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# Impact Of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict On The Educational Development Of Senior Secondary School Students In Guma Local Government Area Of Benue State

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on the educational development of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Three research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised of 250 teaching staff from the public secondary schools in the area. The sample size was 100 respondents made up of teaching staff representing 40% of the entire population of the study. The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire titled "Students' Educational Development Questionnaire (SEDQ). The instrument consisted of items in three clusters: A, B and C which provided answers to the three research questions. Each of the clusters had five (5) items making a total of fifteen (15) items. The respondents were provided with the "Yes" or "No" options in responding to the items. The data were analyzed based on the research questions using percentages and frequencies. The findings of the study revealed that herdsmen-farmers' conflict has significant impact on the school enrolment, academic achievement and educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that; destroyed schools and school facilities should be renovated by the government to make schools look habitable; this might encourage parents and significant others to enrol their children and wards in such schools.

**Keywords:** Herdsmen-farmers' Conflict, Educational Development, School Enrolment, Academic Achievement, Educational Attainment.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a veritable tool for the development of individuals in the society. It is through education that knowledge is acquired by the individuals alongside skills, values and attitudes that are beneficial to the society. Education in Nigeria is considered as a tool for national development. This is why the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) informs that education is designed to make Nigeria a free, just and egalitarian society, a land full of opportunities for all its citizens, to be able to

generate a great and dynamic economy and growing into united, strong and self-reliant nation. This is the philosophy underlying Nigerian education which is geared towards, among other things, the social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress of the entire citizenry. Oyelere and Wharton (2013) corroborate this view by stating that education significantly improves an individual's chances to increase welfare and escape poverty and plays a critical role in socio-economic development. However, situations of violent conflict affect the successful implementation of the goals of education and the development of learners.

In Nigeria, in recent times a typical example of a conflict that has obstructed educational development and militated against the high performance of students is the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts. The conflicts between these two groups meet all the criteria for the classification of an event as violent. The conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria have been going on for decades, but, the period 2014-2018 had witnessed a serious escalation of the conflicts with serious genocide and carnage done by Fulani herdsmen and some reprisal attacks by the farmers (Hanior, Tor-Anyiin & Adeyelu, 2022). The herdsmen-farmers' conflict although going on in almost all the Northern States and some parts of the southern region, has been prevalent in the Middle Belt (North Central) region of the Nigerian State. In this region, Beetseh, Tion, and Terwase, (2018) maintain that Benue State has been the most hit in recent times. Leaving many homeless, displaced and devastated, the conflicts in this part of country have also affected the availability and scarcity of food in the State (Okoli & Handeior, 2018).

According to Nuhu (2018), in Nigeria conflict between farmers and herders arise from disagreements over the use of land around farmland and/or grazing areas and stock routes and access to water points for both animals and households. Nuhu (2018) further asserted that, movement of herders from one area of the country to another is usually caused by the increasing demand for fresh grazing grounds especially during draught periods or dry seasons, when the herders move southwards because of the availability of pasture. In most cases, the herders encountered problems with the local people because farmers' crops were destroyed by their cattle (Paul, 2015). A range of factors underlie these disputes, including porous borders, proliferation of small and light weapons in the rural areas, destruction of crops by cattle, cattle rustling, increased competition for land (driven by desertification, climate change, and population growth), lack of clarity around the demarcation of pasture and stock routes, and the breakdown of traditional relationships and formal agreements between pastoralists and farmers (Paul, 2015).

It is worthy of note that if conflicts are not resolved students are adversely affected in terms of poor performance and wastage of resources and productivity (Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Ajemunigbohun, 2010). It becomes obvious that in a place where conflict is prevalent, the smooth running of academic activities of secondary schools becomes impeded. For this reason of displacement of people during conflicts, Oyelere and Wharton (2013) indicate that the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) show much lower academic attainment. Bruck, Di-Maio and Miaari (2014) submit that the higher the intensity of the conflict in the locality of the school the lower the probability that the student passes the exam.

Ahmed (2015), in a study on herdsmen-farmers' conflicts and management of secondary schools averred that the management of secondary schools which requires proper planning, directing, monitoring and controlling of human, material, time and physical resources, finances, records and information flow has been affected drastically within this latter part of the 21st century as most school facilities and documents have been destroyed thereby keeping students and teachers out of school. The incessant destruction of lives and properties has created management problems for school teachers and head-teachers in such areas. According to Suleiman (2016), when farmer-herders' disaster strikes, infrastructural facilities in the schools such as classroom buildings, offices, books and other relevant documents are greatly destroyed or damaged. Most often, schools are burn down to ashes in the rural areas. This makes it hard for learners to continue with their learning activities for a long time as they relocate to a safer place with their families. The carnage also brought about decreased school enrolment in some parts of the state that are affected by the crises. The emotional and psychological problems created in the people as a result of the fear further lead to decreased enrolment (Joseph, 2017).

