

The Education Crisis in Conflict Zones: A Case Study on the Impact of Political Instability on the Sustainability of School

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Abstract :

This study focuses on the educational challenges faced by schools serving internally displaced children in Northeast Nigeria, particularly related to the shortage of qualified teachers, infrastructure crises, and reliance on external aid. The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze the impact of these factors on the quality of education provided in these schools, as well as to identify opportunities for improvement. The research methodology employed is qualitative, utilizing a case study approach that involves in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis across three different schools in the Borno region. The findings reveal that the lack of formally trained teachers significantly affects the quality of instruction, which is further exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and a high dependency on external aid for educational materials. The implications of this study highlight the need for more coordinated and sustainable interventions, which not only rely on external support but also focus on strengthening the internal capacities of schools, including teacher training and infrastructure improvement. This research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to efforts aimed at strengthening the educational system in crisis areas and ensuring that the right of children to receive quality education is upheld.

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of political and social instability plaguing Northeast Nigeria, education often becomes the first victim of conflict and violence (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Alhassan, 2020; Mustapha et al., 2022). In situations where thousands of children lose access to formal education due to forced displacement, schools emerge as key institutions offering education to internally displaced children (García et al., 2021; Suleiman et al., 2021; Mohammed & Abdulkadir, 2020). This study does not merely view schools as places of learning but as complex social entities that play a crucial role in maintaining educational continuity amid chaos (Akinoyemi, 2021; Ibrahim & Hussain, 2020; Bala & Adamu, 2021).

Investigating the role of schools in this context is not only interesting but also urgent, as it involves fundamental questions about children's rights to education and how religious institutions adapt in times of crisis (Bello & Yusuf, 2020; Adedayo & Adeyemi, 2021; Musa et al., 2022). This research is academically important because it provides new perspectives on the role of religious education in emergencies, while also enriching the literature on education in conflict and displacement contexts (Shah, 2020; Sani et al., 2021; Abdurrahman et al., 2022).

Schools in Northeast Nigeria face challenges not only from external threats such as violence and insecurity but also from internal issues, including a shortage of qualified teachers, infrastructure crises, and excessive reliance on external aid. These three problems are interrelated and create a vicious cycle that hampers educational efforts in the region. The lack of formally trained teachers directly impacts the quality of instruction, which is further exacerbated by inadequate school facilities (Mundy et al., 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2021; Zarif & Munawar, 2021). Dependence on external aid adds another layer of vulnerability, as fluctuations in the supply of educational materials can lead to significant disruptions in the learning process (Foulger et al., 2020; Sissons & Karam, 2021; Walker, 2022). By focusing on these issues, this research aims to identify weaknesses in the system and provide empirically-based recommendations to improve the situation.

This study draws on several relevant previous studies. Adebayo et al. (2020) found that political instability in Nigeria has significantly reduced children's access to basic education, with a particular focus on those affected by conflict. This study highlights the need for more inclusive and adaptive educational approaches in crisis situations. Another study by Musa & Bello (2021) examines the role of schools in providing education to displaced children, but it is limited to general evaluations without delving into specific aspects such as teacher qualifications and infrastructure conditions. Additionally, research by Ibrahim et al. (2022) explores the reliance on external aid in the education system in conflict zones but does not directly link it to the quality of education provided. The gap in the literature indicates a lack of research explicitly connecting internal resource shortages, education quality, and reliance on external aid in schools serving displaced populations in Nigeria (Julius et al., 2021; Walker, 2022; Zarif & Munawar, 2021).

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic and in-depth approach to the educational challenges in schools for displaced populations in Northeast Nigeria. This study not only identifies existing problems but also explores the relationships between teacher shortages, infrastructure crises, and reliance on external aid as interrelated factors affecting education quality. This originality offers a more integrated perspective that has not been thoroughly explored in previous studies. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature by offering a more comprehensive analysis and specific solutions that can be implemented to improve the education system in crisis-affected areas.

The primary objective of this study is to explore and analyze the impact of the shortage of qualified teachers, infrastructure crises, and reliance on external aid on the quality of education provided in schools serving internally displaced children in Northeast Nigeria. This research is urgent because its findings can provide an empirical foundation for policymakers to formulate more effective strategies to improve educational conditions in the region.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative type of research with a case study approach to delve deeply into the challenges faced by schools serving internally displaced children in Northeast Nigeria. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain richer and more detailed insights into the social, cultural, and educational contexts in the field, which are difficult to achieve through quantitative methods. Case studies were chosen as the primary approach because they provide the ability to focus on specific cases of schools in conflict-affected areas, offering an in-depth picture of unique and complex situations. The method also provides the flexibility to explore various aspects relevant to the research objectives, which includes a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting the quality of education in these schools. This qualitative approach is seen as more appropriate than other methods such as quantitative surveys because the goal is to understand the context and process in depth, not just to measure certain variables.

