

GROWING NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PHYSICS TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Security of lives and property is the bedrock of socio-economic development. Where security is absent, meaningful development can hardly be achieved. Unfortunately, in the recent times Nigeria is bedeviled with myriads of security challenges emanating from Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, secessionists' agitations, armed cult groups' activities, and farmer-herder conflicts. The prevailing ravaging poverty in Nigeria is believed to be the underlying factor prompting insecurity across the country. Kidnapping for ransom and violent attacks on Nigerians and government infrastructures such as schools, police stations, military formations and correctional centres are now prevalent. The magnitude of insecurity in the country is expanding geometrically on daily basis. A number of schools in the northern geo-political zone are currently shut thus, increasing the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Tertiary educational institutions are not spared in the wave of violent attacks occasioned by non-state actors like extremist jihadist groups, ESN, and bandits. The havocs wrecked by these non-state actors have impacted negatively on tertiary education in Nigeria. Hence, this paper discussed the growing national security challenges in Nigeria and its implication for physics teacher education. It also suggested the way forward out of the problem of insecurity and steps towards guaranteeing the future of physics teacher education in Nigeria.

Key words: National security challenge, Physics teacher education, Secessionist agitation, Terrorist attacks

Introduction

Meaningful development can only be achieved in a secured environment; where there is safety of lives and property. It is in such a secured environment that people can freely move and transact their businesses without fear of being kidnapped for ransom, attacked, killed and even denied access to social privileges due to ethno-religious inclination. Unfortunately, the prevailing happenings across the breadth and length of Nigeria suggest that we are living in an unsecured country. Presently, Nigerians are confronted with threats arising from Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, secessionists' agitations, ethno-religious conflicts, cult related violence and farmer-herder conflicts on daily basis (Bello, 2022). The growing violence mostly perpetrated by non-state actors had imparted adversely on virtually all the facets of the economy. Meanwhile, government efforts to address the lingering security challenges seemed

to have yielded little or no fruit (Salman, 2014). The perplexity of security situation in Nigeria has prompted one to ponder on the future of physics teacher education in Nigeria, particularly in most Northern states where schools are closed due to impact of religious extremists' insurgency and banditry attacks.

Teacher education generally is a crucial aspect of the National policy on Education because of the pivotal role quality-teachers play in the provision of quality education at all levels. According to the National policy on Education, the teacher education is geared towards producing 'highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system' (FRN, 2014). Hence, Physics teacher education is meant to produce high quality physics teachers who will be professionally and intellectually competent in the dispensation of physics knowledge. The universities, monotechnics, polytechnics and colleges of education are tasked with the responsibility of training physics teachers across the country. However, with the flagrant insecurity occasioned by Boko Haram violent insurgency and banditry in the Northern states of Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Niger and Katsina; many prospective physics student-teachers shun admission opportunities opened to them in such Northern tertiary institutions. This is despite Federal Government's claimed commitments towards providing security within and around those tertiary institutions, which is captured in the National Policy on safety, Security and Violence-free Schools in Nigeria. The policy was developed to ensure a safe and secured learning environment for students, teachers and school physical infrastructures (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2021). Besides, study has shown that our tertiary institutions are far from being safe and secured due to government's failure to provide adequate security personnel, patrol vehicles, modern security facilities, and perimeter fence around the campuses, which are essential in checking the security challenges arising from cult-related activities, kidnapping, illegal possession of firearms and religious extremists' violence (Ekpoh, Edet, & Ukpoh, 2020). Apart from the internally induced security challenges confronting teacher education other emerged national security challenges have equally had tolls on the development of physics teacher education. With the forgoing, this paper discusses the growing national security challenges and its implications for physics teacher education in Nigeria.

Physics Teacher Education in Nigeria

Physics is one of the natural sciences taught at secondary and tertiary institutions. It is considered a fundamental course of study in the field of sciences despite the fact that it is perceived by students as very difficult subject perhaps due to its abstractness and demand for mathematical skills. Comparatively, there are fewer theories in physics than we have in other sciences. However, this did not underestimate the predictive capacity of physics theories. Mulhall (2015), noted that physics theories have strong predictive capacity than those of other sciences. It suffices to say that Physics theories had generated many strong testable predictions that gave room to scientific and technological innovations that culminated in a number of inventions that shaped the world economy. Thus, the relevance of physics in technological advancement as well as national development cannot be underestimated (Onyedineke & Izato, 2012).

