

AVAILABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTINUITY STRATEGIES FOR ENROLMENT IN BASIC SCHOOLS AMIDST FARMERS-HERDERS' CONFLICT IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored the availability and effectiveness of continuity strategies for enrolment in basic schools amidst farmers–herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria. A descriptive exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and proforma records. 482 respondents participated in the survey, 24 stakeholders were interviewed. Multistage sampling techniques of purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling were employed. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics of mean and ANOVA, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. Findings revealed that five major continuity strategies were available: Organized Community Efforts, Technological/Remote Education Programmes, Educational Support Services, Temporary Learning Centres, and Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms. Organized Community Efforts recorded the highest level of availability, indicating strong community involvement in sustaining schooling during conflict. In terms of effectiveness, Temporary Learning Centres were rated the most effective strategy for ensuring uninterrupted learning for displaced pupils, followed by community-based efforts and remote learning initiatives; fluctuating enrolment trends in Benue State, contrasted with a steady increase in Nasarawa State; there is moderate positive influence of continuity strategies on pupils’ enrolment, particularly through flexible schooling approaches; Inferential analysis revealed no significant differences in perceptions of continuity strategies based on gender or state. The study concludes that community-driven initiatives, complemented by institutional and adaptive strategies, are crucial for sustaining basic education in conflict-affected settings. The study recommended among others that; The Federal and State Ministries of Education should institutionalize continuity strategies by integrating Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) and Remote Education Programmes (REPs) into emergency education policy frameworks, ensuring that every conflict-affected community has a pre-approved plan for rapid educational response and deployment when crises occur.

Keywords: Continuity Strategies, Basic Schools Enrolment, Farmers–Herders’ Conflict.

Introduction

Generally, education is seen and regarded as the bedrock every development, and has been considered as a fundamental human right. All over the world, education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right, since it is seen as a critical instrument needed for human empowerment as well as social cohesion or unity/development. The basic school or level of education is even seen as basic and compulsory which must be acquired by all children regardless of their origin or location. This level of schooling provides children with literacy foundational, numeracy, as well as life-long skills cum values needed socialization and responsible citizenship. In Nigeria, several past governments showed how committed they were

to ensuring basic education continuity via different policies, some of which were UPE scheme and the UBE programme, which all aimed to ensure equitable access, enrolment, retention, and completion of education at the basic school level. Consequently, the process of achieving or realizing these goals has always been hampered or hindered, especially in the north-central region of Nigeria given high level of insecurity imposed by the farmers-herders' conflict.

In recent years, one of the most enduring and disruptive forms of insecurity in Nigeria has been the farmers-herders' conflict, which is particularly prevalent in the North-Central region. This conflict, driven by competition over land and water resources, climate change, population pressure, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms, has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, and mass displacement of rural communities. Beyond its humanitarian and economic consequences, the farmers-herders' conflict has significantly undermined social services, including the provision and continuity of basic education in affected areas.

The disruption of educational activities due to farmers-herders' conflict has resulted in noticeable fluctuations in pupils' enrolment, retention, and completion rates. In many conflict-affected communities, schools are forced to close temporarily or operate irregularly due to security threats, attacks on communities, or displacement of teachers and learners. Parents are often reluctant to enroll or retain their children in school because of safety concerns, thereby leading to declining enrolment and increased dropout rates (Ogunyemi, 2020). Where schools remain open, irregular attendance and poor completion outcomes are common, undermining the effectiveness of basic education delivery. Several studies or researches conducted reveal that, children who live in conflict-affected areas or conflict-prone zones withdraw from schools often dish schools for other learning strategies or styles. Girls and children from low-income households are particularly vulnerable, as they are more likely to be engaged in domestic labour, farming activities, hawking, or early marriage during periods of insecurity (Nwankwo, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). These patterns raise serious concerns about equity in access to education and suggest that the impact of conflict on enrolment may vary across gender groups. In addition to reduced access and participation, the psychological consequences of farmers-herders' conflict further affect pupils' engagement with schooling. School enrolment refers to the number of pupils admitted into a school within a given period. Oguiche et al. (2016) define enrolment as the total number of learners registered by a school over a specified time-frame. In this study, school enrolment is conceptualized as the number of newly admitted Basic One pupils enrolled at the lower basic level of education. Sustained enrolment is essential for school continuity, effective resource allocation, and long-term educational planning.

