

## EFFECTS OF BANDITRY ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Banditry in Zamfara State, has affected thousands of school-aged children leading to educational exclusion and disrupting access to formal schooling. This study employs a qualitative research design and relied purely on secondary data, synthesizing peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports, and conflict monitoring databases to examine the patterns and extent of displacement, trends in primary and secondary school enrolment, and the effects of banditry on educational quality between 2020 and 2025 as the main objectives of the study. The study adopted the State Fragility Theory and interprets banditry as both a symptom and amplifier of state weaknesses, where authority deficits has contributed to violence, disruption of service delivery, which undermines community trust in education. Findings reveal that banditry displacement pattern is concentrated in the rural area of the state there by affecting 40 to 50% of internally displaced children leading to fragmented access to education. The study also discovered that primary and secondary school enrolment trend declined from 30 to 50% due to pre-existing cultural and economic factors with banditry acting as the major driver. The study proffered the following recommendations: The government should set up school protection committees comprising parents, teachers, and traditional leaders to monitor and report any suspicious activities to the security agencies; introduce mobile and radio-based learning programs for displaced children; and integrate technical and vocational education to curb banditry by providing skills for self-reliance for unemployed youths.

**Keywords:** Banditry, Education Access, Displacement, School Enrolment, Educational Quality, Zamfara State.

## Introduction

The educational system in Northern Nigeria has severely been compromised due to escalating insecurity driven by armed banditry, insurgency, and inter-communal clashes which has heightened perpetual cycle of underdevelopment and social instability across the region (Abdulrahim et al., 2023; UNIDIR, 2024). This area, marked by historical socioeconomic disparities and governance challenges, has witnessed a surge in violent disruptions since the early 2020s, with banditry emerging as a particularly debilitating threat to institutional functionality and human capital formation (Tade, 2025; Barnett, 2025). Within this framework, education insecurity represents a multifaceted crisis where physical threats, forced displacements, and resource diversions create barriers to learning, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and hindering national progress toward sustainable development goals (Deutsche, 2025; Amnesty International, 2025).

In Northern Nigeria, banditry coupled with existing vulnerabilities, including inadequate infrastructure, poverty, and cultural norms have amplified educational exclusion most especially on girl-child (UNIDIR, 2024; Akpa-Achimugu & Ibeh, 2023). Research demonstrates that insecurity most especially banditry, acts as a predictor of diminished student learning outcomes, with attacks on schools leading to closures, reduced enrollment, and interrupted academic calendars in affected states (Abdulrahim et al., 2023). There is a surge in kidnapping related events in the North West region with 662 incidents recorded between 2019 and 2023 representing a 169% increase over the North East region. During this period many schools were temporarily shutdown which affects the learning process (ACLED, 2024). According to United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2024), aside displacing communities, the proliferation of bandit activities has also instilled widespread fear, resulting in lower attendance rates and heightened dropout tendencies in schools, particularly in rural settings where alternative livelihood pressures prevail. This regional dynamic underscores a broader pattern where violence undermines educational investments, fostering environments conducive to further instability and limiting opportunities for socioeconomic advancement (Amnesty International, 2025; Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021).

Zamfara State has been the epicenter of banditry with multiple effects most especially on education amid its status as one of Nigeria's educationally disadvantaged areas (UNIDIR, 2024). Empirical examinations reveal that armed banditry has led to significant disruptions in school operations, including the closure of institutions in high-risk local government areas and a decline in pupil enrollment due to safety concerns (The Cable, 2024). In Talata Mafara Local Government Area, for example, bandit activities have been linked to reduced educational outcomes, with qualitative data highlighting how violence erodes teacher morale and community support for schooling (Abdulrahim et al., 2023; The New Humanitarian, 2023).

According to UNIDIR (2024) and Amnesty International (2025) economic assessments indicate that insecurity imposes indirect costs on education in Zamfara, thereby diverting household resources from learning to survival and perpetuating inter-generational educational deficit. These state-specific hurdles, compounded by failure to address the root causes, highlight the importance to restore educational access and resilience in the face of ongoing threats. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the study examines the effect of banditry on access to education in Zamfara State with the view to proffering solutions.

