Role of Counselling in Reviving Education in Security-Threatened Areas of Northern Nigeria

BY

S. Y. Tsagem, PhD
Department of Educational Foundations
Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto
P. M. B. 2346, Sokoto.
e-mail: shehu.yahaya@udusok.edu.ng
Phone: +234 8032868031

Abstract

The paper is on the role of counselling in reviving education in areas where it has been devastated by the activities of insecurity. It gives information about northern Nigeria and the nature of its education and also how the region struggles to overcome its problem to achieve what it does in that respect. The paper further discusses on how insecurity activities have robbed the region of the gains so far made in educational development. Concepts that are of interest to the paper are also explained. Furthermore, the paper examined incidences of GGSS Chibok schoolgirls' abduction, GSSS Kankara kidnappings, Bethel Baptist High school abduction, FGC Birnin Yauri kidnappings, Federal University Gusau kidnappings etc. to show how these result into notable educational devastations in the region. Barriers to access, protracted nature of displacement, urban displacement, physical integration without social integration and finally the search for quality as outstanding and daunting challenges to education in security-threatened areas are also looked into. One of the suggestions made as to the roles that counselling could play is that because people involved in insecurity are usually physically, emotionally, mentally traumatized and are socially made frail, expert counselling services could be utilized to help in such situation.

Introduction

The northern part of Nigeria is a region that has been inherently considered as educationally less developed than its southern counterpart. Over the recent years, there have been efforts mounted by states, national and international government and non-governmental organizations in order to help the region made the necessary stride towards achieving acceptable gains that will position it to socio-economically develop and compete favorably. Thus, Farkas and Császár (2018) pointed that the northern area is inhabited by mostly livestock farmer nomads, namely the Hausa-Fulani people, the most populous Nigerian ethnic group accounting for about 30-32% of the total population of the country. The kind of sedentary and serious religious life of the majority of the people in the north, though lead them to enjoy a relative peaceful existence over years, is also a factor that led them not to fully accept western type of education. Thus, in comparison to the southern region, these and other factors, lead to the region being left behind in educational and economic advancements despite constituting the vast majority of Nigeria's population and sheer physical landmass.

Part of the reasons for the region's educational challenges lies in its socio-cultural life and beliefs and as pointed out by Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor (2011) that ethno-religious conflicts have been identified as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. But, as a result of these numerous efforts and interventions the region has made appreciative gains in its educational pursuits. Somehow, very recently a menace that is seriously threatening to tear down any educational gains so far achieved; insecurity. Thus, Tsagem

(in Press) observed that in recent years the region has witnessed an alarming upsurge in the rate of religious extremism, insurgency, kidnapping for ransom, farmer/herder clashes, robbery, political crisis, wanton and insistent killings and general insecurity that threatened its collective survival. Whole villages and towns were attacked, especially by the activities of the Boko Haram Islamic sect in the north-east and by the insurgent bandits in the north-west, and the inhabitants forcefully made to evacuate as migrants. From the start, it is to be noted that thieves, cattle rustlers, armed robbers, kidnappers, insurgents and Islamic extremists are all and one thing in the region; it is very hard to separate one from the other in the region.

As succinctly put by Tsagem (in Press) that insecurity in Nigeria is on the verge of being the identity of the country; this is because no single day passes without any news of the act of insecurity which can either be kidnapping, armed robbery, Boko Haram, terrorism, marauders, communal clash, etc. The fact that the Nigerian government seems to be incapacitated and incapable of curbing this menace or probably playing politics, perhaps doesn't want to put a stop to it for an undisclosed reason, is of more concern and worrisome to the state. As a social menace, insecurity is threatening every aspect of social and economic life of northern Nigeria and a notable sector that is seriously suffering is that of education in the region.

Consequently, because of effects of insecurity in the region, a lot of schools and the process of schooling have been greatly affected. Insecurity in the region has led to the razing, destruction and devastation of lives and properties in northern Nigeria and because schools in the regions are always attached to such villages and towns, this makes them easy targets for destruction or seizure. Accordingly, as people abandon their settlements for fear of their lives, the school become abandoned and vacant too. Thus, whole academic calendars were lost not to talk of incidences where students are chased, killed and kidnapped for ransom. In this respect, UNICEF (2022) observed that ensuring educational provision in predominantly rural areas and the impact of insurgency in the northeast present significant challenges. In north-eastern and north-western states, 29 percent and 35 percent of Muslim children, respectively, receive Qur'anic education (UNICEF, 2022), which does not include basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. The government considers children attending such schools to be officially out-of-school (UNICEF, 2022). They further noted that "in north-eastern Nigeria, 2.8 million children are in need of education-in-emergencies support in three conflict-affected States (Borno, Yobe, Adamawa). In these States, at least 802 schools remain closed and 497 classrooms are listed as destroyed, with

another 1,392 damaged but repairable". It is pertinent to note that primary, secondary, post-secondary and other tertiary education are all affected by this menace.