History has it that, school enrolment in Nigeria, and particularly North-central Nigeria has dwindled over time due to several other factors such as policy, cultural as well as socio-economic and demographic variables or factors. Thus, this has resulted to low enrolment as well as retention and completion rates. However, the incessant conflict between farmers and herders in Benue and Nasarawa States of North-central Nigeria have been particularly of grave effects on schools, particularly basic schools. Despite the adoption of such strategies, there is limited empirical evidence on their availability and effectiveness in sustaining basic schools in farmers-herders' conflict zones. Moreover, little is known about how these continuity strategies influence pupils' enrolment and completion outcomes, or whether their effects differ based on gender and state context. Accordingly, there is need for a more concise or proper examination of the availability and effectiveness of continuity basic schools strategies available for sustaining basic schools despite the ongoing and or continuous farmers-herders' conflict in the region.

Statement of the Problem

In every part of the world, basic education is regarded and or considered as the basis for any human and social or whatever form of development. It enhances stability and reduces social violence or youth unrest to the barest minimum. All over Nigeria, the urge to attain or achieve universal access to basic education remains an uncompromising core policy objective. However, incessant level of insecurity evident in banditry, kidnapping and farmers-herders' conflict has greatly undermined and is still undermining this goal. In Benue and Nasarawa states of North-central Nigeria, the persistent farmers-herders' conflict has become an emerging threat to the stability and effectiveness of access to basic schools, most especially rural areas or communities.

There are several empirical studies supporting and antagonizing these claims, like the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2020) reports, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2022) reports that communal violence, including farmers-herders' conflict, has displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the region, many of whom are school-aged children. Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2019; 2023), and so on and so forth. The decline is a clear indication that insecurity has eroded whatever progress that may have been achieved or made earlier. Moreover, studies show that girls and children from economically disadvantaged households are disproportionately affected during conflicts, as families adopt negative coping strategies such as withdrawing children, especially girls from school for safety, labour, or early marriage (UNESCO, 2020).

In response to educational disruptions caused by conflict, schools and education authorities are expected to implement continuity or enrolment strategies such as temporary learning spaces, flexible school schedules, community-based education initiatives, and psychosocial support to sustain access to basic education. However, existing literature reveals limited empirical evidence on the availability and effectiveness of such strategies in farmers-herders' conflict zones in North-Central Nigeria. Where strategies exist, their impact on pupils' enrolment and completion remains inadequately documented, and little is known about how their effectiveness varies by gender and state context (Adebayo, 2019).

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the persistent decline in pupils' enrolment, retention, and completion in basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria, alongside insufficient empirical understanding of the availability and effectiveness of continuity strategies used to sustain basic education. The lack of evidence-based insights into how these strategies function across gender and state contexts constrains effective policy formulation and school-level interventions. Addressing this problem is critical to safeguarding the right to education for children in conflict-affected communities and ensuring the sustainability of basic education in the region.

Objectives of the Study

The study investigated:

1. the availability of continuity strategies to sustain basic education amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria;
 2. the effectiveness of continuity strategies to sustain basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria;
 3. the ways continuity strategies influence pupils' enrolment in basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria;
 4. the differences in the ways continuity strategies influence pupils' enrolment in basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria on the basis of gender; and
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5. the differences in the ways by which continuity strategies influence pupils' completion of basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria based on State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perception of continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict based on state.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive design of exploratory sequential type, using both quantitative and qualitative research. The study used questionnaire, interview guide and profoma as instruments to garner data and sampled 482 respondents across the two states for the questionnaire while 24 participants were interviewed for the availability of continuity strategies. The study adopted multistage sampling techniques of purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the continuity strategies available to sustain basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria?

To answer this research question, the study employed a triangulation approach, which firstly involve quantitative analysis and then complemented with qualitative findings. The findings were presented thusly. The quantitative findings show the mean score of continuity strategies available to sustain basic schools amidst farmer header conflict in North-central, Nigeria. A structured survey was employed to measure the observed strategies and the result was presented in table 1:

Table 1: Mean Score of the Continuity Strategies Available to sustain basic school amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria?

Continuity Strategies	Mean
Organized Community Efforts (OCE)	2.76
Technological/Remote Education Programmes (REPs)	2.59
Educational Support Services (ESS)	2.57
Monitoring & Evaluation Platforms (MEPs)	2.46
Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs)	2.45

Table 1 show that all five continuity strategies are being implemented to varying degrees in conflict-affected areas. Among them, Organized Community Efforts (OCE) recorded the highest mean score (M = 2.76), followed by Technological/Remote Education Programmes (REPs) (M = 2.59) and Educational Support Services (ESS) provided by government and NGOs (M = 2.57). In addition, Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms (MEPs) (M = 2.46) and Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) (M = 2.45) had the lowest mean. This implies that communities themselves play the strongest role in ensuring school continuity, while institutional and technological supports are present but less widespread.