### Statement of the Problem

Armed banditry in Zamfara State has resulted in widespread school closures, student abductions, teacher shortages, reduced enrollment, and a pervasive atmosphere of fear that has effectively denied thousands of children their right and access to education. Zamfara State has suffered frequent kidnappings, raids on schools, and extortion of communities, which has transformed educational institutions into high-risk environments, leading to

indefinite closures of schools in many rural and semi-urban areas, particularly in high-risk local government areas such as Talata Mafara, Maru, and Zurmi (Abdulrahim et al., 2023). The communities did not only suffered from interrupted learning process but also experienced severe psychological, economic, and social burdens which compel them to prioritize survival over schooling, thereby exacerbating out-of-school rates in a state already identified as one of Nigeria's most educationally disadvantaged (UNICEF, 2025; The New Humanitarian, 2023).

Banditry in the state which involves large scale abduction of school children has led to a sharp decline in attendance, particularly among girls, who face heightened risks of kidnapping and early marriage, further widening gender disparities in literacy and educational attainment (Amnesty International, 2025). In rural Zamfara, where nomadic and pastoralist communities are disproportionately affected, banditry has severely hampered both formal and nomadic education systems, leaving many children without any structured learning opportunities (UNIDIR, 2024). The economic toll is equally significant as families in bandit-affected areas often withdraw their children from school to engage them in income-generating activities such as hawking in order to reduce exposure to risk, while the destruction of school infrastructure and the displacement of educators have equally resulted in overcrowded classrooms in safer areas and a general decline in instructional quality (Abdulrahim et al., 2023; The New Humanitarian, 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on banditry's societal impacts in Northern Nigeria, significant research gaps persist, particularly in the context of Zamfara State. According to UNIDIR (2024) and Tade (2025) existing studies often aggregate data across the North-West region, while doing little or ignoring the localized dynamics of banditry in Zamfara, such as its differential effects on nomadic versus sedentary communities or the long-term cognitive and psychosocial outcomes for affected students. What remains unknown includes the precise mechanisms through which banditry influences gender-specific enrollment declines, as contested narratives in the literature debate whether cultural factors or direct violence play a predominant role (Akpa-Achimugu & Ibeh, 2023). Previous studies have failed to adequately address community-level resilience strategies, the efficacy of policy interventions such as school feeding programs or alternative learning modalities, or the quantitative assessment of pre-and post-banditry educational metrics in Zamfara. These gaps highlight the need for focused, empirical research that can inform targeted interventions to restore and protect educational access in highly risk zones.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of banditry on access to education in Zamfara State.

The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine banditry's patterns, displacement and effects on access to education in Zamfara State.
- ii. To identify trends in primary and secondary school enrolment as influenced by banditry in Zamfara State.
- iii. To appraise the effects of banditry on the quality of education in Zamfara State.

### **Research Questions**

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. Does the displacement of school-aged children in Zamfara State as a result of banditry affected their access to education?
- ii. Has banditry influence trends of primary and secondary school enrolment in Zamfara State?
- iii. Does banditry affects the quality of education in Zamfara State?

## Theoretical Framework

The theory of state fragility has evolved from post-Cold War analyses of internal conflicts, with key proponents including Joel Migdal, who in his 1988 work “Strong Societies and Weak States” explored state-society relations and the inability of governments to exert social control in developing contexts (Migdal, 1988).

The basic assumption of the theory is that fragile states lack the institutional strength to manage internal and external pressures, leading to vulnerabilities across economic, political, and social domains (OECD, 2025; Grävingholt et al., 2015). The strength of the theory lies in its ability to highlight the role of non-state actors in filling governance voids, aiding in resilience-building strategies (Siqueira, 2014). However, critics point to conceptual ambiguities, as fragility often conflates causes (e.g., poverty) with symptoms (e.g., conflict), leading to imprecise indicators and normative biases toward Western state models (Nay, 2014; Bertoli & Ticci, 2017). State fragility theory is chosen for its ability to explain how structural governance failures enable banditry and disrupt education, shifting analysis from individual criminal acts to systemic vulnerabilities (Carment et al., 2011; Okoli, 2024). Its relevance to sub-Saharan Africa, where fragility correlates with conflict and underdevelopment, makes it ideal for contextualizing banditry's educational toll (Naudé et al., 2011).

