



FROM RURAL INSECURITY TO AN EDUCATION EMERGENCY: THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT AND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Persistent insecurity continues to pose a major constraint on educational access in Nigeria's Northwest. The paper examined the evolution of insecurity and its educational consequences in Sokoto State from 2010 to August 2026 using historical documentary analysis and an outcome-based process tracing approach. Evidence revealed four phases: escalating rural violence from 2010 to 2014; consolidation of banditry and kidnapping from 2015 to 2019; institutional recognition of school safety from 2020 to 2023; and documented school abductions, closures, displacement, and emergency education responses from 2024 to August 2026. The analysis showed that insecurity, poverty, and weak educational capacity disrupted schooling through fear, restricted mobility, closures, displacement, teacher pressures, and psychosocial distress. Seven school closures in 2024 and an emergency education programme targeting over 25,000 affected children in 2026 demonstrated the severity of the crisis. The paper recommended integrated school safety, early warning, displacement sensitive planning, remedial learning, psychosocial support, teacher resilience, and sustained support for affected schools and communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is both a human right and a foundation for human development, yet its availability and continuity are especially fragile where armed violence, forced displacement and weak public institutions intersect. Education Cannot Wait estimated that 234 million crisis-affected school-age children required urgent support to access quality education at the end of 2024, including 85 million who were out of school (Education Cannot Wait [ECW], 2025). The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2026) subsequently documented 8,566 attacks on education globally during 2024–2025, more than 40% above the preceding two-year period. Nigeria was among the countries reporting the highest numbers of persons harmed in attacks on education, and more than 700 students and education personnel were reportedly abducted nationally during the period. These trends reinforce a central proposition

of education-in-emergencies scholarship: conflict affects education not only by destroying schools or directly attacking learners, but also through fear, displacement, institutional decline, household impoverishment, teacher withdrawal and the erosion of routine educational governance (Burde et al., 2017; Almoayad et al., 2024; Mousse & Mosisa, 2026).

Nigeria's Northwest has become an important setting for examining these mechanisms. The region has experienced a sustained expansion of armed banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling, intercommunal violence and population displacement. Ojo et al. (2023) describe Northwest banditry as a multidimensional security crisis shaped by weak institutional capacity, poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, resource competition, under-governed rural spaces and the proliferation of armed groups. Ojewale (2024) demonstrates that schools and learners have become particularly vulnerable within this environment, linking banditry to deaths, fear, reduced enrolment, abandonment of educational facilities and forced displacement. Nationally, causal research also shows that conflict can substantially reduce educational attainment, although the magnitude depends on the type of conflict and how it interacts with households and institutions (Ajogbeje & Sylwester, 2024). Evidence from other conflict settings similarly cautions against reducing educational harm to physical proximity to violence alone: conflict-induced institutional and economic shocks may affect attendance even when violence itself is geographically distant (Almoayad et al., 2024).

Sokoto State provides a theoretically and policy-relevant case. The state combines high structural educational vulnerability with increasing exposure to regional insecurity. The 2022 Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index placed Sokoto at the highest state-level incidence of multidimensional poverty, approximately 91% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). A recent administrative education snapshot also points to substantial system pressure: the Federal Ministry of Education's 2024/2025 digital school census reports 1,212,573 learners in Sokoto, a learner–teacher ratio of 65.2, a learner–classroom ratio of 82.4, and a learner–toilet ratio of 269.4; these figures should be interpreted cautiously because the national reporting rate of the digital census was 57.9% (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2026). Such conditions matter analytically because the same security shock may produce very different educational effects in a well-resourced system than in one already operating with shortages of staff, classrooms, sanitation and household resources.

The problem is no longer hypothetical. UNICEF's 2024 humanitarian reporting documented seven Sokoto schools closed because of insecurity and one school reportedly occupied by the military (UNICEF, 2025a). In March 2024, schoolchildren were abducted from a Tsangaya school at Gidan Bakuso in Gada Local Government Area (LGA), demonstrating that educational spaces themselves had become exposed to kidnapping (European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2026). Displacement has also intensified: IOM recorded 94,729 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sokoto in its December 2023 assessment, a substantial increase from the previous round (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024),

while later reporting placed the state's IDP population at approximately 99,729 by February 2025, with armed banditry and kidnapping identified as the dominant drivers (EUAA, 2026). A single banditry and kidnapping incident in five communities of Isa LGA in May 2025 affected 8,219 people and triggered movement both within Sokoto and into neighbouring Zamfara State (IOM, 2025a).

Despite this evidence, an identifiable gap remains. Much of the scholarship on conflict and education in Nigeria concentrates either on the Boko Haram-affected Northeast, national-level effects, or the Northwest as a regional aggregate (Bertoni et al., 2019; Ajogbeje & Sylwester, 2024; Ojewale, 2024). Regional analyses are indispensable, but they can obscure how the crisis develops within a particular state, how the evidentiary record changes over time, and how educational governance moves from ordinary development planning to emergency-oriented response. A subnational historical analysis is therefore valuable not because Sokoto is isolated from regional dynamics, but because it shows how regional violence is translated into local educational exclusion through specific institutional and social mechanisms.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Insecurity has increasingly become a serious threat to educational access and continuity in Northwestern Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto State, where armed banditry, kidnapping, displacement and threats to schools have disrupted the provision of education. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2025) reported that insecurity and armed violence in Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina had forced schools to close, disrupted learning and displaced children and teachers. UNICEF (2024) also reported school closures in Sokoto because of insecurity, demonstrating that the disruption had become a significant education concern. More recent evidence indicates that the problem has persisted. UNICEF (2026) reported continuing disruptions to education arising from conflict and displacement in Sokoto, while the Sokoto State Government (2026) acknowledged that insecurity had affected educational infrastructure and appealed for expanded support to restore essential services in affected communities.