The question was answered using thematic analysis and the findings were presented thus; This thematic analysis was conducted using interview responses and five continuity strategies emerged as themes: Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs), Technological/Remote Education Programmes (REPs), Educational Support Services (ESS), Organized Community Efforts (OCE), and Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms (MEPs). This was illustrated in figure 1:



Figure 1: Thematic Mapping of Available Continuity Strategies Themes

The diagram presents a thematic map of continuity strategies for education in crisis or insecurity contexts, showing how multiple community-, technology-, and support-based interventions interconnect. At the center is “Continuity Strategies (Themes),” branching into five main clusters: Organized Community Efforts (such as parental encouragement, resource pooling for books and uniforms, food and mat contributions, teacher housing, adjusted school shifts, and community monitoring); Temporary Learning Centres (including safer village relocation, makeshift shelters, school mergers, and TLCs for displaced pupils); Technological/Remote Education (radio lessons, outdoor classes under trees, small-group or home teaching, and volunteer teachers); Educational Support Services (remedial classes, NGO learning kits, counseling and trauma support, security provision, and emergency rebuilding funds); and Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms (attendance tracking, sensitization meetings, and confidence-building talks). Together, the diagram illustrates a coordinated, multi-layered response aimed at sustaining learning access and quality despite disruption.

Research Question Two: How effective are the continuity strategies available to sustain basic schools amidst farmers-herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria?

To answer this research question, triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings shows the following result: the mean score result from quantitative data were computed and presented in table 2:

Table 2: Mean Scores on Effectiveness of Continuity Strategies Available to Sustain Basic Schools amidst Farmers-Herders’ Conflict in North-Central Nigeria

Effectiveness	Mean
The TLC have ensured uninterrupted learning for displaced pupils.	2.93
Because of OCE pupils continue to perform academically despite displacement or insecurity.	2.67
Educational radio and remote learning platforms (REP) are used to sustain learning during displacement.	2.59
Teachers are able to effectively deliver lessons using the available continuity measures (ESS).	2.50
The learning environment remains safe and supportive due to implemented strategies (MEP).	2.36

Table 2 shows the effectiveness of the available continuity strategies to sustain basic schools amidst farmers-herders’ conflict in North-central Nigeria. As indicated in the table, TLCs (M = 2.93) were rated the most effective strategy, followed by OCE (M = 2.67) and REPs (M = 2.59). ESS (M = 2.50) showed moderate effectiveness, while MEPs (M = 2.36) were perceived as the least effective. This suggests that while community support and TLCs were central to sustaining learning, institutional supports and monitoring mechanisms had limited reach or effectiveness.

Research Questions 3: In what way do continuity strategies influence pupils’ enrolment in basic schools amidst farmers-herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria?

To address this research question, data were obtained from three complementary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of how continuity strategies influence pupils’ enrolment in basic schools amidst the farmers-herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria. The first set of data comprised a 15-year proforma record of enrolment rate, which provided the empirical foundation for assessing enrolment trends over time. The second set of data was derived from a survey to quantify their perceptions of the effectiveness of various continuity strategies on sustaining school enrolment during conflict periods. The third component consisted of qualitative interviews with key stakeholders. The result was presented thusly;

Table 3: Fifteen-year Enrolment Records of in Basic Schools in Farmers-Herders’ Conflict-Prone Zone in North-Central Nigeria

S/N	Year	Benue	Nasarawa
1	2010/’11	6,264	7632
2	2011/’12	6,256	7912
3	2012/’13	5,913	8219
4	2013/’14	6,073	8417
5	2014/’15	3,727	8674
6	2015/’16	6,165	8837
7	2016/’17	6,071	9084
8	2017/’18	6,743	10029
9	2018/’19	4,693	11472
10	2019/’20	6,624	12610
11	2020/’21	3,757	13,941
12	2021/’22	6,365	14168
13	2022/’23	4,197	14652
14	2023/’24	3,950	16,347
15	2024/’25	3,491	17231

(Source; State Ministry of Education, 2025)

Table 3 presents a fifteen-year trend of pupils’ enrolment in basic schools within farmers–herders conflict-prone areas of Benue and Nasarawa States. The table reveals fluctuations in enrolment figures across the years, with Benue showing irregular patterns marked by sharp declines in 2014/’15, 2018/’19, and 2020/’21. In contrast, Nasarawa displays a consistent upward trend throughout the fifteen years. A line graph was used to illustratively present the result.