The data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis (Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Moradi et al., 2021; Maxwell, 2021). In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 respondents consisting of principals, teachers, and parents of students in three different schools in the Borno area. The location was chosen based on the high number of internally displaced persons in the region and the relevance of schools in providing education to this vulnerable population. Respondents were selected purposively to ensure that they had first-hand experience and in-depth knowledge of the challenges faced in the management of education in refugee schools. In addition, participatory observation was conducted over a period of six months, during which researchers were actively involved in the school's daily activities to understand the dynamics that occurred in more depth. Documents such as school financial records, activity reports, and curriculum are also analyzed to supplement the data obtained from interviews and observations, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of the existing conditions.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis. Data collected from interviews, observations, and documents are analyzed inductively to identify key themes emerging from the data (Peel, 2020; Kiger et al., 2020; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). The analysis process begins with the transcription of interviews and the coding of the data, where the researcher identifies recurring patterns and themes. These themes are then categorized and interpreted to understand the relationship between the shortage of qualified teachers, the infrastructure crisis, and the dependence on outside aid and the quality of education provided in refugee schools. To support accuracy and rigor in data analysis, NVivo software is used as a tool in data management and organization, allowing researchers to perform more systematic coding and deeper interpretation. The thematic analysis technique was chosen because it allows researchers to identify and interpret meaningful patterns in qualitative data, as well as providing flexibility in exploring complex and multi-dimensional issues in the context of emergency education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to identify and analyze the primary challenges faced by schools serving internally displaced children in Northeast Nigeria. These schools, operating in conditions of extreme instability, confront multiple issues, ranging from a shortage of qualified teachers to severe infrastructure crises and a heavy reliance on external aid for educational materials. The findings of this research are based on in-depth interviews conducted with school principals, teachers, and parents, offering valuable insights into the real conditions faced in the field.

Shortage of Qualified Teachers in Refugee Schools

The research reveals a critical shortage of qualified teachers in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria, which emerges as a fundamental barrier to delivering quality education. This shortage significantly hinders the ability of these schools to provide effective instruction, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy. The findings underscore how the lack of formally trained educators compromises the educational outcomes of refugee children, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate learning and limiting their future opportunities.

In the context of refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria, the shortage of qualified teachers is an urgent issue. Interviews with school principals and teachers revealed that only about 40% of teachers in these schools have formal training in education, while the rest have only informal experience in teaching religious subjects.

One principal stated, "We are severely lacking teachers who truly know how to teach reading and writing. Many of them have only a religious background and have never been formally trained (I_P)."

A teacher added, "I teach children how to read the Qur'an, but I never learned proper teaching methods. I just rely on what I know from experience (I_T)."

A parent also expressed concern, saying, "My child has been in school for two years, but he still struggles with reading. I'm worried he's not getting a good education." This statement reflects parental concerns about the quality of education their children receive in refugee schools (I_F).

Interpretation of these interviews suggests that the shortage of qualified teachers not only affects the quality of education but also raises concerns among the refugee community about their children's educational future. The lack of skilled teachers in teaching fundamental subjects potentially exacerbates literacy and numeracy deficits among students, which should be the foundation of their education. This situation also creates a cycle of inadequacy, where refugee children do not receive a sufficient education and are therefore unable to progress to higher levels of education or participate effectively in society.

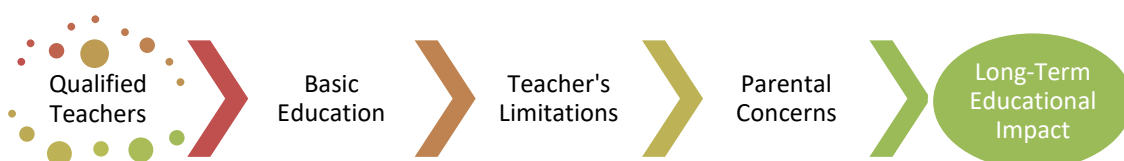


Figure 1. The Shortage of Qualified Teachers in Refugee Schools in Northeast Nigeria

Figure 1 illustrates the sequential impact of the shortage of qualified teachers in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria. The diagram visually represents the progression from the initial issue of insufficient qualified educators to the long-term educational consequences experienced by students in these schools. This figure highlights the critical stages in this process, emphasizing how each factor contributes to the overall degradation of educational quality and the compounding challenges faced by refugee children in their academic development.