Recent newspaper reporting has similarly documented the continued closure of schools in parts of Sokoto because of fears of abduction (The Guardian, 2026). At the national level, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2026) continues to document attacks on education in Nigeria, highlighting the vulnerability of learners, teachers and educational institutions in conflict-affected areas. Despite this growing evidence, existing reports largely document individual attacks, school closures, displacement and humanitarian responses rather than systematically explaining how insecurity in Sokoto State has historically transformed from indirect rural conflict into a sustained education emergency. The problem addressed by this paper, therefore, is the need to examine this historical transformation and its implications for educational access, continuity, institutional capacity and the ability of the education system to remain functional amid recurrent insecurity.

PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS

The paper, in a nutshell, seeks to historically examine the transformation of insecurity and its implications for educational access and continuity in Sokoto State, Nigeria, from 2010 to August 2026. Specifically, the paper seeks to trace changes in the nature and geographical spread of insecurity; examine the mechanisms through which banditry, kidnapping, displacement, school closures, restricted mobility, institutional capacity constraints and psychosocial distress have affected educational access; and analyse the evolution of government and development-partner responses from conventional education provision and school-safety measures toward an education-in-emergencies approach. By integrating historical evidence, documentary analysis and process tracing, the paper aims to explain how pre-existing structural vulnerabilities, particularly poverty and limited educational capacity, have amplified the educational consequences of recurrent insecurity and to identify implications for strengthening safe, continuous and resilient education provision in conflict-affected communities in Sokoto State.

Therefore, the paper advances three contributions. First, it constructs a cautious historical periodisation of insecurity and educational access in Sokoto between 2010 and August 2026, explicitly distinguishing Northwest-wide evidence from Sokoto-specific evidence. Second, it develops a conflict-amplification framework that explains why security shocks may generate disproportionate educational harm where poverty and educational capacity constraints are already severe. Third, it interprets the emergence of safe-school interventions, displacement-sensitive learning support and the April 2026 EU–UNICEF programme as evidence of an institutional transition from conventional education provision toward an education-in-emergencies approach.

CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis combines education-in-emergencies scholarship with a multidimensional understanding of educational access. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE, 2024) defines education in emergencies as quality learning opportunities provided in crisis settings, including conflict, protracted violence, forced displacement, disasters and public-health emergencies, with education serving physical, psychosocial and cognitive protective functions. This definition is useful because it shifts analysis away from a narrow binary of “school open” versus “school closed.” A school may formally remain open while access is substantively constrained by unsafe travel, irregular attendance, teacher absence, displacement, household fear, infrastructure congestion or psychosocial distress.

Accordingly, educational access is treated here as comprising at least five interrelated dimensions: availability of functioning learning spaces; physical and social accessibility; continuity and regularity of participation; institutional capacity to provide instruction; and the capability of learners to remain meaningfully engaged. This multidimensional conception is

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consistent with evidence showing that conflict affects schooling through diverse pathways. In Northeast Nigeria, sustained exposure to insurgency reduced enrolment and years of schooling (Bertoni et al., 2019). At national level, Ajogbeje and Sylwester (2024) find that conflict type matters, with repeated farmer–herder conflict events producing substantial educational losses. In Yemen, Almoayad et al. (2024) show that direct changes in local violence did not always immediately alter attendance, whereas institutional deterioration associated with conflict—such as a teacher strike—could sharply reduce attendance. The implication is that the educational effect of insecurity depends on mediating institutions and household responses as well as the incidence of violence itself.

This article therefore proposes a conflict-amplification framework. The framework begins with structural vulnerability: poverty, rural remoteness, limited school infrastructure, high learner–teacher ratios and weak household shock-absorption capacity. A security shock—bandit attack, kidnapping, threat, road insecurity or displacement—then activates proximate mechanisms. These include risk perceptions and parental withdrawal, restricted mobility, temporary or prolonged school closure, forced displacement, loss or redeployment of teachers, pressure on receiving schools, damage or military use of educational facilities, and psychosocial distress. These mechanisms affect the availability, accessibility, continuity and quality of education. Institutional response can either amplify or mitigate the outcome. Early-warning systems, safe-school protocols, alternative learning arrangements, psychosocial support, accelerated education, teacher support and social protection can reduce the translation of insecurity into long-term educational exclusion.

The framework is deliberately explanatory rather than deterministic. It does not assume that every security incident automatically reduces enrolment, nor that all displaced learners permanently leave school. Instead, it directs attention to causal pathways and the conditions under which an external security shock becomes an education-system crisis. In Sokoto, this approach is especially pertinent because insecurity has developed within a context of already-high multidimensional poverty and significant educational resource pressure (NBS, 2022; FME, 2026).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a historical documentary design combined with explaining-outcome process tracing. Process tracing is appropriate where the objective is to reconstruct how a sequence of events and mechanisms contributes to an observed outcome within a case, rather than merely establish covariance between variables (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). The outcome to be explained is the transformation of insecurity from a broader rural and regional security problem into a systemic constraint on educational access in Sokoto State.

