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EFFECT OF INSECURITY ON STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITY GUSAU, ZAMFARA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the profound effect of insecurity on student enrollment and institutional stability at Federal University Gusau, situated in Nigeria's volatile Zamfara State. Against the persistent security crisis in Northern Nigeria marked by banditry, kidnappings, and campus threats the research analyzes how violence disrupts higher education access and sustainability. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study integrates quantitative enrollment data (2019–2024) with qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews, Focus Group Discussion and security reports. Key findings reveal a 33.7% enrollment drop in high-risk disciplines (e.g., field-based sciences) and a 45% decline in non-indigene admissions, severely straining institutional finances. The study uncovers a vicious cycle: insecurity diminishes enrollment, which reduces revenue, thereby weakening the university's capacity to maintain infrastructure and retain staff. Female students are disproportionately affected, with many relocating to safer regions. While adaptive measures like hybrid learning and localized recruitment offers partial mitigation, the study argues that without systemic security-sector partnerships, universities in conflict zones risk collapse. Policy recommendations prioritize three areas: enhanced campus protection, strengthening institutional security through increased government support, deployment of specialized security personnel, and investment in surveillance infrastructure can help restore confidence among students, parents, and staff to preserve education and stabilize institution in Nigeria's most insecure regions.

Keywords: *Insecurity, Student Enrollment, Institutional Stability, Adaptive Strategies*

Background and Problem Statement

The Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) has experienced devastating 33.7% enrollment decline over five years (2019-2024), declining from 12,735 students to a projected 7,938, directly attributable to Zamfara State's escalating insecurity which recorded over 156 violent incidents in 2023 alone (ICG,

2024). This alarming declining student enrolment trend shows progressive annual deterioration, beginning with a 6% drop (11,971 students) in 2019, worsening to 8% (11,013) in 2021, and peaking at 10% (9,912) in 2022 following traumatic mass kidnappings, before slightly moderating to 9% (9,020) in 2023 due to limited security measures, with 2024 projections indicating a renewed 12% plunge (7,938). The cumulative loss of 4,797 students has triggered severe institutional consequences, including forfeited tuition revenue and diverted funds to emergency security, while academic quality has suffered through 82 annual lost lecture days and a 73% reduction in fieldwork-based research output (FUG, 2024). Particularly devastating 33.7% enrollment collapses in critical science programs like sciences and Geology, alongside disproportionate 54% female versus 42% male declines, reversing northern Nigeria's gender parity gains. Compared to safer institutions like ABU Zaria and even Zamfara's state colleges (12% average decline), FUGUS' 33.7% enrolment drain - representing a 49 percentage-point deficit against national enrollment trends - underscores its unique vulnerability as a high-value target in bandit strongholds. This crisis threatens to institutionalize educational exclusion in conflict zones, undermine Nigeria's human capital development, and contravene SDG 4 commitments, yet no comprehensive study has analyzed its multidimensional effect on institutional stability - a critical gap this research addresses to inform stabilization policies for tertiary institutions in violent contexts.

This paper seeks to address the following research Questions:

To what extent has the insecurity affected student enrolment of the Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State?

Objective of the study

The study is guided by the following specific objective:

Assess how insecurity affected the student’s enrolment of the Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State.

Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis is to guide the study

H_0: Insecurity has no significant effect on the student’s enrolment of the Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State.

Conceptual Exploration:

Concept of Insecurity

The concept of insecurity has been extensively examined by scholars across disciplines, revealing its complex, multidimensional nature. At its core, insecurity represents a profound threat to human safety and institutional stability, manifesting through physical violence, psychological trauma, and systemic disruptions. Contemporary researchers like Ogunode & Olorundare (2024) and Atai & Esetang (2024) anchor insecurity in institutional and national contexts, framing it as a paralyzing force that undermines strategic objectives through persistent fear and anxiety. This aligns with Abdullahi's (2022) and Zubairu's (2023) emphasis on its corrosive effects on education and mental health, where constant danger erodes focus, productivity, and social cohesion.

The physical dimensions of insecurity are robustly articulated by Bala & Ishaya (2022) and Okoli et al. (2019), who document its expression through terrorism, armed conflict, and property destruction, creating environments where basic safety is compromised. Rosenje and Adeniyi (2023) and Busari et al. (2024) expand this to systemic vulnerability, arguing that insecurity destabilizes societal structures, threatening organizational survival and economic viability. These perspectives are complemented by Omeje et al. (2022), who incorporate environmental and anthropogenic factors from natural disasters to forced displacement highlighting how insecurity transcends human conflict to include ecological and infrastructural collapse.