Joseph (2017) further notes that even parents who have returned from the internally displaced persons' camps prefer to stay at home with their children, than sending them back to school to continue their education. According to most parents interviewed by the researcher, they prefer to stay at home with their children because they do not know when next the Fulani herders are coming to attack. This psychological problem further aggravated the enrolment situation in the affected areas in Benue State. Apart from the fear of the unknown, the financial crisis the returners from IDP camps may have little or no money at all to send their children/wards back to school. On the whole, school enrolment reduced by half even when normalcy returned to some areas because many people left the rural areas and even the state in search of peace and safer schools for their children (Joseph, 2017). Thus, Benue State which had a high school enrolment rate is now lagging behind in this area as most school age children are found in Internally Displaced Persons Camps. Ahmed (2015) notes that when there is natural disaster or herders-farmers clash in an area, it affects school enrolment because many people run from their places of abode to safer places. When there are insurgencies for instance, Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Fulani Herdsmen crises, many people will flee the area for safety, this affects the population of the area generally, school enrolment and the quality of educational improvement.

Students' educational attainment is also compromised by exposure to violence. Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education that an individual has completed. The closure of schools that is caused by the violent activities of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts can have adverse effects on the level of education attained by the students in such conflict areas. Advancement in academics is hampered by violent conflicts as the closure of schools often results to the cancelation of academic calendars and postponement of promotional and external examinations. The likelihood of young children dropping out of school is also significantly higher in conflict-affected regions than elsewhere in the world.

As noted by Hanior, Tor-Anyiin and Adeyelu (2022), the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have claimed a lot of lives and property. In Benue and Nigeria today it is not unusual to wake up to news of herdsmen attacks on sedentary farmers in villages. A lot of these farmers have been chased out of their homes and are taking refuge in IDP camps scattered all over the State with no properties or sources of livelihoods, just surviving off food grants from government, NGOs and kind hearted individuals. The researcher has observed that this phenomenon can have adverse impact on the educational development of the areas attacked, and even areas prone to attack. The displaced persons can also be affected socioeconomically, thereby, militating against their development in various spheres of life including their education. The current study is aimed at determining the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts on the educational development of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. This population was chosen because as parents flee their homes because of attacks, they do so with their children. The forceful change in environment evidently halts some life processes, including education which is the researcher's major concern.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The socio-economic impacts of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts are not farfetched. The displacement of victims from their homes, the destruction of properties and deaths recorded are proofs of how devastating this phenomenon is to the affected areas. In most local governments, schools have been converted to IDP camps to house those displaced. But this is at the detriment of the educational development of such areas and the students. Guma Local Government Area has been one of the most hit Local Governments in Benue State since the conflicts. With IDPs scattered in schools converted to camps, there is no doubt that this impacts on the education in the area. Therefore, this study was embarked upon to investigate how the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have affected the educational development of Senior Secondary School students in terms of their enrolment into schools, their attainment and their academic achievement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on the educational development of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Determine the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on the school enrolment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.
2. Ascertain the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on the academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.
3. Determine the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on the educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were answered to guide the study;

1. What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on school enrolment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?
2. What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?
3. What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised of 250 teaching staff from the public secondary schools in the area. The sample size was 100 respondents made up of teaching staff representing 40% of the entire population of the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Students' Educational Development Questionnaire (SEDQ). The instrument consisted of items in three clusters: A, B and C which provided answers to the three research questions. Each of the clusters had five (5) items making a total of fifteen (15) items. The respondents were provided with the "Yes" or "No" options in responding to the items. The data were analyzed based on the research questions using percentages and frequencies.

**ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**Research Question 1**

*What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on school enrolment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?*

**Table 1: Impact of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict on School Enrolment of Senior Secondary School Students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.**

S/N	Item	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1	The unrest contributed to low school enrolment rates	80	80	20	20
2	Herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have led to the death of many school age children thereby reducing pupils' population in schools.	76	76	24	24
3	Farmers-pastoralists conflicts have made parents to move their wards from the rural secondary schools to town where there are more security agents.	76	76	24	24
4	Herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have killed parents of school age children thereby leaving no one to enroll such children in school.	76	76	24	24
5	Herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have disabled many school age children thereby making it difficult for their parents to enroll them in school.	92	92	8	8

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution for the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts on school enrolment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State and their corresponding percentages. Table shows that herdsmen-farmers' conflicts have disabled many school

aged children, caused low school enrolment rates, have led to death of many school children as well as the death of their parents and significant others thereby leaving no one to enroll them in school.

