A STUDY OF REHABILITATION PROGRAMME AND RISK OF RECIDIVISM AMONG NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria, driven primarily by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), have created a persistent humanitarian and security crisis. Since 2009, the insurgency has claimed thousands of lives and displaced millions, with youth disproportionately represented among combatants. In response, the Nigerian government launched rehabilitation initiatives such as Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), designed to de-radicalize, provide vocational training, and reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life. Despite these efforts, the risk of recidivism, relapsing into violent extremism, remains high, raising concerns about the sustainability of current Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) strategies.

This research critically examined the effectiveness of Nigeria's rehabilitation programmes in reducing recidivism among youth ex-combatants. Anchored in Social Identity Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior, it investigated how identity reconstruction, behavioral intentions, and socio-economic conditions shape reintegration outcomes. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys of three hundred (300) ex-combatants with qualitative interviews involving, returnees, community leaders, program officials, and security stakeholders. Data were analyzed using descriptive, alongside thematic framework. Findings reveal that vocational training, psychosocial counselling, and religious re-orientation represent the most effective components of rehabilitation, fostering identity transformation and offering pathways to legitimate livelihoods. However, significant barriers persist.

Stigmatization by host communities, inadequate post-rehabilitation support, weak institutional coordination, and inconsistent funding undermine reintegration outcomes. Many ex-combatants expressed distrust of state institutions, while economic deprivation and community rejection emerged as key predictors of relapse. The results suggest that while rehabilitation programmes have potential, their sustainability is fragile without broader structural and social reforms. The research concludes that effective reintegration requires a holistic, youth-centered approach that extends beyond skills acquisition to include long-term psychosocial support, community sensitization, and institutional trust-building and market-driven opportunities.

Keywords: Rehabilitation programme, recidivism, youth ex-combatants, non-state armed groups, Boko Haram, islamic state west africa province (ISWAP), disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

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Dickson Agwu Chibueze

DEDICATION

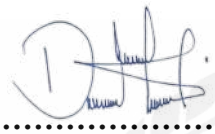
This research is specially dedicated to God Almighty, whose guidance, strength, and grace have sustained me through every step of this academic journey. I also dedicate this work to my late parents and first love, Elder and Mrs. Chibueze Dickson Agwu, and to my beloved wife, Chinyere Juliet Dickson, and my daughter, Chimamanda Hanna Dickson. Their love, prayers, sacrifices, and encouragement have been my anchor and greatest source of inspiration.

I also dedicate this work to all individuals and communities affected by conflict in Northern Nigeria, and to the practitioners and institutions committed to rehabilitation, reintegration, and lasting peace. I hope that this research contributes, in some measure, to their efforts to restore hope and promote harmony in Nigeria and beyond.

Dickson Agwu Chibueze

DECLARATION

I, Mr. Dickson Agwu Chibueze, with ID number 6617802002, hereby declare that this work is entirely mine and it is original, unless specific acknowledgements verify otherwise. I have done this independent study by myself under the supervision of an advisor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Armed conflicts in Africa have produced significant humanitarian crises, and Northern Nigeria is a stark example, with the Boko Haram insurgency and its splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), devastating communities for over a decade. Since 2009, the insurgency has claimed over three hundred and fifty thousand (350,000) lives and displaced millions across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). The Nigerian government, in collaboration with international partners, has implemented disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs such as Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), launched in 2016.

These initiatives aim to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian society through vocational training, psychosocial support, and community sensitization (Alozieuwa, 2020). Despite these interventions, evidence suggests that rehabilitation programs face significant setbacks. The risk of recidivism defined as the likelihood of ex-combatants relapsing into violent extremism remains high. Socio-economic deprivation, unresolved trauma, ideological convictions, and stigma from host communities are key contributors (Adejoh, 2021; Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). This raises critical questions about the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's DDR initiatives and the unique vulnerabilities of youth ex-combatants.

Globally, DDR programs in post-conflict states such as Sierra Leone, Colombia, and Afghanistan have yielded mixed results. While Sierra Leone successfully reintegrated thousands of child soldiers by coupling DDR with community healing approaches (Annan et al., 2011),

Afghanistan's programs struggled due to weak institutional frameworks and community rejection (Maclay & Özerdem, 2010). These global experiences highlight the necessity of tailoring rehabilitation efforts to local socio-political contexts rather than adopting "one-size-fits-all" models. In Nigeria, the challenges are compounded by deep-seated socio-political cleavages, religious extremism, poverty, and weak governance structures.

Rehabilitation programs often lack transparency, sufficient funding, and inclusive participation of community stakeholders, which limits their effectiveness (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, research indicates that reintegration efforts fail when communities perceive them as rewarding perpetrators of violence while neglecting victims (Boas, 2013). Against this backdrop, this research critically examined the rehabilitation programs and the risk of recidivism among youth ex-combatants of non-state armed groups in Northern Nigeria. By situating the research within Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it investigated how group identity, socio-economic conditions, and individual perceptions influence reintegration outcomes. The findings are expected to contribute practical insights into designing youth-centered, context-sensitive, and sustainable rehabilitation frameworks.

Armed conflicts fueled by non-state armed groups have destabilized societies globally, with youth disproportionately affected. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has thrived in the socio-economic vulnerabilities of young people, offering them financial incentives, a sense of belonging, and ideological motivation (Agbiboa, 2021). With youth unemployment in Nigeria hovering around 42% in the fourth quarter of 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021), the susceptibility of young men and women to recruitment remains high. Rehabilitation programs are thus central to preventing cycles of violence and promoting peace-building.

The Nigerian government established Operation Safe Corridor as a flagship rehabilitation initiative targeting low-risk Boko Haram fighters willing to surrender. The program includes vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, farming, and small-scale entrepreneurship, along with religious re-orientation, psychosocial counseling, and de-radicalization sessions (International Crisis Group, 2021). However, scholars and policy analysts question its effectiveness due to recurrent reports of recidivism. Cases of ex-combatants rejoining armed groups point to systemic gaps in the program (Ugwueze et al., 2022).

A major challenge lies in the stigmatization of ex-combatants by host communities. Many communities view DDR programs as rewarding violence while neglecting victims of insurgency. This rejection undermines reintegration and fosters alienation, which can trigger relapses into insurgency (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). Another significant barrier is the inadequacy of monitoring post-rehabilitation. Unlike successful DDR models in Sierra Leone, which incorporated long-term mentoring and community inclusion, Nigeria's DDR is criticized for short-term, state-centric approaches (Annan et al., 2011). The significance of this research lies in its focus on youth ex-combatants, who constitute most fighters in Boko Haram and ISWAP. Theories of radicalization emphasize that youth are both highly vulnerable to extremist recruitment and central to long-term peace-building (Horgan, 2019).

By examining rehabilitation and recidivism through a youth-centered lens, this research contributes fresh insights into improving DDR frameworks in conflict-affected societies. Moreover, the research has broader regional and global implications. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and a key actor in West African security. Weak rehabilitation outcomes risk prolonging insurgency and destabilizing neighboring states (Campbell & Harwood, 2018). Successful youth reintegration strategies in Nigeria can therefore serve as a model for similar

interventions in fragile states across the Sahel and beyond. This research is also significant for policy because it bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and field realities.

While DDR is widely recognized in academic literature as a peace-building tool, empirical studies from Northern Nigeria remain limited. By combining quantitative analysis of rehabilitation outcomes with qualitative insights from interviews with ex-combatants, community leaders, and security officials, the research generates context-specific evidence to inform both Nigerian and international stakeholders. Finally, the research contributes to advancing scholarly debates on peacebuilding, youth radicalization, and transitional justice. It critiques the assumption that DDR is a linear process of disarmament, training, and reintegration. Instead, it underscores DDR as a socially contested process requiring trust-building, inclusiveness, and sustained support.

This research is justified by the urgent need to strengthen DDR programs in Nigeria amidst escalating insecurity. While billions of naira has been invested in rehabilitation efforts, persistent reports of recidivism question their effectiveness (International Crisis Group, 2021). Addressing this issue is crucial not only for Nigeria's internal security but also for regional stability in the Lake Chad Basin. Additionally, this research fills a scholarly gap by focusing on youth-specific rehabilitation and risk of recidivism.