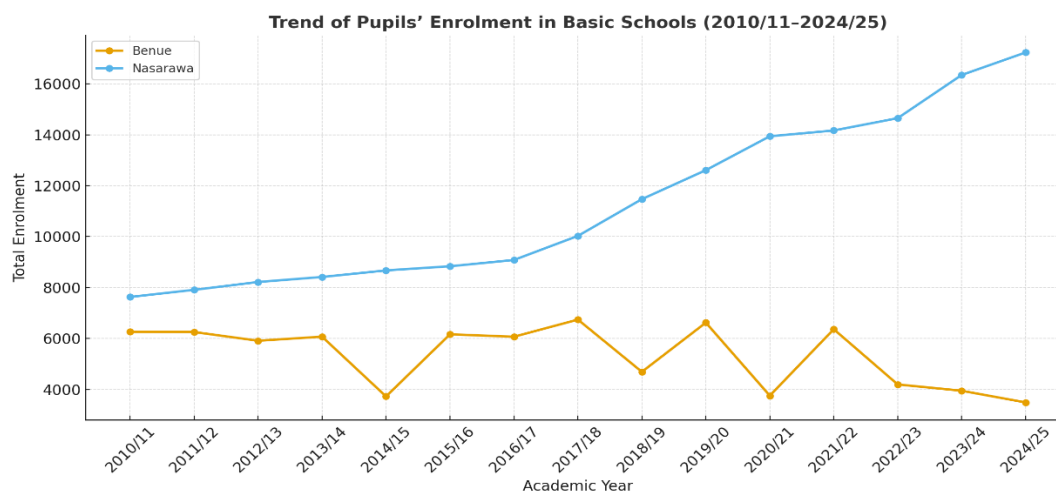


Figure 2: Trend of Pupils' Enrolment in Basic Schools in amidst farmers-herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria

Figure 2 illustrate the trend of pupils' enrolment in basic schools across Benue and Nasarawa States from 2010/'11 to 2024/'25. The visual clearly highlights the fluctuating pattern in Benue compared to the steady upward growth in Nasarawa over the fifteen-year period. In addition, to the proforma record finding, survey findings were presented in table 4.

Table 4: Mean Score on the Influence of Continuity Strategies on Pupils' Enrolment

S/N	Item Statement	Mean
1	The availability of learning alternatives has encouraged more pupils to enroll in school.	2.27
2	Parents are more willing to send their children to school due to improved safety and continuity measures.	2.36
3	School-based sensitization campaigns have boosted enrolment in conflict-affected areas.	2.69
4	There is provision for relief packages and educational support materials ensure increased access to school enrolment	2.34
5	The use of flexible schooling approaches attracts new enrolments during conflict periods.	2.45

As presented in table 4, the mean scores for all items range between 2.27 and 2.69, indicating a moderate perception among respondents regarding the influence of continuity strategies on pupils' enrolment. The highest-rated item was "School-based sensitization campaigns" (Mean = 2.69). Conversely, the lowest-rated item was "The availability of learning alternatives" (Mean = 2.27). This implies that the responses reflect a cautious optimism that continuity strategies contribute positively to enrolment, though their impact appears uneven across different intervention types.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers-herders' conflict based on gender.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test on Continuity Strategies by Gender

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	Df	t-cal.	p-value	Remark
Male	263	12.94	2.71	480	-0.835	0.404	Not Significant
Female	219	13.13	2.27				

The independent samples t-test result in the table 5 shows that male respondents (N = 263, Mean = 12.94, SD = 2.71) and female respondents (N = 219, Mean = 13.13, SD = 2.27) reported similar levels of effectiveness in continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers–herders’ conflict. With a calculated t-value of -0.835 at 480 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.404, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level, the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant. This implies that gender does not significantly influence the perceived effectiveness of continuity strategies for sustaining basic education in conflict-affected areas. Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference in continuity strategies based on gender is retained.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perception of continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers-herders’ conflict based on state.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test on Continuity Strategies by State

State	No	Mean	Std.	Df	t-cal.	p-value	Remark
Benue	266	13.04	2.67	480	0.179	0.858	Not Significant
Nassarawa	216	13.00	2.32				
Total	481						

