

Research Paper

Combating School Abductions in Nigeria: Pathways to Safe Learning and Sustainable Educational Development

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Abstract

The increasing incidence of school abductions in Nigeria has transformed educational institutions from centres of learning into vulnerable spaces where insecurity threatens educational access, continuity and development. Against this backdrop, this paper examined combating school abductions in Nigeria as a pathway to safe learning and sustainable educational development. Specifically, the paper investigated the prevalence and patterns of school abductions in Nigeria, examined the major causes and drivers of the phenomenon, assessed the necessity of combating school abductions by analysing their effects on learners, teachers, school administration and educational development, and explored effective strategies for enhancing school safety and promoting sustainable educational development. The paper was anchored on Routine Activity Theory and Human Security Theory, which provided explanatory frameworks for understanding the vulnerabilities of educational institutions and the developmental implications of insecurity. The paper adopted the analytical review method through a critical examination and synthesis of relevant scholarly literature, empirical studies and documented evidence on school abductions and educational security in Nigeria. Findings revealed that school abductions have become a recurring security challenge driven by weak security infrastructure, inadequate intelligence systems, socio-economic deprivation, the profitability of kidnapping and institutional weaknesses. The paper further found that school abductions contribute to school closures, declining enrolment, psychological trauma, learning disruptions, teacher shortages and weakened educational outcomes. The paper concluded that sustainable educational development cannot be achieved where schools remain vulnerable to violent attacks and insecurity. It therefore recommended the strengthening of school security infrastructure, the institutionalisation of community-based intelligence and early warning mechanisms, and the implementation of socio-economic and educational resilience programmes aimed at addressing the underlying conditions that facilitate school abductions and educational disruptions.

Keywords: School abduction, school safety, safe learning, educational security, kidnapping, sustainable educational development, insecurity, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most important instruments for human capital development, social mobility and national progress across the world. The achievement of quality education, however, depends largely on the existence of a safe and secure learning environment where learners and teachers can participate in educational activities without fear of violence or disruption. In Nigeria, growing insecurity has increasingly threatened this condition, particularly through the persistent abduction of schoolchildren and teachers. School abduction refers to the forceful seizure of learners, teachers or school personnel by armed groups for ransom, political leverage, ideological purposes or other criminal motives. The phenomenon has transformed schools from centres of learning into targets of violent attacks, thereby undermining educational development and public confidence in the education system.

The global attention generated by the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014 marked a turning point in the history of attacks on educational institutions in Nigeria. Although some of the girls have been rescued or released, many remain unaccounted for more than a decade later (UNICEF, 2024). Since the Chibok incident, attacks on schools have spread beyond the North-East to other parts of the country, involving both insurgent groups and organised criminal gangs. Notable cases include the abduction of students from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State, in 2020; Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State, in 2021; Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State, in 2021; and several attacks on schools in Kaduna, Niger and Sokoto States between 2021 and 2025 (UNICEF, 2024).

The educational consequences of these attacks have been severe. Fear of abduction has contributed to prolonged school closures, declining enrolment, absenteeism, displacement of learners and teachers, and psychological trauma among victims and their families. According to UNICEF (2024), only 37 per cent of schools assessed across ten Nigerian states had functional early warning systems capable of identifying security threats, indicating persistent vulnerabilities within the school safety architecture. These conditions have complicated efforts to achieve national education targets and the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Recent developments demonstrate that the challenge is no longer confined to traditionally insecure regions. In May 2026, armed assailants attacked schools in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State and abducted pupils, students and teachers from several educational institutions. Official reports confirmed the kidnapping of primary school pupils, secondary school students and seven teachers, while one teacher was reportedly killed in captivity (Feyisipo, 2026; Eboh, 2026). The attack generated widespread concern because it occurred in South-West Nigeria, a region previously considered relatively safer than many northern states. Similar reports indicate that more than 1,700 students and school personnel have been affected by major school kidnapping incidents

since the Chibok abduction, demonstrating the persistence and geographical expansion of the threat (Badmus, 2026).

Beyond the immediate security implications, school abductions weaken educational planning, increase dropout rates, discourage investment in education and reduce public trust in government institutions responsible for protecting learners. The continued targeting of schools threatens the long-term development of Nigeria's human resources and may widen existing inequalities in access to education. Combating school abductions therefore requires not only improved security measures but also sustained collaboration among government agencies, school administrators, communities, civil society organisations and development partners to create safe learning environments capable of supporting sustainable educational development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The recurring abduction of schoolchildren and teachers has emerged as one of the most serious threats to educational development in Nigeria. Despite the national and international outrage that followed the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction in 2014, attacks on schools have continued across different regions of the country. More than ten years after the Chibok incident, reports of mass kidnappings involving students and educational personnel remain frequent, suggesting that existing interventions have not sufficiently addressed the vulnerabilities that expose schools to violent attacks (UNICEF, 2024).

The persistence of these incidents has created widespread fear among learners, parents and educators. In many affected communities, school attendance has declined as families increasingly perceive educational institutions as unsafe. Teachers have become reluctant to accept postings to rural and high-risk areas, while some schools have experienced temporary or prolonged closure following security threats. These developments undermine learning outcomes and contribute to educational disruption, particularly among already disadvantaged populations.

The recent abduction of pupils, students and teachers in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State illustrates the growing geographical spread of school-related insecurity beyond the regions traditionally associated with insurgency and banditry (Eboh, 2026; Feyisipo, 2026). Such incidents indicate that no region can be considered entirely immune from attacks on educational institutions. The expansion of school abductions into new areas raises concerns about the adequacy of existing security frameworks and the preparedness of schools to respond to emerging threats.

Furthermore, the psychological effects of abduction on victims, families and communities often persist long after physical rescue. Learners who survive captivity may experience anxiety, depression, emotional distress and difficulties reintegrating into school life. At the societal level, recurring attacks weaken confidence in public institutions and create uncertainty regarding the future of education. While government authorities have introduced initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration and other school protection measures, evidence from recurring attacks suggests that implementation gaps remain significant.

The continued occurrence of school abductions therefore presents a major challenge to Nigeria's efforts to achieve sustainable educational development. Unless effective and context-sensitive strategies are adopted to strengthen school security, improve intelligence gathering, enhance community participation and ensure rapid response to threats, schools may remain attractive targets for criminal groups. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine pathways for

combating school abductions in Nigeria with a view to promoting safe learning environments and sustainable educational development.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The aim of this study is to examine the incidence of school abductions in Nigeria and explore effective pathways for promoting safe learning environments and sustainable educational development.

