

SOCIAL POLICY AS A DRIVER OF NATIONAL SECURITY: A SYSTEMATIC DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Education is increasingly recognised as an important component of national resilience because it strengthens human capital, expands legitimate socioeconomic opportunities and supports social cohesion. In Nigeria, however, education has largely been treated as a developmental and service-delivery issue rather than as part of a preventive national-security strategy. This study examines the relationship between social policy and national security through a systematic document analysis of Nigeria's education sector. Four research questions guide the analysis: the relationship between education-focused social policy and national security; recent evidence on the condition of Nigeria's education sector; the relationship between educational deprivation and insecurity; and the security implications of recent government education interventions. The study systematically analysed peer-reviewed literature and authoritative policy and institutional documents published principally between 2021 and 2026. Searches were structured around Google Scholar and ScienceDirect and supplemented with searches of official repositories of the National Bureau of Statistics, Federal Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and other relevant institutions. Documents were selected according to relevance, authority, publication period and direct connection to education, social vulnerability and security. Data were extracted and organised thematically around educational access and quality, socioeconomic vulnerability, insecurity and school disruption, and policy interventions. The findings show that educational deprivation is associated with persistent human-capital deficits, socioeconomic vulnerability and reduced resilience; insecurity simultaneously disrupts schooling through attacks, abductions and displacement; and recent interventions such as HOPE-EDU and Nigeria's school-safety framework demonstrate the potential of education policy to contribute to national resilience. The study concludes that education should be incorporated more explicitly into Nigeria's preventive national-security and resilience planning without subordinating its civilian and developmental character.

Keywords: Social policy, national security, education, human capital, educational deprivation, Nigeria, systematic document analysis.

Introduction

The concept of national security has progressively expanded beyond the traditional protection of territorial integrity and state institutions to include the socioeconomic and human conditions that enable individuals and communities to live securely. Contemporary human-security thinking emphasises protection from fear, want and indignity, thereby drawing attention to economic opportunity, social inclusion, education and other conditions that influence vulnerability and resilience (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Within this broader perspective, education constitutes more than the transmission of knowledge. It is an investment in human capability, productivity, social participation and institutional resilience.

Education contributes to national resilience through several interconnected mechanisms. It develops knowledge and skills, improves access to employment, supports social mobility, promotes civic participation and can strengthen tolerance and social cohesion. International evidence also shows that persistent educational exclusion and weak learning outcomes constrain the capacity of societies to convert demographic growth into productive human capital (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Education therefore has both developmental and preventive significance, particularly in countries experiencing high levels of poverty, inequality, youth unemployment and insecurity.

Nigeria provides an important context for examining this relationship. The country has a very large and youthful population but continues to experience substantial educational deficits. UNICEF's recent evidence indicates that approximately 10.2 million children remain out of school at the primary level, while another 8.1 million are out of school at the junior-secondary level. The burden is disproportionately concentrated in northern Nigeria, where poverty, insecurity, gender disparities and inadequate educational infrastructure interact to constrain access and participation (UNICEF, 2025).

Educational deprivation also intersects with wider socioeconomic vulnerability. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reported that 62.9% of Nigerians, representing approximately 133 million people, were multidimensionally poor. Education constitutes one of the dimensions through which deprivation is experienced. The implication is not that poverty or educational exclusion automatically produces insecurity. Rather, persistent deprivation may reduce access to legitimate opportunities and weaken the socioeconomic foundations upon which individual and community resilience depend.

The relationship between education and insecurity is reciprocal. Conflict, terrorism, banditry and kidnapping have repeatedly disrupted schooling in parts of Nigeria. School attacks, abductions, displacement and fear can reduce attendance, interrupt learning and undermine confidence in public institutions. Recent scholarship on school safety in Nigeria identifies insecurity as a significant threat to educational development, while empirical research in Katsina State shows that physical vulnerability of schools and inadequate security arrangements increase exposure to attacks and mass abduction (Aderinto et al., 2025; Oladunni et al., 2025).

The Federal Government has introduced several measures intended to address these challenges. The National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools provides a national framework for school safety, early warning, disaster-risk reduction and prevention and response mechanisms at national, state, local-government and school levels (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2021). More recently, the HOPE for Quality Basic Education for All (HOPE-EDU) programme was approved by the World Bank in March 2025. The programme combines US\$500 million in World Bank financing with US\$52.18 million from the Global Partnership for Education and is designed to improve foundational learning, expand access to basic education and strengthen

education systems. It is expected to directly benefit approximately 29 million children, 500,000 public-primary teachers and more than 65,000 public-primary schools, while supporting non-formal education for additional out-of-school children (World Bank, 2025).