Existing studies often examine DDR in general terms, neglecting the unique vulnerabilities of youth. By incorporating theoretical insights from social psychology and criminology, the research advances a deeper understanding of recidivism. Finally, the research is justified by its practical utility. Policymakers, program implementers, and communities can apply its findings to design more inclusive, context-sensitive interventions that reduce relapse into insurgency and promote lasting peace.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The persistence of violent extremism in Northern Nigeria, despite ongoing rehabilitation initiatives such as Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), underscores a critical gap in existing strategies to reintegrate ex-combatants effectively. While DDR programs globally have been recognized as essential peace-building mechanisms, the Nigerian model faces systemic flaws, particularly in addressing the unique vulnerabilities of youth ex-combatants. Reports indicate that many participants relapse into violent extremism, suggesting that rehabilitation programs are not adequately mitigating the risk of recidivism (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The rehabilitation process is further complicated by structural challenges such as limited funding, insufficient psychosocial support, stigmatization from host communities, and a lack of effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). Moreover, Nigeria's DDR approach often overlooks youth-specific needs, despite the fact that young people represent the largest demographic within armed groups and bear the heaviest burden of the conflict (UNDP, 2021).

This research addressed the research gap by critically examining the effectiveness of Nigeria's rehabilitation programs in facilitating the sustainable reintegration of youth ex-combatants while investigating the socio-economic, psychological, and ideological drivers of recidivism. By anchoring the research in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it sought to provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual motivations, community dynamics, and institutional weaknesses in shaping reintegration outcomes. The research problem was thus framed around the question: Why do rehabilitation programs in Northern Nigeria struggle to prevent recidivism among youth ex-combatants, and what policy interventions can strengthen their effectiveness?

Despite the Nigerian government's efforts to design and implement rehabilitation programs for ex-combatants, recidivism remains a pressing challenge. The Operation Safe Corridor initiative, introduced in 2016, was envisioned as a structured DDR program to help former insurgents transition to civilian life. However, recent studies and reports highlight that a significant number of rehabilitated youths either return to armed groups or fail to integrate meaningfully into their communities (Alozieuwa, 2020).

Several issues underpin this challenge. First, socio-economic exclusion remains pervasive. Many ex-combatants graduate from rehabilitation without sustainable employment opportunities, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment offers from extremist networks that exploit financial desperation (Adejoh, 2021). Second, stigmatization and mistrust from host communities act as major barriers to reintegration. Communities, particularly in Borno and Yobe States, often perceive ex-combatants as security threats and reject their return, further alienating them (Ikelegbe, 2016). Third, inadequate psychosocial and mental health support leaves trauma and radical ideologies unaddressed, which perpetuates violent tendencies.

Institutional weaknesses also exacerbate the problem. Poor inter-agency coordination, lack of transparency, and limited stakeholder engagement hinder effective implementation (Maclay & Özerdem, 2010). Furthermore, DDR programs in Nigeria are often donor-driven and short-term, failing to account for the long-term social, cultural, and political complexities of reintegration. The problem is compounded by the broader regional insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin, where porous borders and transnational extremist networks increase the likelihood of relapse into militancy. If unaddressed, recidivism risks perpetuating cycles of violence, undermining Nigeria's peacebuilding efforts, and destabilizing the wider West African sub-region.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective are rehabilitation programs in addressing the specific needs of youth ex-combatants from non-state armed groups in Northern Nigeria?
2. What are the key factors contributing to the risk of recidivism among reintegrated youth in post-rehabilitation program contexts?
3. What programmatic and policy interventions can strengthen rehabilitation processes to mitigate the risk of youth recidivism in Northern Nigeria?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are:

1. To critically assess the effectiveness of current rehabilitation programs in facilitating the sustainable reintegration of youth ex-combatants in Northern Nigeria.
2. To identify and analyze the socio-economic, psychological, and ideological factors contributing to the risk of recidivism among reintegrated youth.
3. To recommend context-specific, youth-sensitive strategies to strengthen rehabilitation program implementation and reduce the likelihood of re-engagement in violent extremism.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The research contributes to the scholarly discourse on DDR, youth radicalization, and peace-building in Africa. While DDR has been extensively studied in contexts like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Colombia, there is limited empirical research on the unique challenges faced in Nigeria's insurgency-affected areas (Annan et al., 2011). By focusing on youth-specific

rehabilitation and recidivism, this research addresses a critical gap in literature and enriches theoretical debates on post-conflict recovery. The findings will inform policymakers at national and regional levels. Given the Nigerian government's heavy investment in Operation Safe Corridor and other DDR initiatives, evidence-based insights into their strengths and weaknesses are vital.

The research provides actionable recommendations for improving transparency, community engagement, and post-rehabilitation monitoring. Furthermore, regional bodies such as ECOWAS and the African Union, which emphasize counterterrorism and peace-building, can adapt lessons from this research to strengthen DDR frameworks across West Africa. For practitioners, including non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and rehabilitation officers, the research offers practical strategies for enhancing reintegration outcomes. Insights into psychosocial support needs, community perceptions, and socio-economic reintegration will enable stakeholders to design more holistic, youth-centered interventions. Importantly, it highlights the role of community inclusion as a determinant of success, advocating for grassroots involvement in DDR processes.

Beyond Nigeria, this research provides lessons for fragile states grappling with violent extremism. The rise of ISIS-affiliated groups in the Sahel, Mozambique, and Somalia underscores the urgency of understanding recidivism in African contexts (Campbell & Harwood, 2018). By generating locally grounded evidence, the research informs global debates on preventing violent extremism (PVE) and sustaining peace. The research emphasizes the importance of designing rehabilitation initiatives that account for the aspirations and vulnerabilities of young people. By centering youth experiences, it aligns with the United Nations's Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, established through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, which recognizes the role of young people as peace-builders (United Nations Security Council, 2015). Overall, this

research is significant because it not only critiques existing DDR programs but also proposes evidence-based, context-sensitive solutions that can foster long-term peace in Northern Nigeria and beyond.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This research was geographically scoped to Northern Nigeria, with a particular focus on states most affected by insurgency, such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. These states host rehabilitation centers, including the Operation Safe Corridor camp in Gombe, making them strategic for investigating the dynamics of DDR and recidivism. The research primarily focuses on youth ex-combatants (aged 18 - to - 35) due to their dominance in armed groups and heightened vulnerability to relapse. Thematically, the research centered on rehabilitation programs, risk of recidivism, and the socio-economic, psychological, and ideological factors shaping reintegration. While drawing on global DDR experiences for comparative insights, the research narrowed its analytical lens to the Nigerian context. Methodologically, the research employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys with ex-combatants and qualitative interviews with community leaders, policymakers, and program implementers. This triangulation enhanced the validity of findings.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Irrespective of the validity of outcomes of this research, it is necessary to state the various roadblocks the researcher encountered during the data collection for the research. Such limitations to this research include:

1. **Access to respondents**: Security challenges in insurgency-affected areas restricted the access to certain ex-combatants or communities.

2. **Social desirability bias**: Ex-combatants may underreport experiences of recidivism or ideological leanings to present themselves in a favorable light.
3. **Generalizability**: While the research provides deep insights into Northern Nigeria, its findings may not fully capture DDR dynamics in other African contexts, given differing socio-political realities.
4. **Resource constraints**: Financial and logistical limitations restricted the sample size or duration of fieldwork.

Despite these limitations, the research mitigated challenges through purposive sampling, careful ethical considerations, and triangulation of data sources.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Rehabilitation Programme: Structured interventions, such as vocational training, counseling, and deradicalization, aimed at preparing ex-combatants for reintegration into society.

Recidivism: The act of relapsing into violent extremism or rejoining insurgent groups after undergoing rehabilitation.

Non-State Armed Groups: Organized groups that use armed violence outside state authority, including Boko Haram and ISWAP.

Reintegration: The process by which ex-combatants are socially, economically, and politically accepted back into civilian life.

Deradicalization: Efforts to challenge and alter extremist ideological beliefs of ex-combatants, often through religious re-orientation and counseling.

Youth ex-Combatants: Individuals aged 18–35 who previously participated in armed groups and are undergoing or have undergone rehabilitation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The concepts of rehabilitation, recidivism, de-radicalization, non-state armed groups, and government interventions form the conceptual pillars of this research. Each provides a distinct but interconnected lens for understanding the challenges and prospects of addressing the risk of recidivism among former combatants in Northern Nigeria.

