

Learning from Educational Impediments: Insights for Nigeria from the Tigray Conflict¹

Olileanya Amuche Ezugwu², Adaeze Udom³, Tola Benjamin Kehinde⁴

Abstract:

Education serves as a crucial foundation for the advancement and prosperity of any nation, shaping individuals, empowering communities, and fostering economic growth. Nevertheless, educational systems are vulnerable to disruption caused by conflicts and violence, resulting in significant consequences for students, teachers, and educational institutions. This study examines the educational impediments faced in Tigray from the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict, the potential lessons that Nigeria can learn and strategies Nigeria should implement to mitigate these challenges. The study employed a qualitative method using case study research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve interview participants for the primary data, while secondary data were collected from scholarly publications, journals, articles, and online materials. The findings revealed common obstacles encountered by Ethiopia's educational sector, including disrupted access to schooling, displacement of students and teachers, infrastructure damage, loss of learning resources, and psychological trauma among students. These challenges significantly hindered the provision of quality education and impeded progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education. This study concludes that education plays a vital role in Nigeria's economic growth and political stability, and by drawing upon Ethiopia's experiences recommends Nigeria to enhance its resilience and preparedness in similar crises, such as strengthening emergency education response mechanisms, investing in inclusive and community-driven education, bolstering infrastructure resilience, and prioritising psychosocial support for affected students, among others.

Keywords:

Africa; conflict; economic growth; education; security; Tigray conflict.

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceas.2024.4.1.248>

² Dept. Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Ota. ORCID: 0009-0006-4459-2150; olileanya.ezugwups@stu.cu.edu.ng.

³ Covenant University Ota Ogun State, Nigeria. ORCID: 0009-0005-7481-4482

⁴Dept. Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University. ORCID: 0009-0004-9963-5029; tola.kehindepgs@stu.cu.edu.ng.



Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar for the development and progress of any nation. It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals, empowering communities, and fostering economic growth and societal development. However, in regions affected by conflicts, access to quality education becomes severely compromised, impeding the overall progress of the population (Fore, 2020). One such conflict-ridden region is Tigray in Ethiopia, where the recent conflict has had significant ramifications on the educational system. The Tigray conflict, which started in 2020 between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has had devastating consequences on the educational sector; as schools were destroyed, educational resources depleted, and teachers and students displaced, resulting in a disruption of the learning process (Mlaba, 2021). On 28 February 2022, UNICEF reported that in 2021, more than 2.8 million children missed school from Afar, Amhara, Tigray regions. The devastating conflict prevented Tigray's children from receiving further education, which is especially worrying given that the COVID-19 pandemic had previously caused a protracted disruption and that many children are still unable to attend school (UNICEF, 2022).

The Tigray conflict officially began on November 4, 2020; after Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, declared the "Law enforcement operation," which ordered the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and the Armed Forces against the Tigray Region (Ethiopian Embassy, London, 2021). The unexpected attack carried out during the night by members of the Tigray Regional Special Forces and Militia on the offices and bases of the ENDF in Mekelle - which is the capital of Tigray; was the immediate precipitating factor that led to the conflict. The conflict became an international crisis as it escalated beyond Ethiopian boundaries to neighbouring countries in East Africa and international organisations.

Reported by Ghent University, Belgium, the Tigray conflict caused more than 500,000 deaths from direct violent killing and famine. The estimate comprises 50,000 to 100,000 victims of direct homicides, 150,000 to 200,000 fatalities from malnutrition, and more than 100,000 additional deaths brought on by a lack of access to healthcare (Ghent University, 2023). According to the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), more than 20 million people required protection and humanitarian aid by the end of 2022 due to the Tigray conflict (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022).

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, faces its own security challenges, which have over the years affected its educational sector and effectiveness of policies. Despite commendable efforts to improve access to education, Nigeria continues to grapple with issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, low enrolment rates, and disparities between urban and rural areas (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007; Jacob & Samuel, 2020). Even though elementary education in the nation is both free and required by law, 10.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 do not attend. Only

61% of children aged 6 to 11 routinely attend primary school in Nigeria, while only 35.6% of children from 36 to 59 months receive early childhood education (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2022). Many schools have been forced to close in recent years due to insecurity, particularly in regions of northern Nigeria, without explicit orders from the government because school administrations could not ensure students and teachers safety (UNICEF, 2022).

The state of insecurity in Nigeria, especially in the north-east region, posed by the terrorist group Boko Haram and other insurgent groups, and conflict outbreaks in the Niger Delta region over boundaries and resources, have detrimentally affected the educational institution amongst other institutions (Baba, 2020; Ubiebi & Ogbonna, 2021). Since December 2020, more than 11,536 schools have been closed due to insecurity. In less than two years, 1.3 million children's education in Nigeria has been impacted by security issues (Abdullahi, 2022). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South has altered education in the South-East to the extent that pupils were not permitted to complete part of their papers for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC) in 2022. Educational observers claim that the country's educational system is still under threat from insecurity affecting students, teachers, and the government, resulting in the decline of education (US Department of State, 2022).

The choice of the Tigray conflict as a case study stems from its relevance to issues of political instability and regional/ethnic disparities, which are prominent drivers of insecurity and conflict in Nigeria. While existing research on the impact of the Tigray conflict on the region's educational sector is substantial, it predominantly focuses on the Tigray region itself and lacks comparative analysis with other conflict-affected nations on the African continent. Given Nigeria's enduring challenges with insecurity and political instability, there exists a pressing imperative to scrutinise the educational barriers confronted in Tigray due to the conflict, particularly in light of Nigeria's security context.