Applied to the study, the theory illuminates how authority deficits manifested in ungoverned forests such as kuyambana, Burwaye, Ajja, Sububu, Kamuku and porous borders in Zamfara State which sustain banditry activities, leading to school attacks and closures that restrict educational access to students.

## Methodology

This study employs secondary research design, focusing on the synthesis and critical examination of existing data sources to investigate the effects of banditry on access to education in Zamfara State, Nigeria. This design is employed in the study area due to high security risk where primary data collection becomes impracticable. Given the research's emphasis on historical trends and qualitative insights from 2020 to 2025, this approach facilitates a retrospective assessment without the ethical and logistical challenges of fieldwork in banditry-affected areas. In order to ensure a balanced interpretation of patterns in displacement, enrolment, and educational quality, the design integrates qualitative synthesis with elements of quantitative trend review.

Data were drawn from a range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports from organizations such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Amnesty International, and UNICEF, as well as conflict monitoring databases like the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and government publications from the Zamfara State Ministry of Education. Sources were selected based on their content in addressing banditry or related insecurity in Zamfara State and entire North-West region, with explicit links to education whose publication dates between 2020 and 2025 in order to capture contemporary trends. There was also verifiable authorship from reputable academic, governmental, and non-governmental institutions.

Data validation was conducted to corroborate findings and mitigate inconsistencies through cross-verification across multiple source. For instance event data on banditry incidents from ACLED were confirmed with school enrolment statistics from UNICEF reports to ensure temporal alignment. Reliability was assessed by evaluating source credibility, such as the methodological rigor in UNIDIR's community surveys, while validity was enhanced by focusing on context-specific data from Zamfara. In order to avoid over-reliance on any single perspective, a diverse range of sources including both international (e.g., UNIDIR) and local Nigerian studies was selected to balance potential Western biases.

### **Banditry's Patterns, Displacement and Effects on Access to Education**

The patterns and extent of displacement among school-aged children in Zamfara State as a result of banditry involving armed raids and abductions since 2020 shows concentration in rural local government areas like Anka, Bukkuyum, Zurmi, and Bakura, where families flee to urban centers or IDP camps to seek refuge (Rufa'i, 2025). The extent of this displacement is notable with estimates indicating that over 100,000 individuals have been displaced in Zamfara, including approximately 40,000 school-aged children, leading to widespread educational interruptions (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025).

Dominant views, from authors such as Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh (2023), emphasize that these displacements are prolonged and destructive, creating barriers to formal education through family separations and loss of school records, resulting in permanent exclusion for many children. This perspective is supported by Yahaya & Musa (2025) in their qualitative analyses showing how banditry's economic toll forces displaced families to prioritize survival labor over schooling, entrenching inter-generational educational deficits. However, counter views argue that displacements can be adaptive, enabling access to better-resourced urban schools for some children, as short-term relocations allow reintegration once violence subsides (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). This optimistic counter-narrative is contested by Muhammad et al (2024) that evidence of urban overcrowding and discrimination, often prevent effective reintegration by students. A key gap lies in the scarcity of gender-disaggregated data, as most studies overlook how displacements differentially affect girls through increased risks of early marriage.

