

# Influence of Herders-Farmers Conflict on Pupils' Enrolment, Retention and Completion of Basic Education in Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study investigated the impact of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' enrolment, retention, and completion of basic education in Benue State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey method, it sampled 30 out of 438 basic schools across three local government areas of Guma, Logo, and Ukum were selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using a profoma titled "Influence of Herders/Farmers Conflict on Pupils' Enrolment, Retention, and Completion of Basic Education in Benue State, Nigeria," covering ten academic years (2012-2022). Descriptive statistics, including tables and bar charts, were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that increasing conflict led to declining enrolment, reduced retention, and lower completion rates, particularly in 2014, 2018, and 2020. The study concluded that the farmers-herders conflict significantly affects basic education in the state. It recommended that stakeholders—including international communities and federal/state governments—should intervene through seminars, workshops, and conferences to mediate and raise awareness. Such initiatives aim to reduce the conflict and curb its negative impact on school participation.

**Keywords:** Farmers-herder, Conflict, Enrolment, Retention, Completion, Basic-schools

## INTRODUCTION

The world in general and the African continent in particular has been engulfed with series of conflicts from time immemorial. Recently, the nature of these conflicts has taken a new dimension as symbolized through greed, internal struggle for political space, resource control and protection of values. Accordingly, peaceful co-existence within and or among nations is today more challenging than ever before. For instance, Nigeria is laced with some of the most obstinate conflicts, most of them constructed from differences in ethnic identities, religion, political interests, greed, and so on. In fact, record has it that Nigeria as a country had witnessed a serious number of national ethnic-conflicts ever before the independence but the menace has aggravated in the last six decades (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Nwankwo, 2015). The historical development of ethnic conflict (communal wars and violence) can be traced from within (internal) national rivalry to external (physical) and this is not very far from power rivalry and decision making over economic assets and other significant human aspects of life such as political power, land disputes and socio-cultural fanaticism (Egbefo & Salihu, 2014). Essentially, ethnic conflicts has inflicted on the economic, physical and human wellbeing of the nation and all efforts made by government, communities as well as private individual to checkmate it seems to have produced little or no result (Joshua, 2017). The inherent diversities that confront most African nation states manifest in conflicts, thus making Africa *"the Problem Child of the World"* (Onuoha, 2012).

Generally, many nations in the contemporary world are highly bedeviled by one form of conflict or the other, leading to loss of lives, property and community insecurity. Nevertheless, the absolute number of war deaths has declined globally between 1946 and 2016 from over 200,000 to about 84, 000 deaths (United Nations, 2020). However, violent

conflict still persists with many being waged against the state by non-state actors such as those being perpetrated by ethnic and political militias and the insurgent groups against the state leading to loss of lives, properties, community destruction, and mass internal dispersal along breakdown of law and order. Violent conflict is the primary driver of terrorism, with more than 90% of terrorist related deaths occurring in countries involved in violent conflicts (UN Report, 2020).

In West Africa, conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have been a negative common feature of socio-economic livelihood (Abubakar & Yahaya, 2019). These violent conflicts have escalated in parts of West Africa along the Sahel region claiming about 50,000 lives and destroying properties worth \$36 billion between 2009 and 2019 while the primary factor for the escalation of the farmers-herdsmen conflict has been competition for land, water and forage (Global Conflict Tracker, 2019). Though, political and socio-economic factors have also contributed to some of these conflicts, the main issue is about how the land resources are being managed and allocated to both the farmers and herders. Among the vital resources for the survival of both the herders and farmers, land has remained an overwhelming source of conflicts among them because it is a vital resource for grazing and farm cultivation. As an agrarian resource, much of the lives of the farmer and herders and human livelihoods in general are dependent on land resources. Accordingly, most conflicts between herders and farmers conflict across Nigeria are rooted in right to land use (Blench, 2010, in Aun, 2023). More so, pastoralists and farmers are both the primary victims and actors in these conflicts as these conflicts do not only occur between the two groups but even within each group. The scale and frequency of herdsmen-farmers conflicts varies greatly between and within West African states.

Nigeria in general is facing multiple conflicts, prominently among them is the trend of cattle rustlers and disputes over land use between farmers and herders, which has gravely contributed to undermining community security in Nigeria (Aun, 2019) while food insecurity and large-scale displacements have also been major characteristics of the herders-farmers conflict at the detriments of education, particularly basic education. The most common herder/farmer conflicts in Nigeria are between Fulani pastoralists and farmers from different ethnic backgrounds, especially Zarma, Hausa, and Mawri; all being northern Nigeria. Serious disputes sometimes occur within Fulani agro-pastoral communities in Niger as well, between farmers and herders. These rarely become violent but occasionally cases have to be taken to the local authorities for resolution (Aun, 2023).