Understanding the specific challenges faced in Tigray, such as the disruption of educational infrastructure, the psychological impact on students and teachers, and the long-term consequences on the education system, Nigeria can learn from addressing its own educational impediments even before the escalation of conflicts and instability. The experiences in Tigray offer a unique learning opportunity for Nigeria on the strategies and measures that should be taken to mitigate educational challenges during and after a conflict. This includes examining the role of local communities, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations in restoring educational stability.



Review of Related Literatures

The Concept of Conflict

Conflict has been a part of human history for as long as people have been around. It is a prominent trait that can be passed on from generation to generation in current society. Morgenthau (1948) proposes that even in situations where individuals do not have access to firearms or other instruments of violence, they are nonetheless likely to fight using only their fists. According to Holsti (1983), conflict is a close relationship between states or competing parts within a state that signifies internal friction or hostility that surface as exterior political, economic, or military conflicts. This close relationship might be between two states or between rival sections within a state. Coser (1998), on the other hand, defines conflict as a fight between competing parties for limited prestige, power, and resources with the purpose of damaging or eliminating their opposition. In agreement, Folarin (2015) states that the surrounding of the society with other humans brings up issues of disagreement, clash of interests, which would commonly lead to confrontations or disagreement, thus creating a community of men and women who succumb to conflicting behaviour and disagreement.

According to the explicit definition of conflict in politics, conflict is a manifestation of the competing interests of opposing or complementary political organisations. Conflict frequently results in political violence, which, when understood in the context of Weberian theory, makes political violence an acceptable tool for venting rage (Anifowose, 1982). However, conflicts can either be dominant or recessive, non-violent or violent, and resolvable or unresolvable depending on the circumstances. However, the vast majority of conflicts that have been documented throughout the course of human history have been characterised by violence, having a severe impact not only on the states involved but also on the residents of those states (Omotosho, 2004). Accordingly, it would be acknowledged that not all conflicts are intrinsically violent, but that some conflicts could potentially take the form of violence.

The Tigray Conflict

The Tigray conflict was a violent struggle that raged from November 2020 to November 2022; between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF). The conflict is said to have been caused by some underlying factors such as: ethnic diversity, unacceptance of Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minister by the TPLF; introduction of the Prosperity Party by the Prime Minister as a replacement for the dissolved Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (which was the former ruling party under the leadership of TPLF); and the immediate cause which was the TPLF attack on the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) offices and bases in Mekelle - capital of Tigray. The conflict saw violent confrontation of arms (guns, T-72 tanks, rockets, M20/A200 missile launchers, AR2 MRL, jet fighters, etc.) by both

parties, which caused more than thousands of deaths from direct violent killing and famine (Al Jazeera, 2021). By its spill over effect to other communities, the conflict attracted the intervention of the Amhara ethnic group, Oromo ethnic group, Egypt, Somalia and Eritrea and other external actors. The Tigray conflict was the most escalated conflict in the Horn of Africa between 2020 and 2022; with high humanitarian crises - more than 20 million people were in desperate need of humanitarian aid and protection, more 500,000 deaths were recorded (UNOCHA, 2022), and about 5.5 million people were compelled to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of Ethiopia, due to subsequent escalation of the conflict to neighbouring states of Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan (Wilson Center, 2023).

The vital social services in the Tigray region and in the nearby regions of Afar and Amhara, notably the educational system, suffered tremendous harm as a result of the two years of violent conflict in Ethiopia. It is unfortunate that even after the African Union (AU)'s African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, for instance, urged African nations to "either ban the use of schools for military purposes, or, at a minimum, enact concrete measures to deter the use of schools for military purposes," throughout the conflict, schools were used as military bases by all combatants, as well as for sexual violations (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In particular, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) engaged in widespread abuses of civilians while fighting alongside the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) against Tigrayan forces. Both the EDF and ENDF bombed, plundered, and invaded schools - on occasion, these locations have been used to perpetrate further crimes, such as weaponized rape; as Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) became a major weapon during the conflict; pervasive and systematic. According to Human Rights Watch (2022), an eyewitness reported to have seen various women taken inside a school where they occasionally stayed for two, three, or five days with the militants, only to be released with battered and sobbing faces. The environment made it difficult to inquire about the women's whereabouts, and no one dared.

Education in Ethiopia During the Tigray Conflict

Education in Ethiopia is a critical sector that the government has prioritised for the country's development. With the creation of the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in (1997), which is a government-led initiative that outlines the strategies, priorities, and goals for the development of the education sector. According to the Federal Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa (2015), the Program aims to improve access, quality, and relevance of education through various interventions, including infrastructure development and teacher training. The Ethiopian government over the years have maintained significant educational growth, especially among children and youths.



Ethiopia introduced free primary education in 1994 (World Bank, 2009), to increase access and enrolment rates. This policy helps remove financial barriers to education for families and has contributed to improved school attendance. Although the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy focuses on enhancing access, quality, and relevance of education; emphasising inclusive education, technical and vocational education, and technology integration in teaching and learning, according to the World Bank (2023), the literacy rate for individuals aged 15 and above in Ethiopia was estimated to be around 56.8% in 2018. There is a gender disparity, with the male literacy rate at approximately 63.5% and the female literacy rate at about 50% (Galal, 2022). As of 2019, the net enrolment rate for primary education in Ethiopia was reported to be around 86.6%, reflecting increased access to education. However, despite progress, Ethiopia still faces challenges of out-of-school children. The number of out-of-school children was estimated at 3.3 million in 2019. Efforts are being made to reduce this number through targeted interventions and policies (Carmichael, Darko, Kanji, & Vasilakos, 2022).