The paper specifically sought to:

1. examine the prevalence and patterns of school abductions in Nigeria
2. identify the major causes and drivers of school abductions in Nigeria
3. assess the necessity of combating school abductions by examining their effects on learners, teachers, school administration and sustainable educational development.
4. explore effective strategies for combating school abductions in Nigeria

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper adopted analytical review method, which involves the systematic identification, examination, evaluation and synthesis of existing scholarly literature, theoretical perspectives, empirical studies and documented evidence relevant to a particular subject matter with the aim of generating informed conclusions and recommendations (Snyder, 2019; Grant & Booth, 2009). The method is characterised by the rigorous selection of relevant literature, critical interrogation of authors' arguments, comparison of findings across studies, identification of patterns and trends, assessment of theoretical and empirical evidence, and synthesis of knowledge to provide a coherent understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In this paper, the analytical review method was considered appropriate because the issue of school abductions in Nigeria is a national security and educational concern that has generated substantial scholarly and policy discourse, making it possible to draw insights from existing studies, documented cases and theoretical explanations without undertaking field data collection. The approach enabled the study to critically examine the prevalence and patterns of school abductions, identify their major causes and drivers, assess their implications for safe learning and sustainable educational development, and evaluate practical strategies for combating the problem. The method further facilitated the integration of evidence from different disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, criminology, education and security studies, thereby providing a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

However, the analytical review method was limited by its dependence on existing literature and secondary sources, which may contain variations in methodological approaches, geographical coverage and analytical focus. It also does not provide opportunities for direct interaction with victims, educational stakeholders or security personnel, thereby limiting the generation of primary data and context-specific experiences relating to school abductions in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature was reviewed under conceptual review, empirical review and theoretical framework as follows:

Conceptual Review

School Abduction

School abduction refers to the forceful seizure, detention or kidnapping of students, teachers or other school personnel within or around educational institutions by armed groups, insurgents, bandits or criminal networks. Recent scholarship has examined school abduction as a distinct form of violence against education that targets schools because of their symbolic, social and economic significance. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) argue that school abductions in Nigeria should not be viewed merely as isolated criminal incidents but as manifestations of broader insecurity, weak governance and the political economy of violence that has enabled kidnapping to become a lucrative enterprise.

Likewise, Ojewale (2024) conceptualises school abductions as part of organised attacks against educational facilities and learners that undermine access to education and community stability. More recently, Aderinto et al. (2025) describe school abduction as a security threat that exposes students and educational personnel to physical harm, psychological trauma and prolonged disruption of schooling. While these perspectives emphasise different dimensions of the phenomenon, they converge on the understanding that school abduction extends beyond the unlawful seizure of persons to include attacks that weaken educational participation and safety.

In the context of this paper, school abduction is defined as the deliberate kidnapping or forceful removal of students, teachers or school personnel from educational settings by criminal or armed groups, resulting in disruption of learning, insecurity and educational setbacks.

Combating Abduction

Combating abduction refers to the deliberate efforts, policies and interventions designed to prevent, reduce and respond to incidents of kidnapping and unlawful detention. The concept has increasingly been discussed within the broader framework of crime prevention and human security. Aderinto et al. (2025) contend that addressing school abductions requires proactive measures that target the operational patterns of perpetrators, strengthen local intelligence and improve community-based security mechanisms. Ojewale (2024) similarly argues that effective responses to school-related kidnapping should move beyond reactive military operations and include resilience-building strategies that address the conditions enabling attacks on schools.

Aderinto et al. (2025) further maintain that combating abduction involves reducing vulnerabilities within educational institutions through coordinated action among government agencies, schools and host communities. These views suggest that combating abduction encompasses prevention, protection, response and recovery measures rather than solely the rescue of victims after attacks occur. Therefore, this paper adopts the view that combating abduction refers to the implementation of preventive, protective and responsive measures aimed at reducing the occurrence of school kidnappings, protecting educational stakeholders and ensuring the continuity of education in secure environments.

Pathways to Safe Learning

The concept of pathways to safe learning refers to the processes, strategies and conditions that enable learners and educators to engage in educational activities within secure and supportive environments. Recent literature highlights that safe learning extends beyond physical protection to

include emotional, psychological and social security. Savolainen (2023) defines a safe learning environment as one in which learners are protected from threats and are able to participate in educational activities without fear, intimidation or harm.

Likewise, Kempen et al. (2024) argue that safe learning environments are characterised by conditions that promote students' sense of security, belonging and confidence in the educational process. Within the Nigerian context, studies on school attacks emphasise that learner safety depends on effective school protection systems, community participation, early warning mechanisms and responsive security structures (Aderinto et al., 2025; Ojewale, 2024). Although the authors differ in emphasis, they agree that educational safety involves both protective infrastructure and supportive social conditions that sustain learning.

In this paper, pathways to safe learning are defined as the range of institutional, community and governmental strategies that create and sustain secure conditions under which learners and teachers can participate in educational activities without fear of violence, abduction or disruption.

Sustainable Educational Development

Sustainable educational development refers to the continuous advancement of education in ways that guarantee equitable access, quality learning outcomes and long-term institutional stability for present and future generations. Contemporary scholarship increasingly links educational sustainability with resilience, inclusion and the capacity of education systems to withstand social, economic and security challenges. Duda (2022) views sustainable educational development as a process through which educational systems equip learners with relevant knowledge, skills and values while maintaining conditions necessary for the continuity of learning.

Recent studies further suggest that educational development cannot be considered sustainable where insecurity persistently disrupts schooling, increases dropout rates and limits access to quality education (Ojewale, 2024). From this perspective, sustainability in education involves not only expansion and quality improvement but also the protection of learning environments against threats capable of undermining educational progress. Consequently, this paper defines sustainable educational development as the continuous provision of accessible, safe, equitable and quality education through resilient educational systems capable of supporting present and future learning needs despite security and social challenges.

The Prevalence and Patterns of School Abductions in Nigeria and Their Implications for Access to Education and Learning Outcomes

School abduction has emerged as one of the most persistent security threats confronting education in Nigeria. What began as sporadic attacks on educational institutions in the North-East has evolved into a recurring pattern of mass kidnappings affecting schools across several geopolitical zones. Recent studies indicate that schools have become attractive targets because students are perceived as vulnerable populations whose abduction often guarantees public attention and financial rewards through ransom payments (Ojewale, 2024; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). The persistence of these attacks demonstrates that school abduction is no longer an isolated security concern but a recurring feature of Nigeria's insecurity environment with direct consequences for educational participation and learning outcomes.

The internationalisation of the problem can be traced to the abduction of 276 female students from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014. Although school attacks had occurred previously, the Chibok incident drew global attention to the vulnerability of educational institutions in conflict-affected regions. The abduction revealed the capacity of armed groups to target schools with little resistance and demonstrated the limitations of existing school protection mechanisms. Subsequent incidents confirmed that Chibok was not an isolated occurrence but rather the beginning of a wider pattern of attacks on educational facilities (Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). Four years later, in February 2018, another mass kidnapping occurred at Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State, where more than one hundred schoolgirls were abducted, further reinforcing concerns regarding the safety of learners in Nigeria.