The protracted conflict in Nigeria is generally believed to be complicated and worsened with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as the formation of militias and armed groups operating along established links across the Sahel with untold consequences on community security (Raji & Adewoyin, 2016). The year 2016 saw further incidents of the clash between farmers and herders in Agatu, and Nimbo communities, as well as massive destruction of lives and properties in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State. The peak of it all was 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 when the herders attacked Benue communities and killed hundreds of people, destroyed houses, lives and properties worth billions of naira and displaced several communities that led their governor to voice and cry out to the federal government and even the international community (Aun, 2023). Consequently, if settlements are displaced, people are killed and houses or properties are damaged, it will be difficult for education to continue and such is the case of the schools in the selected local government areas of Benue state. The trend or battle with these two parties has since then blown to full conflict that staying in the areas is like deciding between life and death.

Violence between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria is associated with loss of lives. The trigger for conflict is usually the destruction of crops by livestock, sometimes due to cattle and small ruminants moving southwards on transhumance into agro-pastoral areas before crops have been harvested or just after they have been planted. Most conflicts are

seasonal in nature and therefore somewhat predictable while the conflicts usually stem from disputes over land rights and natural resource access (Tion & Terwase, 2019).

Benue state in particular has not been without its share of these conflicts. By records, no decade of post-independent Nigeria has been conflict free in Benue state (Aun, 2023). Nigeria has had some of the most sordid tragedies arising from differences of political opinions, ethnic and religious differences as well as distrust. Benue State is one of the North Central states in Nigeria with a population of about 4,253,641 in 2006 census (Aun, 2023). Benue state was created in 1976 among the seven (7) states created at that time by the military administration headed by the late General Murtala Muhammed, which increased the federation from twelve to nineteen. The state derives her name from the Benue river, which is the second largest river in Nigeria. The state borders Nasarawa State to the North; Taraba State to the East; Kogi State to the West; Enugu State to the South-West; Ebonyi and Cross-River State to the South; and has an international border with Cameroon to the South-East. Benue State is a rich agricultural region; popularly grown crops include: sweet potatoes, cassava, yam, soya bean, guinea corn, rice, groundnuts, palm trees, maize, millet, vegetables and fruits among others. Benue state is known as "*food basket of the nation*" (Nigeria) and has three major ethnic groups, which are Tiv, Idoma, Iggede, and other minorities like Etulo, Abakpa, Akweya, Nyifon and Jukun (National Human Development Report 2018).

The capital of Benue State is Makurdi. Benue State as she exists today is a surviving legacy of an administrative entity that was carved out of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century. The territory was initially known as Munshi Province until 1918 when the name of her dominant geographical features, the 'Benue River' was adopted. Currently, Benue state is witnessing various forms of conflicts and insecurity across almost all its local governments. No part of Benue state is spared in the record of conflicts, among farmers themselves or farmers and herders which span through land issues, communal, political, economic, ethnicity and insurgency (NHDR, 2018). In Benue State, the highest levels of farmer-herder violence took place in Agatu, Guma, Logo, Nimbo, Gwer, Ukum, amongst others. The persistent violent conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State has led the warring parties to acquire arms and recruited ethnic militias for self-defense. The use of sophisticated firearms makes the conflicts more dangerous with unimaginable casualties on both sides. The year 2020 saw further incidents of the clash between farmers and herders in Agatu, and Nimbo communities as well as massive destruction of lives and properties in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State.

Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of out-of-school children in the world, Nigeria and particularly Benue state. For example, UNESCO (2018) reported that more than 258 million children are out of school worldwide. Nigeria's out-of-school children currently stand at 40.8million which has increased astronomically from 10.2 or 10.5million to 15 million later 20 million in the previous years (Akinpelu, 2021). Akinpelu (2021) reported that Benue State accounts for 603,803 which represent 29 percent out of school children and this placed the state on the list of top 10 states with high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria. This may be attributed to the "*no to open grazing*" law of the state as was implemented in 2017 by the state house of assembly, which the herders do not take likely and are reported to have been causing violence since then, killing several thousands of people and destroying houses and farm produce worth billions of naira.

