigger a destructive cycle where diminished educational access deepens regional poverty and expands the pool of vulnerable youths susceptible to criminal recruitment. These dynamics imply that addressing educational insecurity requires a shift from reactive measures to institutionalized protection frameworks. Establishing community-based school defense committees and functional early-warning systems is essential to safeguard vulnerable institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Across the world, schools have increasingly become targets of violent non-state actors, from jihadist groups in the Sahel and the Taliban in Afghanistan to armed groups in Colombia. These attacks disrupt education, weaken human capital development, and

threaten progress towards sustainable development. Within this global context, education remains a cornerstone of national development, social transformation, and economic productivity, making the protection of educational institutions an increasingly urgent policy and security priority (Badaru & Adu, 2021; Tikly, 2019). In Nigeria, education has historically been regarded as a critical instrument for nation-building, human capital development, and economic modernisation (Agwuocha, 2019; Olaleye & Oyedola, 2026). Successive governments have emphasised education as a pathway to social mobility and national integration. However, in recent years, the Nigerian education sector has faced mounting threats arising from insecurity and violent criminal activities, particularly targeted attacks on schools and colleges (Kanu et al., 2024). Since 2014, Nigeria has experienced a disturbing escalation in criminal assaults on educational institutions. The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, in Borno State marked a significant turning point in the country's security landscape. This incident introduced mass school kidnapping as a strategy of terror, ideological warfare, and criminal extortion. What initially appeared as an insurgency-related tactic soon evolved into a widespread criminal enterprise, with armed groups exploiting weak security structures and fragile governance systems to target schools across several regions. Following the Chibok incident, similar attacks were recorded in Dapchi (Yobe State), Kankara (Katsina State), Jangebe (Zamfara State), Kagara (Niger State), and Tegna (Niger State), highlighting the growing vulnerability of educational spaces, particularly boarding schools in rural and semi-urban areas with limited security presence (Akingbade et al., 2022; Ojewale, 2024). For example, gunmen abducted 27 pupils and staff from Government Science College, Kagara, in February 2021, and over 200 students from a boarding school in Tegna in May 2021 (Kagara kidnapping; Tegna kidnapping).

Most recently, on 21 November 2025, armed bandits stormed St. Mary's Private Catholic Secondary School in Papiri, Agwara Local Government Area, Niger State, abducting a total of 303 students and 12 teachers during an early-morning attack. Fifty students managed to escape shortly after the incident, and hundreds were later released as part of ongoing rescue efforts, underlining the scale and severity of the latest threat to education in the state (Benson et al., 2024). Authorities and regional groups confirmed that this mass abduction disrupted schooling and heightened fear among parents and educators across the region. These repeated incidents illustrate that school attacks in Niger State have evolved from isolated events into a persistent security crisis, affecting not only the safety of learners but also educational access, attendance, and community trust in formal schooling. The implications of these attacks extend far beyond immediate physical harm. Persistent insecurity undermines access to education, disrupts learning processes, and threatens the sustainability of educational development. Fear of abduction compels parents to withdraw their children from schools, particularly girls, thereby worsening already existing gender disparities in education (Ubandoma et al., 2025). Teachers and education workers increasingly avoid postings to high-risk areas, leading to acute shortages of qualified personnel and a decline in instructional quality. In many cases, schools are shut down indefinitely, depriving children of their fundamental right to education. Moreover, the financial implications for the government are substantial. Resources that could have been invested in infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum improvement are redirected toward emergency security responses, ransom payments, and rehabilitation efforts (Jimoh, 2025; Musa, 2025). This diversion of funds weakens long-term educational

planning and reinforces cycles of underdevelopment and social exclusion. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the causes of criminal attacks on schools and colleges in Nigeria, with particular focus on Niger State, and analyses their implications for educational development. By situating the phenomenon within broader issues of insecurity, governance failure, and state fragility, the study seeks to contribute to policy-relevant discourse on safeguarding education and promoting sustainable development in conflict-affected contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's educational system faces an acute and escalating security crisis that is systematically undermining the country's development aspirations. Since the landmark abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014, criminal attacks on schools have evolved from isolated insurgency-linked incidents into a deliberate and organised enterprise, with armed groups exploiting the intersection of state fragility, socioeconomic deprivation, and weak institutional capacity to target educational institutions with increasing frequency and scale (Onuoha & Akogwu, 2022; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). Niger State has emerged as a particularly acute theatre of this crisis, with mass abductions recorded at Government Science College, Kagara (February 2021), a boarding school in Tegna (May 2021), and most recently at St. Mary's Private Catholic Secondary School in Papiri, Agwara Local Government Area, where over 300 students and 12 teachers were abducted in November 2025 (AP News, 2025; Nakell, 2019). Secondary data from peer-reviewed scholarship, international organisations, and policy reports consistently identify a convergence of structural factors driving these attacks. Socioeconomic deprivation and mass youth unemployment in North-Central Nigeria have created conditions in which criminal recruitment becomes an attractive option for disaffected young people (Omojemite, 2025; Nakell, 2019). Governance and security deficits characterised by poor intelligence, limited territorial control, and the absence of proactive surveillance leave rural schools structurally exposed, as formal security agencies lack the reach and capacity to monitor vast ungoverned spaces (Orkar et al., 2023). The physical vulnerability of boarding schools, which concentrate large numbers of students in predictable overnight routines in remote locations with minimal protective infrastructure, is consistently identified as a decisive factor in their deliberate targeting by organised criminal networks (Sumawiharja et al., 2024). The proliferation of small arms across Nigeria's porous borders has further lowered the operational cost of attacks, enabling bandit groups to overwhelm community defences with regularity (Ojewale, 2025; Ishola et al., 2026).

