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Leadership and Education-in-Emergency in Nigeria: An Academic Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Education sector in Nigeria has witnessed several natural and man-made challenging crises that are contributing to the inability to meet the global goal of sustainable education at all levels. The frequency of these circles of crises over some time has resulted in what is referred to as an 'academic pandemic'. This paper examined the factors responsible for a state of emergency in the Nigerian education sector and the roles of leadership in the management of these challenges. Relevant secondary data sourced from both print and online resources were arranged into themes and analyzed for contents holistically and historically in line with the interpretive research paradigm. The study suggests that the crisis-laden education sector needs a general overhaul that targets its establishment, operations and outcomes. A sustainable leadership approach is required for structural, cultural, safety, legislative and humanitarian factors that limit accessibility to quality education.

Keywords: Academic Pandemic, Administration, Education, Emergency, Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

It is now increasingly difficult to access quality education in Nigeria because of what the author conceptualized as an 'academic pandemic' that has been affecting the education sector overtime till. The quality of teaching and schools' infrastructure has been on a steady decline due to the impacts of the comatose state of the education system.

In the northeastern part of Nigeria, the activities of insurgents and bandits have led to the closure of many schools while some are reduced to piles of rubbles and fatal loss of lives of students and teachers due to violent attacks. In the southeast, the standard of education is suffering a decline due to the activities of the proscribed terrorist group known as the IPOB which has resulted in irregular school schedules in the region. From west to east and north to south, the deplorable state of the Nigerian education sector is very glaring. The reoccurrence patterns of the crisis in the education sector have reached the point of a pandemic (academic pandemic) therefore, it is not just a crisis of individuals, communities, social institutions or governments, it is a globally concerned crisis

The education sector in Nigeria is faced with conflicts and upheaval that must be controlled for visible sustainable development to be achieved. From basic (primary) schools to secondary schools and higher institutions, the experience is the same. Basic (primary) education is devoid of discipline. The basic routines in school supervision are not regular and Examination malpractices have made Memory not to be cultivated. Social activities and games caused by social and technological distractions occupy the major time.

Secondary education fails even more due to the gap in preparation given in the basic schools. Cultism, substance abuse, school pull-out, peer influence, school vandalism and bullying are now the order of the day. According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), "quality education protects cognitive development and psychosocial well-being, giving children hope in times of crisis".

Seventy per cent of school children are affected by a learning crisis syndrome in Nigeria. In addition, it was indicated that within 10 years, about 53% of Nigerians would neither be able to write nor read in Nigeria, this was confirmed by the government of Nigerian that Globally, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children with about 18.5 million of school-aged children not having access to quality basic education

Without any doubt, the crisis in the Nigerian education sector has become an 'academic pandemic' that is affecting children across the country It is disturbing that millions of school going-age children have never set foot in a classroom due to what Education stakeholders attributed nomadic practices, religious and cultural factors, terrorism and banditry is ravaging the northern parts of the country. The impacts of this crisis are more pronounced on children from the poorest households, the girl child, children living with disabilities, children affected by displacement, victims of forced migration or emergencies, children in street situations, children in geographically remote areas and nomadic children.

The continued denial of Nigeria's right to quality education due to terrorist and bandit activities will affect the human capital deficit needed to embrace the technological transformation needed in the knowledge-based economy. to solve this crisis, there is a need for leaders at all levels to collaborate with all stakeholders, decision-makers and policymakers internally and externally.

School leaders can improve society dramatically by creating a more conducive environment through leadership for children from the global south to acquire basic writing and

reading skills before leaving school because this will help to eradicate poverty, diseases, ignorance, and hunger. A sustainable leadership approach is required for structural, cultural, security, legislative and humanitarian factors that limit accessibility to quality education.

Crises and emergencies do not necessarily have the same meaning. A crisis is broader and encompasses social problems, economic issues, and natural and manmade disasters while emergencies are contextually specific with relatively narrow meaning (Farazmand, 2007). For this study, emergencies and crises will be interchangeably used.

This review of literature on crisis management is an attempt to understand the nature of the leadership necessary for schools to successfully learn from the past, deal with present crises and be able to manage the crises they inevitably will encounter.

2. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to review the challenges facing

Nigeria has been facing challenges in the education sector for a long period. These challenges are affecting the educational outcomes of students and the job performances of teachers. The failure of the government to position education to a global standard has resulted in a state of emergency. ('academic pandemic') in the sector. This study reviewed the challenges and suggested the way forward.