Despite these developments, education and security policy remain insufficiently integrated in Nigerian policy discourse. Security debates tend to emphasise military operations, intelligence, policing and law enforcement, whereas education is generally discussed under development, welfare and service delivery. This institutional separation creates a policy gap because many of the conditions associated with vulnerability to insecurity are also affected by educational access, quality and continuity.

The present study therefore examines education as a social-policy instrument with implications for national security. Rather than claiming that education independently causes or prevents insecurity, the study systematically analyses available documentary evidence to identify the pathways through which educational conditions interact with socioeconomic vulnerability, social resilience and security.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria continues to experience terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence and other forms of insecurity despite sustained investment in conventional security institutions. Although military, police, intelligence and other coercive instruments remain indispensable, persistent insecurity demonstrates the importance of addressing the wider social and economic conditions within which insecurity develops and becomes entrenched.

Education represents one of these conditions. Large numbers of children remain excluded from formal education, learning outcomes remain weak and substantial regional inequalities persist. Insecurity further compounds these problems by disrupting schools, displacing learners and teachers, damaging infrastructure and generating fear among families and communities. The result is a mutually reinforcing relationship in which insecurity damages educational opportunity while prolonged educational deprivation may deepen socioeconomic vulnerability.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore not simply Nigeria's education deficit but the limited integration of education-centred social policy into the country's preventive conception of national security. Although substantial evidence exists on educational deprivation, human capital, poverty and school insecurity, the evidence remains dispersed across academic studies, government documents and international institutional reports. A systematic synthesis is consequently required to establish what the available evidence reveals about the relationship between education and national security in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine social policy as a driver of national security through evidence from Nigeria's education sector.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the relationship between education-focused social policy and national security;
- ii. analyse recent evidence on the condition of Nigeria's education sector;
- iii. assess the relationship between educational deprivation, insecurity and social vulnerability; and
- iv. examine recent government education interventions and their implications for national resilience.

Research Questions

- i. What relationship exists between education-focused social policy and national security?

- ii. What does recent documentary evidence reveal about the condition of Nigeria's education sector?
- iii. How does educational deprivation relate to insecurity and social vulnerability?
- iv. What are the national-security implications of recent government interventions in Nigeria's education sector?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

1 Social Policy

Social policy refers broadly to government measures, institutions and programmes designed to improve welfare, reduce inequality, expand access to essential services and strengthen human development. Contemporary social-policy thinking increasingly emphasises investment in human capabilities and resilience rather than viewing public expenditure solely as redistribution. Education occupies a central position within this approach because it affects skills, employment, social mobility, health, civic participation and intergenerational opportunity.

In the Nigerian context, education policy encompasses basic, secondary and tertiary education, teacher development, educational financing, inclusion, school safety and alternative learning pathways. The significance of education as social policy is consequently determined not only by enrolment but also by quality, equity, continuity and the ability of institutions to reach vulnerable populations.

2 National Security

National security traditionally refers to the protection of the state, its institutions, territorial integrity and population against internal and external threats. Contemporary approaches, however, recognise that security is also influenced by economic, social, political and human conditions. The UNDP (2022) human-security perspective consequently broadens the analytical focus to include freedom from fear, freedom from want and protection from indignity.

For Nigeria, this broader conception is particularly relevant because insecurity frequently intersects with unemployment, poverty, displacement, weak institutions and social exclusion. National security should therefore not be reduced to the capacity to respond to violence after it occurs; it should also include policies capable of reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience before crises escalate.

3 Education as a Social-Policy Instrument

Education is a principal mechanism through which states build human capital. Human Capital Theory holds that investment in knowledge and skills improves productivity, earning capacity and economic performance (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). From a social-policy perspective, education can also reduce intergenerational disadvantage by expanding opportunities for children from poor and marginalised households.

The security significance of education arises from these broader effects. Education can improve legitimate economic opportunity, civic participation and social inclusion while strengthening individuals' capacity to engage with information critically. In conflict-affected settings, schools may additionally provide continuity, psychosocial support, protection and access to other social services. Conversely, prolonged educational exclusion may deepen vulnerability where it coincides with poverty, unemployment and weak institutional support.

