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Examining the Impact of IPOB Sit-at-Home Lockdown and Insecurity on School System in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the impact of IPOB Sit-at-Home Lockdown and Insecurity on School System in Imo State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to identify impacts of sit-at-home and insecurity on the school system in the Imo state and to find out the common causes of insecurity in Schools. Content analysis method was used in the paper presentation. Primary and Secondary data were sorted from online publications. The paper adopted Structural Violence Theory. The paper identified weak security system, corruption, youth unemployment, porous borders, poverty, and ideology, and so on as the causes of insecurity in Imo state and the

Southeast region. The impacts of these orders and insecurity include loss of access to education, disruption of school calendar the psychosocial well-being of learners, and the teaching-learning process was also affected and destruction of basic Schools facilities were some of the negative impacts of insecurity on the School system in Imo state, Nigeria. It was recommended based on the findings that the Federal and State government should employ political solutions to address the issues of the agitators in the southeast region. This will help to reduce the tension in the region and restore parent confidence in the safety of their children in schools across the state and the region.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country with a diverse cultural heritage and with different ethnic groups with predominantly three major tribes of Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba separated by the Rivers of Niger and Benue and was amalgamated in 1914 by the British into one entity from two protectorates of Southern and Northern respectively, these three major tribes produced prominent personalities who fought for Nigeria's Independents in 1960 but through coups and counter coups the relationship between the southeastern part and the rest got soured and soon led to three years civil war that claimed over five million lives until the war ended on 15th January, 1970 but the Igbo ethnic group still fill short-changed in Nigeria fifty years after and this has led to the formation of different groups agitating for the liberation of the Igbos and actualizing Biafran Republic. One of the recent groups is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) whose leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was arrested and extradited from Kenya and has been in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS) his followers through Simoen Ekpa the second in command has declared a sit at home restriction to press for his release from the Federal government of Nigeria. The ongoing Monday sit-at-home strategy activity of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast-Nigeria is rooted in the historical struggle towards the restoration of an independent State of Biafra in the old Eastern region of Nigeria (Owoeye, et al 2022). Ekpo and Agorye (2019) described the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a secessionist movement based in Southeast Nigeria to restore the defunct Biafran Republic, albeit, through peaceful means. They also maintained that the objectives of the organization are to facilitate and advocate the Igbo's right to self-determination. In the quest to actualize self-determination by IPOB from Nigeria, its leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu through online broadcasting has gained massive followers

majorly youths and men who see him as the messiah for Biafran actualization. The leadership of Nigeria was not happy with the recent popularity of Mazi Kanu, therefore seeks a way to incarcerate him. Sequel to Nnamdi Kanu's arrest and extradition from Kenya, the Indigenous People of Biafra ordered a sit-at-home protest on Mondays until Kanu is released. The protest, which has since become a major pain in the South East, has divided residents in the region and Igbos in the diaspora, with the rest of Nigeria curiously watching what the exercise would ultimately achieve (Punch 2022). Undoubtedly, the sit-at-home has cost the residents of the South East a lot in terms of lives and property. Since it started, several innocent citizens (both average and prominent) have lost their lives in the most gruesome manner, depriving families of their loved ones who are sometimes breadwinners, and truncating the destinies of the dependants left behind while leaving scars that may never heal (Punch 2022). Academic activities have been put on hold in some communities in the South East while some students have been displaced from their communities due to sit-at-home orders and insecurity. It is in the realization of the importance of education of the child that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its 1999 constitution made a declaration of the right of every Nigerian child to education, irrespective of gender, tribe, religion, or race. It makes sense to state that the lofty vision of education as enunciated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria would be realized if there is a serene and secure school system. This paper, therefore, seeks to address the impact of IPOB sit-at-home lockdown and insecurity on the school system in Imo state Nigeria.

KEYWORDS

Insecurity, Lockdown, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Monday Sit-At-Home Order

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Violence Theory

According to the Structural Violence Theory, conflict is inherent in social structures. Social structures and institutions cause structural violence. Johan Galtung distinguished between three kinds of violence: direct or overt, indirect or structural, and cultural. Direct violence intends to harm another individual or group directly and is a response to the experience of structural violence. In structural violence, institutions, systems, and structures either discriminate between people or deny or deprive them of their rights and the ability to satisfy their basic human needs such as survival, well-being, safety, respect, freedom, identity, religion, etc. Cultural violence is

used to justify and legitimize overt and structural violence through ideology, religion, language, arts, education, etc. Structural violence threatens the lives and livelihoods of individuals, groups, communities, etc., and prevents them from developing their potential and realizing their goals. It can take the form of repression, exploitation, and/or alienation. Here people could be exploited economically, repressed politically, and/or alienated culturally by the structure. Slavery and colonialism are some of the examples of structural violence. Gandhi believed in creating new social arrangements free of structural violence. His approach to conflict resolution thus aimed to preserve the individual while systematically targeting the structure.

