

Research Paper

From Classrooms to Crisis Zones: Insecurity, Human Capital Formation, and the Future of Basic Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education remains the most strategic mechanism through which nations develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for sustainable development across the world, yet growing insecurity across Nigeria has increasingly threatened the ability of the basic education system to perform this critical function. Against this backdrop, this paper examined the nexus between insecurity, human capital formation, and the future of basic education in Nigeria under the theme *From Classrooms to Crisis Zones: Insecurity, Human Capital Formation, and the Future of Basic Education in Nigeria*. Specifically, the paper investigated the extent to which insecurity affects access to and participation in basic education, assessed the impact of insecurity-induced disruptions in schooling on human capital formation among school-age children, and examined the implications of persistent insecurity for the future development and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria. The paper was anchored on Human Capital Theory which views education as an investment in the productive capacities of individuals. An analytical review methodology was adopted through the systematic examination, synthesis, and critical analysis of relevant theoretical, empirical, and documented evidence on insecurity and education in Nigeria. The paper revealed that persistent insecurity, manifested through terrorism, banditry, school attacks, kidnapping, and communal violence, has significantly reduced school enrolment, attendance, retention, and participation, while simultaneously disrupting learning processes and weakening human capital development. The paper further found that continued attacks on educational institutions threaten the sustainability of basic education by widening educational inequalities, discouraging teacher retention, and undermining public confidence in the educational system. The paper concluded that insecurity has become a major impediment to educational development and human capital formation in Nigeria, and therefore recommended among others the strengthening of school security architecture, implementation of targeted educational recovery programmes for affected learners, and the integration of security-sensitive planning into basic education policies to guarantee safe and uninterrupted learning.

Keywords: Insecurity, Human Capital Formation, Basic Education, School Attacks, Educational Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most important instruments for human capital formation, providing the knowledge, skills, values, and competencies required for economic productivity, social mobility, and national development across the globe. Human capital theory posits that investment in education enhances the productive capacities of individuals and contributes to long-term economic growth. In developing countries such as Nigeria, basic education occupies a strategic position because it serves as the foundation upon which further educational attainment and workforce development are built. The quality, accessibility, and continuity of basic education therefore determine the future stock of human capital available for national development (Nwachukwu, 2024).

In recent years, however, the Nigerian basic education sector has faced severe disruptions arising from growing insecurity. The country has witnessed persistent attacks on schools, mass abductions of pupils and students, destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of teachers and learners, and prolonged closure of schools in conflict-affected communities. These developments have transformed many learning environments into zones of fear and uncertainty, particularly in the northern region of the country. The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014 marked a turning point in the targeting of educational institutions by armed groups. More than a decade later, the threat has persisted and expanded across several states, including Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Borno (UNICEF, 2024)

The resurgence of mass school abductions in recent years has further heightened concerns about the future of education in Nigeria. In March 2024, armed groups abducted more than 280 pupils and teachers from a school in Kuriga, Kaduna State, drawing national and international attention to the vulnerability of educational institutions (Afolabi, 2024). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), attacks on schools and insecurity-related disruptions have contributed significantly to educational exclusion and learning poverty across the country. UNICEF reported that Nigeria currently has approximately 10.2 million primary school-age children and 8.1 million junior secondary school-age children who are out of school, while about 74 per cent of children aged 7–14 years lack basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNICEF, 2024b). These figures raise serious concerns about the country's capacity to develop the human resources required for sustainable development.

The consequences of insecurity extend beyond physical attacks. Fear of abduction has compelled many parents to withdraw their children from school, especially girls, while teachers increasingly avoid postings to conflict-prone communities. In the North-East, insecurity has led to the closure of numerous schools and the displacement of thousands of learners. UNICEF (2024) noted that 113 schools in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States remained closed due to insecurity. Such disruptions reduce instructional time, weaken educational outcomes, and increase the likelihood of school dropout, child labour, early marriage, and youth involvement in criminal activities.