As it is, efforts are being made to see how the affected education in the region could be revived, various avenues are being explored. And because people involved in instances of insecurity are highly traumatized, disengaged from their normal lives and are living as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in camps scattered through-out most of the states in the region, this paper saw the reason to discuss the possible contributions that counselling could give in ameliorating the issue. Thus, certain strategies are presented on how this could be successfully achieved.

Conceptual Definitions

The concepts of insecurity and counselling are hereby discussed seeing as they are the major important factors. Insecurity can be loosely regarded as situation when people's lives and properties are threatened because the apparatus that protects them is rendered inactive. Likewise, it could also be seen as a situation where law and order are no longer effective in protecting lives and properties; most people that discussed insecurity submitted that all the descriptors point to a condition of vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood. On the other hand, counselling could be regarded as a process through which individuals who need help are guided in understanding themselves, their capabilities and weaknesses in order to lead a more satisfying life; one that positively impact the society in which he lives.

i. Insecurity

Insecurity has been seen by different people but, all the views pointed to the fact that it is when the machinery for protecting individual lives and properties are ineffective or altogether absent. Thus, insecurity is conceived by Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim (2013) as a situation where human and national security of a state is compromised by internal or external forces or interests exacerbated by the former's weak or poor economic, military and/or human resource development conditions. Similarly, Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) pointed that insecurity is the antithesis of security which attracts such common descriptors as want of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded or protected, instability, trouble, lack of protection and being unsafe among others. Therefore, it means insecurity is a state of not knowing, a lack of control, and the inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable (Jimoh, 2020). For Beland (2005) insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged

lack of protection. It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. The general insecurity in Nigeria has been described as a decline in the security of the Nigerian nation-state likened to situation of the ruler and his immediate supporters, thus, the security calculus of the Nigerian state has failed. This state of inequality, unfairness and injustice has toughened the people, forcing them to take their destiny into their hands (Egwu, 2001).

ii. Counselling

Counselling is viewed by Aliero, Aliero and Tsagem (2022) as a dynamic and purposeful relationship between two people who approach a mutually defined problem, with mutual consideration of each other to the end that the younger or less mature or more troubled of the two is aided to a self-determined resolution to problem. Thus, it is a process in which the counselor give appropriate and correct information to the individual, suggests and offers several appropriate courses of action and options and helps to clarify needs, feelings or motivations so that appropriate decision could be made. Likewise, Okoye (2010) viewed counselling as an interactional relationship designed to facilitate the personal development of information leading to effective decision making and awareness of the self. Furthermore, Bashar (2020) draw attention that educational counselling could therefore be regarded as the type of counselling which is being applied within the educational setting to help the pupils not only to solve their educational problems but also to be equipped with skills to effect satisfactory self-solutions to their educational problems. Such self-solution is geared towards meeting the demands, expectations, norms and morals of the society within which the individual operates.

Challenges to Education in Security-Threatened Northern Nigeria

The gains made in terms of educational achievements in northern Nigeria is greatly affected by insecurity in the area also. To this end, there have been reports of both primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions of learning getting shut down due to insecurity; some states, like Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina, have no other option than to close down most (all!) schools in remote areas and on border boundaries in order to avert continuous kidnapping of students and teachers and the destruction of such schools. In Maradun, Gummi and other areas in Zamfara state some schools were reportedly hijacked by insurgents, Islamic extremists, kidnappers, armed robbers, thieves and cattle rustlers and turned into their "operational headquarters". All such schools (and the students) were relocated to the urban centers; an undesired and costly mistake that tasks both governments and parents.

4

Even before the insecurity issue, northern Nigeria has been noted for being educational less developed. This is as noted by *https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education* that even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school (UNICEF, 2013). Only 61 percent of 6–11-year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the north of the country, the picture is even bleaker, with a net attendance rate of 53 percent and getting out-of-school children back into education poses a massive challenge.