Source identification and scope

The evidentiary window covers January 2010 to 31 August 2026. A small number of pre-2020 sources were retained where they provide foundational theory, methods or evidence on conflict and education; however, the analysis prioritises material published from 2021 onward. Searches were conducted across publisher platforms and the public repositories of the Federal Ministry of Education, National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, INEE, GCPEA, EUAA and relevant Nigerian government sources. Search combinations included “Sokoto” or “Northwest Nigeria” with terms such as “banditry,” “kidnapping,” “displacement,” “school closure,” “school attack,” “education access,” “safe schools,” “education in emergencies,” “teacher,” and “school safety.” Cross-reference chaining was used to identify influential earlier studies and policy documents.

Because the study is an explanatory historical case analysis rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis, the objective was not exhaustive retrieval of every publication. Instead, sources were selected for temporal relevance, evidentiary authority, geographic specificity and their capacity to illuminate the proposed mechanisms. Priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies; official federal and state policy or administrative sources; intergovernmental humanitarian and displacement assessments; and reports with explicit methodology or identifiable data provenance. News reporting was used only where necessary to corroborate dated events and was not used to estimate prevalence.

Triangulation and evidence hierarchy

The analysis applied a three-level evidence hierarchy. First-tier evidence included official administrative records, IOM displacement assessments, UNICEF humanitarian and school-safety monitoring, federal policy documents and peer-reviewed empirical studies. Second-tier evidence comprised reputable intergovernmental security syntheses that draw on multiple datasets and documented incident reporting. Third-tier evidence included credible media accounts used to corroborate specific events. Claims were retained only when they were either directly supported by a first-tier source or could be triangulated across sources.

A critical rule was geographic discipline. Evidence about Northwest Nigeria was not automatically attributed to Sokoto. Regional findings were used to establish the wider conflict ecology within which Sokoto is situated, while Sokoto-specific claims required explicit state or LGA-level documentation. This distinction is particularly important for the earlier phases of the periodisation, when direct documentation of educational consequences in Sokoto is much thinner than regional documentation of violence.

Coding and process-tracing logic

Documents were read and coded against predetermined analytical categories: changing forms

of insecurity; geographical diffusion; attacks or threats affecting schools; school closure; learner displacement; enrolment and attendance; teacher availability and retention; infrastructure; military use; psychosocial consequences; gender and vulnerability; government response; community coping; and education-continuity interventions. The material was then organised chronologically to identify turning points and mechanism sequences.

Four phases were constructed inductively from the convergence of the documentary record. The first two phases primarily capture the evolution of the wider regional security environment and its gradual encroachment on Sokoto. The third marks institutional recognition of school safety and resilience as an education governance problem. The fourth is supported by direct Sokoto evidence of school abduction, closure, displacement and dedicated emergency-education programming. These phases should therefore be understood as analytical periods rather than rigid historical boundaries.

Methodological cautions

The design does not estimate a causal effect size of insecurity on enrolment or attainment. Documentary sources vary in coverage, definitions and sampling frames. IOM figures capture assessed displacement locations rather than every population movement, while UNICEF's 2023 Minimum Standards for Safe Schools monitoring was a pilot involving schools with ongoing UNICEF education programming and is not a representative census of every school in Sokoto (UNICEF, 2024). Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Education's 2024/2025 digital census had incomplete national reporting (FME, 2026). These data are therefore used to establish patterns, system pressure and plausible mechanisms, not to claim precise statewide causal magnitudes.

HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF INSECURITY AND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Phase I: Early regional escalation and indirect educational exposure (2010–2014)

The beginning of the analytical period is characterised by a critical evidentiary asymmetry. Northwest Nigerian scholarship documents the escalation of intercommunal violence, cattle rustling, rural criminality and armed-group activity from approximately 2011, but the available record provides relatively limited Sokoto-specific documentation of school disruption during these early years (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020; Ojo et al., 2023). It would therefore be methodologically unsound to retrospectively describe Sokoto's education system as already experiencing the same directly documented school-targeting pattern that became visible a decade later.

Nevertheless, this period matters because it established the regional conflict ecology from which later insecurity diffused. ICG (2020) traced the Northwest crisis to intertwined farmer–

herder tensions, criminal violence, weak policing, arms availability and rural governance deficits. Ojo et al. (2023) likewise identify escalating violence across northern farming and herding communities, under-governed spaces and weak state capacity as enabling conditions. Sokoto's borders with Zamfara, Kebbi and the Niger Republic make the state inseparable from this regional political geography: insecurity is mobile, armed actors operate across administrative boundaries, and household risk is affected by road networks, markets, grazing routes and displacement flows rather than state borders alone.

The educational significance of this phase is thus best interpreted as indirect exposure. When rural insecurity increases, education can be affected before schools themselves become targets: households alter travel, pastoral and farming livelihoods are disrupted, teachers may avoid remote postings, and community resources are diverted toward security and survival. The historical record available for Sokoto does not allow these pathways to be quantified for 2010–2014, but subsequent evidence shows how these same mechanisms later became observable and institutionally recognised.

