SCHOOL SAFETY AND GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN KEBBI STATE, NIGERIA

AONDOWASE TARGBA, PhD
Department of Sociology, Federal University Gusau, Nigeria.
+2347031313574, aondowasetargba@fugusau.edu.ng

YUSUF BALA RIBAH
Department of Sociology, Federal University Gusau, Nigeria.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v9i8.34

Keywords

School Safety, girl child, education, attacks, kidnapping.

Abstract

Research Problem
The attacks and kidnapping of students in northwest Nigeria have affected the school safety and affects girl child's education in the area. Despite several school safety initiatives and security efforts, Kidnapping still persists in Kebbi State, northwest Nigeria.

Methods/Theory
The study is qualitative and presents evidence-based findings on school in Federal Government Girls College, Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State, Nigeria, aiming to guide policy and enhance school safety and girl child education. Utilising the cognitive vulnerability theory, the paper assesses how security threats affect education for girls in the study area. The study is based on evidence from in-depth interviews with 40 respondents in the Birnin Yauri community of Kebbi State, employing purposive and snowball sampling methods, with data analysed through thematic analysis.

Results
Findings show that factors impacting on school safety include lack of adequate security personnel and lack of proactive measures to avert an impending security threat from relevant authorities. Results indicate that the school's authority was alerted of the pending attacks which unfortunately and eventually happened. The attacks on schools have affected parents' and guardians' attitudes to enrolling their girls in school for fear of recurrence. Socio-economic factors such as religion and poverty exacerbated poor attitude to girl child's education in the study area.

Conclusion
The safety of schools in Kebbi State, especially the FGGC Birnin Yauri, has affected girl child education in Kebbi State due to the fear of further attacks and uncertainty with security concerns. Weak proactive measures by authorities to avert attack the school was responsible for the abduction.

Key Contribution to Knowledge
The paper proposes the political will and active community engagement in and ensuring school safety and encouraging girl child education in troubled communities.

Recommendations

The study suggests that the government should consider increased security deployment to all schools in volatile areas in Kebbi State to build safety and confidence in staff, students and community members in the area.

Background

Adolescent girls in northern Nigeria face significant challenges in accessing and completing secondary education due to a severe shortage of schools, with ten primary schools for every secondary school (World Bank 2020). Poor infrastructure and inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities further hinder their education. Furthermore, approximately 80 per cent of impoverished households reside in the north, making it difficult for them to afford both direct and indirect schooling costs. (World Bank 2020). However, educating the girl child is essential for empowering them to contribute to the country's development. It enables girls to understand their rights and promote hygiene and health awareness, ensuring better care for their families, leading to improved quality of life. Educated girls are respected in society and serve as role models, inspiring future generations (Teachmint, 2026). Every child is entitled to a safe education, free from violence, highlighting the need for educators to work in secure and dignified conditions. Schools should be safe havens for learning, even in wartime (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack [GCPEA], 2026). Recent events in Northwest Nigeria highlight the severe impact of increased arms proliferation, which has exacerbated armed banditry and deepened the security crisis, jeopardising regional stability and Nigeria's socio-economic development (Agu and Ugada, 2024).

The abduction of over 200 girls from Chibok in 2014 has sparked concern for school safety in northern Nigeria, where girls' education rates are among the lowest (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025). In response to the challenge orchestrated by the kidnapping of school children in Nigeria, the "Safe Schools Initiative" was launched in 2014 by UN Special Envoy Gordon Brown, along with the Nigerian Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector leaders. This initiative includes school-based interventions, community measures for school protection, and special provisions for at-risk populations to address the situation in the troubled states with the potential for nationwide implementation (UNDP, 2025). Unfortunately, these initiatives could not tame the wave of kidnappings in Nigeria. Recently, on November 17, 2025, armed bandits attacked the Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School in Maga, Kebbi State, and kidnapped over 24 girls (United Nations Children Fund [UNICEF], 2025).