Human capital formation depends on sustained access to quality education, effective teaching, and a secure learning environment. Where insecurity undermines these conditions, educational attainment declines and future economic productivity is weakened. Evidence from conflict-affected settings indicates that exposure to violence significantly reduces school attendance, learning achievement, and skill acquisition among children (Galindo-Silva & Tchunte, 2023). In Nigeria, the continued targeting of schools threatens not only the educational future of millions of children but also the country's aspirations for economic growth, social cohesion, and demographic dividend. Against this backdrop, examining the relationship between insecurity, human capital formation, and the future of basic education has become increasingly important for educational planning and national development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The persistent insecurity affecting Nigeria has emerged as one of the greatest threats to the sustainability of basic education and the development of human capital. Despite considerable investments in educational expansion through programmes such as the Universal Basic Education scheme, increasing incidents of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, armed conflict, and attacks on schools have continued to undermine educational progress. Educational institutions that should function as safe spaces for learning are increasingly becoming targets of violence, creating widespread fear among learners, parents, teachers, and communities.

The recurring abduction of schoolchildren from Chibok in 2014, Dapchi in 2018, Kankara in 2020, Tegin in 2021, Kuriga in 2024, Oriire in 2026 and several other communities demonstrates that attacks on educational institutions are no longer isolated incidents but a continuing security challenge. UNICEF (2024a) reported that only 37 per cent of assessed schools across selected Nigerian states possessed early warning systems capable of identifying security threats. Similarly, findings from the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools assessment indicated that many schools continue to operate without adequate protective measures against attacks (UNICEF, 2024c).

The educational consequences of this insecurity are evident in the rising number of out-of-school children, declining school attendance, interrupted learning processes, teacher shortages in conflict-prone areas, and deteriorating learning outcomes. While Nigeria already faces challenges relating to educational access and quality, insecurity has compounded these difficulties by forcing school closures, displacing learners, and discouraging enrolment. The result is a generation of children whose educational opportunities are increasingly constrained by fear and instability.

The long-term implications for human capital formation are equally troubling. A country that fails to educate its children adequately risks producing a workforce lacking the skills, knowledge, and competencies required for economic transformation and global competitiveness. The continued disruption of basic education threatens future labour productivity, innovation, social development, and poverty reduction efforts. Although several studies have examined insecurity and education separately, there remains a need for deeper scholarly attention to how sustained insecurity affects human capital formation through its impact on basic education in Nigeria. This concern becomes more urgent as attacks on schools continue to occur despite government interventions and international advocacy for safer learning environments. Consequently, this paper therefore sought to examine how the growing insecurity crisis is shaping human capital formation and influencing the future of basic education in Nigeria.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this was to examine the effects of insecurity on human capital formation and its implications for the future of basic education in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the paper were to:

- i. examine the extent to which insecurity affects access to and participation in basic education in Nigeria.
- ii. assess the impact of insecurity-induced disruptions in schooling on human capital formation among school-age children in Nigeria.
- iii. investigate the implications of persistent insecurity for the future development and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the analytical review method, which involves the systematic identification, selection, examination, synthesis, interpretation, and critical evaluation of existing scholarly literature, empirical studies, theoretical contributions, and documented evidence relevant to a particular phenomenon. According to Snyder (2019), an analytical review goes beyond mere description by critically interrogating existing knowledge, identifying patterns, establishing relationships among variables, exposing inconsistencies in previous findings, and generating new insights from available evidence.

Similarly, Xiao and Watson (2019) maintain that analytical reviews require clearly defined review objectives, systematic sourcing of relevant literature, critical appraisal of evidence, thematic analysis, and logical synthesis of findings to address specific research questions. In this study, relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theoretical works, and empirical studies on insecurity, human capital formation, and basic education were critically reviewed, compared, and synthesised to generate evidence-based conclusions.

The adoption of the analytical review method was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine and explain the relationship between insecurity, human capital formation, and the future of basic education in Nigeria through existing documented evidence rather than through primary data collection. The method also enabled the integration of findings from diverse studies and contexts to provide a broader understanding of the subject matter.

However, the method is limited by its dependence on the quality, availability, and scope of existing literature, making it susceptible to publication bias, contextual variations across reviewed studies, and the inability to establish direct causal relationships through firsthand empirical investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was done in line with the aim and objectives of the paper under conceptual review, empirical review and theoretical framework as follows:

Conceptual Review

The key concepts in this paper are reviewed as follows:

Classrooms to Crisis Zones

The concept of “classrooms to crisis zones” has emerged within educational and conflict studies literature to describe situations where schools and learning environments cease to function as safe spaces for teaching and learning due to armed violence, insecurity, displacement, terrorism, or organised criminal activities. Recent studies view schools not merely as physical structures but as social institutions whose effectiveness depends on security, stability, and uninterrupted learning processes. According to Leoni (2023), education serves as a critical mechanism for developing human capabilities and productive skills necessary for social and economic advancement. This position implies that when schools are exposed to violence and instability, their capacity to fulfil this developmental role becomes impaired.