4 Education and Social Resilience

Social resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to absorb shocks, adapt to changing circumstances and recover from disruption. Education can strengthen resilience by improving skills, social networks, civic knowledge and access to

opportunities. UNESCO (2024) emphasises the importance of effective educational leadership and system capacity in achieving sustainable improvements in educational outcomes.

In Nigeria, resilience is particularly important in communities affected by conflict and displacement. Education continuity can help prevent the loss of human capital and provide structured environments in which children can remain connected to learning and social support. Evidence from accelerated-learning programmes in northeast Nigeria also demonstrates that targeted educational interventions can improve learning and social-emotional outcomes among children affected by educational exclusion (Diazgranados Ferráns et al., 2022).

Theoretical Framework

1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, principally associated with Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), conceptualises education as an investment that enhances knowledge, skills, productivity and future earnings. The theory provides a basis for understanding the relationship between educational policy and national resilience. Societies with stronger human-capital systems are better positioned to generate productive employment, innovation and economic opportunity.

Applied to Nigeria, the theory suggests that educational exclusion imposes costs beyond the individual learner. When large segments of the population lack adequate foundational skills, the economy experiences reduced productive capacity and weaker prospects for inclusive growth. These conditions may increase socioeconomic vulnerability, although the theory does not establish a direct causal relationship between low education and violent behaviour.

2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory broadens security analysis beyond the state to the protection and empowerment of people. The approach recognises economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political dimensions of security (UNDP, 1994, 2022). Education fits within this framework because it can reduce vulnerability by expanding capabilities, improving access to economic opportunities and strengthening social participation. The theory therefore provides a direct conceptual bridge between social policy and national security: security is strengthened when policies reduce the conditions that make individuals and communities vulnerable to shocks and exclusion.

3 Social Investment Theory

Social Investment Theory views expenditure on human capabilities as an investment capable of producing long-term social and economic returns. Education is a central social investment because it can generate benefits across the life course through improved skills, employment, productivity and social participation. The theory is particularly useful for interpreting contemporary Nigerian education interventions. Programmes that expand foundational learning, increase access, improve teacher capacity and strengthen education systems can be understood as investments in the country's future productive and social capacity. Their security significance consequently lies in strengthening the foundations of resilience rather than replacing conventional security institutions.

Together, the three theories provide a complementary analytical framework. Human Capital Theory explains the productive value of education; Human Security Theory explains its role in reducing vulnerability; and Social Investment Theory explains why sustained educational expenditure can produce long-term social returns. The combined framework supports the proposition that education can contribute to national security through human-capital development, opportunity, inclusion and resilience.

Methodology

1 Research Design

The study adopted a systematic document analysis design. This approach was selected because the research questions concern patterns and relationships that can be examined through existing academic, governmental and institutional evidence rather than through primary field data. The study does not claim to estimate a statistical causal relationship between education and insecurity. Instead, it systematically identifies, evaluates and synthesises documentary evidence concerning educational conditions, social vulnerability, insecurity and policy interventions in Nigeria.

The reporting structure was informed by established principles of transparent evidence synthesis, including systematic identification, screening, eligibility assessment, extraction and synthesis of evidence (Page et al., 2021). The approach also recognises the value of combining peer-reviewed research with policy and institutional documents when addressing policy-oriented questions (Peters et al., 2020).

2 Search Strategy

A structured literature and document search was undertaken using combinations of the following terms: education and national security in Nigeria; education and insecurity in Nigeria; educational deprivation and insecurity; out-of-school children Nigeria; education and human security; education and social resilience; school safety Nigeria; education policy Nigeria; human capital Nigeria; and education and violent extremism.

Academic literature was searched through Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, while supplementary searches were undertaken in official repositories and institutional databases. These included the National Bureau of Statistics, Federal Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP and other relevant policy institutions. Reference lists of relevant academic studies were also examined to identify additional sources directly relevant to the research questions.

3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included when they:

- i. addressed Nigeria or provided directly relevant comparative evidence;
- ii. examined education, educational deprivation, human capital, school safety, social vulnerability or their relationship with insecurity;
- iii. were published principally between 2021 and 2026;
- iv. were peer-reviewed academic studies, official government documents, international institutional reports or other authoritative policy documents; and
- v. contained substantive empirical, statistical, policy or analytical evidence relevant to at least one research question.