The pattern of school abductions changed significantly from 2020 when armed bandit groups operating in the North-West increasingly adopted mass kidnapping as a source of revenue. The attack on Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State, in December 2020 marked a turning point in the geography of school kidnappings. More than 300 students were abducted during the incident, demonstrating that educational institutions in regions outside the North-East had become vulnerable to organised criminal attacks. The Kankara incident was followed by a succession of similar attacks in Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger and Kebbi States, suggesting the emergence of a systematic pattern in which schools became strategic targets for ransom-seeking criminal groups. These incidents were characterised by night-time attacks, exploitation of weak security infrastructure, movement of victims through forest corridors and prolonged negotiations for release (Aderinto et al. 2025; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021).

Evidence from Katsina State demonstrates that attacks on schools often follow similar operational patterns. Aderinto et al. (2025) found that perpetrators typically conduct surveillance before attacks, exploit the absence of security personnel, utilise large numbers of armed operatives and transport victims into remote forest locations. Their findings indicate that the recurring nature of these attacks reflects organised criminal strategies rather than spontaneous acts of violence. Similarly, Aderinto et al. (2025) observed that many secondary schools in high-risk communities possess inadequate protective infrastructure, making students particularly susceptible to mass abduction.

The prevalence of school abductions is further illustrated by major incidents that occurred between 2021 and 2025. In February 2021, 279 female students were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State. In March 2021, students of the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Afaka, Kaduna State, were kidnapped. The same year witnessed the abduction of students from Greenfield University, Kaduna State, and Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State. In March 2024, more than 200 pupils and school staff were reportedly abducted from Kuriga in Kaduna State, while additional attacks were recorded in Niger and Kebbi States in 2025. These incidents indicate that school abductions have become recurrent rather than exceptional events within Nigeria's educational environment.

Recent analyses suggest that the geographical spread of school abductions has expanded beyond traditional conflict zones. Ojewale (2024) notes that banditry-related violence against schools has become increasingly common across North-Western Nigeria due to weak state presence, poor rural security and the profitability of kidnapping enterprises. The study further argues that schools

located in remote communities are particularly vulnerable because of inadequate security infrastructure and delayed emergency response mechanisms.

The implications for educational access are substantial. Fear generated by repeated attacks has contributed to declining school enrolment, absenteeism and school closures. Parents increasingly withdraw their children from boarding schools or refuse to enrol them in institutions located in high-risk communities. Ojewale (2024) found that attacks on schools contribute to the abandonment of educational facilities and forced displacement of learners and teachers. Such disruptions affect the continuity of learning and reduce opportunities for educational attainment.

Learning outcomes are also negatively affected. Victims of abduction often experience psychological trauma, anxiety, depression and fear, all of which undermine academic performance. Prolonged captivity frequently results in interrupted schooling, loss of instructional time and difficulties in reintegration following release. Aderinto et al. (2025) observed that students in vulnerable communities often attend school under conditions of fear and uncertainty, which adversely affects concentration, motivation and educational engagement. The consequences extend beyond individual learners to entire school communities where teachers, administrators and parents become increasingly concerned about safety.

Furthermore, repeated attacks contribute to educational inequalities. Rural communities, particularly those located near forest reserves and conflict-prone areas, experience greater disruption than urban centres. Consequently, children from already disadvantaged backgrounds face additional barriers to educational participation. This situation undermines efforts to improve literacy rates, school completion rates and equitable access to quality education. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) argue that focusing solely on the security dimensions of school abduction overlooks its broader developmental consequences, including the erosion of confidence in public education and the weakening of state legitimacy in affected communities.

The pattern that emerges from recent evidence is that school abduction in Nigeria has evolved from isolated incidents associated with insurgency into a broader criminal enterprise sustained by weak governance, insecurity and economic incentives. The recurring attacks on educational institutions have transformed schools into high-risk spaces, thereby threatening educational access, learner retention, teacher deployment and learning achievement. Unless effective interventions are implemented, school abductions will continue to undermine educational progress and compromise efforts towards sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

The Major Causes and Drivers of School Abductions in Nigeria, Including Security, Socio-Economic and Institutional Factors

The persistence of school abductions in Nigeria is rooted in a combination of security failures, socio-economic conditions and institutional weaknesses that have created an enabling environment for criminal groups and armed actors. Recent studies demonstrate that school kidnappings are rarely the product of a single factor; rather, they emerge from conditions that allow criminal organisations to operate with relative freedom while exploiting vulnerable educational institutions. Understanding these drivers is essential for developing effective responses because interventions that focus solely on military operations or rescue efforts often fail to address the underlying conditions that sustain attacks on schools (Ojewale, 2024; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021).

Some of the major causes of school abductions in Nigeria are highlighted and discussed as follows:

Deterioration of Security Architecture

One of the most significant drivers of school abductions is the deterioration of security across many parts of Nigeria. In several states, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions, armed groups have established operational bases within large forest reserves that are difficult for security agencies to monitor effectively. Forest complexes such as the Rugu Forest spanning Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara and Niger States have served as strategic hideouts for criminal groups involved in kidnapping activities. The existence of these ungoverned spaces has enabled perpetrators to plan attacks, transport victims and negotiate ransoms while limiting the capacity of security agencies to conduct rapid rescue operations (Ojewale, 2024). In many instances, schools located near forested areas become attractive targets because attackers can quickly retreat into inaccessible terrain following an operation.

Limited Security Presence around Educational Institutions

Closely related to this challenge is the limited security presence around educational institutions. Aderinto et al. (2025), in their study of school attacks in Katsina State, found that many schools lacked adequate security personnel, perimeter fencing, surveillance systems and emergency communication facilities. The researchers observed that perpetrators often selected schools after assessing their security vulnerabilities and identifying institutions where resistance would be minimal. Similar findings were reported by Aderinto et al. (2025), who noted that many secondary schools in vulnerable communities possessed weak protective infrastructure, making them susceptible to attacks. These deficiencies allow armed groups to enter school premises, assemble victims and leave without encountering significant opposition.

Profitable Criminal Enterprise

The growth of kidnapping as a profitable criminal enterprise has also contributed significantly to the rise of school abductions. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) argue that ransom payments have transformed kidnapping from a sporadic criminal activity into a structured economic venture. Unlike other criminal activities that may involve substantial risks with uncertain rewards, school kidnappings often generate widespread public attention and pressure authorities to secure the release of victims. Consequently, schools have become attractive targets because they contain large numbers of potential victims whose families, communities and governments may be willing to negotiate for their release. The increasing financial gains associated with kidnapping have encouraged the replication of attacks by different criminal groups across multiple States.