Similarly, Galindo-Silva and Tchunte (2023) argue that exposure to conflict significantly disrupts educational participation, learning outcomes, and skill acquisition among children. While Leoni's perspective focuses on the developmental function of education, Galindo-Silva and Tchunte emphasise the consequences of violent disruptions on educational attainment. These perspectives collectively suggest that educational institutions become crisis zones when insecurity prevents schools from carrying out their fundamental mandate of knowledge transmission and human development. In the context of this paper, classrooms to crisis zones refer to the transformation of schools and learning environments from secure centres of teaching and learning into spaces characterised by fear, violence, disruption, and educational uncertainty arising from persistent insecurity.

Insecurity

Insecurity is generally understood as a condition in which individuals, groups, or institutions face threats to their safety, wellbeing, stability, and survival. Contemporary security scholars have moved beyond state-centred notions of security to focus on threats affecting human lives and social institutions. Ugwu et al. (2023) contend that insecurity reflects circumstances where individuals are exposed to threats that undermine their freedom from fear and limit their ability to pursue normal social and economic activities.

Similarly, Innes (2023) conceptualises insecurity as a condition of vulnerability arising from exposure to threats and uncertainties capable of disrupting normal life conditions. Although Ugwu et al. emphasise the human security dimension of insecurity, Innes places greater attention on vulnerability and exposure to threats. Both perspectives converge on the idea that insecurity creates an environment in which individuals and institutions cannot function effectively.

However, these definitions remain broad and may not adequately capture the educational implications of insecurity. Within the context of this paper, insecurity is defined as the persistent presence of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, armed conflict, and other violent activities that threaten the safety of learners, teachers, and educational institutions, thereby disrupting the effective delivery of basic education.

Human Capital Formation

Human capital formation refers to the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, competencies, values, and capabilities that enhance their productivity and contribution to society. Human capital remains central to educational and developmental discourse because education is

widely regarded as a primary means through which productive capacities are developed. Leoni (2023) argues that human capital is built through educational investments that improve individuals' productive abilities and opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

Likewise, Kucharcikova et al. (2024) describe human capital as the stock of knowledge, experience, skills, creativity, and competencies possessed by individuals that contribute to organisational and societal development. While Leoni places emphasis on the role of education in expanding human capabilities, Kucharcikova et al. focus on the economic and productive attributes derived from knowledge and experience. Similarly, Omotayo and Ogunniyi (2024) maintain that human capital development involves investments in education and skills acquisition that improve individual and national development outcomes.

These positions collectively underscore the importance of education as a foundation for human capital accumulation. For the purpose of this paper, human capital formation refers to the process through which children acquire the knowledge, skills, competencies, values, and learning outcomes necessary for productive participation in society through sustained access to quality basic education.

Basic Education

Basic education occupies a foundational position in every educational system because it provides learners with essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required for lifelong learning and personal development. Recent educational literature views basic education as the minimum level of formal learning necessary for effective participation in society. Chisunum and Nwadiokwu (2023) define basic education as education that equips learners with fundamental competencies, attitudes, values, and skills that serve as the basis for future learning and development.

Similarly, Nwachukwu (2024) views education at the foundational level as the primary mechanism for developing human resources and promoting sustainable national development. While Chisunum and Nwadiokwu concentrate on the acquisition of basic competencies and learning readiness, Nwachukwu emphasises the developmental significance of foundational education for human capital growth. The two perspectives are complementary because they recognise that foundational learning is essential for individual and societal advancement.

In the context of this paper, basic education refers to the foundational level of formal education comprising primary and junior secondary schooling designed to equip learners with essential literacy, numeracy, cognitive, social, and life skills required for further education and meaningful participation in society.

The Extent to Which Insecurity Affects Access to and Participation in Basic Education in Nigeria

Access to education refers to the ability of children to enrol in, attend, and complete schooling, while participation encompasses regular attendance, engagement in learning activities, progression through educational levels, and completion of prescribed educational programmes. In Nigeria, insecurity has emerged as one of the most significant barriers to both educational access and participation, particularly in regions affected by insurgency, banditry, communal violence, kidnapping, and armed conflict. Recent studies indicate that attacks on schools have altered educational trajectories for millions of children, leading to school closures, displacement, absenteeism, dropout, and reduced enrolment rates (Ojewale, 2024).

