



**MASS-ABDUCTION OF STUDENTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This research examined the incidence of mass-abduction of students and its implications on educational development in northern Nigeria. It used descriptive research approach, and the materials were obtained from secondary sources, such as published books, journals, newspapers, and other online resources. The data generated were thematically analysed in accordance with the research topic. The research posited that most of the states in northern Nigeria are relatively educational less-developed, making mass-abduction of students a severe threat to the region's and the nation's ability to achieve the necessary levels of educational advancement. It noted that the kidnapping/mass-abduction of schoolchildren makes parents less likely to sending their children (particularly the girl-child) to school, which has an impact on the number of students' school enrolment of already educationally less-developed states in Nigeria, especially in the northern

parts of the country. In light of this, the researchers urged governments to enhance security at educational institutions. The security agents should collaborate with local security operatives like Ya Sarki Baka and other informal security groups to fortify security and curb violence in many parts of Nigerian society.

Keywords: Insecurity, kidnapping, girl-child education, school enrolment, educationally less-developed states.

Introduction

There is not a single nation on the planet that is capable of making a substantial socio-economic development without education. Therefore, education is a panacea for the growth of every aspect of any nation, including Nigeria. Since the post-colonial era, Nigeria has made significant strides in terms of school enrollment, helping to address the illiteracy issue. However, the recent widespread mass-abduction/kidnapping of students in northern Nigeria is a brake on the educational progress that has been made. The criminal act has led to the closure of many educational institutions, posing a severe threat to the growth of the education system, particularly in the comparatively less-developed states that are primarily found in the northern part of Nigeria.

According to Maishanu (2020), the Katsina State Governor, His Excellency, Alhaji Aminu Bello Masari, ordered the closure of all boarding schools in the state on December 11, 2020, the day after 303 students from the Government Boys Science Secondary School, Kankara in Katsina State were abducted. This would make the issue of children not attending school in northern Nigeria much worse. Given that 69 percent of the estimated 10.5 million out-of-school children in the country are from the north, it is evident that northern Nigeria is already the region with the greatest educational disadvantages in terms of mass illiteracy and school enrollment (Adeniran & Castradori, 2021; Peterside, 2021).

Peterside (2021) noted that the low cutoff scores for entry into unity schools and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) admission requirements for students in northern Nigeria were intended to inspire students in the region. However, the frequent mass abduction of students in northern Nigeria will have a negative impact on enrollment, especially for girls, who are already affected by poverty, religion and unfavorable cultural practices that do not portend well for education in the region.

After the Chibok schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram insurgency in 2014, the federal government created the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) as a programme to build fences around vulnerable schools, relocate students in high-risk areas, and improve education in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). For the three-year project backed by the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, at least \$20 million (£14 million) has been pledged (Adeniran & Castradori, 2021; Peterside, 2021). Therefore, the recent wave of student abductions is alarming and calls into question the effectiveness of SSI, making schools in northern Nigeria risky place to learn. In light of the aforementioned, this article examines the mass-abduction of students and its effects on educational growth in northern Nigeria, which is already educationally disadvantaged due to the nation's high rate of out-of-school children.

Conceptual and Theoretical Explanations

Education is an essential instrument for growth. Knowledge, skills, character, and aptitude necessary for the attainment of certain goals for both individuals and society are transmitted through education. Learning new knowledge and skills is the goal of education. Additionally, it entails assisting others in picking up new skills and encouraging their reflection on what they have learned. The progress of civilisation can be furthered by teaching students how to find and use knowledge. The education system

offers the specialised or technical training needed to carry out job duties that aid in a society's overall development. While development comprises a condition of positive transformation in both quantity and quality of people's lives as well as in society, educational development refers to measures aimed at improving the teaching of such positive change (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Katsina, 2012).

A mass-abduction occurs when a criminal organisation forcibly takes innocent, law-abiding people against their will and transports them to an unidentified location for financial gain. Since kidnapping involves the act of capturing, holding, or transporting a person or group of people through unlawful force or trickery often with a demand for ransom, mass-abduction is the same as kidnapping (Uzorma & Nwanegbo-Ben, 2014). It is an organised crime involving a network of specialists with the goal of doing the evil deed without interruption (Dangiwa & AbdulQouadir, 2019). According to Fage & Alabi (2017), kidnapping is the forced or fraudulent abduction of a person or group of individuals, including students, for causes ranging from economic, political, and religious to self-determination struggles. It entails forcibly removing students from their place of study or point of interest without their knowledge in order to hold them hostage and make money off of their families or the government.

The mass abduction of students has emerged as one of Nigeria's current educational development concerns, particularly in the northern part of the country where the heinous act has become increasingly common in recent years. According to Inyang & Abraham (2013), the prevalence of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and religious fanaticism contribute to the issue of mass-abduction of students in educational institutions in northern Nigeria. Aside from being frustrating, poverty and unemployment also breed other social ills like illiteracy (Haruna, 2013).

