

**SCHOOL ABANDONMENT, FEAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF RURAL EDUCATION IN
NIGERIA'S MIDDLE BELT AND SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR:
A COMPARATIVE POSITION PAPER ON SAFE SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
AND CONFLICT-SENSITIVE SECURITY RESPONSE**

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Abstract

The mass abandonment of classrooms in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, following the May 2026 Esinele attacks reflects a broader pattern of education disruption across Nigeria's Middle Belt, Southwest, and Lagos State. Comparative analysis of similar incidents in Ogun, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, and Lagos States shows that insecurity, misinformation, and the absence of visible, community-integrated school protection create a cycle of fear, school closure, and long-term educational collapse. This paper uses conflict analysis, human security theory, and community policing frameworks to explain why reactive security responses fail to restore confidence. It proposes a multi-layered Safe School and Community Resilience Framework applicable to state and non-state actors, with specific recommendations for Oyo, Ogun, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, and Lagos States. The framework emphasizes intelligence-led presence, trauma-informed communication, forest corridor management, and institutionalized school safety committees, drawing on Akinade's works on educational institution security, disaster management in schools, agrosecurity, community policing, and strategic security models.

Keywords: Safe Schools, Rural Insecurity, School Abandonment, Community Policing, Forest Corridors, Educational Security, Nigeria

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

On 16 May 2026, attacks in Esinele and Yamota, Oyo State, triggered mass school abandonment across Ogbomoso and neighboring communities including Ikose, Ikoyi, Tewure and Dananu. Teachers and pupils deserted both public and private schools. A false alarm at Areago Grammar School led to a stampede with two fatalities. Despite government assurances, attendance remained below 20% in most public schools four days after the incident.

This pattern is not isolated. Between 2016 and 2026, Lagos State experienced attacks on Babington Macaulay Junior Seminary in Ikorodu, and schools in Owutu and Epe areas. Ogun State faced incursions along the Ijebu-Ore corridor. Kwara State recorded attacks in Patigi and Kaiama LGAs. Kogi State faced repeated abductions in Kabba/Bunu and Yagba West. Benue State has documented over 120 school closures due to herder-farmer and bandit violence. The pattern is consistent: violence near schools → fear → abandonment → learning loss → community decline.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The collapse of rural schooling is driven by three interlocking failures:

1. Physical security failure: Inability to prevent attacks and provide visible deterrence around schools and access routes.
2. Psychological security failure: Loss of confidence among parents, pupils, and teachers despite official assurances.
3. Institutional communication failure: Misinformation fills the vacuum left by slow, unverified government messaging.

1.3 Objectives

1. To analyze the drivers and dynamics of school abandonment in Oyo State and compare with Ogun, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, and Lagos States.
2. To assess why reactive security deployments fail to restore confidence.
3. To propose a conflict-sensitive, multi-stakeholder framework for safe schools and community resilience.

1.4 Significance

Education is a human security good and a protective factor against radicalization, poverty, and crime. The loss of rural schooling accelerates out-of-school children, reduces human capital, and creates recruitment pools for criminal and extremist groups. This paper provides actionable advice for government, security agencies, traditional institutions, civil society, and communities.

1.5 Methodology

The study uses comparative case analysis of six states, qualitative content analysis of media and field reports, and doctrinal review of Nigeria's legal framework. It integrates applied frameworks from Akinade's works on educational institution security, disaster management in schools, agrosecurity, community policing, public-private security, and strategic security models.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Human Security and Education

Human security theory reframes security from state-centric defense to the protection of individuals and communities. Education is a core component. Akinade's *Social and Human Security for Sustainable Development* argues that when schools close due to fear, human security collapses and development reverses.

2.2 Security and Safety in Educational Institutions

Akinade's *Security and Safety in Educational Institutions* establishes that schools are soft targets unless protected through environmental design, access control, surveillance, and community engagement. The book emphasizes that physical security must be matched with psychological reassurance and clear protocols for response and recovery.

