

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY IN ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISRUPTIONS AMONG OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The educational disruptions faced by out-of-school children in Kogi State, Nigeria, are deeply rooted in the region's socio-economic challenges, including poverty, insecurity, and cultural barriers. These factors are compounded by the traumatic experiences that many children endure, such as exposure to violence and displacement. Trauma significantly impacts these children's educational prospects, leading to disengagement from the school system and perpetuating a cycle of poverty and underachievement. Addressing these disruptions requires innovative approaches, with trauma-informed pedagogy emerging as a promising strategy. This approach emphasises creating a safe, supportive, and responsive learning environment tailored to the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Implementing trauma-informed pedagogy in Kogi State could be crucial in mitigating the adverse effects of trauma on learning and encouraging re-engagement with education. The approach has been shown to enhance students' engagement, reduce behavioural issues, and improve academic performance. Furthermore, it benefits educators by reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction. However, successful implementation requires a comprehensive, collaborative effort involving professional development, integration into school policies, and community involvement. Adopting trauma-informed pedagogy in Kogi State has the potential to significantly improve the educational outcomes of out-of-school children, fostering their long-term well-being and success.

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**Keywords:** Trauma-informed pedagogy, effectiveness, educational disruptions, out-of-school children

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### **Introduction**

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental driver of human development and social transformation. It provides individuals with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities required to break free from poverty, contribute meaningfully to society, and live fulfilling lives. Yet, for many children in Nigeria, and particularly in Kogi State, access to education is frequently disrupted by socio-economic, cultural, and security-related challenges. Out-of-school children in the state are among the most vulnerable groups, often trapped in cycles of deprivation that undermine their chances of educational attainment. These disruptions are further intensified when children are exposed to traumatic experiences such as violence, displacement, abuse, or chronic poverty, all of which have severe consequences for their learning and personal development. The issue of educational disruption among out-of-school children in Kogi State cannot be understood in isolation from the traumatic realities that shape their daily lives. Traumatic experiences have profound implications for children's emotional stability, concentration, memory, and social interaction. When left unaddressed, trauma can erode a child's motivation to attend school, diminish self-confidence, and increase the likelihood of behavioural difficulties. Research has shown that trauma not only undermines academic performance but also threatens long-term wellbeing, perpetuating cycles of underachievement and exclusion

(Bethell, Gombojav, Solloway, & Wissow, 2017). In a state like Kogi, where socio-economic instability and insecurity are prevalent, trauma becomes a critical factor influencing whether children can engage effectively with formal education.

In response to these challenges, trauma-informed pedagogy has gained recognition as a viable educational strategy for mitigating the adverse effects of trauma on learning. Trauma-informed pedagogy refers to an approach that acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma, understands its effects on learners, and integrates this understanding into teaching methods, classroom management, and school culture. It emphasises safety, trust, inclusiveness, empowerment, and empathy as cornerstones of effective teaching. By adopting trauma-sensitive principles, teachers create learning environments where children feel secure, supported, and capable of learning despite past adversities (Cavanaugh, 2016). In contexts such as Kogi State, where many children face significant trauma, this approach could be a transformative tool in re-engaging out-of-school children and reducing educational disruptions. Evidence from prior research demonstrates the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices in improving learning outcomes. Studies have indicated that students in trauma-informed classrooms show greater engagement, fewer behavioural problems, and improved academic performance (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). These findings are particularly significant for out-of-school children in Kogi State, whose disrupted learning journeys leave them at risk of academic regression and social exclusion. Through trauma-informed pedagogy, such children can be supported to rebuild resilience, develop coping skills, and reconnect with formal education in a safe and nurturing environment.

Trauma-informed pedagogy also has implications for teachers. Educators working with traumatised learners often face unique challenges that may lead to frustration, stress, and professional burnout. However, when teachers are adequately trained in trauma-sensitive practices, they are better equipped to manage classroom dynamics, address behavioural issues, and provide meaningful support to vulnerable learners. This not only improves students' outcomes but also enhances teachers' job satisfaction and professional effectiveness (Berardi & Morton, 2019). In Kogi State, where schools frequently operate under resource constraints, the empowerment of teachers through trauma-informed training becomes a crucial factor in sustaining educational progress. Regardless of its potential, the successful adoption of trauma-informed pedagogy in Kogi State requires a systemic and collaborative approach. Training and continuous professional development for teachers are essential, as is the integration of trauma-sensitive principles into school policies and practices. Equally important is the involvement of parents, community leaders, counsellors, and policymakers in creating a supportive ecosystem around children's education. Without such holistic engagement, efforts to re-engage out-of-school children may fall short of addressing the deep-seated issues that disrupt their learning (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018).

