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SOCIAL COHESION AS A CORRELATE OF SCHOOL SAFETY AMONG RURAL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined social cohesion as a correlate of school safety among rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey of the correlational type was adopted for the study. The population of this study comprised all students in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria, while the target population comprised 59,109 students in six selected rural tertiary institutions. The sample size for this study was 382 students, determined using the Research Advisors (2006) sample size determination table at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for the selection of the sample. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Social Cohesion and School Safety Questionnaire (SCSSQ)" was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85 using Cronbach's Alpha. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study showed that social cohesion was high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with friendly relationships among students being the most prominent aspect. School safety was also very high, with students' sense of safety from physical harm being the most prominent aspect. The study further revealed a significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State. Based on the findings, the study concluded that strengthening social cohesion among students can contribute to sustaining school safety. It was therefore recommended that school management should strengthen activities that promote friendly relationships, mutual support, cooperation, respect, and peaceful resolution of disagreements among students.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, School Safety, Rural Tertiary Institutions, Kwara State.

Introduction

A school is not merely a place where students receive formal instruction; it is a social institution in which individuals interact, develop relationships, share values, and participate in activities that influence collective life. The quality of these interactions can determine whether students and staff experience their educational environment as inclusive, supportive, and secure. Social cohesion therefore represents an important social dimension of educational life because it concerns the relationships, trust, participation, and sense of belonging that connect members of a community. A

cohesive educational environment can encourage cooperation among students, staff, and members of surrounding communities while creating conditions for peaceful coexistence. Education consequently performs both an instructional and social function, as institutional experiences can shape how individuals relate to people from different social backgrounds and participate in collective affairs. Social cohesion connects interpersonal relationships with wider patterns of community cooperation and collective responsibility.

Social cohesion becomes particularly important where educational institutions must respond collectively to social and security challenges. Community connection, belonging, volunteering, trust, and confidence in legitimate institutions constitute important components of cohesive communities (Orazani et al., 2023). Opportunities for positive social contact and cooperative interaction can also strengthen relationships among groups and contribute to more cohesive social environments (Orazani et al., 2023). Within educational settings, a sense of school membership is associated with the development of generalized social trust, particularly where students experience their social environment as fair and predictable (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2023). These relationships are important because trust can encourage individuals to interact openly, seek assistance, and cooperate with others when collective problems arise.

The relevance of social cohesion to school safety arises from the fact that safety is not produced exclusively through physical infrastructure, surveillance systems, or formal security personnel. Trusting relationships can facilitate communication about risks, encourage reporting of suspicious activities, and increase willingness to cooperate with institutional authorities. Student trust in higher education institutions is connected with students' relationships with campus actors and their sense of belonging to the institution (Calderone & Fosnacht, 2023). A strong sense of school membership can similarly provide an important social foundation for generalized trust among students (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2023). Community-level cohesion can also involve mutual trust, communal relationships, and other social connections that influence collective responses to crime and insecurity (Adeleke et al., 2023). School safety can therefore be understood partly as a social outcome shaped by the quality of relationships between institutional members and the communities within which educational institutions operate.

Social cohesion is especially relevant to tertiary institutions because universities and other higher education institutions bring together individuals with different social, cultural, religious, and geographical backgrounds. Such diversity creates opportunities for interaction and learning but also requires mechanisms through which differences can be managed constructively. Positive contact and cooperative relationships are among the approaches identified as capable of strengthening social cohesion (Orazani et al., 2023). Shared educational activities can also promote relational connections between groups by creating opportunities for interaction and cooperation around common institutional experiences (Hughes & Loader, 2023). In addition, students' experiences of belonging and fair treatment can contribute to social trust

within educational communities (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2023). These processes are relevant to safety because students and staff who trust one another and identify with their institution may be more willing to communicate participate in activities designed to protect the wider educational community.

