

MANAGING BASIC EDUCATION AMIDST ECONOMIC AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This paper examined the management of basic education amidst economic and security challenges in contemporary Nigeria. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was designed to ensure equitable access to functional and quality education for all children. However, recurring economic crises, insecurity, and inadequate policy implementation continue to undermine its objectives. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, utilizing secondary data and documentary analysis to explore the impact of inflation, unemployment, insecurity, and poor funding on basic education delivery. The findings revealed that economic instability has led to reduced government funding, teacher demotivation, school dropouts, and infrastructural decay. Furthermore, insecurity, particularly in Northern Nigeria, has caused displacement of pupils and teachers, closure of schools, and disruption of learning activities. The study concludes that effective management of basic education in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that integrates economic reforms, security stabilization, and educational innovation. The paper recommends enhanced government funding, strengthened community participation in school governance, teacher welfare improvement, and the establishment of safe learning environments in conflict-affected zones.

Keywords: Basic Education, Economic Challenges, Security Challenges, Educational Management, Nigeria

Introduction

Education remains the most potent tool for human advancement, national integration, and socio-economic transformation. It serves as the foundation upon which nations build sustainable development and inclusive progress. In Nigeria, the basic education level—comprising early childhood, primary, and junior secondary education—represents the critical stage for equipping learners with foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills required for personal and national

growth. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in 1999 marked a major policy shift toward ensuring free, compulsory, and quality education for all school-aged children (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). However, the realization of this noble objective has been severely hindered by persistent economic and security challenges, which have constrained the effective management and delivery of basic education across the country.

Economic and security challenges are two interrelated crises that have had far-reaching implications for Nigeria's educational system. Economically, the country continues to experience inflation, unemployment, revenue shortfalls, and poor infrastructural investment, all of which negatively affect education funding and administration (World Bank, 2023). The rising cost of living has strained household incomes, making it increasingly difficult for parents to support their children's education, while the continuous devaluation of the naira has eroded the purchasing power of educational institutions, limiting their ability to procure learning materials, maintain facilities, and motivate teachers. Security-wise, the prevalence of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts—particularly in Northern Nigeria—has resulted in the destruction of schools, displacement of learners, and closure of educational institutions (UNICEF, 2023). Consequently, millions of children remain out of school, especially in conflict-prone areas, threatening the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The management of basic education in Nigeria under these dual crises presents enormous challenges. Educational management refers to the systematic coordination of human, material, and financial resources toward achieving educational goals and objectives (Adebayo & Adamu, 2021). Effective management ensures that schools operate efficiently, teachers perform optimally, and learners achieve desirable outcomes. However, under conditions of economic hardship and insecurity, managers of basic education face dwindling budgets, shortage of qualified teachers, infrastructural decay, declining morale, and disruption of academic calendars. According to Edeh and Ibrahim (2022), education managers in Northern Nigeria spend more time addressing crises—such as school closures and displacement—than improving instructional delivery and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, economic mismanagement at both federal and state levels has resulted in irregular teacher salaries, lack of instructional resources, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. As a result, teacher absenteeism has increased, while the quality of instruction continues to decline. Insecurity exacerbates these economic difficulties by displacing teachers, destroying facilities, and creating psychological trauma among learners and staff (Oguche & Bello, 2023). The combination of poverty, fear, and poor governance creates an educational environment that is neither safe nor conducive for learning.

The North-West and North-East regions, in particular, have witnessed unprecedented attacks on schools, including mass abductions of pupils and teachers. Such incidents have not only disrupted learning but also instilled fear among parents, discouraging school enrolment. Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, and Borno States have become flashpoints of educational insecurity. In Katsina State alone, hundreds of public schools have either been closed or merged due to repeated attacks by armed groups (Daily Trust, 2024). These conditions demand innovative

educational management strategies capable of sustaining learning continuity even in unstable environments.