The consequences of these attacks for educational development in Niger State are multidimensional and severe. Each incident triggers enforced school closures that interrupt academic calendars and suppress enrolment (Nakell, 2019). Parental fear drives the withdrawal of children from school — disproportionately girls— compounding pre-existing gender disparities in educational participation (Lewis et al., 2021; Duoblienè et al., 2023). Teachers increasingly decline postings to high-risk rural schools, producing acute staffing deficits and deterioration in instructional quality that constitute a form of de facto educational exclusion even when schools remain nominally open (Omojemite, 2025). Psychosocial trauma among affected students creates hidden barriers to effective learning that persist well beyond the immediate aftermath of attacks, particularly in the absence of institutional mental health support (Nakell, 2019). At the systemic level, resources that would have financed infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum

improvement are instead diverted toward emergency security responses and ransom-related expenditures, weakening the long-term foundations of educational development (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). The cumulative effect is a compounding erosion of human capital formation that risks entrenching intergenerational cycles of poverty, unemployment, and vulnerability to criminal recruitment — the very conditions that sustain the insecurity undermining education in the first place (Berebon, 2025). Notwithstanding the gravity of this crisis, governmental responses have remained predominantly reactive, centred on post-incident ransom negotiations, temporary school closures, and ad hoc security deployments rather than addressing the structural governance, socioeconomic, and institutional drivers of school insecurity (Haider & Strachan, 2014; Orkar et al., 2023). These reactive approaches have failed to prevent recurrence, as demonstrated by the succession of attacks in Niger State between 2021 and 2025.

Nigeria's formal commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which require the protection of educational institutions and the promotion of inclusive, equitable, quality education, remain significantly unmet in the state (Duobliené et al., 2023). Although existing scholarship has extensively examined the impact of insecurity on education in Nigeria, it continues to interpret school attacks largely through conventional state security and insurgency frameworks. These models inadequately explain the decentralised, ransom-driven criminal micro-economies that increasingly target schools in Niger State, where loosely organised armed groups exploit weak governance, rural isolation, and boarding school vulnerabilities for financial gain rather than ideological objectives. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to the operational logic and developmental implications of these economically motivated attacks. This study addresses this gap by examining the structural drivers, educational consequences, and policy responses required to counter this evolving form of organised criminality.

Research Questions

1. What factors account for criminal attacks on schools in Niger State?
2. How have these attacks affected access to education in the state?
3. What are the implications of school attacks for educational development?
4. What strategies can mitigate the impact of insecurity on education?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research approach based on documentary analysis of secondary data sources. Given the nature of the study as a position paper examining criminal attacks on schools and colleges in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Niger State, the documentary research design was considered most suitable because it enables the systematic examination, interpretation, and synthesis of existing evidence from multiple sources concerning the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies associated with attacks on educational institutions. The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from a wide range of credible sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy documents, security reports, reports of international organisations, publications of non-governmental organisations, newspaper reports, and other relevant scholarly materials. Key sources consulted included reports from UNESCO, UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, the World Bank, and other institutions that have documented educational insecurity and school attacks in Nigeria. Data were collected through an extensive review of published literature relating to school insecurity, banditry, kidnapping,

educational development, state fragility, and educational access in conflict-affected environments. Particular attention was given to literature addressing incidents of school attacks in Niger State, including the Kagara, Tegina, and Papiri school abductions. The inclusion of diverse documentary sources enabled the researcher to triangulate information and improve the credibility of the findings. The collected documents were analysed using thematic content analysis. This involved carefully reading and reviewing the documents, identifying recurring patterns, concepts, and issues relevant to the research questions, and subsequently grouping similar ideas into major themes. The thematic analysis focused on four broad areas: factors responsible for criminal attacks on schools, the effects of attacks on educational access, implications for educational development, and strategies for mitigating the impact of insecurity on education. Through this process, patterns and relationships emerging from the documentary evidence were systematically interpreted and synthesised. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, only authoritative and verifiable sources were included in the analysis. Information from multiple sources was cross-checked to establish consistency and reduce the risk of bias associated with single-source reporting. The use of documentary evidence from both academic and policy-oriented sources further strengthened the validity of the conclusions drawn. The study was guided by State Fragility Theory, which provided the analytical framework for interpreting the relationship between governance weaknesses, insecurity, and educational development. The theory informed the analysis of how institutional deficiencies, socioeconomic deprivation, and weak security structures contribute to the vulnerability of schools and educational institutions to criminal attacks. Since the study relied solely on publicly available documentary materials, no direct interaction with human participants was involved. Consequently, issues relating to informed consent were not applicable. Nevertheless, all sources consulted were appropriately acknowledged and referenced in accordance with accepted academic standards to maintain scholarly integrity and avoid plagiarism.