Phase II: Consolidation and regional diffusion of organised banditry (2015–2019)

During the second phase, Northwest insecurity increasingly shifted from localised disputes and opportunistic criminality toward organised banditry, kidnapping for ransom, village raids and larger-scale displacement. The literature emphasises that this transformation was not driven by a single cause or actor. Rather, criminal economies, weapons proliferation, youth marginalisation, weak rural governance, resource disputes and the strategic use of difficult terrain combined to create a fluid ecosystem of armed groups (ICG, 2020; Ojo et al., 2023).

Educational risk correspondingly became more systemic. A school does not need to be directly attacked for banditry to reduce access. As kidnapping becomes a routine threat, the perceived cost of children travelling to school rises; as communities are raided, family mobility and livelihoods become unstable; and as rural areas become harder to serve, teacher deployment and supervision become more difficult. Ojewale's (2024) later regional analysis identifies fear, decreasing enrolment, abandonment of educational facilities and displacement as principal education effects of banditry, mechanisms whose roots lie in this earlier regional consolidation.

Direct Sokoto education data remain limited in this phase, and this limitation is substantively important. It suggests that the educational consequences of insecurity may initially develop as dispersed household and community adaptations that are poorly captured by routine education statistics. A central implication is that waiting for school attack counts alone may underestimate the onset of educational insecurity.

Phase III: School safety becomes an institutional governance problem (2020–2023)

The third phase is marked by a change in institutional response. By 2020, regional banditry had

become sufficiently severe for policy analysis to describe Northwest violence as a major national security crisis (ICG, 2020). At the education-sector level, Nigeria's National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools and its implementing guidelines formalised a whole-school approach to safeguarding in 2021 (FME, 2021). The Minimum Standards for Safe Schools subsequently specified that schooling should continue during armed conflict, that schools should develop risk-management and early-warning arrangements, and that military use of learning institutions should be avoided (FME, 2022). This policy evolution is significant: it recognises that educational access under insecurity depends on preparedness, continuity and institutional resilience, not only on conventional school expansion.

UNICEF's monitoring of the Minimum Standards provides the first detailed school-safety snapshot for Sokoto in the period examined. The pilot monitoring covered schools with UNICEF education interventions and therefore should not be treated as a representative statewide census. Even with that caveat, the findings indicate pronounced implementation gaps. At the end of 2023, Sokoto's average score across the six school-safety result areas was 26%. The state recorded a relatively high 67% score in the conflict result area, reflecting improvement in selected conflict-related indicators, but performance remained low in five of six areas. None of the monitored Sokoto schools reached the report's threshold of 70% or higher overall, and Sokoto met only five of 21 minimum standards on average (UNICEF, 2024).

This apparent paradox (i.e relative improvement in selected conflict indicators but very low overall safety readiness) is analytically revealing. A school may have a school-based management committee trained in safety or procedures for continuity during conflict while still lacking strong systems, natural-hazard preparedness, everyday-hazard protection or adequate infrastructure. The UNICEF report itself warns that the improvement in Sokoto's conflict result area was not mirrored across other areas. In other words, security preparedness cannot be separated from the broader institutional capacity of the education system.

The structural context reinforces this point. The NBS (2022) multidimensional poverty profile shows exceptionally high deprivation in Sokoto, while current education administration data indicate high learner–teacher and learner–classroom ratios (FME, 2026). Security shocks therefore encounter a system with limited slack. A displaced cohort entering a receiving school, for example, does not enter an empty institutional space; it enters classrooms and staffing arrangements that may already be stretched.

Phase IV: Directly documented education emergency (2024–August 2026)

The fourth phase represents the clearest transition from indirect educational exposure to directly documented crisis. In March 2024, at least 15 pupils were abducted from a Tsangaya school in Gidan Bakuso, Gada LGA; the incident was later followed by the recovery of the abducted students and an adult woman (EUAA, 2026). The event matters not merely as an

isolated crime but as a change in target: a learning space and its pupils had become entangled directly in the economics and tactics of kidnapping.

School closure evidence became equally explicit. UNICEF's 2024 humanitarian situation report recorded 19 insecurity-related school closures across the Northwest states covered in that section, including seven in Sokoto, and reported one Sokoto school occupied by the military. The same report stated that 3,352 school-based management committee members in Sokoto and Zamfara received training on the Safe Schools Declaration, school management and disaster-risk reduction (UNICEF, 2025a). The coexistence of closure and capacity-building illustrates the dual character of the period: acute disruption was occurring at the same time that institutional resilience mechanisms were being developed.

Displacement intensified the education challenge. IOM's March 2024 atlas identified 94,729 IDPs in Sokoto, up from 67,936 in the preceding comparison period (IOM, 2024). UNICEF reported that attacks in Isa LGA in April 2024 displaced nearly 6,000 people and that Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina together hosted more than half a million IDPs resulting from armed violence by the end of 2024 (UNICEF, 2025a). EUAA's 2026 synthesis, drawing on IOM, places Sokoto's IDP population at approximately 99,729 in February 2025 and identifies armed banditry/kidnapping as the principal driver of displacement (EUAA, 2026). On 11 May 2025 alone, an incident affecting Bafarawa, Kagara, Arume, Gebe and Kamarawa communities in Isa LGA affected 8,219 individuals and displaced households both internally and across the Zamfara border (IOM, 2025a).