Robert K. Merton's 1938 anomie theory was chosen as the theoretical framework to describe the phenomenon under investigation. According to the theory, violent and criminal behaviour, such as mass-abduction of schoolchildren, results from the breakdown of social norms or laws that guide people's behaviour. Merton made a distinction between cultural and social structures; the former relates to the goals and interests of individuals, whereas the latter refers to the means or accepted procedures that govern and control the achievement of such goals and interests. As a result, a society's cultural system encourages everyone to pursue their goals through means normatively prescribed or approved forms of behaviour. However, opportunities to meet these goals through socially acceptable means are not equally distributed. When a person's access to the socially acceptable means of achieving these goals is curtailed or eliminated by social structure, deviant and criminal behaviours, such as mass-abduction/kidnapping of students for ransom, result. The five modalities of personal adaptation that Merton described are conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion (Prabhakar, 2012; Siegel, 2004), as explained below:

Accepting societal goals and means of achieving them is known as conformity. In a well-balanced society, this social adaptation is the most prevalent. Innovation is the acceptance of goals but rejection of means. For instance, criminals, including kidnapers, embrace the goal of money but do not use the conventional means of getting an education and working hard to achieve it. They innovate by kidnapping numerous students in order to demand ransom from their families and government officials. For the kidnapers or abductors, the crime is a tremendously lucrative business because of the ransom payments. According to Inyang & Abraham (2013), poverty, brought on by unemployment and illiteracy, is one of the risk factors for kidnapping/mass abduction of students. According to Merton, poverty alone does not lead to crime, but when it is

combined with a society's primary objective of financial success – as it is in Nigeria – and a poor person is unable to compete due to a lack of cultural norms, the result is typically a criminal act like mass student abduction. Ritualism is the acceptance of the means while rejecting the goals. The lowest levels of violence and other criminal behaviour are found among ritualists. Retreatism involves rejecting both the goals and the societal means of achieving them. For instance, if someone cannot use illegal methods to further their aims due of earlier socialisation, they may reject both their goals and their means and turn into an alcoholic, drug addict, or homeless person (Prabhakar, 2012). Rejecting societal goals and means of achieving them in favour of trying to adopt new ones is what defines rebellion. For instance, anyone associated with the Boko Haram uprising in northern Nigeria could be categorised as rebels against the current societal structure.

Materials and Methods

The materials for this research were obtained from secondary sources like published books, journals, newspapers, and other online resources. The researchers employed a descriptive technique and thematic analysis to examine the mass-abduction of students and its effects on northern Nigeria's educational advancement.

Incidence of Mass-Abduction of Students in Northern Nigeria

In northern Nigeria, there are numerous cases of students' mass abduction. The incessant mass-abduction of students portend a doom in education system in Nigeria and northern part of the country in particular, as over 1,073 students have been abducted between 2020 and 2021 in the region (Iwara, 2021; Ojelu, 2021). The following table lists instances of mass-abduction of students in northern Nigeria:

Table 1: Cases of Mass-Abduction of Students in Northern Nigeria

Date Abducted	Name & Address of School	No. of Students
13/1/2022	Federal University of Lafia, Lafia Nasarawa State.	4 Students.
17/02/2021	Government Science School, Kagara, Niger State.	27 Students.
26/02/2021	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State.	317 Students.
11/03/2021	Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation Afaka, Kaduna State.	39 Students.
20/04/2021	Greenfield University, Kaduna, Kaduna State.	20 Students.
20/05/2021	Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Niger State.	150 Students.
17/06/2021	Federal Government College, Birni Yauri, Kebbi State.	80 Students.
11/06/2021	Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Kaduna State.	8 Students.
05/07/2021	Bethel Baptist High School, Damishi, Kaduna State.	121 Students.
01/9/2021	Government Day Secondary School, Kaya, Zamfara State.	73 Students.

11/12/2020	Government Boys Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State.	303 Students.
19/12/2020	Dandume Islamic School Students, Katsina State.	80 Students.
19/02/2018	Government Girls Secondary School, Dapchi, Yobe State.	105 Students.
14/04/2014	Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State.	276 Students.

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2022.

The mass-abduction of students began in Nigeria on April 14, 2014, when Boko Haram militants abducted 276 students from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State. The kidnapping of 105 girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Dapchi, Yobe State, on February 19, 2018, came next (The Guardian, 2021; Punch, 2018).

In the northern Nigerian educational institutions, mass abductions are a common occurrence. However, on December 19, 2020, armed bandits kidnapped approximately 80 children from Dandume Islamic School in Katsina State. On December 11, 2020, 303 students from the Government Boys Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State, followed suit. As can be seen from the table above, Boko Haram terrorists and armed bandits have thus continued to kidnap students from educational facilities, such as Arabic, primary and secondary schools, as well as post-secondary institutions, almost with impunity. In many instances, ransoms are paid by the parents, relatives, and even governments on the students before they are released. In rare cases, the kidnappers kill or never free some of the captive students, like Leah Sharibu, a 14-year-old girl, so that they can be married off (Daily Trust, 2022).