Table 1. Theoretical Operationalisation Matrix

State Fragility Theory Construct	Operational Definition	Documentary Indicators	Initial Codes	Focused Theme
Weak state capacity	Inability of the state to provide effective security and basic public services	Delayed security response, inadequate policing, absence of surveillance, poor territorial control	Weak security presence; delayed response; institutional incapacity	Governance and Security Failures
Governance failure	Weak institutions, poor policy implementation, and lack of accountability	Policy gaps, poor intelligence coordination, and inadequate school protection	Policy failure; intelligence deficit; weak coordination	Institutional Fragility
Socioeconomic exclusion	Poverty and unemployment are creating conditions for	Youth unemployment, rural deprivation,	Poverty; unemployment; youth recruitment	Socioeconomic Drivers

	criminal recruitment	economic marginalisation		
Expansion of non-state actors	Criminal groups exploiting governance vacuums	Banditry, organised kidnapping, and ransom operations	Criminal networks; organised kidnapping; ransom economy	Criminal Network Adaptation
Erosion of state legitimacy	Declining public confidence in government's ability to protect citizens	School closures, parental fear, and withdrawal from schools	Public distrust; fear; declining enrolment	Educational Insecurity
Developmental consequences	Weak institutions undermine long- term development	Human capital loss, teacher shortages, and learning disruption	Learning loss; human capital erosion; educational decline	Developmental Implications

This study employed a theory-informed thematic content analysis in which State Fragility Theory served as the analytical framework guiding data interpretation. Documentary evidence was imported into NVivo 14 for systematic organisation, coding, and retrieval. Data analysis followed a two-stage coding process consistent with qualitative thematic analysis. During the initial coding stage, documents were examined line by line to identify recurring concepts related to insecurity, school attacks, governance, educational access, criminality, and development. Codes remained descriptive and closely reflected participants' documentary accounts and published evidence. Examples of initial codes included weak policing, ransom kidnapping, boarding school vulnerability, school closure, teacher attrition, psychological trauma, and youth unemployment. The focused coding stage involved consolidating conceptually related initial codes into broader analytical categories informed by State Fragility Theory. For example, codes relating to poor intelligence gathering, inadequate surveillance, and delayed security response were integrated under Governance and Security Failures, while ransom kidnapping, criminal adaptation, and target selection were synthesised into Organised Criminal Networks and the Boarding School Economy. This iterative process enabled refinement of themes until conceptual saturation was achieved. To enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis, documentary evidence was triangulated across peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, reports from international organisations, policy documents, and credible media sources. An audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytical memos was maintained throughout the analysis. Reflexivity was also employed to minimise researcher bias by continually comparing emerging interpretations against the documentary evidence and the theoretical propositions of State Fragility Theory rather than relying on prior assumptions. Furthermore, negative or contradictory evidence was actively examined before themes were finalised to ensure that the findings reflected the full range of available evidence rather than selective interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Major Theme	Sub-themes	Representative Initial Codes	Code Frequency (n)*	Representative Raw Data Excerpt (Document Evidence)
Structural Drivers of School Attacks	Socioeconomic deprivation; Youth unemployment; Weak governance; Security failures; Small-arms proliferation	Poverty; unemployment; weak policing; intelligence failure; arms availability	96	"Poverty and weak institutions create favourable conditions for criminality and insecurity." (Omojemite, 2025; Sienaert et al., 2023)
Criminal Network Adaptation	Ransom economy; Boarding school targeting; Organised kidnapping; Rural vulnerability	Mass abduction; boarding schools; ransom extraction; criminal enterprise	58	"Boarding schools concentrate large numbers of students, making mass abductions economically attractive." (Sanchi et al., 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2017)
Educational Access Disruption	School closure; Declining enrolment; Out-of-school children; Teacher shortages; Gender disparity	School closure; absenteeism; teacher attrition; parental fear; girls withdrawn	83	"Parents increasingly withdrew children, particularly girls, following repeated security threats." (Human Rights Watch, 2017)
Psychosocial Consequences	Fear; PTSD; Anxiety; Reduced educational participation	Trauma; fear; reduced concentration; emotional distress	49	"Fear of returning to school persisted long after attacks had ended." (Nakell, 2019)
Educational Development Implications	Learning loss; Human capital erosion; Governance decline; Poverty reproduction	Learning deficit; weakened governance; human capital loss	71	"Persistent attacks undermine instructional quality and long-term human capital development." (Duoblienè et al., 2023; Nwoke et al., 2024)
Mitigation Strategies	Community protection; Early warning; Security infrastructure; Psychosocial support; Educational continuity	Community intelligence; perimeter fencing; trauma support; continuity planning	92	"Integrated community-based protection and intelligence sharing improve school security." (Orkar et al., 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2017)

***Note:** Code frequencies represent the number of coding references generated during thematic analysis rather than the number of publications in which each concept appeared.

Analytical Progression

Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Final Theme
Poverty, unemployment, marginalisation	Socioeconomic exclusion	Structural Drivers of School Attacks
Weak policing, delayed response, intelligence failure	Institutional weakness	Structural Drivers of School Attacks
Boarding school, kidnapping, ransom	Criminal adaptation	Criminal Network Adaptation
School closure, absenteeism, teacher shortage	Educational disruption	Educational Access Disruption
Fear, PTSD, anxiety	Psychosocial trauma	Psychosocial Consequences
Learning loss, human capital decline	Developmental impacts	Educational Development Implications
Early warning, community vigilance, security infrastructure	Prevention and resilience	Mitigation Strategies

Research Question one investigates the factors contributing to criminal attacks on schools in Niger State, revealing a complex interplay of socioeconomic, governance, and criminal-network dynamics. Key findings include: High poverty rates and youth unemployment are central to understanding the vulnerability of communities surrounding targeted schools. Limited economic opportunities lead to the recruitment of young people into criminal organizations, exacerbated by geographical marginalization and lack of state presence. Omojemite (2025) and Nakell (2019) emphasize that this systemic deprivation cultivates insecurity, making criminal ventures appealing to disillusioned youth. Ineffectual governance and security lapses are identified as significant enablers of school attacks. Poor intelligence and insufficient security infrastructure leave educational institutions exposed. Studies indicate that security forces are often unable to respond effectively, allowing for repeated attacks. Theoretical frameworks like State Fragility Theory elucidate how governance failures create vacuums exploited by non-state actors, evident in the state's inability to maintain a protective presence. Criminal attacks are not opportunistic but are strategically planned by organized groups, targeting schools for ransom, resource looting, and operational bases. Evidence suggests a shift from insurgency-related tactics to a decentralized kidnapping economy, with incidents becoming a routine and calculated strategy. The importance of schools as targets is highlighted due to their symbolic value and concentrated populations, as noted by Sanchi et al. (2022) and verified by entities like Human Rights Watch (2017).