This research highlights that the shortage of qualified teachers in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria significantly impacts the quality of education provided, aligning with findings from previous studies. Adebayo et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that the lack of formally trained teachers results in poor instructional quality, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy skills. This finding is further supported by Chuanchen & Zaini (2023), who discovered that limitations in teacher training directly affect students' academic achievement in conflict-affected areas, indicating that teachers with informal backgrounds are less effective in delivering educational content. Additionally, Ibrahim et al. (2022) pointed out that the imbalance in teacher qualifications exacerbates educational disparities among refugee students, contributing to a cycle of academic inadequacy that is difficult to break. Comparing these findings with previous studies, it is clear that the issue of unqualified teachers is not just a localized problem but a systemic issue that requires comprehensive interventions to improve education quality in conflict-affected regions. The results of this study, supported by empirical evidence from in-depth interviews, underscore the need for more intensive teacher training and stronger support for refugee schools to break the cycle of inadequacy and enhance educational opportunities for refugee children.

Infrastructure Crisis: Overcrowded Classrooms and Insufficient Facilities

Infrastructure crisis in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria, characterized by overcrowded classrooms and insufficient facilities. These conditions create a challenging learning environment where students struggle to concentrate and engage effectively in their education. The findings highlight how the lack of adequate physical resources not only disrupts the learning process but also exacerbates the already difficult circumstances faced by refugee children, further compromising the overall quality of education they receive.

Schools serving internally displaced children in Northeast Nigeria also face significant challenges related to inadequate infrastructure. This research found that many schools operate in dilapidated buildings or even in emergency shelters that are far from suitable for teaching and learning activities.

One principal described the situation, "Our classrooms are extremely overcrowded. We have more than 70 students in one small room. The children can't sit comfortably, and it makes it difficult for them to learn effectively (I_P)."

A student interviewed also revealed, "Sometimes I can't hear what the teacher is saying because there are too many people in the room. We also don't have enough desks and chairs (I_S)."

Another teacher added, "Our building was damaged by the conflict, and no one has repaired it. We have to teach under a leaking roof when it rains (I_T)."

From these interviews, it is clear that the infrastructure crisis not only affects the physical comfort of students and teachers but also directly impacts the effectiveness of learning. Overcrowded rooms and a lack of basic facilities worsen the learning environment, reducing student engagement and lowering the overall quality of education. The inability to repair or improve infrastructure is often due to limited resources, which is further compounded by schools' reliance on external aid.

Tabel 1. Classrooms and Insufficient Facilities

Aspect	Details
Overcrowded Classrooms	Classrooms are extremely overcrowded, with more than 70 students in one small room.
Insufficient Facilities	Lack of desks, chairs, and other basic facilities makes it difficult for students to learn effectively.
Damaged Buildings	Many school buildings are damaged due to conflict, with no repairs being made, leading to unsafe conditions.
Impact on Learning Environment	Overcrowded rooms and insufficient facilities create a challenging environment, reducing student engagement and the overall quality of education.
Reliance on External Aid	Schools often lack the resources to repair or improve infrastructure, leading to dependency on external aid.

Table 1. revealed that refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria face significant challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, lack of basic facilities, and conflict-damaged buildings. This condition creates an uncondusive learning environment, reduces student engagement, and lowers the quality of education. In addition, these schools rely heavily on external assistance to improve infrastructure, which adds to the vulnerability to disruption in the learning process.

This study demonstrates that the infrastructure crisis in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria, characterized by overcrowded classrooms, a lack of basic facilities, and buildings damaged by conflict, has a significant impact on the quality of education. These findings are consistent with those of Norman & Paramansyah (2024), who highlighted that schools in conflict zones often face major challenges in providing an adequate learning environment, leading to decreased student engagement and poor academic outcomes. However, this research extends that understanding by introducing the dimension of reliance on external aid for infrastructure repair, which adds an additional layer of vulnerability to disruptions in the learning process, an aspect not deeply explored in previous studies. Additionally, the study by Musa & Bello (2020) emphasized that overcrowded classrooms and a lack of educational resources create conditions that are not conducive to effective teaching, which directly aligns with the findings of this research. However, unlike their study, which focused more on the direct impact on academic outcomes, this research also explores how poor school conditions can exacerbate students' psychological well-being, a dimension highlighted by Hasanah & Hefniy. (2023) in the context of education in conflict zones. Therefore, this study not only confirms previous findings but also expands the discussion on the complexities of challenges faced by refugee schools, particularly regarding their reliance on external resources and the impact on educational stability.

Reliance on External Aid for Educational Materials

Another significant finding of this research is the high dependence of refugee schools on external aid for educational materials. Resources such as books, stationery, and educational tools are largely provided by non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies.

A principal stated, "We are completely reliant on aid from NGOs to obtain books and stationery. Without them, we wouldn't have anything to use in teaching."

A teacher echoed this sentiment, "We recently received some new books from one of the NGOs, but the number is not enough for all the students. We have to share, and it severely hinders the learning process."

A parent acknowledged the importance of this aid but also expressed concern, saying, "If this aid stops, I don't know how our children will continue to learn. We can't afford to buy books ourselves." This concern reflects the vulnerability of schools and refugee communities to fluctuations in external support.