3. THEORETICAL SUPPORT

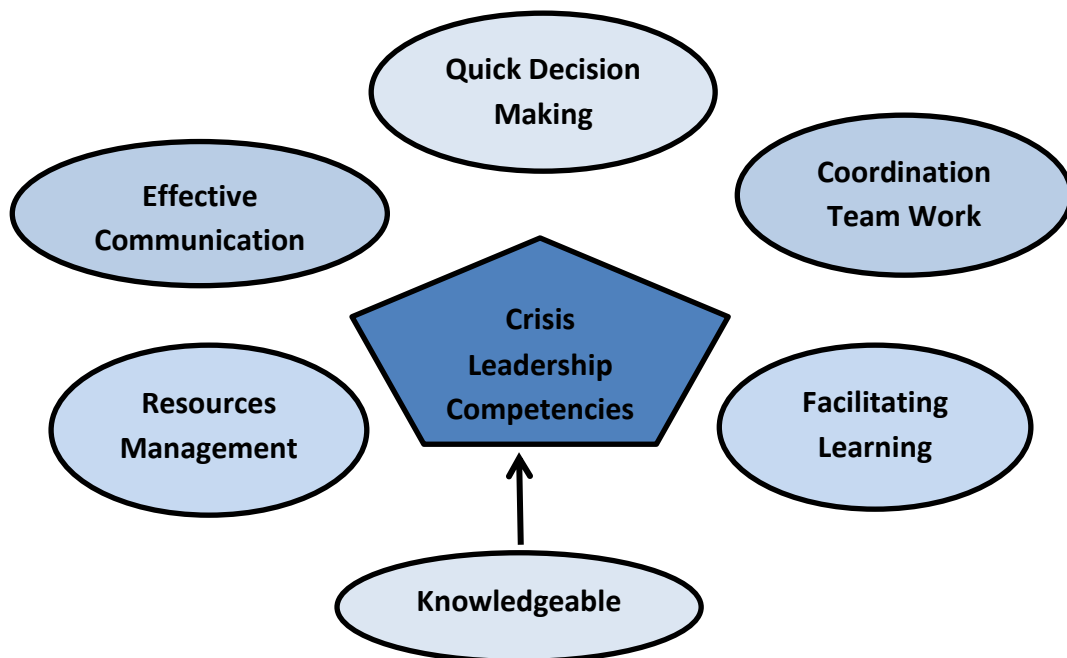


Figure 1. Crisis Leadership Competencies
Source: Ayoko et al. (2024)

This study is supported by the theory of crisis management. According to Mitroff (2007), the best approach to managing a crisis is preparation. Leading a community, educational institution, work organization, healthcare establishment, religious organization, political organization, government bureaucracy, research organization, nonprofit outfit, production company or an ongoing social movement is more important during turbulent and so, a leader must be prepared to shock absorb the organization through adequate planning, prevention, and containment of crises.

In the education sector, competency is key for the effective administration of schools during turbulent periods. School leaders must be able to manage the limited resources, coordinate the team and all education stakeholders by including them in decision-making where necessary open up channels for quick and interactive communication and be knowledgeable enough to facilitate learnings for the students, teachers and the school community. Figure 1 illustrates the key Crisis Leadership Competencies a leader must exhibit during emergencies

Knowledgeable: The more adequate knowledge of a crisis at the disposal of the school leader, the more the possibility of the crisis getting controlled.

Quick Decision-Making: School leaders must possess the ability to make calculated and quick decisions during turbulent situations.

Communication: School leaders should open up direct communication channels for all stakeholders (Liu et al. 2020).

Resource Management: Limited resources during a crisis must be well coordinated by the school leader.

Coordinating Team Work: Delegation of responsibilities to knowledgeable subordinates must be put in place by the school leader.

Facilitating Learning: school leaders should continually learn from previous and current crises and setbacks to strengthen the organization to prepare for future crises by examining the approach that enabled them to respond well, as well as those factors that inhibited their response.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper reviewed some factors responsible for crises and emergencies in the educational sector and the roles of leadership in Nigeria. Secondary data sourced from both print and online resources were arranged into themes and analyzed for contents holistically and historically in line with the interpretive research paradigm

5. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

5. 1. Leadership as a Concept

The ability to influence a team of individuals continuously to achieve specific goals in a particular situation is known as leadership. Leaders are people who make sound and sometimes difficult decisions and provide followers with the directions, knowledge and tools necessary to

overcome challenges, achieve set goals and sustainable development. The concept of Leadership encompasses the traits, styles, abilities and principles of different approaches to influencing a team of people to bring out the best in them through effective communication during turbulent periods

To perform effectively in emergencies, a Strong conflict resolution initiative, skills and approach are required to create solutions, control and evaluate the outcomes of the challenges

5. 2. Concept of Academic Pandemic

An academic pandemic is simply the declaration of a “state of emergency” in the education sector due to natural or man-made factors that lead to a declined standard or decay in the education sector.