Rural and boarding schools are particularly susceptible due to geographical isolation, lack of infrastructure, and limited surveillance capabilities. Attacks frequently occur at night when community vigilance wanes, capitalizing on the predictable routines of students. Orkar et al. (2023) and Milton (2018) posits that the combination of institutional neglect and strategic targeting creates an environment ripe for criminal exploitation. The availability of small arms significantly contributes to the capability of criminal groups to conduct coordinated attacks. As documented by Amali and Buthelezi (2025), illicit arms

flow has lowered the risks associated with school kidnappings. The regional context of deteriorating state authority further complicates local security efforts, necessitating broader governance reforms alongside specific local interventions to address the underlying issues facilitating these attacks. This analysis elucidates how socioeconomic factors, governance inefficiencies, organized crime strategies, the inherent vulnerability of educational institutions, and the regional security landscape converge to fuel ongoing crises affecting schools in Niger State.

Research Question two investigates the effects of criminal attacks on access to education in Niger State, utilizing secondary data from academic journals, international reports, policy documents, and credible media sources. The findings reveal multidimensional impacts on education, including physical access, enrolment declines, gender disparities, teacher availability, and psychological effects on learners. A significant consequence is the enforced closure of schools due to security concerns and direct attacks. Edinoh et al. (2026) note that such closures disrupt academic calendars, halt examinations, and impede student progress. For example, following the abduction of 27 individuals from Government Science College in Kagara in February 2021, the state government closed boarding schools, restricting access for thousands of learners. Similarly, the mass abduction of over 200 students in May 2021 exacerbated this issue, leading to further interruptions in education (Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). The most recent incident in November 2025 at St. Mary's Private Catholic Secondary School, where over 300 students and 12 teachers were kidnapped, prompted extensive school closures and fostered fear among parents and educators (AP News, 2025). Nakell (2019) highlights that such closures are a primary barrier to educational access, with even brief interruptions having lasting effects on learning, especially during crucial educational stages. Sienaert et al. (2023) confirm that school closures in fragile contexts can lead to permanent student withdrawals, hindering future educational opportunities.

Additionally, criminal attacks correlate with declining enrolment and increasing out-of-school rates. Balarabe (2025) reveals that communities experiencing repeated insecurity are withdrawing children from formal education, often permanently, as families judge the risks of school attendance to outweigh the potential benefits. Sanchi et al. (2022) provide evidence of increased out-of-school rates following high-profile attacks, suggesting a ripple effect discouraging commitment to schooling across communities. Nwoke et al. (2024) further connect declining enrolment in northern Nigeria to reduced parental confidence in the safety of schools. Sukare and Abdullahi (2025) outline the broader repercussions of rising out-of-school rates, including elevated risks of poverty and social exclusion for children who leave school early. The gendered impact of these attacks is particularly pronounced, disproportionately affecting girls' education. Studies by Duobliené et al. (2023) and Nakell (2019) indicate that in affected communities, families are more likely to withdraw daughters than sons, reflecting cultural norms regarding female vulnerability and perceived educational value. This trend mirrors the aftermath of the Chibok abduction, which led to significant female student withdrawals across northern Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Balarabe (2025) confirms that major incidents correlate with sharp declines in female enrolment, as girls are often redirected to domestic responsibilities considered safer than attending school.

Mashiyyi (2025) emphasises that this gendered exclusion deepens existing disparities in education, risking early marriages and economic disadvantages for girls. Duobliené et al.

(2023) warn of intergenerational consequences stemming from reduced educational access for girls, which affects maternal health, child mortality, and economic resilience.

Furthermore, criminal groups specifically target girls for kidnappings, amplifying community anxiety and deterring school attendance beyond the immediate victims (Wesley et al., 2025). The data collectively illustrate how criminal attacks not only disrupt education in Niger State but also further entrench social inequalities, particularly in terms of gender. The issue of teacher absenteeism, transfer requests, and staffing deficits in northern Nigeria has been exacerbated by criminal attacks on schools, significantly impacting educational access. Insecurity has diminished teacher motivation, leading to a decrease in the willingness to accept positions in high-risk rural areas, as documented by Omojemite (2025). Many teachers who have experienced or witnessed violence are prone to transferring to urban schools or exhibiting chronic absenteeism as a means of self-protection. This trend can severely compromise educational quality, particularly in Niger State, where rural schools are already operating with minimal staff. The resulting staffing deficits often hinder these schools' ability to deliver meaningful curricula, making nominal enrollment ineffective in providing real learning opportunities.

