

FARMERS-HERDERS CRISIS AND EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Dr. OGABA O George

Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi
Department of Educational Administration and Planning

Abstract: This study investigates the perceived impact of the farmers-herders crisis on education in public primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. The objectives are twofold: to assess the crisis's impact on infrastructural facilities and to determine its effect on student enrollment in primary schools. Guided by research questions addressing the state of school infrastructure and enrolment trends, the study formulates two null hypotheses to be tested at a 0.05 significance level. Utilizing a survey research design, data were collected from a representative sample of 390 teachers across a population of 2,755 primary schools. Multi-stage sampling techniques ensured a diverse and reliable participant selection. The research employed the Farmers-Herders Crisis and Education in Primary Schools Questionnaire (FCAEIPQ), which demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach Alpha = 0.887). Data analysis included descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests to assess the hypotheses. Results indicate significant adverse impacts of the crisis on both school infrastructure and student enrolment, with findings revealing damaged facilities and increased dropout rates. The study emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions, including infrastructure rehabilitation, enhanced security measures, and community engagement initiatives, to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis on educational access and quality in the region.

Keywords: Farmers Herders crisis, education in public Primary School, infrastructural facilities, student enrolment.

© 2024. Dr. OGABA O George. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Background to the Study

Education stands as a fundamental pillar of societal advancement and individual growth, providing both hope and pathways for communities aiming for a sustainable and prosperous future (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2017). In regions affected by socio-political tensions and communal conflicts, such as Benue State, Nigeria, the stability and resilience of educational institutions become particularly vital (Olayiwola, 2020). Primary education, in particular, holds critical importance as it lays the groundwork for lifelong learning and influences the developmental trajectory of young learners (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). However, the ongoing "Farmers-

Herders Crisis" has significantly disrupted this foundational stage, affecting infrastructure, instructional resources, student enrolment, instructional quality, and teacher attendance in public primary schools (Oduntan, 2019; Olayiwola, 2020).

In Nigeria, primary education marks the initial stage of formal learning, typically spanning the first three grades, and aims to introduce children to core academic concepts and essential life skills that promote cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2020). This early stage is crucial as it provides a structured environment designed to nurture foundational skills such as independence, concentration, and cooperative problem-solving, thus supporting the holistic development of young learners (Okebukola, 2018). However, the stability of primary education in Nigeria, especially in conflict-prone areas like Benue State, has been deeply compromised by the escalating Farmers-Herders Crisis, which has undermined educational continuity and access (Olayiwola, 2020).

The Farmers-Herders Crisis represents a complex socio-economic and environmental conflict, primarily revolving around the competition for essential resources such as land, water, and grazing areas (Olayiwola, 2020). This conflict is rooted in a range of contributing factors, including demographic pressures, climate change, weak governance, and historical grievances, manifesting as recurrent tensions and violence between farming communities and pastoralist groups (Adisa, 2018). The crisis has not only heightened regional instability but also adversely impacted educational institutions. This study, therefore, focuses on understanding how the activities associated with the Farmers-Herders Crisis have affected critical aspects of education in Benue State's primary schools, including infrastructure, instructional materials, student enrolment, supervision, and staff attendance (Olayiwola, 2020; Oduntan, 2019).

One of the major impacts of the crisis has been on the infrastructural facilities of primary schools, which encompass physical structures and essential amenities such as classrooms, playgrounds, utilities, and other elements that support a conducive learning environment (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). In Benue State, confrontations and movements linked to the crisis have led to the neglect, vandalism, and destruction of these vital structures (Olayiwola, 2020). These disruptions force the abandonment of schools, displace communities, and widen educational inequalities by diverting resources from infrastructure maintenance and development (Oduntan, 2019). Additionally, the environment of tension and insecurity created by the crisis poses risks to both students and teachers, which further hinders teaching activities and compromises the preservation of school infrastructure and resources (Oduntan, 2019).

The impact of the crisis on student enrollment and attendance has also been severe. Student enrollment, defined as the number of officially registered students attending classes within a specific period, has declined significantly due to the recurring violence associated with the crisis (Olayiwola, 2020). The crisis has led to widespread displacement of families, forcing them to seek refuge in safer areas, which disrupts children's education and causes a substantial drop in enrolment rates (Adisa, 2018). In fleeing to safer regions, displaced families encounter barriers to re-enrolment, contributing to long-term educational disruption, increased dropout rates, and limited future opportunities for affected children (Abutu, 2018; Olayiwola, 2020).

