

SCHOOLING IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETY: ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN BASIC EDUCATION IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Borno State has endured more than fifteen years of insurgency, and the consequences for its basic education system extend well beyond the destruction of school buildings. This study examines schooling in a post-conflict society with emphasis on access and participation in basic education in Borno State, Nigeria. Four research questions were addressed and two hypotheses tested at the .05 level of significance. A survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 1,000 teachers and 5,000 learners in selected schools across the state, from which 250 teachers and 350 learners were purposively selected. Data were collected using a self developed structured questionnaire titled *Schooling in Post-Conflict Society: Access and Participation in Basic Education*, administered on a four point scale. Test and retest administration returned a reliability coefficient of 0.90. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analysis. Teachers agreed that conflict has impaired access to basic education, with insecurity discouraging attendance attracting the highest level of agreement at 88.0 percent and a mean of 3.48, followed by displacement at 84.0 percent. On participation, poverty recorded the highest mean at 3.41 and 86.0 percent agreement, slightly ahead of irregular attendance and dropout. Both teachers and learners endorsed the proposed remedial strategies, though teachers rated them consistently higher than learners did, a divergence of some practical interest. Enrolment in the sampled schools fell from 5,000 before the conflict to 3,200 during it and had recovered to 4,100 by the post-conflict period, representing a decline of 36 percent followed by a partial recovery of 28 percent that leaves enrolment 18 percent below its pre-conflict level. Attendance followed a similar incomplete trajectory, falling from 85 to 55 percent and recovering only to 65 percent, while dropout remains at 25 percent against a pre-conflict 10 percent. Participation scores were significantly lower after the conflict than before it. The study concludes that educational recovery in Borno State is real but partial, and that the residual deficit is concentrated in participation rather than in enrolment, which has implications for how recovery is measured and resourced.

Keywords: post-conflict education; schooling; access; participation; basic education; Borno State; educational reconstruction; insurgency

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a strategic instrument of social, political and economic development. It provides the foundation for literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and citizenship, and it is through basic education that most of a population acquires the capabilities on which later development depends. Becker (1993) established the framework within which this contribution is conventionally understood, treating schooling as investment in human capital whose returns accrue both to the individual and to the society.

In states affected by armed conflict, education systems suffer disruption that is structural rather than merely physical. Schools are destroyed, teachers are displaced, communities are fragmented and children's educational trajectories are interrupted at ages when interruption is difficult to recover from. UNESCO (2022) documents the pattern across conflict affected settings globally and notes that the educational consequences persist well beyond the cessation of hostilities.

Borno State, in north eastern Nigeria, has experienced one of the most severe insurgencies in the country's history. The Boko Haram conflict has affected social institutions across the state, and education has been directly targeted rather than incidentally damaged. Adebayo (2020) examines the relationship between insurgency and educational development in the north east, and Ibrahim and Ahmed (2021) trace the effects of conflict and displacement on school participation specifically.

The educational crisis in Borno extends beyond physical destruction to include elevated dropout, interrupted learning, reduced transition between levels, low attendance and psychological harm to learners and teachers alike. These dimensions are analytically distinct. A rebuilt school raises the capacity for access; it does not by itself restore the attendance, progression and engagement that constitute participation. The distinction matters for measurement, because enrolment is the indicator most readily counted and participation the one that determines whether enrolment produces learning.

In the post-conflict period the restoration of schooling has become central to reconstruction and peacebuilding. Government agencies, humanitarian actors and development partners have invested in rebuilding infrastructure, deploying teachers and re-enrolling displaced children (UNICEF, 2021; Mohammed and Goni, 2022). The question this study addresses is how far that investment has restored access and participation, and where the residual deficit lies.

The study examines schooling in the post-conflict society of Borno State, with particular emphasis on access and participation in basic education. It addresses four research questions: what effect has conflict had on access to basic education; what effect has it had on learner participation; what strategies do stakeholders consider capable of improving access and participation; and how do enrolment, attendance and dropout compare across the pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict periods.

2. Conceptual and Empirical Review

2.1 Post-Conflict Schooling

Post-conflict schooling refers to the restoration, reconstruction and transformation of education systems after periods of violent conflict. It encompasses the reopening of schools, the rebuilding of infrastructure, the redeployment of teaching personnel and the reorientation of curricula towards reconciliation and social cohesion.