Consequently, the preparation and development of physics teachers which is the concern of physics teacher education mean so much to the nation; since the quality of training the teacher received determines the quality of education bequeathed to the learners (Ugwu, 2018). Therefore, to further enjoy dividends of physics research outcomes in the area of scientific and technological advancement; planned efforts are required to make physics teacher education a priority. Meanwhile, physics teacher education programme is exclusively run in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities. Whilst Colleges of Education and

Polytechnics mainly produce the middle level manpower physics teachers with the least teacher qualification of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Universities produce higher level manpower physics teachers with Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees in Physics Education.

A critical review of teacher educational system in Nigeria showed that Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities are producing 'ill-motivated, non-conscientious and inefficient classroom teachers' (Odeh, 2019). The antecedence of this is a crisis laden society in which social norms and values are less appreciated. Presently, crime rate is escalating, official corruption is the order of the day and examination malpractices are hardly frowned at because teacher education has failed to yield the desired results. Earlier, while reviewing literature on issues involved in Nigeria teacher education with the view of refocusing physics education in Nigeria Udoh (2012), asserted that teacher education has:

- i. Failed to produce motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers.
- ii. Discourage the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- iii. Failed to provide teachers with adequate intellectual and professional backgrounds to function and adapt to changing situations.
- iv. Failed to assist teachers fit into the social life of the community and society at large as well as inefficient in enhancing teacher commitment to national goals.
- v. Failed to enhance teacher commitment to the teaching profession.

These flaws in teacher education are prompted by many factors which include government's failure to sustain institutional infrastructure, poor motivation of teacher trainers, poor budgetary allocation to education sector and rising national security challenges.

Rising National Security Challenges

Apart from the internal security challenges arising from cultism in teacher education institutions across the country, Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, secessionists' agitations and militancy are now emerged national security challenges confronting teacher education in Nigeria. Owonikoko (2021) asserts that insecurity is crippling Nigeria's education system following the devastating impact of Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and secessionists' agitations on school activities across the country. It was noted that more than 800 secondary school and university students have so far been kidnapped in coordinated terrorists' and bandits' attacks in Nigeria. Kidnapping however has become a hydra-headed security challenge in the recent times which has dealt a humongous blow on education sector. Many schools in the North-Eastern Nigeria are currently closed to learning activities due to high spate of kidnapping incidences in the region. The school is no longer safe for the students because of its vulnerability to terrorists' and bandits' attacks. Nigerians are beginning to accept that education in Nigeria is not safe and schooling is too risky since it portends loss of life and freedom in the hands of terrorists and bandits who demand outrageous ransoms from kidnap victims.

Consequent upon the emerging fact about the prevailing unsafe nature of educational institutions in Nigeria, Onyedineke and Izato (2022) posited that the toxicity of insecurity across the country poses serious national security challenges to physics education development due to its crippling effects on formal education delivery in Nigeria. The security challenges are heightening on daily basis with little or no respite. Government on her own has equally taken steps to address them, though her efforts seemed to have not yielded any plausible result. There are still palpable fears among Nigerian students studying in tertiary institutions due to unabated Boko Haram insurgency and bandits' attacks which institutional failure has indirectly strengthened. Official corruption which is an indication of institutional failure is these days

widespread, with security personnel sacrificing national interest on the altar of ethno-religious sentiments. Thus, exposing innocent Nigerian students to avoidable life threatening danger.

Presently, most teacher education training institutions in Nigeria lack what it takes to address the menace of unsafe learning environment from ideological and infrastructural perspectives. This is evident in dearth of training on safety measures and availability of security logistics. Most student-teachers lack training on the fundamental self-defense skills that could help them respond adequately to the prevailing security emergencies occurring due to rising incidence of kidnapping in the tertiary educational institutions. Ordinarily, a course programme on safety issues particularly on the safety of students and educational institutions should have been developed and incorporated into the teacher-training curriculum of the colleges of education and universities. The incorporation of such programme into teacher education curriculum will help equip students with knowledge and practical skills necessary to respond to crisis situations that may arise in the school environment (Kovarikova, 2018). There is also lack of adequate security personnel and monitoring devices such as closed circuit televisions (CCTVs) to ensure effective surveillance in and around the campuses.