2.3 Disaster and Hazard Management in Schools

Akinade's *Managing Disasters and Hazards In Schools Environments* provides a framework for pre-incident planning, incident response, and post-incident recovery. It stresses the importance of drills, evacuation plans, communication protocols, and psychosocial support to prevent secondary casualties such as stampedes and trauma-induced abandonment.

2.4 Agrosecurity and Environmental Threats to Schools

Akinade's *Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection* highlights how ungoverned forests, farms, and rural corridors adjacent to schools become staging areas for criminal groups. Protecting schools requires integrating agrosecurity and environmental monitoring into school safety planning.

2.5 Community Policing and Public-Private Security

Akinade's *Community Policing: Strategic Approaches In Crime Prevention and Public Policing and Private Protection For Maximum Security* provide operational models for integrating statutory forces, private security, vigilante groups, and community actors. These models are critical for extending coverage to rural schools with limited police presence.

2.6 Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models

Akinade's *Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models* demonstrates that reactive deployment without strategic planning and community intelligence fails to sustain security gains. Strategic models emphasize prevention, early warning, and multi-agency coordination.

2.7 Conflict Analysis and Fear Dynamics

Akinade's *Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution and Prevention* shows that fear operates as a social multiplier. Proximate violence, even when not directly on school premises, creates anticipatory fear. Misinformation accelerates this effect, and early mediation and verified communication are critical to preventing escalation.

2.8 Communication in Crisis

Akinade's Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations demonstrates that timely, accurate, and empathetic communication reduces panic and restores compliance. Silence and generic assurances are counterproductive.

3. Comparative Case Analysis: Oyo, Ogun, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Lagos

3.1 Oyo State: Ogbomoso Corridor, May 2026

Incident: Attacks in Esinele and Yamota. False alarm at Areago Grammar School caused stampede and two deaths.

Response: Government issued assurances. No visible security deployment around schools in first 72 hours.

Outcome: Near-total school abandonment in 6 communities. Teachers left before 11am.

Analysis: The absence of visible deterrence and slow communication converted a single incident into a sub-regional school shutdown.

3.2 Ogun State: Ijebu-Ore and Sagamu Corridors, 2023-2025

Incident: Repeated kidnappings and attacks along forest corridors bordering Ondo and Oyo. Schools in Ijebu East and Sagamu LGA experienced periodic closures.

Response: Deployment of Amotekun and police, but coordination gaps limited effectiveness.

Insight: Ogun's experience shows that without joint command and community intelligence integration, deployments become reactive and unsustainable.

3.3 Kwara State: Patigi and Kaiama LGAs, 2022-2024

Incident: Bandit incursions from Niger and Kogi borders targeted schools and villages. Over 30 schools closed in 2023.

Response: Federal military deployment, but limited community engagement.

Insight: Military presence without community liaison failed to restore parental confidence. Students remained out of school despite reduced kinetic activity.

3.4 Kogi State: Kabba/Bunu and Yagba West, 2021-2026

Incident: Repeated abductions of students and teachers. Schools in rural areas adopted irregular schedules or closed entirely.

Response: State government created a Safe School Response Team, but funding and logistics gaps limited coverage.

Insight: Dedicated institutional structures help, but must be resourced and linked to local intelligence.

3.5 Benue State: Guma, Makurdi, Logo LGAs, 2018-2026

Incident: Herder-farmer conflict and banditry led to over 120 school closures. IDP camps host many displaced students.

Response: Multiple interventions, but insecurity remains cyclical.

Insight: Protracted conflict requires a development-security-education nexus, not just security deployment.

3.6 Lagos State: Ikorodu, Owutu, Epe Corridor, 2016-2024

Incident: In 2016, gunmen abducted students and staff from Babington Macaulay Junior Seminary in Ikorodu. In 2020-2022, schools in Owutu and Epe areas faced repeated threats and abduction attempts linked to maritime and forest-based criminal groups.

Response: Lagos State deployed rapid response units, installed perimeter fencing, and established school security committees. The state also conducted security audits under the Safe Schools Initiative.

Insight: Lagos demonstrates that urban-peri-urban schools can achieve faster recovery when physical security upgrades are combined with active school safety committees and regular drills. However, schools in isolated peri-urban areas remain vulnerable due to proximity to ungoverned forest and waterways.