It is not deniable that Ethiopia recognizes the significance of education as a catalyst for development. While progress has been made, challenges remain in terms of access, quality, and inclusivity. The government, in collaboration with international partners, has been working towards addressing these challenges and improving education outcomes for all Ethiopian citizens. However, during the Tigray conflict which started in November 2020, until November 2022, the educational system and stability of Ethiopia were highly devastated, especially in the Tigray region; where the military forces attacked and fought the opposition.

The Tigray conflict led to the disruption of school activities in the region. Many schools were damaged, destroyed, or occupied by armed forces, preventing students from accessing education. As reported by the Save the Children Organization in 2022, between June and December 2022, Ethiopia's out-of-school population increased from 3.1 million to 3.6 million, in part due to recent war in the Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions and ongoing instability in some areas of Oromia that displaced more civilians. With 24.1 million people hit by the greatest drought in four decades, including 12.6 million children, Ethiopia experienced one of the biggest humanitarian disasters in its history. The drought caused more than 1 million people to be displaced, only in the Somali region. From the statement made by Henrietta Fore - UNICEF Executive Director, in 2020, many children were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other areas, leading to interruptions in their education (UNICEF, 2022). Due to the security situation, many schools in Tigray were forced to close, depriving students of learning opportunities. Some schools were repurposed as shelters for displaced individuals, further impacting access to education (Wilson Center, 2023). During the conflict, education infrastructure, including schools, classrooms, and educational materials, were not left undamaged. This hampered the ability to provide a conducive learning environment for students, nor a safe environment for all.

Education in Nigeria

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy was introduced in 1999 to provide free and compulsory basic education for all children in Nigeria. It covers nine years of formal schooling: six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. According to Labo-Popoola et al. (2009), all governments in Nigeria from colonial times until the present have consistently placed primary education at the centre of their educational policies, raising the possibility that the difficulties may not lie in the creation of the policies themselves but rather in their implementation. Since Universal Primary Education (UPE) was first based on regions (Eddy & Akpan, 2009), universalizing primary education became a national endeavour in Nigeria in 1976. All students, regardless of status, are entitled to equal educational opportunities. The strategy states that education should level the playing field and provide prospects for achievement for everyone, regardless of background (Labo-Popoola et al, 2009). Everyone has the fundamental human right to a basic education, as stated by the Convention on Human Rights and the Treaty against Discrimination in Education (Babalola, 2013, Baba, 2020).

In response to the security challenges facing the education sector, the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was launched in 2014 by the Federal Government, in order to provide safe and secure learning environments for students and teachers in areas affected by insecurity through measures such as increased security presence and infrastructure improvements. According to Umar (2022), schools have been forced to close in recent years due to insecurity, particularly in regions of northern Nigeria, without explicit orders from the government because school administrations could not ensure student safety. Since December 2020, as reported by UNICEF (2022), more than 11,536 schools have been closed due to insecurity in the country. Additionally, the Organization reported that in less than two years, 1.3 million children's education in Nigeria has been impacted by security issues, affecting all aspects of their lives, including education - which during crises is not usually recognised to be important (Abdullahi, 2022).

According to the World Bank, the literacy rate in Nigeria for individuals aged 15 and above was estimated to be around 62.0% in 2018. Nigeria, according to the 2022 UNICEF report has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, which was estimated to be around 10.5 million. Although the allocation of budgetary resources to the education sector is essential for its development, and the Nigerian government in recent years has committed to allocating a significant percentage of the national budget to education. However, the actual implementation and disbursement of these funds remain areas of concern.

While Nigeria has made efforts to improve its education sector through various policies and initiatives, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, high number of out-of-school children, and regional disparities persist. Addressing these challenges requires



sustained commitment, increased investment, and comprehensive reforms to ensure inclusive and quality education for all Nigerians.

Conflict and Instability in Nigeria

Education in Nigeria, in relation to insecurity challenges, is a complex and multifaceted issue. In recent years, Nigeria has faced significant security challenges, particularly in the form of insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and communal conflicts. These security challenges have had a detrimental impact on the education sector in various ways. There have been instances where schools have been directly attacked by insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram. These attacks have resulted in the loss of lives, injuries, and abductions of students and teachers (Momodu, & Tukur, 2021). Such incidents have created fear and trauma among students, parents, and teachers, leading to a decline in school enrolment and attendance.

Especially in the northern and south-eastern part of Nigeria, insecurity has led to the destruction of school infrastructure, including buildings, classrooms, and educational materials. This hampers the ability of schools to provide a conducive learning environment for students and further disrupts educational activities (Shinge, Barde, Umar, Suraj, Bukar, and Garba, 2022). Additionally, many students and teachers have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety in other regions. This displacement disrupts their education and results in the loss of valuable educational opportunities. Regrettably, insecurity has created an environment where young people, particularly those who lack access to quality education and economic opportunities, are vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent groups. Lack of education and prospects for the future make them more susceptible to radicalization and involvement in violent activities.