Economic, emotional, behavioural, social, financial, cognitive, political and physical challenges that persistently put academic integrity into jeopardy at all levels are known as “academic pandemic”.

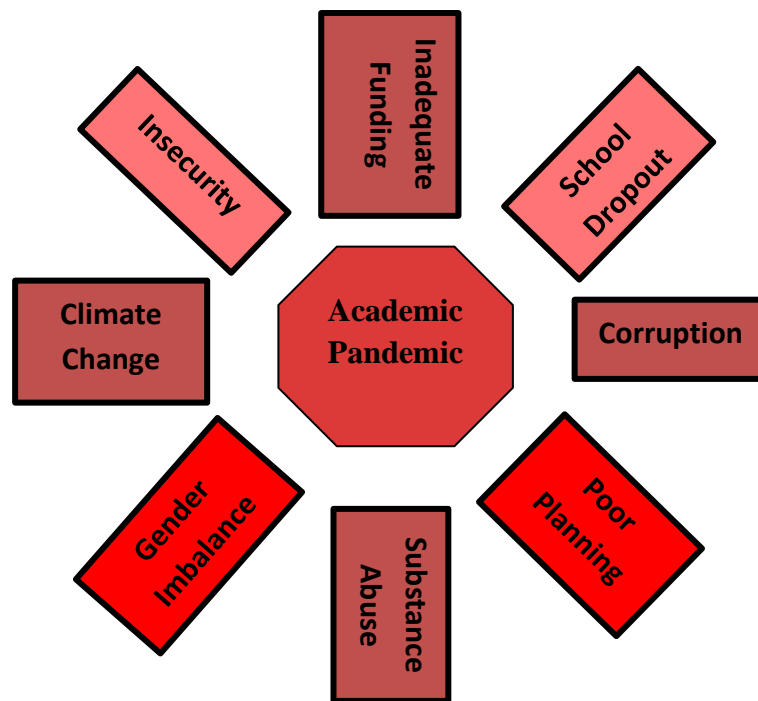


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Causes of Academic Pandemic
Source: Ayoko et al. (2024)

5. 3. Emergency Situations in Nigerian Education System

The crises witnessed in the education sector in Nigeria have different manifestations and dimensions either natural or man-made but efforts are limited to the ones threatening the effective school administration and sustainable development of education in Nigeria.

5. 3. 1. Insecurity

The rate of violence in Nigeria poses significant threats to the life, property and teaching-learning process in the school environment. The operations of insurgents have been well over thirteen years in the northeast zone and banditry in the northwest and northcentral zones has led to the declaration of a state of emergency due to the large-scale school destruction, killings and kidnappings.

In the southeastern part of Nigeria, a proscribed separatist group known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), consistently announces a proscribed separatist group, orders to agitate for the release of their leader, Nnamdi Kanu, who is detained on trial for treason. On such sit-at-home days, the fear of attacks makes the school leaders shut the school. Schools that disobey such orders are usually Assaulted by hoodlums and this compromises the safety of students and teachers significantly.

Students lost 20% of the time allotted for teaching and learning weekly in the five South-East states. Students also missed national examinations scheduled within this stay-at-home period. Public schools Students in Sokoto and Zamfara States did not register for the WAEC examination this year because of various militating factors. The Internally Displaced students are less concerned about education but survival.