Cross-State Pattern:

- Attacks near schools create immediate fear.
- Misinformation accelerates abandonment.
- Reactive deployments restore order but not confidence.
- Only visible, sustained, community-integrated presence restores attendance.
- Schools with pre-existing safety plans and drills recover faster, as seen in Lagos.

4. Legal and Policy Context

4.1 Right to Education and State Obligation

Section 18 of the 1999 Constitution and the Child Rights Act 2003 place a duty on the state to provide accessible and safe education. The state's obligation includes protecting the physical environment of schools.

4.2 The Safe Schools Initiative

Nigeria adopted the Safe Schools Declaration in 2014. Implementation requires risk assessment, physical protection, community involvement, and continuity of learning plans. The cases above show a gap between policy and local execution.

4.3 Role of State Laws

States like Lagos and Ogun have enacted laws establishing security outfits and school safety units. These laws provide the legal basis for community-state integration but require funding, training, and oversight to be effective.

5. A Multi-Layered Safe School and Community Resilience Framework

5.1 Layer 1: Physical Protection and Visible Deterrence

Safe School Zones: Cluster 5-10 vulnerable schools into zones. Establish joint posts with NPF, NSCDC, Amotekun/Vigilante, and vetted local hunters. Conduct daily patrols on routes and around school perimeters.

Environmental Design: Apply principles from Akinade's Security and Safety in Educational Institutions including perimeter fencing, controlled access points, lighting, and clear sight lines.

Forest Corridor Management: Map forest corridors within 5km of schools. Deploy forestry guards, drones, and community scouts. Clear overgrowth to deny cover. Akinade's Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection outlines how environmental monitoring reduces criminal staging in rural areas.

5.2 Layer 2: Intelligence and Early Warning

School Safety Committees: Each school to have a committee with principal, PTA chair, community leader, and police liaison. Meet weekly.

Community Early Warning: Train teachers, students, and community members to recognize and report suspicious activity. Use USSD codes or WhatsApp groups linked to a verified command center. Akinade's Community Policing: Strategic Approaches In Crime Prevention outlines how to build trust-based information flows.

5.3 Layer 3: Disaster and Hazard Management in Schools

Pre-Incident Planning: Schools must have evacuation plans, lockdown procedures, and communication trees as outlined in Akinade's Managing Disasters and Hazards In Schools Environments.

Drills and Simulation: Conduct termly drills for fire, intrusion, and evacuation. Drills reduce panic and prevent secondary casualties like stampedes.

Incident Command: Designate a school incident commander and deputy. Establish liaison with nearest police station and hospital.

5.4 Layer 4: Public-Private and Community Security Integration

Joint Operations: Integrate statutory police, NSCDC, state security outfits, and licensed private security firms under single command for school protection. Akinade's Public Policing and Private Protection For Maximum Security provides the framework for role clarity and accountability.

Vetting and Training: All non-state actors deployed to schools must be vetted and trained on child protection, use of force, and communication protocols.

5.5 Layer 5: Communication and Trust Building

Trauma-Informed Communication Protocol: Government must issue verified updates within 2 hours of incidents. Avoid silence. Use local languages and trusted community figures.

Counter-Misinformation: Designate a single information officer per LGA. Use radio, SMS, and community criers to correct false alarms rapidly. Akinade's Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations emphasizes that timely, accurate communication reduces panic.

5.6 Layer 6: Psychosocial Support and Continuity of Learning

Psychosocial First Aid: Deploy counselors to schools after incidents. Train teachers in basic psychological first aid.

Continuity of Learning Plans: Pre-agree on remote learning, shift systems, and safe relocation protocols for when physical attendance is impossible.

5.7 Layer 7: Governance, Strategy and Accountability

State Safe School Coordination Unit: Located in the Governor’s Office, with representatives from Education, Security, and Local Government. Publish monthly public reports.

Strategic Planning: Apply the strategic security and crime prevention models in Akinade’s Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models to move from reactive deployment to prevention-oriented planning.

Community Scorecards: Allow parents and teachers to rate security presence and response. Use data to adjust deployment.