2.1.1 REHABILITATION AS A CONCEPT

Rehabilitation, in the context of conflict and post-conflict societies, refers to structured, multidimensional programmes aimed at restoring individuals who have engaged in armed conflict or violent extremism into functioning, law-abiding, and productive members of society. It is not simply the provision of vocational training or temporary assistance but a holistic approach that seeks to rebuild psychological, social, and economic capacities of ex-combatants (Basra & Neumann, 2020). Rehabilitation incorporates psychosocial support, de-radicalization efforts, skills acquisition, educational interventions, and reintegration into communities.

In transitional and post-conflict settings, rehabilitation is often aligned with Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) frameworks, which are widely recognized as the global standard for post-conflict peace-building (Muggah, 2020). DDR emphasizes three stages: first, the surrender of arms (disarmament); second, the dismantling of armed groups (demobilization); and finally, the reinsertion and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life. Rehabilitation, therefore, operates at the intersection of these phases by ensuring that former fighters do not relapse into violence.

A key feature of rehabilitation is restorative justice, which emphasizes rebuilding trust between the individual and society. Restorative rehabilitation goes beyond skill provision, focusing instead on restoring dignity, identity, and a sense of belonging to ex-combatants (Adejoh, 2021). It also addresses the psychological trauma and ideological indoctrination that often underpin violent behaviors. Scholars argue that successful rehabilitation requires psychosocial interventions such as trauma counseling, family reconciliation, and community dialogue sessions (El-Masri, 2020).

In Nigeria, rehabilitation is institutionalized through programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor, launched in 2016, which aims to de-radicalize and reintegrate former Boko-Haram fighters. This programme combines vocational training, civic education, religious reorientation, and psychosocial support (Onuoha, 2022). However, the success of such initiatives is often debated. Critics argue that while vocational skills are provided, the broader challenge of community acceptance and stigma remains inadequately addressed (Nwankpa, 2021).

Globally, rehabilitation initiatives highlight that reintegration success depends not only on the individual's readiness to change but also on structural and contextual factors such as community attitudes, security concerns, and access to livelihoods (Horgan & Braddock, 2019), where communities reject rehabilitated ex-combatants, the likelihood of relapsing into violence increases. Rehabilitation is thus inherently relational; it requires simultaneous preparation of ex-combatants and sensitization of receiving communities.

In essence, rehabilitation should be viewed as a multifaceted process that integrates psychological healing, ideological transformation, skills training, and community reconciliation. For Northern Nigeria, the effectiveness of rehabilitation depends on balancing security imperatives

with sustainable social reintegration, ensuring that ex-combatants are not merely disarmed but are meaningfully reabsorbed into the socio-economic fabric of society.

2.1.2 RECIDIVISM: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

Recidivism refers to the tendency of individuals who have undergone rehabilitation or release programmes to relapse into criminal, extremist, or violent behaviors. In the context of non-state armed groups, recidivism manifests as the re-engagement of former combatants with insurgent movements or other violent networks after participating in DDR or rehabilitation initiatives (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). It remains one of the greatest threats to the sustainability of peace in post-conflict regions, particularly in Nigeria's northeast.

The causes of recidivism are complicated and include economic, social, psychological, and ideological factors. Poverty and unemployment are among the most prominent structural drivers. When ex-combatants leave rehabilitation centers without sustainable economic opportunities, they often revert to armed groups that promise income, status, and protection (Agbiboa, 2021). In regions where youth unemployment rates are high, insurgent groups exploit this vulnerability by offering financial incentives and a sense of belonging.

Psychological trauma also plays a significant role in recidivism. Many ex-combatants suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), survivor guilt, or unresolved grief from conflict experiences. Without adequate psychosocial interventions, these psychological scars increase vulnerability to re-radicalization (Weiss & Horgan, 2021). Additionally, stigmatization by communities makes reintegration difficult. Communities often perceive rehabilitated ex-combatants with suspicion, treating them as perpetual outsiders, which in turn fuels feelings of alienation and resentment (Annan et al., 2019).

Ideologically, recidivism can stem from partial or failed de-radicalization. Some ex-combatants may superficially comply with rehabilitation processes while secretly retaining extremist beliefs. If rehabilitation fails to address ideological indoctrination deeply, relapse becomes likely (Horgan, 2019). Furthermore, extremist groups often maintain underground networks within communities and prisons, facilitating the re-recruitment of former members.

The implications of recidivism are profound for both security and development. At the security level, recidivism undermines state and international counterinsurgency efforts, prolongs conflicts, and erodes public trust in rehabilitation programmes (Boas, 2013). For instance, reports of "recycled terrorists" returning to the battlefield weaken political and community support for de-radicalization initiatives. Developmentally, recidivism disrupts peace-building, diverts resources, and destabilizes local economies.

In the case of Nigeria, Operation Safe Corridor has faced criticism due to documented cases of relapse among some rehabilitated fighters (Onuoha, 2022). This has raised concerns about the adequacy of its de-radicalization curriculum and the sustainability of its reintegration packages. International experience suggests that recidivism rates decline when rehabilitation programmes integrate long-term monitoring, mentoring, and community-based support systems (Basra & Neumann, p.55, 2020).

In conclusion, recidivism is not merely the failure of an individual but also reflects systemic gaps in rehabilitation design and implementation. To mitigate recidivism in Northern Nigeria, interventions must holistically tackle economic marginalization, ideological indoctrination, psychosocial trauma, and community stigmatization while building trust through transparent and inclusive reintegration processes.

2.1.3 DE-RADICALIZATION—PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES

De-radicalization refers to systematic interventions aimed at reversing extremist beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, enabling individuals who have embraced violent ideologies to disengage from them and rejoin society as peaceful citizens. Unlike disengagement, which primarily denotes the cessation of violent acts, de-radicalization seeks a deeper cognitive and ideological transformation that addresses the root causes of extremism (Rabasa et al., 2010). It involves challenging extremist worldviews, promoting alternative narratives, and building resilience against re-radicalization. Globally, de-radicalization programmes adopt diverse strategies tailored to cultural, political, and religious contexts.

Common approaches include religious re-education, where clerics and theologians counter extremist interpretations of scripture with moderate perspectives (Boucek, 2008). This strategy has been widely used in Muslim-majority countries, including Saudi Arabia's "Counseling Programme" and Indonesia's religious rehabilitation initiatives. In Nigeria, Operation Safe Corridor incorporates Islamic clerics who engage ex-combatants in theological dialogues aimed at correcting extremist misinterpretations (Onuoha, 2022).

Another critical strategy is psychosocial intervention. Extremist group membership often provides individuals with identity, belonging, and status. De-radicalization, therefore, focuses on addressing psychological trauma, loneliness, and unmet social needs that initially pushed individuals towards extremism (El-Said, 2020). Counseling, therapy, and community support are essential in helping ex-combatants construct new, non-violent identities. Education and vocational training are equally central to de-radicalization processes.

By equipping ex-combatants with employable skills, programmes aimed to reduce economic vulnerabilities that extremist groups exploit (Horgan & Braddock, 2019). Education also plays a preventive role by promoting critical thinking, tolerance, and civic responsibility. In practice, skill-based training is most effective when combined with job placements and long-term livelihood support, ensuring sustainability.

Community engagement is another indispensable component of de-radicalization. Reintegration can only succeed if communities are willing to accept rehabilitated individuals. Thus, de-radicalization initiatives often incorporate community dialogue, reconciliation ceremonies, and awareness campaigns to foster trust and mutual acceptance (Marsden, 2017). Without community buy-in, even successful ideological transformation may fail in practice, as stigma and exclusion can drive recidivism. Despite these strategies, de-radicalization remains fraught with challenges.

Critics argue that ideological change is difficult to measure and that some participants may feign compliance to secure release or benefits (Koehler, 2017). Moreover, insufficient monitoring post-rehabilitation increases the risk of relapse. To address this, best practices emphasize aftercare and mentorship programmes, where rehabilitated individuals receive continuous support, mentoring, and monitoring to ensure long-term disengagement. In sum, de-radicalization is not a one-time intervention but a gradual, multidimensional process combining religious dialogue, psychosocial support, education, vocational empowerment, and community reconciliation. For Northern Nigeria, success depends on balancing security imperatives with trust-building, ensuring that interventions resonate with local religious, cultural, and socio-economic realities.

