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Social Justice and Vulnerability of The Education Sector in Nigeria: Implications for National Security and Development

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Abstract

This study examined the intersection of social justice, Nigeria's education sector's vulnerability, and the consequential impacts on national security and development. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Three research questions. The population of the study comprised all secondary school teachers in Delta State with a sample size of 600 teachers selected from 30 public secondary schools from the three senatorial districts of Delta State. 10 schools and 20 teachers, including the principals, were selected from each of the senatorial districts. The multistage sampling technique was used for the sample selection process. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire with a 34-item, four-point rating scale validated by two experts and trial-tested to establish reliability. An internal consistency of 0.82 was attained. 600 copies of the instrument were administered, and 573(96%) copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics of mean scores and standard deviation were used for the data analysis. Findings from the study revealed among others that Nigeria's education system is bedeviled with insecurity due to endemic injustice which manifests in inequality in access to quality education, disparity in accessing admission to read choice careers due hike in school fees to the detriment of the masses making the education system vulnerable and culminating in risk of youth radicalization and involvement in criminal activities which results in insecurity and underdevelopment of the nation. It was recommended among other points that education should be subsidized so that the lowly can afford quality education and skills development and that the Delta State government should make policies that prioritize equitable resource allocation across rural and urban schools and develop a system to monitor and enforce educational policies uniformly across regions to prevent regional disparities.

Keywords: Inequality, insecurity, national development, social justice, and vulnerability of the education sector.

Introduction

Globally, education is acknowledged as a powerful driver of social justice, promoting equal access to resources, empowering marginalized groups, and fostering critical thinking among students. The extensive benefits of education have led to a stronger emphasis on using educational systems to address disparities in socioeconomic status, race, and gender (Darder, 2017). This emphasis highlights the persistence of social and economic inequalities, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Many forward-thinking individuals have scrutinized dominant narratives and systemic inequalities affecting Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, issues that have contributed to security challenges and hindered national development. In other regions, education has been instrumental in creating inclusive curricula and raising awareness of social and economic justice, strengthening unity in multiethnic societies like Nigeria (Giroux, 2018).

Schools and universities are implementing policies aimed at reducing illiteracy and uplifting underrepresented students. Programs that prioritize accessibility and diversity are expanding, with initiatives like scholarships for low-income students making education more accessible (OECD, 2020). Additionally, integrating digital technology into education has increased access to quality resources, particularly for marginalized communities, a need underscored by the disparities that became evident during remote learning in the COVID-19 pandemic

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(UNESCO, 2021). These transformative changes emphasize education systems' growing role in promoting social equity and justice (Apple, 2019).

Social justice in education focuses on ensuring fair distribution of educational opportunities and resources, regardless of socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, or geography. In Nigeria, this is critical due to complex socioeconomic dynamics. Despite Nigeria's position as Africa's largest economy, it has a high number of out-of-school children, estimated at 10.5 million in 2021, with challenges particularly severe in the north where socioeconomic disparities and displacement limit access, especially for girls (UNICEF, 2021). Security threats in various regions—such as insurgencies, banditry, and ethnic tensions—intensify these issues, affecting education and national stability (Agora Policy Report, 2023; Nextier, 2022).

Although the government has made strides with initiatives like the National Policy on Education and the Universal Basic Education program, funding and infrastructure gaps hinder the realization of equitable education (Umar et al., 2019). These disparities lead to significant educational inequities between urban and rural areas, with urban areas generally better resourced (Ezekannagha & Anunobi, 2020). The quality of education also remains a concern, as many public schools lack qualified teachers and essential resources, limiting the transformative potential of education (Adeyemi & Adu, 2018).

Systemic issues such as gender-based discrimination, inadequate teacher training, and limited support for children with disabilities further challenge the development of an inclusive education system (Odebiyi, 2020). International organizations continue to support reforms aimed at inclusivity and gender equity, but sustained national commitment is essential to overcoming these barriers and achieving education's social justice objectives (World Bank, 2022; Obasi & Awodipe, 2023). Ensuring educational equity requires addressing disparities in access and quality, particularly in underserved areas, as noted by Adebayo (2019), where rural children often have limited access to schools and quality education is disproportionately low.

