Dilemma of Banditry and Insecurity on Students' Kidnapping in Nigerian Education Sector: Panacea for School Administrators Today and Tomorrow

SHITTU, Taofeek Olawale PhD[1]; DAIRO, Taiwo Sunday[2]; PROF. MOHAMMED, Mubashiru Olayiwola[3] &

KAYODE Oluwaseun Temitayo[4]

[2]ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6327-7715

[1,2,3&4]*Department of Educational Management, Lagos State University, Nigeria*

Abstract		Original Research Article

This paper explored the dilemma of banditry, insecurity, and students kidnapping in Nigeria, highlighting their causes, patterns, and far-reaching implications for school administration and national development. The Nigerian educational industry has increasingly been confronted with the tripartite challenges of banditry and insecurity, with the kidnapping of students emerging as one of the most alarming manifestations. These threats have disrupted academic calendars, forced the closure of schools, and heightened fear among school administrators, teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders which undermined the constitutional right of Nigerian citizens to education. The study adopts a conceptual and analytical approach to explore how socioeconomic inequalities, unemployment, porous borders, proliferation of small arms, and governance failures contribute to the worsening security situation in schools. Recently, educational institutions in Northern Nigeria have become soft targets for bandit and kidnappers due to weak security architecture, poor intelligence gathering, inadequate funding, and the remote location of many schools. Furthermore, it evaluates the psychological, educational, and economic consequences of student abductions on learners, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The study concludes that banditry and kidnapping pose security threats on students kidnapping, and sustainable security strategies by school administrators can mitigate risks and restore confidence in the safety of educational institutions. As a panacea, the study recommended among others that propose strategic measures for school administrators including the integration of school-based security management systems, collaboration with security agencies and host communities, deployment of technology-driven surveillance, staff and student safety training, emergency preparedness planning, and advocacy for improved government intervention today and tomorrow.

Keywords: Banditry, Insecurity, Student Kidnapping, School Administrator.

Introduction

Over a decade, insecurity in Nigeria has increased in scale and complexity due to weak policing, high unemployment, the proliferation of illegal weapons, and the gradual disintegration of community protection systems. Today in Nigeria, banditry has graduated from mere minor local disturbances into a national challenge with dire implications for education. Criminal gangs frequently raid communities, destroy school facilities, and kidnap students and teachers. The most disturbing cases are the kidnappings for ransom, where children have become easy targets whose abduction can pressure families, entire communities, and government officials to pay large sums of money. Therefore, many schools in Nigeria function within a state of constant fear, uncertainty, and emotional distress. Schools intended to be safe and nurturing spaces for learning, have increasingly become the most vulnerable areas targeted by criminal groups. According to UNICEF (2022), over eleven thousand schoolchildren have been kidnapped in Nigeria since 2014. This disturbing tendency is a reflection of the deteriorating security landscape that has shaken people's confidence in the nation's education system to the core. The most affected stakeholders in this crisis are school administrators. Some of the administrative tasks include; communicating with parents when necessary, planning academic calendars for the school, Handling of student recruitment and admission in the school, disciplining students when needed, making both daily and long-term decisions in the school Shittu, Beyioku & Erunedo (2024). Their role has grown beyond academic supervision to the management of risk assessment, crisis communication, protection of students, and emergency planning, when most of them had never received formal training in the management of security. This is a situation that has made administrators engage in difficult decisions over school operations and safety plans amidst lean resources and inadequate government support. The subsequent kidnappings in Dapchi, Kankara and Kaduna consolidated what has now been made clear: that criminal groups knowingly target schools because doing so creates public panic and draws national attention-indeed, international attention.

However, many schools lack basic protective structures such as security fencing, well-trained guards, surveillance systems, or emergency communication tools. In the absence of such facilities, school administrators can only trust in makeshift safety measures, which may prove to be inefficient in case of an attack. These challenges place enormous stress on teachers and school leaders who are expected to ensure academic quality while protecting lives. Parents, too, have not been spared by the increasing insecurity in schools. Sending children to school has become something to be feared by many families, especially those in high-risk areas. Some parents keep their children at home, while others have moved them to distant, safer but more expensive communities. The consequences of such withdrawal from school not only affect the academic development of children but also exacerbate poverty and widen educational inequality. Some students suffer serious emotional and psychological distress: just the news of kidnappings in communities close to their home may instill fear and anxiety leading to loss of concentration. The word Kidnap was derived from two English words "Kid" meaning (Infant) and "Nap" meaning (Sleep). Literarily, it is a process of abduction people as hostage for ransom payment. Kidnapping is a notorious and nefarious behaviour orchestrated by criminal with the mindset of abducting and hostage students for ransom package. Student kidnapping is a nefarious, villainous, terrible and seasonal crime that portend security challenges in Lagos state (Odumbo, Shittu, Akinyemi & Momoh, 2017).

