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MITIGATING SCHOOL-DROP-OUT-SYNDROME THROUGH INTEGRATING RECONCILIATORY INITIATIVES INTO EDUCATIONAL RECOVERY FOR SUSTAINING PEACE IN POST-BANDITRY BIRNIN GWARI COMMUNITY OF KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explored how school drop-out syndrome can be mitigated by integrating reconciliatory initiatives into educational recovery for sustaining peace in post-banditry Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State. It examines how the recent reconciliatory initiatives in Birnin Gwari LGA and Kaduna State, which combine community-led dialogue, amnesty programs, and socio-economic rehabilitation, offer a fragile yet promising pathway to peace after years of banditry. It starts by examining the devastating impact of banditry on education in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data, it explores how persistent insecurity has disrupted schooling, exacerbated dropout rates, and deepened socio-economic inequalities. The paper proceeds to explore how these peace-building efforts can be sustained, adapted, and replicated to revive education and prevent relapse into violence. Drawing parallels with global post-conflict recovery models, it argues that education itself must be both a beneficiary and a driver of sustainable peace. The paper concludes that banditry in Birnin Gwari reflects systemic issues of state fragility, resource competition, and ethnic strife; that, unlike ideological insurgencies, bandits exploit economic grievances, complicating counter-measures; that education crisis mirrors global patterns (Sahel conflicts) but is intensified by local factors like illegal mining and weak law enforcement; thatgovernment responses, such as the Safe Schools Initiative, face challenges of corruption and underfunding and that Birnin Gwari's tentative peace demonstrates that reconciliatory initiatives, when rooted in community agency and socio-educational investment, can reverse banditry's harms. However, without systemic commitment to equity and justice, the paper believes that these gains risk erosion. By treating education as inseparable from peace-building, Nigeria can transform Birnin Gwari from a cautionary tale into a blueprint for conflict resolution. The paper recommends enhanced security, community engagement, leveraging technology, and national policy integration in order to turn the tide of school drop-out in society.

Keywords: school drop-out, educational recovery, reconciliatory initiatives, post-banditry, Birnin Gwari, peace accord, education

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Introduction

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1988) (UNESCO), Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of development (UNESCO, 1948). However, in Birnin Gwari, a region plagued by banditry, this right was under severe threat for decades. Banditry, characterised by armed violence, kidnappings, and extortion, has escalated since the mid-2010s, rooted in socio-economic marginalisation, ethnic tensions, and weak governance (International Crisis Group, 2020). The recent reconciliatory initiatives in Birnin Gwari LGA and Kaduna State, combining community-led dialogue, amnesty programs, and socio-economic rehabilitation, offer a fragile yet promising pathway to peace. This paper investigates how insecurity has crippled educational access, quality, and equity, drawing on scholarly frameworks of human security and fragility (Newman, 2010), and how peace-building efforts can be sustained, adapted, and replicated to revive education and prevent relapse into violence.

Impact of Security Challenges on Education

Existing research highlights Nigeria's broader security challenges, including Boko Haram's insurgency and farmer-herder conflicts (Okechukwu, 2021). While studies analyse terrorism's impact on education in the Northeast, less attention is paid to banditry in Northwest Nigeria. Reports by the International Crisis Group (2020) link banditry to unemployment and illegal mining, while UNICEF (2022) notes Nigeria's 10.5 million out-of-school children, with insecurity as a key driver. This paper fills a gap by focusing on Birnin Gwari's unique context.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative analysis of secondary data from academic journals, NGO reports (Amnesty International, Mercy Corps), government publications, and verified news sources. Thematic coding identifies direct and indirect effects of banditry on education, contextualised within socio-political dynamics. Thematic and content analysis procedures are deployed to analyse and interpret the data.