Gender disparities in Nigerian education remain a significant concern, with many girls facing barriers such as early marriage and child labor, which impact their educational attainment (Osokoya, 2017). In Delta State, uneven economic distribution and unequal access to educational resources reinforce these disparities. Although recent initiatives, including new universities, aim to improve access, social and economic inequalities persist, challenging educational equity and security. Addressing these issues is essential for safeguarding Nigeria's future and promoting an equitable, just society.

However, the unprecedented drift of northern youths, some of whom are teenagers who should be in primary and secondary schools, seems to compound the degree of social injustice and security threat in the State as the number of out-of-school children surges higher and cases of attacks on schools keep rising in the area. Something must be done for the future of education and for children to be protected. This paper examined the intersection of social justice, the vulnerability of the Nigerian education sector, and the consequential impacts on national security and development with a focus on Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's education sector faces critical challenges due to persistent social justice issues that hinder its role in promoting equitable development and reinforcing national security. Despite its importance as a catalyst for socioeconomic progress, the sector is marred by disparities in access, funding, and quality, which vary significantly across regions. These inequalities are often driven by socioeconomic imbalances, political exclusion, and systemic neglect, resulting in substantial differences in literacy rates, especially for children in low-income or conflict-ridden areas. Such disparities not only entrench cycles of poverty but also increase the vulnerability of individuals to radicalization and criminal activities, creating additional security concerns. Furthermore, the absence of a stable and supportive educational framework limits human capital development, weakening Nigeria's capacity for sustainable growth and global competitiveness. This situation is compounded by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and recurring industrial disputes, all of which disrupt educational continuity. The link between social inequity in education and Nigeria's security issues highlights the need for targeted policies to create a more inclusive, accessible, and robust education system. Addressing these vulnerabilities is crucial for reducing security risks, empowering young people, and fostering equitable development in the nation.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to assess the influence of social injustice on the vulnerability of the education sector in Nigeria: implications for national security and development. Specifically, the study aimed to determine:

1. The way government policies and implementation perpetuate educational vulnerabilities, inequality, and insecurity in the education sector.
2. The extent to which social injustice such as inequality and discrimination, impacts the accessibility and quality of education in Delta State
3. The implications of vulnerability of the education sector for national security and development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. How do government policies and implementation perpetuate educational vulnerabilities, inequality, and insecurity in the education sector?
2. To what extent does social injustice such as inequality and discrimination, impact the accessibility and quality of education in Delta State
3. What are the implications of the vulnerability of the education sector for national security and development?

Method

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised all secondary school teachers in Delta State with a sample size of 600 teachers selected from 30 public secondary schools from the three senatorial districts of Delta State. 10 schools and 20 teachers from each school, including the principals, were selected from each of the senatorial districts. The multistage sampling technique

was used for the sample selection process. The senatorial Districts were comprehensively selected. The purposive random sampling techniques was used for the selection of the local government areas from which the schools were selected for the study. Thereafter, the quota sampling technique was used to allocate the number of schools selected from each Senatorial District. The random sampling technique was used for the selection of the final participants. 20 respondents (teachers) were selected from each school selected for the study. Thus, 200 participants were selected from each senatorial District totaling 600 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire with a 26-item four-point rating

scale validated by two experts and trial-tested to establish reliability. An internal consistency of 0.82 was attained. 600 copies of the instrument were administered, and 573(96%) copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics of mean scores and standard deviation were used for data analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: How do government policies and implementation patterns perpetuate educational vulnerabilities, inequality, and insecurity in the education sector?