Ogunode, Ahaotu & Obi-Ezenekwe (2021) observed that no sustainable development can take place in those regions affected by the crisis and that low quality of education, loss of manpower, destruction of school infrastructure, brain-drain, inadequate funding, lack of private investment in education all the effects of these emergencies

5. 3. 2. Cultism and Social Vices

As opined by Igodo (2002) a cult is a group of people who share common beliefs ideas and practices conduct eccentric and unconventional in secrecy. They are always concealed, unknown, disguised and behind closed doors but carry out offensive and defensive actions to defend members. The frequency of occurrences of cultist activities in Nigerian institutions of learning has been on the increase in recent times. It has assumed terrorist dimensions that result in maiming, school attacks, deaths, vandalism, decapitation, oppression and threats to students, the community academic and nonacademic staff. the spread of this Menace of Secret Cults to secondary and some primary schools is another crisis in the Nigerian education sector

Citing Silas & Chinyere (2015), the list of secret cults operating in the Nigerian education sector are: “Black Axe; Black Beret; Black Ofals; Dreaded Friends of friends; Black Brothers; Black Sword; The Termites; Black Scorpion; Blanchers, Blue Angels; Gentleman's Club; Big 20; Green Barret; Buccaneers; Black Ladies Club; Eiye; Klu Klu Klan; Egbe-Dudu; Nite Hawk; The family; Fangs; Eagle club; The Hepos; Jurists; Mgbamagbu Brothers; Dragon; Trojan Horse; Jaggare Confederation; Black Angels; Panama Pirate Confraternity; Blood suckers; The Fame; Klan Confraternity; Daughters of Jezebel; Burkinafaso Revolution; Amazons; Nite Rovers; Charlie's Angels; Mgba Mgba; Bra-Bra; Airwords; Bulky Sisters; Ogoni; Magic Lords; Black Bra; Marphites; Predators; Musketeers; Pyrate Confraternity; Phoenix; Odu, Black Cross; Red Fishes; Scavengers; Red Devils; Fraternity of Friends; Osiri; Scorpions; Black cat; Fraternity; Fliers; White Angels; Sons of the Night; Baby One Breast Confraternity; Maplates; Mafiaso; Bats; Black Cobra; Thomas Sankara Boys; Black Nationalist; Royal Queen; Temple of Eden; Third Eye; Vikings; Clack cross; Red Beret; Black Arrow; Bloodline; Mafia; Ninjas; Black Brassier; and many more”.

5. 3. 3. Poverty

Poverty makes it challenging to attend school and the Continued inability to access education will result in poverty, so the cycle continues. The poor population are denied quality educational opportunities, which will affect their productivity, self-reliance, and self-development more vulnerable, drop out of school, are unproductive, and become victims of child marriage and child labour. The middle class and the rich have merged into one, eliminating the middle class and leaving the social class as the "rich and the poor". They exempted themselves from these challenges by sending their children to private schools at home or abroad and this continues to create inequality by widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

Education used to be the leveller in past because children from poor backgrounds often met, interacted and outcompeted children from rich backgrounds in schools. They learn to build self-confidence and satisfaction knowing that even though they are indigent, they are diligent and as good as their rich colleagues with hard work, no matter their family backgrounds. The reverse is the case nowadays because children from the humble background are hard (Dakuku, 2022)

5. 3. 4 Inadequate Funding

The global goal of 2030 for quality, affordable, equitable and inclusive basic education for all school children might not be achieved by Nigeria due to poor funding of the education sector. Over the past 10 years, the budgetary allocation to education ranges between 5%-7%. This is a "far cry" from the benchmark recommended by UNICEF that countries allocate between 15%-20% of their yearly budgets to education.

Despite the promises by political leaders during campaigns over the years, to make education a priority "the truth is that disaster in the education sector is no longer waiting to happen", it is already happening because of the deplorable state of school infrastructures, overpopulation in the classroom, poor job performance of teachers due to poor welfares, inadequately qualified teachers, lack of teaching aids, poor ranking and recognition of Nigerian graduates globally are all due to poor funding of education

5. 3. 5. Out-of-School Children and Youth

Nigeria has the highest rate of about 18.5 million school-going-aged children out of school. This implies that about one-third of Nigerian children are not in school. Globally, it means that one out of every five out-of-school children is Nigerian. This estimation is a sharp rise from the 10.5 million recorded by UNICEF in 2021. The surge is not far from the banditry experienced in the northwest and northcentral regions, terrorism in the northeast region and kidnapping in the southeast region. The security risks have limited educational and social services in these conflict zones.

The contributing factors for this scenario are multiple and interconnected. The cost of education is increasing at an alarming rate. This makes it impossible for parents to send their children to school. children with disabilities, children affected by forced migration or displacement, children in street situations, girl children, children affected by conflicts, crises or emergencies, and children located in remote areas are more liable.

