

## **EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOLING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BARKIN LADI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*The study looked at possible effects regular exposure of school children to violence can have on their attitude towards schooling in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area that has had several cases of violence in recent times. In this era of no-one-left-behind educationally, there is need to find out how these vulnerable school children in the study Area are faring in the face of incessant killings around them. Causal comparative design was employed for the study. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Six schools ( 2 public and 4 private) in affected and accessible communities in the study area were purposively sampled and one hundred and eighty two students who joined those schools due to displacement from their own communities constituted the sample for the study. A 20-item attitude to schooling questionnaire with good content validity as judged by two experts; one from Measurement and Evaluation and one from Educational Psychology, University of Jos, was used for data collection. Construct validity of the instrument was established through factor analysis and its internal consistency reliability coefficient using, Chronbach-Alpha method was 0.95. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, means and Chi-square statistics. The findings show that many of the students had positive attitude towards schooling, enrolment status of schools fluctuated, direction of attitude of students varied with gender, but not with school-type. Girls were found to have more positive attitude than boys. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the vulnerable students were still having positive attitude towards schooling in spite of security challenges around them. Displaced ones still enrolled into existing schools in their new localities, whether public or private. It was recommended among others that environment be made safe and secure to further boost the students' attitude towards schooling.*

### **Introduction**

Education is seen by the Nigerian government as a veritable instrument for national development. Through it, rights, values, and attitude for survival

of the individual and the society are inculcated, also, skills for self-reliance are acquired through education as stated in the National Policy on Education (FME,2014). To ensure nobody is left out, Education For All (EFA) was declared at a conference in Thailand in 1990. Consequent upon this, Nigeria launched Basic Education programme which is inclusive in nature and free for all citizens just to be sure that everybody; the rich, poor, physically challenged and so on, gets access to basic exposure to education ( Ogungbesan, 2012). However, frequent crises experienced in different parts of Nigeria have the tendency to exclude some people from acquiring basic education. These people are the vulnerable school children in conflict areas like Barkin Ladi Local Government Area in Plateau State, Nigeria.

It is a known fact that the atmosphere of peace and stability gives rise to progress in all spheres of any society. However, violent and conflict situations perpetuate insecurity, threats to life and property and distorts the smooth running of the various arms of the society. One of the sectors that are disrupted by violence and conflict is education.

Frequent exposure of children to violence creates a state of insecurity around them and this is said to influence school attendance, enrolment, involvement in co-curricula activities as well as increase number of out- of-school children (Ajake, 2016). Exposure of children to violence also affects their academic achievement (Osofsky&Osofsky, 2011). According to these scholars, such children have their cognitive activities disrupted, they develop problems with attention, keeping of school rules and classroom instruction. They also suffer from emotional problems like diminished concentration, sleep problems, depression, anxiety, sudden startling, and so on. Social life of such children is equally affected as they become aggressive, lose empathy and develop other social vices. These are usually aided by poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate medical attention, loss of parents/guardians or parents' unemployment. However, the damaging effects of children's exposure to violence on their academic development can be minimized if the attendant behavioural and social problems are detected in good time and taken care of. The presence of the adverse effects can show up in their attitude towards schooling as disposition towards a thing, to a great extent, affects a person's level of involvement and success in the venture.

Different researchers defined attitude towards schooling in different ways. Attitude towards schooling can be seen as a positive or negative predisposition towards schooling and every activity in the school environment, which could be cognitive, emotional, or behavioural (Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart& Roy, 2006). Attitude towards schooling has also been conceptualised as the way a person perceives his/her school attendance (Moe,

Pezzaglia, Tressoildi, &Toso, 2009). Similarly,Veresova and Mala (2016) submitted that attitude towards school and learning can be understood as beliefs, thoughts and opinions about school and learning in it, emotions and a relationship towards school and learning built upon feelings, and a tendency to behave in accordance with favourable and unfavourable experiences with school and learning.

In this study, attitude towards schooling will be seen as predisposition, beliefs, thoughts, opinions and emotions about schooling and school activities built on feelings and experiences with schooling. This implies that an individual's feelings and experiences with schooling determines whether attitude towards schooling will be positive or negative.

According to Kpolovie, Joe, and Okoto (2010), students develop good sense of belonging and engagement in school only when they have a positive attitude towards schooling. The condition of belonging means that a student is a valued member of the school community while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. Some students view schooling as essential to their long term well-being, and this attitude is reflected in their participation in academic and non-academic activities. Students tend to have good relations with school staff and with other students when their attitude to schooling is positive.