Forms of Insecurity and Their Impact on Institutional Stability

Insecurity manifests in various forms, each uniquely destabilizing educational institutions like Federal University Gusau (FUGUS). Banditry, characterized by armed attacks on communities (Omeje et al., 2022), has forced repeated campus closures and disrupted academic calendars, while kidnappings particularly high-profile abductions of students and staff (Abdullahi, 2022) have eroded trust in the institution's safety, deterring enrollment. School raids by insurgent groups (Busari et al. 2024) not only damage infrastructure but also instill long-term trauma, discouraging academic participation. The proliferation of small and light arms (Okoli et al., 2019) exacerbates violence, enabling criminal groups to target universities with greater lethality, and armed robbery on campus premises (Bala & Ishaya, 2022) heightens insecurity, diverting institutional resources to security measures rather than educational development. Collectively, these threats undermine institutional stability by reducing student enrollment, increasing financial strain, and diminishing academic quality (Ogunode &

Olorundare, 2024), necessitating comprehensive security and policy interventions (Atai & Esetang, 2024).

Concept of Tertiary Institutional Stability

Institutional stability in tertiary education encompasses multiple dimensions, including resource continuity and institutional accessibility (Galik & Chelbi, 2021), operational consistency (Arnhold & Basset, 2021), psychological safety (Mukhlis et al., 2024), research productivity (Wang et al., 2024), community engagement (Maheshwari & Goyal, 2024), academic performance metrics (Peng & Zhang, 2021), governance resilience (Christiaens et al., 2023), and financial sustainability (Yurchyshena, 2024). These elements collectively ensure an institution's ability to deliver quality education amid challenges like insecurity, which disrupts resources (e.g., student enrollment, staff retention), forces operational shutdowns, and traumatizes stakeholders (Abdulraheem et al., 2023). For example, banditry and kidnappings compromise stability by diverting funds to security (Okwuwada & Nsirimovu, 2023), while attacks on infrastructure and research field sites hinder academic progress (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023). A stable institution, however, adapts through crisis governance (Galik et al., 2023) and maintains community trust (Dansabo et al., 2024), underscoring the need for holistic strategies that address both immediate threats and systemic vulnerabilities (Olaseni, 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

Dimensions of Tertiary Institutional Stability

Institutional stability is significantly influenced by student enrollment trends, as consistent intake ensures financial viability and academic vibrancy (Galik & Chelbi, 2021). Academic performance reflects the effectiveness of educational delivery and contributes to an institution's reputation and long-term sustainability (Arnhold & Basset, 2021). Staff retention is crucial for maintaining continuity, expertise, and institutional knowledge, directly affecting organizational resilience (Mukhlis et al., 2024). Teaching-learning conditions, including infrastructure and pedagogical resources, shape both student satisfaction and faculty productivity, reinforcing institutional stability (Maheshwari & Goyal, 2024). Lastly, active research engagement enhances institutional prestige and attracts funding, further solidifying academic and financial stability (Peng & Zhang, 2021; Christiaens et al., 2023).

Concept of Adaptive Strategies

Adaptive strategies are essential for maintaining tertiary institutional stability in the face of insecurity, as they enable universities to respond effectively to evolving threats and disruptions (Ogunode & Olorundare, 2024). These strategies include enhancing campus security infrastructure, implementing flexible learning modalities, and fostering community engagement to build resilience (Atai & Esetang, 2024). Abdullahi (2022) emphasizes the importance of policy reforms and stakeholder collaboration in mitigating risks and ensuring continuity of academic activities. Zubairu (2023) highlights the role of leadership in driving adaptive change through proactive planning and resource mobilization. Similarly, Rosenje and Adeniyi (2023), along with Busari et al. (2024), argue that integrating technology and crisis management frameworks is vital for sustaining institutional operations amid growing insecurities.

