

STEMMING THE TIDE OF INSURGENCY THROUGH FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

Insurgency and terrorism have been major issues threatening nations globally. This development permeates racial, colour, ethnic, creed, religious, political and cultural divides. Nigeria has been severely threatened by the Boko Haram insurgency, which has resulted in widespread violence, loss of lives, economic decline, and the displacement of millions. Despite numerous military interventions, huge chunk of resources and international collaborations, the crisis persists, necessitating alternative and sustainable solutions. This paper explores the potential of adult education as a strategic tool for curbing insurgency in Nigeria. It investigates the nexus between illiteracy and insurgency, the thrusts of this paper lie in how literacy in its functional form can be deployed to power critical thinking skills productive capabilities, emotional intelligence and civic awareness in the recipients for the quest at identifying and resisting extremist ideologies. This study posits that functional literacy can serve as a panacea for effectively addressing all the indices of social inequalities that spur ideological cum religious extremism and radicalization. The paper concludes with significant recommendations, such as the establishment of functional and accessible literacy centers, provision of incentives for learners and educators, recruitment and training of professionally trained facilitators, and enhanced security for educational establishments irrespective of the status. The integration of adult literacy dimension into the anti-insurgency efforts, can assist Nigeria to foster peace, social stability, national security and economic growth.

Keywords: Insurgency, Tide, Functional literacy, Boko haram

Introduction:

Insurgency is a current problem confronting nations across the world today. It is not peculiar to race or ethnic divide, it is a problem confronting whites, blacks and the coloured races. Insurgency comes in various forms and has been branded as terrorism, [revolution](#), [outbreak](#), [coup d'état](#), [uprising](#) and many more. Nigeria as a nation is also not spared from this undesirable experience in the form of militant groups, banditry, kidnapping rings and notably the Boko Haram insurgency group (Adedire, Ake & Olowojolu, 2016). The development has ushered in many developments in its wake and it has been confronted in different ways. Unfortunately, all the strategies though successful to an extent have not been able to help in its eradication. Insurgency is a wide concept depending on the interpretation, encompassing constructs like [revolution](#), uprising, social upheaval, treachery, separatist movement, [secessionist](#)

[organizations](#), [subversion](#), [sabotage](#), [insurrection](#), [rebellion](#), [mutiny](#) and so on. This wideness has also made it difficult to have a common basic definition for the concept. Thus there exists various and different definitions of the concept. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines insurgency as a state of rebellion against a government, and the Cambridge dictionary supports this definition by defining it as an event in which a group of people attempts to seize control of their nation by force. However, it may not be an issue of taking over the whole country but may be limited to just a part of the country depending on the motive for the action.

Insurgency is sometimes referred to as armed conflict, war, terrorism, rebellion and uprising. However, regardless of whatever name it is given, it usually has its roots in conflicts arising from ethnicity, religious identity, ideological differences, political affiliation or economic grounds. It is also obvious that uprising and conflicts may be as old as man but the nature of one may differ from another. Also while some insurgencies occur at the local level, some happen at the national space while some are international in nature. It is believed that the September 11, 2001, Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States was international. This was supported by Rogan (2007), who said that the World Trade Centre attacks by Al-Qaeda had a negative impact on both America and the rest of the globe. However, since Boko Haram is to a great extent restricted to Nigeria's borders, its situation serves as an illustration of a national insurgency. It is crucial to emphasise that the Boko Haram insurgency has been the main scourge of the Nigerian system since its first significant strike on August 26, 2011, when a car bomb struck the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, killing at least 23 people and injuring over 80 more (National Counterterrorism Center, 2022).

Insurgency attracts attention as an issue for discourse because of its attendant hardship on humanity. Whenever insurgency happens, it usually takes its toll on the immediate environment affecting both human and material resources especially negatively. Specifically, insurgency usually affects human movement and relational activities with others in addition to its attendant destruction of lives and properties. Activities of insurgents also usually result in declined supply of food, shelter, health facilities, restricted economic and educational opportunities to mention a few.

Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria

Although there is no consensus on the exact date of inception of the Boko Haram movement, there is an agreement in history as observers trace the movement to Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, a Muslim cleric who established the “Jama'atulAlhulSunnahLidda'watiwal Jihad” group who believe that “Western education is sinful” (Adesoji, 2009). However, Boko Haram, the Hausa and Arabic name for this organisation, is more well-known. It is obvious that the group stemmed from a religious ideology which is against Western education. Thus, the emergence could be traced to religious reasons with a strong belief that Boko Haram's main intention is for Nigeria to operate fully as an Islamic state governed by Islamic law. Other schools of thought, however, contend that, the fact that poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy are much more common in northeastern Nigeria plays a major role in the movement's success in the region (Chothia, 2011; Akanji, Omoregie and Baruwa, 2020). Ikezue and Ezeah (2015) identify many principal causes contributing to the evolution of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, including religious, political, ethnic, and economic elements, alongside corruption and the influence of existing terrorist organisations.

The series of attacks that commenced in 2011 persisted into 2012, as witnessed in the assault on Kano City, Kano state, which targeted police stations and government facilities, resulting in over 185 fatalities. The situation deteriorated significantly in 2014, as the group's activities and capabilities escalated, leading to frequent attacks on Christians, security personnel, the media, and educational institutions. A notable event was the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, in April 2014. This was followed by other attacks later. (International Crisis Group, 2014; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023)

According to Amalu (2015), the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has resulted in significant loss of life and property. The development has resulted in food and nutrition instability and a heightened prevalence of infectious illnesses. Moreover, it has deprived millions of children and

adolescents of educational opportunities and exacerbated the number of internally displaced individuals owing to the loss of housing. Moreover, it has exacerbated the insecurity situation in the nation, resulting in individuals always experiencing worry and anxiety.

Although the effects of insurgency are usually felt by the total population of whatever area is affected, it is usually more pronounced on vulnerable individuals like women, children and the aged. In fact, children are usually affected negatively more than others (Isokpan and Durojaye, 2016; National Counterterrorism Center, 2022). In addition to missing the beauty of childhood often experienced within a cohesive family structure, some children are compelled to reside in fractured families, with some facing death, others losing one or both parents or being coerced into participating in warfare. In some instances, kids are compelled to exist as refugees, where they may encounter human rights abuses, significant food and housing shortages, and a denial of educational opportunities. As an illustration, a lot of young people in the northeastern region of the nation, which has been devastated by Boko Haram, have experienced all of these things.

Education in the region has suffered greatly as a result of targeted assaults on students, teachers, schools, and other educational institutions. The attacks did not also spare both foreigners and Nigerians alike (Amalu, 2015; Akanji, Omoregie and Baruwa, 2020). As a result of all the negative effects of the continued attacks, most parts of the North Eastern part of Nigeria became no-go- areas with Nigeria designated as a security risk zone by some foreign governments. In addition to local and international observers denouncing these killings, the US State Department classified Nigeria as a danger zone nation and Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation in November 2013.

The International Crisis Group (2014) succinctly outlined the ramifications of the Boko Haram insurgency, indicating that the year-long conflict has incited animosity among neighbours, resulted in thousands of fatalities, displacing millions of individuals, obliterated numerous schools and government structures, and severely undermined an already beleaguered economy in the North East, one of Nigeria's most impoverished regions.

Efforts made to curb insurgency in Nigeria

The resultant effects of insurgency are undoubtedly not desirable for a country like Nigeria and all efforts need to be made to stem the tide. It is important to acknowledge that various initiatives have been undertaken by both governmental and non-governmental organisations to mitigate the proliferation of the Boko Haram insurgency.

It is on record that the Government of the country has been trying its best to curtail the development, especially through military deployment. In addition, there are several non-governmental organisations that are also contributing their efforts to stem the tide of insurgency and take care of the victims. Adedire, Ake, and Olowojolu (2016) noted that the Federal Government of Nigeria employed brute military force against insurgent groups and deployed over 8,000 troops to the affected regions in northern Nigeria as a strategy to mitigate the activities of Boko Haram. This involves the deployment of specialised anti-terrorism combat units to terrorist regions to mitigate Boko Haram's operations (Okupe, 2015).