In the northeast region of Nigeria, where the insurgency has lasted for well over twelve years, incidents are increasingly frequent: due to widespread kidnappings at educational facilities, banditry also poses serious dangers to education in the northwest and north-central zones. Since 2021, as argued by Anyadiegwu and Nzekwu (2022), the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has designated Mondays as a day of solitude in honour of their respected leader Nnamdi Kanu, who has been facing prosecution by the Federal Government. In addition, both the IPOB and various South-East regional groups have consistently enforced "sit-at-home" orders on Mondays and other days, resulting in the suspension of all activities, including educational activities, leading to significant and negative impacts on the educational sector.

The 2023 UNICEF report stated that Nigerian school enrolment is severely hampered by pervasive dread. From 10.5 million in 2021, there are currently over 18.5 million out-of-school children, which significantly impedes the educational and economic growth of the country. The Northeast terrorism and banditry in the northwest and north-central regions are factors, according to UNICEF, in the spike. Beyond the

violence, there are restrictions to supporting numerous children who are trapped in conflict-affected environments, typically due to security considerations. Additionally, a lot of children live in areas affected by war where both social and economic resources are scarce. In the face of a protracted humanitarian catastrophe, educational services seem to take a back seat, it would not be a necessity nor priority.

The statistics on poverty will get worse if barriers to education persist (Baba, 2020). A lack of educational possibilities for the younger generation will have an impact on their vulnerability, productivity, and self-reliance. Recruits are required to fill out the ranks of the numerous non-state armed groups. Therefore, groups that are uneducated, unskilled, and underproductive are susceptible to the antics of violent people (Jacob & Samuel, 2020). According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), a good education safeguards cognitive growth and psychological well-being, offering kids hope in difficult situations. In order to provide educational services to millions of disadvantaged children in Nigeria, it is necessary to persistently address the institutional, cultural, security, and humanitarian barriers to education (NextierSPD, 2022).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative method, using case study research design to examine the educational impediments faced in Tigray during the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict (2020-2022), and the lessons that Nigeria can learn from this experience. It explores the intervention of the Ethiopian government to resolve the challenges to education in the Tigray region caused by the conflict. The research is based on primary data from in-depth interviews with twelve (12) respondents: academic experts in Ethiopian politics and education, experts in Nigerian education and international affairs, and citizens of Ethiopia living in the Tigray region. Secondary data were collected from government reports, international organisation reports, pertinent books, journals, and online resources. This is in order to identify the educational impediments faced by the Tigray region during the two-year Ethiopia-Tigray conflict, and to provide recommendations and mechanisms that the Nigerian government can adopt in fostering its educational system during conflicts and instability. By understanding the educational impediments in the Tigray region, Nigeria can develop more informed and effective policies to safeguard education during times of conflict. The study can serve as a basis for policymakers to design mechanisms that prioritise continuity and resilience in the education system.



Findings

Educational Impediments in Ethiopia During the Tigray Conflict

Disrupted Schooling: The Tigray conflict led to the closure of schools and universities in the Tigray region and surrounding areas, resulting in a significant disruption of education. The Tigray education bureau in 2021 carried out a preliminary assessment that comprised 2,054 primary, elementary, and secondary public schools as well as two teacher-training institutes, but excluded schools in Western and Northern Tigray that were under the control of Eritrea and Amhara. From their findings, 88.3% of classrooms suffered substantial damage; this damage included the theft, demolishing, and burning of 96.5% of student desks, 95.7% of blackboards, and 63.5% of student textbooks (Tigray Education Bureau, 2021). Additionally, many schools were damaged or used as shelters for internally displaced people, making them inaccessible for learning purposes. According to one of the interview respondents living in Tigray:

“During the two-year war period, I and my family were in Tigray. I have three kids. Two of them were in school before the conflict and they were forced to suspend schooling due to the war. All schools were closed and students were forced to listen to war news and propagandas ... Students were forced to suspend school, causing a four-year delay in their education. Now, they are struggling to catch up on what they've missed, which is made very difficult due to a poorly designed accelerated learning program. Additionally, students have aged, affecting the age-grade connection, with many learning below their appropriate level. The second effect is on teachers: they were forced to suspend teaching, with many joining the military, resulting in casualties among educators.”

Another respondent stated:

"the region's educational institutions are using a crash in education to compensate for the time passed during the war (crashing six months of lectures into three months), but I say it's not efficient and I guess the consequence will be huge. So it's better to stop a war before it starts.”

Inaccessibility and Safety Concerns: The conflict and insecurity in the region made it difficult for students to attend school regularly. Ongoing violence and attacks on educational facilities created safety concerns for students and teachers, leading to decreased school attendance. Further survey by the Tigray Educational Bureau stated that, because of damage to schools, Tigray's primary school children now walk an average of 7.3 kilometres (km) rather than the 2.5 km they did just two years ago to get to school. From the study, it was reported that 1,911 students and 235 teachers (from elementary and secondary schools) were killed in the war, but there could be more unidentified persons (Tigray Education Bureau, 2021). This made it difficult for both

students and teachers to attend school, and with further escalation of the conflict and reported number of displacements and deaths, education ceased to be a priority or necessity to the teachers and students. As Respondent 11 stated that during the conflict, most schools, if not all, were closed due to the risk of bombardment (Air and Land), land mines, and systematic sexual violence. Additionally, a lecturer at Mekelle University responded:

“Due to the heavy military presence in the region, there was active fighting in and around Mekelle, there were serious security threats which put students, especially children, females, and students with disabilities at heightened protection risks. The safety and security of the pupils was jeopardised. After the cessation of hostilities agreement, students returned to school, but the security of the region has become very fragile and lots of abductions are going on, which creates security concerns for students.”

