

Environmental Insecurity and the Nigerian Child's Learning: Coping Strategies

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Abstract - *Insecurity is an impediment to learning. This paper focuses on environmental insecurity, learning of the Nigerian child and coping strategies. Impact of security challenges on the child's learning include stressful studies, poor school attendance, vandalization of school buildings and production of half-baked graduates. Consequently, parents tend to withdraw their children and wards from schools while some affected students resolve on their own to put an abrupt end to their pursuit of education. Strategies for helping the Nigerian school child to cope include: positive mind-set, being security-alert, counselling, provision of security tips and gadgets/equipment as well as community and media sensitization.*

Keywords: *Insecurity, School, Coping, Strategies, Learning*

INTRODUCTION

School security is vital to effective teaching and learning. School activities thrive in environments that support protection of lives and properties. A well-secured learning environment that is devoid of security threats is perceived to enhance learning. In line with this, Shuaibu [1] posited that security is a highly valued goal.

Presently, the safety of the school child is of primary concern to stakeholders in the Education sector in Nigeria. This is because school insecurity is becoming a nagging problem sweeping across the nation. Parents are worried about their children and wards' protection in the face of terrorists' attacks in Nigeria, especially in the northern part. A terrorist group known as **Boko Haram** is on the rampage, attacking and bombing public places including schools. They kidnap adults, women, girls, school children and teachers. Majority of the 276 Chibok secondary school girls kidnapped by the Boko haram insurgents in 2014 were yet to be found [2]. Even school assemblies were not spared. Bombs were detonated in school assemblies or around the school. Education has been severely disrupted in the North-eastern part of Nigeria [1], especially with the regular murder and abduction of innocent students. Such incidents helped in creating fear in the minds of students, teachers and parents; causing withdrawal of

students from schools or outright closure of schools for long periods.

Also, in different parts of the middle-belt and the North, religious crisis had erupted leading to violent attacks that hindered smooth learning of students in schools. Many Christian students had been withdrawn from Mission schools located within Muslim-dominated areas in Jos (and vice versa) as a result of series of religious attacks. The few Christian students remaining in such schools often carry out their academic activities with hidden fear of the unknown and cautious actions. Examples are mission secondary schools located in Nassarawa area of Jos.

In the other parts of Nigeria, other forms of environmental insecurity abound. These include kidnappings, violent attacks and cultism. Kidnapping is growing at an alarming rate in Nigeria [2]. Adults, children, teachers and students are kidnapped for days and ransom demanded. Vanguard news [10] reported the rescue of three kidnapped Kogi polytechnic students by police men in Lokoja. The kidnapers asked for 20 million Naira ransom. Also, Iheanachor [3] reported that five (5) secondary school teachers were abducted at gun-point from a school in Rivers State and the abductors demanded 25 Million Nairansom for the release of the teachers. The visit of the gun-men left the people in the area in total fear and tension.

Effective learning of the Nigerian Child is dependent on a secured learning environment that will necessitate emotional stability. According to Dibia and Obi [4], the academic success of students depends largely on their emotional stability. Environmental insecurity puts the Nigerian students in stressful conditions that can affect students' behavior and impede learning. When students feel unsafe, stressful and fearful, the results are poor school attendance, outright withdrawal from schools, lack of concentration in class work and unstable psychological wellbeing of the learner. The need to overcome these security challenges by the Nigerian child for effective learning becomes paramount. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses on insecurity of the school environment; the Nigerian child's learning and coping strategies. The focus is on the Nigerian secondary school child's learning.

Concepts of Security and Insecurity

Security is perceived as a basic human need that contributes to effective learning. Psychologists proposed that security is crucial for human survival. According to the hierarchy of Needs postulated by Abraham Maslow, the lower needs of man like food, shelter and security must be met before other higher needs like education or intellectual/cognitive needs [5]. Inability to satisfy the need for security may cause stress in individuals and hinder them from pursuing higher level needs.