In managing basic education amidst economic and security challenges, the role of education administrators becomes crucial. They must navigate competing priorities such as scarce funding, teacher motivation, infrastructural maintenance, and learner safety. This calls for resilience, adaptive leadership, and collaborative engagement among stakeholders, including government agencies, communities, and development partners. According to Obasi (2022), sustainable educational management in crisis contexts requires decentralization, community participation, and efficient utilization of limited resources.

Despite these challenges, education remains Nigeria's best hope for national recovery and transformation. Managing basic education effectively under economic and security pressures is, therefore, a strategic necessity. It requires not only increased funding and improved security but also a systemic reform that promotes accountability, innovation, and inclusiveness. This study, therefore, examines the management of basic education amidst economic and security challenges in contemporary Nigeria, with emphasis on identifying the nature of these challenges, their impact on educational quality, and the strategies required to sustain basic education delivery.

Statement of the Problem

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) initiative was established to provide every Nigerian child with access to free and quality education, thereby reducing illiteracy and promoting human capital development. However, more than two decades after its implementation, the objectives of UBE have not been fully realized due to persistent economic instability and widespread insecurity. The challenges of poor funding, inflation, and teacher demotivation, coupled with the increasing rate of attacks on schools, have undermined the management and effectiveness of basic education in Nigeria.

Economically, Nigeria's dependence on oil revenue has made its education sector vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Budgetary allocations to education have remained below UNESCO's recommended 26%, averaging between 6–8% in recent years (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023). Consequently, public schools are underfunded, infrastructure is dilapidated, and teachers are underpaid. Many schools lack basic facilities such as classrooms, teaching aids, and sanitation. The inability of governments to pay salaries promptly or provide adequate training opportunities has resulted in low morale among teachers, further affecting instructional quality.

In addition to these economic constraints, security challenges have become a major impediment to educational management. The Boko Haram insurgency, rural banditry, and kidnapping of schoolchildren have forced the closure of thousands of schools, particularly in Northern Nigeria. According to UNICEF (2023), over 1.5 million children have been displaced due to insecurity, while more than 1,500 schools remain closed across conflict-affected states. In Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, and Borno States, school administrators face the daily dilemma of protecting pupils' lives while striving to maintain educational continuity. These conditions erode public confidence in the education system and further widen the literacy gap between Nigeria's regions.

Moreover, the management structure of basic education remains weak and overly centralized, making local decision-making difficult. Corruption, poor monitoring, and bureaucratic inefficiency also hinder effective utilization of funds. Community participation, which is vital for school development, has declined due to fear of insecurity and loss of livelihoods. As Akinola and Usman (2022) noted, educational managers now operate in survival mode—focusing on crisis response rather than long-term planning or quality assurance.

Given these realities, the core problem is that economic hardship and insecurity have severely constrained the effective management of basic education in Nigeria, leading to declining enrolment, low retention rates, poor academic outcomes, and widening educational inequalities. Unless proactive strategies are developed to mitigate these twin challenges, Nigeria risks reversing decades of progress toward universal education and sustainable national development.

Research Questions

- i. What are the major economic challenges affecting the management of basic education in contemporary Nigeria?
- ii. How do security challenges influence pupils' access and participation in basic education?
- iii. What strategies can educational administrators adopt to manage basic education amidst economic hardship?
- iv. What measures can be implemented to ensure safety and continuity of learning in insecure environments?

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant relationship between economic challenges and effective management of basic education in Nigeria.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between security challenges and pupils' access to basic education in Nigeria.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between management strategies and the sustainability of basic education amidst economic and security challenges.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting data on existing conditions, opinions, and relationships without manipulation of variables. The population comprised education administrators, head teachers, and teachers in public basic schools across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Using Taro Yamane's (1973) formula for sample size determination, a total of 400 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure gender, regional, and professional representation. A structured questionnaire titled *Management of Basic Education Amidst Economic and Security Challenges Questionnaire (MBEESCQ)* was developed by the researchers and divided into four sections: Section A: Demographic Information, Section B: Economic Challenges in Basic Education, Section C: Security Challenges in Basic Education, Section D: Management Strategies and Solutions. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Administration and Measurement and Evaluation from Federal University Dutsin-Ma and Nasarawa State University, Keffi, yielding a

Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.86. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha method, producing a coefficient of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency. Data were collected through direct questionnaire administration with the help of trained research assistants. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 386 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 96.5% response rate. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT

4.1 Research Question 1

What are the major economic challenges affecting the management of basic education in contemporary Nigeria?