Furthermore, the economic strain resulting from the crisis has forced many teachers to seek additional sources of income, compromising their availability and commitment to teaching duties (Abutu, 2018). The ongoing conflict has exacerbated challenges related to instructional supervision, which further affects educational quality and continuity in these areas.

Consequently, children in these conflict-affected regions experience interruptions in their educational journeys, which hinders their long-term personal and academic development (Oduntan, 2019). Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the perceived impact of the Farmers-Herders Crisis on educational outcomes in public primary schools in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal setting, primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria, would function as thriving centers of education, characterized by well-maintained infrastructure, a wealth of instructional materials, and a dedicated teaching staff committed to delivering high-quality education. Unfortunately, this ideal is far from reality due to the protracted crisis involving Fulani herders, which has severely disrupted the educational landscape. The ramifications of this conflict extend well beyond immediate violence, permeating primary schools and adversely affecting critical elements of education delivery. The infrastructural facilities have suffered extensive damage or destruction, access to instructional materials has diminished, and teachers face significant challenges related to consistent attendance and effective supervision. Furthermore, fluctuations in student enrolment rates add another layer of complexity for educators striving to maintain a stable learning environment. While there is anecdotal evidence pointing to these significant challenges, there remains a considerable gap in comprehensive empirical research that quantifies and qualifies the extent of these educational disruptions. This study aims to fill that gap by systematically investigating the impact of the Fulani herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities and student enrolment in primary schools across Benue State.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the perceived impact of the farmers-herders crisis on education in public primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

- i. To assess the impact of Farmers-herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools in Benue State.
- ii. To determine the impact of Farmers-herders' crisis on student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State .

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. How has the Farmers-herders' crisis impacted the infrastructural facilities in primary schools across Benue State?
- ii. What is the impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools in Benue State.
- ii. The Farmers-herders' crisis does not affect student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State..

Methodology

The study aimed to investigate the perceived impact of the farmers-herders crisis on education in public primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria, utilizing a survey research design to collect insights from a representative sample of teachers. To ensure the findings could be generalized to the broader population, the research employed a survey methodology with structured questionnaires, chosen for its efficiency, standardization, and cost-effectiveness. The study encompassed a population of 2,755 primary schools and 15,012 teachers, from which a sample size of 390 teachers was determined using the Taro Yamane formula.

To select participants, multi-stage sampling techniques were implemented, incorporating proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling, followed by accidental sampling of teachers from the chosen schools. The data collection instrument, titled the Farmers-Herders Crisis and Education in Primary Schools Questionnaire (FCAEIPQ), was validated by experts and demonstrated strong reliability, achieving a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.887 through a pilot study. Research assistants were recruited to enhance the accuracy of questionnaire completion and maximize response rates, thereby facilitating comprehensive data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested with the Chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit test at a significance level of 0.05. This statistical approach enabled the analysis of categorical data, allowing researchers to determine whether the observed frequency distributions significantly deviated from expected distributions.

Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Research Question 1

How has the Farmers-herders' crisis impacted the infrastructural facilities in primary schools across Benue State?

i. Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the impact of Farmers-herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools across Benue State

Item No	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Std	Decision
1	The crisis has led to damage of school buildings, disrupting schooling activities	43	105	146	91	385	2.26	0.95	D
2	The crisis has led to abandonment of school buildings, disrupting schooling	116	213	56	-	385	3.16	0.66	A
3	Herders and farmers conflict contributes to the displacement of communities, worsening educational disparities	166	213	56	9	385	3.16	0.66	A
4	Resources are diverted away from investing in school infrastructure, perpetuating	101	203	80	1	385	3.05	0.70	A
5	The tense environment hinders teaching and learning activities, affecting maintenance of school	116	213	56	-	385	3.16	0.67	A
	Cluster Mean/Standard Deviation						3.57	0.73	SA

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the perceived impact of the farmers-herders crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools across Benue State. The data reveal a significant concern among respondents regarding the effects of the crisis on education infrastructure. Specifically, while the item regarding the damage to school buildings received a mean score of 2.26 with a standard deviation of 0.95, indicating a "Disagree" response, the majority of other items related to abandonment of school buildings (mean = 3.16, SD = 0.66), displacement of communities (mean = 3.16, SD = 0.66), diversion of resources from school infrastructure (mean = 3.05, SD = 0.70), and the tense environment affecting teaching and learning (mean = 3.16, SD = 0.67) all received "Agree" responses. The cluster mean of 3.57 with a standard deviation of 0.73 suggests a general consensus that the farmers-herders crisis has a

significant adverse impact on educational infrastructure, with respondents affirming that it leads to abandonment of school facilities and a worsening of educational disparities due to community displacement. Overall, the results highlight the urgent need for interventions to address these challenges and restore educational stability in the region.