Table 1: Frequency, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations Distribution of Respondents on the Ways Government Policies and Implementation Patterns Perpetuate Educational Vulnerabilities, Inequality, and Insecurity in the Education Sector.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	x	SD	Decision
1	Government policies contribute to the scarcity of essential educational resources.	135	151	164	123	2.52	1.07	Agree
2	Government allocation of resources to schools is inadequate for the needs of students and teachers."	161	142	155	115	2.61	1.10	Agree
3	Government policies do not adequately address the unique challenges of under-resourced schools.	188	161	131	93	2.77	1.08	Agree
4	Current policies are effective in reducing dropout rates in vulnerable communities	91	111	192	179	2.20	1.05	Disagree
5	Policies favor urban schools over rural schools, contributing to inequality in education."	201	199	91	82	2.91	1.04	Agree
6	Students from low-income backgrounds face greater challenges in accessing quality education due to government policies	175	183	114	101	2.75	1.07	Agree
7	Government support for marginalized groups (e.g., girls, minority communities) is insufficient."	161	187	129	96	2.72	1.05	Agree
8	Educational funding distribution is biased and increases inequality	211	173	134	55	2.94	0.99	Agree
9	Inadequate implementation of safety policies leaves students vulnerable to insecurity in schools	214	168	92	99	2.87	1.10	Agree
10	Government policies fail to provide safe learning environments, especially in conflict-prone areas	211	170	134	58	2.93	1.00	Agree
11	Policies for protecting students and staff in crisis situations are poorly enforced	199	201	91	82	2.90	1.03	Agree
12	The government regularly evaluates and updates education policies to address social injustice.	71	89	149	264	1.94	1.05	Disagree
13	Corruption and mismanagement in policy implementation widen the gaps in social injustice	180	196	104	93	2.81	1.05	Agree
14	Government policy implementation is consistent across different regions and communities.	86	103	187	197	2.14	1.05	Disagree
	Grand Mean/Standard Deviation					2.64	1.05	Agree

Results in Table 1 reveal that respondents agree with all the items with mean scores that range between 2.52 and 2.94; values that are significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean. However, respondents disagree with items 4(2.20), 12(1.94, and 14(2.14) with mean scores significantly less than 2.50 criterion mean. The result reveals a grand mean score of 2.64 and a standard deviation of 1.05. The result indicates that government policies and allocation of resources to schools do not adequately address the unique challenges of under-resourced schools, but favour urban schools over rural schools, contributing to inequality in education and that students from low-income backgrounds face greater challenges in accessing quality education due to such policies

which support the marginalization of groups such as the girls, underprivileged people, and minority communities, poor funds distribution with biased intension against rural communities expand the scope of social injustice and inequality. Additionally, the result indicates that inadequate implementation of safety policies leaves students

vulnerable to insecurity in schools as government policies fail to provide safe learning environments, especially in conflict-prone areas, and corruption and mismanagement in policy implementation widen the gaps in social injustice. It, however, indicates that current policies effectively reduce school dropout rates in vulnerable communities, that the government does not regularly evaluate and update education policies to address social injustice, and that policy implementation is inconsistent across different regions and communities.

Research Question 2: To what extent does social injustice such as inequality and discrimination, impact the accessibility and the quality of education in Delta State

Table 2: Frequency, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviation Distribution of Respondents' Rating on the Extent Social Injustice Impacts Accessibility and the Quality Education in Delta State.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	x	SD	Decision
15	Quality education is accessible to all students regardless of social background	91	101	180	201	2.14	1.07	LE
16	Socioeconomic inequality limits many students' accesses to quality education in Delta State.	179	197	99	98	2.80	1.06	HE
17	Discrimination based on ethnicity affects students' ability to enroll in good schools	82	201	91	199	2.29	1.09	LE
18	Gender inequality restricts educational opportunities for students in Delta State	171	188	89	125	2.71	1.11	HE
19	Students from low-income families have fewer educational options available to them.	165	200	75	133	2.69	1.12	HE
20	Rural-urban dichotomy restricts students' access to quality education	183	171	79	140	2.69	1.16	HE
21	Schools in more affluent areas provide higher-quality education than those in poorer areas.	221	169	81	102	2.89	1.11	HE
22	Discrimination against certain groups affects the quality of teaching they receive.	173	182	67	151	2.66	1.17	HE
23	Students in marginalized communities have fewer opportunities for academic growth	204	173	87	109	2.82	1.11	HE
24	Educational resources (e.g., books, technology) are distributed fairly among schools	204	82	94	193	2.52	1.28	HE
25	Social injustices affect students' confidence and academic performance.	196	212	73	92	2.89	1.05	HE
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation						2.66	1.12	HE