Impacts of Banditry on Education

1. **School Closures and Attacks**:

Over 60% of Birnin Gwari's schools have closed due to attacks (Kaduna State Ministry of Education, 2023; Birnin Gwari Unity Forum, 2024& Birnin Gwari Local Government Council, 2025). Notable incidents include the expulsion of tens of villages and towns in Birnin Gwari with their schools (Islamic and western-styled), the 2021 abduction of 39 students from Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation and the mass abduction of nearly 200 school students in the neighbouring Kuriga town in 2024.

2. Infrastructure Destruction

Schools repurposed as military bases or destroyed, displacing 15,000 students (UNICEF, 2022). According to Birnin Gwari Unity Forum (2024) and Birnin Gwari Local Government Council (2025), nearly all the schools and public infrastructure in the deserted villages and towns in the LGA are dilapidated or destroyed due to many years of abandonment.

3. Dropout Rates

Enrollment plummeted by 45% between2018 and 2023, with girls disproportionately affected due to safety concerns (Plan International, 2023). For instance, when whole towns or villages and their schools are forcibly made to vacate their abodes, when teachers from other places cannot travel to their places of work or when existence is preferred over schooling, the result is massive dropping out from school.

4. Psychological Trauma

Teachers and students report PTSD symptoms, which hinder learning outcomes (Akorede et al., 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Such memories of killing and maiming one's family members before one's very eyes, recounting times when one was being chased, abducted or even shot, are both devastating and psychologically traumatising for a long time.

5. Economic Strain

Families prioritise survival over education, with child labour increasing by 30% (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2022). Displaced families who oftentimes lose their breadwinners to banditry resort to relying on kids for means of sustenance through begging or cheap and harmful labour, jeopardising the education of the young ones and exposing them to multifaceted vulnerabilities.

6. Strangulation of the Existing Schools in the Remaining Towns/Villages

Even the so-called existing schools in the last-man-standing-of-sort towns and villages have been rendered comatose, ineffective in the following ways:

i. Teachers are forced to abandon duty posts due to unsafe roads or school locations, leading to disruption or uncatered-for students.

ii. The general teacher paucity, which needs to be mitigated by such supportive government schemes as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and deployment of student-teachers for teaching practice by teacher training institutions, excludes insecure areas, tagged as red zones that are risky to go to.

iii. Over-straining of the personnel and facilities of the existing schools due to the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled their terrorised locations to enrol their wards in the safe schools.

iv. At times, the schools in the relatively safer locations get converted to camps for the IDPs or counter-banditry security personnel, prioritising shelter and security over education.

v. Exclusion of the schools in Birnin Gwari general area, even those in relatively safer locations, from virtually all interventions in the form of structural or personnel development programmes or projects of governments and NGOs, citing security concerns on programme/project executors.

Contextualising Reconciliatory Initiatives in Birnin Gwari

After over a decade of devastating attacks and counter-attacks, leading to near total desertion of Birnin Gwari land, around September 2024, through reconciliatory moves coordinated by the office of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Service Chiefs and the Kaduna State Government, in collaboration with some Muslim clerics, peace was brokered in Birnin Gwari LGA. The peace accord is lauded by all people living within or traversing through the vast Birnin Gwari land. The peace process in Birnin Gwari involves a myriad of efforts and strategies, the most important of which are summarised below.

1. Community-Driven Dialogue

Traditional leaders, notably, the Emir of Birnin Gwari, were in the forefront of the conciliatory moves, given their influence among the people. For instance, the Emir was conspicuously represented by the *Hakimin Tsakiya* (Head of the Central District). *HakiminGabas* (Head of the Eastern District)and *Hakimin Yamm* (Head of the Western District) at various places and times, mediating between bandit groups, security forces, and civilians.

2. Amnesty Programs

The embedded amnesty in the Birnin Gwari peace accord exists in the form of conditional disarmament and reintegration of repentant bandits, supported by state and federal agencies. As it stands, all repentant bandits have been given assurances of freedom from any retribution from both government and affected communities on conditions of among others releasing the captives/abductees in their custody, cessation of any form of hostility against anyone in any place and helping the government and community against defaulters from both within and outside the Birnin Gwari general area.

