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GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS ENHANCING BANDITRY AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN RAFI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGER STATE, NIGERIA (2020–2026)

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Abstract

This study examined the geographic factors that enhance banditry and their impact on educational services in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria, between 2020 and 2026. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design complemented by Geographic Information System (GIS) and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) spatial analysis techniques. The population of the study was 320,000, comprising teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and security personnel. A sample size of 384 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire that was validated by experts and pilot-tested with 50 respondents from Tegina. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Frequency counts were used for data analysis to answer the research questions. The study also utilized a Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) map of Rafi Local Government Area to depict vegetation density and identify potential areas favourable to bandit activities. Geographic Information System (GIS) technology was used to map the spatial distribution of terrain within the identified banditry hotspot areas in Rafi LGA, Niger State. The findings revealed that dense forests, poor road networks, and porous community boundaries significantly enhance banditry in Rafi LGA, whereas remote settlements and illegal mining/rural poverty were not identified as major contributing factors. The study also found that banditry negatively affects educational services through increased fear among teachers and students, teacher transfers, reduced student attendance, disruption of teaching and learning activities, and the withdrawal of children from school by parents. The study concluded that geographic factors significantly enhance banditry and undermine educational development. The study recommends that Government and security agencies should increase the deployment of security personnel in identified banditry hotspot areas such as Tegina, Pandogari, and Yakila in order to improve surveillance and rapid response to attacks.

Keywords: Banditry, Geographic Factors, Educational Services, Insecurity, School Closure

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1.0 Introduction

Education is widely recognized as an important tool for national development, human capital formation, and social transformation because it promotes literacy, economic growth, and national stability (5). Educational services involve the activities, facilities, personnel, and instructional processes that support teaching and learning in schools. However, effective educational services require a safe and secure environment. In Nigeria, especially in the northern region, the increasing level of insecurity caused by banditry has seriously disrupted educational activities and threatened access to quality education (6).

Banditry has become one of the major security challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions. It involves criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling, village attacks, and the destruction of property by armed groups (3). Geographic factors such as dense forests, mountainous terrain, poor road networks, scattered settlements, and weak security presence have contributed to the persistence of banditry in many parts of Northern Nigeria (4). These environmental conditions provide hideouts and operational bases for armed groups, making security operations difficult and increasing attacks on rural communities and schools.

Between 2020 and 2026, Niger State, particularly Rafi Local Government Area, became one of the major hotspots of banditry in Nigeria due to its physical environment and strategic location within the insecurity corridor linking Kaduna and Zamfara States. The 2021 attack on Government Science College, Kagara, in which students and staff were abducted, highlighted the severe impact of insecurity on educational services in the area (7). Continuous attacks have led to school closures, displacement of teachers and students, declining school enrolment, and disruption of teaching and learning activities.

Most existing studies have focused largely on poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and ethnic conflicts without adequately examining how physical terrain and spatial characteristics contribute to insecurity. In view of this gap, this study seeks to examine the geographic factors enhancing banditry and its impact on educational services in Rafi Local Government Area, Niger State, Nigeria (2020–2026). The findings are expected to contribute to knowledge by providing empirical evidence on how geographic factors such as dense forests, poor road networks, and porous boundaries enhance banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. It will also

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add to existing literature by showing how banditry disrupts educational services through school closures, reduced attendance, and interruption of teaching and learning activities.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria. Rafi is one of the twenty-five Local Government Areas in the state, with its headquarters located in Kagara. The Local Government Area covers an estimated land area of about 3,680 square kilometers and had a population of approximately 181,929 people according to the 2006 National Population Census. Based on the 3.2% annual growth rate projection of the National Population Commission, the projected population of Rafi LGA is estimated to be about 320,000 people in 2026.

The area is predominantly rural, with farming and trading serving as the major occupations of the people. Rafi shares boundaries with Shiroro, Mariga, and Rijau Local Government Areas, as well as Kaduna and Zamfara States, which are regions affected by insecurity and banditry activities. Geographically, Rafi Local Government Area lies within the Guinea Savannah vegetation belt and is characterized by dense forests, rocky landscapes, scattered settlements, difficult terrain, and poor road networks. These physical features have contributed to the increasing activities of bandits by providing hideouts and making security operations difficult.