The effects continued into 2025. UNICEF's end-of-year humanitarian report notes that persistent insecurity led Sokoto and several other Northwest states to temporarily close schools as a preventive measure (UNICEF, 2026a). Such preventive closure illustrates a central mechanism of educational exclusion: schooling can be interrupted not because a school has been physically attacked, but because authorities and households anticipate unacceptable risk.

By 2026, the response itself had changed in character. In April, the European Union's humanitarian arm and UNICEF announced a EUR1 million programme targeting more than 25,000 conflict-affected children aged 5–17 living in IDP camps and host communities in Sokoto. The intervention includes accelerated learning for out-of-school children, remedial support for enrolled learners, safe-school practices, crisis-sensitive teacher development, WASH, life skills, mental-health and psychosocial support, and measures to strengthen system resilience (UNICEF, 2026b). In July 2026, Sokoto State Government also publicly acknowledged that insecurity and banditry had damaged schools and health facilities in parts of the state and appealed for expanded reconstruction support (Sokoto State Government, 2026).

Therefore, these developments justify using “education emergency” as an analytical description of the contemporary phase, not as a claim that Sokoto has been formally declared

under a specific legal emergency classification. The defining feature is that routine education planning is no longer sufficient: safety, displacement, psychosocial support, accelerated learning, host-community capacity and humanitarian-development coordination have become integral to maintaining access.

Table 1: Historical periodisation of insecurity and educational access in Sokoto State

Period	Security transformation	Educational significance	Illustrative evidence
2010–2014	Regional escalation of rural violence, cattle rustling, intercommunal insecurity and emerging armed groups.	Primarily indirect exposure; Sokoto-specific school-disruption evidence remains thin.	ICG (2020); Ojo et al. (2023)
2015–2019	Consolidation and diffusion of organised banditry, kidnapping and village raids across the Northwest.	Fear, mobility and teacher-deployment risks become more plausible system pressures; direct Sokoto education data still limited.	ICG (2020); Ojo et al. (2023); Ojewale (2024)
2020–2023	Banditry recognised as a sustained regional security crisis; school safety becomes formal policy concern.	National safe-school policy and monitoring; end-2023 Sokoto pilot shows major implementation gaps.	FME (2021, 2022); UNICEF (2024)
2024–Aug. 2026	Direct attacks/abductions, repeated displacement, preventive closures and continuing banditry.	School abduction; seven Sokoto closures in 2024; displacement pressure; facility damage; dedicated EiE programme.	UNICEF (2025a, 2026a, 2026b); IOM (2024, 2025a); EUAA (2026); Sokoto State Government (2026)

MECHANISMS LINKING INSECURITY TO EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION

The historical sequence indicates that insecurity constrains educational access through interacting mechanisms rather than a single direct pathway. These mechanisms help explain

why the educational consequences can persist beyond the duration of an individual attack.

1. **Direct Attack, Threat, and Anticipatory Fear:** The most visible mechanism is direct exposure of learners or educational spaces to violence and kidnapping. The Gidan Bakuso abduction demonstrates this pathway in Sokoto, while GCPEA's national evidence shows that abduction of students and education personnel has become a major protection concern in Nigeria (GCPEA, 2026). Yet the larger educational effect may come through anticipation. Once parents believe that schools or journeys to school create kidnapping risk, attendance decisions change even in communities not directly attacked. Ojewale (2024) identifies fear as one of the major effects of banditry on education across the Northwest. Thus, the security incident and the social memory of the incident are both educationally consequential.
2. **School Closure, Mobility Restrictions, and Lost Instructional Time:** Temporary closure is a rational short-term protection response, but repeated closure transforms protection into lost instructional time. UNICEF's documentation of seven Sokoto school closures in 2024 and further temporary closures in 2025 provides direct evidence of this mechanism (UNICEF, 2025a, 2026a). Road insecurity can produce similar effects by making regular travel unsafe for learners, teachers and inspectors. The mechanism is cumulative: missed days become learning loss, re-entry becomes harder, and some learners may never return after prolonged interruption. Research from Nigeria and other conflict settings shows that repeated conflict exposure can reduce educational attainment, but that institutional disruption can be as important as the immediate violence itself (Ajogbeje & Sylwester, 2024; Almoayad et al., 2024).
3. **Forced Displacement and Pressure on Receiving Schools:** Displacement affects both origin and destination communities. In the community of origin, an attack can empty classrooms, remove teachers and break continuity. In the receiving community, displaced children require places, teachers, materials, sanitation and psychosocial support. IOM evidence shows that most displaced people in the North-Central and Northwest zones live with host communities rather than in formal camps, making the pressure on ordinary public services particularly important (IOM, 2025b). The May 2025 Isa displacement illustrates how a single incident can rapidly redistribute households across wards and even state boundaries (IOM, 2025a). This mechanism is especially consequential in Sokoto because administrative indicators already point to high learner–teacher and learner–classroom ratios (FME, 2026). Displacement can therefore create a double burden: conflict reduces access in areas of origin while simultaneously congesting education provision in safer receiving areas. The 2026 EU–UNICEF programme's explicit focus on both IDP camps and host communities reflects recognition of this dual pressure (UNICEF, 2026b).