The international community has also approved the authorised deployment of soldiers by neighbouring nations (Chad, Niger, and Cameroon) on Nigerian territory, and the Nigerian military is authorised to conduct operations outside of its boundaries in order to pursue terrorists who are escaping. This has compelled military operatives from Nigeria and its neighbours to mount series of attacks in different frontiers. This endeavour was effective since it decreased the region that Boko Haram had previously controlled.

On the global scale, the Nigerian government has been working with the International Community to counter the terrorist group Boko Haram by offering financial, human, and information assistance as well as weapons and ammunition. In an effort to penalise or deter such acts, the international community likewise impose sanctions on those who support terrorism. Additionally, the UN Security Council placed sanctions on members of Boko Haram in May 2014, freezing their assets and enacting travel restrictions and weapons embargo (Adedire, Ake

and Olowojolu, 2016; Akanji, Omoregie and Baruwa, 2020).

However, despite all these efforts, the situation has still not abated. Though the Federal Government eventually declared Boko Haram as being technically defeated, their activities still continue in some parts of the country. With hundreds of individuals dead in armed conflicts between bandits and local vigilantes in different parts of the north-western part of the country, armed bandits continue to represent a serious threat to communities in most parts of northern Nigeria. In fact, the situation has gotten to an extent that one insurgent group is now waging war against the other and the area of operations still suffers for it. Related to this is a record of civilian casualties in areas where armed bandits operate due to increased military operations against extremist hideouts. It is therefore obvious that this situation demands a more enduring non-combative alternative conflict resolution approaches which could be found in functional literacy. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2023).

Maryville University (2023) describes literacy as the process of acquiring words, sounds, and language, while Alberta Education (2023) defines it as the capacity, self-assurance, and desire to interact with language in order to acquire, produce, and transmit meaning in all aspects of everyday life. Essentially, literacy mainly attempts to assist people to reach a level of reading, writing, and numeracy necessary for productive engagement in their society, generally referred to as basic education. This helps to empower the recipient who did not have the opportunity of formal education to acquire basic skills that will transform their lives and make them live better lives (Ayodele & Adedokun, 2012). Literacy helps individuals to get involved in their communities, stay out of poverty, and get better-paying employment to support their families.

The Connecticut State Library (2022) identifies seven essential literacies: basic literacy, early literacy, civic/social literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and legal literacy. This paper, however, concentrates on basic and early literacy, which are also anticipated to be functional. Literacy is deemed functional when it equips the individual with the ability to participate in activities necessitating literacy for effective functioning within their group and community, as well as to facilitate ongoing use of reading, writing, and calculation for personal and communal advancement (UNESCO, 2020). It is this kind of literacy that helps to ensure social transformation, good governance and good citizenship.

Early literacy is given to school-age children attending the normal school system while basic literacy is essentially for those who did not have the opportunity of attending the normal school system. This is otherwise referred to as adult literacy. For the normal school system, literacy allows children of school age to be given instruction in the classroom setting which is designed to empower the child to function effectively in life and imbibe good citizenship. When someone has a minimum level of literacy, they are more aware of their responsibilities as citizens, their rights as people, the laws of the community, and the consequences of breaking them.

It goes without saying that literacy instills a sense of self-worth in the recipients, preventing them from acting inappropriately or doing anything that might damage their reputation. According to Literacy Together (2023), there is a direct link between adult illiteracy and criminality since over 75% of inmates in correctional facilities and 59% of inmates in penitentiary facilities did not complete high school or are considered low-literate. This suggests that literacy plays a significant role in ensuring that individuals exhibit appropriate conduct, positive virtues and values, and the socially acceptable habits required to forge enduring bonds that maintain social order.

Nigeria belongs to the set of countries in the world where the non-literacy level remains very high. It is also important to stress that Nigeria at present has 38 percent of its population as non-literates. This implies that going by the estimated population of above 200 million, Nigeria has about 80 million of its citizens as non-literates. This implies that there are 80 million people who did not have the opportunity to attend school or know how to read and write. A lot of them are not

empowered to learn new skills, improve their health, and be lifted from the dungeon of ignorance and poverty in the country (Ayodele& Adedokun, 2012; UNESCO, 2020).

