

## **EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON SAFETY, SECURITY, AND VIOLENCE-FREE SCHOOLS**

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### **Abstract**

A worsening problem marked by rising school violence and falling educational standards has been exacerbated by corruption, which has severely damaged Nigeria's educational system.

Defined as actions taken by individuals in power for personal gain, corruption manifests in various forms within academic institutions, leading to unethical practices that compromise the integrity of education and produce low-quality graduates. This environment fosters a culture where violence is normalized, as students exposed to corrupt practices may resort to aggression to resolve conflicts, evident in the alarming incidents of physical assaults on teachers and peers. The Nigerian government's response, encapsulated in the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools, aims to create secure learning environments by implementing comprehensive safety plans and addressing the root causes of violence. However, the interrelation between corruption and school violence remains a critical challenge, necessitating a concerted effort to combat corruption to ensure a safe and effective educational atmosphere that promotes the development of Nigeria's human capital and aligns with global standards for education.

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## Introduction

Corruption has permeated nearly every sector of the Nigerian economy, including the education system. This has exacerbated the country's educational crisis, leading to a growing number of children being excluded from formal schooling.

Corruption has become an inevitable evil in Nigerian society today. It is on this note that the term corruption has been defined as any form of action or omission enacted by a member of an organization by using the advantages of the position he occupies at the moment to violate the rules, regulations, norms and ethics of the organization for personal or selfish interest at the detriment of the organization or other parties involved (Azelema, 2008). Corruption also means the violation of established rules and regulations for personal aggrandizement or gains. Being a polymorphous issue in our society today, it has also been defined as deviation from the moral values and ethical standards of the society, which needs reversal in all spheres of our national life. These immoral and unethical behaviors are capable of causing decline and decay in all sectors of the economy. In addition, the Catholic Secretariat Forum of Nigeria (2002) says corruption may be explained as gratification by an official person receiving anything in cash or kind in favor or disfavor of a person or group of individuals in the course of discharging his official duties in an organization. Educational corruption depicts a situation whereby members of an academic institution infringe on the rules, regulations and ethical standards of the institution for selfish reasons, leading to the production of low-quality graduates or professionals.

The goal of Nigeria's National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools is to provide a secure learning environment for all students, highlighting the significance of school security as the cornerstone of a successful education. The rising rates of physical violence, bullying, and threats of armed conflict against children in educational settings prompted the development of this policy.

The National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools in Nigeria is therefore aimed at guiding policy, setting a standard for implementing comprehensive school safety plans and providing prevention and response mechanisms at the national, state, local government and individual school levels. Among other things, the policy will contribute to early warning, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and disaster risk management (DRM). School safety and security is defined in this policy as a set of rules and regulations guiding the prevention and mitigation of hazards occurring in formal education settings (primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria, whether private or government-owned) and/or informal education settings that have adverse effects on education; such hazards have been a major issue in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that a critical factor in the safety and security of schools in Nigeria is the increase in the incidences of violence against children (VAC). The president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR), launched the Year of Action to End VAC on September 15, 2015 in Abuja. Nigeria's commitment to end VAC falls in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which requires schools to provide safe and welcoming environments that are free of the threat of all forms of violence, including those based on sex, age, religion, socio-economic background, ability, disability and HIV infection status.

The National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools aims to create a safe learning environment by ensuring that all schools are free from violence, bullying, and other threats, thereby fostering a conducive environment for education. It adopts a zero-tolerance approach toward any threats to school safety, including gang activity, substance abuse, gender-based violence, and risks from natural disasters and armed conflicts. The policy emphasizes the need for comprehensive safety and security plans that incorporate prevention and response mechanisms at various levels—national, state, local government, and individual schools. A significant focus is placed on child protection, recognizing that a safe school environment is essential for the development of

Nigeria's human capital. Additionally, it includes strategies for disaster risk management to prepare schools for various hazards, encourages inter-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders to enhance school safety, and provides guidelines for implementation and monitoring to ensure compliance and effectiveness in creating secure educational environments.

### **Relationship between Corruption and School Violence**

Corruption and school violence are interrelated issues that can significantly impact educational environments and societal stability. The relationship between these two phenomena can be understood through several key aspects: The focus of insecurity and violence in schools have shifted from the bandits and insurgents' attack on schools and abduction of students.

A teacher at the Army Children's High School, Epe, Lagos, Ahmed Saheed, dead by one of his students who he flogged. Also, a final year microbiology student of the University of Ilorin, Salaudeen Waliu Aanuoluwa, allegedly beat a female lecturer, Dr. Rahmat Zakariya, to a coma over a minor disagreement.