The factors responsible for this increase in the number of out-of-school children may not be clearly known but one could succinctly argue that the challenge of out of school children in Benue state is fueled by ceaseless farmers/herders attacks in several communities partially or holistically, with the number standing at 603,803 children (Akinpelu, 2021). Other factors responsible for the increased number of out of school children may be attributed to child labour, early marriage, kidnapping, natural disasters,

poverty, teenage pregnancy, distances, insecurity, gender, disability, culture, religion among others. Consequently, the increased number of out-of-school children in Benue state can be attributed to some or all of these factors. This issue of out of school children is not only limited to Benue state, other states all over the nation (Nigeria) are also victim of the same scenario.

Consequently, either directly or indirectly, the educational sector or the entire society will be affected by this ugly incident, due to the fact that the affected states and by extension Nigeria at large may lack adequate manpower now and in the future (World Bank 2022), increased crime rate, increased dependency rate, high rate of poverty, inability to contribute meaningfully to the society, among others. The attacks are persistent and continuous and have been targeted at strategic areas. For example, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018, a deadly attack was launched on Guma residents and more than 200 people were killed, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2022, 36 people were killed in Gbeji village of Ukum local government area, 1572 farmers were also reported to have been killed in a period of six (6) years between 2013-2018 by herders in Guma, Logo and other local government areas of Benue state (Gambo, 2019) while 73 herdsmen and 5,000 cattle were claimed to have been killed by native farmers in the state within the same time frame. Also, it was reported by the governor of Benue State that more than 1,878 persons have lost their lives between 2014 and 2016 and over 3920 people died in another heinous herders attack in the State (Yikabs, Kayode, Gambo, & Tsonji 2020).

This grave conflict between farmers and herders has meted several consequences on the people of Benue state, resulting to displacement of people, instilled fear in community members, reduced farm produce, social disunity, closure of markets, restlessness, distortion of peace, destruction of buildings, etc. Also, the conflict destroys public and private assets, thereby decreasing the productive capacity of the firms; aggressions against the population erode human capital by killing and maiming as well as reducing school enrollment, retention, completion and deteriorating the health conditions of the population. Conflict imposes additional costs beyond destruction; increasing uncertainty and risk, conflict forces households and firms to change behaviour to avoid being targeted or to minimize the potential losses after an attack, agricultural producers prefer to cultivate crops of low risk and low returns and households use cattle to cover drops in income (Ibanez, 2016).

The agro-induced conflicts in Benue has impacted negatively on the states' and national economy that the states hardly produce and supply what is their real source of income. The Federal Government of Nigeria was reported to have lost over \$13.7 billion in revenue annually to herder/farmer conflicts (Vanguardngr, 2017) in Benue, Kaduna, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau States, from where harvested crops are transported to other parts of the country. Accordingly, Ortom (2017), asserted that attacks by herders on the farmers had led to community insecurity and cost Benue State N95 billion between 2012 and 2014 for IDPs resettlement and the cost of securing the State from the crisis (FFHR (2017). The report also states that the Agatu communities in Benue State lost over N65 billion in properties during the early 2016 attacks by herders while the herders lost over 200 vows worth more than N100 million. The conflict has thus lowered the income of herders and farmers and increased food insecurity in the affected communities and beyond.

The attempts by the Federal Government and or state governments to curtail the conflict and bring normalcy include creating of grazing routes for the herdsmen in Benue state along other geo-political zones in Nigeria, but this has exposed the complex nature of the problem because while states, including Kano, Katsina and Bauchi States supported it, others, including Benue and Anambra did not (Ventures Africa, 2019). Other measures of containing herders-farmers conflict in North-Central Nigeria included the use of community security by both parties (farmers and herders), provision of security patrol on the attacked communities by the government, financial compensation of the affected farmers and herdsmen. It remains unclear whether the establishment of Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA) settlements for the Fulani herders would have normalized the situation or at least made it

better than it was after the enactment of the anti-grazing law in 2017 (Ndodim & Alagbe, 2021). The program was later changed and renamed Livestock Intervention Program by the federal government but the situation was not palatable to the people of Benue state as they did not accept.