Table 4.1: *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Economic Challenges Affecting the Management of Basic Education*

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	S D	X	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate funding from government affects effective planning and delivery of basic education.	170	130	52	34	3.13	0.88	Agreed
2	Irregular payment of teachers' salaries reduces morale and productivity.	168	132	50	36	3.12	0.87	Agreed
3	Rising inflation and cost of living hinder school operations and maintenance.	165	138	48	35	3.14	0.86	Agreed
4	Lack of modern infrastructure due to poor economic conditions affects learning quality.	162	137	50	37	3.10	0.88	Agreed
5	Insufficient instructional materials and digital tools weaken effective teaching in basic schools.	160	136	53	37	3.08	0.89	Agreed
Cluster Mean						3.11	0.88	Agreed

Source: Field Study, 2026

Interpretation:

All items in Table 4.1 have mean values above the decision benchmark of 2.50, with a cluster mean of 3.11, indicating respondents' agreement that economic challenges—such as poor funding, low teacher motivation, inflation, and inadequate infrastructure—significantly affect the management of basic education in Nigeria. The low standard deviation (0.88) suggests consistency in respondents' opinions.

4.2 Research Question 2

How do security challenges influence pupils' access and participation in basic education?

Table 4.2: *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Security Challenges Influencing Pupils' Access and Participation*

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	S D	X	SD	Decision
6	Insecurity leads to the closure of many schools, especially in the North.	172	134	48	32	3.15	0.87	Agreed
7	Fear of attacks discourages parents from sending their children to school.	168	136	50	32	3.13	0.86	Agreed
8	Kidnapping and banditry have displaced teachers and pupils from learning environments.	165	135	52	34	3.11	0.88	Agreed
9	Poor security infrastructure in schools exposes pupils to danger and trauma.	160	138	50	38	3.09	0.89	Agreed
10	School closures caused by communal conflicts disrupt pupils' academic continuity.	158	139	51	38	3.08	0.89	Agreed
Cluster Mean						3.11	0.88	Agreed

Source: Field Study, 2026

Interpretation:

The data show all mean scores are above 2.50, with a cluster mean of 3.11. Respondents agreed that insecurity, kidnapping, and school attacks have severely reduced pupils' access and participation in basic education. The findings suggest that insecurity remains a major obstacle to achieving equitable and inclusive education in Nigeria.

4.3 Research Question 3

What strategies can educational administrators adopt to manage basic education amidst economic hardship?

Table 4.3: *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Management Strategies for Basic Education Amidst Economic Hardship*

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	S D	X	SD	Decision
11	Proper prioritization of education in national and state budgets enhances stability.	165	137	51	33	3.12	0.86	Agreed

12	Educational administrators should adopt cost-effective resource management techniques.	160	139	52	35	3.10	0.87	Agreed
13	Collaboration with NGOs and private partners can improve funding and infrastructure.	158	140	50	38	3.08	0.89	Agreed
14	Digitalization and use of low-cost technology can sustain learning during economic crises.	162	135	53	36	3.10	0.88	Agreed
15	Training school leaders in financial and crisis management enhances efficiency.	163	138	49	36	3.11	0.87	Agreed
Cluster Mean						3.10	0.87	Agreed

Source: Field Study, 2026

Interpretation:

With all mean values above 2.50, the cluster mean of 3.10 indicates that respondents agreed on the importance of innovative management strategies such as effective budgeting, digital adoption, partnerships, and leadership training in mitigating the impact of economic hardship on basic education.