The study area was selected due to persistent cases of banditry, kidnapping, and attacks on schools recorded between 2020 and 2026, which have negatively affected educational services and community safety in the area.

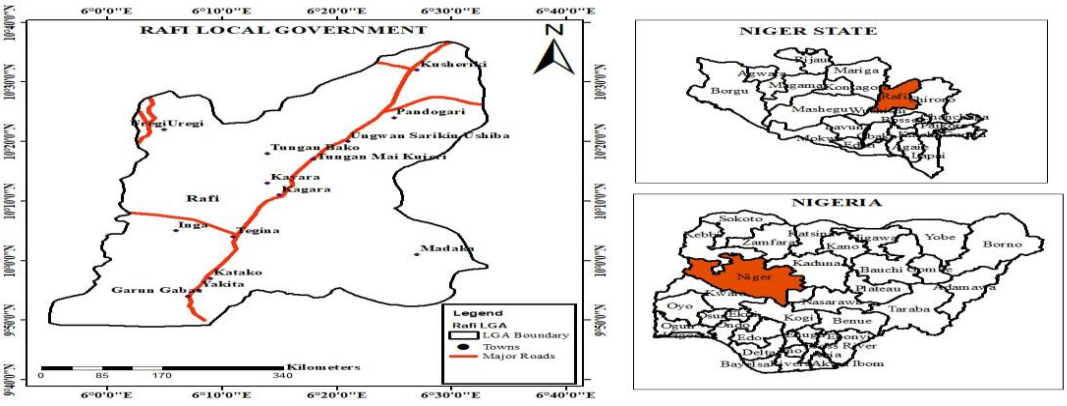

Figure 1: Map of Study Area (Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria)

Source: Department Of Geography (Remote Sensing Unit) FUTMinna .

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2.2 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design complemented by Geographic Information System (GIS) and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) spatial analysis techniques. The survey design enabled the collection of primary data from respondents, while GIS and NDVI were used to analyse spatial patterns of vegetation and banditry hotspots in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The study combined both primary and secondary sources of data to obtain reliable information on insecurity and education-related challenges. Similar approaches have been adopted in studies on banditry and educational disruption in Niger State and Northern Nigeria.

2.3 Population and Sample Size of the Study

The population of the study was 320,000, comprising teachers, school administrators, students, parents, community leaders, and security personnel in Kagara, Yakila, Madaka, Alawa, and Pandogari in Rafi Local Government Area. A sample size of 384 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table. The sample included 95 teachers, 205 students, 44 parents, 20 community leaders, and 20 security personnel drawn from Kagara, Yakila, Madaka, Alawa, and Pandogari in Rafi LGA.

2.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The major instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Geographic Factors and Educational Impact of Banditry Questionnaire (GFEIBQ).” The instrument was validated by experts in Geography, Education, and Research Methodology to ensure clarity, relevance, and suitability. A pilot study was conducted with 50 respondents in Tegina, and the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78, indicating that the instrument was reliable. The study also used a Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) map of Rafi Local Government Area to show vegetation density and identify potential areas favourable to bandit activities. In addition, a Geographic Information System (GIS) map of the terrain was used to identify hotspot areas for banditry activities in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State.

2.5 Data Analysis

The study used frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores to analyse data and provide answers to the research questions. The decision rule was based on a criterion mean of 2.50. Any item with a mean score above 2.50 was accepted, while any item below 2.50 was rejected. A

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3.0 Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What geographic factors enhance banditry in Rafi LGA?

Table 1: Geographic factors enhance banditry in Rafi LGA

S/N	Factors	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Dense forests provide hideouts for bandits	182	124	46	32	3.19	Accepted
2	Poor road networks hinder security operations	170	118	56	40	3.09	Accepted
3	Remote settlements encourage criminal activities	92	84	110	98	2.44	Rejected
4	Porous community boundaries aid bandit movement	164	120	58	42	3.06	Accepted
5	Illegal mining and rural poverty contribute to banditry	88	82	116	98	2.42	Rejected

Criterion Mean = 2.50 Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 presents responses on the extent to which geographic factors enhance banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The findings show that most of the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents that certain geographic conditions contribute to banditry in the area. Specifically, respondents agreed that dense forests provide hideouts for bandits (mean = 3.19), poor road networks hinder security operations (mean = 3.09), and porous community boundaries aid the movement of bandits (mean = 3.06). These results suggest that the physical environment of Rafi LGA plays a significant role in supporting criminal activities by making it difficult for security agencies to access remote areas and respond quickly to attacks.