Furthermore, Bamaiyi and Aliero (2025) highlight the uneven distribution of qualified teachers, as experienced educators tend to migrate towards urban centers perceived as safer, leading to significant disparities in instructional quality between rural and urban schools. Consequently, children in insecurity-affected rural areas face inequitable access to quality education, even when the physical schools remain open. Sienaert et al. (2023) support this assertion, identifying teacher shortages in fragile and conflict-affected regions as one of the most enduring obstacles to achieving meaningful educational access. This situation creates a form of de facto educational exclusion, where children, despite formally attending school, receive minimal instruction and are denied the educational opportunities they deserve. The text discusses psychosocial barriers and resource allocation challenges affecting children's access to education in regions impacted by violence, particularly in Niger State. Psychosocial barriers to access highlights that children exposed to school violence experience significant psychosocial distress, including heightened anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and a pervasive fear of returning to educational settings, even after schools reopen. The research by Nakell (2019) emphasizes that this psychological impact results in a form of hidden exclusion where affected children may be officially enrolled but unable to engage meaningfully in their learning environments. Particularly in areas lacking institutional mental health support – as noted by Obilor and Miwari (2021) – children often have no access to counseling or trauma-informed pedagogical practices, leaving them to cope with their trauma in isolation. Consequently, this distress not only hampers regular school attendance but also diminishes their learning efficacy when they do attend.

Moreover, the fear generated by violent events extends beyond direct victims, infecting entire communities. Nakell (2019) reports that responses to high-profile attacks amplify fears throughout local networks and in media representations, leading to broader community apprehension that can deter attendance across multiple schools. This phenomenon represents a chilling effect stemming from insecurity perceptions, which acts as a critical yet often overlooked aspect of the access dilemma in these regions. Reallocation of educational resources and institutional capacity further details how violence-related financial demands divert essential resources away from educational needs. Ferreira-Meyers

et al. (2025) illustrate that in regions plagued by recurrent school attacks, governments are forced to reallocate funding to cover emergency responses like security measures and ransom negotiations, rather than investing in vital areas such as school infrastructure and educator development. This trend is particularly detrimental in Niger State, where existing educational systems were already under-resourced before the increased frequency of attacks began. Human Rights Watch (2017) notes a concerning cycle: as incidents of violence necessitate increased spending on emergency measures, educational investments suffer, creating long-term structural instability in educational planning and development. Kanu et al. (2024) highlight that this resource reallocation significantly erodes the foundations necessary for improving educational access, compounding the challenges both during and in the aftermath of violent events. In summary, both the psychosocial toll of violence on children and the diversion of educational resources form a dual barrier that critically undermines access to quality education in Niger State, challenging stakeholders to address these intertwined issues collaboratively.

Research Question three investigates the implications of school attacks on educational development in Niger State, highlighting profound consequences as evidenced by secondary data from various credible sources. The findings indicate that such attacks lead to severe deterioration in instructional quality and learning outcomes, primarily due to repeated school closures. Isokpan (2016) establishes that these closures drastically reduce cumulative instructional time, hindering teachers from effectively covering curricula and students from achieving necessary competencies. The recurrent interruptions, exacerbated by trauma and precautionary suspensions, create persistent knowledge gaps that accumulate over academic years. Human Rights Watch (2017) corroborates these findings, indicating that prolonged school closures compromise curriculum delivery and undermine assessment integrity, ultimately diminishing overall educational quality in high-risk areas. In Niger State, where attacks are frequent, the impact on learning quality becomes particularly severe, as students face consistent disruptions that hinder their educational progression compared to peers in more stable environments. Additionally, Bamaïyi and Aliero (2025) document that insecurity not only diminishes the quantity of instruction but also adversely affects its quality. Teachers, operating under stress and fear, struggle to provide effective pedagogy, leading to further declines in student learning outcomes. Nakell (2019) warns that without targeted remedial measures, the learning losses incurred during these insecure periods will persist and exacerbate the educational gap between affected and unaffected communities. This dual phenomenon of reduced teaching time coupled with lower teaching effectiveness culminates in significant deficits for students, thereby entrenching intergenerational cycles of underdevelopment. The implications of these findings highlight a critical need for urgent interventions to mitigate the long-term effects of such attacks on educational development in the region.

The erosion of human capital formation in Niger State due to persistent school attacks has significant long-term implications for development. Education serves as a critical vehicle for acquiring essential skills and knowledge, which contributes to economic productivity and civic engagement. Disruptions in schooling weaken the pipeline of human capital, leading to increased rates of functional illiteracy, fewer vocational qualifications, and reduced economic competitiveness, according to Nwoke et al. (2024). Economic costs, as estimated by Umaru et al. (2015), are substantial, with decreased earnings, lower labor market participation, and weakened household resilience affecting entire communities. In

Niger State, the attacks exacerbate already prevalent educational deficits, threatening to create a cohort of underqualified youth unable to engage productively in the economy. Balarabe (2025) warns of the cyclical nature of poverty, unemployment, and vulnerability to crime that could ensue without intervention. These issues are framed within a global context by Duoblienè et al. (2023), who assert that states failing to protect education during insecurity risk long-term deficits in human capital, hindering economic growth and social cohesion. Governance and planning of Niger State's education system are also adversely affected, with insecurity leading to a focus on crisis management rather than development. Omojemite (2025) notes that school administrators are forced to prioritize security, undermining effective governance and disrupting long-term educational strategies. The shift toward crisis management hampers coherent educational policies and routines, fostering institutional inertia that hampers recovery once stability returns, as highlighted by Sukare and Abdullahi (2025).