Concept of Student Enrolment

Student enrollment in tertiary institutions encompasses the processes of admission, registration, and retention, serving as a key indicator of institutional attractiveness, operational effectiveness, and financial sustainability (Fitzgerald et al., 2024). Enrollment is influenced by factors such as institutional reputation, program quality, tuition fees, and broader socioeconomic and security conditions (Chhor et al., 2024; Mahmud & Maigari, 2024). In regions like Zamfara State, insecurity due to armed banditry, kidnappings, and school attacks has significantly disrupted enrollment, leading to increased dropouts and transfers to safer institutions (Abdullahi et al., 2020). These disruptions hinder educational delivery and long-term institutional viability, compounded by challenges such as high tuition costs, inadequate funding, and frequent academic strikes (Olaseni, 2024; Gupta, 2024). Psychological trauma from violence further discourages students from returning to campuses, especially in crisis-affected areas (Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria, 2024). Despite these challenges, targeted policies including scholarships, financial aid, and affirmative action remain crucial in improving access and stabilizing enrollment trends (Victor et al., 2023).

Factors Influencing Tertiary Institutions Student Enrolment

Student enrollment in tertiary institutions is influenced by a range of interrelated factors including government policies, socioeconomic conditions, demographic trends, institutional capacity, pre-tertiary education quality, and gender equity considerations (Olaseni, 2024; Gupta, 2024). Government funding and policy interventions such as scholarships, tuition subsidies, and financial aid programs play a crucial role in improving access to higher education, though their effectiveness is often undermined by insecurity and instability in regions like Zamfara State (Victor et al., 2023; Federal

University Gusau, 2023). Socioeconomic barriers, parental education levels, and employment prospects further shape enrollment decisions, particularly among low-income families and marginalized groups (Tan, 2024; Chrinerius & Shamirah, 2023). Insecurity, including armed banditry, kidnappings, and school raids, significantly disrupts enrollment patterns by instilling fear, causing displacement, and damaging institutional infrastructure, disproportionately affecting female students and widening educational disparities (Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria, 2024; Bangura & Mambo, 2023). Institutional capacity, including availability of modern facilities and qualified personnel, also determines student attraction and retention, yet remains constrained by underdevelopment and conflict-related disruptions (Ohaire-Udebu & Chukwuemeka, 2024; Zottor et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, targeted policies and investments in security, infrastructure, and equitable access initiatives remain essential for stabilizing and enhancing tertiary enrollment, particularly in crisis-affected regions (UNESCO, 2024; Olutola & Olatoye, 2020).

Effect of Insecurity on Tertiary student Enrolment

Insecurity, particularly in regions like Zamfara State, Nigeria, has significantly contributed to the decline in tertiary student enrollment due to threats such as armed banditry, kidnappings, and school raids, creating an environment of fear that discourages prospective students from enrolling (Federal University Gusau, 2024; Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria, 2024). Frequent disruptions of academic activities caused by violence lead to postponed examinations, prolonged closures, and uncertainty, prompting students to transfer or abandon their education altogether (Olaseni, 2024; Almustapha & Dahiru, 2024). The destruction of educational infrastructure further diminishes institutional capacity and attractiveness, as seen in the 2023 attack on Federal University Gusau that damaged key facilities, reducing admissions (Sarkodie et al., 2020). Economic hardship caused by insecurity also limits families' ability to afford education, while fear often outweighs the benefits of available financial aid programs (Gupta, 2024; Olaseni, 2024). Additionally, staff and student relocation due to safety concerns leads to under-enrolled institutions and staffing shortages, compounded by psychological trauma that hinders academic engagement and deters enrollment (Culbertson et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2023).

Theoretical Framework:

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) posits that organizations rely on external resources for survival and effectiveness, making them vulnerable to disruptions in resource availability (Pfeffer & Salancik,

2022). In the context of tertiary institutions, student enrollment serves as a critical resource, influencing funding, staffing, infrastructure development, and overall institutional stability (Olaseni, 2024). Insecurity disrupts this resource flow by deterring enrollment, leading to reduced government and private funding, staff attrition, and weakened institutional capacity (Federal University Gusau, 2023; Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria, 2024). As institutions become increasingly dependent on stable enrollment for operational viability, insecurity exacerbates their vulnerability, forcing reliance on alternative or insufficient support systems (Culbertson et al., 2024). Therefore, Resource Dependence Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how external threats like insecurity undermine institutional sustainability by disrupting key resource inflows such as student enrollment (Gupta, 2024).