Generally, security implies safety, freedom from danger and protection from physical harm. Human beings are instinctively driven to maximize available resources in ensuring their physical, physiological and psychological well-being. Security is not limited to protection from physical harm. Security also involves existence of environmental factors that instill peace of mind in an individual in order to empower him/her function effectively in the society. Poor human relations between teacher and student can hamper students' mental health and cause insecurity. Poor infrastructural designs in schools can expose students to insecurity problems like health hazards and stress. Some female students feel threatened as a result of rampant incidences of sexual abuse and rape in schools and the society.

Shuaibu [1] therefore submitted that a safe school is one that fosters peaceful, positive or cordial relationships among students, teachers and administrators.

Insecurity is concerned with feelings of uncertainty, dangers or threats to life. According to Hassan [6], insecurity is a negative feeling involving fear, anxiety, uncertainty and injustice, among others. When an individual does not have control over a situation but has to rely on the cooperation of others that cannot be guaranteed, the result may be frustration or insecurity. Insecurity is a threat to learning. Prevailing peace or conflict within communities around the schools often has ripple effects on the teaching and learning activities of such schools.

Concept of Learning

Learning is a process of acquiring, understanding and applying knowledge, skills, attitudes and concepts [7]. Psychologists generally perceive learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior which occurs as a result of practice or experience [5]. Learning empowers the child to function effectively in the society. According to Bloom's (1956) classification of learning behaviors, learning involves cognitive, affective and psycho-motor processes. Learning, as a Cognitive process, involves attention, perception, interpretations, analysis of observed phenomenon and reasoning [8]. All these processes are enhanced in a safe school environment. The affective (feelings and emotions) and psychomotor (physical and mental skills) processes of learners are also enhanced in safe school environments. Environmental insecurity incidences like insurgency attacks, religious crises, armed robbery and cultism pose threats to learning processes of the Nigerian child.

Impact of Security Challenges on Nigerian Child's Learning

Insecurity is an obstacle to education in Nigeria. Security challenges have effects on learning. Some of these are:

Stressful Studies

Security challenges trigger traumatic disorder and toxic stress that affect learning negatively. Stressful conditions make children to experience neurobiological changes [9]. Insecurity engenders fears in students making them to study in an atmosphere of stress. The fear of being attacked at any time causes lack of concentration in learning activities [11] and students' lack of confidence too. Students' thinking, creative processes, memory and attention are

tampered with. Fear, anxiety and frustrations do not bring out the best in students.

Poor School Attendance

In the face of security threats in Nigeria, parents consider pulling their children out of schools. Many students have been displaced and kept out of school [12], [13]. Students may miss school for days as a result of security challenges. The girl-child is also negatively affected. She is kept at home for a long time or given out for early marriage.

Closure of Schools

Some schools are shut down as a result of security challenges. Government had to close down many secondary schools in crises-prone areas for several months. This is the case of Borno State where schools were shut-down in major towns as a result of insurgency [14].

Vandalization of School Facilities

School buildings and facilities are destroyed during insurgency or crises. Many secondary schools have been burnt down by insurgents. School facilities become inadequate.

Production of Half-baked Graduates

Some schools are not closed down by government but end up churning out half-baked graduates as a result of insecurity. Schools are not able to spend stipulated number of months per term. Schools in unsafe areas lack adequate qualified teachers. As such, students are not properly taught.

Non-establishment of new Schools

The Child's learning is affected in that he/she has limited number of schools to choose from. Government and private owners are unable to open new schools. A child that has flare for technical training may not get such a school to attend as proprietors are scared of establishing new schools in crises-prone areas.

Strategies for Coping with Environmental Insecurity

The following strategies are proposed to help the Nigerian school child to cope with environmental insecurity:

a) On the part of students:

- ***Positive Mind-set***

Having a positive mind-set is critical in coping with environmental insecurity. The Nigerian school child should be determined to survive and forge ahead in spite of all odds. The learner should make good use of the limited time at his/her disposal to study effectively. As an adage says, "Every problem has an expiry date". Maintaining a positive outlook of life will help to give hope for a better future. It will help the school child to still pursue great academic heights in spite of insecurity.