**Research Question 2:** *What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?*

**Table 2: Impact of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict on Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.**

S/N	Item	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1	The students' performance in tests and exams has dropped since the conflicts.	71	71	29	29
2	The conflicts affected students' study habits negatively	98	98	2	2
3	The students come to school nowadays without completing assignments	98	98	2	2
4	Herdsmen-farmers' conflicts affected the class participation of the students negatively.	100	100	0	0
5	The violence made studying difficult as schools were closed	60	60	40	40

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution for the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts on academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State and their corresponding percentages. Across all items, more than 50% of the respondents agreed that herdsmen-farmers' conflicts led to drop in performance of students in tests and exams. They also affirmed that the conflicts affected students' study habits, class participation and also affected teaching and learning as schools were closed.

**Research Question 3:** *What is the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict on educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State?*

**Table 3: Impact of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict on Educational Attainment of Senior Secondary School Students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.**

S/N	Item	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1	The conflicts obstructed the promotion of some students to higher classes.	100	100	0	0
2	Violence obstructed the academic calendar making every activity come to a halt	84	84	16	16
3	Some of the students repeated classes due to the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts.	100	100	0	0
4	External examinations are not conducted in the area because of the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts.	82	82	18	18
5	Some students dropped out of schools due to the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts.	98	98	2	2

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution for the impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts on educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State and their corresponding percentages. In items 11 and 13, 100% of the respondents ticked "Yes" to the statements "the conflicts obstructed the promotion of some students to higher classes" and "some of the students repeated classes due to the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts" respectively. The respondents also agreed that herdsmen-farmers' conflicts led to students' school dropout, obstruction of school calendar and external examinations.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The discussion is arranged around the research questions.

The first finding of the study revealed that herdsmen-farmers' conflict has significant impact on the school enrolment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. This implies that the activities of the farmer-herders conflict affected the intake of students in the senior arm of secondary schools in the study area. The respondents who were teachers in secondary schools affirmed that the herdsmen-farmers' conflict had; contributed to low school enrolment, caused the death of school aged children and also killed the parents/sponsors of some potential students. This finding coincides with that of Okwori and Angernyi (2019), who found in their study on farmers/pastoralists conflicts on the management of primary schools in Benue State of Nigeria that the conflicts had negatively influenced infrastructural facilities utilization and students' enrolment in primary schools in Benue State to a high extent. Corroboratively, Opiki and Adeleke (2015) in a study on the impact of communal conflicts on educational development found that, the total enrolment in the affected schools dwindled, attendance reduced drastically and educational facilities were grossly unavailable in the conflict affected area. Unaffected schools experienced increased enrolment and attendance yearly during the four years under study. There was significant difference in the academic achievement between the affected and unaffected primary schools. Pinga and Sani (2019) also found in that study that herdsmen-farmers' conflicts affected the funding of primary and secondary schools and the educational development in conflict affected areas in Benue State.

The second finding of the study revealed that herdsmen-farmers' conflict has significant impact on the academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. This finding implies that the performance of students in terms of quality and quantity of learning received negative impact by the clashes between farmers and herdsmen. The respondents averred that the performance of students in tests and exams had relatively dropped since the beginning of the conflicts. Opiki and Adeleke (2015) averred that in their study of communal conflicts on educational development; there was significant difference in the academic achievement between the affected and unaffected primary schools. This implies that the unaffected students performed better than those affected by the conflicts.

The third finding revealed that herdsmen-farmers' conflict has significant impact on the educational attainment of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. This implies that the achievement of the goal of progressing to the next level of education was affected by the herdsmen-farmers' conflicts. Educational attainment is measured in terms of promotions to the next levels of education, however, the conflicts had obstructed the smooth transition of students to higher classes. The respondents revealed that the conflicts had obstructed the academic calendar and also caused the students to repeat classes. Ibrahim and Adebayo (2021) found in their study that herdsmen-farmers' conflicts had serious impact on the provision of infrastructural facilities in secondary schools and on students' enrolment in secondary schools in Benue State. A halt in the enrolment of students into secondary school will affected educational attainment negatively.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that herdsmen-farmers' conflict has significant impact on the educational development of Senior Secondary School students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Destroyed schools and school facilities should be renovated by the government to make schools look habitable; this might encourage parents and significant others to enroll their children and wards in such schools.
2. Teachers should undergo some retraining to learn new teaching methods that are more inclusive and attend to students that have gone through violence to help increase their achievement and general performance in school.

3. Senior Secondary School students eligible for promotional and external examinations should be registered in other schools that are in locations that are less conflictual to help curb the impact of the conflicts on educational attainment.
4. Counsellors should be made available to students to attend to their psychosocial and academic needs to ensure adjustment within and outside the school.

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