4. **Teacher Availability and Institutional Capacity:** Teachers mediate whether a school can translate formal reopening into meaningful learning. Conflict can produce absenteeism, reluctance to accept remote postings, displacement of staff, shortened teaching hours and difficulties in supervision. The Sokoto documentary record does not provide sufficiently consistent teacher-level longitudinal data to quantify conflict-attributable teacher losses. Nevertheless, broader evidence shows that teacher shortages and weak trauma-sensitive preparation are recurrent constraints in conflict and displacement settings (Mousse & Mosisa, 2026). In Sokoto, a high learner–teacher ratio indicates that even modest staff disruption could have disproportionate consequences (FME, 2026). The same logic applies to school management. UNICEF’s safe-school monitoring found that Sokoto’s overall implementation remained weak despite improvement in selected conflict-related standards (UNICEF, 2024). Resilience therefore depends not only on security personnel but on functioning school committees, risk plans, early-warning systems, referral pathways, continuity arrangements and local administrative capacity.
5. **Infrastructure Damage, Military Use, and the Availability of Learning Space:** Insecurity can reduce education supply by damaging school buildings or converting them to other uses. Sokoto State Government reported in July 2026 that banditry had damaged several schools and health facilities in affected areas (Sokoto State Government, 2026). UNICEF also reported one Sokoto school occupied by the military in 2024 (UNICEF, 2025a). Military use is important because it can interrupt schooling and may alter how communities and armed actors perceive the civilian character of educational facilities. Nigeria’s Minimum Standards for Safe Schools explicitly emphasise non-militarisation and the continuation of schooling during conflict (FME, 2022).
6. **Psychosocial Distress and Learning Readiness:** Educational access is incomplete if a child is physically present but psychologically unable to participate. Exposure to violent attack, abduction, displacement or persistent fear can impair concentration, sense of safety and engagement. Systematic evidence from conflict-affected settings links displacement and violence to psychosocial trauma and poorer educational outcomes, while highlighting trauma-sensitive teaching and school-based psychosocial support as important resilience measures (Mousse & Mosisa, 2026). Direct Sokoto measures of learner trauma remain scarce, so this article does not estimate prevalence. However, the inclusion of mental-health and psychosocial support in the 2026 Sokoto emergency-education programme indicates that implementing agencies recognise this mechanism as operationally relevant (UNICEF, 2026b).
7. **Structural Poverty and Unequal Capacity to Absorb Shocks:** Security shocks do not fall on equal households. Sokoto’s exceptionally high multidimensional poverty

incidence means that many families have little financial capacity to respond to displacement, transport costs, lost livelihoods or alternative schooling (NBS, 2022). This generates feedback loops. Insecurity can reduce farming, trade and household income; falling income increases the opportunity cost of keeping children in school; interrupted schooling lowers future human capital; and low human capital may reproduce economic vulnerability. The conflict-amplification framework therefore treats poverty not simply as a background statistic but as a mechanism that magnifies the educational consequences of insecurity. Gender and other forms of vulnerability require particular monitoring. Crisis-affected girls, displaced children and children with disabilities face elevated risks globally (ECW, 2025; GCPEA, 2026). However, the available Sokoto documentary corpus does not permit a robust estimate of gender-differential causal effects of insecurity. Policy should therefore avoid assuming uniform impacts and instead build gender-, disability- and displacement-disaggregated monitoring into emergency education planning.

Table 2: Mechanisms Linking Insecurity to Educational Exclusion

Mechanism	Observations	Consequence	Inference
Direct attack and fear	Gidan Bakuso schoolchild abduction, March 2024.	Parental risk aversion, irregular attendance, avoidance of exposed schools/routes.	Direct event; broader behavioural pathway supported by Northwest research.
Closure and mobility	Seven Sokoto schools closed for insecurity in 2024; preventive closures reported again in 2025. 94,729 IDPs recorded in Sokoto in Dec. 2023 assessment;	Lost instructional time, delayed re-entry, potential dropout.	Direct administrative/humanitarian documentation.
Displacement	8,219 people affected by May 2025 Isa incident.	Loss of origin-school continuity and congestion of receiving schools.	Direct displacement evidence; school-pressure pathway analytically inferred.
Institutional capacity	Low overall safe-school implementation; high learner–teacher and classroom ratios.	Reduced capacity to absorb shocks and displaced learners.	Triangulated administrative evidence.
Infrastructure/military use	One school reported occupied by military in 2024; state reports school damage in 2026.	Reduced learning-space availability and altered protection environment.	Direct reported evidence; scale not quantified.
Psychosocial distress	PSS explicitly included in 2026 conflict-affected education response.	Reduced concentration, engagement and readiness to learn.	Mechanism supported by wider EiE research; Sokoto prevalence unknown.