6. Role and Responsibility Matrix

State Governments: Fund Safe School Zones, coordinate inter-agency command, publish weekly briefs, resource psychosocial support.

Local Governments: Host school safety committees, facilitate community guard integration, maintain school access roads.

Security Agencies: Conduct joint threat assessments, provide training to community guards, ensure rapid response within 15 minutes.

Traditional Rulers: Convene reconciliation, endorse glue-bearers for school committees, mobilize community cooperation.

Religious Institutions: Provide counseling, host community dialogue, counter extremist narratives.

Civil Society: Monitor implementation, document incidents, and advocate for victim support and accountability.

Parents and Citizens: Participate in committees, report suspicious activity, support school activities to normalize presence.

7. Comparative Policy Lessons

State	Key Challenge	Effective Response	Lesson for Others
Oyo	Panic from false alarm; no visible presence	Communication must match kinetic response	Rapid deployment + verified communication
Ogun	Forest corridors; coordination gaps	Amotekun-police joint patrols	Joint command structure is essential
Kwara	Cross-border incursions	Military deployment	Military alone insufficient without community trust
Kogi	Student abductions	Safe School Response Team	Dedicated structure helps, needs funding
Benue	Protracted conflict, IDPs	Multi-actor humanitarian response	Education must be linked to broader peacebuilding
Lagos	Peri-urban abductions, waterways	School audits, fencing, drills, committees	Pre-incident planning reduces panic and recovery time

8. Implementation Roadmap for State Actors

Phase 1: 0-30 Days

1. Declare affected LGAs as Safe School Priority Zones.
2. Deploy visible joint patrols to all schools within 5km of forest corridors and waterways.
3. Establish School Safety Committees in 100% of affected schools.

Phase 2: 30-90 Days

1. Train 500 teachers and community members in early warning and psychosocial first aid.
2. Launch verified communication channel per LGA.
3. Conduct forest corridor mapping and clearing operations.
4. Conduct security audits and drills in all schools using Akinade's Managing Disasters and Hazards In Schools Environments checklist.

Phase 3: 90-180 Days

1. Roll out community scorecards and adjust deployment based on feedback.
2. Integrate Safe School data into state education and security dashboards.
3. Evaluate and replicate model to other LGAs.

9. Advice to Non-State Actors and Citizens

To Traditional Rulers: Use your authority to convene families and communities. Endorse school safety committees. Mobilize community labor for clearing school surroundings.

To Religious Leaders: Preach against panic and stigmatization. Provide counseling. Use sermons to disseminate verified information.

To Parents: Participate in PTA safety committees. Do not spread unverified information. Attend school events to normalize presence.

To Civil Society: Monitor government commitments. Document incidents professionally. Advocate for victim support and budget allocation.

To Teachers and School Administrators: Apply the protocols in Security and Safety in Educational Institutions and Managing Disasters and Hazards In Schools Environments. Conduct termly drills. Maintain calm leadership during incidents.

10. Conclusion

The abandonment of classrooms in Ogbomoso, Ikorodu, Owutu, Epe, and similar communities is a symptom of a larger failure to secure the human environment of education. Comparative evidence from Ogun, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, and Lagos shows that reactive, invisible security responses do not restore confidence. Only visible, sustained, community-integrated protection, supported by timely communication, pre-incident planning, and psychosocial care, can reverse the cycle of fear and abandonment.

The state cannot do this alone. Non-state actors and citizens must co-produce security and resilience. The frameworks in Akinade's works provide the operational and governance basis for this co-production. The cost of inaction is a lost generation. The cost of action is manageable if coordinated.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Safe School Zone Command and Control Structure
- Appendix B: School Safety Committee Terms of Reference and Membership
- Appendix C: Early Warning Indicators for Schools Near Forest Corridors and Waterways
- Appendix D: Template for Weekly Parent-Teacher Security Brief
- Appendix E: Psychosocial First Aid Protocol for Schools
- Appendix F: School Disaster and Hazard Management Checklist
- Appendix G: Community Scorecard Tool for School Security
- Appendix H: Agrosecurity Assessment Checklist for Schools in Rural Areas

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