3. Socio-Economic Interventions

Livelihood grants, vocational training, and infrastructure rebuilding should be the next cogent step to take by the Nigerian government if a new leaf is to be turned on this crucial matter. For now, this is at the promissory stage. These initiatives have reduced attacks by 40% since 2022 (Kaduna Peace Commission, 2023), enabling the gradual reopening of schools. However, their long-term viability remains contested

Suitability of the Birnin Gwari Model for Educational Recovery

1. Addressing Direct Impacts of Banditry

i. School Reopening: Improvements have resulted in the return of schools in states such as Borno and Kaduna (the southern part) (State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), 2023). With improved security, a good percentage of previously closed schools will resume operations, and the community vigilantes and repentant and integrated bandits will continue to patrol school premises, mirroring Colombia's EscuelasSegurasModel. Many

Islamiyyah and western-styled schools will re-open relative to the reconstruction efforts achieved in terms of the people's shelter and the school infrastructure.

ii. Trauma-Informed Education: Partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the United Nations' International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF)and local groups/bodies like the Reaching Out Of School Children (ROOSC) Project of the Kaduna State Government should introduce counselling programmes for students and teachers, critical for reversing the psychological scars associated with violence victims. In this direction, the activities of religious groups like the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Birnin Gwari Area Council and the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah wa Iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS), Birnin Gwari Local Government Branch are commendable. The present researchers are witnesses to these laudable contributions of the aforementioned organisations. Their efforts at de-radicalising the former actors and victims of banditry in the area should be complemented and supported/sponsored, given their serious reformatory and consolatory impacts.

2. Tackling Root Causes

i. Youth Engagement: Since an idle mind is the devil's workshop, creating and equipping vocational centres targeting former bandits and out-of-school youth in such lucrative sectors as agriculture and mining through cooperatives and the like can reduce recruitment incentives to banditry in the near and even far future. As seen in Mozambique's post-civil war recovery, economic empowerment curbs relapse.

ii. Gender-Sensitive Policies: Scholarships, especially for girls, whose enrollment dropped by 60% during peak banditry (Plan International, 2022), can address systemic inequities exacerbated by conflict. In conflict-prone areas and times, girls' schools and female students are more targeted due to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, non-resistance and fragility.

3. Community Ownership

Several community ownership strategies could be taken to sustain peace and boost student re-enrolment in post-banditry time in the affected communities. Such steps as having a viable school-based peace committee are necessary. Through such initiatives, parents, teachers, and elders can collaborate on safety protocols, fostering trust. Similar participatory frameworks succeeded in post-Boko Haram Northeast Nigeria.

4. Replicability

a. Conditions for Scaling the Model

For the Birnin Gwari approach to be replicated in regions like Zamfara or Niger State, the following are critical:

i. Decentralised Governance: Empower local leaders who understand socio-cultural dynamics, avoiding top-down militarisation. Any peace initiative without involving and relatively empowering the local leadership to take control of certain issues will be a mirage. It will simply end up putting square pegs in round holes, a clear mismatch and a waste of efforts and resources.

ii. Integrated Funding: There should be a pool of resources from the government, NGOs, and the private sector. Efforts like the Kaduna Safe Schools Fund and Reach Out Of School Children (ROOSC) are quite commendable. But efforts should be made to make sure the funds are judiciously used.

iii. Data-Driven Monitoring: Governments and other critical stakeholders in the peace initiative should try and track metrics like student retention, attack frequency, and employment rates to adjust strategies. The aim should be to advance the frontiers of mutual trust, cooperation and responsibility via proper and adequate engagement.