However, respondents rejected the items stating that remote settlements encourage criminal activities (mean = 2.44) and that illegal mining and rural poverty contribute to banditry (mean = 2.42). This implies that, according to the respondents, these factors were not considered strong direct geographic contributors to banditry in the study area. The cluster of responses indicates that while some geographic factors significantly enhance banditry in Rafi LGA, others are not strongly supported by respondents. The accepted items therefore suggest that physical features such as

forests, poor roads, and porous boundaries are the most influential geographic enablers of bandit activities in the area.

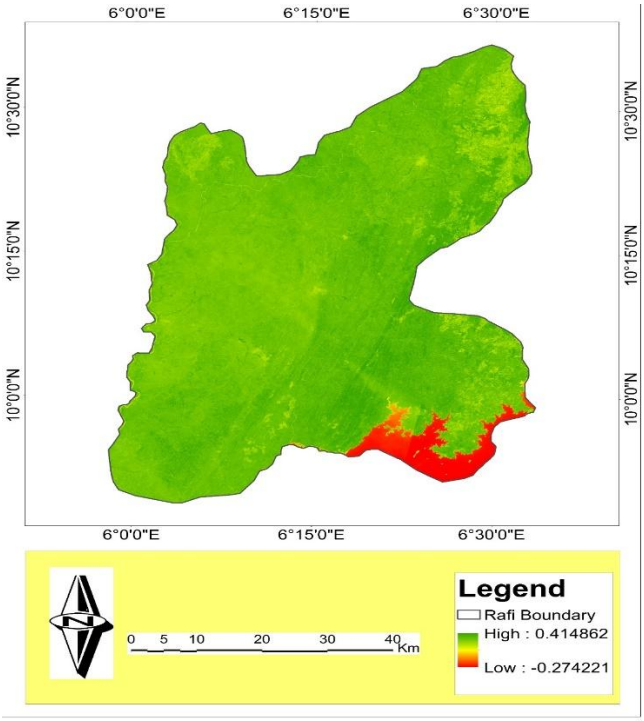

Fig 1: Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) Map of Rafi Local Government Area Showing Vegetation Density and Potential Areas Favorable for Bandit Activities. (Source: USGS Earth Explorer, 2025)

The findings of research question one revealed that geographic factors play a significant role in enhancing banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. Specifically, the study established that dense forests, poor road networks, and porous community boundaries are major environmental conditions that support the activities of bandits. These features provide hideouts, restrict security accessibility, and facilitate the movement of criminal groups across communities. This finding aligns with the view of (4), who observed that difficult terrain and ungoverned forest spaces in Northern Nigeria create safe havens for armed groups and intensify insecurity in rural communities. Similarly, (2) noted that poor infrastructure and weak state presence in remote areas significantly contribute to the persistence of banditry in Nigeria.

In addition, the NDVI analysis of Rafi Local Government Area revealed vegetation values ranging from −0.274 to 0.415, indicating varying vegetation conditions across the study area. Areas with

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moderate to high NDVI values dominate the landscape, suggesting extensive woodland and savanna vegetation cover. These vegetated environments are strongly associated with major banditry hotspots such as Kagara, Tegina, Pandogari, Yakila, and Madaka, where dense vegetation provides concealment, limits surveillance, and facilitates the movement of armed groups. Conversely, areas with lower vegetation density show comparatively reduced levels of banditry activities.

Furthermore, the GIS spatial analysis of terrain-induced banditry hotspots shows that high-risk areas are concentrated around Tegina, Pandogari, and Yakila. These locations are characterized by rugged terrain, dense vegetation, and poor accessibility, which create favourable conditions for bandit activities. The spatial pattern demonstrates that physical geography significantly influences the distribution and persistence of insecurity in Rafi LGA. Overall, the findings confirm that environmental and spatial characteristics jointly contribute to the persistence of banditry and subsequently disrupt educational service delivery across the study area.