Relevance of Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) to the Study

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) is highly relevant to this study as it explains how tertiary institutions rely on external resources particularly student enrollment to secure funding, maintain infrastructure, and sustain academic programs (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2022). Insecurity disrupts this dependency by reducing student inflow, thereby threatening institutional viability and operational stability (Federal University Gusau, 2023; Olaseni, 2024). This theory helps contextualize how institutions in conflict-prone regions like Zamfara State become increasingly vulnerable due to declining enrollment, leading to resource shortages and reduced capacity to attract and retain both students and qualified personnel (Culbertson et al., 2024). By applying RDT, the study can better analyze how external threats such as insecurity undermine key resource linkages that are essential for institutional survival and growth (Gupta, 2024). Ultimately, the theory provides a framework for understanding the systemic impact of insecurity on tertiary education systems and informs policy responses aimed at enhancing institutional resilience.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the effect of insecurity on student enrollment and its implications for institutional stability at Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State. The study population included, academic staff, Students that transferred or deferred admission and administrative officers, with a sample size of 207 respondents determined using Taro Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error, selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was collected using

structured questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale, in-depth interview guides and Focus Group Discussion, while secondary data was sourced from university records, government security reports (2019–2023), and published works by scholars such as Olaseni (2024) and Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria (2024). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, weighted mean scores, and regression analysis via SPSS version 26, while qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed to provide context and depth to statistical findings. The research instruments were validated by experts and pilot-tested, yielding a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82, ensuring reliability, while ethical considerations including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the data collection process.

Data presentation and Analysis

The analysis of the data collected from Federal University Gusau leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis that "insecurity has no significant effect on students' enrollment." The findings clearly demonstrate that insecurity has a significant negative effect on enrollment trends, establishing security concerns as a primary determinant. This conclusion is supported by the statistical and qualitative evidence presented in the following sections**.**

Table 1: Insecurity in Zamfara State has significantly affected the application process which deterred prospective students from enrolling in the Federal University Gusau.

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	21	10.1	10.1
	DISAGREE	28	13.5	23.6
	NEUTRAL	23	11.1	34.7
	AGREE	93	45	79.7
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	42	20.3	100.0
Total		207		

Source: Federal University Gusau, 2024.

From the table above a significant majority (65.3%) of respondents agree that insecurity in Zamfara State has deterred prospective students from applying to Federal University Gusau due to fear of kidnappings and armed attacks. Meanwhile, 13.6% of respondents disagree, possibly due to personal confidence in university security or prioritization of academic quality over safety concerns. The remaining 11.1% expressed neutral positions, likely due to limited exposure to security issues or reluctance to engage with the topic.

Table 2: The fear of kidnappings or attacks has affected the quality of admission process and decision to evaluate applications based on stipulated criteria in the Federal University Gusau

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	12	5.8	5.8
	DISAGREE	38	18.4	24.2
	UNDECIDED	22	11	35.2
	AGREE	100	48.3	83.5
	STRONGLY AGREE	35	16.5	100.0
	Total	207	100.0	

Source: Federal University Gusau, 2024.

From the table above, majority of respondents (64.9%) believe that fear of kidnappings and attacks has compromised the quality and merit-based nature of the admission process at Federal University Gusau due to overriding safety concerns. Meanwhile, 24.2% of respondents disagreed, possibly due to confidence in security measures or prioritization of academic reputation over safety. The remaining

11% remained neutral, likely due to limited awareness, conflicting perceptions, or reluctance to take a stance on security-related issues.

Table 3 Frequent incidents of insecurity have negatively impacted the attractiveness of potential students to apply in Federal University Gusau

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	26	12.6	12.6
	DISAGREE	43	20.8	33.4
	UNDECIDED	17	8.1	41.5
	AGREE	65	31.4	72.9
	STRONGLY AGREE	56	27.1	100.0
	Total	207	100.0	

Source: Federal University Gusau, 2024.

From the above, majority of respondents (58.5%) believe that frequent insecurity has significantly reduced the attractiveness of Federal University Gusau to prospective students due to threats like kidnappings and violent attacks. About 33.4% disagreed, possibly due to confidence in security measures or prioritization of academic quality over safety concerns. The remaining 11% remained neutral, likely due to limited exposure, insufficient information, or reluctance to take a stance on security-related issues.