An estimated 35 per cent of Nigerian children who attend primary school do not attend secondary school. Some students are pushed out of schooling because they find it difficult to

transition from secondary schools to higher institutions every year, many students are denied admission into the limited space available due to overpopulation and limited school infrastructures to carry the capacity of the admission seekers.

5. 3. 6. Gender Imbalance

About 6.34 million (2 out of 3) out-of-school children are girls. This indicates that gender inequalities in Nigeria are still alarming, especially for people living with disabilities, in remote areas, victims of child soldiers, child labour, child marriage and girls and women facing poverty.

To guarantee the right to quality and accessible education, our leaders must reduce gender inequalities at all levels of education because gender inequality in education leads to unequal distribution of opportunities, wealth and resources between men and women.

According to Odozi (2012), the exclusion of women from schooling opportunities is rather detrimental to national economic growth and sustainable development because of the denial of accessibility to necessary economic productive activities, resources, and benefits and so subject the girl child to early marriage and womanhood which deny them educational opportunities. This gender bias in education eventually creates inequalities in employment considerations, political leadership opportunities, human capital development and social bias for women by artificially restricting the enrollment of qualified girls and taking less qualified boys instead (Dollar and Gatti, 2009).

5. 3. 7 Climate Change

Paradoxically, schools are the major casualties of climate change and also part of the solution through the delivery of environmental education and social awareness that future generations of skilled professionals will use to combat climate change and its associated effects. Schools cannot survive and thrive in a depleted ecosystem. According to Ayoko & Ayoko (2024), School administration is adversely impacted by ozone layer depletion due to the associated outcomes such as economic losses, forced movement to safer locations, and deaths of teachers and students which can halt the teaching and learning processes in the school system.

The occupational hazards it causes to teachers also affect their job efficiencies and well-being. In addition, Ayoko & Ayoko (2024) opined that global warming affects sustainable school administration due to the health implications and inability of students and teachers to concentrate on their studies and teachings. Students may eventually drop out of school because of climate-induced sickness. School leaders should create necessary environmental safety awareness that will promote green behaviour through adequate green education. Outdoor activities should also be limited during highly intense sunlight. protection against sunburn by the use of broad-spectrum sunscreen creams. The approved refrigerants in refrigerators and air conditioning systems should be adhered to by the technicians and leakages in air conditioners should be repaired before re-filling.

One hand, schools can be a powerful tool in the fight against climate change. On the other hand, they are also in the crosshairs of becoming another casualty of climate change. Leaders can prepare schools for the climate change crisis through the utilization of renewable energy, distance and online education by providing students with digital ICT devices and building reinforced structures against fire, flood, storm and so on but it is important to discourage manmade climate change activities by inculcating behavioural change (Donny et. al., 2023)

5. 3. 8. Poor Planning

The foundation of educational institutions must be well planned to compete globally with international standings. Globally, Educational planning is facing challenges in selecting strategies and steps to realize the set goals and be able to face challenges in the future. School leaders and educational decision-makers must continue to map out the strategies for sustainable development of the education sector. Strategies to stop or adapt to the effects of crisis and disaster including preventive measures must be planned for (Machali & Kurniadin)

For the academic challenges to be faced, educational planners must make decisions about policies that will guarantee the future and eradicate education policies that are not right on target. The poor planning, formulation and implementation of the national policy on education from the onset is another critical factor responsible for the emergencies in the education sector. The Planning of the Nigerian education sector was done based on European concept and culture which is alien to the socioeconomic fabric and technological advancement of the country.

Ogunode & Yahaya (2021) listed the factors that are responsible for poor planning in the Nigerian education sector as lack of current data, inadequate planning tools, shortage of planners, shortage of planning funds, policy instability, corruption, political instability, unqualified school leaders, lack of capacity building for planners and lack of international collaborations for global standards

5. 3. 9. Substance Abuse

The irrational and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the acceptable cultural pattern or medical prescriptions is known as drug abuse. Erumi (2015) noted that energy drinks and alcohol are among the abused substances in Nigeria. Obiechina & Isiguzo (2016) also confirmed in their study that the following class of substances are abused by youths and students in Nigeria classes of abused substances according to the study are Inhalants such as kerosene, anaesthetic gas, thinners, nail polish, paints, deodorant spray, chloroform, propane, halothane and other industrial and household solvents; Depressants such as barbiturate and tranquillizers; Stimulants such as amphetamine, caffeine and cocaine; Narcotics such as cannabis, opium, tramadol, heroin and morphine; Hallucinogens such as lysergic acid diethylamide. Aphrodisiacs and codeine syrup are also confirmed. However, it was suggested that non-empirically, Rohypnol is among the substance abused. Tramadol was identified by Idowu et al. (2018) while Adesina, Adebayo & Iken (2020) discovered kola-nut and sedatives such as phenobarbital as among the abused substances.