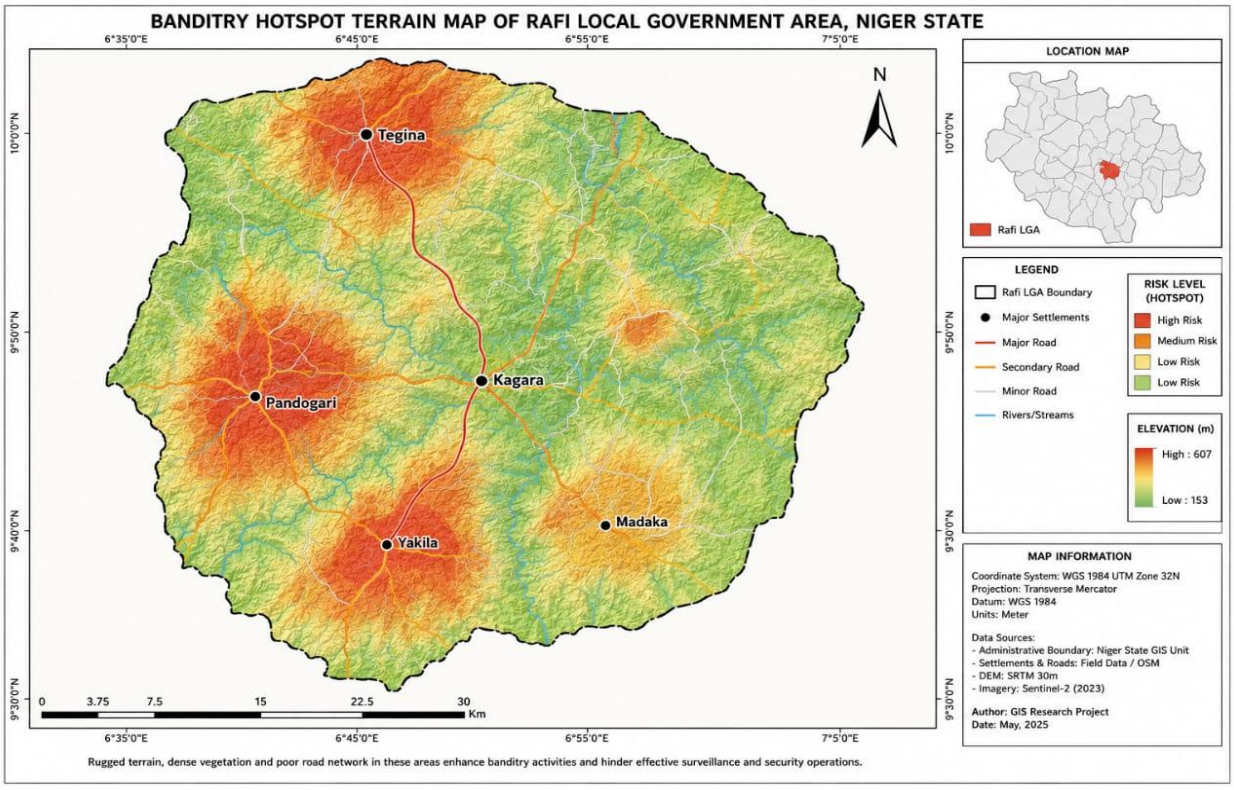

Fig 2: Banditry Hotspot Terrain Map of Rafi LGA, Niger State (Source: Niger State GIS Unit, 2023)

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Research Question 2: What is the effect of banditry on educational services in Rafi LGA?

Table 2: Effect of banditry on educational services in Rafi LGA

S/N	Effects	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Bandit attacks create fear among teachers and students	190	126	38	30	3.24	Accepted
2	Teachers seek transfer from affected schools	182	124	44	34	3.18	Accepted
3	Student attendance has reduced drastically	186	122	42	34	3.20	Accepted

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S/N	Effects	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
4	Teaching and learning activities are disrupted	192	124	38	30	3.25	Accepted
5	Parents are reluctant to send children to school	188	120	44	32	3.21	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50 Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 presents responses on the effect of banditry on educational services in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The results show that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a general agreement among respondents that banditry has significant negative effects on educational services in the study area. Specifically, respondents agreed that bandit attacks create fear among teachers and students (mean = 3.24), teachers seek transfer from affected schools (mean = 3.18), student attendance has reduced drastically (mean = 3.20), teaching and learning activities are disrupted (mean = 3.25), and parents are reluctant to send their children to school (mean = 3.21). These findings suggest that insecurity has created a hostile learning environment that affects both teaching staff and learners. The cluster mean indicates a strong agreement that banditry significantly disrupts educational services in Rafi LGA. The findings imply that insecurity not only affects school attendance and teacher stability but also reduces parental confidence in the safety of schooling, thereby weakening the effectiveness of the educational system in the area.