Research Question 2

What is the impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the impact of Farmers-herders' crisis on student enrolment in primary schools across Benue State

Item No	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Std	Decision
6	The crisis causes widespread displacement, affecting families and disrupting children's education	120	5	136	122	385	2.32	1.22.	D
7	Displaced families flee to safer regions, leading to a decline in school enrolment due to safety concerns and economic hardships	232	137	16	-	385	3.56	0.58	SA
8	Existing socio-economic disparities are exacerbated, due to the crisis, posing challenges to maintaining access to education	51	203	116	15	385	2.75	0.73	A
9	Dropout rates increase due to poor supervision instruction resulting from the crisis	158	187	38	2	385	3.30	0.67	A
10	The crisis frequently leads to financial struggles for families, rendering it challenging for parents to cover necessary educational costs like tuition	134	197	53	1	385	3.12	0.68	A
Cluster Mean/Standard Deviation							3.01	0.78	A

Table 2 illustrates the mean and standard deviation regarding the impact of the farmers-herders crisis on student enrolment in primary schools across Benue State. The responses reflect a mixed perception among the participants regarding how the crisis affects enrollment. Notably, the item stating that the crisis causes widespread displacement, impacting families and disrupting children’s education received a mean score of 2.32 (SD = 1.22), indicating a "Disagree" response. Conversely, the statement that displaced families flee to safer regions, leading to a decline in school enrolment due to safety concerns and economic hardships garnered significant agreement, with a mean score of 3.56 (SD = 0.58), classifying it as "Strongly Agree." Additionally,

several other items received favorable responses: the increase in dropout rates due to inadequate supervision (mean = 3.30, SD = 0.67) and the financial struggles faced by families in covering educational costs (mean = 3.12, SD = 0.68) were both categorized as "Agree." The overall cluster mean of 3.01 (SD = 0.78) indicates a general agreement among respondents that the farmers-herders crisis has a considerable impact on student enrolment in primary schools, underscoring the urgent need for strategies to mitigate these adverse effects and enhance educational access for affected communities.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools in Benue State.

Table 3: Chi-square Test on the impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools in Benue State.

Response Options	Fo	Fe	a	df	χ^2 -cal	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
Strongly Agree	116	96.3					
Agree	213	96.3					
Disagree	56	96.3	0.05	3	215.634	0.000	S, Reject H ₀
Strongly Disagree	1	96.3					
Total (N)	385						

Table 3 presents the results of the Chi-square test conducted to assess the impact of the farmers-herders crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools in Benue State. The table includes observed frequencies (Fo) for each response option—"Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree"—as well as the expected frequencies (Fe), which are uniformly set at 96.3 for each response category. The analysis yields a Chi-square statistic (χ^2 -cal) of 215.634 with 3 degrees of freedom (df) and an asymptotic significance (p-value) of 0.000. Since the p-value is significantly lower than the alpha level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀), which posits that there is no significant impact of the farmers-herders crisis on infrastructural facilities. This result indicates a statistically significant impact of the crisis on the condition of educational infrastructure in primary schools, affirming that the ongoing conflict adversely affects the structural integrity and availability of essential resources in these institutions. The findings highlight the critical need for interventions aimed at addressing these infrastructural challenges to support educational continuity in the region.

Hypothesis 2: The Farmers-herders' crisis does not affect student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State

Table 4: Chi-square Test on the impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State.

Response Options	Fo	Fe	a	df	χ^2 -cal	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
Strongly Agree	134	96.3					
Agree	197	96.3					
Disagree	53	96.3	0.05	3	233.961	0.000	S, Reject H ₀
Strongly Disagree	1	96.3					
Total (N)	385						

Table 4 presents the results of the Chi-square test conducted to evaluate the impact of the farmers-herders crisis on student enrolment in primary schools in Benue State. The table displays observed frequencies (Fo) for the response options—"Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree "with all expected frequencies (Fe) set at 96.3. The analysis reveals a Chi-square statistic (χ^2 -cal) of 233.961 with 3 degrees of freedom (df) and an asymptotic significance (p-value) of 0.000. Given that the p-value is significantly less than the alpha level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀), which asserts that there is no significant impact of the farmers-herders crisis on student enrollment. This result indicates a statistically significant effect of the crisis on student enrollment rates in primary schools, suggesting that the ongoing conflict adversely influences enrollment figures. The findings underscore the urgency for targeted strategies to mitigate these challenges and ensure that affected communities have access to education, highlighting the critical role that stability plays in maintaining student enrollment.