Education is one of the most powerful weapons known for reducing poverty and inequality in every society. It is also used for laying the foundation for a sustainable growth and development in any nation (Domikel & Edward, 2014). According to Bruns, Mingart, and Rakotomalal, (2003) in Aun (2021) primary education is the core of development and progress in modern societies. It is the level of education that develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. In other words, it helps to eradicate illiteracy, which is one of the strongest predictors of poverty. Thus primary education is the only level of education that is available everywhere in both the developed and the developing countries as well as in urban and rural areas. This explains why primary education is the largest and most vital sub-sector of any education system and offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of young ones.

However, there is no doubt that the new era in the history of basic education in Nigeria was opened in September 1976 when the then Head of State, and commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces of Nigeria, Lt General Olusegun Obasanjo officially announced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and declared that every Nigerian child should now regard basic education as his natural heritage, a right and no longer a privilege (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1976). This of course made primary education the sole responsibility of the Federal Government. The aim was to; wipe out illiteracy and evolve a uniform system of education throughout the country; establish a wider base from which secondary schools could draw their entrants; increase manpower needs of the country and also to increase the number of intake in primary schools. Primary school (now basic education) became the base of Nigeria's educational system when the National Policy on Education system is built upon it (Domikel & Edward, 2014). The basic level is therefore the key to the successes or failure of the whole system and as such must be made available, safe and enticing to the pupils, of all kinds regardless of location or any other factor.

Furthermore, it is generally believed and assumed that conflict affects school enrolment wherever it occurs and without enrolment, there will be no retention as well as completion. Accordingly, it is assumed that, enrolment, retention and completion of primary schools in Benue state as a whole and particularly Guma, Logo and Ukum local governments has never been that stable as a result of conflict between the herders and herders which usually makes it impossible for the pupils to complete their primary education since during the conflict some pupils would either be taken to other nearby towns while some parents would even prefer to keep their children at home and alive than to risk their lives in school (Ololo, 2017).

School enrolment means the number of pupils, students or persons admitted in a school at a particular time. Oguche, Haruna and Ikani (2016) see it as the number of pupils or students that schools register over a period of time. In this study, school enrolment is the number of the newly admitted primary one pupils. School enrolment determines the validity of a school: where the enrolment rate is growing, there is hope of continuity but where it is decreasing, the school may fold up or close down. For every new session, it is always expected there will be newly admitted pupils in primary schools same it has been with other institutions of the nation at large and it is also the believe and expectation of every school head and school administrators that the new intake outgrow the previous or subsequent ones but in the midst of crises where even the existing pupils are leaving the schools, how would the new ones be encouraged to join those schools and that is assumed or believed to be the case with majority of the schools in Benue state (especially the rural areas) of Guma, Logo, and Ukum local government areas of Benue state, Nigeria.

Nonetheless, retention means enrolment of pupils or students in a school and their successful completion of same school. It also entails the percentage or number of pupils, students or learners who returned to the same school for their second and or subsequent years. Keeping in mind that pupils' retention is not same as grade or class retention or school persistence (the number of pupils, students or learners who return to school at any other school for completion). Grade retention is when a pupil repeats a grade while pupils' retention is the process of enduring pupils' success or graduation. It is the overall picture. According to Dunlap and Lowental (2010) in some parts of the world and even Nigeria, economy, parental financial status or background amongst others are the factors that results to school persistence or transfer of learners but the case is not completely same with Benue state as most parents are forced into transferring their children or wards to other places or school against their wish due to conflict that had ravaged their area, thus making it impossible for the nearby schools to continue for a period of time. Retaining learners is fundamental to the ability of an institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition (the opposite of retention) is not only a fiscal problem for schools, but a symbolic failure of an institution to achieve its purpose and that is why every school or institution tries its possible best to use some interventions or strategies to curb the menace.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

The herders-farmers conflict remains one of the localized conflicts that has existed and distorted the peace of people for years in Nigeria, having it source from land resource. Despite many years of efforts to resolve the conflict through corporate social organisations and government mediation, committees of enquiry, the law courts, decrees and peace enforcement, the conflict still remains to be resolved. The traditional peaceful co-existence between herders and farmers has recently turned into quarrel and fight, resulting to mistrust and suspicion. Accordingly, both herders and farmers are known to have lived together for decades with issues bordering on land resource amicably resolved. The process at ensuring peace was built around traditional rulers and institutions. The prolonged nature of the conflict and frequent eruption of violent conflict in this area questioned the state and nature of education in the area. That is, with the conflict, it is possible the state and nature of education in the area is interrupted, given that families/children are displaced along with their parents or relations and teachers. Despite the use of several indigenous and other methods to resolve the conflict, the conflict remains unresolved and this is observed to have negative consequences on the basic schools in Benue state and particularly the areas like Guma, Logo and Ukum which serves as the study area.