2.1.4 NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS' ACTIVITIES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) are organized armed actors operating outside state authority, often motivated by ideological, political, religious, or economic goals. They are characterized by their use of violence, recruitment of marginalized populations, and exploitation of weak governance structures (Schneckener, 2019). In Northern Nigeria, Boko-Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), represent the most significant NSAGs, responsible for widespread violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises. The activities of NSAGs typically include armed attacks, bombings, kidnappings, and forced recruitment. These groups also establish parallel governance structures in areas under their control, providing rudimentary services while enforcing strict ideological codes (Alozieuwa, 2020). Such actions undermine state legitimacy and create alternative sources of authority.

The socio-economic impact of NSAGs is profound. First, they perpetuate mass displacement. The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced more than 2.2 million people within Nigeria and across its borders into Chad, Cameroon, and Niger (UNHCR, 2022). Displacement erodes livelihoods, disrupts education, and strains already fragile social services in host communities. Second, NSAG activities devastate local economies. The destruction of infrastructure, closure of schools, collapse of markets, and restriction of agricultural activities undermine livelihoods. Farmers in Borno and Yobe states, for instance, have abandoned farmlands due to insecurity, leading to food insecurity and rising poverty (World Bank, 2020). Women and children bear disproportionate burdens, as they face increased risks of sexual exploitation, forced marriages, and recruitment as child soldiers. Third, NSAG violence deepens poverty and inequality. Armed conflict disrupts trade routes and investment, discourages economic development, and fuels cycles of deprivation.

Boko Haram's looting, extortion, and imposition of illegal taxes further impoverish already vulnerable populations (Agbiboa, 2021). These conditions, in turn, create fertile ground for further recruitment into armed groups, perpetuating a vicious cycle. At the political level, NSAGs weaken state legitimacy by exposing the state's inability to guarantee security. This erodes citizen trust in governance and creates fertile ground for alternative ideologies. The prolonged insurgency in Northern Nigeria has led to the militarization of everyday life, with communities depending on vigilantes and paramilitary groups for protection, often exacerbating cycles of violence (Okpara & Olaniyan, 2021).

Socially, NSAG activities fracture community cohesion. Distrust grows between displaced persons and host communities, while suspicion lingers around rehabilitated ex-combatants. Such divisions make post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation more difficult. Moreover, prolonged exposure to violence normalizes insecurity, leaving deep intergenerational scars. Thus, the activities of NSAGs extend beyond immediate violence—they produce systemic socioeconomic disruptions that perpetuate underdevelopment, food insecurity, and state fragility. Addressing their impact requires integrated strategies combining military pressure, humanitarian support, and long-term development.

2.1.5 GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS AND RESULTS SO FAR

The Nigerian government has pursued a variety of interventions to address violent extremism and the challenge of rehabilitating ex-combatants. These interventions have ranged from military counterinsurgency operations to soft approaches such as de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes.

The most prominent initiative is Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), established in 2016, which provides a structured rehabilitation programme for repentant Boko-Haram members. OSC offers vocational training, religious re-education, psychosocial counseling, and civic orientation, with the ultimate aim of reintegrating participants into society (Adejoh, 2021). While innovative, OSC has faced mixed results. Proponents highlight it's potential for transforming ex-combatants, but critics argue it is underfunded, poorly monitored, and faces widespread community resistance (Onuoha, 2022). Beyond OSC, the government has implemented National Counter Terrorism Strategies (NACTEST), which emphasizes a whole-of-society approach, integrating security, development, and governance measures (Nwankpa, 2021). These policies aim to address both the symptoms and root causes of violent extremism. In practice, however, challenges such as corruption, insufficient funding, and bureaucratic inefficiency have limited their effectiveness.

The government has also engaged in military operations, such as Operation Lafiya Dole, aimed at degrading Boko Haram's capabilities. While these have achieved tactical successes, including the killing or arrest of insurgent leaders, the insurgency has persisted, partly due to the adaptability of groups like ISWAP (Alozieuwa, 2020). Heavy reliance on military force has also drawn criticism for human rights violations, which risk alienating local populations and undermining counterinsurgency gains. At the international level, Nigeria has partnered with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising troops from Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin. This collaboration has been instrumental in curbing cross-border insurgent activities. However, coordination challenges and resource gaps remain significant (Zenn, 2020).

Results so far suggest that while Nigeria has developed a multi-pronged intervention framework, implementation gaps persist. Rehabilitation programmes often fail to ensure long-term reintegration due to insufficient aftercare and weak community acceptance. Military victories are

frequently offset by insurgents' resilience and ability to exploit governance deficits. Moreover, the absence of a comprehensive post-rehabilitation monitoring framework undermines sustainability. In summary, government interventions have made progress in weakening insurgent capabilities and experimenting with rehabilitation, but systemic challenges, underfunding, community resistance, human rights concerns, and lack of holistic reintegration, continue to constrain success. Going forward, a more community-centered, development-driven approach is essential.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopted Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as its primary theoretical lens, supported by Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991).

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive their identity from group membership. In conflict contexts, youth combatants often join armed groups to gain belonging, recognition, and empowerment denied by mainstream society (Huddy, 2016). Boko Haram, for example, constructs a collective identity rooted in religious ideology, framing itself as a defender of faith against perceived enemies. Through this group identity, members develop loyalty and are willing to engage in violence. In rehabilitation, SIT explains why disengagement is difficult. Former combatants must reconstruct their identities outside the armed group, which requires psychosocial support and community acceptance. Without an alternative positive identity, they risk returning to insurgent groups that provide recognition and purpose (Hogg, 2018). Thus, rehabilitation must move beyond vocational training to foster identity transformation, offering ex-combatants new social anchors such as community associations, entrepreneurship groups, or faith-based networks.

Theory of Planned Behavior complements SIT by focusing on behavioral intentions. TPB argues that individuals' behavior is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived

behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). For rehabilitated ex-combatants, the decision to reintegrate peacefully or relapse into violence depends on their attitudes towards civilian life, community norms regarding acceptance, and their perceived control over livelihoods. For example, if returnees believe reintegration is socially rejected or feel powerless due to unemployment, their behavioral intention may lean towards recidivism. Integrating SIT and TPB, this research posits that rehabilitation effectiveness hinges on both identity reconstruction (SIT) and behavioral motivation (TPB). Programmes that fail to address identity needs or strengthen behavioral intentions risk producing surface-level reforms without deep-rooted transformation.

This dual framework is highly relevant to Northern Nigeria, where ex-combatants must rebuild identities eroded by extremist indoctrination while navigating communities skeptical of their reintegration. By analyzing rehabilitation through these lenses, this research generates nuanced insights into why recidivism persists and how DDR can be redesigned for sustainability.

2.3 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.3.1 SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social Learning Theory (SLT) emphasizes that behaviors are acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In the context of violent extremism, many youths are socialized into insurgency by observing peers, community role models, or charismatic leaders within Boko Haram. Violent behavior is reinforced through rewards such as social recognition, financial incentives, or spiritual justification (Akers & Jennings, 2016). Over time, these patterns become normalized as individuals repeatedly witness violence being celebrated, sanctioned, or materially rewarded.

Applied to rehabilitation, SLT suggests that successful de-radicalization must replace extremist role models with positive ones. Mentorship programmes, peer support groups, and

vocational trainers can serve as alternative models for ex-combatants to emulate. If rehabilitated youths observe successful reintegration stories and receive positive reinforcement (e.g., economic independence, community acceptance), they are more likely to sustain peaceful behavior. This is why initiatives that bring in respected religious clerics, community elders, and even rehabilitated ex-fighters as role models often produce greater success in reorientation programmes (Bandura, 1977).

However, SLT also cautions that without sustained reinforcement, relapse is possible. If ex-combatants return to environments where extremist peers remain influential or where unemployment limits positive reinforcement, the likelihood of recidivism increases. This suggests that short-term rehabilitation interventions may not be sufficient unless supported by long-term structures. Community leaders, religious institutions, and local government authorities therefore need to play an active role in reinforcing the behaviors that rehabilitation programmes instill.

In the Nigerian context, SLT further underscores the importance of controlling extremist propaganda and online radicalization. Since Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) exploit social media to glorify violence and promote martyrdom, the exposure of returnees to such media creates a risk of re-radicalization. This calls for digital literacy campaigns and positive counter-narratives that reinforce peaceful alternatives.