Table 6 shows that respondents from Benue State (N = 266, Mean = 13.04, SD = 2.67) and Nassarawa State (N = 216, Mean = 13.00, SD = 2.32) demonstrated very similar perceptions regarding the effectiveness of continuity strategies for sustaining basic schools amidst farmers–herders’ conflict. The t-calculated value of 0.179 with 480 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.858 ($p > 0.05$) indicates that the difference between the two states is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained, implying that state location does not significantly influence the perceived effectiveness of continuity strategies employed to sustain basic education during the conflict.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study indicate that a range of continuity strategies are available to sustain basic schools amidst farmers–herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria, with varying levels of implementation. Accordingly, OCEs was considered the most dominant strategy available for continuity of basic schools, implying that, majority of the communities were primarily concerned and strongly involved in the process of ensuring access, enrolment, retention and completion of basic schools in their local areas, regardless of the security situation. This is in alignment with other studies which stated that, community participation, parental involvement, and local resource mobilization are critical coping strategies to ensure or sustain education in conflict-affected regions (INEE, 2016; UNICEF, 2020). The REPs and ESS further shows attempts by both the community, the governments as well as other non-state actors to reduce interruptive learning during the conflict via means such as radio instruction, television broadcasts, as well as provision or supply of learning tools or psychosocial support. However, the comparatively lower mean scores recorded for Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms

(MEPs) and Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) indicate structural and logistical challenges in institutionalizing oversight mechanisms and alternative learning spaces during prolonged insecurity, a pattern similarly reported in conflict-prone regions of sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2018).

Thus these results are reinforcement to reveal more on how these continuity strategies for basic school enrolment work in reality/practice. Through thematic analysis, five major strategies; Temporary Learning Centres, Technological/Remote Education Programmes, Educational Support Services, Organized Community Efforts, and Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms, were identified as interconnected responses to educational disruption. Stakeholders highlighted community-driven initiatives such as flexible school schedules, parental encouragement, shared teaching responsibilities, and material support as the most immediate and reliable means of sustaining schooling. This supports literature asserting that community resilience often compensates for weak formal systems during conflict (Brock-Utne, 2017; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). Meanwhile, strategies such as radio-based learning, outdoor classes, and volunteer teaching reflect adaptive innovations commonly adopted in fragile contexts to overcome barriers to school access (Burde et al., 2017). Despite their relevance, participants noted that these interventions are unevenly implemented and often constrained by insecurity, funding limitations, and inadequate coordination.

Accordingly, this result from triangulated sources of questionnaire, interview guide and proforma reveal shows that the existence of continuity strategies and their effectiveness is a factor of community involvement or participation. As a result, the findings emphasized the need for holistic or integrated approach with the combination of efforts from all quarters for better and effective educational continuity, during conflict.

Conclusion

This study established that, sustainability of basic education amidst farmers–herders’ conflict in North-Central Nigeria largely depends on a blend of community-led initiatives, adaptive learning arrangements, and institutional support mechanisms such as Organized Community Efforts serving as the most consistent and widely implemented strategy. While Temporary Learning Centres and flexible schooling options have proven highly effective in ensuring learning continuity for displaced pupils, their limited availability constrains broader impact. Technological and remote education programmes, alongside educational support services, contribute moderately to sustaining instruction but face challenges related to infrastructure, security, and coordination, whereas monitoring and evaluation mechanisms remain the weakest link. Regardless of the constraints, the continuity strategies available proved to be effective to ensuring better enrolment, retention and completion of basic schools with holistic involvement.

Recommendations

- a) The Federal and State Ministries of Education should institutionalize continuity strategies by integrating Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) and Remote Education Programmes (REPs) into emergency education policy frameworks, ensuring that every conflict-affected community has a pre-approved plan for rapid educational response and deployment when crises occur.
- b) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and education partners such as UNICEF or Save the Children should expand community sensitization campaigns and provide conditional learning support (e.g., feeding, uniforms, learning kits) to encourage displaced and vulnerable families to enroll or re-enroll their children in schools within conflict-affected areas.

- c) School administrators and Local Government Education Authorities should establish psychosocial support units within Temporary Learning Centres and mainstream schools to address trauma, sustain motivation, and provide continuous monitoring of attendance and well-being, thereby reducing dropout rates during and after conflict.
- d) Government agencies and humanitarian partners should strengthen long-term sustainability mechanisms, including consistent funding, training, and evaluation—so that communities with prolonged exposure to conflict continue to see tangible improvements, thereby restoring confidence and preventing resilience fatigue among long-term residents.

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