The concept carries a normative dimension that distinguishes it from simple restoration. Post-conflict schooling is not merely schooling that occurs after a war; it is education provided in societies emerging from conflict, directed at rebuilding systems while addressing the social divisions that contributed to the conflict in the first place. Restoring a system to its pre-conflict condition may therefore be an insufficient objective where features of that condition contributed to grievance.

2.2 Access to Basic Education

Access refers to the opportunity and ability of all school age children to enrol in and benefit from formal schooling. It encompasses the physical availability of schools, safety of the route and the premises, affordability, and the absence of discriminatory barriers. In the Nigerian context, basic education comprises six years of primary schooling and three years of junior secondary schooling under the Universal Basic Education framework (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2024).

UNESCO (2026) treats access, quality and relevance as interlinked rather than sequential, which is directly pertinent to post-conflict assessment: a child who enrolls in a school without teachers, materials or safety has access in a formal sense only.

2.3 Participation in Basic Education

Participation refers to the extent to which enrolled children engage with the learning process, encompassing regular attendance, classroom involvement, progression between grades and retention to completion. The distinction from access is the organising distinction of this study. Access is a condition for participation and does not guarantee it, and interventions that raise one may leave the other unchanged.

Empirical work in the north east bears this out. Ibrahim and Ahmed (2021) find that displaced children who re-enrol frequently attend irregularly, and UNICEF (2024) reports both substantial re-enrolment and continuing attendance deficits in the same population. Okeke (2019) examines the gendered dimension of participation in fragile communities, noting that barriers to girls' continued attendance frequently intensify after conflict even where enrolment recovers.

2.4 Educational Reconstruction in Borno State

Mohammed and Goni (2022) examine post-conflict reconstruction and access to basic education in Borno State specifically, documenting significant infrastructure investment alongside persisting participation deficits. UNICEF (2025) reports continuing humanitarian need across the north east, and the World Bank (2022) records out of school rates and adjusted net attendance for Nigeria that place the north east substantially behind national averages. The present study contributes to this literature by comparing teacher and learner assessments directly and by situating the survey findings against enrolment, attendance and dropout data across the three conflict periods.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design, Population and Sample

A survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 1,000 teachers and 5,000 learners in selected schools across Borno State. A purposive sample of 250 teachers and 350 learners was drawn, giving 600 respondents in total. Purposive selection was used in order to reach schools and respondents in communities directly affected by the conflict, which a random procedure across the state would not reliably have achieved.

The two respondent groups are analysed separately throughout, since they occupy different vantage points: teachers observe patterns across cohorts over time, while learners report their own experience. Where the two groups diverge, that divergence is treated as a finding rather than as measurement error.

3.2 Instrument and Reliability

Data were collected using a self developed structured questionnaire titled Schooling in Post-Conflict Society: Access and Participation in Basic Education. Items were scored on a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Reliability was established through test and retest administration, returning a coefficient of 0.90, which indicates a high level of consistency and supports the use of the instrument for the purposes of this study.

3.3 Method of Analysis

Descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies, percentages and item means, were used to address the research questions. Item means were computed on the four point scale as

$$x_{\text{mean}} = (4f_{\text{SA}} + 3f_{\text{A}} + 2f_{\text{D}} + 1f_{\text{SD}}) / N \quad (1)$$

where f denotes the frequency in each response category and N the number of respondents. A mean of 2.50 or above was taken to indicate agreement. All means reported in this article have been recomputed directly from the underlying response frequencies using equation (1).

An independent samples t test was used to compare participation before and after the conflict, computed as

$$t = (x_{\text{mean}_1} - x_{\text{mean}_2}) / \sqrt{(s_1^2/n_1 + s_2^2/n_2)} \quad (2)$$

with the null hypothesis rejected where the calculated value exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at the .05 level.

4. Results

4.1 Effect of Conflict on Access to Basic Education

Table 1 reports teacher responses on the effect of conflict on access. Agreement was high across all four items. Insecurity discouraging attendance attracted the strongest endorsement, with 88.0 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing and a mean of 3.48, followed by displacement at 84.0 percent and a mean of 3.30. Destruction of schools attracted the lowest agreement of the four at 74.0 percent, with a mean of 3.14.