Critically, the theory also helps explain why some rehabilitation programmes fail. Where vocational skills training is provided but not linked to viable markets or sustainable employment, the intended reinforcement (economic independence) does not materialize. In such cases, individuals may revert to the violent lifestyle they once observed and imitated. Thus, SLT highlights the interplay between individual behavior, social environment, and systemic support in shaping outcomes of rehabilitation.

In summary, Social Learning Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding both radicalization and reintegration. It demonstrates that individuals learn violence in the same way they can learn peace—through consistent observation, imitation, and reinforcement of positive role models. To minimize recidivism, rehabilitation efforts must embed ex-combatants in environments where pro-social behaviors are visible, rewarding, and sustainable.

2.3.2 STRAIN THEORY

Strain Theory argues that deviant behavior arises when individuals experience a disjunction between societal goals and available means to achieve them. Merton (1938) originally framed strain as a structural imbalance where individuals aspire to socially approved goals such as wealth, status, or education but lack the institutionalized means to attain them. Later, Agnew (1992) expanded the framework through the General Strain Theory (GST), emphasizing emotional responses to negative experiences such as failure, loss, or victimization. These strains produce frustration and anger, which can manifest in deviance or violence.

In Northern Nigeria, pervasive poverty, unemployment, and political exclusion create strain for youths, making extremist groups attractive alternatives (Okafor & Okocha, 2018). Boko Haram exploits these structural inequalities by promising empowerment, financial rewards, and social recognition. Many recruits report joining because they saw no legitimate means to achieve dignity, education, or economic stability (Agbiboa, 2021). Thus, insurgency can be understood as a maladaptive response to systemic marginalization.

In rehabilitation, Strain Theory highlights the need to reduce socio-economic pressures driving youth radicalization. Vocational training, livelihood support, and microfinance schemes are crucial in providing alternative means to achieve social mobility. For example, if ex-

combatants are equipped with skills in tailoring, agriculture, or ICT and supported with market linkages, they can pursue aspirations without resorting to illegitimate means. Furthermore, psychosocial support can help address emotional strains, such as trauma and social rejection, which Agnew (2006) emphasizes as triggers for deviance.

The theory also implies that structural reforms must complement individual rehabilitation. Even the best-designed reintegration programme cannot succeed if the broader environment continues to generate strain. High youth unemployment rates, poor governance, and weak educational systems in Northern Nigeria create a fertile ground for relapse. Thus, rehabilitation should not be seen in isolation but as part of a broader socio-economic development agenda.

Critically, Strain Theory helps explain variations in recidivism. Some ex-combatants return to violence because the underlying strains remain unresolved—such as stigma from communities, poverty, or lack of political inclusion. Others who are able to access opportunities through reintegration support remain nonviolent. This underscores the need for multi-level interventions that address both micro (individual) and macro (structural) strains. In conclusion, Strain Theory demonstrates that rehabilitation programmes will be ineffective unless they provide tangible alternatives to the blocked opportunities that originally fueled radicalization. By reducing structural inequalities and equipping ex-combatants with legitimate means to pursue life goals, the risk of recidivism can be significantly diminished.

2.3.3 PUSH AND PULL FACTORS THEORY

Push and Pull Factors Theory provides a dual-lens explanation of radicalization and disengagement. Push factors are structural conditions that drive individuals away from mainstream society, such as poverty, unemployment, political exclusion, and discrimination. Pull factors, by

contrast, are the attractive elements within extremist groups, including ideological narratives, group solidarity, material incentives, and promises of identity and belonging (Bjørgo, 2005).

In Northern Nigeria, push factors such as lack of education, unemployment, and state neglect push youths into Boko Haram. Pull factors such as religious indoctrination, promises of paradise, and the sense of brotherhood within the group sustain their commitment (Onuoha, 2014). For example, Boko Haram often provides basic needs such as food and shelter, which act as strong pull factors for vulnerable youths. The combined effect of this push and pull forces explains why insurgency persists despite military countermeasures.

Rehabilitation, therefore, must counter both dimensions. On the push side, socio-economic interventions such as livelihood programmes, education, and healthcare provision reduce vulnerabilities. On the pull side, deradicalization programmes, psychosocial counseling, and community reintegration weaken the appeal of extremist ideologies. A dual strategy is essential: removing the conditions that push youths toward violence and simultaneously undermining the attractions that pull them in. This framework also highlights the importance of family and community roles in disengagement. Where communities actively welcome-back ex-combatants, the pull of extremist groups diminishes. Conversely, stigmatization may act as a push factor back into insurgency, since individuals may feel rejected by society and gravitate again towards extremist solidarity.

Push and Pull Facors Theory also explains why some rehabilitation initiatives achieve only partial success. If programmes focus solely on countering ideological narratives (pull factors) but fail to address poverty and unemployment (push factors), relapse is likely. Similarly, if economic opportunities are provided but ideological indoctrination remains unchallenged, recidivism may still occur. In the Nigerian context, policymakers must therefore adopt an integrated model that

balances both sides. Investment in youth empowerment, inclusive governance, and education can reduce push pressures, while community dialogues, religious reorientation, and psychosocial support counteract pull attractions.

In conclusion, Push and Pull Factors Theory provides a broader framework for understanding radicalization and rehabilitation. It demonstrates that de-radicalization must be holistic, targeting both the conditions that drive individuals away from society and the incentives that draw them into violent groups. Without addressing both sides rehabilitation efforts risk being incomplete and unsustainable.

2.3.4 SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

Social Control Theory posits that strong social bonds—family, school, religion, and community discourage deviance, while weak bonds create opportunities for delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). The theory emphasizes four key elements of social bonds: attachment (emotional ties to significant others), commitment (investment in conventional goals), involvement (participation in conventional activities), and belief (endorsement of societal norms and values). When these bonds are strong, individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behavior because they have more to lose. In the Nigerian insurgency context, weak family structures, collapsed educational systems, and eroded community trust facilitated youth radicalization (Ikelegbe, 2016). Many Boko Haram recruits came from communities where attachment to family was weak, commitment to education or jobs was minimal, and belief in the legitimacy of the state was eroded. This breakdown of social bonds created space for extremist groups to step in and provide alternative sources of attachment and commitment.

Rehabilitation, from this perspective, must rebuild social bonds. Family reconciliation programmes, community dialogues, and faith-based interventions are essential in preventing recidivism. If returnees establish strong attachments to family and community, their likelihood of relapse diminishes. Educational opportunities and civic engagement activities can also strengthen involvement and belief in societal institutions. For instance, returnees enrolled in vocational schools or apprenticeships not only gain skills but also build new social networks that reduce their vulnerability to extremist influence. Social Control Theory also underscores the role of stigma in recidivism. If communities reject returnees, their bonds with society remain weak, making relapse more likely. Conversely, acceptance, trust-building, and forgiveness strengthen attachments and reduce risks. This suggests that community-based rehabilitation, rather than isolated institutional approaches, is more effective in sustaining reintegration.

Critically, the theory highlights the importance of preventive measures. By strengthening social institutions such as schools, religious organizations, and families before radicalization occurs, societies can reduce vulnerability to extremism. In Northern Nigeria, investment in education, youth development programmes, and family support structures would serve as protective factors against recruitment. However, Social Control Theory is not without limitations. It assumes that social institutions are inherently positive, whereas in some contexts, they may perpetuate inequality or exclusion. For example, where religious institutions promote divisive ideologies or where state institutions are corrupt, strong bonds may not necessarily prevent deviance. This means rehabilitation strategies must carefully evaluate which social bonds to strengthen and how.

In summary, Social Control Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding both the causes of radicalization and pathways to rehabilitation. It emphasizes that restoring and

reinforcing social bonds—through family, education, religion, and community—can significantly reduce the risk of recidivism among ex-combatants.

2.4 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The reviewed literature highlights that rehabilitation and recidivism among ex-combatants are shaped by interconnected psychological, socio-economic, and community dynamics. Conceptually, rehabilitation is a holistic process that goes beyond vocational training to include deradicalization, psychosocial healing, and community reintegration. Recidivism emerges when these dimensions are neglected, particularly when structural inequalities persist.

The theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior provides a strong foundation for understanding why ex-combatants struggle with identity reconstruction and behavioral intentions post-rehabilitation. Complementary theories such as Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, Push and Pull Factors Theory, and Social Control Theory further explain how radicalization occurs and how rehabilitation can be designed to reduce relapse.