This study therefore focus on the threat of banditry and kidnapping is not only a security problem but a major obstacle to national development. No country can build an effective education system when students, teachers, and administrators live in fear. Insecurity disrupts academic activities, discourages enrollment, reduces teacher retention, and weakens overall school management. Protecting the education system must, therefore, become a national priority. Safety in schools, therefore, requires inter-agency collaboration between the government agencies, the

local communities, the parents, school administrations, traditional institutions, and security organizations. Schools also need improved infrastructure, reliable communication systems, trained security personnel, and well-articulated emergency procedures. Community-led intelligence systems must be strengthened to detect threats early. It is equally important that training, funding, and policy support be provided to the school managers to respond effectively in case of emergencies. Nigeria is at a moment when concrete actions must be taken by all well-meaning Nigerians to protect its education system. If the current insecurity continues unabated, Nigeria risks losing an entire generation of learners to trauma, fear, and disrupted schooling. Education cannot thrive in unsafe environments, and this means the future depends on the collective commitment to securing every school and safeguarding every learner.

Evolution of Insecurity and Banditry in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria has transformed from sporadic, localized disturbances to one of the most pervasive national issues, affecting nearly every facet of the nation. The country has experienced illicit armed groups, communal clashes, insurgency, and a sprawling crime network that crosses state borders over the last two decades. Sequel to the calamity of insecurity in Nigeria, effective teaching and learning seem to be dwindling toward the attainment of academic excellence. Insecurity seems to be a state of danger, anxiety, fear, worry, and uncertainty which can hinder the growth and development of man and society (Shittu, Ola & Nwokocha, 2023). Moreso, banditry first came into prominence in the early 2000s, especially in the North West, driven by resource competition, weak governance arrangements, and increased poverty among rural communities. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) describe banditry in Nigeria as transformed into an articulated network of armed groups engaged in such activities as village raids, cattle rustling, and property destruction. The rise in kidnapping for ransom followed a similar pattern. From being confined to the Niger Delta area in the early 2000s, it has now spread into nearly all parts of Nigeria. This phenomenon is symptomatic of deeper structural

deficiencies, including chronic unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, inadequate social safety nets, and a pervasive lack of marketable skills among vulnerable to exploitation and health hazards (Ogundele & Olarenwaju in Shittu, *et al.* 2025).

In modern times, kidnapping is largely influenced by financial motivation rather than political agitation. In response to the crisis, the Nigerian government, in 2014, launched the Safe Schools Initiative. This policy aimed at strengthening school security, enhancing community surveillance, and making the learning environment safer for the students. Nevertheless, reports from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack demonstrate that implementation has been sluggish and uneven. Due to weak coordination, limited funding, and lack of political will, many schools, especially in rural areas, are yet to benefit from the program. It is such discontinuity between policy and practice that has contributed to the worsening insecurity situation.

Dilemma of Banditry and Insecurity on Student Kidnapping in Nigerian

Schools have increasingly been targeted by bandit and kidnapping attacks because they represent soft and vulnerable targets. Most Nigerian schools, particularly in rural areas, lack perimeter fencing, security guards, alarm systems, or any form of surveillance equipment. By taking advantage of these weaknesses, criminals attack at night or in the early morning hours when monitoring is always low. School children are also high-value targets because their abduction garners public attention and almost guarantees payment of a ransom. The abduction at Chibok in 2014 was a major turning point that attracted global attention to the vulnerability of schools. Since then, this trend of kidnappings has continued in Niger, Kaduna, Katsina, Borno, and Zamfara states. The UNICEF (2021) reported that between 2020 and 2021 alone, more than 1,400 students were abducted. Criminals are increasingly targeting schools because they know government agencies and parents will urgently negotiate for the safe return of children, making them profitable. The political motivations of school attacks also exist in rural areas. Disrupting education serves to weaken communities, discourage school attendance, and

limit social mobility. For example, Ede and Igbo assert that the strategic option of disrupting school attendance is employed to weaken the population and reduce resistance to criminal operations.