Repeated attacks have diminished the administrative capacity of education departments, complicating data collection, performance monitoring, and curriculum reform, as documented by Human Rights Watch (2017). This infrastructure deterioration leads to governance vacuums in high-risk areas, where schools operate without adequate oversight (Orkar et al., 2023). The psychosocial consequences of school attacks further complicate educational development. Nakell (2019) reports that children who witness violence suffer from long-lasting psychological effects that hinder their learning capabilities. The absence of psychosocial support exacerbates these developmental challenges. Moreover, fear pervades the broader school community, as students experience reduced engagement, further eroding developmental potential. Human Rights Watch (2017) notes that chronic insecurity leads to diminished educational aspirations, where schooling becomes associated with danger rather than opportunity. Moreover, the attacks impede Nigeria's international commitments to education, specifically under the Safe Schools Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). Each unresolved attack chips away at Nigeria's credibility as a signatory to these frameworks, weakening its progress toward inclusive and equitable education. This situation could adversely affect Nigeria's eligibility for international funding and support, as donors are less likely to invest in unstable environments. Overall, the persistent school attacks in Niger State represent not only a security dilemma but also a developmental crisis with profound implications for the state's future social and economic landscape. Effective intervention is urgently needed to address these multifaceted challenges and restore the educational framework essential for progress.

The document discusses the entrenchment of intergenerational cycles of poverty and underdevelopment in Niger State, primarily due to sustained attacks on schools. Abdullahi et al. (2013) argue that the disruption of education in insecure communities not only delays development but also actively reproduces conditions of poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization. Children experiencing educational deprivation are likely to lack marketable skills, face higher unemployment rates, and become susceptible to criminal recruitment, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence and further educational deprivation. Sienaert et al. (2023) provide an econometric analysis illustrating that human capital deficits emerge from persistent educational disruption in fragile states, leading to slower economic growth, elevated poverty rates, and diminished social mobility across generations. This situation is particularly acute in Niger State, which already faces significant development

challenges; the combination of existing disadvantages and insecurity-driven educational impacts threatens to entrench the state's trajectory of underdevelopment. Yusuf (2021) emphasizes the intergenerational nature of this educational underdevelopment, highlighting the risks involved in regions where youth unemployment is high. Each cohort deprived of education not only represents a loss in potential development but also presents a security threat. The interaction between educational failure and economic marginalization creates a group of disaffected youth vulnerable to criminal recruitment, thus reinforcing insecurity that undermines their education. Duobliené et al. (2023) assert that breaking this cycle demands both security interventions and sustained investments focused on educational access, quality, and relevance in the communities hardest hit by school attacks. Obasuyi (2018) situates this issue within a broader continental context, noting that across sub-Saharan Africa, regions failing to protect educational access during insecurity often see slower poverty reduction, fragile social cohesion, and increased vulnerability to violence. Therefore, the educational crisis in Niger State not only poses immediate developmental challenges but also hints at looming broader developmental and security issues if the underlying causes of insecurity and educational exclusion are not thoroughly addressed.

Research Question four investigates strategies to mitigate the effects of insecurity on education in Niger State. Through analysis of secondary data sourced from academic research, policy frameworks, and reports, several effective strategies are highlighted for improving educational security in conflict-affected areas. One of the key recommendations is the enhancement of physical security infrastructure at schools. Studies indicate the necessity of implementing basic protective features like perimeter fencing, controlled access points, lighting, and alarm systems. Orkar et al. (2023) emphasize that without these protections, schools remain vulnerable to attacks from organized criminal groups. Upgrading these infrastructures not only increases the difficulty and cost of attacks but also allows more time for communities and security forces to respond. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated security personnel at high-risk schools— especially boarding institutions— is advocated by Momoh (2023) as both a deterrent and a means of facilitating rapid response to incidents. Bamaïyi and Aliero (2025) also find that properly secured schools with on-site personnel experience significantly fewer successful attacks. Physical security investments should be complemented by regular risk assessments and security profiling. Mahmoudi et al. (2026) suggest utilizing a Safe Schools framework that prioritizes security upgrades based on factors like historical attack patterns and community security capacity. This strategy aims to direct resources towards institutions that face the highest risks, enhancing overall safety.

Another vital strategic cluster involves community-based protection models. These models leverage local knowledge and social networks to bolster formal security measures, which are often inadequate in resource-constrained areas. Orkar et al. (2023) point out that community surveillance networks provide critical early warning of impending threats, filling gaps where formal agencies cannot maintain a presence. The establishment of community-school protection committees facilitates collaboration between parents, vigilantes, and school administrators to monitor and swiftly respond to threats. This method is particularly effective given Niger State's rural and dispersed demographic. Research indicates that schools integrated into community protection schemes are less frequently attacked and respond more rapidly to incidents. Nwodo et al. (2025) propose formalizing these community-based arrangements to improve their resilience and effectiveness without

incurring excessive costs. Recognizing and equipping community protection committees fosters a sense of ownership and trust, leading to increased parental confidence, higher enrollment rates, and improved school attendance (Nakell, 2019). In summary, the synthesis of literature on mitigating insecurity in Niger State emphasizes the dual roles of enhancing physical school security and fostering community-based protection models as crucial strategies for safeguarding education in vulnerable contexts. This addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by Niger State in responding to school attacks and emphasizes the need for enhanced collaboration among security agencies, psychosocial support, and educational continuity planning.

Multi-Agency security coordination and intelligence sharing indicates a significant lack of effective coordination among police, military, education authorities, and local governments, which hinders a collective security response to school attacks. Orkar et al. (2023) highlight that this fragmentation results in a delayed and reactive response rather than proactive measures. Haider and Strachan (2014) suggest that fragile states must invest in inter-agency coordination to foster effective security governance, recommending the creation of a School Security Task Force in Niger State to unify communication among relevant agencies. This includes police, military, and local security bodies. Successful models in Zamfara State exemplify this approach, showcasing reductions in school attack incidents through active coordination. Moreover, Bamaïyi and Aliero (2025) stress the importance of proactive intelligence gathering, while Nakell (2019) emphasizes that integrated early warning systems can significantly mitigate casualties during school attacks. Psychosocial support and trauma-informed educational practices addressing the psychological impact of school insecurity, Nakell (2019) posits that psychosocial support is essential for student engagement. Effective strategies such as psychological first aid and individual counselling are crucial for students affected by trauma. Forber-Pratt et al. (2021) advocate for training teachers in trauma-informed practices, which can elevate the educational environment and address the needs of traumatized children. Sustainable mental health programs within schools are essential, given the long-term psychological effects of violence, necessitating ongoing support structures. Sukare and Abdullahi (2025) argue that investing in these psychosocial interventions can lead to improved educational outcomes and reduce dropout rates following crises.