Global DDR studies from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Colombia underscore the importance of sustained reintegration, while Nigerian scholarship reveals persistent challenges such as weak funding, stigmatization, and lack of community ownership. This review suggests that sustainable rehabilitation in Northern Nigeria must integrate identity transformation, socio-economic empowerment, and community acceptance. However, significant gaps remain in evaluating the actual effectiveness of Nigerian rehabilitation programmes and their impact on recidivism. This gap justifies the present research, which seeks to empirically assess rehabilitation and propose context-specific solutions to mitigate relapses into violent extremism.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design, population, sampling techniques, instruments of data collection, and method of analysis. It also presents the structured questionnaire and interview guide designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The quantitative research employed a descriptive survey to collect structured responses from ex-combatants and rehabilitation officers, while the qualitative research provided deeper insights through semi-structured interviews with key informants including community leaders, security officers, and programme coordinators. The choice of a mixed approach is based on its ability to capture both the breadth and depth of the research problem (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Quantitative data provided measurable trends about rehabilitation effectiveness and recidivism risk, while qualitative data contextualized participant's lived experiences.

This design is consistent with recent conflict rehabilitation studies in Africa, where multiple data sources enrich findings and improve reliability (Aghedo& Eke, 2019). Moreover, mixed methods enhance triangulation and reduce bias in interpretation. Hence, this approach is considered suitable to achieve the objectives of investigating rehabilitation programmes and the risk of recidivism among non-state armed groups in Northern Nigeria.

3.3 POPULATION

The population consisted of ex-combatants enrolled in rehabilitation programmes, programme administrators, and community reintegration officers across Northern Nigeria. Official records from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) estimated about 1,200 active participants in rehabilitation camps in Maiduguri, Kaduna, and Jos. These figures provide contextual information about the programme but do not represent the total population of all eligible respondents across Northern Nigeria (NEMA, 2021).

3.4 SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

The research population consisted of ex-combatants enrolled in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) centers in Northern Nigeria, estimated at about N = 1,200 individuals (UNDP, 2022).

Sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population (1,200)

e = margin of error (0.05 for 95% confidence)

$$n = \frac{1200}{}$$

$$1 + 1200(0.05^2)$$

$$n = \frac{1200}{1 + 1200(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1200}{1 + 3}$$

$$n = \frac{1200}{4} = 300$$

Thus, the sample size was 300 respondents.

3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In this research a multi-stage sampling technique was employed.

Stage 1: Stratified Sampling – Ex-combatants were stratified into categories based on region (Northeast, Northwest, and North-central) to ensure representation across geographical zones affected by insurgency.

Stage 2: Purposive Sampling – Key rehabilitation centers and camps were purposively selected, as they host a high concentration of ex-combatants.

Stage 3: Simple Random Sampling – Within each selected survey, respondents were randomly selected to avoid bias. For qualitative data, purposive sampling was used to select fifteen (15) interviewees (programme coordinators, security operatives, and community leaders). This ensured perspectives from diverse stakeholders in the rehabilitation process.

3.6 INSTRUMENT OF DATA COLLECTION

The research utilized two instruments:

i. A structured questionnaire with both closed-ended (Likert scale) and open-ended questions for ex-combatants.
ii. An interview guide for rehabilitation officers and community leaders.

The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic profile, experiences in rehabilitation, and perceptions of recidivism risk. The interview guide focused on challenges of reintegration, community acceptance, and programme effectiveness.

3.7 VALIDITY OF INSTRUMENT

Content validity was duly tested by subjecting the questionnaire and interview guide to expert review by three (3) academics in peace and conflict studies, and two (2) field officers from rehabilitation centers. Construct validity was further achieved by aligning items with the research objectives and theoretical framework (Social Learning Theory). A pilot test with thirty (30) respondents (excluded from the main sample) was conducted, and ambiguous items were revised.

3.8 RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENT

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. After the pilot test, the fifteen (15) Likert-scale items were analyzed, yielding an alpha score of zero-point-eight (0.82), which exceeds the minimum threshold of zero-point-seven (0.70) (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates high internal consistency of the instrument.

TABLE 3.1 RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENT

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.82	0.70	25

3.9 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize demographic variables and Likert responses. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically following Braun & Clarke's (2019) six-step approach. Transcripts were coded, categories identified, and themes developed. Direct quotes were used to illustrate participant's voices. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings ensured triangulation.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS

4.1 THEMATIC QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA

Interview transcripts were subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step thematic analysis. Three (3) key themes emerged:

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Programmes

Participants highlighted vocational training and religious re-orientation as the most impactful interventions.

> "The tailoring skills I learnt here are useful. I now think about starting a shop rather than going back to the bush." (Male ex-combatant, Maiduguri camp)

> "Counselling sessions have helped some of the boys to calm down. Before, many were very aggressive." (Rehabilitation officer, Kaduna)

> "Learning carpentry has changed my mindset. Now I can make furniture for sale, and people even come to place orders." (Male ex-combatant, Kaduna camp)

> "The religious teachings here opened my eyes. They corrected the wrong ideas we had before about fighting for God." (Ex-combatant, Maiduguri camp).

This theme suggests that rehabilitation programmes that combine vocational, psychosocial, and religious dimensions are highly effective in transforming ex-combatants' behavior and outlook. Vocational training equips individuals with employable skills, reducing the appeal of armed activity (Knight, 2021). Counseling sessions provide emotional support and address trauma, which

scholars argue is essential in post-conflict reintegration (Dercon & van der Weide, 2022). Religious re-orientation, meanwhile, plays a critical role in dismantling extremist narratives, helping participants reinterpret ideology in ways that foster peace (Onuoha, 2020).

Essentially, participants expressed a sense of hope and purpose they lacked before. The provision of practical livelihood options also fosters independence and dignity, making return to violence less attractive. This aligns with findings by Idler and Özerdem (2021), who argued that sustainable DDR must target both material and psychological needs. Thus, the effectiveness of these programmes lies in their holistic approach, where skill-building, psychosocial support, and ideological correction reduce the risk of recidivism.

Theme 2: Community Acceptance and Reintegration Challenges

Ex-combatants frequently mentioned stigma as a major obstacle to reintegration.

"People in my village still look at me as a killer, not someone who has changed." (Ex-combatant, Jos camp)

"Communities need to trust again; without acceptance, these youths can easily return to violence." (Community leader, Maiduguri)

"Sometimes families themselves reject the boys. Some parents refuse to take them back home." (Rehabilitation officer, Jos)

"Even when I tried to start small business, customers avoided me because of my past." (Male ex-combatant, Kaduna).

This theme reveals that community perception is central to successful reintegration. Despite the positive impacts of rehabilitation, stigma continues to push many ex-combatants to the

margins of society. Being labelled dangerous or untrustworthy undermines their ability to rebuild livelihoods. Research shows that stigma and mistrust are persistent barriers in DDR processes across Africa (Boas & Hatløy, 2020). Rejection by families and employers' fuels frustration, which in turn heightens recidivism risk (Annan et al., 2019).

The broader social environment thus plays a crucial role in sustaining rehabilitation gains. Community-based reconciliation and sensitization programmes have proven effective in restoring trust and promoting forgiveness (Ikejiaku, 2022). This resonates with the testimonies here, where both community leaders and ex-combatants highlighted the need for acceptance. Without it, DDR risks producing individuals rehabilitated "on paper" but alienated in practice. Addressing stigma is therefore as vital as vocational and psychosocial interventions. Successful reintegration requires collective healing and shared responsibility between ex-combatants and host communities, as also noted by McMullin (2021).

Theme 3: Sustainability of DDR Programmes

Stakeholders raised concerns about limited funding and weak monitoring.

> "The programme is good, but funding is inconsistent, and this affects the continuity of training." (Programme coordinator, Abuja)

> "After graduation, we don't really follow up on the boys. Some of them disappear, and nobody knows where they are." (Reintegration officer, Maiduguri)

> "We need long-term investment; without it, everything we do here will be wasted when the boys return to poverty." (Programme manager, Abuja)

"Sometimes we run out of materials for training, and the boys just sit idle. That makes them frustrated." (Vocational trainer, Kaduna).

This theme highlights the structural weaknesses that undermine DDR sustainability. Inconsistent funding disrupts training continuity and diminishes participant motivation. Weak monitoring systems mean that many ex-combatants are lost once they exit programmes, a gap that creates vulnerability to re-recruitment (Munive, 2020). Scholars argue that short-term interventions are insufficient without institutional capacity and long-term planning (Themnér, 2019). Effective reintegration requires post-programme support systems, including microcredit, job placements, and mentorship (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2019).