Table: Incidents Students Kidnapping Incidents in Nigerian Schools (2015–2025)

S/N	Date / Year	Location / School	Number Abducted	Brief Description
1	Jan 2015	Malari, Borno State	40 boys/young men	Boko Haram abducted dozens of male youth from Malari community.
2	Feb 2018	Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State	110 girls	Abduction of schoolgirls by Boko Haram; many later released.
3	Dec 2020	Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State	300+ boys	Gunmen stormed the boarding school and kidnapped hundreds.
4	Feb 2021	Government Science College, Kagara, Niger State	Dozens	Students and staff abducted in a night raid.
5	Feb 2021	Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State	317 girls	Large-scale abduction; most victims released days later.
6	Mar 2021	Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, Kaduna State	Dozens	Armed bandits abducted tertiary students from their hostels.
7	Apr 20, 2021	Greenfield University, Kaduna State	Several students	Gunmen abducted students; multiple casualties recorded.
8	2021 (multiple)	Various Schools in NW Nigeria	Hundreds	Spike in mass abductions across Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Katsina.
9	Mar 7, 2024	LGEA Primary & Secondary School, Kuriga, Kaduna State	227–287 pupils	One of the largest abductions after 2021; many later rescued.

10	Mar 2024	Islamic Seminary, Gidan Bakuso, Sokoto State	15 pupils	Armed men abducted students from an Islamic boarding school.
11	2024 (Jan–Dec)	Multiple states	Hundreds	UNICEF and Save the Children report sharp rise in school kidnappings.
12	Nov 17, 2025	Gov't Girls Comprehensive Secondary School, Maga, Kebbi State	25 schoolgirls	Students abducted; one escaped; others later rescued.
13	Nov 21–22, 2025	St Mary's Catholic Primary & Secondary School, Papiri, Niger State	~303 students + 12 staff	Large-scale abduction; dozens escaped, many still missing.
14	2024–2025	Nationwide	Hundreds	Documented pattern of escalating attacks targeting schools.
15	2014–2025 (cumulative)	Countrywide	1,400+ students	Aggregated figure of schoolchildren abducted since 2014.

(Researcher Survey, 2026)

This trend of students' kidnappings in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025 indicates indicate a steady spread from the northeastern part of the country through the northwest, north central, and lately into the southwest. These expansions show that no region is insulated from this growing insecurity that threatens schools and their students. Over time, the nature of these abductions also changed. From being strongly tied to ideological motivations for the early kidnappings by Boko Haram, later incidents have been largely influenced by bandit groups for financial benefit through ransoms (Ogunleye, 2023). This evolution has transformed the kidnapping of students into a commercial activity, something for which schools have become soft targets due to their large number of potential victims and high negotiating value for ransom. Many schools in the affected regions had to shut down temporarily or even permanently, resulting in lost instructional time and significant drops in enrollment figures. Due to fear, parents pulled their children from schools, while survivors of abductions suffered emotional trauma and anxiety, finding it very hard to adjust back to normal academic life. Teachers and school administrator also suffered increased pressure as they were struggling to maintain safety, handle trauma, and keep learning environments intact under constant threat. In this period, government responses were mostly reactive, constituting rescue operations and temporary closures as opposed to the establishment of a long-term preventive system. While there are some efforts to strengthen security, the persistence of attacks suggests some lapses in rural security infrastructure, intelligence gathering, and community-based protection. These weaknesses contributed to the continued vulnerability of schools. The repeated abductions also had far-reaching social and humanitarian consequences: the emotional

suffering and financial strain families faced, especially when they were forced to contribute to paying a ransom for their release. Survivors carried long-term psychological scars that affected their educational progress and well-being. The incidents also weakened public trust in the state's ability to provide safety. These incidents undoubtedly point to the need for stronger security strategies on the part of school managers. For administrators, safety protocols now involve controlled access to the school, perimeter fencing, emergency drills, and consultation with local security agencies. As the nature of the threat evolves, so too does the responsibility of educational leaders to develop responsive and preventive security measures that protect students and restore confidence in schooling**.**

Panacea for School Administrators Today and Tomorrow

These pathways offer realistic solutions that can restore safety, strengthen resilience, and rebuild public trust in the education system.

i. Schools are compelled to assume a more structured security framework by establishing perimeter fencing, controlled access points, and trained security personnel, as well as regular patrol systems. Most schools are still vulnerable, as their basic protective structures are either weak or completely nonexistent. Putting in place modern surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras, alarm systems, and community-based reporting structures, would enhance the level of early threat detection.