Another case of unruly behavior by students led the Ogun government to direct 12 schools to proceed on compulsory vacation from November 30, ahead of the December 10 vacation date. Students of the affected schools were said to have engaged in riotous behavior, including physical assault on teachers and fellow students. The most disturbing case of a violent attack is that of the late Sylvester Oromoni of DOWEN College, Lagos, who five students allegedly assaulted for refusing to join a cult. Unfortunately, the incident claimed the boy's life.

Because it creates a climate in which violent acts are accepted and normalized, corruption plays a major role in school violence. Because of their exposure to corrupt practices that erode respect for authority and legal standards, students in educational institutions rife with corruption may believe that using violence to settle disputes or exercise control is appropriate. For example, in Nigeria, situations such as student attacks on teachers and the emergence of cultism are examples of how corruption and violence are intertwined. These events not only disturb the educational environment but also have serious consequences, including fatalities

According to the study, corruption can also change people's perceptions of violence, increasing the likelihood that people will consider aggressive behaviors acceptable. This can intensify the cycle of hostility in schools.

### **Significance of Combating Educational Corruption**

Research on corruption in education is lacking, although corruption in general has attracted attention from the media and scholars in recent decades. Still, with an increasing amount of research being done in this field, things are starting to change.

Executives in the education sector may have avoided scrutiny for fear that a tarnished reputation would diminish the sector's resources (Poisson, 2010). However, given the harmful effects of corruption, it is of paramount importance to recognize and address corruption in education. Below are some core arguments that support the combating of corruption in education. These arguments are universal and relevant to learning environments in both developed and developing countries.

1. The education system molds people from childhood to maturity. These effects are felt on an individual basis concerning lifetime earnings, health, family life, and subjective well-being, as well as on a societal level regarding the nation's skill base, which supports economic growth, income distribution, and intergenerational mobility (Burgess, 2016). When skills and employment are mismatched, corruption produces net losses and negates the benefits of education at all levels.
2. Particularly vulnerable people are the targets of corruption in education. Ambitions are stifled for both students and parents who wish the best for their children. This ultimately results in parents agreeing to pay a price requested by an administrator of the school to guarantee their child's spot there, or in paying a fee requested by a

teacher to guarantee their child receives a positive report card. In circumstances where pupils are too impoverished to pay in the traditional manner, professors may also sexually exploit them. Deeply troubling the interaction between educators and students entrusted to their care is the payment of sexual favors and other unethical practices in the educational setting (Poisson, 2010).

3. Corruption in education replaces good values and morals with a cynical view of the world when young and highly impressionable students learn that fighting corruption does not pay off, but siding with it might. Corruption has "disastrous consequences" when it interferes with the "development of attitudes and values related to citizenship and justice" (Poisson, 2010). If citizens do not trust the education system to be fair and impartial, then all senior positions, whether in business, science or politics, are perceived to have been gained through privilege rather than achievement. This erodes the credibility of and trust in educational institutions, creates frustration and disengagement, and damages aspirations and social cohesion that are necessary for all successful societies (Altbach, 2015; Heyneman, 2004).

4. Education is the key to sustainable development, as recognized by Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By undermining the quality of education and access to it, corruption significantly hampers the attainment of the SDGs.

5. High-quality and accessible education empowers societies and individuals and is thus one of the most effective channels for advancing a productive and moral society. Corruption negates all that.

#### **School Violence in Nigeria:**

School violence refers to various violent acts that occur in educational environments and impact staff, teachers, and students. It encompasses sexual, psychological, and physical abuse and can take different forms, each with unique attributes.

School violence involves a spectrum of crimes occurring within educational institutions. Ensuring safer schools requires establishing valid and reliable indicators of the current state of school crime and safety across the nation and periodically monitoring and updating such indicators. Two decades ago, the term "school violence" itself was widely used to describe violent and aggressive acts on school campuses. Today, the definition is much broader in scope (Center for Prevention of School Violence, 2004).

School violence is a major facet of the broad health problem that is youth violence. This involves any physical force or power that is used intentionally against another person or group, with physical or psychological harm being the likely result. Youth violence, which typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 24, is likely to originate from violence that begins in early childhood.