However, initiatives for school safety should consider the design of the school environment must prioritise its academic purpose, engaging all stakeholders, including students, staff, community members, policymakers, and the Ministry of Education, to ensure safety. The World Bank emphasises the critical importance of boosting girls' education as the key investment for Nigeria's human capital development; hence, the initiation of the AGILE project, which aims to enhance access to and quality of education for girls, particularly in northern Nigeria. By addressing structural impediments comprehensively, the project seeks to foster better educational outcomes for girls, enhancing their productivity and contributing to improved economic results for themselves

and the nation (World Bank, 2020). The project aims to enhance access to secondary education and empower adolescent girls across seven Nigerian states: Kano, Kebbi, Kaduna, Katsina, Borno, Plateau, and Ekiti. It is expected to benefit approximately 6.7 million adolescents and 15.5 million direct beneficiaries, including families and communities (World Bank 2020).

Reports indicate that despite notable policies on education in Nigeria, the safe environment or safety of schools has been an issue of concern. In Kebbi State, for example, there have been security challenges due to a fire outbreak, leading to the government closure of Girls Science Secondary School (GGSSS) Yauri. Four fire outbreaks were reported to have occurred at the school, all in the afternoon, and were not connected to an electricity surge, as all the outbreaks happened during a power outage (Muhammad, 2014).

Reports indicate that in Kebbi State, more than 100 pupils and five of their teachers at Federal Government Girls College, Birnin Yauri, were kidnapped in 2022. However, after 707 days in captivity, two female students from FGC Birnin Yauri were released on May 25, 2023 (Idris, 2023). This followed the earlier release of three other girls on May 7, 2023. The parents of the abducted students had reported that the bandits demanded N100 million, which they allegedly paid an undisclosed ransom after receiving support, as the Kebbi State government did not meet the bandits' demands (Daily Trust Editorial, 2022). The traumatic experiences faced by children, whether as victims or witnesses, have lasting effects that hinder their engagement with formal education. These events significantly impact the educational landscape over time, highlighting the urgent need to safeguard children's lives and their fundamental right to education (Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh, 2023). It is in the light of the above that the study examines school safety and the impact it has on girl child education in Kebbi State with a focus on the Federal Government Girls College (FGGC) Birnin Yauri, where there was an incidence of bandit attack and kidnapping of schoolgirls in 2022.

Conceptual Definition

School Safety

School safety and security is defined in this policy as a set of rules and regulations guiding the prevention and mitigation of hazards occurring in formal education settings (primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria, whether private or government-owned) and/or informal education settings that have adverse effects on education; such hazards have been a major issue in Nigeria (National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools with its Implementing Guidelines [NPSSVIG], 2021). Safe Schools is an "all-hazards" approach aimed at safeguarding students and educators from violence, conflict, and natural disasters. It combines physical security measures, safety policies, and psycho-social support to ensure a secure learning environment, often engaging community initiatives and aligning with international standards such as the Safe Schools Declaration (CGPEA, 2026).

Girl Child Education

Girl-child education ensures girls access to education, feel safe in school, and acquire essential life skills. Girl child education is aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of girls and women across various backgrounds including school, college, health, professional, technical, and vocational education (Teachmint, 2026). Girls' education involves providing quality learning and empowerment opportunities to ensure girls complete their education and acquire vital life skills. It fosters gender equality, enhances economic growth, mitigates poverty, and improves health outcome enabling girls to make informed choices and achieve their potential (UNICEF, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Vulnerability Theory

Cognitive vulnerability theory suggests that fear arises from interpreting situations as dangerous, disgusting, unpredictable, or uncontrollable, leading to a "vulnerability schema" that influences individuals' perceptions and responses to potential threats (Amfield, 2006). Cognitive theorists assert that erroneous beliefs leading to fear and anxiety stem from earlier life experiences, including personal encounters, observations, or even hearsay about fearful events. These beliefs distort current interpretations of reality, creating a feedback loop that reinforces the beliefs themselves. For instance, someone with generalised anxiety disorder may perceive the world as dangerous, while an individual with panic disorder might exhibit heightened anxiety in ordinary situations (Binda, 1999).