The infamous combined activities of the Islamist militant Boko Haram group, the incessant killings and destruction by the bandits, and the wanton robbery and kidnappings have all combined to wreak untold widespread hardship on many settlements and the people of the region that has led to a lot of displacement (Tsagem, in Press). Being specific to education, Dryden-Peterson (2011) observes that "displacement jeopardizes children's physical and psychosocial health, and it presents challenges to child protection especially related to sexual violence and recruitment into armed forces" and then concludes that "*conflict-induced displacement also has great implications for **education**, both for refugees and IDPs*".

Recently there are numerous disruptions to education in the north as a result of insecurity but, the paper is only going to dwell on the most outstanding disruption to education in the region. First and foremost, there is the most notorious "Chibok Girls' Abduction" where 276 girls from Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, Borno state were abducted on April, 2014 (*https://en.m.wikipedia.org)*. This is weeks after "some group of young boys were burned alive in their own school" (New York Yimes, 2018). This happened at the incidence that the girls were writing their SSCE/WAEC examinations. This single act has resulted to wide spread fears and lead to closure of numerous schools in the state and the north-east region, a situation whereby some students still remain in captivity. And since then, this has greatly affected schooling in the area, especially that of female. In this regard *https://www.epdc.org/node/5898.html* observed that in addition to issues of school access, family and school resources, and attitudes towards education, school attendance in northern Nigeria is impeded by the increasingly brazen extremism of Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, and its targeting of girls' education. The group opposes the Western-style education associated with formal schooling in Nigeria and seeks to relegate women exclusively to the household.

In another incidence, 344 students of Government Science Secondary School Kankara, Katsina state were forcefully abducted from their school in December, 2020 *(cbsnews.com*, 2020). The students were abducted in the early night hours; they were rounded from their classes, hostels and the school premises. Within a very short time they were herded into the forest and before it is twilight, they crossed into the neighboring Zamfara state. Initially, it was believed that the perpetrators were insurgents but, somehow members of the dreaded Boko Haram sect claimed responsibility. Well, this act seriously disrupted education when the state took the decision to relocate all its remotely cited schools to the towns; mostly to the capital. Majority of those schools were evacuated and abandoned and the concentration of the students at the schools in the towns lead to an effect termed by Dreyden-Peterson (2011) as internal displacement.

In another episode, more than 100 students of the Federal Government College Birnin Yauri, Kebbi state were abducted in June, 2021 (*tvcnews.tv*, 2021). The school was attacked in broad daylight by the bandits/insurgents and after exchanging gun fire with the security officers of the school, the abductors made away with that number of students and a teacher who felt he could not abandon the children. This happened at the middle of the term and the only available solution left for the school authority was to shut down the school for fear of another possible attack. Thus, school activities were disrupted for the rest of the term and beyond; this is because the school never went back to being normal as majority of parents withdrew their wards as the action being taken by the government is not favorable to them or, to some extent, to the system.

Likewise, 140 students from Bethel Baptist High School, Damishi, Kaduna state were kidnapped in July, 2021 (The Guardian, 2021), barely a month after the abduction incidence at FGC Birnin Yauri, Kebbi state. The abductors attacked the school and kidnapped more than 140 students. The action was not the first of its kind in the state but, it generated a lot of heat that the state ended up putting measures that greatly affect process of schooling in the area.

Zamfara state is undeniably the second state in Nigeria, after Borno state, with the highest number of disruptions in education by insurgent activities. These activities have touched both *Islamiyya/makarantun allo*, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of learning. In June 2023, 5 students of the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state were abducted while they were about to write their semester examinations (www.dailytrust.com). This infuriated their colleagues to staged a protest that leads to blocking of the Kaduna-Gusau-Sokoto major road for hours; though the action left innocent travellers stranded but, it also attracts the attention of those in the government.

This had seriously eroded the confidence of the students in pursuing their educational endeavors and has also affected the operational logistics of the institution.

As of the time of writing this paper, most of the victims involved are yet to regain their freedom with the exception of students of GSSS Kankara and those of Federal University Gusau who recently, August 10th – 12th 2023, regain their freedom. Of course, the Leah Sharibu case is another celebrated case that still lingers and remains unresolved; she is the only remaining among abductee of the 110 students of Government Girls Science and Technical School, Dapchi, Yobe state abducted by ISWAP in February, 2018.