Table 1: Perceived effect of conflict on access to basic education (teachers, n = 250)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Conflict reduces school enrolment	120 (48.0%)	85 (34.0%)	30 (12.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.24	Agree
Destruction of schools limits access	115 (46.0%)	70 (28.0%)	50 (20.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.14	Agree
Insecurity discourages attendance	160 (64.0%)	60 (24.0%)	20 (8.0%)	10 (4.0%)	3.48	Agree
Displacement affects access	130 (52.0%)	80 (32.0%)	25 (10.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.30	Agree

Note. SA strongly agree, A agree, D disagree, SD strongly disagree. Means recomputed from the response frequencies using equation (1). Decision threshold 2.50.

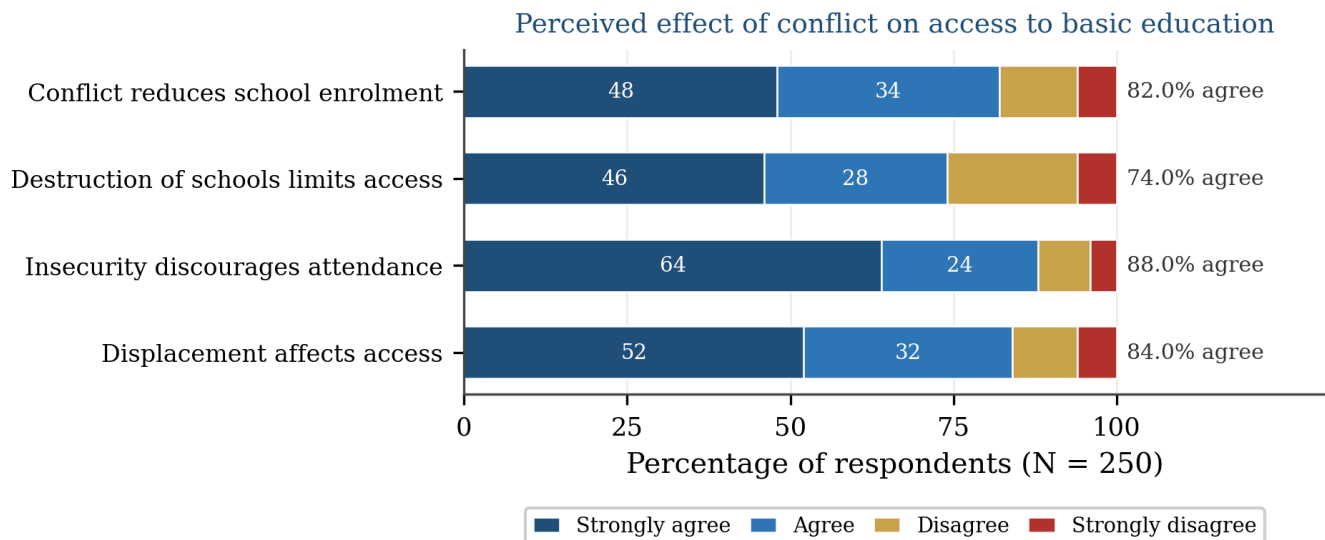


Figure 1: Distribution of teacher responses on the effect of conflict on access to basic education. Insecurity attracts the highest agreement, while destruction of school buildings attracts the lowest, which indicates that the barrier operates through fear as much as through physical loss of facilities.

The ordering of these items is substantively interesting. Physical destruction of schools, which is the most visible manifestation of conflict and the one that attracts most reconstruction funding, attracts the lowest level of agreement among the four. Insecurity, which is a perception of risk rather than a physical fact, attracts the highest. Teachers are reporting that what keeps children out of school is principally the danger of going, not the absence of somewhere to go. This has a direct bearing on the balance between building and security investment in recovery programming.

4.2 Effect of Conflict on Learner Participation

Table 2 reports teacher responses on participation. Poverty limiting participation recorded the highest mean at 3.41 with 86.0 percent agreement, marginally ahead of irregular attendance at 3.35 and dropout at 3.33. Trauma affecting classroom participation recorded the lowest mean at 3.30, though agreement remained high at 83.2 percent.