Examples of violent behavior include:

- i. Bullying
- ii. Fighting or hitting
- iii. Use of weapons
- iv. Electronic aggression
- v. Gang violence

#### **School violence occurs:**

- i. At the school
- ii. On the way to or from school
- iii. During a school-sponsored event
- iv. On the way to or from a school-sponsored event

### **Cause and Consequence of School Violence in Nigeria**

The intentional use of physical force to threaten oneself, another individual, a group or community, or both, with the intent to cause pain, psychological distress, deprivation of growth, injury, or even death is known as violence. According to Okafor (2020), violence differs among cultures. In addition, violence committed against people based on their gender identity is known as gender-based violence. Girls who experience violence are unable to grow and fully exercise their rights. Female infanticide, forced pregnancy, female genital mutilation, honor killing, acid attacks, emotional, sexual, bullying, intimate partner violence, degrading treatment, sexual abuse, forced abortion, and early marriage are a few instances of gender-based violence (Okafor 2021).

The causes of school violence in Nigeria are multifaceted, stemming from domestic hostility and child abuse, frustration and lack of parental care, the influence of peers and media, lack of counseling in schools, access to weapons, and poverty. The consequences are far-reaching, including declines in academic performance, mental health problems such as depression and anxiety in victims, physical health issues, social difficulties, and broader community impacts that damage the school's reputation, breed anger and fear, and place higher demands on services while limiting economic growth. Addressing this complex problem requires a comprehensive approach that targets the root causes and provides support for both victims and perpetrators.

### **National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools**

Safety and Security are two words that are often confused by people. They get tossed around and together all the time, mentioning the others when one means the other one. They are often used interchangeably either correctly or incorrectly. However, safety and security are, of course, strongly related but are two distinct concepts. To this effect, the author of this article attempts to illuminate the distinction between these concepts so that their application is also clear and most likely would be straightforward. Specifically, the focus is on the application of safety and security in terms of school environments.

The questions at hand are, what is school safety and school security? Are these two terms similar in meaning and application? What is the importance of a safe and secure school? What characterizes a safe and secure school environment? The foregoing questions are the ones that the author attempts to clarify. This is because the definition of concepts enables people to have a common understanding of a word or subject, which enables meaningful conversations and better decision making. More so, how safety or security is defined affects its application in the school environment and provides an opportunity to influence positive outcomes for learners, teachers and other school staff. In order to fully exploit the concepts, it is important that we categorically look at their meanings.

The word "safety," comes from the Latin word *solvus*, which means "uninjured or in good health" (Maddox, 2010). The first records of the word were noticed from around 1250. According to Safeopedia (2021), safety is a concept that includes all measures and practices taken to preserve the life, health, and bodily integrity of individuals. Safety is the condition of being protected from harm or other non-desirable outcomes. Safety can also refer to the control of recognized sources of danger (hazards) to achieve an acceptable level of risk.

Defining security is problematic because the term has had many different meanings to different people in different places and different times over the course of human history. Actually, there has been a never-ending debate on its nature and dimension because there is not a broad consensus on its meaning. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (2017), the word "secure" entered the English language in

The 16th century. It was derived from the Latin word *securus*, meaning freedom from anxiety. The term security is related to the presence of peace, safety and the protection of people and their resources. It also relates to the absence of threats to human life and dignity. According to Stone (2009), security is about freedom from threat



and the ability of states to maintain independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. Security is generally agreed to be about the feeling of Being safe from harm, fear, anxiety, oppression, danger, poverty, defense, protection and preservation of core values and threats to those values. William (2008) also contributed to the definition of the word security. He stated that security is most commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherish values, especially those threats that threaten the survival of a particular reference object. From the foregoing definitions, security generally refers to the freedom from, or resilience against, potential harm or other unwanted coercive change caused by others. Morgan (2021) provided a clear definitional distinction between safety and security. He contended that one of the primary differences between the two terms is their definition. Security refers to the protection of individuals, organizations, and properties against external threats that are likely to cause harm. It is clear that security is generally focused on ensuring that external factors do not cause trouble or unwelcome situations to the organization, individuals, and the properties within the premises (Morgan, 2021). On the other hand, safety is the feeling of being protected from the factors that cause harm.

### **The Nexus between Corruption and School Violence**

Corruption severely compromises security officer training, safety protocols, and efforts to prevent violence, resulting in a vicious circle of dysfunction that makes social unrest and violence worse.