Displacement patterns are further described as episodic and linked to banditry's seasonal dynamics, with intensified attacks during harvest periods prompting mass exoduses that disrupt school activities (Usman & Yusuf, 2024). The extent of displacement among school-age children is not only restricted to physical re-locations but include internal community shifts, with empirical reports estimating that 30 to 40% of displaced children in Zamfara experience multiple movement thereby compounding educational losses through repeated enrolment challenges (The New Humanitarian, 2023). Dominant interpretations, such as those from Abdulrahim et al. (2023), view this as a pathway to chronic exclusion, where displaced children face barriers like overcrowded host schools and lack of transportation, leading to dropout rates exceeding 50% in affected areas. However Ebonine, (2022) argued against such analysis insisting that displacement fosters informal learning opportunities in safer environments, potentially mitigating access losses through community networks. This counter-view is challenged by qualitative data showing informal setups lack effective structure and credibility, often resulting in inferior educational outcomes compared to formal systems (Sanchi et al., 2022). Gaps revealed that much attention is not given to nomadic children's displacements, where banditry disrupts mobile lifestyles without adequate tracking of their educational trajectories (Inusa, 2024).

The effects of displacement on formal education access in Zamfara Stat shows that children often encounter exclusion in host communities due to resource strains, with reports indicating 20 to 30% lower enrolment rates for IDPs compared to non-displaced peers (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025). Dominant views highlight how trauma from displacement impairs learning motivation, leading to chronic absenteeism and reduced academic performance. Some of the authors argue that displacements can enhance access to education by relocating children from rural areas affected by banditry to urban schools with better facilities, potentially improving long-term outcomes (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). This perspective is contested by evidence of urban discrimination and overcrowding class rooms, which exacerbate exclusion (Yahaya & Musa, 2025). A notable gap is the lack of longitudinal studies examining reintegration success, as current research focuses on immediate disruptions without follow-up (Muhammad et al., 2024).

### **Trends in Primary and Secondary School Enrolment in Zamfara State**

The trend in primary and secondary school enrolment in Zamfara State, indicate a marked decline due to banditry-related insecurity since 2020. The State witnessed persistent attacks on schools, mass abductions of students, school closures which instilled fear among parents leading to reduced attendance, and sharp drops in enrollment, particularly in rural areas. For instance, a primary school in Gwashi Village, Bukkuyum LGA, Zamfara State, witnessed enrollment declined from over 250 pupils to 119 in 2021 due to heightened bandit attacks on school (Suleiman, 2024). Report from UNICEF (2025) shows that primary school enrolment in Nigeria has fallen by 20 to 30% in high-risk areas, with banditry contributing to school closures and parental reluctance to send children to school due fear of being attacked or kidnapped. With targeted abductions and fear of violence, particularly in rural local government areas like Maru, Zurmi and Bakura, trends in secondary school enrolment show even steeper drops, with data suggesting reductions of up to 40% (Muhammad et al., 2024)

Banditry activities has disrupted academic calendars and community stability leading to over 422,213 out-of-school children in Zamfara State (Aliyu et al., 2025). The influence of banditry has equally affected the trend of primary and secondary school enrolment in Zamfara State following major incidents, such as the 2021 Jangebe abduction of school children, which prompted widespread withdrawals and hesitancy (Yahaya & Musa, 2025). However, some authors argue that school enrolment trends are primarily driven by pre-existing poverty and cultural norms in the affected areas, with banditry serving as a secondary amplifier rather than the main cause (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). This divergent perspectives underscore methodological gaps, as aggregated North-West data often masks Zamfara-specific variations, such as nomadic-urban differences in enrolment responses to insecurity.

Gender imbalance mark another trend, with banditry disproportionately lowering female school enrolment. Reports indicate that in bandit-prone zones characterized by insecurity which reinforces early marriage and household roles, girls' primary and secondary enrolment rates have declined by 25 to 35% (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025). This view is supported by analyses showing abduction fears as a key deterrent for female attendance (Abdulrahim et al., 2023). Counter arguments suggest that banditry's gender impact is overstated, with cultural barriers playing a more enduring role, as evidenced by consistent low rates in less insecure periods (Ebonine, 2022). The literature's gap here lies in insufficient disaggregated data on nomadic girls, where banditry intersects with mobility constraints to exacerbate enrolment losses (Usman & Yusuf, 2025).