Within the context of peace studies, structural violence overtly strives to connect the invisible violent "influences" of institutions with social conditions leading to the loss or deprivation of human lives (Galtung 1999). It emphasizes its focus on non-manifestable threats such as poverty and unjust social, political, and economic structures in comparison to direct threats like knives and guns while acknowledging both threats to administer similar dire consequences (Köhler and Alcock 1976). It is a "hybrid concept" which recognizes the necessity of both theoretical rhetoric and empirical evidence (Høivik 1977). A stronger emphasis is placed on the latter, so much so that if a theory disagrees with statistics, the theory has to be readjusted to fit the conclusions of the research accordingly (Galtung 1999). Structural violence views the agent of death is no longer conventional manifestable objects, but deadly "influences" such as discrimination, exploitation, and injustice. Therefore, this study will be based on Structural Violence Theory because it seeks to address the current political situation of the Southeast region of Nigeria which believed that they have been repressed politically and their right to identity has been denied.

CONCEPT OF SIT AT HOME ORDER

Sit-at-home order is a strategy adopted by non-state actors to press for the release of their leader arrested by the Nigerian government. Sit-at-home order is a threatening action to force the government to release their leader that was arrested by the Nigerian government. Sit-at-home order is an order of restriction given within a region and enforced illegally by non-state actors to violently demand the release of their leader from the Nigerian government detention Niyi & Okwuagwu (2022). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) first introduced the sit-at-home order in the Southeast to add pressure to their quest for the actualization of an independent nation of Biafra and to show that most people in the Southeast support their quest for freedom. It soon transformed into a tool for achieving other goals, including raising awareness for other Biafran-

related issues, and, recently, it has become a tool to draw attention to the plight of the leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu. The statement was quoted thus: "*We, the global family of the Indigenous People of Biafra, ably led by the prophet of our time, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, wish to announce once again that this year's annual Biafra Remembrance Day and candlelight procession will take place on Sunday night, 30th of May, while a sit-at-home and total lockdown takes place on Monday, 31st of May, 2021, and not May 30 as earlier announced. The adjustment is to enable churches to hold their normal services on Sunday, May 30, without any obstruction. But there will be no human or vehicular movement throughout Biafra land on Monday, May 31. Every person in Biafra land is, therefore, advised to observe a sit-at-home order on Monday, May 31, 2021*".

The sit-at-home order has consequent effects on academic activities in the region. Speaking with The Cable on 18th October 2021, Ndukwu said despite the cancellation of the sit-at-home order, residents and students still find it difficult to come out on Mondays owing to fear of the unknown. He called on the government and law enforcement agencies to take urgent steps in assuring Imo residents of their safety to enable parents and guardians to allow their children and wards to attend school. "This sit-at-home has affected us badly, though we have not been observing it but last Monday after what happened in Owerri, we have to tell them to stay at home because life first," he said. "Many parents and guardians don't bring their children to school on Mondays due to the risk involved, it has affected teaching and learning because Monday is gone out every week and the curriculum is not covered, thereby making students miss their classes." Economic activities were paralyzed in Owerri and other cities on Mondays as banks, schools, shops, and many markets failed to open for business.

CONCEPT OF INSECURITY IN SCHOOLS

Security has remained a critical issue of great concern for many nations in the world. No nation or society can boast of being completely free from the problem ensued by insecurity. In the last two decades, countries like Israel, North Korea, the USA, Russia, and South Korea, have experienced different forms of security challenges ranging from transnational violence; Terrorism, Kidnapping, Insurgency, socio ethno-religious crises, has emerged in countries like Kenya, Afghanistan, Sudan and Nigeria (Isaactomason, 2022). Education is not left out. Insecurity can be acute and lead to displacement and prolonged school closures. It can also be sporadic or chronic and form part of the day-to-day reality with which learners and educators

have to cope. Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro (2013) termed insecurity as "the antithesis of security." They further acknowledged that due to the many ways insecurity affects human life and existence, the concept of insecurity has been variously interpreted. Béland (2005) would describe insecurity as "the state of fear and anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection." Insecurity hampers access to education, but it can also affect the psychosocial well-being of learners and the quality of learning (Anyadiegwu & Nzekwu 2022). In Nigeria, the issue of security has occupied center stage, since the country's return to democracy in 1999 (Joseph, 2013). Several factors are responsible for incessant insecurity as observed by Manga (2019); Osaat (2021) including but not limited to weak security system corruption, unemployment, porous borders, poverty, and religious extremism, and so on. While many types of school-based security-related activities are implemented in areas affected by armed conflict and violence, it is not clear whether and how the various implementers measure the impact of these interventions on the access to education; the psychosocial well-being of learners, and the teaching-learning process. Researchers have continued to center on global and national insecurity in general with little or no research on strictly the insecurity situation in the southeast with a strict emphasis on the sit-at-home order and its effects on the teaching/learning process and the school system at large. (Anyadiegwu & Nzekwu 2022). Insecurity has become a global concern affecting the different facets of the life of humankind. These incidents have posed a severe threat to socioeconomic development in the country in that it stifles business, economic activities, and the school system and discourages local and foreign investors (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014).