The impact became globally visible following the abduction of 276 girls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, in 2014. Although the Chibok incident remains one of the most cited examples, subsequent attacks reveal that educational institutions continue to be targets of violence. The Dapchi schoolgirls' abduction in Yobe State in 2018, the Kankara abduction involving over 300 students in Katsina State in 2020, the Greenfield University kidnapping in Kaduna State in 2021, the Teginia school abduction in Niger State in 2021, and the Kuriga mass abduction in Kaduna State in March 2024 collectively demonstrate the persistence of threats against educational institutions. Reports indicate that 227 pupils were abducted during the Kuriga attack, making it one of the largest school kidnappings since 2021.

The consequence of these attacks extends beyond the immediate victims. Ojewale (2024) argues that bandit attacks on schools in north-western Nigeria have created widespread fear among parents, resulting in reluctance to enrol children in schools located in vulnerable communities. In many rural areas of Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, and Niger States, parents increasingly perceive schooling as a security risk rather than a developmental opportunity. Consequently, school attendance has declined in several conflict-prone communities, particularly among girls who are considered more vulnerable to abduction and sexual violence.

Studies examining educational participation under conflict conditions consistently demonstrate that insecurity disrupts continuity in schooling. Østby, Haer, and Helskog (2026), using evidence from Nigeria, found that attacks on educational institutions significantly reduce school participation and educational outcomes among affected children. Their findings indicate that exposure to attacks generates both immediate and long-term educational disadvantages, including interrupted schooling, learning losses, and reduced progression through educational levels.

Beyond direct attacks, insecurity contributes to the displacement of households and communities. Children displaced by conflict frequently experience prolonged interruptions in education due to relocation, lack of educational facilities, overcrowded classrooms in host communities, and financial hardship. Makinde et al. (2023) demonstrate that childhood exposure to armed conflict in Nigeria is associated with adverse developmental outcomes, highlighting how conflict environments undermine children's wellbeing and educational opportunities.

Teacher participation has also been adversely affected. Fear of attacks has reduced teachers' willingness to accept postings in conflict-affected communities. Schools experiencing teacher shortages often operate below capacity, reducing instructional quality and increasing pupil-teacher ratios. Galindo-Silva and Tchuente (2023), although studying Cameroon, found that conflict increases teacher absenteeism and reduces effective learning time. Similar patterns have been documented across conflict-affected areas of northern Nigeria where insecurity has weakened educational service delivery.

The cumulative effect is the emergence of educational exclusion. Access is no longer determined solely by the availability of schools but increasingly by the ability of communities to guarantee safety. Consequently, insecurity has become a major determinant of educational participation in Nigeria, undermining efforts to achieve universal basic education and widening educational inequalities between conflict-affected and relatively stable regions.

The Impact of Insecurity-Induced Disruptions in Schooling on Human Capital Formation Among School-Age Children in Nigeria

Human capital formation depends fundamentally on sustained investment in education, skill acquisition, cognitive development, and knowledge accumulation. When schooling is disrupted by insecurity, the process through which children acquire productive capacities is weakened. Consequently, insecurity-induced interruptions in education have direct implications for the development of human capital among school-age children.

Recent literature demonstrates that exposure to armed conflict adversely affects educational achievement, cognitive development, health outcomes, and future productivity. Galindo-Silva and Tchunte (2023) found that violent conflict significantly reduced pupils' performance in reading and mathematics and contributed to increased teacher absenteeism. Their findings reinforce the argument that insecurity undermines the acquisition of foundational competencies required for human capital development.

In Nigeria, repeated school closures resulting from insecurity have substantially reduced instructional time. Ojewale (2024) observed that many schools in north-western Nigeria experienced prolonged closures following bandit attacks and threats of kidnapping. Such interruptions reduce curriculum coverage, delay academic progression, and weaken learning outcomes. Children who miss substantial periods of schooling often experience learning losses that persist even after schools reopen.

The Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, Tegna, and Kuriga incidents provide practical illustrations of how insecurity disrupts human capital formation. In each case, educational activities were suspended for extended periods as authorities sought to address security concerns. Beyond the affected schools, neighbouring institutions frequently experienced reduced attendance due to fear among parents and learners. Consequently, educational disruption extended beyond the immediate victims to entire communities.