As it is with other constructs, Candeas, Rebelo, and Oliveira (2012) reported that differences exist in attitudes based on gender. Girls seem to have more positive attitude towards schooling than boys who are less motivated and so have more negative attitude towards school. The report further reveals that girls do not require more time to study, engage less in cases of misconduct and have less absenteeism; they also have more expectations about future and are more enthusiastic about further studies. On the other hand, boys are less committed to studies and give up more easily. Fisher, Schult and Hell (2013) supported this submission in their findings which indicates that girls during adolescence have more positive attitudes towards school compared with the boys. The report equally showed that schools that are more engaging (especially private schools) arouse more positive attitude. Students who perceive more support from their teachers who live with them at school have more positive attitudes towards schooling and feel more satisfied with school. Again, the extent to which families actively take part in their children's academic life also tends to influence students' attitude to schooling. A study by Kuperminc, Daniel and Alvarezlimenez (2008) showed that family contexts that are less exciting and less involved in their children's education are manifested in their children's less positive attitudes toward school, less resilience levels and have higher probability of dropping out of school.

Several factors have been found to affect students' attitude towards schooling. Some of these factors are highlighted by Davadas and Lay (2017) as follows: Parental influence which can be either direct or indirect. Direct effects include parents helping their children with homework while indirect parental effects include parental encouragement, parental expectation and their own attitude toward school. Teachers' support is also necessary in encouraging students' positive attitude towards schooling. Teachers' strong influence on students' beliefs in their school life suggests the importance of the teacher's role in students' success which leads to the development of more positive attitudes. Classroom instructional strategies that provide students with multiple opportunities such as modelling, student-centred, cooperative learning, collaborative discussion, and spatial thinking are found to impact students' attitudes towards schooling more positively.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that most factors that make for positive attitude towards schooling thrive under an atmosphere of peace. Where violence occurs frequently, no time is given for all the activities listed above. Parents and teachers may not even be there to play their various roles towards the children's schooling, sometimes, the schools are shut down for sometime or closed completely or used as camps for displaced people. This seems to be the case in Barkin Ladi local government Area.

For some years now, Plateau State (and Barkin Ladi Local Government Area in particular) has been witnessing violent conflicts which have profoundly affected the psychological and emotional well-being of the locals due to targeted attacks on some communities. The most recent crisis took place in June this year when Mangu, and Riyom Local government Areas as well as Barkin Ladi (Gashish and Ropp Districts) came under heavy attack of gunmen. About 120 people were reported killed, 200 people sustained gunshot injuries and houses burnt (Nanlong, Duru, Omonobi, & Una, 2018)). Some schools were also attacked during this incidence such that school children had to be evacuated and schools closed before third term examinations were written. Many school children were displaced, some returned from school to join surviving family members in Internally Displaced People's Camps having lost their homes.

The regular attacks and killings by unknown gunmen and other crises situations in BarkinLadi Local Government Area, have forced many parents out of their communities to other areas for safety. This has led to the displacement of many school children as well as total closure of some schools. Some children are separated from their families and loved ones and are left at the mercy of foster parents because they have no idea of where their parents have relocated to. Some of these children later join the schools in their host

communities (Jacob, 2015). However, the major worry is that regular exposure of children to violence which leads to regular disruption of school activities and other problems may affect their attitude towards schooling, given the difficulty they encounter in adjusting to new school environment, foster parents and new communities. The problem of this study therefore is to investigate the effect of exposure to violence on students' attitude towards schooling in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the direction of attitude of secondary school students towards schooling in the study area.
2. To determine the enrolment status of students into secondary schools in the study area.
3. To determine whether the attitude of secondary school students toward schooling in the study area differ according to gender.
4. To find out whether the attitude of students in the study area towards schooling differ according to school type.

To guide the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the direction of attitude of secondary school students towards schooling in the study area?
2. What is the enrolment status of students into secondary schools in B/Ladi Local Government Area?
3. To what extent does direction of attitude towards schooling differ according to gender among secondary school students in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area?
4. To what extent does direction of attitude towards schooling differ according to school type among secondary school students in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area?

The following hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at .05 level of significance:

1. The attitude of secondary school students towards schooling in the study area is not dependent on gender.
2. Secondary school students' attitude towards schooling in the study area is not dependent of school type.

## **Method**

The research design adopted for this study was the causal comparative research design. The reason for employing this design was because the study was carried out in retrospect. Exposure to violence had already affected what it could affect in the children. The population of the study comprised all the

existing secondary schools in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. For the purpose of this study, 6 accessible schools (2 public, 4 private) in the most affected communities were purposively selected and only students who joined those schools owing to displacement from their indigenous communities formed the sample of the study. The instrument used for data collection was an Attitude Towards Schooling Questionnaire (ATSQ). The questionnaire was made up of two parts – A and B. Part A sought demographic information about the respondents’ gender and school type. Part B contained 20 items which measured students’ attitude towards schooling. The modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used and scored 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The content validity of the items (appropriateness, relevance, and comprehensiveness) was assessed by two educational psychologists from University of Jos. A principal components factor analysis was carried out to determine the construct validity of the instrument. This is essentially a method of data reduction that aims to produce a small number of items that can be used in place of the larger number of original items. Thus, out of the initial 45 items, a modified questionnaire of only 20 items was developed. In reducing the number of the items in the questionnaire, only component matrix items with a loading of 0.40 and above were selected, thereby making the remaining items quite strong. The Cronbach-alpha method was employed to determine the internal consistency of the items and the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.95. Copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers and collected on the spot. Data were analysed using frequency counts, means and percentages to answer the research questions while Chi-square test of independence was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