Community trust constitutes one important dimension through which social cohesion can be connected with school safety. Trust involves confidence in the reliability, fairness, and responsiveness of other members of a social environment. Within educational settings, students' experiences of school membership and predictable social relationships are associated with generalized social trust (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2023). In higher education, trust in campus actors also forms part of students' relationship with their institutions and their sense of belonging (Calderone & Fosnacht, 2023). At the wider community level, mutual trust constitutes one of the social cohesion variables associated with crime-control processes in rural Nigerian communities (Adeleke et al., 2023). Community trust may therefore facilitate the exchange of security information, strengthen cooperation between institutions and residents, and encourage stakeholders to respond collectively when threats emerge. Weak trust, by contrast, may create communication barriers and reduce willingness to cooperate with institutional security structures.

Community collective participation represents another dimension of social cohesion relevant to school safety. Collective participation involves the active involvement of institutional and community members in activities and initiatives that affect their shared welfare. Social cohesion interventions are more likely to be strengthened when individuals experience positive contact, participation, and stronger social connections (Orazani et al., 2023). Shared education also demonstrates how organised interaction and cooperation can develop relational dimensions of cohesion across groups (Hughes & Loader, 2023). In rural Nigerian communities, social cohesion has been examined through information networks, mutual trust, and collective relationships that intersect with approaches to crime control (Adeleke et al., 2023). For rural tertiary institutions, collective participation may therefore include cooperation among students, staff, community leaders, residents, and security stakeholders in identifying risks, sharing information, promoting vigilance, and responding to safety concerns.

Community perception provides a further dimension through which social cohesion may relate to school safety. Members of a host community develop perceptions concerning the institution's activities, conduct and relationship with surrounding residents. Positive perceptions can encourage identification with the institution and strengthen willingness to cooperate, whereas negative perceptions may weaken institutional-community relationships. Students' trust in higher education institutions has been linked with their relationships with campus actors and demonstrating the importance of how institutional relationships are experienced and interpreted (Calderone & Fosnacht, 2023). At the community level, cohesion involves shared relationships and common networks that can influence collective approaches to security (Adeleke et al., 2023). Community perception is consequently relevant because the way

stakeholders perceive an institution may influence their willingness and participate in measures designed to maintain safety.

The rural context gives particular significance to the relationship between social cohesion and school safety because rural tertiary institutions may have close and continuous interactions with their host communities. Rural communities often constitute important social environments surrounding educational institutions, making relationships between residents and institutional members relevant to information sharing, cooperation, and collective responses to threats. Evidence from rural Nigerian communities demonstrates that social cohesion encompasses mutual trust, communal cohesion, shared information networks, and other relationships that interact with crime-control processes (Adeleke et al., 2023). These considerations make rural tertiary institutions an important setting for examining whether community trust, community collective participation, and community perception are associated with school safety. The issue becomes particularly important where formal security resources are constrained and institutions depend partly on relationships with surrounding communities.

The Nigerian educational environment provides a significant context for this discussion because insecurity has created serious challenges for the continuity and quality of education in several parts of the country. Banditry in Northern Nigeria has been associated with student abductions, ransom demands, and threats to educational activities, creating substantial challenges for students, educational institutions, and security authorities (Ebonine, 2022). Exposure to collective violence in Northern Nigeria has also been associated with conditions affecting students' well-being, and persistence, demonstrating that insecurity can extend beyond immediate physical threats to influence educational experiences (Shockden et al., 2023). These circumstances demonstrate why school safety should be considered not only in terms of physical protection but also in relation to the social conditions that enable educational communities to respond collectively to insecurity.