- ***Being Security Conscious***

Coping with security challenges demand that learners should be sensitive to happenings around and within the school. Learners should avoid walking alone in darkness; avoid picking "attractive" clocks, phones, i-pad etc. on the ground; report suspicious or strange individuals, events, appearances and objects to the school authorities and/or security operatives.

- ***Counselling***

The learner should seek counselling from the school Counsellor on coping with specific security challenges. Counselling will help to calm troubled or anxious minds; those dejected and confused will also receive rays of hope and guidance on career choices and making progress in their academic pursuits.

- ***Self-Development***

The Nigerian school child in crisis prone areas needs to develop him/herself. He should make use of the time in-between closure of school to become ICT compliant. This can enable him to get internet or On-line resources that will aid his academic pursuits (and progress) while at home.

b) On the Part of Teachers / Administrators:

- ***Create Safety Plans***

School Administrators and teachers should help to create safe learning environment for effective learning to take place. The school should establish and implement safety plans and prevention programs that address insecurity. Security guards should be stationed at strategic places for surveillance and for checking people's movements IN and OUT of the school.

- ***Teach Self-Protection***

Teachers should teach students "Self-Protection" techniques like moving far away from suspected

suicide-bombers or terrorists carrying explosives when sighted and avoiding rushing to “see” things or snapping pictures at bomb-blast scenes.

- ***Provide Security Tips***

Teachers and Administrators should sensitize students on security measures or provide security tips to learners. For instance, a valuable security tip is, any strange object or person should be reported to the school authorities.

- ***Community Sensitization***

The school can reach out to the neighbouring communities to enhance peace and security by organizing peace talks and empowering youths through vocational skills training to take their minds off violence, to prevent idleness and make them responsible members of the society. Enlightenment should be given on the dangers of harbouring terrorists or people of questionable character.

- ***Emergency Exit doors***

Large doors in classes, halls and staff-room should be provided in schools to pave way for emergency exit of teachers and students in time of crises.

c) On the part of Government:

- ***Proactive measures***

Government at Federal and State levels should take pro-active measures to prevent insecurity. Security should be beefed up around schools and adequate protection provided for staff and Students. Police Stations and check-points should be established and military operatives should maintain vigilance around schools. Incessant wars should be waged against terrorists to paralyze their activities and protect lives and properties of patriotic citizens.

- ***Refurbishing of Vandalized Schools***

Government can help refurbish vandalized schools and rebuild burnt schools for academic activities to continue. Furniture and other infrastructural facilities should also be provided.

- ***Special Allowances***

Government should provide special allowances for newly recruited teachers to attract more qualified teachers to schools in troubled areas.

- ***Provision of Security Equipment***

Functional cameras and gadgets should be located in different places within schools to capture movements and faces.

- ***Prompt Response to Emergency Security Calls.***

The security operatives should be on red alert and ready for any emergency call that require their expertise. The vehicles to use and other gadget should be kept ready for prompt response. These will help save many lives and strengthen learners in coping with security challenges.

- ***Media Sensitization***

Government should embark on sensitization of youths on the dangers of insecurity through the media. Civil society groups, traditional and religious institutions should also provide sensitization for members through the media and other meetings.

CONCLUSION

Safety of the Nigerian child in school is not a luxury but a necessity that demands urgent attention of stakeholders in the education sector. The students, teachers, Administrators and Government have vital roles to play to help learners cope. Maintaining positive mindset, being security conscious, community sensitization, prompt response to emergency security calls and self development have been enumerated as some of the coping strategies.

Research Delimitations

The present research was limited to insecurity of the school environment and the learners' coping strategies. The focus was on the Nigerian Secondary school child. Other researchers may wish to focus on other levels of learning such as Primary and Higher Institutions of learning. Also, the present study focused on security challenges around the school. Other researchers may wish to consider security challenges within the school and the impact on learning.

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