The peaceful co-existence and harmonious inter group relations between the herders-farmers in the past has gotten tense with increasing escalation of violence due to cutthroat competition for land and water resources which are very central to the socio-economic survival of both parties. The specific farmers' populated town and villages with intense herders-farmers conflict include Jootar, Vaase, Ayilamo, Anyiin, Sev-av, Gbajimba Agasha and Iorza among others where some schools have been closed permanently while others open only when the conflict subsides. The persistent violent conflicts between the farmers and herders in Benue state have led the conflicting parties to acquire arms and recruit ethnic militias for self-defence. The use of sophisticated firearms makes the conflicts more dangerous with unimaginable destruction of the affected communities, particularly in Anyiin, Ayilamo, Sev-av, Jandekyula, Iorza, Agenke, and Agasha, among others, with the death of about 3,000 people between 2014 and 2018 in all the aforementioned communities.

Ololo (2017) in a study stated the consequences of herders-farmers conflict to include drastic loss of skills, manpower needed in all fields, including education, in and out of school behavioural problems, loss of academic community, destruction or damage of educational infrastructures, closure of schools, as well as relocation of schools. Similarly, some schools

have refugee occupying them and some have been demolished and or closed down for the persistent conflict between the farmers and herders. Some schools have been turned to refugee camps for the people who deserted their homes, while other schools have turned to hide outs for either herders or farmers' security guard with tension boiling every now and then and children not being able to access their schools. Some parents have resolved to keeping their children at home than losing them in school all in the name of education whereas others, who are rich or have relations in other areas in the neighbouring towns, villages, or states of Nasarawa, Abuja, and Taraba or Kogi have taken their children or wards to such areas.

Accordingly, there are different academic works on conflict and farmers/herders conflict (David, 2010; Blench, 2010; & Nwanko, 2015, Aun, 2019, Aun 2021, Aun 2023), among others but none of these works has focused on the variables of this present study; are enrolment, retention and completion in Benue state. For instance, David (2010) conducted a study on grading Nigeria's progress in Education where some states, including Benue were affected by conflict in recent days, Blench (2010) study on pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria was broad but not specific about education, and the findings revealed that traditional methods of conflict resolution are more effective. Nwankwo (2015) carried out a study on rhetoric and realities of managing ethno-religious conflict: the Nigerian experience also pointed out consequences of conflict and emphasized that all parties must discourage the primordial sentiments in communities expressed by ethnic and religious groups. However, none of the above studies was focused on school enrolment, retention and completion in Benue state, a gap this study intends to fill. This study, therefore, examines enrolment, retention and completion of basic schools pupils over a period of 10 academic sessions in Benue state, using Guma, Logo and Ukum local government areas which have the highest occurrence of the herders-farmers conflict in the state.

The study investigated the Influence of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' enrolment, retention and completion of basic education in Benue state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study: assess the influence of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' enrolment in basic education in Benue state, Nigeria; examine the influence of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' retention in basic education in Benue state, Nigeria; and investigate the influence of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' completion of basic education in Benue state, Nigeria.

The following questions guided the study: How does herders-farmers conflict influence pupils' enrolment in basic education in Benue state, Nigeria? How does farmers-herders conflict influence pupils' retention in basic schools in Benue state, Nigeria? How does herders-farmers conflict affect pupils' completion of basic education in Benue state, Nigeria?