#### **Economic loss and inefficiency**

Although obtaining exact figures on the economic costs of corruption is difficult, a 2016 report from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated the cost of bribery alone to be between \$1.5 and \$2 trillion per year. This represents a total economic loss of approximately 2% of the global GDP. Yet, it does not consider the economic cost of all other forms of corruption. Regarding fraud, money laundering and tax evasion, for example, the thousands of leaked documents known as the Mossack Fonseca Papers (commonly referred to as the Panama Papers) exposed the vast economic implications of offshore entities for many nations and for economic inequality in general. Finally, beyond the deadweight economic loss, there is economic inefficiency to consider. When jobs (or contracts) are given to people (or companies) who offer bribes or share a personal connection, this occurs to the detriment of competition. The result is that more qualified candidates and firms are turned down. The more widespread such practices are, the more inefficient the economy becomes. Corruption in developing countries may cause underdevelopment. This can occur when international economic and humanitarian initiatives are derailed as funds disbursed from loans and aid are embezzled or handed out to inferior contractors who have won their bids through corrupt means (kickbacks, bribery, nepotism, etc.). Furthermore, investment in physical and human capital is reduced as resources are diverted from their most beneficial use.

### **Poverty and Inequality**

Corruption is generally not the weapon of the week. In Nigeria, an (in)famous bribery case, involving the international oil company Shell, deprived the Nigerian people of over \$1.1 billion as the money went to corrupt officials instead of to the national budget (Global Witness, 2017). Meanwhile, according to the World Bank (2019), more than 50% of the population of the oil-rich country live in extreme poverty. This example shows that as political and economic systems are enlisted in the service of corrupt actors, wealth is redistributed to the least needy sources. Certainly! Here's a reframed version of the paragraph with improved clarity and flow, while preserving the original meaning:

Mechanisms like political representation and economic efficiency are undermined by self-serving behavior and covert dealings. In corrupt environments, resources intended for education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, elections, and the operational costs of political parties are often diverted for the personal gain of party officials,

government bureaucrats, and contractors. As a result, social programs are weakened, and the redistributive functions of political systems are significantly impaired. Ultimately, these practices lead to a state of unequal opportunity, where benefits are reserved for individuals connected to corrupt networks.

### **Growing Division and Disturbance**

Citizens may be divided into two camps when corruption, especially state capture, becomes the norm: those who support corrupt governments due to favors and bribes, and those who reject them. Compromise and rational discourse are diminished in a society where groups that are vehemently opposed to one another exist. The criteria used to evaluate policy are the identities of the policy proponents and the advantages that rival networks stand to gain, not the ideology or intrinsic virtues of a project.

### **Impact on School Violence**

Because corruption in the educational system fosters an atmosphere of mistrust, unfairness, and resentment among communities and students, it greatly intensifies violence in schools. This investigation looks at the various ways in which corruption affects society dynamics and educational quality, which in turn causes more violence.

### **Education Quality and Student Motivation**

Education quality declines because of the pervasiveness of corruption. Due to financial misappropriation for private benefit, schools frequently lack sufficient infrastructure, trained staff, and necessary instructional supplies. Students may become demotivated because of this decline in educational standards and begin to doubt the worth of their education. When students adopt the corrupt values of the system and think that success can be attained through corrupt means rather than hard work, they may act unethically, which includes bullying and cheating. Kirya (2019),

### **Marginalization and Inequality**

As noted by Borcan et al. (2017), corruption disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups, thereby exacerbating socioeconomic inequality. Poorer students, often lacking the means to pay bribes, may find themselves excluded from educational opportunities. This systemic marginalization can foster feelings of resentment and alienation among students, potentially manifesting as violence within school settings. When education is perceived as a privilege reserved for those who can afford it, it undermines social cohesion and may drive marginalized individuals to express their frustrations through conflict and aggression.

### **Violence as a Reaction to Inadequate Systems**

In response to systemic failings in the educational system, such as insufficient support, unsafe environments, and subpar academic performance, students may turn to violence as a coping strategy or a form of protest. When schools are unable to offer a secure and encouraging atmosphere, children may turn to violent means as a way to vent their concerns. When corruption becomes more accepted, it can strengthen the cycle of violence by encouraging children to imitate the immoral actions they see in adults. Philip G. (2015).

Corruption in Nigeria has significantly impacted safety protocols, leading to cases of violence and insecurity. Several case studies illustrate how corruption has undermined safety measures, resulting in tragic consequences.