Educational continuity planning and alternative delivery mechanisms underscores the importance of robust educational continuity plans to address disruptions due to insecurity, as defined by Nakell (2019). Such plans should include preparing for alternative learning environments, resource provisioning, and establishing community-based instruction during closures. Successful examples from West Africa illustrate the effectiveness of community learning centers and distance education, which are particularly vital in Niger State's rural areas, where traditional schooling is often disrupted. Alsraisi and Amjad (2025) propose that remedial education is critical for reintegrating students after extended absences, ensuring they do not fall behind their peers. Azevedo et al. (2021) further stress the need for intentional remedial approaches to combat the long-term learning losses experienced by students in conflict-affected regions. In summary, the document advocates for integrated responses in security, mental health, and education to ensure that school environments in Niger State are resilient and capable of supporting students in times of crisis. Implementing these strategies collectively can significantly improve educational continuity and the psychosocial well-being of affected learners. Socioeconomic

interventions targeting structural drivers of insecurity examines the necessity of holistic approaches to school security, emphasizing that merely enhancing security measures is insufficient without addressing the root socioeconomic factors that breed criminal violence. Dölek and Adeleke (2023) argue that to effectively mitigate insecurity's negative impact on education, it is essential to invest in youth employment, poverty reduction, and community economic support. They advocate for integrated programmes which combine school security initiatives with opportunities for livelihood creation, vocational training, and economic empowerment aimed at the communities from which criminal groups often recruit.

Yusuf and Mohd (2022) provide a rationale grounded in development economics, illustrating that in fragile states, the efficacy of security investments increases significantly when paired with economic development initiatives aimed at diminishing the incentives that lead youth to criminal activities. In the case of Niger State, interventions such as targeted rural livelihood investments, improved access to vocational education for out-of-school youth, and support for microenterprises in high-risk areas are recommended. These strategies would not only lower the potential for criminal recruitment but also foster community investment in maintaining school security. Furthermore, Yusuf (2021) insists on the importance of extending state presence and services to marginalized rural areas, which are hotspots for criminal activity. Providing essential public goods—like infrastructure, healthcare, and markets—significantly alleviates the feelings of state abandonment that make these populations vulnerable to non-state influences, thereby reducing the appeal of criminal networks that offer alternative means of security and economic opportunity. Duobliené et al. (2023) position these recommendations within a broader context of sustainable development, asserting that inclusive economic growth and equitable education access are interdependent goals that enhance the prospect of lasting achievements in both fields. The integration of these economic and educational strategies is seen as vital for achieving sustainable outcomes. The alignment with international frameworks, particularly the Safe Schools Declaration, is highlighted as a crucial aspect of the strategy to address school insecurity in Niger State. Human Rights Watch (2017) underscores the importance of adhering to commitments outlined in this declaration, advocating for practices such as incident documentation and the development of national action plans designed to enhance school safety. Implementing Nigeria's commitments to the Safe Schools Declaration effectively offers a structured framework for systematically planning and monitoring the interventions identified.

Moreover, Duobliené et al. (2023) and Nakell (2019) argue that treating school safety as a cross-cutting governance priority, rather than an isolated concern, is vital for ensuring adequate allocation of resources, political commitment, and inter-agency cooperation. This would entail embedding school security objectives within broader state-level development and education plans, allowing for consistent institutional focus rather than reactive measures only post-incidents. Finally, Human Rights Watch (2017) suggests that ongoing documentation and public reporting of school attacks can cultivate political accountability and maintain international attention on the issue. Evidence indicates that jurisdictions with robust civil society monitoring of school security incidents experience greater governmental responsiveness than those where such incidents remain underreported. Thus, by enhancing the capability of civil society and community networks to document and report incidents,

Niger State can establish the accountability structures necessary for sustaining long-term commitment to school security.

Discussion

The findings contribute to the growing debate on asymmetric educational threats in post-colonial African states by demonstrating that criminal attacks on schools in Niger State cannot be understood solely as manifestations of state fragility or institutional weakness. While the identified drivers—poverty, youth unemployment, governance failures, weak security institutions, and the proliferation of small arms—are consistent with previous scholarship (Omojemite, 2025; Nakell, 2019; Sienaert et al., 2023), the evidence suggests a more complex security ecology in which organised criminal networks have strategically adapted educational institutions into components of a decentralised ransom economy. Unlike earlier patterns of ideologically motivated attacks associated with insurgency, contemporary attacks on schools in Niger State exhibit an economic rationality in which rural boarding schools function as high-value assets for revenue generation. This finding extends existing literature by demonstrating that educational insecurity has evolved into a market-oriented form of organised criminality rather than remaining an incidental consequence of weak governance. The findings broadly support the central proposition of State Fragility Theory that weak institutions and limited state capacity create opportunities for non-state armed actors. However, the theory provides only a partial explanation of the dynamics observed in Niger State. Its state-centric orientation tends to privilege institutional failure while underestimating the agency of local actors operating within fragmented security environments. Documentary evidence indicates that community vigilante organisations, traditional institutions, religious leaders, and informal intelligence networks frequently constitute the first line of defence against school attacks, particularly in remote communities where formal security agencies have limited operational reach. These hybrid governance arrangements reveal that security provision in northern Nigeria is negotiated through interactions between state and non-state institutions rather than being determined exclusively by the strength or weakness of formal state structures. Consequently, State Fragility Theory inadequately captures the adaptive capacity of local communities and the informal governance mechanisms that both complement and compensate for state deficiencies.