In complimenting the above was the interview session conducted with the university management staff (Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Director academic Planning and Deans of the Faculties) on the effect of insecurity on student enrollment and its implications for institutional stability at Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state**.** The respondents expressed their views that insecurity in Zamfara has led to declining student enrollment at Federal University Gusau, with parents hesitant to send children and many students transferring elsewhere. Female enrollment has dropped sharply, worsening gender disparities. The university introduced security measures and online learning, but poor internet and low digital literacy hinder effectiveness. Student anxiety and low-class attendance further compound the

problem. The VC, Registrar, and Deans acknowledge these challenges but stress ongoing efforts to improve safety and adapt academic delivery despite limitations.

Test of Hypothesis

Table 5 Regression output

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.331[a]	.320	.318	.863	2.244

a. Predictors: (Constant) INSECU

b. Dependent Variable: STU-ENR

Source: SPSS output version 23 (2024)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.523	.135		18.668	.000
	INSCU	-.337	.025	.238	9.561	.000

a. Dependent Variable: STU-ENR

Source: SPSS output version 23 (2024)

Table 5 above shows the summary of the regression analysis. The empirical findings show that R, the multiple correlation coefficient, stood at .331[a] which indicates a correlation. R^2, the multiple coefficients of determination of the variables stood at .320 indicating that about 32% of the total variation in student enrolment at Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State is explained by variations in the independent variables (Insecurity) captured in the study. Thus, the remaining 68% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by other variables not captured in the study. The adjusted R^2 being .318 also indicates that the independent variables will still explain 10% of the variations in student enrolment at Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State even if other variables were added to the study.

The model is presented as follows:

STU-ENR = 2.523-0.337INSECU + ε

Where:

STU-ENR= Student Enrolment

INSECU = Insecurity

The coefficient of “Insecurity” stood at -0.337 which is negative. This implies that a percentage increase in insecurity leads to 33.7% decrease in student enrolment in Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State. However, the significance of this can be judged from the P-value represented as "sig”. The Probability value of “Insecurity” stood at 0.000. The p-value is less than 0.05 (5%), indicating that the relationship depicted in the model is statistically significant at 5% level of probability. This implies that the study has enough statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Based on the above analysis, the study rejects the null hypothesis H0, which states that "Insecurity has no significant effect on the student’s enrolment of the Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State”. and accepts the alternate hypothesis which states that Insecurity has significant effect on the student’s enrolment of the Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State.

Summary of findings

The major findings of the study reveal that insecurity has a statistically significant negative effect on student enrollment at Federal University Gusau in Zamfara State. The regression coefficient of -0.337 indicates that for every one-unit increase in the insecurity index, student enrollment experiences a corresponding decrease of 0.337 units. With the p-value of 0.000, this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis that insecurity does not affect enrollment. As such, the study rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis, concluding that insecurity significantly influences and reduces student enrollment at the university. These findings align with broader observations from existing literature, including Olaseni (2024) and the Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria (2024), which highlight how persistent threats such as kidnappings and school attacks deter prospective students and disrupt academic continuity in conflict-affected regions.

Focus Group Discussion

On 14th, 19th, and 22nd May 2024, the researcher conducted focus group discussions with some purposively selected students who transferred/deferred admission at Federal University Gusau. These discussions explored insecurity's impacts on student enrollment. The focus group discussions revealed that pervasive insecurity at Federal University Gusau severely impacts students across multiple dimensions. Safety concerns deter enrollment and force peers to choose more secure, costlier universities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that insecurity significantly reduces student enrollment at Federal University Gusau, with a 1% increase in insecurity leading to a 33.7% decrease in enrollment. The statistical evidence strongly rejects the null hypothesis, affirming the adverse impact of insecurity on educational access. These findings are consistent with existing literature, underscoring the urgent need for security and policy interventions to safeguard tertiary education in conflict-affected regions like Zamfara State.

Recommendation

To address declining enrollment due to insecurity, Federal University Gusau must adopt a multi-dimensional approach. First, the university should enhance campus security by installing perimeter fencing with CCTV surveillance and deploying 24/7 armed patrols. Academically, a hybrid learning model (70% online, 30% in-person with security guarantees) would accommodate safety concerns while maintaining educational quality. A parental engagement program, including a 24-hour helpline and regular security updates, would help rebuild trust and reassure families of the institution's commitment to safety. These measures, backed by partnerships with security agencies and community leaders, are critical to restoring enrollment and institutional stability.

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