The prevalent rate and the consequential effects of substance abuse among students have called for school leadership concern to initiate strategies to discourage youths to devoid of substance abuse because academic performance, students behaviours, human relationships and educational attainment, are associated with drug use and abuse (Brier, 1995).

5. 3. 10. Institutional Corruption and Wastages

The structure of institutional corruption in Nigerian schools includes the parents, students, lecturers, non-academic staff and administrators. The educational fabric has been weakened by corruption resulting in wastage, misappropriation of resources, low efficiency and low quality of service delivery. According to Onwuka (2009), corruption by political leaders is a tragedy while corruption in educational institutions is a double tragedy because of the after-effects on the future of the students who are the future leaders. The spirit of corruption in the Nigerian

education terrain is not only on the leaders but also on the students. Examination malpractices and “sex for marks syndrome” are common among lazy students. Sustainable administration of schools is affected by corruption in the following ways: poor supervision, diluted quality of education, dilapidated school buildings, incessant strike actions, brain drain syndrome, reduction of funds for school administration, poor staff development and capacity building, poor planning, substandard school plant, inadequate qualified teachers and poor implementation of educational programme (David & guide, 2022)

5. 4. Administration of Education-in-Emergencies

The first question that comes to mind during emergencies is "Who is in charge". The most important issue during an emergency and its management is Leadership. Crisis and leadership are intertwined in that both concepts have a nature to complement one another.

The concepts of leadership and crisis have a complementary nature because it is the leader who has the responsibility to respond to challenges in any organization. A crisis allows the leader to control and reform the impacts of the crisis according to the "crisis-reform thesis," a good leader should not be discouraged by crises (Boin & t'Hart 2003).

Boin et al. (2016) noted that the focus is more on the leader during a crisis because the leader is expected to perform more effectively to protect lives and property. In the context of the national emergency management systems, symbolic leadership is also very important. The political leaders are the emergency managers and are expected to demonstrate their competencies to handle the situation.

The required skills and attributes of school leadership are fundamentally different during emergency periods from those characteristics required as part of the ‘normal’ school environment by controlling events, emotional causes and consequences in the immediate present to curtail personal organizational impacts on the school and the host school community because the school must be positioned for the future pursuit of teaching and learning excellence by the leadership. The school leadership competencies framework for crises and emergency management involves the ability to collaborate with education stakeholders, effective vertical and horizontal communication, democratic decision-making and operations and adaptability to natural and man-made crisis conditions.

When leaders with underdeveloped minds are allowed to lead an organization, institution, community or society they inhibit the development and reduce the organization to the level of their thinking and converse is the case too. This fact underscores the importance of education to the sustainable development of Nigeria. The government must be cognizant of opportunities the students are missing when they lack education and innovate safety strategies to encourage the children to enrol into school, access quality and continuous learning and ensure that the learning outcome can equip them for a sustainable and prosperous future.

From this study, it is possible to conclude that school leaders play an essential role in crisis management by providing an enabling teaching-learning environment for teachers, students and the host community before, during and after challenging periods.

6. CONCLUSION

Leadership approach and expectations are based on the type of crisis, location of crisis, type of organization, duration of crisis, victims of the crisis and scope of the crisis. Apart from

education, all areas of human endeavours are affected by violent conflict and can lead to emergencies in the economic, political, religious, cultural, environmental legislative, and social aspects of the lives of the citizens. Sustainable development cannot be actualized in the absence of peace, mutual understanding and stability. It is not just monetary and policy. We need to focus on behavioural change and public re-orientation on the effects of conflicts, crises and mismanagement that have become endemic in the Nigerian education terrain. To address this rampaging "academic pandemic", government and school leaders at various educational levels should acquire the competencies in crisis prevention and management.

Remote learning through the open, distance and e-learning (ODEL) initiative can be broadly extended to cater for basic (primary) and secondary school students in crisis locations (northeast and Southeast Nigeria) who cannot go to school. The government leaders should obey the recommendation by UNICEF that the budgetary allocation to the education sector be increased to 26%. This will ensure that modern schools are planted, school infrastructure is provided and upgraded, schools are safe, and teachers and students are motivated.

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