Human capital formation also depends on physical and psychological wellbeing. Makinde et al. (2023) established that childhood exposure to armed conflict is associated with adverse nutritional outcomes among Nigerian children. Poor nutrition during childhood affects cognitive development, learning capacity, memory retention, and academic performance. Therefore, the effects of insecurity on human capital formation extend beyond classroom disruptions to broader developmental outcomes. Another significant consequence is increased school dropout. Children who remain out of school for prolonged periods are less likely to return to formal education. Girls are particularly vulnerable because insecurity often increases the likelihood of early marriage and domestic responsibilities. Boys may become involved in informal labour, migration, or criminal activities. These outcomes reduce opportunities for skill acquisition and diminish future earning potential.

Empirical evidence further suggests that insecurity contributes to educational inequality. Children from wealthier households may relocate to safer schools or private institutions, while those from poorer households remain trapped in insecure environments. This creates disparities in educational attainment and future labour market outcomes. Human capital accumulation therefore becomes unevenly distributed across regions and social groups.

At the national level, persistent educational disruptions threaten the quality of the future workforce. Human capital theory maintains that educational investment enhances productivity and economic

growth. When insecurity undermines educational attainment, countries experience reduced labour productivity, lower innovation capacity, and slower economic development. The consequences are particularly severe in Nigeria because basic education constitutes the foundation upon which higher levels of education and specialised skills are built. Sustained disruptions therefore weaken the country's future stock of human capital and limit its developmental prospects.

The Implications of Persistent Insecurity for the Future Development and Sustainability of Basic Education in Nigeria

Persistent insecurity presents significant challenges to the future development and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria. Educational sustainability depends on continuous access, quality instruction, adequate infrastructure, teacher availability, community support, and policy stability. Insecurity threatens each of these conditions simultaneously.

One major implication is the normalisation of educational disruption. Frequent attacks and abductions create an environment in which school closures become routine rather than exceptional. Kingsley et al. (2025) argue that repeated attacks on schools contribute to long-term educational instability, reducing confidence in the educational system and undermining efforts to expand access.

Persistent insecurity also threatens educational infrastructure. Schools damaged or destroyed during attacks require substantial resources for reconstruction. In many communities, damaged facilities remain unrepaired for extended periods, reducing educational capacity. Resources that could have been invested in improving educational quality are increasingly diverted towards security measures and emergency responses.

Teacher retention represents another critical concern. Educational systems depend on qualified and motivated teachers. However, insecurity discourages teachers from accepting postings in vulnerable areas and encourages migration from conflict-prone communities. Persistent shortages of qualified teachers reduce educational quality and limit opportunities for effective learning. Studies on conflict and education consistently show that teacher availability declines significantly in insecure environments.

A further implication is the expansion of educational inequality. Regions affected by insecurity experience declining enrolment, lower attendance rates, weaker learning outcomes, and reduced educational investment. Meanwhile, relatively secure regions continue to advance educationally. This divergence widens regional disparities and contributes to unequal development outcomes across the country. Østby et al. (2026) demonstrate that attacks on education generate lasting disadvantages for affected children, suggesting that educational inequalities created by insecurity may persist across generations.

The future sustainability of basic education is also threatened by declining public confidence. When parents perceive schools as unsafe, they may choose not to enrol their children or may withdraw them from formal education altogether. Such decisions undermine enrolment targets and weaken the social legitimacy of educational institutions. In some communities, alternative arrangements such as home-based learning or informal religious education may replace formal schooling, reducing standardisation and quality assurance.

From a developmental perspective, persistent insecurity threatens national human capital accumulation. Education serves as the primary mechanism through which societies develop skilled

workers, professionals, innovators, and civic leaders. If millions of children continue to experience interrupted education, Nigeria may face shortages of skilled labour in critical sectors including healthcare, technology, engineering, and public administration. This could constrain economic growth and weaken national competitiveness.

The sustainability of basic education therefore depends not only on educational policies but also on the restoration of security. Without effective protection of schools, learners, and teachers, efforts aimed at improving enrolment, retention, quality, and learning outcomes may produce limited results. The future of basic education in Nigeria is thus closely linked to the country's ability to address the underlying drivers of insecurity and create safe learning environments capable of supporting uninterrupted educational development.