The cognitive vulnerability theory, particularly in relation to depression, originated from models established in the 1960s-70s, mainly by Aaron Beck and Martin Seligman, which were later enhanced by Lyn Abramson, John Teasdale, and Lauren Alloy through the hopelessness theory and cognitive vulnerability-stress models (Reilly, 2014). Abela and Sarin (2002) introduced an idiographic approach to cognitive vulnerability, known as the weakest link hypothesis. This concept suggests that an individual's highest maladaptive score among various measures of cognitive vulnerability is the most reliable predictor of depression risk.

The theory posits that common fears can be understood through the lens of perceived dangerousness, disgustingness, unpredictability, and uncontrollability. These factors help to organise how stimuli are perceived in relation to fear, forming a vulnerability schema (Amfield, 2006). The submission of the theory aligns with the findings of Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh (2023) that families in Nigeria's North West are increasingly uneasy about sending their children to school due to rising banditry, leading to widespread school closures and a significant negative impact on education. This deteriorating security situation raises serious concerns about the educational sector.

Literature Review

Child kidnapping is a pervasive global issue that traumatises victims and disrupts families and communities. While most countries have laws aimed at protecting children and preventing such crimes, challenges persist, particularly in regions affected by conflict or poverty. The effectiveness of child protective measures remains a subject of study, especially concerning the roles of parents, governments, and international organisations in ensuring safety and prevention (Orset, 2008). Study highlights the vulnerability of secondary schools in Katsina State, Nigeria, to kidnapping attacks. The frequent abduction of students has become a significant issue, particularly in Northern Nigeria, therefore emphasising the need for protective measures (Aderinto et al., 2025).

Studies show that safety schools in Zuru LGA of Kebbi State, Nigeria, identify critical security threats such as kidnapping, bullying, and inadequate infrastructure, which impede learning and decrease enrolment. The research points to insufficient fencing, a lack of surveillance, and limited security training, stressing the urgent need for the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative (Sabo et al., 2021). A study by Sabo et al. (2021) assessed challenges impacting secondary school safety in Zuru Local Government Area, Kebbi State, Nigeria. It found that most educational stakeholders understand school safety issues, which include bullying, insufficient fencing, inadequate facilities and maintenance, overcrowded classrooms, and absence of guidance and counselling units and first aid boxes.

Additionally, the Zonal Education Boards supervise schools but face financial constraints. The study by Sabo et al. (2021) further reveals that 90.3% of students confirmed the existence of safety rules, while only 9.7% disagreed. The data also indicates that 90.3% of students believe their schools lack adequate fencing, with 55.6% stating there is no good drainage system. Furthermore, only 9.7% reported having access to emergency medical supplies, highlighting substantial safety and infrastructure deficiencies in schools.

Reports indicate that Nigeria is facing significant insecurity and instability due to terrorism, kidnappings, and armed banditry, particularly in the North West region. This ongoing banditry undermines economic activities and social development while challenging the government's primary duty to protect lives and property. The attacks on schools and the mass abduction of students pose serious concerns for the future of education in the region and nationally. Teachers and students have suffered attacks, including murder and injury, leading to displacement and unrest. Findings show that security threats have crippled social and economic life in the Northwest states, including Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, and Tsafe forest (Agu and Ugada, 2024).

Methodology

The study is qualitative and adopts a cross-sectional survey research design. The study was conducted in Birnin Yauri, a town that has recently been severely impacted by school kidnappings. Teachers at the Federal Government Girls College (FGGC) Birnin Yauri, parents and guardians of abducted schoolgirls, and other pertinent key informants who were at least eighteen years old make up the study's population. In-depth interviews with forty (40) respondents in the Birnin Yauri hamlet of Kebbi State were conducted using purposive and snowbow sampling approaches. Thirty (30) individuals of the Birnin Yauri community were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling.