According to Respondent 9,

“There was no fuel for transportation, no access to banks, and no internet. The situation was a complete deadlock. Students couldn't learn, and teachers couldn't teach because it was too dangerous to leave home, with federal government soldiers violating human rights and with drones coming unexpectedly to attack areas of the city.”

Displacement of Students and Teachers: Reported by the European Parliament (2022), hospitals and schools, among other important facilities, were devastated by the conflict. Armed groups from all sides attacked and destroyed several of the camps housing over 100,000 Eritrean refugees living in Tigray before the crisis began. Amnesty International reported in February 2021 that in the Tigrayan city of Axum in December 2020, Eritrean forces targeted and killed more than 100 civilians (Amnesty International, 2021). Despite pressure from the international community, Eritrean forces did not comply with promises to remove their presence in the area. Just a year into the conflict in 2021, Ethiopia claimed to have 5.1 million internally displaced people (IDP), the most of any nation in a single year (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The conflict caused large-scale displacement of populations, including students and teachers. Many students had to flee with their families to safer areas, resulting in interrupted education and difficulties in finding alternative schools. Teachers were also displaced, leaving schools with a shortage of qualified educators.

As stated by one of the respondents:

“Large numbers of students, especially from Western Tigray, Northwestern, Eastern and South Tigray were displaced and still living in IDP camps resulting in separation from their families. They have not been able to attend school, and their education records are lost, and access to education seriously curtailed.”



Lack of Educational Resources: Schools in conflict-affected areas often faced shortages of teaching materials, textbooks, and essential resources necessary for effective learning. The destruction of infrastructure further exacerbated the lack of resources. According to the Wilson Centre report (2023), the Tigrayans were the main target of the Eritrean military force, who equally blocked and damaged the roads and links that would deliver humanitarian assistance to Tigray from external organisations. Particularly when fighting alongside the ENDF against Tigrayan forces, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) engaged in extensive abuses against civilians. Schools were attacked, plundered, and occupied by EDF and ENDF soldiers. During the conflict, according to the responses from the interviewees, there was restriction on movement within regions, violating the rights to freedom of movement. The Tigray conflict promoted human rights abuse and corruption through the unlawful arrest and detention of citizens across the country, especially those found to support or promote the TPLF.

Respondent 12 stated that most schools in Tigray were intentionally destroyed, school educational materials were torn down and burned into ashes, and educational facilities such as offices, classrooms and chairs were stolen, damaged or destroyed.

Psychological Trauma: The violence, displacement, and insecurity experienced during the conflict resulted in significant psychological trauma for both students and teachers. The Tigray conflict caused a high degree of sexual violation, robbery, demolition of infrastructures in Tigray - schools, hospitals and religious institutions. Although the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of the AU urged African nations to "either ban the use of schools for military purposes, or, at a minimum, enact concrete measures to deter the use of schools for military purposes", during the conflict, all belligerents utilised schools as military installations. The Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), occasionally used schools, religious buildings and demolished health centres to conduct other crimes, such as weaponized rape - conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) on women and young girls. According to one of the respondents:

The war was conducted using ground forces and aerial forces such as jets and drones. This created huge psychological impacts on students, teachers, and parents. The sounds of artillery, drones and jets were so awful that our kids developed stress related problems. The level of psychological trauma is so high because there were serious problems with food and non-food items due to the blockade imposed by the Ethiopian government.

In addition, Human Rights Watch in 2022 interviewed an eyewitness who reported to have seen various women taken inside a school where they occasionally stayed for two, three, or five days with the militants, only to be released with battered and sobbing faces. According to Wilson Center (2023), over 20 million people were affected by the war, of which nearly three quarters were women and children. Witnessing or being

victims of violence can have long-lasting effects on mental health, affecting the ability to concentrate and learn effectively.

Discussion of Findings: Lessons for Nigeria

The Tigray Conflict in Ethiopia has undoubtedly had significant implications for the country's education system. Nigeria, as an African country facing instability and insecurity, can draw valuable lessons from Ethiopia's educational impediments during this conflict to address potential challenges in its own education sector.

The most important thing to note, emphasised by one of the respondents is: “War is the greatest enemy of mankind. It not only destroys property but also intellect, innovation, and generation. It kills not only the present generations but also kills the future.” War and conflict should by all means be avoided through mediations, dialogue and other conflict resolution mechanisms before escalation. The impact of war is very serious to the sustainability and development of every society. In the educational sector in Tigray, the gains in education over the last 30 years have been completely destroyed in a matter of two years or less. Not only this, but education also cannot wait; as age progresses, the school age and the school grade become very difficult to balance. Second, as war destroys not only the school infrastructure of the school systems but also the good minds of students. In addition, the respondent stated:

As a fragile state like Ethiopia, Nigeria can learn from Ethiopia to solve political problems through democratic political process ... if by any means there is conflict, educational institutions must be always protected, including the continuation of education even during war. Another lesson is the accountability mechanism. Conflict entrepreneurs and violators of human rights need to account for their actions.