Kwara State provides a relevant setting for examining this relationship, particularly within rural tertiary institutions whose operations are closely connected with surrounding communities. Although the intensity and form of security threats may vary across locations, the social environment surrounding an institution can influence the availability of local information, community support and cooperation with institutional authorities. Rural Nigerian evidence demonstrates that mutual trust, and information networks are important components of social cohesion that intersect with crime-control processes (Adeleke et al., 2023). Evidence from Northern Nigeria further demonstrates that insecurity can disrupt educational environments through threats such as banditry and student abduction (Ebonine, 2022). Students living under prolonged collective violence may also experience consequences for well-being, academic engagement, and persistence (Shockden et al., 2023). These findings establish the importance of examining the social conditions that may contribute to safer educational environments while recognising that evidence from other Nigerian contexts cannot automatically be generalised to rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Tertiary institutions require safe and supportive environments in which teaching, learning, research, and social interaction can take place effectively. Social cohesion can contribute to such environments by strengthening trust, participation, communication, and collective responsibility among institutional members and host communities. Community trust facilitates information sharing and cooperation, while collective participation can support joint responses to security concerns. Social cohesion in rural Nigerian communities has also been associated with mutual trust, communal relationships, information networks, and crime-control processes (Adeleke et al., 2023). Similarly, trust and a sense of institutional belonging are important aspects of students' relationships within higher education environments (Calderone & Fosnacht, 2023; Rinnooy Kan et al., 2023).

Despite these positive possibilities, security challenges continue to threaten educational environments in Nigeria. Banditry, kidnapping, and collective violence have disrupted educational experiences and affected students' well-being and academic engagement (Ebonine, 2022; Shockden et al., 2023). Existing studies have examined social cohesion, trust, insecurity, and educational safety from different perspectives, but important gaps remain. Orazani et al. (2023) focused on interventions for strengthening social cohesion, while Adeleke et al. (2023) examined social cohesion and crime-control strategies in rural communities. Calderone and Fosnacht (2023) examined trust in higher education, whereas Ebonine (2022) and Shockden et al. (2023) focused on insecurity and educational experiences. However, limited evidence specifically establishes the relationship between community trust, community collective participation, community perception, and school safety among rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State. In order to fill this gap, this study seek to examine social cohesion as a correlate of school safety among rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined social cohesion as a correlate of school safety among rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. ascertain the level of social cohesion in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria;
2. examine the level of school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria; and
3. determine the relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of social cohesion in rural tertiary institutions in kwara state, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara state, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide this study.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlational type to examine the relationship between social cohesion and school safety among students in rural institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect quantitative data from students without manipulating the variables under investigation. The population for this study comprised all students in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State while the target population comprised 59,109 students in six selected rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, namely Kwara State University, Malete; Landmark University, Omu-Aran; Thomas Adewumi University, Oko-Irese; Ahman Pategi University, Patigi; Kwara State College of Education (Technical), Lafiag; and Kwara State College of Education, Oro. The institutions were selected based on their location in rural area of Kwara State.

A sample size of 382 students was determined using the Research Advisors (2006) sample size determination table based on the target population of 59,109 students, at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. At the first stage, the six institutions were purposively selected based on their location in rural or predominantly semi-rural communities in Kwara State. At the second stage, proportionate sampling technique was used to allocate the 382 respondents to the six institutions based on their respective student populations. At the third stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from the students in each institution, thereby providing each eligible student with an equal chance of being selected for the study. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled: Social Cohesion and School Safety Questionnaire (SCSSQ).

The instrument consisted of Section A, which measured social cohesion, and Section B, which measured school safety. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale of Very High Level (VHL), High Level (HL), Low Level (LL), Very Low Level (VLL). The mean rating of the item is 1.00-1.74 (VLL), 1.75-2.49 (LL), 2.50-3.24 (HL), 3.25-4.00 (VHL). For the hypothesis that were tested, if the significant value was less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis that were rejected.