Hence, against this backdrop, this study examines the effectiveness of trauma-informed pedagogy in addressing educational disruptions among out-of-school children in Kogi State, Nigeria. The study is driven by the recognition that trauma-informed approaches hold the potential to restore learning, resilience, and inclusion among vulnerable children. By empirically investigating this approach, the research seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can inform teachers, schools, policymakers, and

development partners in their efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable education for all.

### **Conceptualizations**

Trauma-informed pedagogy is an educational approach that incorporates an understanding of trauma and its profound effects into teaching practices. This approach is crucial, particularly in contexts where students have experienced significant trauma that impacts their ability to learn, interact socially, and engage within an academic setting. Trauma can arise from various sources, including abuse, neglect, loss, violence, or other significant life changes. Educators who adopt trauma-informed pedagogy are better equipped to support these students, enabling them to thrive both academically and socially in the classroom. The foundation of this approach lies in the recognition that traditional teaching methods may not be effective for all students, especially those who have endured trauma, and that creating a safe, supportive, and responsive learning environment is essential for fostering their academic success (Alisic, 2020). In regions like Kogi State, where many children face challenging socio-economic conditions, trauma is a prevalent issue.

Trauma-informed pedagogy is very significant in implementing educational activities. It is an educational approach that acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma on students and integrates this understanding into teaching practices to foster a supportive learning environment (Cavanaugh, 2016). This approach emphasises the importance of creating safe, trusting, and inclusive classrooms that recognise and respond to the specific needs of students who have experienced trauma, aiming to enhance their educational outcomes and overall well-being (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2019). By incorporating principles such as safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed pedagogy seeks to not only mitigate the negative effects of trauma on learning but also to promote resilience and academic success among all students, particularly those from marginalised or vulnerable backgrounds (Carello & Butler, 2015). These principles may be of great help to out-of-school children.

Trauma-informed pedagogy is particularly relevant to out-of-school children in Kogi State, a region often plagued by insecurity, poverty, and educational disruptions. Many of these children have experienced significant trauma, which can have a profound impact on their ability to learn and succeed academically. By implementing trauma-informed practices, educators can create safe and supportive learning environments that address the emotional and psychological needs of these children (Craig, 2016). This approach not only helps in re-engaging out-of-school children with education but also promotes healing and resilience, thereby reducing the likelihood of further educational disruption (Ginwright, 2018). In a context like Kogi State, where the challenges of insecurity and economic instability are prevalent, trauma-informed pedagogy offers a vital strategy for ensuring that all children have the opportunity to access quality education, rebuild their lives, and contribute to the future development of the region.

Moreover, the situation of out-of-school children in Kogi State exemplifies the need for trauma-informed pedagogy. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, with Kogi State contributing significantly to this statistic. Many of these children are out of school due to poverty, violence, or other forms of trauma that have disrupted their educational experiences. For those who eventually return to school, the transition can be challenging, as they often bring with them the effects of trauma, which can manifest as learning difficulties, behavioural issues, or emotional distress

(UNICEF, 2022). By implementing trauma-informed practices, educators in Kogi State can create environments that address the unique needs of these children, helping to reintegrate them into the educational system and supporting their long-term academic and personal development.

### **Principles of Trauma-Informed Pedagogy**

The principles of trauma-informed pedagogy serve as the foundation for creating educational environments that are sensitive to the needs of students who have experienced trauma. These principles guide educators in fostering a safe, supportive, and inclusive classroom atmosphere that not only facilitates academic learning but also promotes emotional healing and resilience (Carello & Butler, 2015; Berardi & Morton, 2019). By integrating these principles into daily teaching practices, educators can better support the holistic development of all students, particularly those whose learning has been disrupted by trauma (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019). Some of the principles of trauma-informed pedagogy are as follows:

**Safety:** A fundamental aspect of trauma-informed pedagogy is creating a learning environment that prioritises physical and emotional safety for students. Safety is essential for effective learning, as students are more likely to engage, participate, and take academic risks when they feel secure. This involves establishing clear rules, consistently enforcing boundaries, and being mindful of the classroom's physical setup. Emotional safety is also crucial, requiring educators to recognise signs of trauma and foster an atmosphere of respect, value, and non-judgment (Porges, 2017). A secure environment can alleviate anxiety and stress, which are often heightened in students who have experienced trauma.

**Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Trust is a critical element in trauma-informed pedagogy, built through clear communication and consistent, reliable interactions between educators and students. Students who have experienced trauma may find it challenging to trust others due to past betrayals or harm. Therefore, educators must be intentional in building and maintaining trust by being predictable, keeping promises, and transparently sharing information about classroom activities and expectations. These practices help reduce the anxiety that can arise from uncertainty or unexpected changes (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018). Establishing trust creates a foundation where students feel safe, supported, and open to learning.