FROM ROUTINE EDUCATION PROVISION TO EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

The evolution of policy response is itself evidence of historical transformation. In the early phases, insecurity was primarily addressed as a security and rural-governance problem. By

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2021–2022, school safety had become formalised through national education policy and minimum standards (FME, 2021, 2022). By 2023, monitoring instruments were assessing whether schools possessed early-warning systems, procedures for continuity during conflict, mechanisms to prevent military use and functioning safety governance (UNICEF, 2024). By 2024–2026, interventions in Sokoto were explicitly addressing displacement, alternative access, psychosocial support and system resilience.

This progression reflects the core logic of education in emergencies. INEE (2024) frames emergency education as learning provision that offers cognitive, physical and psychosocial protection in crises. The April 2026 Sokoto programme closely maps onto that architecture: accelerated learning for children outside formal schooling, remediation for those who have fallen behind, crisis-sensitive teacher preparation, WASH and safe-school measures, psychosocial support and system-strengthening (UNICEF, 2026b). The response is therefore not simply “more schooling”; it is a different configuration of education designed around crisis-related barriers.

Three points follow:

1. Safe-school policy must be judged by operational capacity rather than formal adoption. UNICEF’s 2023 pilot demonstrates that Nigeria can possess strong national policy while individual states and schools still struggle to meet implementation standards (UNICEF, 2024).
2. Emergency response must protect learning continuity, not only school buildings. Closure may sometimes be necessary, but alternative timetables, temporary learning spaces, radio or digital learning, accelerated programmes and structured re-entry are needed to prevent temporary protection from becoming permanent educational exclusion.
3. Host communities require explicit financing and capacity support. Where IDPs predominantly reside within communities rather than camps, emergency education cannot operate as a separate humanitarian enclave; it must strengthen the public schools absorbing displaced learners.

The evidence therefore supports a humanitarian-development nexus approach. Security agencies, education authorities, social-protection institutions, community organisations and humanitarian partners have different but interdependent roles. Security without continuity planning may keep a building safe but leave learners out of school. Accelerated learning without route safety may fail to attract attendance. Psychosocial services without sufficient teachers and classrooms may not translate into learning. The education emergency is systemic precisely because the mechanisms are interconnected.

DISCUSSION

The principal historical finding is that insecurity in Sokoto changed in character, geography, targets and educational consequences; it did not merely increase in numerical magnitude. The early record is dominated by regional evidence of rural violence, cattle rustling, farmer–herder tensions and expanding criminal networks. The middle period shows consolidation of organised banditry and kidnapping as a regional system of insecurity. By 2020–2023, education authorities were developing formal school-safety architecture, indicating institutional recognition that insecurity threatened educational continuity. From 2024 onward, the Sokoto record contains direct evidence of schoolchild abduction, insecurity-related school closure, military use of a school, rising displacement, damage to educational facilities and dedicated emergency-education programming.

This sequence refines existing Northwest scholarship. Ojewale (2024) establishes that banditry harms education through fear, reduced enrolment, abandoned facilities and displacement across the region. The Sokoto case adds temporal and institutional detail: it shows how these mechanisms become visible in a particular subnational system and how policy response evolves as the crisis penetrates education. It also illustrates why subnational analysis matters. Regional averages can identify broad trends, but local trajectories determine where displaced households move, which schools close, how receiving schools are affected and what institutional capacities exist to respond.

The second contribution is the conflict-amplification argument. Existing research often asks whether exposure to conflict reduces education. The Sokoto evidence suggests a complementary question: under what structural conditions does insecurity become an education emergency? The NBS poverty profile and current FME capacity indicators indicate that Sokoto entered the acute phase with significant pre-existing disadvantage (NBS, 2022; FME, 2026). In such settings, a shock need not destroy a school to produce educational exclusion. A small change in teacher availability can matter more when learner–teacher ratios are already high; a displaced cohort can create greater pressure when classrooms are already crowded; an increase in transport cost can be decisive for a household already experiencing multiple deprivations.

This finding resonates with Almoayad et al. (2024), whose Yemen study shows that conflict-related institutional deterioration can have substantial educational consequences even where immediate changes in violence do not. It also aligns with Mousse and Mosisa’s (2026) synthesis that conflict and displacement exacerbate pre-existing inequities through access disruption, teacher shortages and psychosocial pathways. The implication is that conflict intensity alone is an incomplete predictor of educational harm. Educational resilience depends on the capacity of institutions and households to absorb, adapt to and recover from shocks.

The third contribution concerns the meaning of “access.” The Sokoto case demonstrates why

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enrolment alone is insufficient. A learner may remain officially enrolled but attend irregularly because roads are unsafe; a school may be open but lack teachers; a displaced learner may find a place in a host school but experience severe overcrowding; a child may return after an attack yet remain affected by fear or trauma. Access in conflict settings must therefore be understood as safe, continuous and meaningful participation. This multidimensional view is more consistent with education-in-emergencies practice than a simple enrolment indicator (INEE, 2024).

The fourth contribution is institutional. Nigeria has developed substantial school-safety policy architecture, including the 2021 national policy and Minimum Standards for Safe Schools (FME, 2021, 2022). Yet the Sokoto monitoring data show a wide implementation gap. The fact that none of the monitored Sokoto schools reached the 70% overall threshold at end-2023 should not be generalised to every school in the state because the pilot sample was purposive; nevertheless, it demonstrates that policy adoption cannot be equated with operational readiness (UNICEF, 2024). This distinction is important for other fragile education systems: resilience is produced through routines, resources, trained personnel and local coordination, not only through national policy statements.