Additionally, five (5) instructors from the impacted school in the research area were chosen using purposive sampling. Five (5) parents of the kidnapped schoolgirls in the Birnin Yauri community were chosen via snowbow sampling. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. In addition to verbal consent to participate and a comprehensive description of the study's purpose, the research was driven by ethical considerations, such as information confidentiality. The methods and procedures used to collect information from participants were well specified. Furthermore, if a participant felt uncomfortable, they might leave the procedure at any time.

Results and Discussion

Findings of the study show that the kidnapping of secondary school children in Birnin Yaura has brought trauma and instilled fear in both students, teachers and parents/guardians to send them for fear of re-occurrence of attack and other safety concerns. Findings show that inadequate security measures, including security personnel, do not guarantee the safety of the schools in the area. One of the participants stated that the abduction of school children in the area also affects parents' attitudes towards enrolling their girls in the school. His submission corroborated the statement by one of the key officials at the FGGC Birnin Yauri that the school enrolment in the school has dropped after the attacks as parents are still afraid to send their children to school. This aligns with a study by Tsoho and Bala (2025) that in the northwestern region, female schools are predominantly targeted by bandits, with instances such as the abduction of numerous students from FGGC Birnin Yauri. Findings also show that in addition to security concerns, other socioeconomic factors such as poverty, religion and a high rate of unemployment in

recent times equally reduce parents' interest in girls' child education.

Findings show that due to the fear and trauma, most of the abducted girls were taken to the Kano metropolis to continue their studies. However, reports indicate that some of the girls were left behind, prompting worries on their ability to learn in an environment of fear. This aligns with the submission of the cognitive theory, which asserts that fear and anxiety stem from earlier life experiences, including personal encounters, observations, or even hearsay about fearful events (Binda, 1999).

Results from parents indicate that the school's authority was alerted of the pending attacks which unfortunately and eventually happened. However, authorities of the school, on their account, also escalated the issue to the appropriate agencies. Participants who were parents or guardians believed that the kidnapping of children would have been averted with adequate security personnel at the school as a proactive measure. This corroborates with a report by Hamagam (2021) that former Governor Abubakar Atiku Bagudu of Kebbi State revealed that two weeks prior to the attack on Federal Government Girls College, Birnin Yauri, intelligence indicated the presence of bandits. Consultations with federal authorities led to the deployment of a contingent from the Special Terrorism Task Force to secure the school during terminal exams. Despite this, bandits overpowered the police providing security, resulting in the abduction of several students, teachers, and staff members.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the safety of schools in Kebbi State, especially the FGGC Birnin Yauri, has affected girl child education in Kebbi State due to the fear of further attacks and uncertainty with security concerns. Despite that the attack was preempted, efforts by authorities were not enough to foil the unfortunate incident. Apart from the fear of security threats, socio-economic factors such as religion and poverty affected parents' attitudes to the girl child's education in the affected schools and environs.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the study made the following suggestions:

1. The government should consider increased security deployment to all schools in volatile areas like FGGC Birninn Yauri in Kebbi State to build confidence in staff, students and the community on the safety of schools in the area.
2. Some of the students that were victims of the kidnapping incidence should equally have the opportunity to continue their education outside of the Yauri environment to avoid reflexive memories of the sad event.
3. Information sharing among community members and security agencies should be prioritised and backed by necessary action to avoid a scenario where the community feels they have notified the management of the school, yet the ugly incidence occurred.
4. The government should sustain engaging in robust community engagement to see that security is not just the responsibility of government but requires collaborative efforts.

References

Agu, C.F. and Ugada, M.O. (2024). Arms Proliferation and Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: Implications for National Security. C*aritas Journal of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities 3(2).* https://caritasuniversityjournals.org/index.

php/cjmssh/article/view/122/112. Accessed February15, 2026.

Akpa-Achimugu, J and Ibeh, C.(2023).*Implications of Armed Banditry for Education in Nigeria's North West Region.* Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/doc/alumni-note-nigeria-north-west-region.Accessed January 9, 2026.