Nigeria has an extremely high rate of illiteracy, and the region devastated by the Boko Haram insurgency is among the regions with the highest rates of illiteracy. This supports the findings of Akanji, Omoregie, and Baruwa (2020), who pointed out that insurgencies often start in isolated locations and gradually become stronger by gaining the trust of the local populace. It should go without saying that the vast majority of individuals in rural regions are typically illiterate. It is therefore not a coincidence that Boko Haram is a sect that rejects western education and perceives it as evil. The antidote therefore would be an effective and functional literacy drive. Most especially, there is the need to focus on adult literacy because it is an important aspect of the educational system of countries, especially in the developing world. Moreover, adult literacy remains one of the tools that countries are using to achieve the set goals of sustainable development which are meant to transform lives to acceptable standards.

Exploiting the Potential of literacy in curbing Boko Haram insurgency

Literacy is a good weapon that could be adopted for the long-lasting eradication of insurgency. As shown in the literature, adequate exploitation of literacy will provide a lasting solution to the problem of insurgency. This fact was confirmed by Osalusi and Oluwagbohunmi (2014), who used a sample of 1675 literate and non-literate respondents from two local government areas of Ekiti state to investigate the significant role of literacy as an instrument of empowerment to improve relationships. The study found that majority of the boys used as political thugs and motor park touts are illiterate, and that most commercial drivers and riders simply pick up arguments and misbehave because they are illiterate.

A study conducted by Onwuadi, Ukpai, Okafor, Okeke, and Imo (2021) aimed to determine the extent to which enhancing literacy provisions can mitigate national security challenges in Ebonyi State. This empirical research utilised a sample of 749 respondents and employed questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The study's findings indicated that enhancing literacy provisions will foster inclusivity in national matters, uphold individual inalienable rights to education regardless of age, facilitate access to social justice for harmonious coexistence, ensure equality among all individuals in national affairs, provide opportunities for every citizen to realise their potentials, and create an equitable environment for civil societies to collaborate with the government in addressing national development challenges. Primarily, literacy enhances the personal, political, and socio-economic security of both the individual and society as a whole.

This suggests that literate people, on the one hand, can use the knowledge and information they have acquired to live and coexist peacefully with one another, which also helps them avoid violence. On the other hand, it is clear that illiterate people are often easily irritated, offended, and start arguments, which usually lead to violence. This may be borne out of the fact that they are forced to take up menial jobs and earn paltry sums of money and therefore are always primed for violence. The solution to this therefore is getting functional literacy across to the citizenry.

Conclusion

It is a known fact that insurgency poses an enormous risk to populations in any affected area and even beyond. In trying to stem the tide of insurgency, governments and non-governmental organisations have tried to provide some measures ranging from military operations to sanctions, yet the situation continues. If the various measures identified below about literacy are adequately explored, it is obvious that there would be an end to this issue.

Recommendations

-The Nigerian government should create and implement adult functional literacy programme in insurgency-affected states, particularly in the Northeast, in collaboration with NGOs and foreign development organizations. In order to provide people with the means for nonviolent

participation and financial independence, these programme ought to go beyond teaching reading and writing to incorporate civic education, dispute resolution techniques, career training, and digital literacy. By addressing the underlying causes of insurgency unemployment, isolation, and ignorance this strategy might tremendously curb susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

- Policymakers should make conscious attempt at repositioning literacy as a crucial component of national security, rather than merely as an educational objective. This entails making the promotion of adult and basic literacy a central part of counter-insurgency efforts and peace building frameworks. To guarantee that education-based interventions are incorporated into post-conflict recovery and community reintegration initiatives, particularly for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and at-risk individuals, security operatives and education providers should work together.

-To guarantee local content and community relevance, attempts should be made to involve community-based outfits, faith-based institutions, opinion based and traditional leaders in the planning and implementation of literacy programs. These bodies can act as grassroots fora for advancing civic engagement, tolerance, and peace education, aiding in the restoration of identity, trust, and resilience in communities impacted by war. A decentralized, inclusive strategy guarantees that literacy becomes more than just a teaching instrument but also a tool for empowerment.

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