Empirical Review

Ojewale (2024) conducted a study on *Learning on the Edge: Impacts of Banditry on Education and Strategic Options for Resilience in Northwest Nigeria*. The study was carried out in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, particularly in communities affected by armed banditry and school attacks. The study was anchored on human security and resilience perspectives, which emphasise the protection of individuals and institutions from threats that undermine wellbeing and development. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were generated through interviews, field observations, documentary sources, and survey responses obtained from affected communities, security stakeholders, and education actors. The findings revealed that banditry has significantly disrupted access to education through school closures, mass abductions, forced displacement of learners, declining enrolment, increased absenteeism, and heightened fear among parents and teachers. The study concluded that insecurity has become a major obstacle to educational development in north-western Nigeria and recommended community-based resilience mechanisms alongside improved security interventions.

While the study provides rich evidence on the educational consequences of banditry, its focus was largely restricted to the North-West region and did not sufficiently examine the broader implications of insecurity for human capital formation and the future sustainability of basic education across Nigeria. This constitutes a gap which the current paper addressed.

Galindo-Silva and Tchunte (2023) investigated *Armed Conflict and Early Human Capital Accumulation: Evidence from Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict*. The study was conducted in conflict-affected regions of Cameroon where educational activities had been severely disrupted by armed violence. Human Capital Theory provided the theoretical foundation for the study by explaining the relationship between educational investment and productivity outcomes. The researchers adopted a quantitative research design using longitudinal and administrative educational data collected from schools and households within conflict zones. Data were analysed using econometric estimation techniques to assess the effects of conflict on educational outcomes and human capital accumulation. The findings showed that exposure to armed conflict significantly reduced school attendance, lowered academic achievement in literacy and numeracy, increased teacher absenteeism, and weakened the acquisition of foundational skills among children. The study concluded that prolonged educational disruption caused by insecurity has long-term consequences for human capital development and future economic productivity.

Although the study provides strong empirical evidence on the relationship between insecurity and human capital formation, it was conducted outside Nigeria and within a different socio-political context. The findings may therefore not fully explain the Nigerian experience where school abductions, banditry, terrorism, and attacks on educational institutions have assumed distinctive dimensions. The present paper filled this contextual gap by focusing specifically on Nigeria.

Østby et al. (2026) examined *Children's Schooling in the Context of Attacks on Education: Evidence from Nigeria*. The study focused on conflict-affected areas of Nigeria where schools had experienced attacks by insurgent and armed groups. The study was guided by conflict and education theory, which explains how violent conflict affects educational participation and attainment. A quantitative research design was employed using large-scale educational and conflict-event datasets covering several years. Secondary data relating to school attendance, attacks on educational institutions, educational progression, and conflict incidents were analysed using advanced statistical techniques. The findings revealed that attacks on schools significantly reduced enrolment, attendance, educational progression, and learning outcomes among affected children. The study further established that children residing in communities exposed to school attacks were more likely to experience prolonged educational interruption and lower educational attainment than those in relatively secure communities. The authors concluded that attacks on education generate enduring educational disadvantages capable of extending into adulthood.

Although the study provides important evidence on the educational effects of insecurity, it concentrated primarily on schooling outcomes and did not extensively investigate the broader implications of such disruptions for human capital formation and the future sustainability of basic education. The current study seeks to bridge this gap by examining insecurity, human capital formation, and the future of basic education as interconnected phenomena within the Nigerian context.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was premised on the theoretical foundation of Human Capital Theory as reviewed below:

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was propounded by Theodore Schultz in 1961 and subsequently expanded by Gary Becker in 1964. The theory emerged as a response to the need to explain how investments in education, training, health, and skill acquisition contribute to economic productivity and national development. Schultz argued that expenditure on education should not be viewed merely as consumption but as an investment capable of generating future returns through improved productivity, enhanced skills, and increased earning capacity. Becker further developed the theory by demonstrating that education and training increase the stock of knowledge and competencies possessed by individuals, thereby improving their contribution to economic and social development.

The central assumption of Human Capital Theory is that education constitutes a productive investment that enhances the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, and capabilities of individuals. The theory maintains that societies that invest substantially in education are more likely to experience higher levels of economic growth, technological advancement, social development, and improved standards of living. It further assumes that educational attainment increases the productivity of individuals and prepares them for effective participation in the labour market and

wider society. Human Capital Theory also posits that the accumulation of knowledge and skills begins from the foundational stages of education, making basic education a critical component of national development. The theory therefore views schools as institutions through which human capabilities are developed and transformed into productive resources for society.