**Peer Support and Collaboration:** Trauma-informed pedagogy highlights the importance of peer support and collaboration in the learning environment. Positive peer relationships foster a sense of belonging and community, which is especially important for students who may feel isolated due to their trauma. Collaborative activities, such as group projects and peer mentoring, encourage students to work together, share ideas, and support each other academically and emotionally. These interactions can help students develop social skills, build confidence, and learn to trust others in a controlled environment. Educators can promote a supportive peer culture by modelling positive interactions, encouraging inclusivity, and addressing conflicts when they arise (Bryant, 2019). Hence, this may foster a sense of control over their learning.

**Empowerment and Choice:** Empowering students is a key aspect of trauma-informed pedagogy. It involves providing students with choices and fostering a sense of control over their learning, which can be particularly important for those who have experienced trauma and may feel powerless. By offering choices in learning approaches—such as selecting project topics, choosing reading materials, or deciding how to demonstrate understanding—educators help students regain a sense of agency and

confidence. Empowering students helps them develop critical decision-making skills (Craig, 2016). Moreover, recognising and validating students' experiences, strengths, and perspectives boosts their self-esteem and resilience.

**Cultural, Historical, and Gender Sensitivity:** Trauma-informed pedagogy also requires educators to be sensitive to the diverse cultural, historical, and gender-related experiences of their students. This awareness is crucial because students from marginalised communities may face additional trauma due to systemic racism, discrimination, or historical injustices. Similarly, gender-based trauma, such as sexual violence or discrimination, can significantly impact a student's sense of safety and well-being in the classroom. Educators must strive to create an inclusive environment that acknowledges these issues and provides support tailored to the unique needs of each student (Ginwright, 2018). This commitment involves ongoing professional development, self-reflection, and a dedication to equity and justice in education.

### **Impact of Trauma on Learning and out-of-school children in Kogi State**

The impact of trauma on learning and the prevalence of out-of-school children in Kogi State is a multifaceted issue that requires a nuanced understanding and approach. Children who have experienced trauma due to violence, displacement, or economic instability face significant barriers to their educational progress. These challenges are emotional and cognitive, but also behavioural and social, all of which can contribute to a child leaving school prematurely. Addressing these challenges is critical to curbing the growing number of out-of-school children in Kogi State and ensuring that all children have access to a supportive and effective learning environment.

**Emotional Dysregulation:** One of the most immediate effects of trauma on children is emotional dysregulation. Children who have experienced trauma may struggle with heightened anxiety, anger, or sadness, making it difficult for them to focus on learning. These emotional challenges can lead to difficulties in concentrating on schoolwork, participating in classroom activities, and maintaining consistent attendance (Cavanaugh, 2016). In Kogi State, where many children face ongoing stressors such as poverty and insecurity, the impact of emotional dysregulation can be particularly severe, contributing to a higher dropout rate as children find it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of school.

**Cognitive Impairments:** Trauma can significantly impair cognitive functions, including memory, attention, and problem-solving abilities. These cognitive deficits can make it challenging for children to grasp new concepts, retain information, and perform well academically (Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016). For out-of-school children in Kogi State, the lack of access to a stable and supportive educational environment exacerbates these cognitive challenges. Without adequate intervention, these children are at a higher risk of falling further behind their peers, perpetuating a cycle of academic failure and disengagement from the educational system.

**Behavioural Issues:** Behavioural problems are another common manifestation of trauma in children. Trauma can lead to aggression, withdrawal, defiance, and other behavioural issues that disrupt the learning process (Oehlberg, 2017). In the context of Kogi State, where resources for addressing behavioural issues may be limited, these challenges can quickly escalate, leading to disciplinary actions that push children further away from the school environment. The absence of trauma-informed approaches in schools can result in a lack of understanding and support for these children, increasing the likelihood that they will leave school entirely.

**Social and Interpersonal Challenges:** Trauma can also affect a child's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships with peers and teachers. Out-of-school children may struggle with trust, collaboration, and engagement in social activities, which are essential components of the learning process (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). In Kogi State, community and family support systems are often strained by economic and social pressures. These social challenges could further isolate children, making it difficult for them to re-enter the educational system or succeed.

### **Effective implementation of trauma-informed pedagogy in Kogi State**

Implementing trauma-informed pedagogy in Kogi State is a critical step towards addressing the high number of out-of-school children in the region. Trauma-informed pedagogy emphasises creating a learning environment that is sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of students, particularly those who have experienced trauma. In Kogi State, many children face adverse conditions such as poverty, violence, and instability, which contribute to their disengagement from school. By adopting trauma-informed practices, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that encourages these children to return to school and remain engaged in their studies (Berardi & Morton, 2019). This inclusive environment lays the foundation for implementing specific trauma-informed strategies.