Research into the dynamics of insecurity in Nigeria has indicated that Insecurity not only impedes education, it also causes infrastructural and facilities decay and poor enrolment of children Abubakar et al (2022). According to UNICEF, about 10.5 million children aged between 5-14 years are out of school in Nigeria and the statistics are worst in Northern Nigeria with about 60% net attendance rate (Iyabo, 2018). This indicates that most Schools in Northern Nigeria are not safe and the Southeast has also joined in the number of out-of-school children. It is a well-known fact that Insecurity has affected many Schools in Northern and almost all the states in Southeast Nigeria. Iyabo (2018) stated that the abduction of 110 Dapchi female students in Yobe state and the sagacious kidnapping of over 300 girls in a hostel in Chibok on 14th April 2014; and February, 29th 2016. Boko (December 2022) Boko Haram and the bandit have in recent times posed grave security challenges to Nigeria where the bandits stormed Schools and

kidnapped students in Tegina, Niger State. Similarly, on February 7th, 42 people including students, teachers, and family members were kidnapped by bandits from Science College Kagara, Niger State have been released after 10 days in captivity (Premium Time, 2021). Olusola (2021) reported that about 800 secondary school students have been kidnapped, maimed, raped, and killed in coordinated attacks by bandits and terrorists. The trend and dynamics of insecurity in Nigeria are worrisome especially when exist many security challenges in the polity.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast first introduced sit-at-home order in the Southeast to add pressure to their quest for the actualization of an independent nation of Biafra and to show that most people in the Southeast support their quest for freedom. Niyi & Okwuagwu (2022). This directive and other criminal activities by kidnappers and unknown gunmen have affected all educational institutions and activities in the region (Ogunode, Iyabode & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). Furthermore, Obi (2021) stated in line with Ogunode, et al. (2022) that Primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions have all been targeted by Unknown gunmen, and other criminal elements operating in Southeast Nigeria. All forms of educational activities have been mostly affected by the insecurity challenges in the region including disruption of West African Examination Council examination and other internal examinations in the state.

CONCEPT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND INSECURITY

For education to occur, it must take place in a setting with variable but certain features such as space, culture, people, and infrastructural facilities that make it unique but similar to environments that support learning. Sustainable Education thrives better in a healthy environment. Generally, nothing goes well in an insecure environment, and particularly, a learning environment that is characterized by insecurity would not only threaten effective learning by affecting the behavior and interaction of both learners and teachers but is also liable for exacerbating other factors such as the destruction of available facilities, scaring qualified teachers/trainers and learners away and causing a shortage of resourceful materials Isaactamson 2022). The educational process having become the dominant response to challenges in all the domains of modern life focuses on finding efficient and sustainable solutions that create value for society in general, rather than individuals and private companies. Traditionally, the educational process includes teaching and learning. The advancement of the educational process complements it with such a social innovation as peer learning which is an important mechanism of social change (Loogma, 2011). However, the educational process is formed by factors. School

as a system depends on external influences to achieve its goals. They are affected by the level of crime, victimization, and violence in society. Insecurity situations promote fears of lives and property and the challenges of insecurity need to be effectively handled for the sustenance of education in Nigeria (Chiemeka-Unogu 2022).

IMPACT OF SIT-AT-HOME ORDERS ON THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Okeoma, Ede, and Nnachi, (2021) stated that private and missionary schools were forced to shut down temporarily in Imo State as a result of the sit-at-home ordered by the Indigenous People of Biafra on Monday, May 31, 2021, throughout the South-East region. Most schools asked their students to stay at home for the said period to avoid any casualty. For instance, Okeoma, et al. (2021) reported that a message from schools run by the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri asked parents to keep their children at home from Thursday, May 27, to Tuesday, June 1, 2021. The message from the Directorate of Education, Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, quoted that "leveraging on the already scheduled public holiday for tomorrow, we have considered it expedient to allow the students/pupils enjoy a longer weekend to resume on Tuesday, June 1, 2021."Boarding students should not be forced to go home. Those who wish to stay back in school should be taken care of." Okah (2021) lamented that as it is, every Monday, while pupils and students and teachers in different parts of the country attend schools, their counterparts in the Southeast avoid going to school in order not to fall victim to the overzealous adherents, thereby drawing back the education of the people from the region. Obi (2021) concluded that the insecurity problems in the region are affecting the school program and activities.