Results in Table 2 reveal that respondents agree with all the items to a high extent except items 15(2.14) and 17(2.29) values that are significantly less than 2.50 decision rule mean. the mean scores for the agreed items range between 2.52 and 2.89; values that are significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean for the determination of a mean score as high or low extent. the grand mean score for the result is 2.66 with a grand standard deviation of 1.12. The result reveals that Socioeconomic and gender inequality restricts educational opportunities for students in Delta State and that students from low-income families have fewer educational options available to them just as the rural-urban

dichotomy restricts students' access to quality education. Additionally, schools in more affluent areas provide higher-quality education than those in poorer areas, discrimination against certain groups affects the quality of teaching they receive, and that students in marginalized communities have fewer opportunities for academic growth as educational resources such as good books and technology are distributed unfairly among schools which affect students' confidence and academic performance.

Research question 3: What are the implications of the vulnerability of the education sector for national security and development?

Table 2: Frequency, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviation Distribution of Respondents' Rating on the Implications of the Vulnerability of the Education Sector for National Security and Development.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	x	SD	Decision
26	The continued attack by hoodlums on educational institutions leads to underdevelopment	197	101	83	192	2.53	1.27	Agree
27	The continued neglect of the education sector by political leaders opens doors of security challenges to the education sector	122	285	82	84	2.78	0.95	Agree
28	The poor treatment and attention given to teachers make the education sector open to criminal attacks and low national development	141	173	93	166	2.50	1.15	Agree
29	A vulnerable education system reduces youth empowerment, which affects national stability	165	181	80	147	2.64	1.15	Agree
30	Vulnerability in the education system increases the risk of youth radicalization	215	157	88	113	2.83	1.14	Agree
31	Limited access to education increases the risk of youth involvement in criminal activities	211	171	76	115	2.83	1.13	Agree
32	The inability to improve education quality poses a risk to national security	177	191	102	103	2.77	1.08	Agree
33	Low quality of education contributes to insecurity in the country	173	203	95	102	2.78	1.06	Agree
34	The inability to improve education quality poses a risk to national security	199	185	103	86	2.87	1.05	Agree
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation						2.73	1.10	Agree

Results in Table 3 reveal that respondents agree with all the items with mean scores range between 2.50 and 2.87; values that are significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean. The grand mean for the result is 2.73 with a grand standard deviation of 1.10. The grand mean score is significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean. The result indicates that the continued attack by hoodlums on educational institutions, the continued neglect of the education sector by political leaders, the poor treatment and attention given to teachers by society make the education sector open to criminal attacks, poor unequal quality, and

low national development. It also indicates that a vulnerable education system reduces youth empowerment, which affects national stability, increases the risk of youth radicalization, just as limited access to education increases the risk of youth involvement in criminal activities, poses a risk to national security and contributes to insecurity in the country.

Discussion of Results

Findings from the results of the study reveals that unhealthy government policies compounded by poor

allocation of resources to schools which do not adequately address the unique challenges of under-resourced schools, and lopsided attention and funding in favour of urban schools over rural schools result in inequality in schools which make students from low-income backgrounds face greater challenges in accessing quality education due to such policies. This finding negates the position of Giroux (2018) who sees education as a means of curbing the perceived threats prompted by social injustice and strengthening the bond of unity, especially in a multiethnic and multicultural society like Nigeria. It, however, aligns with the findings of UNICEF (2021) which emphasized that, despite Nigeria being Africa's largest economy, she has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with approximately 10.5 million children not enrolled in school in 2021 due to social injustice.