Also, 27 students from the Government Science School in Kagara, Niger State, were abducted on February 17, 2021. This comes after 317 girls from the Government Girls Science Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State, were abducted in a group on February 26, 2021. Since then, the heinous crime of mass-abduction of students from educational institutions has been common, occurring virtually monthly throughout 2021 in northern Nigeria. Thus, the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Afaka, Kaduna State, where 39 students were abducted on March 11, 2021, and Greenfield University in Kaduna, Kaduna State, where 20 students were taken on April 20, 2021, made history as the first university where students were abducted.

Additionally, on May 20, 2021, 150 children were the victims of the first abduction of a non-Western institution at the Salihu Tanko Islamic School in Niger State. On June 17, 2021, 80 students were abducted from the Federal Government College in Birni Yauri, Kebbi State. Similar to this, on June 11, 2021, 8 students from the Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic in Zaria, Kaduna State, were abducted. Following this, 121 students from Bethel Baptist High School in Damishi, Kaduna State, were abducted on July 5, 2021, and 73 students from Government Day Secondary School in Kaya, Zamfara State, were abducted on September 1, 2021. The frequency of mass-abductions of students significantly decline in 2022. However, 4 students from the Federal University of Lafia in Lafia, Nasarawa State, were abducted on January 13, 2022. The mass-abduction of students in northern Nigeria has caused the victims to endure unfathomable suffering and even death, as well as worry and anxiety in the students, parents, and other family members. This has worsened the education system in northern Nigeria by forcing schools to close in the affected areas (Obiezu, 2021).

Implications of the Mass-Abduction of Students on the Educational Development in Northern Nigeria

It has been noted that the majority of the northern Nigerian states have relatively underdeveloped educational systems. The mass-abduction of students therefore heralds a grave threat to northern Nigeria and the country's capacity to make the essential strides in educational growth.

The widespread abduction of youngsters from educational institutions may cause many parents and guardians to lose faith in taking their children to school. This could jeopardise the initiatives made for the north to catch up to their southern counterparts. Additionally, it can deter parents from enrolling their children in school, which would have an impact on the accessibility of high-quality, equitable education in the north.

In a similar vein, parents who take their children to school and value education may withdraw them out of concern for their safety, as no parent would want to put their children in danger for a Western education. This would significantly reduce the number of children, especially girls, enrolled in school in northern Nigeria, where education is already below that of the south in term of Western education.

Due to their dread of being kidnapped, children in northern Nigeria would rather stay home than attend school. This will deteriorate the situation of the Western education system in northern Nigeria, where there are already numerous states with underdeveloped educational systems in terms of the number of out-of-school children, especially girls. This always confirms the false belief of the Boko Haram terrorists that Western education is sin or bad.

Academic activities at the afflicted schools are abruptly disrupted by the heinous crimes of repeated mass-abductions of children from educational

institutions, which force schools to close or be destroyed as a result of hostage taking and kidnapping for ransom. Following the abduction of 121 students from Bethel Baptist High School, Damishi, Obiezu (2021) observes that the Kaduna State government closed 13 institutions. Due to this, some parents have started sending their children to safe areas in different parts of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the frequent mass-abductions of students from educational institutions in northern Nigeria deter local and foreign investors from investing in the region's educational system. In light of this, Maureen & Blessing (2018) contend that frequent and persistent abduction and hostage-taking for ransom deter foreign and domestic investors who want to invest in education. This will undoubtedly impede the socio-economic development of Nigeria, particularly in northern part of the country.

Conclusion

Mass-abduction of schoolchildren is a violent crime that hamper Nigeria's educational system advancement. The heinous act has a further negative impact on educational growth, particularly in many states in northern Nigeria that are attempting to catch up with the literacy gains made in other regions of the nation. The number of children who are not in school gets worse, especially the girl-child. Additionally, it has an impact on the nation's overall educational growth, which is a prerequisite for socio-economic development, not just in northern Nigeria, but the whole country. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to reduce these impacts, which have evolved into a cog in the advancement of Nigerians and the nation.

Recommendations

A climate of heightened human insecurity, such as the mass-abduction of students in northern Nigeria, makes it impossible to realise the purpose of education as a vital tool for socio-economic growth of any nation. In light of this, the following suggestions are made:

1. Governments should take effective measures to address the risk factors for violence and criminal activity, such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, and inequality, which not only contribute to mass-abduction of students in northern Nigeria but also other related crimes throughout the nation.
2. Laws should be passed by governments that not only make mass-abduction or kidnappings of students illegal but also mandate the death penalty for those responsible for the horrible crime. As a result, the criminals responsible for the heinous conduct ought to be apprehended, tried in a court of law, and, if found guilty, sentenced in public to deter future offenders.
3. In accordance with the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) programme, governments should strengthen security around schools by installing fence around all of the buildings and placing security guards at the entrances. To accomplish the SSI goals, governments must reform and re-energise the SSI programme.
4. To strengthen security and reduce violence in various facets of Nigerian society, the security agents should collaborate with local security groups, such as Ya Sarki Baka and other informal security groups.

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