One of the key components of trauma-informed pedagogy is ensuring that the learning environment feels safe and supportive for all students. This includes both physical safety and emotional security. In Kogi State, where many children may come from environments where safety is not guaranteed, creating a safe space within the school can be transformative. Schools can establish clear rules, consistent routines, and supportive relationships that help students feel secure and valued. This sense of safety is foundational, as it allows students to focus on learning rather than survival, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropping out of school (Oehlberg, 2017). When students feel safe and trust their environment, transparency in communication and actions further reinforces this security, making them more likely to stay engaged in their education rather than feeling the need to withdraw or drop out.

In addition to safety, trustworthiness, and transparency are essential in trauma-informed pedagogy. Students who have experienced trauma often struggle with trust due to past betrayals or inconsistencies in their lives. Building trust within the school setting is crucial in Kogi State, where many out-of-school children may have faced unpredictable or chaotic home environments. Educators can foster trust by being consistent in their actions, communicating clearly, and involving students in decision-making processes. When students feel they can trust their teachers and the school system, they are more likely to engage with their education and less likely to abandon their schooling (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018). This trust fosters a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and understood, reducing their vulnerability to academic disengagement and increasing their commitment to completing their education. Another vital aspect of trauma-informed pedagogy is the emphasis on empowerment and choice. Many out-of-school children in Kogi State may feel powerless due to their circumstances. By offering those choices in their learning, such as selecting topics of interest or deciding how to approach assignments, educators can help these students regain a sense of control and agency. Empowering students in this way enhances their engagement with school and builds their confidence and resilience, making them more likely to stay in school and succeed academically (Craig, 2016). By fostering a supportive

environment where students feel valued and capable, empowerment cultivates a strong sense of self-efficacy, which is crucial for academic perseverance and long-term success in respective of gender.

In addition, addressing cultural, historical, and gender issues is integral to trauma-informed pedagogy. In Kogi State, cultural norms and gender expectations significantly influence a child's educational experience. Girls, in particular, often face additional barriers to education, including gender-based trauma, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and discrimination, which can hinder their academic engagement and emotional well-being (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022; Ede & Edukugho, 2021). Educators must be culturally sensitive and aware of these challenges to foster an inclusive learning environment that respects and supports all students, regardless of their gender or socio-cultural background. This includes recognising the specific difficulties faced by marginalised groups and implementing tailored, trauma-informed interventions that support their learning and development (Omenka & Ojo, 2020; Roeser et al., 2022). By doing so, schools can reduce the number of out-of-school children and ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed (Ginwright, 2018). This approach fosters an inclusive educational environment where every child has the chance to thrive academically and personally.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that trauma-informed pedagogy can effectively mitigate educational disruptions among out-of-school children. It highlights the critical role of addressing trauma in improving students' engagement, emotional well-being, and academic performance. The research provides empirical evidence that integrating trauma-sensitive approaches into teaching practices and curricula fosters a supportive learning environment, enabling children who have experienced adversity to re-engage with education. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of training educators and involving communities, offering practical insights for policymakers, schools, and stakeholders seeking sustainable interventions for out-of-school children.

### **Conclusion**

Trauma-informed pedagogy is a vital educational approach that focuses on creating safe, trustworthy, and supportive learning environments for students who have experienced trauma. By emphasising safety, peer support, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity, this approach not only fosters academic success but also aids in healing and building resilience. In Kogi State, where educational disruptions are prevalent due to insecurity and economic challenges, the adoption of trauma-informed practices is crucial. These practices can re-engage out-of-school children, improve their academic performance, and help break the cycle of poverty and trauma, offering all children a chance at a brighter future.

### **Way Forward**

To address the educational disruptions faced by out-of-school children in Kogi State, the following strategies for implementing trauma-informed pedagogy are proposed:

1. Professional development programmes should focus on understanding trauma, recognising its effects, and implementing strategies to create a supportive learning environment.
2. Ongoing training and support are necessary to ensure that educators are well-equipped to address the needs of trauma-affected students.

3. Community organisations and parents should provide additional support and resources, contributing to a more holistic approach to addressing educational disruptions.
4. Trauma-informed principles should be integrated into the curriculum and teaching practices.
5. Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices is important for continuous improvement.
6. Collecting feedback from students, educators, and parents can help identify areas for enhancement and ensure that the approach remains responsive to the needs of out-of-school children.

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