Research Question 3: What is the extent of school closures due to banditry in Rafi LGA?

Table 3: Extent of school closures due to banditry in Rafi LGA

S/N	Extent of School Closures Due to Banditry	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Many schools were temporarily closed due to attacks	192	128	38	26	3.26	Accepted
2	Some schools remained closed for several months	184	132	40	28	3.22	Accepted
3	Learners were displaced to safer communities	180	136	42	26	3.23	Accepted
4	Academic calendars were frequently disrupted	188	130	38	28	3.25	Accepted
5	Some communities abandoned schools completely	176	138	42	28	3.20	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50 Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 presents responses on the extent of school closures due to banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The findings show that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a general agreement among respondents that banditry has led to significant school closures in the study area. Specifically, respondents agreed that many

schools were temporarily closed due to attacks (mean = 3.26), some schools remained closed for several months (mean = 3.22), learners were displaced to safer communities (mean = 3.23), academic calendars were frequently disrupted (mean = 3.25), and some communities completely abandoned schools (mean = 3.20). These results indicate that insecurity has greatly affected the continuity of academic activities in Rafi LGA. The cluster mean shows a strong agreement that school closures are a major consequence of banditry in the area. This implies that the persistence of insecurity has not only interrupted normal school operations but has also forced displacement of learners and weakened the stability of the educational system in the affected communities.

Research Question 4: What is the solution to banditry in Rafi LGA?

Table 4: Responses on the solution to banditry in Rafi LGA?

S/N	Suggested Solutions to Banditry	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	More security personnel should be deployed	196	128	36	24	3.28	Accepted
2	Road networks and communication systems should be improved	186	136	38	24	3.26	Accepted
3	Community policing should be encouraged	180	140	40	24	3.24	Accepted
4	Security should be provided around schools	194	130	36	24	3.27	Accepted
5	Government should empower youths economically	184	134	40	26	3.23	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50 Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 presents responses on suggested solutions to banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The results show that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a strong agreement among respondents that the listed measures are effective strategies for addressing banditry in the study area. Specifically, respondents agreed that more security personnel should be deployed (mean = 3.28), road networks and communication systems should be improved (mean = 3.26), community policing should be encouraged (mean = 3.24), security should be provided around schools (mean = 3.27), and government should empower youths economically (mean = 3.23). These findings suggest that respondents view both security-based and socio-economic interventions as important in reducing banditry. The cluster mean indicates a high level of acceptance of the proposed solutions. This implies that effective control of banditry in Rafi LGA requires a combination of improved security presence, better infrastructure, community involvement, and youth empowerment to address both the immediate and underlying causes of insecurity

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3.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of research question one revealed that geographic factors play a significant role in enhancing banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. Specifically, the study established that dense forests, poor road networks, and porous community boundaries are major environmental conditions that support the activities of bandits. These features provide hideouts, restrict security accessibility, and facilitate the movement of criminal groups across communities. This finding aligns with the view of (4), who observed that difficult terrain and ungoverned forest spaces in Northern Nigeria create safe havens for armed groups and intensify insecurity in rural communities. Similarly, (2) noted that poor infrastructure and weak state presence in remote areas significantly contribute to the persistence of banditry in Nigeria. In addition, the NDVI analysis of Rafi Local Government Area revealed vegetation values ranging from −0.274 to 0.415, indicating varying vegetation conditions across the study area. Areas with moderate to high NDVI values dominate the landscape, suggesting extensive woodland and savanna vegetation cover. These vegetated environments are strongly associated with major banditry hotspots such as Kagara, Tegina, Pandogari, Yakila, and Madaka, where dense vegetation provides concealment, limits surveillance, and facilitates the movement of armed groups. Conversely, areas with lower vegetation density show comparatively reduced levels of banditry activities. Furthermore, the GIS spatial analysis of terrain-induced banditry hotspots shows that high-risk areas are concentrated around Tegina, Pandogari, and Yakila. These locations are characterized by rugged terrain, dense vegetation, and poor accessibility, which create favourable conditions for bandit activities. The spatial pattern demonstrates that physical geography significantly influences the distribution and persistence of insecurity in Rafi LGA. Overall, the findings confirm that environmental and spatial characteristics jointly contribute to the persistence of banditry and subsequently disrupt educational service delivery across the study area.