Indeed, the learning environment of Nigeria educational institutions (colleges of education and universities) are plagued by insecurity. Students and lecturers are exposed to intermittent attacks by terrorists. The kidnap incident that took place on April 20, 2021 at the Greenfield University, Kaduna in which twenty students were kidnapped from the University campus in Kasarami village and three students alongside a staff member were killed by the kidnappers during the operation is a case in point. There were no CCTVs on the campus for surveillance, hence the kidnappers could not be easily identified. However, the abducted students were later released after ransoms were paid; though five of them were not lucky enough for they were killed during the abduction (Sahara Reporters, 2022). Similarly, it was reported that armed terrorists invaded the Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic in Zaria, Kaduna state on June 10, 2021 and killed one student while eight other students and a lecturer were kidnapped (Reuters, 2021). Unfortunately, five out of the kidnapped students were later killed few weeks after their abduction. On a global perspective, it was reported that over 320 attacks occurred in tertiary institutions across the world between 2020 and 2021 in which students, lecturers and learning facilities were affected (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack [GCPEA], 2022). It was further reported that 1000 students from Nigeria were kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists from various schools between December, 2020 and September, 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2021). This included the 344 students abducted from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara in Katsina State on December 11, 2020 in a single terrorists' operation (Al Jazeera, 2020; Olukoya & Petesch, 2020).

Secessionists agitations though blamed on Federal government's failure to provide security in the face of multi-facet threats had further compounded security challenges in the country (Campbell & Quinn, 2021). The activities of these secessionists' groups are adversely affecting education generally in the regions of the country where they operate. For instance, the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) through its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) has been enforcing sit-at-home policy every Monday to press for the release of its leader Mr. Nnamdi Kanu. On each Monday of the week no educational activities take place in all levels of educational institutions in the South-east Nigeria. Meanwhile, ESN has been accused of being responsible for at least 344% rise in killings in the South-east Nigeria, with many attacks on certain individuals they perceived as saboteurs, government offices, correctional centres and security service personnel since January, 2021 (Campbell & Quinn, 2021; Tanko, 2021). For the fear of being attacked or possibly have students killed by ESN, all tertiary institutions like other schools are kept under locks and keys every Monday of the week.

However, the unprecedented wave of insecurity in Nigeria had equally been blamed on herder-farmer clashes in the North-central states of Plateau, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa. The violent clashes between farmers and herders were believed to have emanated from disagreements over the use of arable land and water as well as grazing routes (Tanko, 2021). This made the clashes an economic conflict. It was reported that between December 2016 and December 2018, schools in Agatu, Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State were violently attacked by killer herdsman putting many students out of school and learning activities disrupted (Duru, 2018). The clashes have ostensibly resulted in many deaths and displacement of aborigines from their homes to Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Centres. At these IDP Centres, there are hardly educational infrastructures to take care of the displaced youths. Agbo (2020) investigated the effects of farmers and herdsman conflicts on the educational development of North-central geo-political zone of Nigeria and found that the conflict has resulted in dysfunctional educational development, tertiary institutions turned into grazing fields instead of research institutions, and school-age children been put out of school. These findings suggest that the farmer-herder conflicts apart from creating security tensions in the North-Central states have equally been a clog on the advancing wheel of education in the region.

Another contributory factor to insecurity in Nigeria is the Niger Delta militancy. This has been for a long time in the Niger Delta region even before the advent of Boko Haram insurgency. The militants were agitating for resource control in which they demanded for greater share of the profits from sales of petroleum/crude oil. They claimed that crude oil exploration in their region has imparted negatively on the environment, water bodies, farmlands, and fishing occupation due to intermittent oil spillages and gas flaring by oil exploration companies such as Shell, Exxon-Mobil and others. Since crude oil is the major source of federal government's earnings, the militants feel that government should not continue to neglect the Niger Delta region when it comes to infrastructural development, appointments, youths' employment and management of downstream oil sector. The militants' resistance to oil exploration in the region, attacks on oil installations and constant kidnapping of oil company workers led to face-off between the militants and the federal government of Nigeria. The insurgency heightened until 2009 when presidential amnesty programme was launched to broker peace between the militants and the federal government. However, in the recent times militancy is gradually picking up again due to the activities of some armed cult groups who are currently threatening the oil workers and the region (Tanko, 2021).