The instrument was validated for face and construct validity by three lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, who examined the relevance, clarity, suitability, and adequacy of the items in relation to social cohesion and school safety. A pilot test involving 20 students from a tertiary institution outside the selected rural institutions in Kwara State was conducted using the internal consistency method to determine the reliability of the instrument and ensure that the questionnaire items were clear and appropriate without influencing the main study population. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Data collection for the main study was carried out after obtaining permission from the selected institutions and informed consent from the respondents. The comprises of the questionnaire were administered to the

sampled students and retrieved immediately after completion. The data collected were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the research hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What is the level of social cohesion in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1: *Distribution of the Respondents on the Level of Social Cohesion in Rural Tertiary Institutions*

ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
Students maintain friendly relationships with one another despite differences in background.	3.39	VHL
Students willingly support one another when they face academic or personal difficulties.	3.04	HL
Students cooperate with one another when participating in academic and extracurricular activities.	3.03	HL
Students respect one another's opinions even when they have different views.	3.13	HL
Students work together to resolve disagreements and maintain peaceful relationships.	3.07	HL
Average Mean	**3.13**	**High**

Source: Field Survey, (2026)

Table 1 showed the level of social cohesion in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. From Table 1, it was observed that the mean scores of all the questionnaire items were above 2.5, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed with the statements. Specifically, most respondents ($\bar{X}$ = 3.39, SD = 0.669) indicated that students maintain friendly relationships with one another despite differences in background. Respondents also agreed that students willingly support one another when they face academic or personal difficulties ($\bar{X}$ = 3.04, SD = 0.891) and cooperate with one another during academic and extracurricular activities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.03, SD = 0.818). Furthermore, respondents agreed that students respect one another's opinions despite having different views ($\bar{X}$ = 3.13, SD = 0.768) and work together to resolve disagreements and maintain peaceful relationships ($\bar{X}$ = 3.07, SD = 0.738). In addition to that, Finding showed that the level of social cohesion is high with the average mean score of 3.13. Thus, this study revealed that social cohesion is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with friendly relationships among students being the most prominent aspect.

Research Question Two: What is the level of school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara state, Nigeria?

Table 2: *Distribution of the Respondents on the Level of School Safety in Rural Tertiary Institutions*

ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
1. I feel safe from physical harm while moving around this institution.	3.49	VHL
2. The institution has adequate security measures to protect students from threats and criminal activities.	3.43	VHL
3. Students can report safety or security concerns to the appropriate authorities without difficulty.	3.44	VHL
4. The institution responds promptly when situations that may threaten students' safety occur in the institution premises.	3.39	VHL
5. I feel safe attending lectures and other academic activities within this institution.	3.33	VHL
Average Mean	**3.42**	**VHL**

Source: Field Survey, (2026)

Table 2 showed the level of school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. From Table 2, it was observed that the mean scores of all the questionnaire items were above 2.5, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed with the statements. Specifically, most respondents ($\bar{X}$ = 3.49, SD = 0.667) indicated that they feel safe from physical harm while moving around their institution. Respondents also agreed that their institutions have adequate security measures to protect students from threats and criminal activities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.43, SD = 0.639) and that students can report safety or security concerns to the appropriate authorities without difficulty ($\bar{X}$ = 3.44, SD = 0.615). Furthermore, respondents agreed that their institutions respond promptly when situations that may threaten students' safety occur on the premises ($\bar{X}$ = 3.39, SD = 0.669) and that they feel safe attending lectures and other academic activities within their institutions ($\bar{X}$ = 3.33, SD = 0.807). Finding showed that, the various forms of level of school safety is very high with average mean score of 3.42. Thus, this study revealed that school safety is very high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with students' sense of safety from physical harm being the most prominent aspect.

Research Hypothesis One:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 3: *Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Social Cohesion and School Safety in Rural Tertiary Institutions*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-cal	Sig.	Remark
Social Cohesion	382	3.13	2.52	380	0.408	0.000	Rejected
School Safety	382	3.42	2.31				

*Significant at P<0.05; Source: Field Survey, (2026)

Table 3 showed that the r-cal is 0.408 and the p-value is 0.000, which is lesser than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that "there is no significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria" is hereby rejected. Thus, this study revealed that there is significant relationship between social cohesion and

school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The data collected from the respondents was analyzed using Mean to answer the research questions, PPMC to test the research hypothesis. The following were the outcome of the findings:

1. This study revealed that social cohesion is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with friendly relationships among students being the most prominent aspect.
2. This study revealed that school safety is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with students' sense of safety from physical harm being the most prominent aspect.
3. This study revealed that there is significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study revealed that social cohesion is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with friendly relationships among students being the most prominent aspect. This finding is consistent with Gentry et al. (2025), whose systematic review identified social cohesion, social participation, social trust, social values, and social communication as important dimensions through which social capital is assessed among students in higher education. The prominence of friendly relationships in the present study therefore reflects the interpersonal and relational components of cohesion within tertiary institutions. The finding also agrees with Avcı (2023), who established that social connectedness contributes significantly to university students' sense of belonging, while belonging is associated with positive student outcomes. Positive interactions among students can create opportunities for mutual support, cooperation, respect, and inclusion within the institution. Similarly, Graupensperger et al. (2019) linked social cohesion and peer acceptance with students' social and behavioural outcomes, reinforcing the importance of cohesive peer relationships in student communities.

This study revealed that school safety is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, with students' sense of safety from physical harm being the most prominent aspect. Olaifa et al. (2024) investigates the school security measures and staff job performance at public secondary schools located in Ilorin Metropolis, which is situated in Kwara state, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey research design of the ex post facto. A sample of 20 public senior secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis was selected purposively from three local governments in Ilorin. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between the school security measures and staff job performance at public secondary schools located in Ilorin Metropolis. The study ensuring that school safety implies freedom from risk, protection of lives and properties of the school members and the school, and reduction of intra and inter-school conflict while upholding quality education. This finding is consistent with Zuilkowski and Marty (2021), who examined students' perceptions of school safety in northeast Nigeria and established that students' perceptions of safety were an important

dimension of their educational experiences within a context affected by prolonged conflict. The present finding similarly demonstrates that students' subjective sense of safety is an important component of the safety conditions within educational institutions. The finding also agrees with Williams et al. (2018), who found that students' perceptions of safety were associated with positive student relationships, teacher relationships, consistent rules, school environmental conditions, and students' sense of belonging. Institutional safety is therefore not determined solely by physical security arrangements but also by the social and organisational environment experienced by students. Likewise, Moore et al. (2022) found that student-reported school climate encompassed dimensions of safety, physical safety, mutual respect, and belonging, highlighting the importance of both environmental and relational conditions in students' experiences of safety.

This study revealed that there is a significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety in Rural Tertiary Institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Moss et al. (2024), who found that resources and cooperation among young people contributed to perceptions and experiences of safety in high-violence communities. Although their study was conducted in a community setting rather than tertiary institutions, the finding supports the view that cooperation and connectedness can contribute to safer social environments. The relationship identified in the present study may therefore be explained by the capacity of socially cohesive students to support one another, share information about potential threats, cooperate during difficult situations, and collectively respond to safety concerns. Similarly, Pinchak (2024) found that school social organisation and friendship networks were associated with patterns of adolescent violence, demonstrating that the structure and quality of peer relationships can influence safety-related outcomes within educational environments. Thus, the significant relationship obtained in this study suggests that strengthening social cohesion among students may complement formal security measures in promoting safer rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

Conclusion

This study established that social cohesion is high in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. Students maintain friendly relationships, support one another, cooperate in activities, respect different opinions, and work together to resolve disagreements. The study also established that school safety is high, as students generally feel safe from physical harm and perceive adequate security measures within their institutions. Furthermore, the study found a significant relationship between social cohesion and school safety. This implies that positive relationships and cooperation among students can contribute to a safer school environment. Therefore, strengthening social cohesion among students is important for promoting and sustaining school safety in rural tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were suggested;

1. School management should sustain and strengthen activities that promote friendly relationships, mutual support, cooperation, respect, and peaceful resolution of disagreements among students.
2. School management of rural tertiary institutions should sustain and strengthen existing physical security measures while improving other dimensions of school safety to ensure a consistently safe and secure learning environment.
3. School management should strengthen social cohesion through collaboration, mutual trust, inclusiveness, and positive relationships among students, staff, and the host community to further enhance school safety in rural tertiary institutions.

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