## **METHODOLOGY**

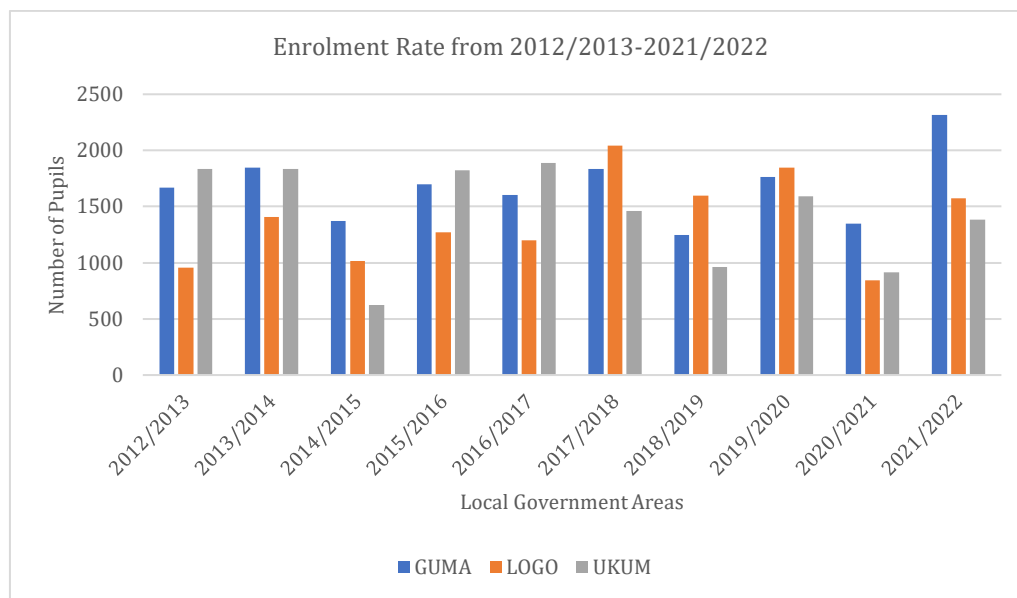
The research design for this study was the ex-post facto design (causal comparative). Bello (2016) sees ex-post facto research as a non-experimental research in which pre-existing groups are compared to see whether independent variables have caused a change in the dependent variable. The population of this study comprised all the 4,486 basic schools in Benue state, Nigeria (UBEC, 2019). To sample the needed population for this study, multistage sampling procedure was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to select three local government areas of Guma, Logo and Ukum where the farmers and herders conflict are predominant and incessant. There are 438 public primary schools in the three local government areas. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 schools from each local government making a total of 30 schools sampled for the study. The research instrument for this study was a profoma. The profoma sample was validate by

experts in the department of social sciences education (measurement and evaluation), faculty of education, university of Ilorin. Thereafter, the researcher went to the Benue State Ministry of Education Board to get data on "Pupils' Enrolment, Retention and Completion of Basic Schools in Benue State, Nigeria". The profoma (see appendix for attached sample of profoma) was used to collect year by year data which was for the duration of the study (2012-2021), showing the rate of enrolment, retention and completion of basic education in the state before, during and after the conflict. Based on the information gathered about each of the basic schools from the State Ministry of Education about the concerned basic schools. Descriptive statistics of tables and graphs was used to analyse the data and the results were presented in tables and graphs for easy interpretation and presentation of the data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### ***Number of pupils enrolled in Basic schools in Guma, Logo and Ukum local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria from 2012/2013-2021/2022***