Table 2: Perceived effect of conflict on learner participation (teachers, n = 250)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Conflict increases dropout rates	135 (54.0%)	75 (30.0%)	28 (11.2%)	12 (4.8%)	3.33	Agree
Learners show irregular attendance	142 (56.8%)	68 (27.2%)	25 (10.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.35	Agree
Trauma affects classroom participation	128 (51.2%)	80 (32.0%)	30 (12.0%)	12 (4.8%)	3.30	Agree
Poverty limits participation	150 (60.0%)	65 (26.0%)	22 (8.8%)	13 (5.2%)	3.41	Agree

Note. Means recomputed from the response frequencies using equation (1).

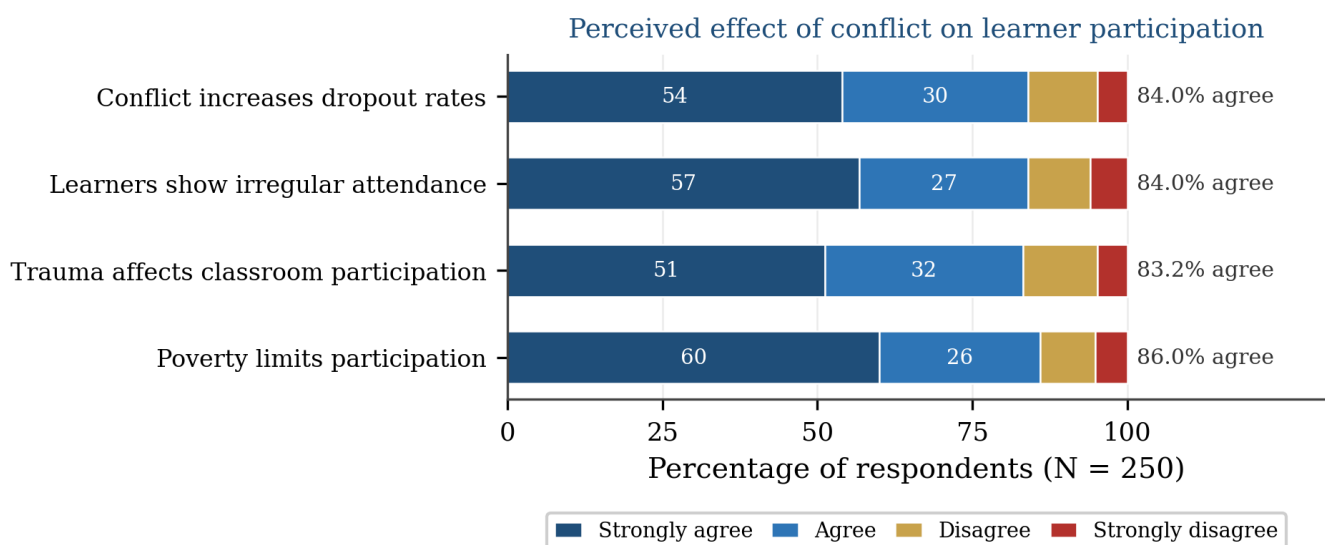


Figure 2: Distribution of teacher responses on the effect of conflict on learner participation. Poverty emerges as the leading constraint, which situates the participation deficit within household economics as well as within the direct effects of violence.

That poverty outranks trauma, dropout and irregular attendance is worth noting, because it identifies a mechanism that is not specific to conflict and will not resolve as security improves. Conflict has impoverished households through displacement and the destruction of livelihoods, and that impoverishment constrains participation through the ordinary channels of direct and opportunity cost. Security restoration addresses the barrier reported in Section 4.1; it does not by itself address this one.

4.3 Strategies for Improving Access and Participation

Tables 3 and 4 report teacher and learner assessments of four proposed strategies. Both groups endorsed all four, with every mean above the 2.50 decision threshold. Teachers rated strengthened school safety highest at 3.48, while learners rated the strategies within a narrow band between 3.06 and 3.11.

Table 3: Strategies for improving access and participation (teachers, n = 250)

Strategy	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Strengthened school safety	160 (64.0%)	60 (24.0%)	20 (8.0%)	10 (4.0%)	3.48	Agree
Inclusive educational financing	130 (52.0%)	80 (32.0%)	25 (10.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.30	Agree
Teacher support and psychosocial services	120 (48.0%)	85 (34.0%)	30 (12.0%)	15 (6.0%)	3.24	Agree
Community based educational reconstruction	140	77	70	15	–	See note

Note. Means recomputed from the response frequencies using equation (1). The frequencies supplied for community based educational reconstruction sum to 302 rather than 250 and the accompanying percentages sum to 114 percent; the row is reproduced as supplied and no mean is computed for it, pending verification by the authors. It is excluded from Figure 3 and from the discussion.