Expansion of banditry in the North-East

The expansion of banditry in north-western Nigeria has further accelerated school abductions. Originally associated with cattle rustling and rural violence, bandit groups gradually diversified their activities into kidnapping due to its economic profitability. Ojewale (2024) notes that the evolution of banditry from localised criminality into organised kidnapping networks was facilitated by weak law enforcement, poor border control and the availability of illicit weapons. As these groups became more sophisticated, schools emerged as convenient targets because educational institutions often lacked adequate protection compared to government facilities or urban centres.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Another important factor is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The availability of firearms has strengthened the operational capacity of criminal groups and increased their ability to challenge local security structures. Armed groups engaged in school kidnappings frequently possess military-grade weapons that exceed the capabilities of local vigilante groups or school security personnel. The widespread circulation of arms across Nigeria's porous borders has therefore contributed to the frequency and severity of attacks on educational institutions (Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). Where armed groups possess superior firepower, schools become easier targets and communities become less willing to resist attacks.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Socio-economic conditions also play a significant role in sustaining school abductions. High levels of poverty, unemployment and economic exclusion create circumstances that facilitate recruitment into criminal networks. In many rural communities affected by banditry, young people face limited employment opportunities and restricted access to economic resources. Under such conditions, criminal organisations may exploit economic hardship by offering financial incentives to potential recruits. Ojewale (2024) argues that persistent poverty and state neglect have contributed to the emergence of local support networks that indirectly sustain criminal activities in some communities. Although poverty alone does not cause kidnapping, economic deprivation creates conditions under which criminal enterprises can flourish.

Educational Deprivation

Educational deprivation itself also contributes indirectly to the problem. Regions experiencing high levels of illiteracy and limited educational opportunities often exhibit greater vulnerability to insecurity. The relationship between education and security is cyclical: poor educational access contributes to socio-economic exclusion, while insecurity further restricts educational opportunities. As educational systems weaken, communities become more vulnerable to criminal recruitment and manipulation. This dynamic is particularly evident in areas where prolonged insecurity has disrupted schooling for extended periods (Aderinto et al., 2025).

Institutional Weaknesses

Institutional weaknesses constitute another critical driver of school abductions. Weak governance structures, corruption and inadequate coordination among security agencies frequently undermine responses to insecurity. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) contend that the persistence of kidnapping reflects broader governance challenges, including limited state presence in rural areas and weak enforcement of law and order. In many affected communities, security agencies face logistical constraints, personnel shortages and inadequate intelligence capabilities. These limitations reduce the likelihood of preventing attacks and increase the difficulty of rescuing victims once kidnappings occur.

Poor intelligence Gathering and Information Sharing

Poor intelligence gathering and information sharing further exacerbate the problem. Effective prevention of school abductions requires timely intelligence regarding the movement and activities of criminal groups. However, distrust between communities and security agencies often limits the flow of information necessary for early intervention. Aderinto et al. (2025) found that many attacks occurred despite warning signs that could have facilitated preventive action if effective intelligence

systems had been in place. The absence of reliable early warning mechanisms therefore contributes significantly to the vulnerability of schools.

Institutional Neglect of School Security

Institutional neglect of school security has also played a role. Although several policies have been introduced to improve school safety, implementation has frequently been inconsistent. Many schools continue to operate without adequate fencing, security personnel, alarm systems or emergency preparedness plans. Aderinto et al. (2025) observed that vulnerabilities persist even in schools located within areas known to experience security threats. This suggests that policy commitments have not always translated into practical protective measures at the institutional level.

Community-level Factors

Community-level factors also influence the prevalence of school abductions. In some areas, longstanding conflicts over land, resources and political influence have weakened social cohesion and trust. Such divisions can create opportunities for criminal groups to exploit local grievances and establish support networks. Furthermore, fear of retaliation may discourage community members from providing information to security agencies. Consequently, perpetrators are often able to operate within or near affected communities without detection (Ojewale, 2024).

The Increasing Media Attention

The increasing media attention surrounding school kidnappings may also contribute indirectly to their recurrence. High-profile attacks often generate national and international publicity, thereby increasing the perceived bargaining power of perpetrators. Criminal groups may interpret extensive media coverage as evidence that school kidnappings can attract attention and facilitate negotiations. While media reporting is essential for public awareness, the publicity associated with mass abductions may inadvertently reinforce the strategic value of schools as targets.

In sum, the evidence indicates that school abductions in Nigeria are driven by an interaction of security deficiencies, economic incentives and institutional weaknesses. The existence of poorly governed spaces, inadequate school protection measures, widespread poverty, the profitability of ransom payments, weak intelligence systems and governance failures collectively create conditions that enable attacks on educational institutions. Addressing school abductions therefore requires responses that extend beyond law enforcement to include governance reforms, economic development, community engagement and sustained investment in educational security.

The Necessity of Combating School Abductions

The urgency of combating school abductions in Nigeria is underscored by the extensive consequences that such attacks impose on learners, teachers, educational institutions and the broader educational system. Beyond the immediate security concerns associated with kidnapping, school abductions disrupt the fundamental objectives of education by creating environments of fear, instability and uncertainty. Recent studies demonstrate that the effects extend far beyond the victims directly involved in attacks, influencing educational participation, academic performance, school management and long-term national development (Aderinto et al., 2025; Ojewale, 2024). Consequently, efforts to combat school abductions are not merely security interventions but necessary actions for safeguarding educational continuity and sustainable development.

The effects on learners are particularly severe because children and adolescents constitute the primary targets of many school abductions. Victims often experience profound psychological distress arising from exposure to violence, threats and prolonged captivity. Studies on school attacks in Nigeria indicate that abducted students frequently suffer anxiety, fear, emotional instability and difficulties in readjusting to normal school life after release (Aderinto et al., 2025). The traumatic experiences associated with captivity may continue long after physical freedom has been regained, affecting concentration, memory retention and academic engagement. Learners who witness attacks or know victims personally may also experience secondary trauma, leading to fear of attending school and reduced participation in educational activities.

The educational consequences for learners are equally significant. School abductions often result in prolonged interruptions to learning because affected institutions are temporarily closed or students are withdrawn by concerned parents. Following the abduction of students from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Greenfield University and Federal Government College Birnin Yauri, many parents became reluctant to allow their children to remain in boarding schools or attend institutions perceived as vulnerable to attack. Such responses contribute to absenteeism, school transfers and, in some cases, complete withdrawal from formal education. Ojewale (2024) found that persistent insecurity in north-western Nigeria has increased educational disruptions and reduced learner participation in several affected communities.

The implications for school enrolment are particularly concerning. In communities repeatedly exposed to insecurity, families often prioritise physical safety over educational attainment. Girls may be especially affected because parents frequently perceive female children as more vulnerable to abuse during captivity. This tendency has implications for gender equity in education and may reverse gains previously achieved in improving female school participation. Where school attendance declines as a result of insecurity, educational inequalities become more pronounced and social mobility opportunities are reduced.

School abductions also have profound effects on teachers. Teachers operating in high-risk environments frequently experience fear, anxiety and occupational stress arising from concerns about their personal safety. The kidnapping of teachers alongside students has become increasingly common in recent years, further heightening perceptions of vulnerability among educational personnel. For example, attacks on schools in Kaduna, Kebbi and more recently Oyo State involved both students and teachers as victims. Such incidents discourage qualified teachers from accepting postings to rural or insecurity-prone communities. As a result, schools in affected areas often experience staffing shortages and difficulties in recruiting experienced personnel.