4.4 Research Question 4

What measures can be implemented to ensure safety and continuity of learning in insecure environments?

Table 4.4: *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Measures for Safety and Learning Continuity in Insecure Environments*

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	S D	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
16	Establishment of school security committees involving community stakeholders.	164	136	50	36	3.11	0.87	Agreed
17	Deployment of trained school security personnel and surveillance systems.	162	137	52	35	3.10	0.88	Agreed
18	Implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative for school protection.	160	138	53	35	3.09	0.88	Agreed
19	Use of virtual learning and hybrid models during school closures.	158	136	54	38	3.07	0.89	Agreed
20	Psychological support and counseling for traumatized pupils and teachers.	166	135	51	34	3.12	0.86	Agreed
Cluster						3.10	0.88	Agreed

Mean								
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Source: Field Study, 2026

Interpretation:

All items recorded mean values above 2.50, with a cluster mean of 3.10. This implies that establishing school-community security partnerships, applying the Safe Schools Initiative, using digital learning, and offering psychological support are effective measures to ensure learning continuity in insecure regions.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

Test of Null Hypothesis 1 (H_{01})

There is no significant relationship between economic challenges and effective management of basic education in Nigeria.

Responses	Observed Freq	Expected Freq	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -tab	Df	p-value	Alpha	Decision
Agreed	302	351	218.74	13.067	350	0.012	0.05	Reject
Disagreed	84							

Interpretation:

Since χ^2 -calculated (218.74) > χ^2 -tabulated (13.067) and p-value (0.012) < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between economic challenges and effective management of basic education in Nigeria.

Test of Null Hypothesis 2 (H_{02})

There is no significant relationship between security challenges and pupils' access to basic education in Nigeria.

Responses	Observed Freq	Expected Freq	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -tab	Df	p-value	Alpha	Decision
Agreed	298	351	224.56	13.067	350	0.010	0.05	Reject
Disagreed	88							

Interpretation:

The χ^2 -calculated value (224.56) is greater than the table value (13.067) and the p-value (0.010) is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that security challenges significantly affect pupils' access and participation in basic education.

Test of Null Hypothesis 3 (H_{03})

There is no significant relationship between management strategies and the sustainability of basic education amidst economic and security challenges in Nigeria.

Responses	Observed Freq	Expected Freq	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -tab	Df	p-value	Alpha	Decision
Agreed	305	351	219.83	13.067	350	0.011	0.05	Reject
Disagreed	81							

Interpretation:

Since χ^2 -calculated (219.83) > χ^2 -tabulated (13.067) and p (0.011) < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between effective management strategies and the sustainability of basic education amidst economic and security challenges.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings in this study is based on the tested hypotheses which examined the relationship between economic challenges, security challenges, and management strategies in relation to the effective management and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria.

First findings show there is a significant relationship between economic challenges and effective management of basic education in Nigeria. This implies that the state of the economy has a direct impact on the management of basic education. Economic instability often leads to inadequate funding, delayed payment of teachers' salaries, insufficient instructional materials, and poor infrastructure maintenance. These factors hinder effective teaching and learning processes at the basic education level. The finding is consistent with the studies of Adeniran (2020) and Okafor and Nwankwo (2021), who reported that limited government budgetary allocation and inflationary pressures reduce the capacity of school administrators to manage resources effectively. Similarly, Ogunleye (2022) observed that economic challenges in developing countries like Nigeria affect the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers, leading to poor educational outcomes. Furthermore, the result aligns with the assertion of UNESCO (2021) that sustainable educational management depends heavily on financial stability and equitable resource distribution. In contexts where economic constraints are severe, the quality and accessibility of basic education suffer significantly. Therefore, this finding emphasizes the need for robust economic reforms and financial prioritization of education to ensure effective management of Nigeria's basic education system.