One major strength of the theory lies in its recognition of education as a strategic instrument for national development and economic transformation. The theory provides a convincing explanation of the relationship between educational investment and the development of productive human resources. It highlights the importance of basic education in preparing individuals for further learning, skill acquisition, and productive employment. The theory has also been widely applied in educational planning, manpower development, labour economics, and public policy because of its ability to explain how educational outcomes influence economic performance and social progress.

Despite its strengths, the theory has been criticised for placing excessive emphasis on the economic returns of education while paying limited attention to social, cultural, political, and security factors that influence educational outcomes. Critics argue that the theory assumes that educational opportunities are equally accessible to all members of society, whereas structural challenges such as poverty, conflict, inequality, and insecurity often limit access to education. The theory has also been criticised for focusing predominantly on the productive value of education without adequately accounting for its broader role in citizenship development, social integration, and cultural transmission.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Human Capital Theory remains highly relevant to the present study because it provides a direct explanation of how insecurity undermines the educational processes through which human capital is developed. The theory suggests that when insecurity leads to school closures, attacks on educational institutions, abductions of pupils and teachers, displacement of learners, and declining school attendance, the process of human capital formation is disrupted. In the Nigerian context, persistent attacks on schools in states such as Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, and Zamfara have interrupted educational participation and reduced opportunities for the acquisition of foundational knowledge and skills. Such disruptions weaken the capacity of basic education to produce the human resources required for national development. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how insecurity transforms schools from centres of learning into crisis zones, diminishes educational investment, weakens human capital formation, and threatens the future sustainability of basic education in Nigeria. Consequently, Human Capital Theory offers the most suitable theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship between insecurity, educational disruption, human capital development, and the future of basic education as examined in this paper.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this paper revealed that insecurity has significantly affected access to and participation in basic education in Nigeria. Evidence from the review showed that persistent attacks on schools, kidnapping of pupils and teachers, armed banditry, insurgency, and communal violence have transformed many educational institutions from centres of learning into environments characterised by fear and uncertainty. This finding corroborates the position of Ojewale (2024), who observed that banditry in north-western Nigeria has contributed to declining school enrolment, increased absenteeism, school closures, and reduced parental willingness to send children to school.

The finding is further supported by Østby, Haer, and Helskog (2026), whose study established that attacks on educational institutions significantly reduce educational participation and attainment among affected children.

The recurring attacks on schools in Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, Tegna, Greenfield, and Kuriga illustrate how insecurity has become a major obstacle to educational access in Nigeria. These incidents not only disrupted academic activities in the affected schools but also generated widespread fear across neighbouring communities, leading many parents to withdraw their children from formal schooling. The implication is that educational participation is increasingly being determined not by the availability of schools but by the perceived security of the learning environment. This situation undermines national efforts aimed at achieving universal basic education and educational inclusion.

The paper further found that insecurity-induced disruptions in schooling have adversely affected human capital formation among school-age children in Nigeria. The paper indicate that prolonged school closures, displacement of learners, interrupted academic calendars, teacher shortages, and reduced instructional time have weakened the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies required for productive participation in society. This finding aligns with the study by Galindo-Silva and Tchunte (2023), who found that exposure to armed conflict significantly reduced learning outcomes and weakened early human capital accumulation among children. Similarly, Makinde et al. (2023) demonstrated that childhood exposure to armed conflict negatively affects developmental outcomes that are essential for educational achievement and future productivity.

The findings suggest that the effects of insecurity extend beyond educational access to the broader process through which societies develop human resources. When children are denied uninterrupted learning opportunities due to insecurity, the accumulation of literacy, numeracy, cognitive skills, and social competencies becomes compromised. The repeated disruption of educational activities in conflict-affected areas of Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, and Niger States demonstrates how insecurity diminishes opportunities for human capital development. Such disruptions increase the likelihood of school dropout, child labour, early marriage, and youth involvement in criminal activities, thereby reducing the future productive potential of affected children.

The paper also revealed that persistent insecurity poses serious threats to the future development and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria. The review showed that continued attacks on schools undermine educational planning, weaken public confidence in educational institutions, discourage teacher retention, and widen educational inequalities across regions. This finding is consistent with the argument of Yusuf and Yusuf (2025), who maintained that the sustainability of educational development depends largely on the provision of safe and secure learning environments. Likewise, Kingsley et al. (2025) observed that repeated attacks on educational institutions contribute to long-term instability within the educational system and weaken efforts aimed at improving educational quality and access.