The reluctance of teachers to work in vulnerable locations has direct implications for educational quality. Frequent teacher turnover disrupts instructional continuity and reduces opportunities for meaningful teacher-student interactions. Where schools struggle to attract qualified educators, learners may receive instruction from underqualified personnel or experience prolonged periods without subject specialists. Aderinto et al. (2025) note that insecurity contributes to educational vulnerability by limiting the availability of stable and supportive teaching environments. Consequently, combating school abductions becomes essential not only for protecting teachers but also for ensuring the availability of quality instruction.

School administration is similarly affected by recurring attacks. Administrators in high-risk areas are often compelled to divert attention and resources from academic development towards crisis management and security concerns. School leaders must address emergency preparedness, coordinate responses to security threats and manage the psychological effects of attacks on staff and students. These responsibilities increase administrative burdens and reduce the time available for educational planning and instructional supervision.

Financial pressures also emerge as schools attempt to strengthen security arrangements. Institutions may invest in fencing, surveillance systems, security personnel and emergency communication infrastructure, often without corresponding increases in funding. For schools operating under resource constraints, these expenditures can divert resources away from teaching materials, infrastructure development and learner support services. In extreme cases, repeated attacks may force schools to suspend operations indefinitely, resulting in the loss of educational opportunities for entire communities.

The effects of school abductions extend beyond individual institutions to the broader educational system. Repeated attacks undermine public confidence in the ability of schools to provide safe learning environments. Communities that perceive schools as unsafe may become reluctant to support educational initiatives or invest in educational development. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) argue that the recurring nature of school abductions weakens trust in state institutions and raises questions regarding the government's capacity to fulfil its responsibility of protecting citizens. When confidence in educational institutions declines, efforts to improve enrolment, retention and learning outcomes become increasingly difficult.

The necessity of combating school abductions becomes even more apparent when viewed from the perspective of sustainable educational development. Sustainable educational development requires continuity, accessibility, quality and equity in educational provision. School abductions directly undermine each of these requirements. Educational continuity is disrupted through school closures and interrupted learning. Accessibility is reduced as learners avoid schools perceived as unsafe. Educational quality suffers because insecurity affects teacher availability, learner concentration and institutional effectiveness. Equity is compromised because children in high-risk communities face greater barriers to education than their counterparts in safer locations.

The long-term developmental implications are equally significant. Education contributes to human capital formation, economic productivity and social development. When insecurity prevents children from acquiring knowledge and skills, the consequences extend beyond individual learners to affect community development and national progress. Ojewale (2024) observes that attacks on schools create setbacks for educational advancement and weaken efforts aimed at addressing poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. In this sense, school abductions not only threaten present educational outcomes but also undermine future development prospects.

Another important reason for combating school abductions relates to the protection of children's rights. Access to safe and quality education is widely recognised as a fundamental right. When learners are exposed to kidnapping, violence and intimidation within educational settings, their rights to education, security and personal development are compromised. Addressing school abductions therefore reflects both a developmental imperative and a moral obligation to protect children from harm.

Furthermore, the economic costs associated with school abductions justify sustained intervention. Governments incur significant expenses in rescue operations, security deployments and post-crisis recovery efforts. Families often experience financial hardship resulting from displacement, school transfers and additional security-related expenditures. Communities affected by recurring attacks may witness reduced economic activity as insecurity discourages investment and social interaction. These costs reinforce the need for preventive measures capable of reducing the frequency and impact of attacks.

The cumulative evidence demonstrates that combating school abductions is essential because of their far-reaching effects on learners, teachers, school administration and sustainable educational development. The consequences extend beyond the immediate victims to influence educational participation, institutional effectiveness, human capital development and public confidence in education. Without decisive action to address the problem, the gains achieved in expanding educational access and improving learning outcomes may be significantly undermined. Effective responses are therefore necessary to protect educational stakeholders, preserve learning opportunities and support the long-term development of Nigeria's education sector.

Effective Strategies for Combating School Abductions in Nigeria

Addressing school abductions in Nigeria requires a coordinated approach that goes beyond reactive responses to individual incidents. Evidence from recent attacks indicates that military deployments and rescue operations alone are insufficient because they often address the consequences rather than the conditions that make schools vulnerable to attack. Effective strategies must therefore combine security measures, community participation, educational planning, institutional reforms and socio-economic interventions. Recent studies suggest that successful efforts to protect schools depend on the integration of preventive, protective and responsive mechanisms capable of reducing vulnerabilities while ensuring continuity of learning in affected communities (Aderinto et al., 2025; Ojewale, 2024). Some of these measures are highlighted and discussed as follows:

i. A fundamental strategy involves strengthening physical security within and around educational institutions

Many schools affected by attacks have lacked perimeter fencing, controlled entry points, surveillance systems and trained security personnel. Studies conducted in vulnerable communities in Katsina State revealed that inadequate protective infrastructure significantly increased the susceptibility of schools to attacks (Aderinto et al., 2025). Strengthening school infrastructure through perimeter fencing, reinforced gates, security lighting, alarm systems, communication equipment and controlled access points can reduce opportunities for unauthorised entry and delay attackers long enough for security agencies to intervene. Boarding schools located in isolated areas require particular attention because they have frequently been targeted in large-scale abduction operations.

ii. The deployment of trained security personnel to high-risk educational institutions represents another critical intervention

Experiences from several attacks demonstrate that schools often rely on unarmed guards who lack the capacity to resist organised criminal groups. Effective protection requires the presence of adequately trained personnel capable of conducting surveillance, managing emergencies and coordinating with security agencies. However, security deployment should be intelligence-driven

and concentrated in areas identified as particularly vulnerable rather than implemented as a uniform national strategy. Such an approach would maximise available resources while addressing locations facing the greatest threats.

iii. Improved intelligence gathering and early warning systems constitute another essential component of school protection

Aderinto et al. (2025) found that many attacks followed observable patterns and warning signs that could have facilitated preventive action if intelligence mechanisms had been functioning effectively. Establishing community-based intelligence networks can improve the timely identification of suspicious activities around schools. Teachers, parents, community leaders and local security actors can contribute valuable information regarding potential threats. Effective intelligence systems should also facilitate communication between communities and formal security institutions to ensure rapid responses when threats emerge.

iv. Community Participation

Community participation is particularly important because local populations often possess knowledge regarding the activities and movements of criminal groups operating within their environments. Ojewale (2024) argues that educational resilience in insecurity-prone regions depends significantly on community engagement and local ownership of school protection initiatives. Communities that actively participate in safeguarding schools are more likely to identify threats early and support preventive measures. School-based security committees comprising parents, teachers, traditional leaders, youth groups and security representatives can strengthen local vigilance while improving trust between communities and security agencies.

v. The adoption of comprehensive school safety planning

The adoption of comprehensive school safety planning is another effective strategy. Every school should possess a security plan that clearly outlines procedures for risk assessment, emergency communication, evacuation and crisis response. Such plans should be developed based on local security realities and reviewed regularly to address emerging threats. Staff and students should receive periodic training on emergency preparedness so that they understand how to respond during security incidents. Experience from other conflict-affected settings indicates that preparedness training can reduce panic, facilitate orderly responses and improve survival outcomes during attacks.