ii. There is a great need for stronger partnerships to be initiated between school administration and local security operatives. Regular security assessments, rapid response protocols, and emergency drills should be jointly developed. Security agencies have to provide schools with direct communication channels that allow them to report suspicious activities immediately.

iii. Communities are the first line of defense. Engaging traditional leaders, youth groups, and community volunteers in monitoring movements around school environments will enhance local vigilance. It is also important that parents and guardians be involved in school safety committees to broaden responsibility for protection.

iv. Federal and state governments need to redesign policies on education security to reflect present realities. Funding for school safety should be ring fenced against diversion. Indeed, investment in infrastructure, training, and technology is needed. Government should also introduce compulsory school security audits and certification for all primary and secondary schools in high-risk areas.

v. School heads and administrators must be professionally equipped to manage crises. Training in risk management, emergency response, communication, and psychological support for learners will strengthen their capacity. Shittu (2020) adds that a number of school managers lack technical understanding to predict or take appropriate measures against security threats. Building their skills will reduce vulnerability.

vi. Provision of Safe School Routes and Secure Transportation Many students are abducted on their way to and from school. Safe routes will minimize exposure to attacks, as well as the deployment of community highway watchers and the introduction of secure school transport systems. The government and private sector actors can collaborate to support safer mobility for learners.

vii. Psychological support and trauma healing among survivors Students and teachers who suffered from or were witnesses to such attacks need to be provided with professional psychological support. Counseling centers, school therapists, and cooperation with mental health organizations will assist in restoring emotional stability and reduce long-term trauma.

viii. Increased Legal Punishment to the Offender The justice system needs to show deterrence:

swift arrest, prosecution, and conviction of the perpetrators of school kidnappings will send a strong message. Strengthened legal frameworks will deter offenders in the future and ensure public confidence.

Conclusion

The study concludes that banditry and kidnapping pose security threats on students kidnapping, and sustainable security strategies by school administrators can mitigate risks and restore confidence in the safety of educational institutions. The consistent increase in banditry and the kidnapping of schools within the period starting from 2015 to 2025 has deepened the crisis in the education sector of Nigeria. The attack on the recent Kuriga school in Kaduna State merely proved that several learning environments have still been left at the mercy of violent disruptions. In conclusion, insecurity in schools is not only a security concern but a major developmental challenge that threatens the future of human capital in Nigeria. For meaningful progress to occur, Nigeria must adopt a long-term, community-driven, and well-funded approach to school safety. School administrators, parents, communities, security agencies, and policy makers are called upon to act in concert to ensure that learning spaces are secure, stable, and supportive.

Recommendations

In this study, following recommendation were made:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should formulate a unified and enforceable school safety framework that makes the minimum level of security standards compulsory for all schools, specifically those in high-risk zones.

2. Schools should be equipped with perimeter fencing, access control gates, alarm systems, and functional CCTV surveillance to prevent unauthorized entry. Targeted funds from government should be made available to support such upgrades.

3. The security guards posted to schools should undergo specialist training in child protection, emergency response and threat detection. This should include collaboration with the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps.

4. Schools should maintain direct communication channels with the police and military units nearby. Regular risk assessments and emergency drills should be carried out jointly.

5. Community leaders, youth groups, and parents should be included in school safety committees. Vigilante structures at the local level can assist in early warnings through the prompt reporting of suspicious activities.

6. Government should introduce digital tools such as drones, safety reporting apps, and geo-fencing systems to support real-time school environment surveillance.

7. Transportation that is safe for children State governments should provide protected school transportation routes through community policing and regular patrols. Schools in isolated areas should be prioritized.

8. Train School Managers on Crisis Preparedness Principles and administrators should be continuously developing their professionals in crisis management, communication, and psychological first aid to enhance their response capacity. Provide Psychological Support to Survivors and Schools Affected by Attacks Counselling units and trauma recovery programs should be set up within the affected communities.

9. A partnership with mental health organizations can facilitate healing among students and teachers. Ensure Swift Prosecution of Perpetrators It is now high time that government strengthened the legal frameworks to make the punishment for school-related kidnapping more severe. Speedy prosecution will deter criminal groups.

10. Promote Continuous Research and Data-Driven Policies Emerging insecurity trends should, therefore, be studied regularly by universities, scholars, and research centres. Such findings should guide policy makers on appropriate timely interventions.

11. Increase Budgetary Allocation to Safety Programmes in Schools Adequate funding should be allocated strictly for the safety infrastructure, emergency training, and monitoring technology. Funds should be monitored in order to avoid mismanagement.

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