Participants' frustration at shortages of training materials also reflects what Boas and Bjørkhaug (2021) describe as the "fragility trap" in DDR, where under-resourced programmes inadvertently fuel disillusionment. For DDR to be sustainable, governments and international partners must commit to predictable funding and comprehensive monitoring mechanisms (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Otherwise, the risk of relapse into insurgency remains high. Thus, sustainability depends not only on initial success within rehabilitation centres but also on building enduring structures that ensure ex-combatants remain integrated in civilian life.

4.2. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.2.1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

TABLE 4.1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)

18–25	72	24%
26–35	138	46%
36–45	60	20%
46 and above	30	10%
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Most respondents, forty-six (46%), were aged twenty-six to thirty-five (26–35) years, reflecting the dominance of young adults in armed groups.

TABLE 4.2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Educational Level	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
No formal education	102	34%
Primary	81	27%
Secondary	75	25%
Tertiary	42	14%
Total	**300**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

A significant proportion (34%) lacked formal education, confirming the link between low literacy and vulnerability to recruitment.

4.2.2 RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

LIKERT SCALE:

i. Research Question (**RQ**)
ii. Strongly Agree (**SA**)
iii. Agree (**A**)
iv. Disagree (**D**) and
v. Strongly Disagree (**SD**)

Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale is stated at **2.5,** this means that when the calculated mean is above **2.5,** then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is below **2.5,** then the item is rejected.

RQ.1: How effective are rehabilitation programs in addressing the specific needs of youth ex-combatants?

TABLE 4.3: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF REHAB PROGRAMMES

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	The rehabilitation programme addresses my psychological needs.	120	100	60	20	3.00	Accepted
2.	Vocational training has improved my chances of lawful employment.	140	90	50	20	3.17	Accepted

3.	Religious and moral re-orientation helps reduce extremist tendencies.	110	120	50	20	3.07	Accepted
4.	The programme provides adequate counselling services.	80	110	70	40	2.77	Accepted
5	Reintegration support (housing, cash, start-up tools) is sufficient.	70	90	90	50	2.60	Accepted
	Average Mean					**2.80**	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

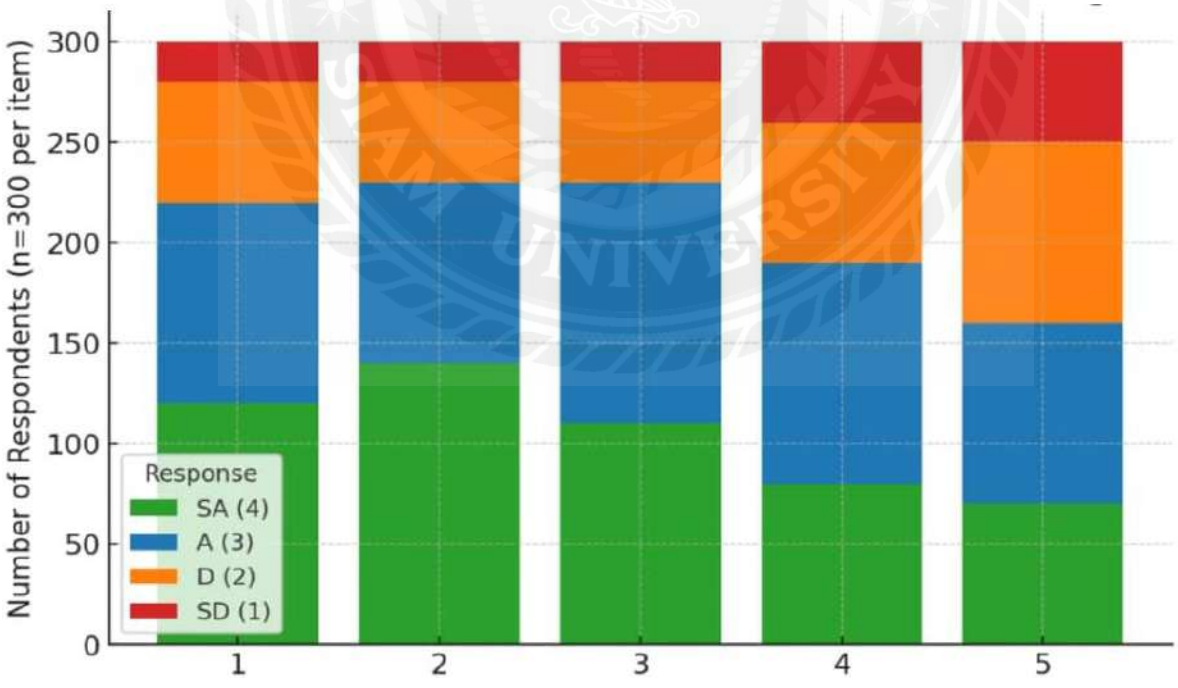


Figure 4.1: Graphical Representation of Data on Effectiveness.

Overall responses indicate moderate-to-strong perceived effectiveness of core program components. Vocational training (Item 2) shows the highest positive endorsement (mean 3.17), suggesting tangible employment-related benefits. Psychological support and moral re-orientation also receive generally favorable ratings (means ≈3.07). However, counseling (Item 4) and reintegration material supports (Item 5) score lower (means 2.77 and 2.60) with wider dispersion, indicating notable gaps. In essence, while skills and moral components appear effective, there are shortfall**s** in counselling intensity and material reintegration assistance that programme managers should prioritise to improve holistic outcomes.

RQ. 2: What are the key factors contributing to the risk of recidivism among reintegrated youth?

TABLE 4.4: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISK OF RECIDIVISM

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
6.	Community acceptance influences my decision not to rejoin armed groups.	130	100	50	20	3.13	Accepted
7.	I have developed trust in state authorities after joining the programme	60	100	90	50	2.57	Accepted
8.	Rehabilitation reduces the likelihood of relapse into violence.	120	110	50	20	3.10	Accepted

9.	I have experienced stigma from community members	90	80	80	50	2.70	Accepted
10.	There are gaps in programme funding and logistics.	160	90	30	20	3.30	Accepted
	Average Mean					**2.9**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

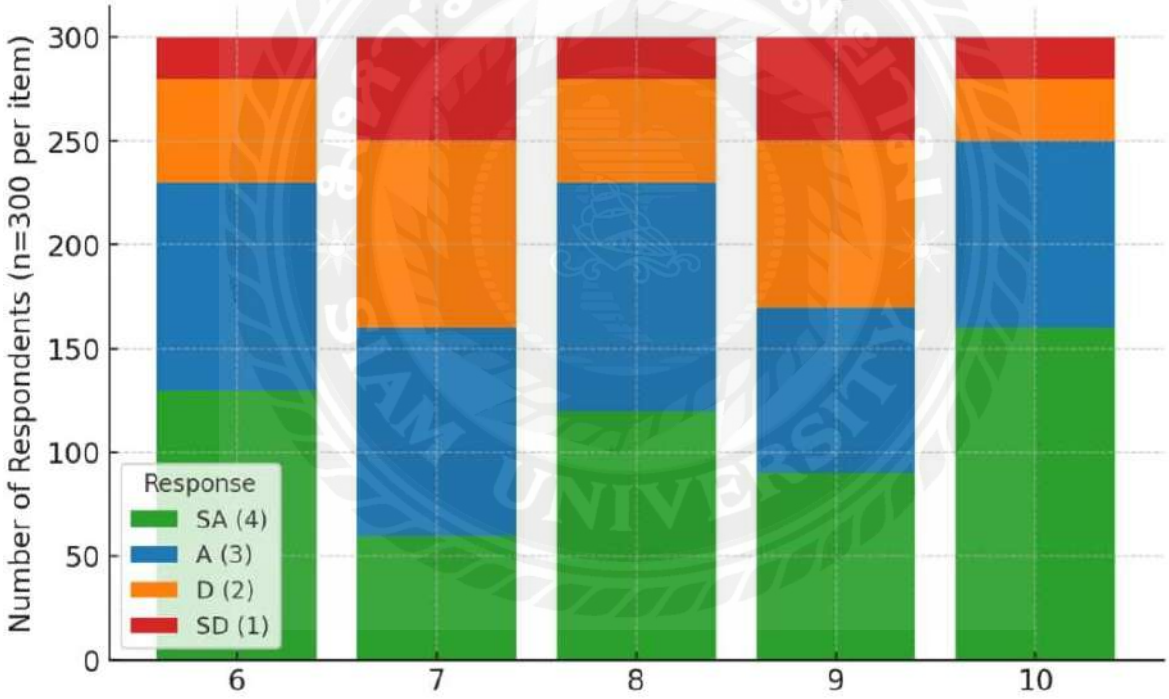


Figure 4.2: Graphical Representation of Data on Factors Contributing to Recidivism Risk

Social acceptance and perceived programme effectiveness strongly lower recidivism risk (Items 6 and 8, means 3.13 and 3.10). However, trust in state authorities is weaker (mean 2.57), revealing a potential institutional vulnerability; limited trust may erode long-term adherence to

peaceful norms. Stigma is a meaningful problem (Item 9, mean 2.70) that can undermine reintegration despite community acceptance reported by others, suggesting heterogeneity across communities or individuals. Importantly, respondents widely perceive funding/logistics gaps (Item 10, mean 3.30), which plausibly impede service delivery and indirectly heighten recidivism risk. Policy responses should therefore target trust-building, anti-stigma measures, and consistent resourcing.