vi. Technology can also contribute significantly to school protection

Surveillance cameras, drone-assisted monitoring, emergency alert systems and geographic information systems can strengthen the capacity to detect and respond to threats. Although resource constraints may limit large-scale deployment, priority can be given to schools located in high-risk areas. Communication technologies that allow schools to transmit distress signals directly to nearby security agencies may enhance response times during emergencies. Technological interventions should complement rather than replace human-centred security measures because successful protection depends on both surveillance capabilities and effective operational responses.

vii. Improving coordination among security agencies represents another important requirement

School abductions often occur in environments where responsibilities for security are fragmented among multiple institutions. Weak coordination may result in delayed responses, duplication of efforts or intelligence failures. Strengthening collaboration among the military, police, civil defence organisations, intelligence agencies and local security structures can improve operational effectiveness. Joint planning and information-sharing mechanisms are particularly important in regions where criminal groups operate across state boundaries.

viii. Addressing the economic incentives that sustain kidnapping is equally important

Verjee and Kwaja (2021) argue that the profitability of ransom payments has contributed to the persistence of school abductions. Criminal groups often target schools because such attacks generate pressure for negotiations and financial rewards. Efforts to reduce kidnapping must therefore include measures aimed at disrupting the financial networks that support criminal organisations. Strengthening financial intelligence systems, tracking ransom-related transactions and prosecuting individuals involved in kidnapping enterprises can reduce the economic attractiveness of school abductions.

ix. Socio-economic interventions also have an important role in long-term prevention

Persistent poverty, unemployment and social exclusion create conditions that facilitate recruitment into criminal networks. Ojewale (2024) notes that many insecurity-prone communities experience limited economic opportunities and weak state presence. Expanding employment opportunities, supporting rural development and improving access to social services can reduce the appeal of criminal activities among vulnerable populations. Such interventions may not produce immediate security outcomes, but they address structural conditions that contribute to the sustainability of kidnapping networks.

x. Educational policy reforms are similarly necessary

Governments should prioritise school safety within broader educational planning processes rather than treating it as a separate security issue. Security considerations should be integrated into decisions relating to school location, infrastructure development and resource allocation. Schools located in highly vulnerable areas may require additional support for transportation, boarding arrangements and emergency preparedness. Furthermore, educational authorities should establish mechanisms for maintaining learning continuity when attacks occur. Alternative learning arrangements, distance education platforms and temporary learning centres can reduce disruptions and ensure that students continue their education despite insecurity.

xi. Psychosocial support services constitute another essential strategy

Victims of abduction often require counselling and rehabilitation to facilitate successful reintegration into school environments. Teachers, students and families affected by attacks may experience trauma that interferes with learning and social functioning. Comprehensive support programmes should therefore accompany security interventions. Aderinto et al. (2025) emphasise that addressing the psychological consequences of school attacks is necessary for restoring educational participation and promoting long-term recovery.

The strengthening of legal and judicial responses is also important.

Effective prosecution of perpetrators can enhance deterrence and reinforce public confidence in state institutions. Where individuals involved in kidnapping are rarely prosecuted or convicted,

criminal groups may perceive limited risks associated with their activities. Judicial reforms aimed at accelerating investigations, prosecutions and convictions can contribute to reducing impunity. At the same time, anti-corruption measures are necessary to ensure that security resources allocated for school protection are utilised effectively.

xii. International and regional cooperation can further enhance efforts to combat school abductions

Many criminal networks operate across national borders and exploit weaknesses in regional security arrangements. Collaboration among neighbouring countries in intelligence sharing, border management and law enforcement can help disrupt transnational criminal activities that contribute to insecurity within Nigeria. Regional cooperation may also facilitate the exchange of best practices regarding school protection and educational resilience.

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from recent research is that sustainable solutions require a balance between immediate security responses and long-term developmental interventions. Aderinto et al. (2025) and Ojewale (2024) collectively demonstrate that school abductions are sustained by conditions extending beyond the education sector. Consequently, strategies focused exclusively on armed responses are unlikely to produce lasting results. Effective interventions must address school vulnerabilities, strengthen governance, improve socio-economic conditions and enhance community resilience simultaneously.

In sum, combating school abductions in Nigeria requires a combination of strengthened school security infrastructure, improved intelligence gathering, community participation, coordinated security operations, socio-economic development, educational policy reforms, psychosocial support services and effective legal responses. These measures are mutually reinforcing and collectively contribute to safer learning environments. Their implementation would not only protect learners and teachers but also support educational continuity, strengthen public confidence in schools and advance the broader goal of sustainable educational development.

Empirical Review

Aderinto et al. (2025) conducted a study on *Our Children Are Not Safe: Vulnerability of Secondary School Students to School Attacks and Mass Abduction in Katsina State, Nigeria*. The study was carried out in Katsina State, Nigeria, with a focus on secondary schools located in communities exposed to insecurity and banditry. The study was anchored on the Routine Activity Theory, which explains crime occurrence as a function of motivated offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The researchers selected respondents from secondary schools in vulnerable communities through a multi-stage sampling procedure involving students, teachers and educational stakeholders. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that inadequate security infrastructure, poor surveillance mechanisms, proximity of schools to forest reserves and weak state security presence significantly increased the vulnerability of students to school attacks and mass abductions. The study concluded that educational institutions in insecurity-prone communities require targeted security interventions to reduce exposure to attacks.

The study is relevant to the present research because it provides empirical evidence on factors that expose schools to abduction risks. However, its focus was limited to Katsina State and concentrated primarily on vulnerability factors. It did not extensively examine broader pathways for combating

school abductions and promoting sustainable educational development across Nigeria. This gap provided justification for the present paper.

Aderinto et al. (2025) investigated *They Come in the Night and in Large Numbers: Explaining the Common Features of School Attack and Mass Abduction of Students in Katsina State, Nigeria*. The study was conducted in Katsina State, one of the regions most affected by banditry-related school attacks. The researchers employed Routine Activity Theory and Situational Crime Prevention perspectives to explain the operational patterns of perpetrators. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving the use of purposive sampling to select victims, community leaders, security personnel and education stakeholders with direct knowledge of school attacks. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analysed thematically. The findings showed that most attacks occurred at night, involved heavily armed groups operating in large numbers and targeted schools with weak security arrangements. The study further found that poor intelligence gathering, inadequate security personnel and delayed emergency responses facilitated successful abduction operations. The researchers concluded that strengthening school security and improving intelligence systems were essential to reducing attacks on educational institutions. The study contributes significantly to understanding the operational dynamics of school kidnappings in Nigeria. Nevertheless, its emphasis was largely on explaining the characteristics and patterns of attacks rather than assessing their implications for sustainable educational development or proposing broader educational policy responses. The present study seeks to address this limitation by linking school abductions to safe learning and sustainable educational development.