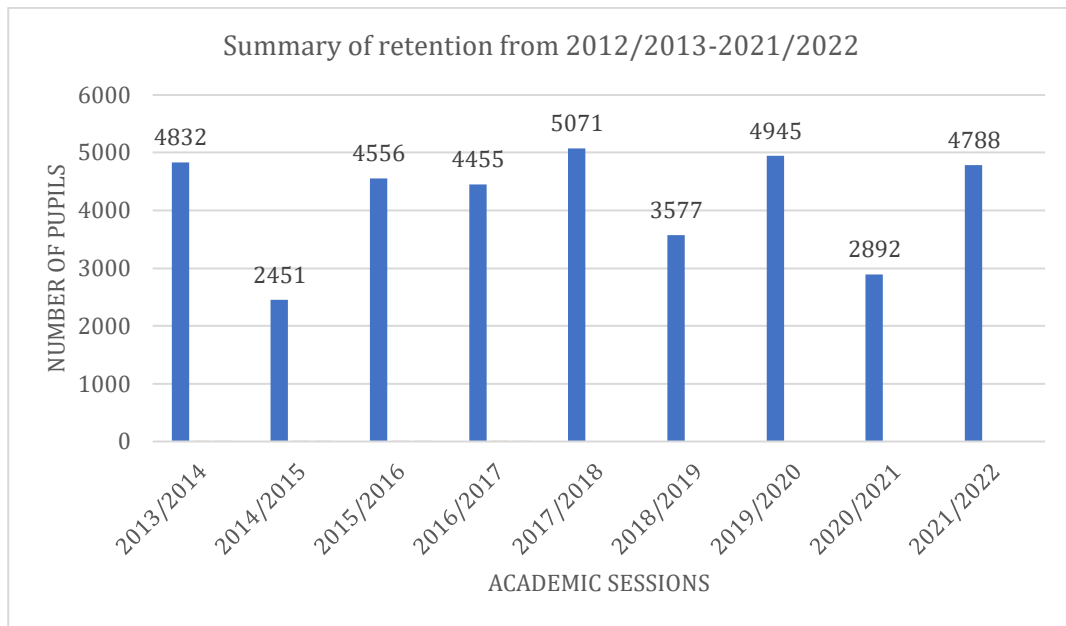


***Source: Fieldwork 2025***

From the figure, it is evident that the number of basic school pupils' enrolment in Guma, Logo and Ukum fluctuates with the conflicting years. Overall, the conflict affected enrolment of basic school pupils in years 2014, 2018 and 2020 with all the three local governments suffering significant decline in enrolment in the above mentioned years.

#### ***Number of pupils retained in Basic schools in Guma, Logo and Ukum local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria between 2012/2013-2021/2022 Academic Sessions***

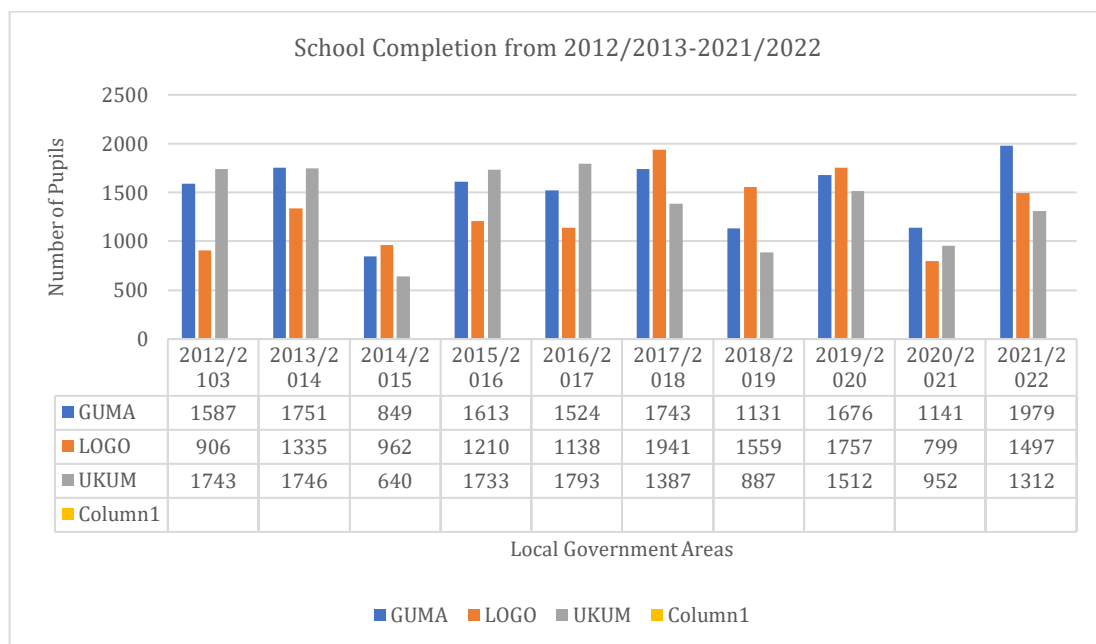




**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

From the figure above, it can be seen that the retention level fluctuates, especially for the 2014/2015 academic session, 2018/2019 academic session and 2020/2021 academic session with the figures decreasing to as low as 2451, 3577 and 2892 respectively.

***Number of pupils who completed Basic schools in Guma, Logo and Ukum local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria between 2012/2013—2021/2022***



**Source: Fieldwork 2023**

As seen above, the information on completion of basic schools in the 30 selected basic schools in the three local government areas of Guma, Logo and Ukum fluctuates at yearly intervals, especially the conflict persistent years of 2014/2015, 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

**Discussion**

The first finding of the study revealed that the number basic school pupils' enrolment in Benue state decreases in proportion to the conflict severity years, especially in years 2014/2015, 2018/2019 and 2020/2021. This is in tandem with the studies of Aun (2021) who stated that, school enrolment depends on certain factors such as its availability, accessibility, and affordability. This implies that, if there are schools in an area void of conflict, such schools will become inaccessible, as the school facilities may be destroyed, burnt down, inhabited by bandits or refugees. The finding also agrees with Avav (2002), Igudia (2018) Pev (2014) Orunoye (2014) and Varella, (2020) whose finding stated that conflict, be it ethnic, communal or whatsoever affects enrolment by causing displacement of learners from their locations that are near the school communities and the schools themselves been shut down, temporarily or converted to homes to house displaced citizens.