Challenges to Education in Security-Threatened Areas

The most outstanding and daunting challenges to education in such situations borders on barriers to access, the protracted nature of displacement, urban displacement, physical integration without social integration and finally the search for quality as documented by Dryden-Peterson (2011).

i. Available evidence indicates that internal displacement severely impacts access to education. Such include facing greater poverty, restrictions on freedom of movement and the regulation of professions, uncertainty about the future compounds poverty that leads to doubts about the benefits of education, adding to the opportunity costs of school attendance. Discrimination based on gender and disability are often heightened during times of conflict, when community support systems disintegrate, social norms break down, and laws are not enforced.

ii. It has been noted that the protracted nature of contemporary displacement leads to an overarching sense of uncertainty for children and families, with three central implications for education. First, education needs to be a first-line response in displacement situations, playing a critical role in restoring an immediate sense of normalcy for displaced children. Second, educational planning cannot be short-term but must be forward-looking in nature, recognizing the likelihood that any given child cannot wait for an end to displacement if he/she is to pursue an education. Third is the underexplored idea that education itself is a portable durable solution given that future security – economic, political, and social – is less connected to where one is geographically and more to skills, capacities, and knowledge that can accompany an individual no matter where that future may be. As a durable solution, increased post-primary opportunities are critical.

iii. Internal displacement is also predominantly urban in nature, often reflecting large migrations from conflict-affected rural areas of a country to the relative safety of towns and cities. While once the domain of young men, the urban displaced increasingly include women and children. The provision of education for refugee and IDP children in urban areas requires major rethinking of how assistance to education for displaced children is conceptualized. Displaced children often overwhelm already stretched schools, especially in poor areas of cities. And yet the traditional focus on building schools, procuring desks, and training teachers is not usually appropriate in the urban context. Integration to the national system is a priority.

iv. Given trends both towards protracted and urban displacement, the model of education is increasingly one of integration of displaced children in local schools. Refugee and IDP children alike can be marginalized on an individual level, facing discrimination and exclusion in the classroom from members of the host society. Further, politically powerful languages, worldviews, ethnicities, and authorities often act through school curriculum and pedagogical practice to exclude groups of children, including the displaced, who do not share in that power. Without social integration, possibilities for political, cultural, and economic stability are limited for displaced children and their families, both in the present and in the future.

v. Education of refugee and IDP children is often of poor quality. UNHCR standards for measuring quality include the number of students per teacher, with a target of 40:1; the percentage of qualified teachers; and the extent to which refugee/returnee qualifications are recognized (UNHCR, 2009). By these metrics, refugee education is uneven. Often there will be only one teacher for 100 or even 200 pupils, especially in younger grades. While evidence is weak, it is likely that IDP children are similarly stymied in the search for quality education. The challenge of poor-quality education acts both as a barrier to educational access for displaced children and an impediment to the role education can play in building durable solutions (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

Suggestions for Counselling Roles in Reviving Education in the Situation

Education in northern Nigeria has been battered by actions of insurgents and kidnappers/abductors and the achievements so far made is inadvertently being lost. Because, education as being instrumental to the development of any society, measures have to be put in

place to resuscitate it, at all cost, as long as development is what is desired. Thus, the roles that counselling could play in reviving the education in the region are highly influenced by Tsagem (in Press) proposals. Thus, it was suggested that:

i. One of the cardinal goals of counselling is that it is for all people. Thus, counselling services should be employed by the particular states and Nigeria in general so that concerted effort should be made to ensure that government systems adhere to the international protocols which enshrine the fact that all children have the same right of access to education, regardless of their status or place of origin.

ii. Because people involved in insecurity are usually physically, emotionally, mentally traumatized and are socially made frail, expert counselling services could be utilized to help in such situation. School age going children are not exempted in the milieu, hence they could be engaged for help right in their camps or in the schools where the authorities might have integrated them, though the most daunting problem is tracing those who relocate and are living with their relatives. Counsellors would do a wonderful job of resuscitating the students' confidence and purpose for engaging them back to school once again.

iii. Education systems should move towards inclusive curriculum reforms and teaching and learning practices that embrace diversity of cultures and languages and in doing so, counsellors should be highly involved so that their professionalism would bear in drawing up such plans. Thus, counselling should ensure that education policies in the country legislate teaching and learning methodologies that integrate children from different cultures, who speak different languages. The policy aims and implementation should work towards integrating migrant children into host education systems and communities, without alienating them or isolating them. The policy options should also enable migrant children to equally access exemption to fees or any other financial opportunities available in the specific communities.

iv. Counselling should be leveraged upon to ensure that at the local level appropriate policies and programmes related to education rights for migrant children are developed and utilized and should thus strengthen the capacities of relevant institutions in hosting communities to provide better quality education and to increase enrolment rates.

v. The states should establish mechanisms through which counselling could handle cases of reported discrimination, for example where access to schools has been unfairly denied due to systemic policies or educational institutions. It has been observed that up till now states in the

north have no specific policies as regards the internal migrants' educational provisions and plans. Most times, the IDPs are restricted in their respective camps with highly inadequate or no any existent provisions as to their education. In this respect, counsellors could be given access in order to lend their hands in providing realistic grounds upon which educational would be made available to them.

vi. Since the affected states in particular and the country have to find realistic and permanent solutions to insecurity in this region so that people affected should be resettled appropriately, counselling services could be employed at all planning and executing levels in order to lend their professionalism so that appreciable gains could be made.