Table 4: Strategies for improving access and participation (learners, n = 350)

Strategy	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Strengthened school safety	145 (41.4%)	125 (35.7%)	50 (14.3%)	30 (8.6%)	3.10	Agree
Inclusive educational financing	150 (42.9%)	120 (34.3%)	50 (14.3%)	30 (8.6%)	3.11	Agree
Teacher support and psychosocial services	135 (38.6%)	130 (37.1%)	55 (15.7%)	30 (8.6%)	3.06	Agree
Community based educational reconstruction	150 (42.9%)	120 (34.3%)	50 (14.3%)	30 (8.6%)	3.11	Agree

Note. Means recomputed from the response frequencies using equation (1).

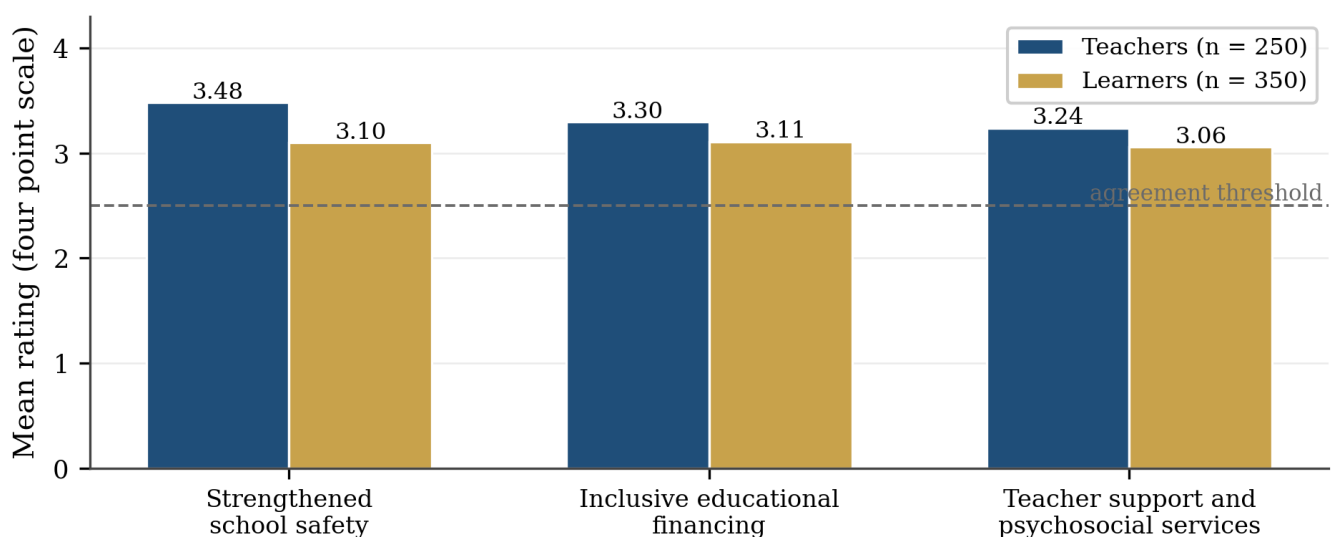


Figure 3: Teacher and learner assessments of three remedial strategies compared. Teachers rate every strategy more favourably than learners do, and the gap is widest for strengthened school safety.

The divergence between the two groups is consistent rather than item specific: teachers rate every strategy above the corresponding learner rating, and the gap is widest for school safety, at 0.38 of a scale point. Two readings are available. Teachers may be better informed about what the strategies involve and therefore more confident in them, or learners may be reporting from more direct experience of how far such measures have actually changed conditions. The design does not distinguish between these, but the direction of the gap argues for consulting learners directly when recovery programmes are evaluated rather than relying on teacher assessment alone.

4.4 Enrolment, Attendance and Dropout Across Conflict Periods

Table 5 reports enrolment, attendance and dropout across the three periods. Enrolment fell from 5,000 before the conflict to 3,200 during it, a decline of 36.0 percent, and recovered to 4,100 afterwards, a rise of 28.1 percent on the conflict figure. The recovery is substantial but incomplete: post-conflict enrolment remains 18.0 percent below the pre-conflict level.