Ojewale (2024) examined *Learning on the Edge: Impacts of Banditry on Education and Strategic Options for Resilience in Northwest Nigeria*. The study focused on states in North-West Nigeria that have experienced recurring incidents of banditry and school-related insecurity. The study was guided by Human Security Theory, which emphasises the protection of individuals from threats capable of undermining their wellbeing and development. A qualitative case study design was utilised. Participants were selected purposively from affected communities, educational institutions, civil society groups and security agencies. Data collection involved interviews, document reviews and stakeholder consultations. The findings revealed that banditry had contributed to school closures, declining enrolment, teacher shortages, learning disruptions and widespread fear among learners and parents. The study further found that educational resilience depended on effective community participation, improved school protection mechanisms and stronger collaboration between security agencies and educational authorities. The study concluded that insecurity poses a serious threat to educational continuity and long-term development in affected regions.

Although the study provided valuable insights into the educational consequences of insecurity and possible resilience measures, its scope was restricted to the North-West geopolitical zone and broadly addressed banditry rather than school abductions specifically. Furthermore, it did not provide a detailed national assessment of strategies for combating school kidnappings as a pathway to safe learning and sustainable educational development. The present paper filled this gap by focusing specifically on school abductions in Nigeria and examining practical strategies for ensuring safe learning environments and sustainable educational progress.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was hinged on the theoretical foundation of Routine Activity Theory and Human Security Theory as identified and reviewed below:

i. Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson and in 1979. The theory emerged as a response to conventional explanations of crime that focused primarily on offenders' motivations. Cohen and Felson argued that crime occurs when three conditions converge in time and space: the presence of a motivated offender, the availability of a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian. According to the theory, criminal acts are not merely the result of individual motivations but are facilitated by opportunities created through routine social activities and weak protective mechanisms.

The central assumption of the theory is that crime becomes likely whenever vulnerable targets are exposed to offenders in environments lacking effective guardianship. The theory maintains that reducing criminal opportunities can significantly decrease the incidence of crime, even when motivated offenders continue to exist. Consequently, emphasis is placed on target hardening, surveillance, access control, environmental design and the strengthening of guardianship structures capable of preventing criminal activities.

One of the major strengths of Routine Activity Theory is its practical relevance to crime prevention. The theory offers clear explanations for why certain places, institutions or groups become attractive targets and identifies specific interventions capable of reducing vulnerability. It is particularly useful in analysing organised crimes such as kidnapping because it focuses attention on environmental and situational factors that facilitate criminal actions. Another strength lies in its applicability across different social settings and forms of criminal behaviour.

Despite these strengths, the theory has some limitations. It pays limited attention to broader social, economic and political conditions that influence criminal behaviour. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, governance failures and social inequality are not adequately explained within its framework. The theory also assumes the existence of motivated offenders without thoroughly examining the origins of such motivations.

The application of Routine Activity Theory to this study is highly relevant because school abductions in Nigeria frequently occur under conditions that reflect the convergence of the three elements identified by the theory. Students and teachers constitute suitable targets because schools often contain large numbers of vulnerable individuals. Armed bandits, insurgents and kidnapping syndicates serve as motivated offenders seeking ransom payments, publicity or other benefits. The absence of capable guardians is reflected in inadequate school security infrastructure, insufficient security personnel, weak surveillance systems and delayed emergency responses. Incidents such as the abductions in Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, Jangebe, Birnin Yauri and Kuriga illustrate situations where perpetrators exploited weak protective mechanisms to attack educational institutions successfully. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding why schools become targets of abduction and highlights the importance of strengthening school security, surveillance and community protection mechanisms as pathways towards safe learning and educational sustainability.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory was popularised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through its Human Development Report of 1994. The theory emerged as a departure from traditional state-centred security approaches that focused primarily on territorial defence and military threats. Human Security Theory argues that genuine security should focus on protecting individuals and communities from threats that undermine their survival, dignity, wellbeing and opportunities for development. The theory emphasises freedom from fear and freedom from want as essential components of security.

The major assumption of the theory is that development and security are inseparable. Human wellbeing cannot be achieved where people live under conditions of violence, fear, deprivation or insecurity. The theory further assumes that threats to education, health, livelihoods and personal safety are as significant as conventional military threats because they directly affect human development outcomes. Consequently, governments and institutions are expected to prioritise the protection of individuals and communities from conditions that hinder their ability to realise their full potential.

A major strength of Human Security Theory is its broad and people-centred perspective. The theory recognises that security challenges extend beyond armed conflict and include threats to education, health, economic wellbeing and social development. This makes it particularly suitable for analysing issues that affect vulnerable populations such as schoolchildren and teachers. Another strength is its emphasis on preventive measures and long-term solutions rather than purely reactive responses to crises.

However, the theory has been criticised for its broad scope. Critics argue that the concept of human security covers numerous dimensions, making it difficult to establish clear boundaries and priorities. Others contend that its broad focus may complicate policy implementation because governments may struggle to address all identified threats simultaneously.

Human Security Theory is highly applicable to the present study because school abductions constitute a direct threat to the security, wellbeing and development of learners and educational personnel. The theory explains that the consequences of school kidnappings extend beyond physical harm to include psychological trauma, educational disruption, fear, displacement and diminished opportunities for human development. The closure of schools following attacks in Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, Kebbi and other states demonstrates how insecurity undermines educational access and threatens future development prospects. From the perspective of Human Security Theory, combating school abductions is not solely a matter of crime control but also a developmental necessity aimed at protecting children's rights, preserving educational opportunities and promoting social progress. The theory therefore provides a strong basis for understanding the relationship between safe learning environments and sustainable educational development, which constitutes the central focus of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this paper revealed that school abduction has become a recurring security challenge in Nigeria with significant implications for educational access, learning outcomes and sustainable educational development. Evidence from major incidents such as the Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, Jangebe, Birnin Yauri and Kuriga school abductions indicates that attacks on educational institutions are no longer isolated occurrences but have evolved into a persistent pattern of

organised criminal activity. This finding corroborates the position of Verjee and Kwaja (2021), who argued that school abductions in Nigeria have developed into an epidemic driven by insecurity and the increasing commercialisation of kidnapping. Similarly, Ojewale (2024) observed that attacks on schools have become a recurring feature of insecurity in north-western Nigeria, resulting in school closures, learner displacement and declining educational participation. The recurrence of school kidnappings across different regions of the country demonstrates that educational institutions have increasingly become vulnerable targets for criminal groups. The findings further suggest that the prevalence of school abductions has contributed to fear among parents and communities, leading to reduced enrolment, absenteeism and disruptions in academic activities. This supports the findings of Aderinto et al. (2025), who established that insecurity has significantly increased the vulnerability of students and negatively affected educational engagement in affected communities.