On strengthening education in emergency preparedness, one of the critical lessons from the Tigray Conflict is the importance of safeguarding schools and educational facilities during periods of insecurity. Nigeria should prioritise protecting schools from being targeted, damaged, or used for military purposes during times of conflict to ensure that education can continue uninterrupted. However, based on findings from the Tigray conflict, it becomes evident that education is often deemed less of a priority and necessity during periods of armed conflicts. Both national and international organisations tend to allocate their resources primarily to humanitarian aid and security initiatives. As noted by one of the respondents:

“During the conflict, both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF were busy in the war and propaganda. Nor were external organisations such as non-governmental and donor agencies had the interest and plan to start schooling. There were some attempts by non-governmental organisations but due to the



frequent aerial bombardments and drone disturbing sounds, there was no right condition to continue teaching-learning during the war.”

Even in cases where educational infrastructure is safeguarded by the government amidst crises and wars, there is no assurance that all school children and teachers can be adequately protected. Consequently, citizens may choose to prioritise personal safety over attending educational institutions, opting to stay within the confines of their homes. Respondent 7 also stated:

“The Ethiopian government has refused to send all kinds of educational materials and salaries for teachers. As a result, education has been halted for almost three years. The regional government has tried to run/operate the schools for very few months; however, that has stopped because of continuous air and land bombardment that has been carried out by the Federal Government. Besides, an acute shortage of educational materials has played its own role in the stoppage of the service. External organisations (e.g. UN, were not allowed to transport educational materials for the schools in Tigray). During the brutal conflict, UN and other NGOs employees were not allowed to carry any medication in the one and only flight/Transportation of World Food Programme (WFP) from Addis Ababa to Mekelle/Tigray region.”

In light of these insights, Nigeria should take proactive measures by establishing dedicated institutions that focus on training teachers and educators to be well-prepared to provide education during times of conflict. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, these trained teachers and coaches can create conducive learning environments, even in challenging circumstances, thereby ensuring that education remains accessible and effective despite the prevailing security challenges. This approach aims to address the apparent disparity in resource allocation during conflicts, where education tends to receive less attention than humanitarian and security assistance. By investing in the preparedness of educators, Nigeria can demonstrate a commitment to prioritising education and safeguarding the learning opportunities of its citizens, even amidst uncertain and volatile situations. Such initiatives are pivotal in fostering resilience and continuity within the educational system during conflict times, ultimately contributing to the overall stability and development of the nation.

Additionally, the Tigray conflict resulted in a significant number of people being internally displaced, including many children. Nigeria should develop robust mechanisms to ensure that children who are displaced due to conflicts or other emergencies have access to education, whether through temporary schools, catch-up programs, or distance learning initiatives. The Government should leverage digital technologies to facilitate distance learning during emergencies, provide access to educational content and resources, and train teachers and students on utilising technology for remote learning. However, a critical concern arises regarding the feasibility of implementing this strategy in rural areas, where schools often suffer from

underfunding, resulting in inadequate educational facilities, unreliable internet connections, and mismanagement of infrastructure and educational budgets. In such circumstances, the use of digital technologies and distance learning becomes challenging for both students and teachers, given the unavailability and unfamiliarity with these facilities.

Nigeria and other African nations should prioritise the establishment of clear demarcation and separation between key institutions, including the judiciary and political parties, the Human Rights Commission and political entities, the Federal Army and political organisations, as well as education and other essential services, in order to mitigate conflicts of interest. These services, such as education, healthcare, food aid, banking, electricity, fuel, agricultural inputs, transportation, among others, represent fundamental rights of citizens that governments are morally obligated to provide without discrimination.

Recommendations

In light of these challenges, this research recommends that, in addition to training teachers for emergency preparedness, the Nigerian government should also provide specialised training for teachers and educational administrators to establish localised educational centres in every street. These centres would serve as short-distance learning hubs, where instructors can gather all students residing within a specific street into a communal space, such as a house, to conduct classes for different groups. The adoption of such an approach would encourage individuals who harbour safety concerns to attend classes, as the learning environment would be within their immediate community, eliminating the need for long-distance travel. Additionally, the creation of localised educational centres ensures that students and teachers can navigate the challenges posed by underfunded rural schools and limited access to digital technologies, making education more accessible and inclusive for all. By incorporating this recommendation into the broader education system, the Nigerian government can take significant strides towards mitigating the impact of underfunding and inadequate infrastructure on rural education.

The government should also prioritise inclusivity and equity in education, ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised populations are not left behind during times of conflict. Special attention should be given to the needs of displaced children and those from conflict-affected communities, including IDPs and refugees.

Furthermore, Nigeria should provide psychosocial support for students affected by conflicts. The trauma and stress associated with living in a conflict zone can significantly impact a child's mental health and well-being. Implementing counselling services and resilience-building programs can help students cope with the challenges they face and continue their educational journey. During conflicts and wars, human rights violations



such as rape and assaults are inevitable; as the Tigray conflict witnessed the rape of women and young girls. The Nigerian government learning from this should employ therapists and psychologists who would visit and medically attend to the children and teachers, towards rehabilitation and healing. The government should also address the challenges of child soldiers; children adopted into the conflict by the warring parties instead of going to school. Whether the conflict is between the Federal Government and a region; as in the case of Ethiopia, or between other regions, the Nigerian Government should protect children from being utilised as war shields or soldiers during wars or conflicts.