Table 5: Enrolment, attendance and dropout across conflict periods

Indicator	Pre-conflict	During conflict	Post-conflict	Net change from pre-conflict
Enrolment	5,000	3,200	4,100	-18.0%
Attendance rate	85%	55%	65%	-20 points
Dropout rate	10%	35%	25%	+15 points

Note. Net change computed by the authors from the reported figures. Source: school records for the sampled schools.

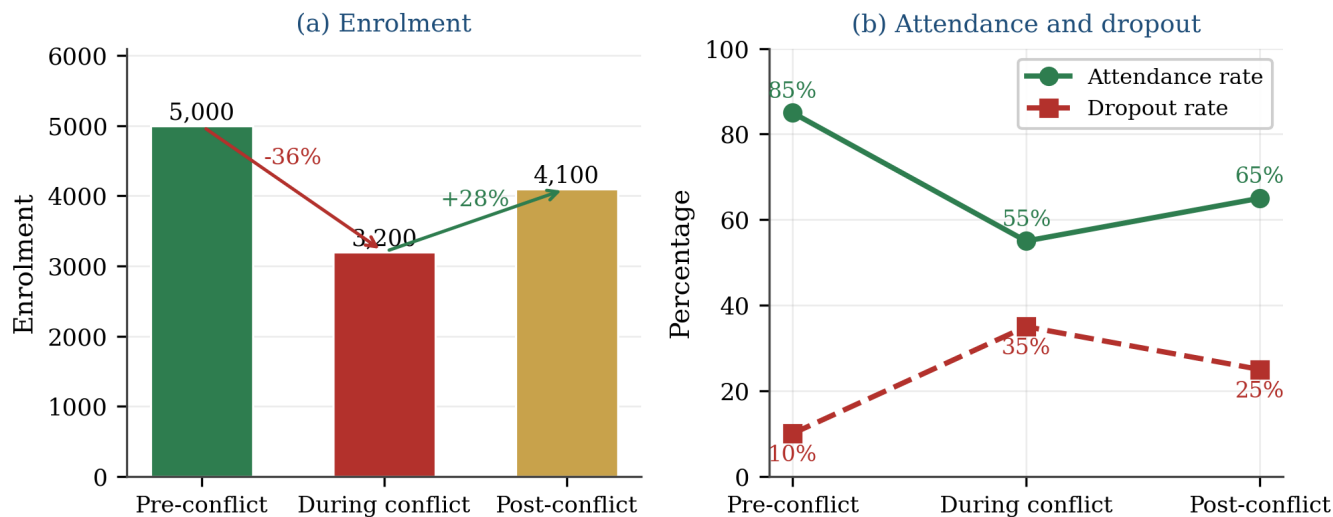


Figure 4: Enrolment, attendance and dropout across the pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict periods. Each indicator shows partial recovery, and in each case the post-conflict position remains materially worse than the pre-conflict baseline.

The attendance and dropout series tell a more cautionary story than enrolment does. Attendance fell by 30 percentage points during the conflict and has recovered only 10, leaving it 20 points below baseline. Dropout rose by 25 points and has fallen by 10, leaving it 15 points above baseline. Enrolment has therefore recovered proportionally further than either participation indicator. The pattern indicates that children are returning to school rolls faster than they are returning to sustained attendance and completion, which is precisely the divergence between access and participation set out in Section 2.3.

4.5 Comparison of Pre-Conflict and Post-Conflict Participation

Table 6 reports the independent samples *t* test comparing participation before and after the conflict. The mean for pre-conflict participation was 3.45 (SD 0.52) against 2.60 (SD 0.63) for the post-conflict period, a difference of 0.85 of a scale point. The calculated value of 4.26 exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at the .05 level, so the null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected.

Table 6: Independent samples *t* test comparing pre-conflict and post-conflict participation

Statistic	Pre-conflict participation	Post-conflict participation
Mean	3.45	2.60
Standard deviation	0.52	0.63
<i>t</i> calculated	4.26	
<i>t</i> critical (.05)	1.96	
Decision	Reject H0	

Note. Test statistic as reported in the source analysis. Degrees of freedom were not reported and the test statistic could not be independently verified from the summary statistics supplied.