The finding also reveals that the politicization of attention and funding of the education sector, particularly between rural and urban schools support the marginalization of groups such as the girl child, underprivileged people, and minority communities due to poor funds distribution with biased intentions against rural communities thereby expanding the scope of social injustice and inequality. Additionally, the result indicates that inadequate implementation of safety policies leaves students in rural settings and slums vulnerable to insecurity as government policies fail to provide safe learning environments, especially in conflict-prone areas. Furthermore, findings reveal that corruption, mismanagement, and poor policy implementation widen the gaps in social justice as the government does not seem to regularly evaluate and update education policies to address social injustice and inconsistencies in policy implementation across different regions and communities. This finding agrees with the position of Obasi & Awodipe (2023), and Adeyemi and Adu (2018) who argue that Nigeria's education sector needs sustained reforms and policy enforcement to overcome social justice challenges and meet its educational goals for sustainable development including ensuring equity, gender equality and equal access to quality education.

Findings from research question 2 reveal that social injustice manifests in socioeconomic and gender inequality which restrict educational opportunities for students in rural settings and that students from low-income families have fewer educational options available to them just as the rural-urban dichotomy restricts students' access to quality education. Additionally, schools in more affluent areas provide higher-quality education than those in poorer areas as a result of relative discrimination against certain groups of people which also affects the quality of teaching they receive. It also reveals that students in marginalized communities have fewer opportunities for academic growth as educational resources such as good books and technology are distributed unfairly among schools which affect students' confidence and academic performance. This could lead to criminality in society as school dropout could resort to unguided activities to attract attention. This finding complements the finding of Agora Policy Report (2023) which unequivocally reported that ritual killings and organized crime perpetrated by mainly school dropouts, also contribute to localized insecurity particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria and in the South South where youth see "oil business" as an alternative for education and wealth creation.

Lastly, findings from research question 3 reveal that the continued attack by hoodlums on educational institutions, the continued neglect of the education sector by political leaders, and the poor treatment and attention given to teachers by society make the education sector open to criminal attacks. It also indicated that unequal quality in schools within a state results in a vulnerable education system which reduces youth empowerment and affects national stability and compounding the risk of youth radicalization, just as limited access to education increases the risk of youth involvement in criminal activities, poses a risk to national security and contributes to insecurity in the country. This finding collaborates with the finding of Umar et al. (2019) and Ezekannagha & Anunobi (2020) who, though, in different studies, collaborate that implementation gaps, inadequate funding, and infrastructure deficiencies remain barriers to achieving equitable and that a lack of social justice in educational resource distribution contributes to persistent regional inequalities, with urban areas having significantly more resources than rural schools.

Conclusion

Traditionally, societies are highly stratified. People are socially and economically structured, giving room for unhealthy competition. However, the need for inclusiveness necessitated the government to make policies that can foster social justice, in which education serves as the melting pot. Nevertheless, government policies and resource allocation practices exacerbate inequalities in the education sector, especially between rural and urban schools, disproportionately affecting students from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. Policies that favor urban over rural schools lead to unequal access to quality education, contradicting the vision of education as a tool for social justice and unity. Consequently, Nigeria records a high out-of-school population due to systemic social injustices.

Politicized and biased funding distribution further marginalizes vulnerable groups, such as girls and minority communities, thereby expanding social inequality. This is complicated by poor implementation of safety policies which leave students, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas, vulnerable to insecurity, highlighting gaps in the government's commitment to creating safe learning environments as inconsistent policy implementation perpetuates social injustice and fuels conflict and insecurity in society. Until these anomalies are adequately addressed, insecurity and development issues will continue to plague the country as socioeconomic and gender inequalities restrict educational opportunities for students and widen the social and economic gaps that education is supposed to address.

Recommendations

Based on the finding from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Policy Redirection:** Government policies should prioritize equitable resource allocation across rural and urban schools. An increased focus on under-resourced schools, especially in rural and low-income areas, would help bridge disparities.
2. **Legislative Reforms:** Lawmakers should enact and enforce policies that protect educational funding from

politicization. This includes enacting specific regulations that prevent funding biases based on geography or socioeconomic status.

3. **Enhanced Security in Conflict-Prone Areas:** To counter insecurity in schools, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions, there should be a commitment to deploy safety personnel and build secure infrastructures, such as perimeter fencing and safe learning facilities.
4. **Policy Consistency and Monitoring:** Develop a system to monitor and enforce educational policies uniformly across regions to prevent regional disparities. Such measures should include regular inspections and public reporting to ensure compliance and improve educational equality

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