The findings of research question 2 found that banditry has severe negative effects on educational services in Rafi LGA. The results showed that insecurity creates fear among teachers and students, leads to teacher transfers, disrupts teaching and learning activities, and reduces parental confidence in sending children to school. These findings are consistent with (6), which reported that insecurity in Northern Nigeria has forced school closures and reduced access to education for thousands of children. The findings also support (5), which emphasized that safe learning environments are

essential for effective educational delivery and improved student outcomes. Therefore, the presence of banditry directly undermines the quality and continuity of education in the study area. The findings of research question 3 revealed that banditry has led to frequent school closures, displacement of learners, and disruption of academic calendars in Rafi LGA. The results indicate that some schools were closed temporarily or for extended periods, while others were completely abandoned in extreme cases. This finding agrees with (7), which reported the closure of several schools in Niger State following major bandit attacks, including the Kagara incident. The study also aligns with (1), which documented widespread displacement of students and disruption of educational systems in conflict-affected communities in Northern Nigeria.

The findings of research question 4 identified several strategies for addressing banditry in the area. Respondents strongly supported increased deployment of security personnel, improvement of road networks and communication systems, promotion of community policing, protection of schools, and youth empowerment. This finding is consistent with (2), which recommended a multi-dimensional approach combining security operations and socio-economic interventions to address insecurity in Nigeria. It also agrees with (8), which emphasized that improving infrastructure and youth employment opportunities can reduce vulnerability to crime. Overall, the findings suggest that addressing banditry in Rafi LGA requires a holistic approach involving both security reinforcement and socio-economic development strategies.

4.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that geographic factors significantly enhance banditry in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. Specifically, dense forests, poor road networks, and porous community boundaries create favourable conditions that support the operations of bandits by providing concealment, limiting security access, and facilitating movement across communities. The NDVI and GIS analyses further confirmed that areas with moderate to high vegetation density and rugged terrain, particularly around Kagara, Tegina, Pandogari, Yakila, and Madaka, are strongly associated with banditry hotspots, indicating a clear spatial relationship between physical geography and insecurity in the study area. The study also concludes that banditry has severe negative effects on educational services in Rafi LGA. It creates fear among teachers and students, leads to teacher transfers, disrupts teaching and learning activities, and reduces parental confidence in sending children to school. Furthermore, banditry has resulted in

frequent school closures, displacement of learners, and disruption of academic calendars, thereby weakening the continuity and quality of education in the area. Finally, the study concludes that addressing banditry in Rafi LGA requires a combination of security measures and socio-economic interventions, as respondents identified increased security presence, improved infrastructure, community policing, school protection, and youth empowerment as key strategies for mitigating insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and security agencies should increase the deployment of security personnel in identified banditry hotspot areas such as Tegina, Pandogari, and Yakila in order to improve surveillance and rapid response to attacks.
2. The government should invest in the construction and rehabilitation of road networks and communication infrastructure in rural communities to improve accessibility and reduce the operational advantage of bandits.
3. Community policing structures should be strengthened to enhance local intelligence gathering and improve collaboration between residents and security agencies in combating insecurity.
4. Special protection measures should be implemented in schools within high-risk areas, including perimeter fencing, security patrols, and emergency response systems to ensure the safety of teachers and students.
5. Government and relevant stakeholders should promote youth empowerment programmes and job creation initiatives to address unemployment, which contributes indirectly to insecurity in the area.
6. A coordinated multi-sectoral approach involving government, security agencies, community leaders, and development partners should be adopted to effectively address both the environmental and socio-economic factors sustaining banditry in Rafi LGA.

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