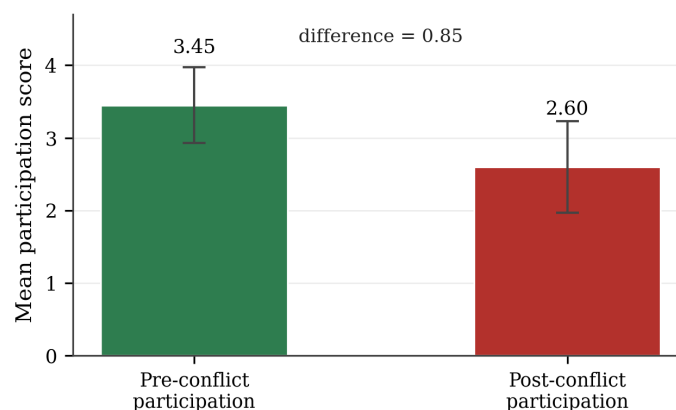


Figure 5: Mean participation scores before and after the conflict, with standard deviation bars. The post-conflict mean lies below the pre-conflict mean by 0.85 of a scale point, and the wider dispersion after the conflict indicates greater variability in learner experience.

A detail of the dispersion deserves notice. The standard deviation rises from 0.52 before the conflict to 0.63 after it. Participation has therefore not only fallen on average but become more unequal, which suggests that recovery has reached some learners considerably more than others. An average that is improving can conceal a distribution that is widening, and targeting decisions require attention to the second as well as the first.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Access: Fear Rather Than Fabric

The access findings point to a conclusion that is somewhat at odds with the shape of much recovery programming. Among the four barriers examined, insecurity discouraging attendance attracted the highest agreement at 88.0 percent, while destruction of school buildings attracted the lowest at 74.0 percent. Reconstruction expenditure in post-conflict settings is typically weighted towards physical infrastructure, which is visible, countable and attributable to donors. The present evidence suggests that the binding constraint on access in Borno is the perceived safety of attendance rather than the availability of premises.

This is consistent with Adebayo (2020), who documents the targeting of educational institutions during the insurgency, and with UNICEF (2025), which reports that insecurity continues to affect school attendance in the north east even where facilities have been restored. The implication is not that reconstruction is unnecessary but that it is insufficient: a rebuilt school on a route parents consider dangerous will stand underused.

Displacement, at 84.0 percent agreement, compounds the problem through a different mechanism. Displaced households are frequently distant from their original schools and uncertain of their residence, and Ibrahim and Ahmed (2021) report that both features depress enrolment independently of facility availability.

5.2 Participation: The Economic Residue of Conflict

On participation, poverty recorded the highest mean of the four items at 3.41. The finding locates a substantial part of the participation deficit in household economics rather than in the direct effects of violence, and it has an important temporal implication. Security can be restored comparatively quickly; the livelihoods destroyed by displacement and the loss of assets recover over much longer horizons. A participation barrier that operates through household poverty will therefore persist after the barrier that operates through fear has eased.

Trauma affecting classroom participation recorded the lowest mean of the four at 3.30, though agreement remained high. The relatively lower ranking should be interpreted with caution. Teachers may be less well placed to identify psychological effects than to observe attendance and dropout, both of which are directly countable, and psychosocial need may therefore be understated by this instrument rather than genuinely lower.

5.3 The Divergence Between Teachers and Learners

Teachers rated every remedial strategy more favourably than learners did, with the largest gap on school safety. The consistency of the direction across items suggests a systematic difference in perspective rather than disagreement about any particular measure.

The finding carries methodological weight for how recovery is evaluated. Programme assessment in conflict affected education commonly draws on teacher and administrator report, which is easier to collect and more readily aggregated. If teachers systematically rate interventions above the learners who experience them, that practice will produce a favourable bias of unknown magnitude. The present data do not establish which group is better calibrated, but they establish that the choice of respondent affects the answer, which is itself sufficient reason to collect both.

5.4 Recovery as Partial and Uneven

The enrolment, attendance and dropout series together describe a recovery that is real but incomplete, and incomplete in a particular way. Enrolment has recovered 50 percent of its conflict era loss, attendance 33 percent and dropout 40 percent. Access, in other words, is recovering faster than participation.