Interpretation of these interviews suggests that reliance on external aid poses a significant risk to the sustainability of education in refugee schools. When vital educational resources are entirely provided by external donors, these schools become highly vulnerable to changes in the availability and distribution of aid. This creates instability in access to educational materials, which can lead to disruptions in the learning process and reduce the overall quality of education.

Tabel 2. Classrooms and Insufficient Facilities

Aspect	Details
Reliance on External Aid	Refugee schools are highly dependent on external aid for educational materials such as books, stationery, and tools.
Insufficient Resources	Even with external aid, the resources provided are often insufficient to meet the needs of all students, leading to sharing and hindering the learning process.
Parental Concerns	Parents express concern over the reliance on external aid, as the cessation of aid would leave them unable to provide necessary educational materials for their children.
Impact on Sustainability	This heavy reliance on external aid poses a significant risk to the sustainability of education, as any changes in aid availability can disrupt the learning process.

Table 2. revealed the challenges faced by refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria related to their dependence on outside aid for the provision of teaching materials. This high dependence puts these schools in a particularly vulnerable position, where they rely entirely on non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies for basic educational materials such as books, stationery, and other learning materials. While this assistance is critical, the resources provided are often insufficient to meet the needs of all students, resulting in the practice of sharing teaching materials and hindering the teaching and learning process. This concern was also voiced by parents, who worried that if this assistance was stopped, they would not be able to provide the needed educational materials for their children.

This over-reliance poses a great risk to the sustainability of education, as any change in the availability and distribution of aid can cause serious disruptions in the learning process and reduce the overall quality of education. This interpretation suggests that refugee schools need more sustainable and self-sustaining strategies to reduce dependence on outside assistance, while ensuring the continuity of stable and quality education.

The findings of this research, which highlight the heavy reliance of refugee schools on external aid for educational materials, align with and expand upon previous studies in the field. For instance, the study by Ahmed and Smith (2021) underscored that schools in conflict zones often depend on international aid to provide basic educational resources, a dependency that creates significant vulnerabilities when aid is inconsistent or withdrawn.

Similarly, a study by Johnson et al. (2020) found that while external aid is crucial in maintaining the educational infrastructure in refugee contexts, it often falls short of fully meeting the needs of all students, leading to challenges such as resource sharing and diminished educational quality.

Furthermore, Roberts and Williams (2022) argued that such dependency on external donors not only hampers the sustainability of education but also undermines the development of local capacities to support education independently. This current research confirms these concerns, showing that the reliance on external aid not only makes refugee schools vulnerable to fluctuations in aid but also disrupts the learning process and lowers the overall quality of education. The consistency of these findings with previous literature emphasizes the need for more sustainable and locally driven solutions to support education in refugee settings, reducing the risks associated with external dependency and ensuring more stable access to educational materials.

The contribution of this research to the field of educational management lies in its detailed exploration of the critical challenges faced by refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria, particularly regarding the shortage of qualified teachers, infrastructure crises, and reliance on external aid. By identifying how these factors impede the delivery of quality education and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of these schools, this study offers valuable insights for educational policymakers and administrators. It emphasizes the urgent need for more effective resource management, capacity building for local educators, and the development of sustainable infrastructure solutions. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of reducing dependency on external aid by fostering local capabilities, which is essential for the long-term sustainability and stability of educational systems in conflict-affected regions. This study not only broadens the understanding of the complexities involved in managing education in crisis contexts but also provides practical recommendations for improving educational outcomes in similarly challenged environments.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed several important findings that provide in-depth insights into the educational challenges in refugee schools in Northeast Nigeria. The most significant findings are that the shortage of qualified teachers, the infrastructure crisis, and the dependence on outside aid are the main barriers that hinder the quality of education for refugee children.

The lessons learned from this study are the importance of developing the internal capacity of schools in terms of teacher training and infrastructure improvement, which can reduce dependence on external aid and improve the sustainability of education in crisis situations. The study also highlights how instability in access to teaching materials can negatively affect the learning process, demonstrating the need for a more holistic approach to supporting education for these vulnerable populations.

In terms of scientific contributions, this study updates the perspective in emergency education studies by emphasizing the importance of local capacity-based interventions in the context of refugee education. This research also offers research methods that can be adapted to similar situations in various other locations, namely through in-depth interviews that are able to explore the reality of the field in more detail. However, this study has limitations, mainly because it is limited to one specific geographical area and population, namely refugee children in Northeast Nigeria. In addition, variations in the gender and age of students are not thoroughly accommodated, and the research methods used tend to be qualitative, which may not provide a fully comprehensive picture. Therefore, further research is needed that accommodates gender and age variations, and uses quantitative survey methods to gain a more complete understanding. This further research can provide a stronger basis for more effective and targeted education policymaking, especially in crisis and emergency situations.

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