Finally, the 2026 intervention signals a meaningful change in the institutional definition of the problem. When an education response includes accelerated learning, remedial support, crisis-sensitive pedagogy, psychosocial care, WASH and host-community support, the underlying diagnosis is no longer simply “schools need protection.” It is that conflict has disrupted the entire chain through which learners access and sustain education. This is the strongest basis for describing contemporary Sokoto as confronting an education emergency in analytical terms.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The historical analysis suggests that Sokoto’s education response should move from episodic reaction toward institutionalised crisis preparedness and recovery. Seven priorities follow.

1. School safety should be risk-differentiated by LGA rather than treated as a uniform statewide problem. Event and displacement data identify recurrent insecurity in particular corridors and LGAs, including Isa and Gada. Education authorities should combine school location, transport routes, recent security incidents, displacement inflows and early-warning information to classify risk and determine appropriate continuity plans. This approach would convert the national Minimum Standards from a general checklist into an operational planning instrument.
2. Education data and displacement data should be linked. Routine Education Management Information System records should include crisis-sensitive fields for temporary closure, days of instruction lost, learner displacement status, re-entry, teacher displacement, temporary learning arrangements and host-school congestion. IOM event tracking provides rapid information on where households move; linking such information to education planning would allow receiving schools to obtain

teachers, classrooms, sanitation and learning materials before overcrowding becomes severe.

3. Every closure decision should be accompanied by a learning-continuity and re-entry plan. Closure may be necessary to protect life, but it should trigger predetermined alternatives: temporary safe learning sites, shift systems, radio or offline digital resources, take-home materials, accelerated learning and clearly communicated criteria for reopening. The objective is to minimise the probability that a temporary security measure becomes a permanent dropout event.
4. Teacher resilience requires dedicated policy. Incentives for hard-to-staff areas, secure transport where feasible, rapid redeployment during displacement, psychosocial support for teachers and crisis-sensitive pedagogy should be institutionalised rather than treated as ad hoc project activities. Teachers are not only instructional personnel; in emergencies they are often the most immediate interface between children, families and the education system.
5. Psychosocial support should be integrated into ordinary school recovery. The 2026 programme's inclusion of mental-health and psychosocial support is appropriate, but scale and sustainability will require training teachers in basic supportive practices, strengthening referral pathways and avoiding the medicalisation of normal stress reactions. Particular attention should be given to learners returning after abduction, violent displacement or prolonged closure.
6. Non-militarisation and civilian protection of schools should remain central. Nigeria's Minimum Standards explicitly discourage military use of learning institutions (FME, 2022), yet UNICEF documented military occupation of one Sokoto school in 2024 (UNICEF, 2025a). Where exceptional security circumstances make temporary use unavoidable, education authorities should ensure rapid restoration, risk assessment and alternative learning provision.
7. Educational resilience must be linked to household resilience. In a state with extremely high multidimensional poverty, social-protection measures, such as cash assistance, school feeding, transport support, learning materials and livelihood recovery, can influence whether displaced and conflict-affected children return to school. Security and education policy should therefore be integrated with poverty-reduction and child-protection systems rather than pursued in isolation.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has four principal limitations.

1. It is a documentary historical analysis and cannot estimate the causal magnitude of insecurity's effect on enrolment, attendance or attainment in Sokoto. A next step should construct an LGA-year or school-year panel linking conflict events, displacement, school closure, enrolment, attendance and teacher data. Such a dataset could test

whether changes in conflict exposure predict subsequent education outcomes and whether effects vary by rurality, gender or baseline school capacity.

2. The evidentiary record is temporally uneven. Sokoto-specific education documentation is comparatively sparse in the early 2010s and becomes much stronger from 2023 onward. The periodisation explicitly reflects this limitation rather than filling historical gaps with regional claims. Archival state education records, school logbooks, local government files and oral-history interviews could improve reconstruction of earlier school disruptions.
3. Several administrative and humanitarian datasets have incomplete coverage. UNICEF's safe-school monitoring was a pilot rather than a representative statewide census, IOM displacement counts reflect assessed locations, and the FME digital census had incomplete reporting nationally. The statistics are therefore best interpreted as convergent indicators of vulnerability and change rather than exact measures of the entire state.
4. The study cannot robustly estimate differential effects by gender, disability or school type. This is a significant gap given the documented vulnerability of girls, displaced learners and children with disabilities in crises globally (ECW, 2025; GCPEA, 2026). Future research should prioritise disaggregated longitudinal data and compare Qur'anic/Tsangaya, public basic education and other learning settings, which may face different exposure and protection arrangements.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that insecurity in Sokoto State has transformed from indirect rural conflict into organised banditry, kidnapping, displacement and direct disruption of education, creating an education emergency. It shows that poverty, limited school capacity and fragile household resources amplify the effects of insecurity through school closures, restricted mobility, displacement, teacher constraints, infrastructure pressures and psychosocial distress. The paper therefore argues that conventional security measures are insufficient and calls for safe-school standards supported by early warning, learning continuity, host-school support, accelerated education, psychosocial care and teacher resilience. Sustainable educational access in Sokoto State consequently requires an education system capable of remaining safe, accessible and functional before, during and after recurrent insecurity.

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