According to Fehintola (2009), poor academic performance of students in internal and external examinations is one of the problems and challenges facing the educational system in Nigeria today. Education itself helps individuals to adapt to a new environment (Ojukwu, 2016). In Nigeria, education is seen as one of the means of getting to the top hierarchy in any endeavor. Thus, poor academic performance usually brings about sadness and frustration to the individual concerned and to his/her parents as well as other members of the family. It gives parents and students feelings of satisfaction and joy when children excel academically (Fehintola, 2009; Ojukwu, 2016). With the ongoing, Monday sit-at-home orders by non-state actors of the (ESN/IPOB) students' academic performance will be affected as a result of psychological trauma caused by insecurity, missing classes, and teachers' migration from schools and areas affected by insecurity in the region. Obi (2021) observed that internal exams that fall within the sit-at-home

order are suspended because of fear of attacks from the agitators namely Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) or Eastern Security Network (ESN). Owuamanam, (2021) reported that gunmen suspected to be members of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) on Monday stormed the Comprehensive Secondary School, Nkume in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State and stopped students from taking their examination. Owuamanam, (2021) submitted that the students were preparing to sit for English in the Junior Secondary School Examination (JSSE) before the gunmen forcefully dispersed them. Olatunde-Aiyedun (2021) further buttressed that these security challenge has been a major setback in achieving academic excellence among learners. Alozie (2021) reported that enforcers of the sit-at-home order, the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB forced the students and teachers of Comprehensive Secondary School, Nkume in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State, to stop the English examination for the West Africa Examination Council, WAEC, on a Monday.

Ogunode and Godwin (2021) observed that Educational institutions operate on the planned academic calendar which specifies the academic session, terms, and weeks that the school will open for teaching and learning. Scheme of work and syllables are there to be covered within the school calendar. These academic calendars and programs of educational institutions are poorly implemented due to the closure of schools which is unhealthy for the development of education because teaching and learning and other academic activities are intermittently disrupted. In agreement with Ogunode and Godwin that many schools, school activities, and other educational policies in some states in the zone do not take place on Mondays because of the sit-at-home order given by armed agitators either of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) or of those called Eastern Security Network (ESN). These groups of agitators disrupt the academic calendar of schools by restricting no-movement order across the zone. Prime Business (2021) reported on September 15, 2021, that the then Ebonyi State governor and Chairman, of Southeast Governors Forum, Engr. Dave Umahi stated that the Southeast cumulatively loses N10 billion for every sit-at-home Monday enforced by the Pro Biafran Movement. This loss will affect the budgetary allocation of the various States in the region. The insecurity problems facing the entire south-east zone imply the revenue generation of the region. The reduction in the revenue generation in the region has also affected the funding of education because the state revenue determines what goes to the various sectors in the states and regions (Olamoyegun, Olatunde-Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper examined the Impact of the IPOB Sit at Home Lockdown and Insecurity on School System in Imo State, Nigeria. The paper has also identified the causes and incidences of insecurity as well as its impact on the school system. It has been discovered that the endless sit-at-home lockdown in the southeast region and Imo state was caused by the detention of the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra Mazi Nnamdi Kanu after a court has ordered the Federal Government of Nigeria to release him but the government refused. Insecurity is caused by unemployment, bad governance, poverty, weak security, judiciary structure, and so on. Some of the security challenges that negatively impacted the School system in the region include endless non-school attendance on Mondays and at times some other days of the week, and disruption of internal and external examinations including WAEC and NECO. Generally, insecurity has impacted natively on the School system in the state and the zone because lives and property were lost, fear of the unknown, low enrolment of students and students drop out has increased, reduction in educational budget and allocation by the state government as a result of decrease on monthly revenue, insecurity also affects student's performance, brain-drain, and infrastructural decay. Based on the problems identified in this paper, the following recommendations were made:

- The Federal and State government should employ political solutions to address the issues of the agitators in the southeast region. This will help to reduce the tension in the region and restore parent confidence in the safety of their children in schools across the state and the region.

- The Federal Government as well as other relevant stakeholders, including Nigeria Security and Civil Defense, the Nigerian Police, Schools authority, parents, traditional rulers, and security intelligence experts should collaborate to effectively provide adequate security and intelligence gathering in various schools across the state.

- The Federal and State Governments should create jobs for graduates and skill acquisition centers for youths and women which will take youths out of the streets.

- The State Government in collaboration with security agencies should provide relevant training to vigilante groups on the rules of engagement in guarding and securing communities in the state including schools.

- Federal and State Governments should investigate human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings by the military, Police, Vigilante groups (Ebubeagu), and nonstate actors, those found guilty should be prosecuted.

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