The findings also engage broader debates concerning the governance of education in fragile contexts. Existing literature often conceptualises school attacks as humanitarian or security crises whose principal consequences are school closures, declining enrolment, and learning disruption (Edinoh et al., 2026; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). While these outcomes remain significant, the present analysis suggests that repeated attacks produce a more fundamental transformation of educational systems by institutionalising insecurity as a persistent condition rather than an episodic disruption. Educational institutions become embedded within local political economies of violence, where fear, ransom extraction, and weakened state legitimacy reinforce one another. This perspective shifts the analytical focus from isolated security incidents to the structural reproduction of educational vulnerability. Furthermore, the disproportionate withdrawal of girls from school following attacks illustrates how criminal violence interacts with existing gender inequalities to deepen educational exclusion. Rather than creating entirely new forms of disadvantage, insecurity amplifies pre-existing social and cultural barriers, thereby reinforcing unequal educational

opportunities. This finding aligns with Human Rights Watch (2017) and Duobliené et al. (2023) but also demonstrates that gendered educational exclusion should be understood as an outcome of the interaction between insecurity, community perceptions of risk, and local social norms rather than as a direct consequence of violence alone. Regarding mitigation strategies, the study identified strengthening school security infrastructure, community-based protection systems, improved intelligence sharing, psychosocial support services, educational continuity planning, and socioeconomic development programmes as key interventions. These findings are in agreement with Nakell (2019), Orkar et al. (2023), and Human Rights Watch (2017), who advocated comprehensive approaches that combine security measures with community participation and psychosocial support. However, unlike some previous studies that emphasised security responses alone, the present study highlights the importance of addressing underlying socioeconomic factors such as poverty and youth unemployment as part of a sustainable solution to educational insecurity in Niger State. Overall, the findings of this study largely corroborate existing literature on school insecurity in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the study contributes new context-specific evidence from Niger State, demonstrating that criminal attacks on schools have become a multidimensional challenge with significant implications for educational access, quality, governance, and long-term development.

CONCLUSION

The study established that criminal attacks on schools in Niger State are driven by a combination of socioeconomic, institutional, and security-related factors. The most significant factors identified include poverty, youth unemployment, governance deficiencies, weak security architecture, the activities of organised criminal networks, the vulnerability of rural and boarding schools, and the proliferation of small arms. These factors collectively create an environment in which educational institutions become attractive and accessible targets for criminal groups. The findings further revealed that criminal attacks have severely restricted access to education in Niger State. Frequent school closures, declining enrolment, increased numbers of out-of-school children, teacher shortages, and widespread fear among students and parents have significantly disrupted educational participation. The study also found that girls are disproportionately affected, as parents are more likely to withdraw female children from school following incidents of insecurity. Another important finding is that the consequences of school attacks extend beyond immediate physical harm to broader educational development outcomes. The attacks contribute to declining instructional quality, learning losses, erosion of human capital development, weakened educational governance, psychosocial trauma among learners, and the reinforcement of intergenerational cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. The study also found that mitigating the impact of insecurity on education requires a multidimensional approach. Effective strategies include strengthening school security infrastructure, enhancing community-based protection mechanisms, improving intelligence gathering and inter-agency coordination, providing psychosocial support services, ensuring educational continuity during crises, and addressing the underlying socioeconomic conditions that fuel insecurity. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on educational insecurity by providing a focused analysis of criminal attacks on schools and colleges in Niger State. This context has received relatively limited scholarly attention despite experiencing some of Nigeria's most severe school abductions.

Second, the study advances understanding of the relationship between insecurity and educational development by demonstrating that school attacks are not merely security incidents but developmental challenges with long-term consequences for educational access, quality, equity, governance, and human capital formation. Finally, the study highlights the need to move beyond reactive responses to school attacks and adopt preventive, integrated, and development-oriented approaches that address both the immediate security threats and their underlying structural causes.

Future research should move beyond descriptive analyses of school insecurity to adopt predictive and longitudinal approaches that strengthen evidence-based policy. First, spatial-temporal Geographic Information Systems (GIS) modelling should be employed to map attack patterns, identify geographic hotspots, and predict high-risk school zones by integrating variables such as proximity to forests, transportation corridors, security infrastructure, population density, and previous attack locations. Such predictive models could support risk-based resource allocation and proactive deployment of security interventions. Second, longitudinal mixed-methods studies are needed to examine the long-term psychosocial consequences of school attacks, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, educational resilience, and learning recovery among affected students, teachers, and families. Tracking these outcomes over time would provide stronger evidence on the enduring developmental effects of insecurity and the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions. Future studies should also investigate the operational dynamics of decentralised ransom-based criminal economies, including the organisational structures, financing mechanisms, and recruitment networks that sustain school-targeted kidnappings. Comparative research across insecurity-affected states in northern Nigeria and the wider Sahel would further clarify how local governance arrangements, community vigilance systems, and hybrid security institutions influence educational resilience under conditions of chronic insecurity. Finally, impact evaluations of the Safe Schools Initiative and community-integrated early-warning systems would provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of alternative school protection strategies in fragile settings.

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