There is also a need to advocate for international support and partnerships. Ethiopia faced challenges in accessing resources and assistance during the conflict. Nigeria should forge strong partnerships with international organisations and neighbouring countries to enhance its capacity to address educational issues during times of crisis and conflict. The government should work with organisations and agencies to access additional resources and expertise to support education in crisis situations, to seek support for education in emergency initiatives, and to mitigate the impact of conflicts and crises on education. Additionally, Nigeria should seek and welcome humanitarian aid for education during conflicts. International organisations and donors often provide support for education in conflict-affected areas. Welcoming this assistance and using it effectively can help alleviate some of the educational challenges faced by students in Nigeria during times of crisis. Similarly, Nigeria should involve local communities in decision-making processes related to education. Engaging parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders can help ensure that education remains a priority during conflict and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the well-being of schools and students. Through community engagement in supporting education during emergencies, by involving local actors in decision-making processes, this will promote their active participation in creating safe and conducive learning environments for their communities and children.

Implementing these recommendations will require strong political will, commitment, and collaboration among stakeholders. By drawing insights from the educational impediments experienced in the Tigray conflict, Nigeria can enhance its preparedness and response to educational challenges during emergencies, ultimately ensuring that all children have access to quality education even in times of crisis.

Conclusion

Studying the educational impediments faced during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia provides valuable insights for Nigeria and its education system. The Tigray conflict has highlighted the detrimental effects of armed conflicts on education, and Nigeria can

learn from these experiences to better protect and promote access to education in times of crisis.

The conflict in Tigray resulted in widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, closure of schools, and disruption of educational activities. These challenges have severely impacted the learning and well-being of children and young people in the region. Nigeria, being a country with its own history of conflicts and security challenges, can draw important lessons from the Tigray conflict to enhance its preparedness and response mechanisms. One key lesson is the critical importance of ensuring the safety and security of schools and educational facilities. Nigeria can strengthen measures to protect schools from attacks, including developing robust security protocols, promoting community engagement in safeguarding schools, and raising awareness about the importance of protecting education in times of conflict.

Additionally, the Tigray conflict has shed light on the need for coordinated humanitarian efforts to address the educational needs of affected populations. Nigeria can enhance its coordination mechanisms among government agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and local communities to provide timely and comprehensive support to students and teachers during crises. The Tigray conflict underscores the significance of prioritising the continuity of education in emergency settings. Nigeria can invest in innovative solutions such as in-house schooling or street conducted classes.

By learning from the educational impediments faced in the Tigray conflict, Nigeria can develop comprehensive strategies to safeguard and strengthen its education system, particularly in times of crisis. The insights gained can inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts to ensure that all children and young people in Nigeria have access to quality education, regardless of the challenges they may face.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

References

Ababa, A. (2015). *Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V)*. Ethiopia Federal Ministry of Education. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://moe.gov.et/storage/Books/ESDP%20V%20English.pdf>



- Abdullahi, M. (2022). *UNICEF: Insecurity has caused closure of 11,536 schools in Nigeria since Dec 2020*. The Cable: news and views unlimited. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2124 from <https://www.thecable.ng/unicef-insecurity-has-caused-closure-of-11-536-schools-in-nigeria-since-dec-2020/amp>
- Africa Up Close: A blog of the Africa Programme. (2023). *Ethiopia's Tigray War and its Devastating Impact on Tigrayan Children's Education. From the African Program 2023*. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/tigray-war-and-education>
- allAfrica. (2022). *Over 1 Million Children Afraid of Returning to School In Nigeria*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00079546.html>
- Amnesty International. (2021). *Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum Civilians may Amount to Crime Against Humanity*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-amount-to-crime-against-humanity/>
- Anifowose, R. (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv, Yoruba and Niger Delta Experience*. Nok Publishers International.
- Anyadiegwu, J. C., & Nzekwu, I. (2022). Impact of Insecurity and IPOB Sit-at-Home Order on Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in SouthEast Nigeria. *World Educators Forum*, 13(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/https://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/world%20educators%20forum/V13N1P2_World%20Educators%20Forum%202022.pdf
- Baba, I. (2020). The Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on the Development of Tertiary Education in North East Nigeria; a Study of Four Selected Institutions. *IAR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(2), None-None.
- Babalola, J. B. (2013). The implementation of the national policy on education in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 25-29.
- Barash, D. P., & Webel, C. P. (2002). *Peace and Conflict Studies*. Thousand Oaks.
- Carmichael, F., Darko, C. K., Kanji, S., & Vasilakos, N. (2022). School closures and educational attainment in Ethiopia: Can extra classes help children to catch up? *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(4), 640-664. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3787>
- Center for Preventive Action. (2023). *Conflict in Ethiopia*. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia>
- Coser, L. A. (1968). *Social Aspects of Conflict*. *International Encyclopedia of Social Science*. Elsevier.
- Eddy, E. N., & Akpan, M. E. (2021). *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 23(1).
- European Parliamentary. (2022). *Ethiopia: War in Tigray Background and state of play*. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from