Conclusion

Insecurity in the in the states of northern Nigeria ranges from religious and political crisis to the activities of cattle rustlers and thieves and this has really dealt a devastating blow to development strides that education has so far made in the region. Education, as is all agreed, is a vital factor for development for any society and as such need to be given the attention and importance it so merits. In this respect, northern Nigeria and the country in general need to give serious attention towards anything that may be threatening it. Solutions have to be found to scale through the trying time that the region is going through and education must be resuscitated to ensure continued survival and one of the ways to do that is by utilizing counselling services. The paper thus discussed possible ways through which counselling would prove vital in restoring education in the security-threatened areas by professionally providing services that will restore confidence in the people to see reason to pursue education after its devastation that they might have experienced.

Reference

Achumba, I. C., Ighomereho, O. S., & Akpor-Robaro, M. O. (2013). Security Challenges in Nigeria and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development,* 4, 79-99.

Aliero, B. U., Aliero, H. S. & Tsagem, S. Y. (2022). Guidance and Counselling: A Tool for Enhancing Performance in Senior Secondary Schools of Kebbi State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 7(11), 1577–1583.

Beland, D. (2005). *The Political Construction of Collective Insecurity: From Moral Panic to Blame Avoidance and Organised Irresponsibility*. Centre for European Studies Working Paper Series 126.

Daily Post (July, 5th 2021). Bandits kidnap scores of students in ethel School, Kaduna.

Dryden-Peterson, S. (2010). *Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in Conflict-Affected Fragile States: Literature Review*. London: Save the Children.

Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). Conflict, Education and Displacement. *Conflict and Education,* 1(1), 1 – 5.

Egwu, S. G. (2001). *Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria*. Jos, St. Stephen Book House.

Farkas M. & Császár, Z. M. (2018). Geographical Analysis of Complex Educational and Forced Migration Tendencies: The Case Study of Nigeria. *European Journal of Geography,* 9 (3), 45–61.

Hazen, J. M. & Horner, J. (2007). *Small arms, armed violence, and insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in perspective.* Switzerland, Small Arms Survey.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org - Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping.

https://www.epdc.org/node/5898.html

https://www.tvcnews.tv (June, 2021). Bandits five teachers, unspecified number of students at FGGC Birnin Yauri.

https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education. Retrieved 25th November, 2022.

Ibrahim, J. & Igbuzor, O. (2002). *Memorandum submitted to the Presidential Committee on national security in Nigeria.*

Igbuzor, O. (2007). Peace and security education: A critical factor for sustainable peace and national development. *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, 2(1), 1-7.

Jimoh, J. B. (2020). Geography and Insecurity in Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Geography* (IJRG), 6 (2), 43 – 51.

New York Times (April, 11th 2018). *Kidnapped as Schoolgirls by Boko Haram: Here They Are Now*.

Onifade, C., Imhonopi, D. & Urim, U. M. (2013). Addressing the insecurity challenge in Nigeria: The imperative of moral values and virtue ethics. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Political Science,* 13(2).

Salawu, B. (2010). Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: Causal analysis and proposals for new management strategies. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(3), 345-353.

The Guardian (6th July, 2021). *Attackers kidnap 140 pupils from Nigerian boarding school*.

Tsagem, S. Y. (in Press). Erosion of the Plans of a Region: Counselling Perspectives on the Impact of Insecurity and Forced Migration on the Educational Attainment of Northern Nigeria. In Dankani M. I. (Ed), *Festschrift in Honor of M. A. Iliya*. Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, UDU Sokoto – Nigeria.

UNHCR (2009). *Education Strategy: 2010-2012*. Geneva: UNHCR.

www.cbsnews.com (December, 2020) – Boko Haram claims kidnap of hundreds of Nigerian schoolboys.

www.dailytrust.com (17th June, 2023). Angry Students Block Major Zamfara Road Over Colleagues' Abduction.