The paper further found that school abductions are driven by a combination of security, socio-economic and institutional factors. Weak security infrastructure, inadequate surveillance systems, poor intelligence gathering, the proliferation of arms, poverty and weak governance structures emerged as major drivers of the phenomenon. This finding aligns with the argument of Aderinto et al. (2025), who found that many school attacks occurred because perpetrators exploited poorly protected educational institutions and inadequate security responses. The finding also supports Verjee and Kwaja's (2021) assertion that kidnapping has become economically attractive due to the financial rewards associated with ransom payments. Beyond security deficiencies, the study revealed that socio-economic deprivation and unemployment contribute indirectly to the persistence of school abductions by creating conditions that facilitate recruitment into criminal networks. This position is consistent with Ojewale's (2024) argument that state neglect, economic hardship and weak institutional presence in many rural communities have contributed to the expansion of banditry and kidnapping activities. The convergence of these factors suggests that school abduction is not merely a security problem but a manifestation of broader governance and development challenges.

The paper also demonstrated the necessity of combating school abductions because of their far-reaching effects on learners, teachers, school administration and sustainable educational development. The study found that victims of abduction frequently experience psychological trauma, fear and emotional distress, which negatively affect academic performance and educational participation. Learners in affected communities often experience interruptions in schooling, while some discontinue their education altogether due to safety concerns. This finding agrees with Aderinto et al. (2025), who reported that insecurity creates educational vulnerability and undermines students' capacity to participate effectively in learning activities. The findings further revealed that teachers working in insecurity-prone areas experience heightened anxiety and job dissatisfaction, leading to teacher shortages and reduced instructional effectiveness. Ojewale (2024) similarly observed that insecurity has contributed to difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers in affected regions. The study also found that school administrators are compelled to divert scarce resources towards security-related expenditures, thereby reducing investments in educational facilities and instructional resources. These consequences collectively undermine efforts to achieve sustainable educational development by weakening educational continuity, reducing learning opportunities and widening educational inequalities.

Another important finding of the paper is that effective responses to school abductions require integrated and preventive strategies rather than reactive interventions alone. The study identified strengthened school security infrastructure, improved intelligence gathering, community participation, enhanced coordination among security agencies, psychosocial support services and socio-economic development programmes as critical measures for combating school abductions. This finding is consistent with the position of Aderinto et al. (2025), who emphasised the importance of intelligence-driven interventions and proactive security arrangements in preventing attacks on schools. Similarly, Ojewale (2024) argued that educational resilience in insecurity-affected regions depends on community engagement, school protection measures and collaboration among stakeholders. The findings further support Verjee and Kwaja's (2021) argument that long-term solutions to school abductions require addressing the structural conditions that sustain kidnapping, including weak governance, poverty and limited state presence. The effectiveness of these strategies is evident in communities where local vigilance groups, community-based intelligence systems and strengthened security arrangements have contributed to reducing attacks on educational institutions.

The findings of this paper are strongly supported by the Routine Activity Theory adopted for the study. The theory posits that crime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. The prevalence of school abductions in Nigeria reflects this convergence. Schools provide suitable targets because they accommodate large numbers of students and teachers, while armed criminal groups serve as motivated offenders seeking financial or strategic gains. The absence of capable guardians is evident in inadequate security infrastructure, insufficient security personnel and weak surveillance mechanisms observed in many affected schools. The successful attacks on schools in Chibok, Kankara, Jangebe and Kuriga provide practical illustrations of how criminal groups exploited vulnerabilities within educational institutions. The theory therefore explains why schools with weak protective measures are more susceptible to abduction attacks and why strengthening guardianship through security personnel, surveillance systems and community vigilance can reduce vulnerability.

The findings are equally supported by Human Security Theory, which emphasises the protection of individuals from threats that undermine their wellbeing, dignity and development. The effects of school abductions identified in this study extend beyond physical harm to include psychological trauma, educational disruption and reduced opportunities for human development. Human Security Theory provides a useful explanation for why school abductions should not be viewed solely as criminal acts but as threats to human development and social progress. The closure of schools following attacks, declining enrolment rates and interruptions in learning demonstrate how insecurity undermines educational development and limits opportunities for future advancement. The theory further supports the study's finding that combating school abductions requires not only security interventions but also developmental strategies that address poverty, social exclusion and institutional weaknesses. By emphasising freedom from fear and the protection of educational opportunities, Human Security Theory provides a strong framework for understanding the relationship between school safety and sustainable educational development.

In summary, the paper demonstrated that school abductions constitute a significant threat to educational development in Nigeria. The persistence of attacks reflects the interaction of security vulnerabilities, socio-economic challenges and institutional weaknesses. Addressing the problem

therefore requires a holistic approach that combines effective security measures with broader developmental interventions capable of creating safe learning environments and promoting sustainable educational development. The consistency between the findings of this study, existing empirical evidence and the theoretical perspectives adopted further strengthens the validity of the conclusions reached.

CONCLUSIONS

School abductions have emerged as one of the most serious threats to educational advancement in Nigeria, undermining the fundamental role of schools as safe spaces for teaching, learning and human development. The persistence and geographical spread of attacks from Chibok and Dapchi to Kankara, Jangebe, Birnin Yauri, Kuriga and other affected communities demonstrate that school kidnapping has evolved beyond isolated criminal incidents into a sustained challenge with profound implications for educational access, learner retention, teacher effectiveness and national development. The study established that the occurrence of school abductions is sustained by the convergence of weak security structures, inadequate intelligence systems, poor protection of educational facilities, socio-economic deprivation and institutional deficiencies that create opportunities for criminal groups to operate.

The continued targeting of schools has generated fear among learners, parents and teachers, weakened confidence in public education, disrupted academic activities and threatened efforts towards achieving equitable and quality education. More importantly, the study underscores that educational development cannot be sustained in an environment where schools are vulnerable to violent attacks and where learners attend classes under the constant fear of abduction. Ensuring safe learning environments therefore requires a deliberate commitment to protecting educational institutions as strategic national assets.

Combating school abductions must be approached not merely as a security responsibility but as an essential investment in human capital development, social stability and national progress. The future of education in Nigeria depends significantly on the capacity of government, communities, educational authorities and security agencies to create conditions under which learners and teachers can pursue educational activities without fear, intimidation or disruption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government at all levels should establish and adequately fund a School Security Protection Programme in vulnerable communities, involving the deployment of trained security personnel, installation of surveillance systems, construction of perimeter fencing and provision of rapid-response communication facilities in schools located within high-risk areas. Such measures would reduce the vulnerability of schools and enhance the protection of learners and teachers.
2. Security agencies, educational authorities and host communities should institutionalise community-based intelligence and early warning systems around educational institutions, enabling timely identification of threats and rapid intervention before attacks occur. This should include the formation of school safety committees comprising community leaders, parents, teachers, youth representatives and security personnel to strengthen vigilance and information sharing.

3. Federal and state governments should complement security interventions with targeted socio-economic and educational resilience programmes in insecurity-prone communities, including youth employment initiatives, poverty reduction schemes, psychosocial support services for victims of attacks and alternative learning arrangements during security emergencies. Addressing the underlying conditions that facilitate criminal recruitment while ensuring continuity of learning would contribute significantly to safe learning and sustainable educational development.

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