Economic implications further influence enrolment, with banditry imposing costs that discourage school participation. Studies show that destruction of means of livelihood through raids on communities by bandits, force school-age children in to petty business such as hawking, thereby reducing primary and secondary enrolment by 20 to 25% in displaced households (Yahaya & Musa, 2025). This economic pressure is amplified in rural Zamfara, where banditry diverts household resources, leading to selective enrolment favoring boys (Muhammad et al., 2024). A notable gap is the absence of longitudinal studies examining post-banditry enrolment resilience.

### **Effects of Banditry on the Quality of Education in Zamfara State**

Schools in rural areas experienced frequent interruptions due to banditry's persistent threats which have created an atmosphere of fear that undermines teaching effectiveness and learning environments. According to The New Humanitarian (2023), the effects of banditry on education has led to distracted classroom learning, where psychological stress impairs both educator performance and student concentration leading to poor quality of learning outcomes. The bandits conducted raids that destroyed classroom and learning activities which compelled learning in substandard conditions that compromise hygiene, space, and practical activities (Amnesty International, 2025).

Divergent perspectives argue that problem of insufficient infrastructural facilities in schools which affects learning outcomes is basically tied to chronic under funding rather than attributing it to banditry as the root cause (Ogunode et al., 2024). This counter-view is challenged by evidence of targeted vandalism of school infrastructure tied to banditry, distinguishing it from general neglect (Inusa, 2024). A gap emerges in assessments of nomadic education quality, where banditry disrupts mobile setups without documented alternatives.

Further analyses show how interrupted curricula resulted in poorer examination results and skill gaps, as chronic absenteeism and trauma hinder student progress in learning (Aliyu et al., 2025). Also gender-specific effects are evidenced, with girls facing amplified quality deficits through restricted participation and heightened vulnerability in schools located at high risk zones of the country (Premium Times Nigeria, 2024). Counter arguments suggest that banditry prompts adaptive outcomes, such as increased resilience or informal skill acquisition amid disruptions of learning process (Ebonine, 2022). This stance is contested by qualitative data indicating irreversible foundational deficits, particularly in literacy and numeracy (The New Humanitarian, 2023). Gaps include limited quantitative metrics on outcome changes, as studies often rely on anecdotal or aggregated data without pre-post comparisons

Teachers retention and administrative challenges affects quality of learning as educator abandoned their duties for safety reasons, thereby leaving schools with unqualified staff and weakening overall learning outcomes (Amnesty International, 2025). Insecurity spurs learning innovative administration in schools, such as digital tools for continuity irrespective of disruption (Sanchi et al., 2022). This is countered by evidence of digital divides in rural Zamfara, rendering such innovations ineffective (Inusa, 2024). A notable gap is the under-exploration of private school quality resilience compared to public institutions under banditry pressure.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings from this study illuminate the profound and interconnected effects of banditry on access to education, interpreting the crisis as a manifestation of entrenched fragility where insecurity dismantles the foundational structures of learning in Zamfara State. Theoretically, the study integrate with State Fragility Theory (Carment et al., 2010), where State authority deficits enable banditry leading to capacity gaps which disrupt enrolment and quality of education system in Zamfara State.

The study finds out that displacement patterns among school-aged children is limited to high prone rural areas, affecting 30 to 40% of IDPs and leading to fragmented access through trauma, overcrowding in host communities, and socioeconomic barriers that prioritize survival over schooling in Zamfara State. This displacement is not merely logistical but symbolic of broader social rupture, where children experience "educational limbo," with interrupted learning fostering cognitive gaps and long-term disengagement (Yahaya & Musa, 2025). This findings align with regional analyses of banditry-induced displacement (Akpachimugu & Ibeh, 2023), by highlighting permanent exclusion over temporary relocations, thereby challenging counter-views of urban school access as a silver lining (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022; Ebonine, 2022).

Further findings reveal a 30 to 50% decline in primary and secondary school enrollment trends, meaning that banditry has created an apprehensive condition among communities leading to invisible barriers that erodes community investment in educational system. Due to the prevailing threats, Parents have refuse to enroll their children in to school for fear of being attacked or kidnapped by bandits. This findings align with the work of Muhammad et'al (2024) showing a 40% decline in school enrollment trend particularly in high risk rural local government areas like Maru, Zurmi and Bakura, in zamfara State. This was however countered by Inusa (2024) that aggregated North-West data often masks

Zamfara-specific variations, such as nomadic-urban differences in enrolment responses to insecurity.