Foundational theoretical publications predating 2021, particularly Schultz (1961), Becker (1964) and UNDP (1994), were retained only where necessary to establish the theoretical framework. Documents lacking identifiable authorship or institutional authority, opinion pieces without substantive evidence and materials unrelated to the Nigerian education-security relationship were excluded.

4 Data Extraction and Analysis

For each eligible document, information was extracted under five categories: publication characteristics; education issue examined; principal evidence or findings; relationship to insecurity or social vulnerability; and policy implications. The extracted evidence was subsequently organised according to the four research questions. Thematic synthesis was then undertaken

around four analytical themes: (1) education and national security; (2) the condition of Nigeria's education sector; (3) educational deprivation, insecurity and social vulnerability; and (4) government interventions and national resilience. Where statistical estimates differed across sources because of differences in definitions, age groups or measurement periods, the study retained the source's original definition rather than combining incompatible estimates.

The credibility of documentary evidence was assessed by considering the authority of the producing institution, methodological transparency, relevance to the research questions, recency and consistency with other sources. Evidence from peer-reviewed studies was considered alongside official statistical and policy sources rather than treating either category as sufficient on its own.

Discussion of Findings

1 Education-Focused Social Policy and National Security

The documentary evidence indicates that education-focused social policy contributes to national security primarily through indirect but strategically important pathways involving human capital, socioeconomic opportunity, social inclusion and resilience. Human Capital Theory explains how education increases knowledge and productive capacity, while Human Security Theory highlights the role of education in reducing vulnerability and expanding human capabilities. The reviewed literature and institutional evidence consistently show that education affects factors relevant to security, including employment prospects, social participation, economic resilience and community capacity. Evidence from northeast Nigeria further demonstrates that targeted educational programmes can improve learning and social-emotional outcomes among children affected by conflict and educational exclusion (Diazgranados Ferráns et al., 2022). However, the evidence does not support the claim that education alone prevents terrorism, banditry, crime or other forms of insecurity. Rather, education functions as one component of a broader preventive policy environment in which employment, social protection, governance, health and security institutions interact. The first research question is therefore answered by finding that education-focused social policy has a **strategic indirect relationship** with national security because it strengthens the human and social conditions that support resilience and reduce vulnerability.

2 Recent Condition of Nigeria's Education Sector

The second research question is answered by evidence of persistent educational exclusion, unequal access and weak learning conditions despite ongoing policy reforms. UNICEF's recent reporting indicates that Nigeria continues to have one of the world's largest out-of-school populations, with approximately 10.2 million children out of school at primary level and another 8.1 million at junior-secondary level (UNICEF, 2025). The problem is geographically uneven, with particularly serious disadvantages in northern regions where poverty, insecurity and gender-related barriers interact with educational deficits. The World Bank's human-capital evidence similarly identifies major weaknesses in learning outcomes and basic education service delivery, while its 2024 review of human-capital expenditure identifies financing and institutional constraints affecting basic education (Belay et al., 2024; World Bank, 2024). The documentary evidence also indicates that access alone is insufficient: educational quality, foundational literacy, teacher capacity, infrastructure, leadership and system accountability determine whether educational participation translates into meaningful human-capital gains. The finding is therefore that Nigeria's education sector has expanded policy attention but continues to face structural deficits that limit its contribution to human development and national resilience.

3 Educational Deprivation, Insecurity and Social Vulnerability

The third research question is answered by evidence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between educational deprivation and insecurity. On one side, poverty, exclusion and weak educational opportunities can increase socioeconomic vulnerability by limiting legitimate pathways to employment and social mobility. NBS (2022) reported that 62.9% of Nigerians, approximately 133 million people, were multidimensionally poor, illustrating the scale of the socioeconomic environment within which educational deprivation occurs. On the other side, insecurity directly damages education through school attacks, kidnapping, displacement and fear. Recent evidence from Katsina State found that schools were highly vulnerable to attacks and mass abduction, with inadequate perimeter protection and insufficient security personnel contributing to vulnerability (Aderinto et al., 2025). Similarly, recent scholarship in the *International Journal of Educational Development* identifies school insecurity as a major threat to educational continuity and development in Nigeria (Oladunni et al., 2025). These findings suggest a reinforcing cycle: insecurity reduces access to education and educational continuity, while prolonged deprivation may deepen social and economic vulnerability. The evidence does not establish that educational deprivation automatically produces criminality or violent extremism; rather, it demonstrates that educational exclusion can form part of a wider cluster of vulnerabilities relevant to national security.