- [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/739244/EPRS_BR I\(2022\)739244_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/739244/EPRS_BR I(2022)739244_EN.pdf)
- Folarin, S. (2015). Types and Causes of Conflict. In K. Soremekun (Ed.), *Readings in Peace and Conflict Studies* (pp. 13-25). Covenant University Press.
- Fore, H. (2021). *2.3 million children in Tigray region of Ethiopia need humanitarian assistance, as thousands flee across border into Sudan*. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/press-releases/23-million-children-tigray-region-ethiopia-need-humanitarian-assistance-thousands>
- Galal, S. (2022). *Youth literacy rate in Ethiopia 2005-2017, by gender. Statistical Report, 2023*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1261338/youth-literacy-rate-by-gender-in-ethiopia/>
- Gatapoulos, A. (2021). *How armed drones may have helped turn the tide in Ethiopia's war*. Al Jazeera. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/features/2021/12/10/how-armed-drones-may-have-helped-turn-tide-in-ethiopia-conflict>
- Ghent University. (2023). *Call for Input to inform the High Commissioner's report to the Human Rights Council on the impact of casualty recording. Every Casualty Counts*. Ghent University. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from
- Holsti, K. J. (1983). *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. Prentice Hall International Inc.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021). *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/28/ethiopia-tigray-schools-occupied-looted>
- Human Rights Watch. (2022). *Ethiopia's Warring Parties Should End Attacks on Women, Girls*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/08/ethiopias-warring-parties-should-end-attacks-women-girls>
- International Peace Information Service (IPIS). (2022). *Famine as weapon of war – A timeline of the Tigray conflict. Reported by Peter Danssaert*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://ipisresearch.be/publication/famine-as-weapon-of-war-a-timeline-of-the-tigray-conflict/#:~:text=In%20an%20exclusive%20interview%20with,Tigrayan%20population%20by%20starving%20them.>
- Jacob, O. N., & Samuel, A. (2020). Educational policy in Nigerian: Challenges of Implementation and Ways Forward. *Middle European Scientific Bulletin*, 4, 1-9. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47494/mesb.2020.4.30>
- Labo-Popoola, S., Bello, A. A., & Atanda, F. (2009). Universal basic education in Nigeria: Challenges and way forward. *Social Sciences*, 4, 636-643.
- Learning in crisis*. (July 21, 2022). NextTierSPD. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://thenexttier.com/learning-in-crisis/>



- Mlaba, K. (2021). *Tigray's Conflict Has Forced Schools to Close. Here's What That Means for Ethiopia's Children*. Global Citizen publicatio. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/tigray-conflict-schools-closed-education-ethiopia/>
- Momodu, J., & Tukur, A. (2021). Education under Armed Attack in North East of Nigeria: Evaluating the Impact of Boko Haram Attacks on Tertiary Institutions in Adamawa State. *Journal of African Politics*, 1(1), 1-33. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58548/2021jap101.0133>.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). *Power and Ideology in International Politics*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Odia, L., & Omofonmwan, S. I. (2007). Educational System in Nigeria Problems and Prospects. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 14, 86-85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2007.11978347>
- Omotosho, M. (2004). Evaluating Conflict and Conflict Management: A Conceptual Understanding in Africa. *African Journal of International Affairs and Development*, 9(1-2).
- Plaut, M. (2012). *The Tigray War and Regional Implications - Introductions: War, Offensives and Atrocities*. *Eritrea Focus, Volume 1*. Eritrea Focus.
- Prime Minister's Office Press Briefing – 26 August 2021*. (2021). Embassy of Ethiopia, London. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/transcript-prime-ministers-office-press-briefing-26-august-2021/>
- Save the Children. (2021). *Funds Needed as Conflict, Climate Change and Displacement Drives 3.6 Million Children Out of School in Ethiopia*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/funds-needed-conflict-climate-change-and-forced-displacement-drives-36-million-children-out>
- Shinge, A., Barde, L., Umar, H., Suraj, J., Bukar, G., & Garba, R. (2022). The impact of Boko haram insurgency on social orientation and academic performance of secondary school students in Potiskum Local Government. *Global Scholarly Communication (GSC) Advanced Research and Reviews*, 10(3), 052–061. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2022.10.3.0258>.
- Tigray's Bureau of Education: Summary Report on Tigray Education's Human and Material Damage*. (2022). Tghat. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.tghat.com/2022/05/11/tigrays-bureau-of-education-summary-report-on-tigray-educations-human-and-material-damage/>
- Ubiebi, K., & Ogbonna, I. S. (2021). Restructuring NDDC: Pathway to Development in the Niger Delta Region *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.4314/UJAH.V21I4.16>
- Umar, Y. (2022). Insecurity In Nigerian Education System: Implications For Educational Managers. *BIJE - Bichi Journal Of Education*, 16(1), 87-95. <https://bijejournal.com/BIJE/article/view/641>

- United Nations. (2020). *World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April, to Boost Drive for Education for All*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://press.un.org/en/2000/20000411.soc4543.doc.html>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2022a). *Despite challenges, UNICEF and partners are supporting children back to learning*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/despite-challenges-unicef-and-partners-are-supporting-children-back-learning>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2022b). *Education in Nigeria*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education>
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2022). *Ethiopia Situation Report 2022*. Retrieved December 15, 2022 from <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia>
- United States: Department of States. (2022). *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2022 from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nigeria>
- World Bank Group. (2009). *Abolishing school fees in Africa: Lessons from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Mozambique*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/780521468250868445/abolishing-school-fees-in-africa-lessons-from-ethiopia-ghana-kenya-malawi-and-mozambique>
- World Bank Group. (2022). *Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages 15 and above) - Ethiopia*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2024 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=ET>