Amfield, J.M. (2006). Cognitive vulnerability: A model of the etiology of fear. *Clinical Psychology Review*. Volume 26, Issue 6, October 2006, Pages 746-768. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.03.007. Accessed February10, 2026.

Binder, E. (1999). Fear and Anxiety**.** *California State University, Northridge.* Spring, 1999. https://www.csun.edu/~vcpsy00h/students/anxiety.htm.Accessed February 20, 2026.

Daily Trust Editorial (2023). The Yauri girls' debacle**.**https://dailytrust.com/the-yauri-girls-debacle/.Accessed February10, 2026.

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2026) .The Safe Schools Declarationhttps://ssd.protectingeducation.org/#:~:text=The%20Safe%20Schools%20Declaration%20is%20an%20inter%2Dgovernmental,continuity%20of%20safe%20education%20during%20armed%20conflict**Accessed February15, 2026.

Hamagam, A .M. (2021). Kebbi gov: Why FG didn't allow us close FGC Yauri despite intelligence on bandits' presence.https://dailytrust.com/yauri-abduction-why-kebbi-didnt-close-school-despite-report-of-bandits-presence/.Accessed February15, 2026.

Idris, A.B. (2023). Bandits release last two FGC Birnin Yauri schoolgirls:*The Guardian.*https://guardian.ng/news/bandits-release-last-two-fgc-birnin-yauri schoolgirls/#:~:text=Share%20:,secure%20release%20of%20the%20girls.Accessed January 9, 2026

Muhammad, G. (2014).Nigeria: Kebbi School Shut Over Fire Outbreak. *AllAfrica.com* https://allafrica.com/stories/201404090791.html . Accessed January 5, 2026

National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools with its Implementing Guidelines. (2021).https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NationalPolicyonSSVFSN.pdf# Accessed September 9, 2024.

Orset, C. (2008). *A Theory of Child Protection against Kidnapping*. CIRPEE.Cahier de recherche/Working Paper 08-16 https://scispace.com/pdf/a-theory-of-child-protection-against-kidnapping-4rffubdz4g.pdf. Accessed February19, 2026.

Reilly, L.C., Ciesla, J.A., , Felton, J.W., Weitlauf,A.S, Anderson, N.L. (2014). Cognitive vulnerability to depression: A comparison of the weakest link, keystone and additive models.*CognEmot*. 2011 Aug 18;26(3):521–533. doi: 10.1080/02699931.2011.595776.Accessed Decemeber 5, 2025.

Sabo, Y. A., Sanchi, I.D., Ndidi, E., Dangari, E. and Alhassan, Y. J. (2021) Analysis of the Constraints Influencing Secondary Schools Safety in Zuru Local Government Area of Kebbi State, Nigeria. *Global Educational Research Journal*: 9(6): pp, 024-029..https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352560638_Analysis_of_the_Constraints_Influencing_Secondary_Schools_Safety_in_Zuru_Local_Government_Area_of_Kebbi_State_Nigeria/link/60d04ace458515dc179954a7/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19. Accessed February10, 2026.

Teachmint (2026). Girl Child Education.*https://www.teachmint.com/glossary/g/girl-child-education/* .Accessed February10, 2026.

Tsoho, I.U. and Bala, N. (2025). Girl Child Education in North West Geo Political Zone of Nigeria: Issue of Access and Retention in Tertiary Institution. *Greener Journal of Educational Research* 15(1), pp. 256-260. https://gjournals.org/GJER/Publication/2025/1/HTML/111525173%20Tsoho%20and%20Bala.htm. Accessed February15, 2026

UNDP (2025). Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative MDTF https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/20000/mptfo_safe_schools_initiative_mdtf_concept_note_final_2_september_201.pdf. Accessed February12, 2026.

UNICEF, (2025). *Girls' education. Gender equality in education benefits every child.* https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education. Accessed February15, 2026.

World Bank (2020). *Nigeria boost support for keeping adolescent girls in school.* https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/07/28/nigeria-to-boost-support-for-keepingadolescent-girls-in-school. Accessed January 28, 2023.