### **Case Studies of Corruption-Related Violence and a Lack of Safety Procedures**

**1. Boko Haram Rebellion:** Systemic corruption inside the Nigerian government is directly associated with the rise of the militant group Boko Haram. Public dissatisfaction with government inefficiencies and corruption, notably in the areas of resource management and public safety, has contributed to the group's rise to prominence. Because of corruption, security services have not received enough funds or assistance, which has allowed Boko Haram to take advantage of the situation and carry out multiple deadly attacks against citizens and public servants in northern Nigeria.

**2. Militancy in the Niger Delta:** Violence in the Niger Delta region has increased due to oil business corruption. Poverty and animosity are pervasive because of the mishandling of oil money and the disregard for the local communities. To get a fair part of the resources taken from their country, militants have turned to violent protests directed at the government and oil firms. When protests are handled improperly, there is a high likelihood that violent altercations between militants and security officers may result.

**3. Lagos Building Collapses:** Numerous building collapses in Lagos that have resulted in casualties and fatalities are attributed to corruption in the construction industry. Because of bribery and a lack of enforcement by regulatory organizations, safety requirements are frequently disregarded. For example, the 2014 Synagogue Church of All Nations building collapse, which claimed over 100 lives, was blamed on insufficient safety protocols and regulatory supervision, both of which were weakened by unethical behavior.

### **Conclusion**

Corruption in Nigeria's educational system has far-reaching implications, particularly in relation to school violence and the overall quality of education. The pervasive nature of corruption undermines the integrity of educational institutions, leading to a decline in the quality of education and fostering an environment where violence can thrive.

The relationship between corruption and school violence is complex. Corruption creates a culture of impunity and normalizes unethical behavior, which can manifest as violence among students and against educators. Incidents of violence, such as assaults on teachers and students, are often rooted in the broader societal acceptance of corruption, leading to a cycle where aggressive behavior is seen as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. Addressing educational corruption is not only crucial for improving the quality of education but also for fostering a safe and conducive learning environment. The National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools aims to combat these issues by establishing comprehensive safety protocols and promoting a culture of accountability within schools.

The fight against corruption in Nigeria's education sector is essential for breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring that all students have access to a safe and high-quality educational experience. By prioritizing integrity and accountability, Nigeria can work toward creating a more equitable and effective educational system that empowers its youth and contributes to the nation's development.

### **Recommendations**

This study recommends that lowering the perception of corruption should be the priority in anti-corruption campaigns to combat violence. Nigeria's civic society and government should endeavor to instill trust in the anti-corruption progress that has been made, without resorting to deceptive or manipulative propaganda. This could increase public support for advancing initiatives to combat corruption in education and reduce violence in the society. One way to tackle the perception of corruption is through public art and TV PSAs, which are two platforms where social and political concerns are already discussed in Nigerian society. The precise reasons why perceptions of corruption rather than real-world examples of corruption appear to be the driving forces behind violence should be the subject of future research. Additionally, this study suggests the following:

*1. Strengthening Governance and Accountability:* Establishing robust governance frameworks that promote transparency and accountability in educational institutions is crucial. This includes regular audits, clear reporting mechanisms, and the establishment of independent bodies to oversee educational practices.

*2. Implementing Comprehensive Anti-Corruption Policies:* Developing and enforcing strict anti-corruption policies within schools can help deter corrupt practices. This should involve training educators and administrators on ethical standards and the consequences of corruption.



3. *Enhancing School Safety Measures:* Schools should adopt comprehensive safety and security plans that address both physical safety and emotional well-being. This includes training staff on conflict resolution, establishing clear protocols for reporting violence, and creating supportive environments for students.

4. *Promoting Community Engagement:* Engaging parents and community members in school governance can foster a sense of ownership and accountability. Community involvement in decision-making processes can help to ensure that schools are responsive to the needs of their students.

5. *Increasing Funding for Education:* Adequate funding is essential for improving the quality of education and infrastructure. Allocating resources transparently and efficiently can help mitigate the effects of corruption and enhance educational outcomes.

6. *Fostering a Culture of Integrity:* Educational institutions should promote values of integrity and respect among students. This can be achieved through character education programs that emphasize the importance of ethical behavior and civic responsibility.

7. *Providing Support Services for Victims of Violence:* Establishing counseling and support services for students affected by violence can help address the psychological impacts of such experiences. Creating safe spaces for dialogue can also facilitate healing and conflict resolution.

8. *Monitoring and Evaluation:* Regular assessment of the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs is necessary. This includes gathering data on incidents of violence and corruption to inform future strategies and interventions.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can work toward creating a more transparent, safe, and conducive educational environment that ultimately enhances the quality of education and reduces violence in schools.

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