**Results**

Table 1: Categories of Students’ Attitude Towards Schooling

Range of Scores	Number of students (%)	Direction of attitude
20-39	14 (7.7)	Negative
40-59	58 (31.9)	Neutral
60-80	110 (60.4)	Positive

Table 1 showed that majority of the students (60.4%) have positive attitude towards schooling

**Table 2: Enrolment Status of Students into Secondary Schools**

S/N	Schools	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
1	A	201	207	109	72	54
2	B	140	180	172	193	120
3	C	160	230	209	249	302
4	D	600	150	250	200	250
5	E	110	87	13	42	82
6	F	-	-	-	-	-

As seen in the table above, there is no particular trend established in students' enrolment into secondary schools in the study area. Number of enrollees in each school per academic session fluctuated.

**Table 3: Categories of Students' Attitude towards Schooling According to Gender**

Range of Scores	Number of students (%)		Direction of attitude
	Boys	Girls	
20-39	9 (8.3)	5 (6.8)	Negative
40-59	42 (38.5)	16 (21.9)	Neutral
60-80	58 (53.2)	52 (71.2)	Positive

Table 3 showed that only a small percentage of boys and girls studied have negative attitude, many of them have positive attitude towards schooling with a higher percentage of girls possessing that than boys. A higher percentage of boys than girls have neutral attitude towards schooling.

**Table 4: Categories of Students' Attitude Towards Schooling According to School Type**

Range of Scores	Number of students (%)		Direction of attitude
	Private	Public	
20-39	8 (6.4)	6 (10.5)	Negative
40-59	37 (29.6)	21(36.8)	Neutral
60-80	80 (64)	30 (52.6)	Positive

As shown in Table 4, higher percentages of students studied in both schools have positive attitude towards schooling though that of private school is slightly higher. Percentages of public school students with negative and neutral attitude towards schooling are slightly higher than their private school counterparts.

Chi-square was performed to examine the relationship between gender and students' attitude towards schooling. The relationship between the variables was significant  $X^2 (2, N=182) = 6.25, p < .05$ . This implies that attitude towards schooling varied with gender. Girls (mean = 64.90) were found with more positive attitude than boys (mean = 61.00).

Chi-square was equally performed to examine the relationship between school type and students' attitude towards schooling. The relationship between the variables was not significant  $X^2 (2, N=182) = 2.35, p > .05$ . The implication is that attitude towards schooling did not vary with school type. Private school students (mean=63.20) and public school students (mean = 61.18) were found with similar attitude towards schooling.

### **Discussion**

Findings of the study showed that in spite of frequent exposure to violence, secondary school students in the study area still have positive attitude towards schooling. This is contrary to expectation, given that inputs by parents, teachers and fellow students that will arouse their interest towards schooling as listed by Davadas and Lay(2017) may not be readily available. Kuperminc, Daniel and Alvarezlimenez (2008) posited that family's less involvement in their children's education results in the children's less positive attitude towards school and lower levels of resilience. This appeared not to be the case with the children in the study area, some of whom have lost their parents and other family members but remained determined to go to school.

The findings also revealed no particular trend in students' enrolment into secondary schools in the study area. Number of enrolees in each school per academic session fluctuated. This was only expected in a conflict-ridden area, any area considered safe at a particular time was where people moved to and any school in that community witnessed a boost while the ones in the communities they fled from received less enrolment.

The findings equally indicated that students' attitude towards schooling was dependent on gender with female students having more positive attitude towards schooling than males. This confirmed the position of Candeas, Rebelo, and Oliveira (2012) and Fisher, Schult and Hell (2013). However, attitude towards schooling was not found to vary significantly with school type. Although Fisher, Schult and Hell purported that schools that are more engaging (private schools) arouse more positive attitude, but given that all the schools in the area were experiencing same frequent exposure to violence, level of engagement of students in the two school types may not have differed, hence the students' similar attitude towards schooling.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that majority of the vulnerable children in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, who experience frequent disruption of school activities due to frequent crises in their communities still have positive attitude towards schooling. However, girls have more positive attitude towards schooling than boys. Although school enrolment fluctuates depending on the safety of the school host community, private and public school students display similar attitude towards schooling. If provided with conducive schooling environment they will benefit greatly from education and so be relevant in their time, contributing to the development of the nation and indeed the entire region.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the following:

1. Federal and State governments should do all within their power to ensure an end to the frequent crises in the area.
2. Boys in the study area need to be helped to develop more positive attitude towards schooling.
3. Both private and public school environments need to be made safe and secure to further enhance students' attitude towards schooling.

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