4 Government Interventions and Their National-Security Implications

The fourth research question is answered by evidence that recent Nigerian education interventions possess important resilience-building potential but require stronger implementation and monitoring. The National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools provides a framework for comprehensive school-safety planning, early warning, disaster-risk reduction and coordinated prevention and response mechanisms (FME, 2021). HOPE-EDU represents a further strategic investment, combining approximately US\$500 million in World Bank financing with US\$52.18 million from the Global Partnership for Education and targeting foundational learning, access and education-system strengthening across Nigeria (World Bank, 2025). The programme's scale—29 million public-primary learners, 500,000 teachers and more than 65,000 schools, together with support for non-formal learning—means that successful implementation could significantly expand the country's human-capital base. Nevertheless, the security value of these interventions should not be assumed from expenditure or enrolment alone. Their contribution to national resilience should be assessed through measurable outcomes including school attendance and continuity in conflict-affected areas, learning outcomes, teacher availability, educational equity, school safety and transition into productive opportunities. The finding is therefore that current interventions provide a foundation for treating education as a preventive resilience instrument, but their security contribution depends on implementation quality, intergovernmental coordination and systematic evaluation.

Conclusion

This study examined social policy as a driver of national security through a systematic document analysis of Nigeria's education sector. The evidence demonstrates that education has strategic security relevance through its contribution to human-capital development, socioeconomic opportunity, social inclusion and resilience. At the same time, persistent educational deprivation and insecurity reinforce one another, particularly in vulnerable communities. The study does not suggest that education is a substitute for military, intelligence, policing or other conventional security capabilities. Rather, it demonstrates that sustainable security requires attention to the

social conditions that influence vulnerability before insecurity becomes entrenched. Nigeria's recent education reforms, particularly HOPE-EDU and the national school-safety framework, provide opportunities to strengthen this preventive dimension. Education should consequently be recognised within national resilience and preventive-security planning while retaining its civilian, developmental and rights-based character. The security value of education will be greatest when investment in access and learning quality is accompanied by school safety, socioeconomic opportunity, effective governance and evidence-based monitoring.

Recommendations

Recommendation One

The Federal Government of Nigeria should designate education as a strategic component of national resilience and national-security planning.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, to integrate relevant education and human-capital indicators into national security and resilience policy frameworks.
- ii. The National Security Adviser, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, UBEC, NELFUND, security agencies and development partners, to establish a multisectoral coordination mechanism for periodically assessing the security implications of educational outcomes.

Recommendation Two

The Federal Government of Nigeria should prioritise equitable access to quality education, particularly in communities experiencing severe educational deprivation and socioeconomic vulnerability.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with UBEC and State Ministries of Education, to prioritise underserved communities for improved school infrastructure, teacher deployment, foundational learning and alternative education programmes for out-of-school children.
- ii. The Federal Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with relevant planning and budget institutions, to strengthen timely and transparent financing of education programmes and ensure effective utilisation of resources targeted at disadvantaged communities.

Recommendation Three

The Federal Government of Nigeria should strengthen school safety and continuity of education in conflict-affected and other high-risk communities.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Armed Forces of Nigeria and State Governments, to strengthen implementation of the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools through risk assessment, early-warning mechanisms and appropriate protective measures.
- ii. State Ministries of Education, in collaboration with Local Government Authorities and community stakeholders, to establish community-based school-protection and emergency-response mechanisms that support safe access to education and continuity of learning during periods of insecurity.

Recommendation Four

The Federal Government of Nigeria should institutionalise evidence-based monitoring and evaluation of the social and resilience outcomes of major education interventions.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The National Bureau of Statistics, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, UBEC and relevant national institutions, to institutionalise periodic collection, analysis and publication of disaggregated education and social-vulnerability indicators relevant to national resilience.
- ii. Universities, in collaboration with research institutes, policy think tanks and relevant government institutions, to undertake interdisciplinary research and periodic evaluation of major education interventions in relation to access, learning outcomes, social inclusion, school safety and national resilience.

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