b. Challenges to Replication and Sustainability of the Peace Initiatives

Certain challenges are potent in facilitating or inhibiting the sustainability and replicability of the Birnin Gwari peace rebuilding initiatives, unless pre-empted and proactively nipped in the bud. This section addresses a few of such:

i. Persistent Mistrust: Communities may resist reintegrating ex-bandits without guarantees of accountability. The presence of some actors in the terrible and nightmarish banditry activities moving about unpunished (given amnesty) in the communities could trigger reprisals. The imperative of forgiveness, not vengeance, for lasting peace to reign, rather than a vicious cycle of reprisals and counter-reprisals, should be emphasised to all communities in the post-banditry period. The government at all levels should lead with practical commitment in this direction by implementing the terms of the treaty in both letter and spirit. Decisive actions should be taken to forestall any potential breaches from whatever sources and angles.

ii. **Resource Constraints:** Limited state capacity and donor fatigue threaten sustainability. The sustainability of peace after the nasty experiences needs a lot of complex strategies that could be capital-intensive. When budgetary allocations are not favourably made or judiciously managed, the myriad of human and material resources needed might be scarce, leading to an inglorious return to the days of mayhem and destruction.

Education as a Pillar of Sustainable Peace

Just as the destruction of is a direct consequence of banditry, education is a catalyst for peace. For lasting and sustainable peace to be achieved, therefore, education has to be invoked. Examples of ways to galvanise education for peace abound in such steps as curriculum reform and infrastructural revolution.

i. Funding and Policy: Prioritise education in budgets, implement the Safe Schools Declaration, and support NGOs providing alternative learning spaces. The budgetary allocation of 28% to education for the year 2025 is quite a step in the right direction, if care and deliberate steps are taken to implement it to the letter and inclusively.

ii. Research: Invest in longitudinal studies to track recovery and specific impacts. Funding should therefore be earmarked by governments and the private sector to incentivise research in this direction.

iii. Curriculum Reform: Integrating peace education to foster tolerance can be a viable option, as done in the Rwandan post-genocide peace initiative. The peace education could be a new subject entirely or new topics injected into existing ones, like Social Studies or Civic/Citizenship Education. Alternatively, religious education, which already teaches tolerance and forgiveness and remorse, should serve the purpose.

.**iv.Physical Rebuilding:** Reconstructing destroyed schools as monuments of resilience ("Peace Primary Schools"). The Borno State massive re-building os schools and towns remains a commendable physical rebuilding step taken by the government.

Conclusion

Banditry in Birnin Gwari reflects systemic issues: state fragility, resource competition, and ethnic strife. Unlike ideological insurgencies, bandits exploit economic grievances, complicating countermeasures. The education crisis mirrors global patterns (Sahel conflicts) but is intensified by local factors like illegal mining and weak law enforcement. Government responses, such as the Safe Schools Initiative, face challenges of corruption and underfunding.

Birnin Gwari's tentative peace demonstrates that reconciliatory initiatives, when rooted in community agency and socio-educational investment, can reverse banditry's harms. However, without systemic commitment to equity and justice, these gains risk erosion. By treating education as inseparable from peace-building, Nigeria can transform Birnin Gwari from a cautionary tale into a blueprint for conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Banditry has devastated education in Birnin Gwari, perpetuating cycles of poverty and insecurity. The peace initiatives are part of the laudable, long-awaited developments needed:

1. Enhanced Security: The government should collaborate with communities to fortify schools and deploy trained security personnel to deter non-compliant and defaulting aggressors.

2. Community Engagement: The drivers of the peace initiatives should leverage local leaders for conflict resolution and reintegration programmes, to give second chances and reformative changes to former/repentant bandits.
3. Leverage Technology: Radio-based learning (used during COVID-19) should be deployed for conflict-prone areas. This works even in areas with no mobile networks or a constant electricity supply.
4. National Policy Integration: Mainstream Kaduna's peace framework into Nigeria's National Action Plan for Safe Schools, to facilitate its awareness and deliberate replication in other regions.
5. International Partnerships: The Nigerian Government should collaborate with bodies like ECOWAS to share best practices across West Africa's conflict zones.

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