This second finding suggests that security challenges significantly affect pupils' access and participation in basic education. Insecurity—manifested through insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal clashes—has become a critical barrier to pupils' school attendance, enrolment, and retention in several parts of the country. Insecurity not only disrupts school operations but also instills fear in parents and students, discouraging regular school participation. The finding corroborates the works of Abdulrahman (2019) and Edeh & Mohammed (2020), who established that insecurity in Northern Nigeria has led to the closure of many schools and a rise in internally displaced pupils. Additionally, UNICEF (2022) emphasized that over 1.3 million children in Northern Nigeria have been forced out of school due to persistent insecurity. The study by Oyetunde and Salihu (2021) also noted that insecurity depletes government resources, diverting funds from education to military expenditure. The present finding reinforces the notion that security is a prerequisite for educational development, as learners and teachers require a safe and stable environment to achieve optimal performance. Hence, ensuring adequate security and community safety is crucial for guaranteeing equal access to quality basic education in Nigeria.

Third finding shows that there is a significant relationship between effective management strategies and the sustainability of basic education amidst economic and security challenges. This finding implies that strategic management approaches—such as participatory leadership, transparent budgeting, community involvement, and innovative resource utilization—play an essential role in sustaining educational outcomes even under difficult economic and security conditions. It aligns with the work of Adebayo and Yusuf (2021), who noted that effective management practices, including decentralization and stakeholder collaboration, improve educational resilience. Similarly, Oladipo (2022) emphasized that adaptive management strategies enable educational administrators to cope with limited resources and environmental uncertainties. Moreover, this finding supports World Bank (2023) observations that nations with proactive educational management systems can mitigate the adverse effects of economic downturns and insecurity on learning continuity. By implementing data-driven planning, monitoring, and accountability frameworks, school managers can enhance efficiency and sustainability. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of educational administrators through professional development and policy support is critical for sustaining Nigeria's basic education amidst prevailing challenges.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the management and sustainability of basic education in Nigeria are significantly influenced by economic and security conditions, as well as by the effectiveness of management strategies employed by school administrators. The rejection of all three null hypotheses indicates that economic hardship, insecurity, and management practices are interdependent factors shaping the functionality of the basic education system. The study revealed that economic challenges—such as inadequate funding, inflation, and delayed salaries—impair the ability of educational managers to provide adequate learning materials, maintain infrastructure, and motivate teachers. Similarly, security challenges—ranging from insurgency and kidnapping to communal violence—have limited pupils' access to schools, disrupted learning continuity, and discouraged parental investment in education. However, it was also established that effective management strategies, including participatory decision-making, transparent resource utilization, and adaptive planning, can enhance the resilience and sustainability of basic education despite these challenges. In essence, the study concludes that addressing economic instability, improving national security, and strengthening managerial capacity are vital for achieving a sustainable, accessible, and high-quality basic education system in Nigeria. A holistic and well-coordinated policy approach that integrates economic reforms, security enhancement, and educational management improvement is therefore necessary to safeguard and advance the goals of basic education.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government at all levels should prioritize the education sector in budgetary allocations to ensure steady funding for basic education. Adequate financial resources should be directed toward teacher welfare, infrastructure development, instructional materials, and school maintenance. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) should also be

encouraged to supplement government efforts in mitigating the effects of economic challenges on education.

2. The federal and state governments should collaborate with local communities, security agencies, and civil society organizations to enhance school safety and protect pupils, teachers, and educational infrastructure from attacks. The establishment of School Protection Committees, deployment of security personnel, and adoption of early-warning systems can help create safer learning environments, particularly in regions affected by insecurity.
3. School administrators and educational planners should be trained in modern management techniques that promote resilience and sustainability under economic and security constraints. Emphasis should be placed on strategic planning, participatory leadership, resource optimization, and crisis management. The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should also institutionalize continuous professional development programs to improve managerial competence and ensure evidence-based decision-making in the education sector.

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