National Security Challenges: Implications to Physics Teacher Education

Safety and security of schools as a crucial issue considering the spate of Boko Haram insurgency, bandits' attacks, and kidnappings in the country (Salman, 2014). As earlier said, no meaningful progress can be made in an unsecured environment where people are daunted with threats on daily basis. The educational implication of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs stressed safety need as an important criterion that must be met before effective teaching and learning can take place in a formal school setting. However, existing literature on school safety have vast accounts on unsafe nature of Nigeria tertiary institutions where physics teachers are produced (Aguba, 2010; Asiyai, & Oghuvbu, 2019; Ekpoh, Edet, & Ukpoh, 2020; Bello, 2022). Bello (2022), observed that insecurity in the country has led to a decay in the educational sector. Such a decay, no doubt equally extended to physics teacher education because interruptions to colleges of education and university programmes due to violent attacks on campuses have both direct and indirect adverse impact on the quality of physics teachers produced by the institutions.

According to Badiora (2017), the magnitude of crime in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has astronomically risen that it has become a national issue. Apart from crimes committed by students themselves and lecturers, the violent crimes committed by terrorist groups in the tertiary institutions particularly in the Northern states is one of the reasons why prospective physics student-teachers are turning down admission placement in higher institutions in the region. This has resulted in admission attrition for prospective physics student-teachers in those tertiary institutions in the north. The low enrolment of physics student-teachers undoubtedly has negative implications for the future of physics teacher education in Nigeria because if the trend remained unchecked; there may be a time when no candidate will opt for physics education in those tertiary institutions.

Agbo (2020), found that farmer-herder conflicts has led to forceful conversion of tertiary educational institutions in the North-Central states into grazing fields for herdsmen exploration and exploitation citing University of Ilorin and Plateau State University as examples. This negates the purpose of university education in line with the National Policy on Education (2014) which states that: "... universities shall be encourage to collaborate with government, industries and global community in the conduct of research and disseminate the results" (p.42). Universities and other tertiary institutions producing physics teachers are established to carry out researches and not cattle grazing. Thus, any activities conducted in the tertiary institutions other than teaching and researching portend danger to the future of teacher education in Nigeria.

Currently, government is making frantic efforts to address the daunting challenges of national insecurity occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, youth restiveness, Niger Delta militancy, and secessionists' agitations. To this effect, huge financial resources are earmarked in the national annual budget to fight this hydra-headed menace called insecurity to the detriment of education. Budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria is far below the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommended 26%, hence tertiary institutions of learning are poorly funded with infrastructural deficits. The infrastructural deficit is evident in the widespread lack of well-equipped physics laboratories, computer laboratories, lecture classrooms, lecture theatres, libraries, micro-teaching laboratories and workshops in Nigeria tertiary institutions. This has far reaching implications for physics teacher education in Nigeria because infrastructure is one of the essential requirements for conducive learning environment.

Conclusion

Security challenges are global phenomena that have kept national governments on their toes due to the adverse impacts they have on national development. Nigerians have borne brunt of violent threats coming from the jihadist terrorists, secessionists' agitators, bandits, armed cult groups and Niger Delta militants in the recent times. The educational institutions in Nigeria are not void of the stings of the prevailing security challenges. Today, the universities and other higher institutions of learning are no longer safe for learning due to incessant killings, kidnappings, sexual molestations, and cult clashes perpetrated by non-state actors. The prevalent insecurity across the nation had impact negatively on teacher education and physics teacher education in particular going by the quality of physics teachers produced in the recent time (Udoh, 2012).

Funds that should have been deployed in the education sector to provide teaching and learning infrastructures are now channeled to the defense sector. According to the government, the huge investment on procurement of military hardware and training of security personnel were to ensure that the war on insecurity is won. However, for the past seven months the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been on industrial action to press home her

demand for revitalization of university education in Nigeria. Unfortunately, government's position had remained that there is no fund for the revitalization of university education, considering the huge sum of money it has spent on national security. This is not a welcome development for the future of teacher education in Nigeria.

Way Forward

To strengthen and preserve the future of physics teacher education in Nigeria the following suggestions are proffered:

1. Government and other stakeholders in teacher education should urgently re-strategize on how to improve the practice and delivery of physics education in Nigeria tertiary institutions.
2. Government should redouble her efforts in addressing the current security challenges bedeviling the nation.
3. Proactive steps should be taken to beef up security around tertiary institutions in order to end the carnages in our campuses due to terrorists' attacks.
4. A legislation should be enacted to make kidnapping of students and lecturers on campuses a criminal offence punishable by death.

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