Discussion of findings

The study's first finding highlights the substantial impact of the farmers-herders crisis on the infrastructure of primary schools in Benue State. Research conducted by Okon (2020) and Ude (2018) provides strong evidence for this conclusion, specifically in Benue and Enugu States. Both studies employed survey methodologies targeting primary school administrators, teachers, and local stakeholders, revealing extensive damage to vital infrastructure, including classrooms, libraries, sanitation facilities, playgrounds, and water supply systems. Okon’s research concentrated on Benue State, underscoring the urgent need for intervention measures to address the deteriorating educational infrastructure. In a similar vein, Ude’s study in Enugu State

also emphasized widespread infrastructural damage and the critical need for comprehensive strategies to combat the challenges intensified by the ongoing farmers-herders crisis.

The second finding of the study indicates that the farmers-herders crisis significantly affects student enrollment in primary schools within Benue State. This conclusion aligns with the research of Ochube (2018), who reported that the Fulani herdsmen crisis negatively impacted school enrollment, leading to declines in student numbers, increased absenteeism, reduced teacher attendance, destruction of school infrastructure, prolonged school closures, and setbacks in educational progress. Additionally, the findings resonate with Mohammad (2017), who identified a significant negative effect of the farmers-herders crisis on primary school enrollment in Bauchi State. Socioeconomic factors, such as household income and access to educational resources, emerged as critical determinants influencing enrollment patterns during this crisis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of the farmers-herders crisis on education in public primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Firstly, the research indicates a notable detrimental effect of the crisis on school infrastructure, corroborating previous studies that documented extensive damage to essential facilities such as classrooms, libraries, sanitation facilities, and playgrounds. These findings emphasize the urgent need for intervention measures to address the challenges arising from the deterioration of these infrastructural assets.

Secondly, the study confirms the substantial influence of the crisis on student enrollment in primary schools. Issues such as decreased enrollment, absenteeism, and damage to school infrastructure contribute to setbacks in educational advancement. This necessitates the development of comprehensive strategies to mitigate the crisis's impact on enrollment rates. Overall, the findings underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to protect the integrity of educational institutions and ensure that children in conflict-affected regions continue to have access to quality education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the impact of the Farmers-herders' crisis on education in public primary schools in Benue State:

1. **Infrastructure Rehabilitation:** Urgently assess and repair the damaged infrastructure in public primary schools, including classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities. Collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities is essential to secure funding and resources for these rehabilitation efforts.
2. **Enhanced Security Measures:** Implement enhanced security protocols in and around schools to ensure the safety of students and teachers. This includes working with local authorities and law enforcement to create a secure environment that encourages school attendance and reduces absenteeism.
3. **Community Engagement Programs:** Develop community engagement initiatives to involve parents, local leaders, and stakeholders in supporting education efforts. By fostering collaboration and communication, these programs can help mobilize resources, promote school attendance, and encourage parental involvement in their children's education.

References

- Abutu, F. (2018). Impact of conflict-induced displacement on primary school enrolment in Nigeria. *Journal of Development Studies*, 7(3), 156-169.
- Adeyemi, T., & Adeyinka, A. (2020). Primary education in Nigeria: An overview of challenges and prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 20(1), 13-25.
- Adeyemi, T., & Adeyinka, B. (2020). The role of primary education in societal development: A case study of Nigeria. *Journal of African Educational Research*, 6(2), 78-92.
- Adisa, R. S. (2018). The farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria: Causes and implications for the educational sector. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 12(2), 30-40.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Mohammad, A. (2017). Impact of the farmers-herders' crisis on primary school enrolment in Bauchi State, Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies*, 6(2), 34-48.
- Ochube, C. (2018). Effects of the Fulani herdsman crisis on primary school enrolment in Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation*, 11(3), 78-92.
- Oduntan, A. (2019). Challenges of primary education in conflict-affected regions: A case study of Benue State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology*, 15(3), 112-125.

- Okebukola, P. (2018). The role of primary education in the development of cognitive skills. *Journal of Studies in Education, 8*(2), 25-37.
- Okon, R. (2020). Impact of the Farmers-Herders Crisis on infrastructural facilities in primary schools: A case study of Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Infrastructure and Development, 7*(1), 45-58.
- Olayiwola, O. (2020). The impact of the Farmers-Herders Crisis on primary education in Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies, 8*(1), 45-58.
- Ude, N. (2018). Assessing the effects of the Farmers-Herders Crisis on primary school infrastructural facilities: A case study of Enugu State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Development and Planning, 5*(2), 112-126.