This ordering is intelligible and it matters for policy. Re-enrolment can be achieved through campaigns, rebuilt facilities and the return of displaced families, and it produces a countable result within a programme cycle. Sustained attendance requires that households can meet the direct and opportunity costs of schooling week after week, that the route remains safe, and that the school is functional enough to be worth attending. The first is an event; the second is a condition. Mohammed and Goni (2022) report a comparable pattern for Borno, and UNESCO (2022) identifies it as characteristic of post-conflict education systems more generally.

The widening dispersion in participation scores reinforces the point. Recovery is not reaching all learners equally, and an indicator reported as a mean will register improvement even where a substantial minority is being left behind. Okeke (2019) suggests that girls in fragile communities are among those most likely to occupy that minority, though the present study did not disaggregate by gender and cannot confirm it for this population.

5.5 Implications for Reconstruction Policy

Three implications follow. First, the balance of recovery investment should shift somewhat from physical reconstruction towards the conditions of safe and sustained attendance, since the evidence identifies security and household cost as the leading constraints rather than facility availability. Second, monitoring should track participation indicators alongside enrolment, since the two are recovering at different rates and enrolment alone overstates progress. Third, evaluation should incorporate learner report, given the systematic divergence documented in Section 5.3.

5.6 Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings. The sample was purposively selected from conflict affected communities, so the findings describe those communities rather than Borno State as a whole, and the direction of any resulting bias is towards greater reported impact. Teacher responses are perceptual assessments of learner behaviour rather than observations of it, and the enrolment, attendance and dropout figures derive from records for the sampled schools rather than from state level administrative data. The comparison between pre-conflict and post-conflict participation relies on recall for the earlier period, which is subject to error over a fifteen year interval. The reported *t* statistic could not be independently verified from the summary statistics supplied, and degrees of freedom were not reported. One row of Table 3 contains frequencies that do not sum to the stated sample and has been excluded from analysis pending verification. Finally, the study did not disaggregate by gender, age or displacement status, each of which the wider literature identifies as consequential.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined access and participation in basic education in post-conflict Borno State. Conflict was found to have impaired access principally through insecurity and displacement, and to have impaired participation principally through poverty, irregular attendance and dropout. Enrolment, attendance and dropout have all recovered partially from their conflict era levels without returning to pre-conflict values, and participation was significantly lower after the conflict than before it.

The central conclusion concerns the shape of the recovery rather than its existence. Access is being restored faster than participation, and the residual deficit is concentrated in sustained attendance and completion rather than in enrolment. Since enrolment is the indicator most readily counted and most frequently reported, there is a real risk that recovery is recorded as more complete than it is. Rebuilding schools restores the capacity for education; restoring participation requires that households can afford to use that capacity and consider it safe to do so.

The following recommendations are made.

1. **Prioritise safety of access over facility count.** Investment should address the security of routes to school and the perceived safety of attendance, which teachers identified as the leading barrier, alongside continued reconstruction.
2. **Address the household cost of participation.** School feeding, fee abolition and conditional support should be expanded, since poverty was the highest rated constraint on participation and will outlast the security barrier.
3. **Expand psychosocial and teacher support.** Structured psychosocial provision should be available to learners and teachers alike, with the caution that teacher report may understate the scale of need.
4. **Monitor participation, not only enrolment.** Education authorities should track attendance, progression and completion as primary indicators, since enrolment alone overstates the extent of recovery.
5. **Include learners in programme evaluation.** Given the systematic divergence between teacher and learner assessments, recovery programmes should be evaluated with direct learner input rather than through teacher report alone.
6. **Expand accelerated and catch-up provision.** Learners whose schooling was interrupted require targeted catch-up programmes if re-enrolment is to translate into completion.

7. **Disaggregate monitoring by gender and displacement status.** The widening dispersion in participation indicates uneven recovery, and targeting requires knowing which groups are being left behind.

8. **Strengthen community participation in school governance.** Community involvement supports both the perceived safety of schools and local accountability for attendance.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest relating to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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Ethical Statement

Permission was obtained from the relevant education authorities and school administrations before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and responses from learners were collected with the knowledge of school authorities. All responses were anonymised and are reported only in aggregate.

Authors Contributions

Mala Mallam Kulloma: conceptualisation, instrument design, data collection and drafting of the manuscript. **Muhammad Alkali Kolo:** methodology, data analysis, review and editing. **Mohammed Mallam Bunu:** literature review, interpretation of findings, critical revision. All authors approved the final version.

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