The second finding of the study revealed that number of basic school pupils' retention was decreasing in line with the years of conflict severity in the study area as was evident in years 2104, 2018 and 2020. This finding corroborates the studies of Alubo (2006), Oguiche, Haruna and Ikanni (2016), Aluaigba (2012;2015), and Akinpelu (2021) who in different studies but with similar findings affirmed that conflict brings untold hardship to people that some have to relocate to nearby cities, withdraw their children or wards to other schools due to fear of the unknown and even if others insist on staying, the schools may not be accessible hence some teachers may have been killed or seek transfer to other schools or location on the basis of insecurity. That is, some of the pupils who were enrolled in the basic schools in Benue state have left the schools on the basis of insecurity or on account of losing their sponsors or transfer of parents from the said areas to other locations that are devoid of conflict. Also, this finding is in conformity with the findings of Shamyekina (2006) and UNECO (2019) that conflict increases rate of dropouts and reduces academic survival or attainment due to displacement, death, hardship, looking for or engagement in work, joining military or militancy, and other challenges that may accompany the conflict therein. Accordingly, it is believed that this situation may be applicable to the farmers-herders conflict in the study area of Benue state.

The last finding of the study revealed that, the number of basic school pupils who completed basic education in Benue state fluctuates, as they dwindled during the years where the conflict was more severe. This finding is in agreement with Bolarinwa, Oluwakemi and Folorunso (2012), Opiki and Adeleke (2015) Shakya (2011) Ukertor (2016) Ololo (2017), Aun, (2019), Aun (2021) and Aun (2023) who stated in separate studies that conflict results to denied or decreased to schools by prevents opening of schools, threatening children's security which led some to refuse to return to school or education, damaging or destroying educational infrastructures, increasing teachers and learners absenteeism, destruction of learning facilities, killing of parents and or teachers, increased poverty rate, dwindled economy, and what have you. All these are contributory factors to inability of pupils to complete their basic education within stipulated time or throughout their lifetime since some of their sponsors may have been killed or have their sources of income or livelihood destroyed. Contrariwise, this finding contravenes the studies of Miguel and Roland (2006) and Swee (2009) who stated that there was no significance difference in the completion of basic education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that even the bombed areas were not found to have low level of literacy but claimed this was attributed to aid and resources distributed after the conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study examined the influence of herders-farmers conflict on pupils' enrolment, retention and completion of basic schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the herders-farmers conflict influences school enrolment,

retention and completion as this was evident in this study, especially in the persistent years of 2014/2015, 2018/2019 and 2020/2021. The data gathered revealed fluctuating figures on both enrolment, retention and completion in the study area, especially in the three years mentioned above. Some of the schools in the conflict-affected communities shut down, pending the return of peace and normalcy, others moved to nearby areas, thus not allowing them to access education the way they should. Other areas saw total destruction of their homes and schools as well of killing of their parents, or sponsors who made it impossible for them to enroll or become unable to complete their basic education.

Accordingly, it can be deduced or inferred that, the herders-farmers conflict in Benue state, just like every other conflict has had grave consequence on the enrolment, retention as well as completion of basic education of learners as with the made evident in the study area. The plethora of studies as shown above proved that conflict of whatever form has negative impact as was the case with Benue state of Nigeria for the herder and farmers conflict where houses, schools and school properties, farmlands, and even lives were destroyed and some teachers seeking transfer to other locations.

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that; there should be ways of stopping or reducing the influence of the herders-farmers conflict by the state government through provision of lasting solution to the conflict that has taken a new dimension and is on the verge on poisoning the harmonious and smooth relationship between the herders-farmers in the state, through intervention by international communities, federal and the state government as an intermediary so as not to allow the continuous decline in the number of basic school pupils; there should be strategies for retaining basic school pupils so as to ensure they are safe and willing to remain in school, even if they are relocated or moved to refugee camps. Other places where refugees camp during conflict are provided with educational facilities or educational aids to help the children of school age to not miss out on teaching learning process just like their counterparts in the non-conflict areas of the state or the nation at large so that their enrolment would not be affected; the pressing issues that always results to the causes of the conflict should be urgently addressed by the state government and well-meaning individuals to ensure successful completion of basic education by the basic school pupils who were enrolled and are retained, no matter the situation.

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