The findings indicate that where insecurity persists, educational institutions struggle to function effectively, educational infrastructure deteriorates, and scarce resources are diverted from educational improvement to emergency security responses. Consequently, the future of basic education becomes uncertain, particularly in communities where insecurity has become entrenched. The widening educational gap between conflict-affected regions and relatively peaceful areas

further suggests that insecurity may contribute to long-term inequalities in educational attainment and socioeconomic opportunities.

Furthermore, the findings of this paper strongly support the assumptions of Human Capital Theory propounded by Schultz (1961) and later expanded by Becker (1964). The theory posits that education constitutes an investment through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies that enhance productivity and contribute to national development. The findings demonstrate that insecurity undermines this investment by disrupting the educational processes necessary for human capital formation. The closure of schools, abduction of learners, displacement of communities, and interruption of academic activities reduce opportunities for educational attainment and skill acquisition. As a result, the stock of human capital required for economic growth and social development becomes weakened. The experiences of communities affected by the Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, Tegin, and Kuriga incidents provide practical illustrations of this theoretical proposition. In each case, educational activities were disrupted, learners were displaced, and opportunities for knowledge acquisition were significantly reduced. These outcomes validate the central assumption of Human Capital Theory that educational investment is essential for developing productive human capabilities and that any factor capable of disrupting education will inevitably affect human capital development.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce Schultz's argument that education should be viewed as an investment rather than mere consumption because the consequences of educational disruption extend beyond individual learners to the broader society. When insecurity prevents children from acquiring foundational education, the country risks producing a future workforce with inadequate skills and competencies. This has implications for labour productivity, innovation, economic competitiveness, and national development. The theory therefore provides a convincing explanation for the observed relationship between insecurity, educational disruption, and weakened human capital formation in Nigeria. The findings ultimately suggest that efforts to improve basic education and strengthen human capital development cannot succeed without addressing the security challenges that continue to threaten educational institutions across the country. Sustainable educational development requires not only increased investment in educational infrastructure and learning resources but also the creation of safe environments in which teaching and learning can take place without fear of violence or disruption.

CONCLUSIONS

Arising from the above discussions, the paper concluded that the future of any nation is largely determined by the quality of education available to its children and the extent to which such education contributes to the development of human capital capable of driving social and economic progress. The transformation of schools from centres of learning into targets of violence and insecurity poses a profound threat to Nigeria's developmental aspirations because it weakens the very foundation upon which knowledge, skills, values, and productive capacities are built. The persistence of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and other forms of armed violence against educational institutions has created conditions that discourage school attendance, disrupt learning processes, diminish educational attainment, and undermine the formation of human capital required for national development.

Beyond the immediate educational consequences, the continued erosion of safe learning spaces threatens to widen regional inequalities, increase educational exclusion, perpetuate poverty, and reduce the country's capacity to produce a skilled and competitive workforce. As insecurity continues to redefine the educational experiences of millions of Nigerian children, the challenge extends beyond safeguarding schools to protecting the future productive potential of an entire generation. Addressing insecurity within the education sector is therefore not merely an educational necessity but a strategic national imperative for sustaining human capital development, strengthening social stability, and securing the long-term future of basic education in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Federal and State Governments, in collaboration with security agencies and local communities, should institutionalise a comprehensive Safe Schools Security Framework that includes the deployment of trained school protection personnel, installation of early warning and surveillance systems, regular security risk assessments, and the establishment of rapid-response mechanisms in vulnerable communities to prevent attacks on educational institutions and guarantee uninterrupted access to basic education.
2. Government should implement targeted educational recovery programmes in insecurity-affected areas through the provision of alternative learning centres, psychosocial support services, accelerated learning initiatives, and special scholarship schemes for displaced and vulnerable children in order to minimise learning losses and strengthen human capital formation among school-age children whose education has been disrupted by conflict and violence.
3. Federal and State Ministries of Education should integrate security-sensitive educational planning into basic education policies by prioritising the reconstruction of damaged schools, incentivising teacher deployment and retention in high-risk areas through special allowances and insurance packages, and strengthening community participation in school governance to enhance the sustainability, resilience, and future development of basic education in conflict-prone regions of Nigeria.

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