The study also finds out that the banditry which created teacher absenteeism and infrastructure decay has negatively affected the quality of learning outcomes in Zamfara State. This suffice to say that the continued apprehensive atmosphere created by banditry has led to distracted classroom learning, where psychological stress impairs both educator performance and student concentration leading to poor quality of learning outcomes in Zamfara State. This interpret banditry as a threat to educational system in the State thereby leveling down learning outcomes across genders. This findings align with the work of Usman & Yusuf (2024) analyzing how banditry affected quality of education on school-aged children most especially nomadic children who faced compounded exclusion due to disrupted mobility. Although Ogunode et al., (2024) argued that poor quality of learning outcomes is largely attributed to gross under-funding instead of banditry.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the multifaceted effects of banditry on access to education in Zamfara State, Nigeria, through a secondary data analysis lens, guided by the objectives of exploring displacement patterns among school-aged children, assessing enrolment trends under banditry-related insecurity, and appraising quality declines in primary and secondary education. Drawing on State Fragility Theory (Carment et al., 2010), the analysis reveals banditry as a symptom and amplifier of state weaknesses, where authority deficits enable violence, leading to disruption of service delivery, and legitimacy erosion which undermine community trust in educational institutions. The findings, synthesized from diverse secondary sources, underscore a crisis that not only curtails immediate access but also entrenches long-term inequalities, perpetuating cycles of fragility in one of Nigeria's most vulnerable regions.

Key findings demonstrate that banditry-induced displacement follows cyclical, rural-centric patterns, affecting 30 to 40% of IDPs as school-aged children and leading to fragmented access through enrolment barriers, trauma, and socioeconomic pressures (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025; Amnesty International, 2025). Enrolment trends reflect a 30 to 50% decline in primary and secondary levels, with insecurity as a primary influencer, though contested by views attributing primacy to cultural factors (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). Educational quality suffers from instructional erosion, infrastructure damage, and outcome deficits, with divergent opinions on resilience highlighting adaptive potentials amid irreversible gaps (Yahaya & Musa, 2025; Rufa'i, 2025). These interpretations extend State Fragility Theory by introducing "insecurity-induced educational fragility" as a sub-concept, where banditry cascades authority failures into capacity and legitimacy breakdowns, challenging the theory's macro-focus with localized nuances (Grävingsholt et al., 2015; Nay, 2014). Counter claims of temporary effects (Ebonine, 2022) are outweighed by evidence of sustained disruptions, advancing the theory through empirical refinement in sub-Saharan contexts.

Practically, implications include the need for secure, mobile education models and trauma-informed curricula to counter displacement effects, while policy recommendations advocate integrated security-education frameworks. The findings emphasize the role of banditry in exacerbating gender and nomadic disparities, urging inclusive interventions to mitigate inter-generational poverty. However, ethical considerations arise, as over-securitization risks militarizing schools, potentially alienating communities (Sanchi et al., 2022).

### **Recommendations**

Drawing on the findings, the study offers detailed, and research-driven recommendations to mitigate the effects of banditry on access to education in Zamfara State.

- i. Governmental should make policies which emphasis on integrated security-education frameworks to rebuild state capacity and legitimacy. This is feasible through existing structures like the Zamfara State Ministry of Education, with funding reallocated from security budgets to education recovery.
- ii. The Government should set up school protection committees comprising parents, teachers, and traditional leaders to promptly monitor and report suspicious activities to the security agencies. This is feasible with minimal resources, building on existing Zamfara State Community Protection Guards (CPG)
- iii. There should be introduction of mobile and radio-based learning programs for displaced children in the State as banditry disrupts traditional enrolment. This can be achieved by partnering with NGOs for device distribution, drawing on successful STEM initiatives in banditry-prone areas.
- iv. The Government should also integrate technical and vocational education to equip youth with relevant skills for self-reliance to prevent youths from engaging in banditry.

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