RQ. 3: What programmatic and policy interventions can strengthen rehabilitation processes to mitigate recidivism?

TABLE 4.5: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON STRENGTHENING REHAB PROCESSES

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
11.	Peer influence in camps encourages positive behaviour.	110	100	60	30	2.97	Accepted
12.	Vocational training aligns with market opportunities.	100	110	60	30	2.93	Accepted
13.	The programme effectively monitors rehabilitated ex-combatants.	70	90	80	60	2.57	Accepted
14.	Lack of community support increases risk of recidivism.	140	90	50	20	3.17	Accepted
15.	The programme is sustainable in the long term	60	90	100	50	2.53	Accepted

	Average Mean					**2.7**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

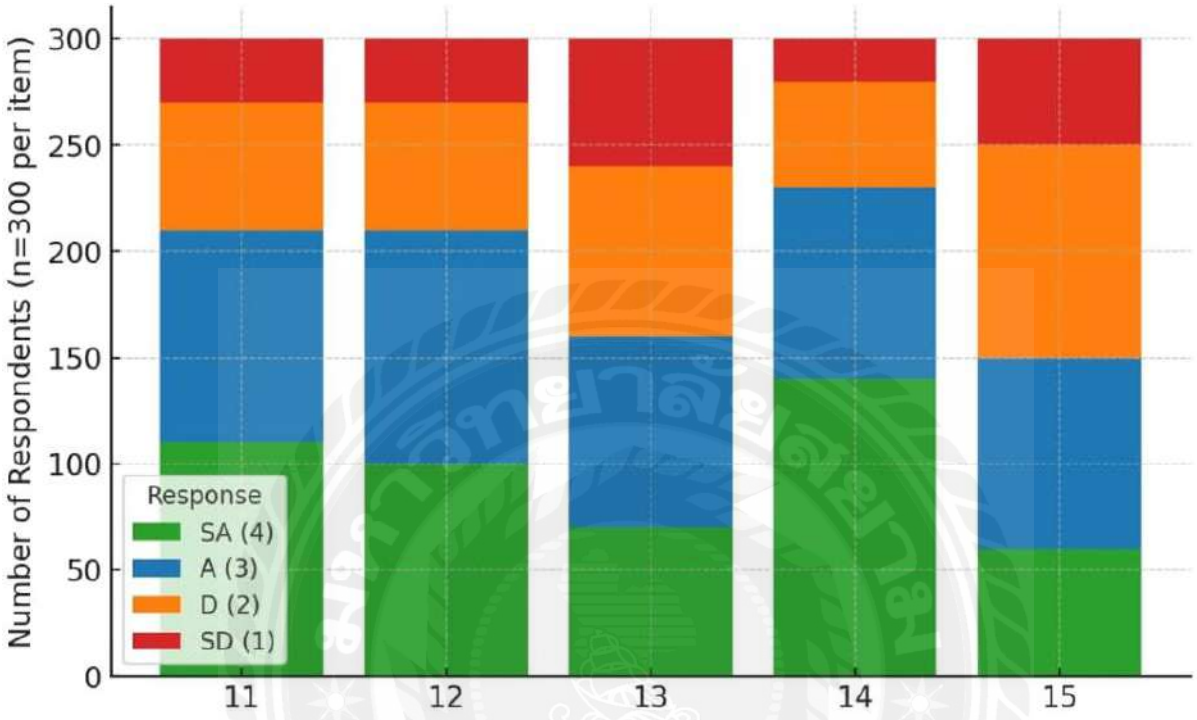


Figure 4.3: Graphical Representation of Data on Strengthening Rehab Processes

Respondents emphasize community support and positive peer influence (Items 11 & 14, means 2.97 and 3.17) as crucial for preventing relapse and confirm that vocational training is moderately well aligned with markets (Item 12, mean 2.93). However, monitoring mechanisms (Item 13, mean 2.57) and long-term sustainability (Item 15, mean 2.53) are less satisfactory, flagging gaps in program oversight and financing. Practically, this suggests policymakers should invest in robust follow-up/monitoring systems, scale market-driven vocational options, and secure sustainable funding streams, while leveraging peer structures and community engagement as frontline prevention mechanisms.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this research reveal multi-layered insights into the dynamics of rehabilitation and recidivism among youth ex-combatants in Northern Nigeria. In alignment with the research objectives, the results underscore both the strengths and limitations of current rehabilitation programmes, highlight critical socio-economic and psychosocial drivers of recidivism, and suggest avenues for enhancing programme sustainability and community reintegration.

Objective One (1): Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Programmes

The thematic and quantitative data point to vocational training, counselling, and religious re-orientation as the most effective components of rehabilitation. Vocational programmes were widely endorsed by participants (mean = 3.17), providing tangible skills that offer pathways to lawful employment and financial independence. This aligns with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that behaviors are acquired and sustained through observation, modelling, and reinforcement. Ex-combatants who learned tailoring, carpentry, or other trades demonstrated behavioral change as they imitated productive lifestyles and received positive reinforcement from earning income.

Counselling services, although moderately effective (mean = 2.77), helped address aggression and trauma, thereby complementing the strain-induced frustrations that often push youth into violence. Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) provides a useful lens here: many combatants were initially drawn into insurgency due to blocked opportunities and social strain. Rehabilitation, by reducing psychological distress and providing coping strategies, mitigates these frustrations and offers legitimate pathways to achieve goals. Similarly, religious re-orientation corrected

extremist interpretations of faith, reinforcing Push and Pull Factors Theory (Speckhard, 2016), where ideological misrepresentation functioned as a "push" into violence. By reframing narratives, religious programmes reduced extremist pull and redirected identity toward peaceful coexistence.

When situated within Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), these findings illustrate how rehabilitation shifts ex-combatants' group affiliations. Previously, their sense of identity was embedded in insurgent networks that glorified violence. Rehabilitation provides new "in-groups" based on vocational cohorts, counselling groups, and faith communities. This re-socialization fosters positive self-concept and collective identity around peace, entrepreneurship, and spirituality, weakening attachment to violent groups. Thus, SIT helps explain why ex-combatants increasingly identified with productive societal roles rather than with armed factions.

Objective Two (2): Socio-Economic, Psychological, and Ideological Drivers of Recidivism

Despite programme successes, several findings highlight persistent risk factors for relapse into violence. Stigma emerged as a dominant challenge, with respondents citing rejection by families and communities (mean = 2.70). From the perspective of SIT, stigma reflects the difficulty of transitioning into a new in-group identity. When communities continue to label ex-combatants as "killers," reintegration is undermined, and individuals may revert to old identities where they felt recognised and respected. McMullin (2021) argues that exclusion fosters marginalization, reinforcing attachment to deviant groups.

Distrust of state authorities (mean = 2.57) also surfaced as a vulnerability. This reflects a broader crisis of legitimacy in state institutions, echoing Annan et al. (2019), who found that lack of trust in government hinders DDR outcomes across conflict contexts. Weak monitoring and inconsistent programme funding further exacerbate this risk. Without sustainable structures, ex-

combatants perceive the state as unreliable, making them susceptible to alternative identities offered by insurgent recruiters. From Strain Theory, economic deprivation and inadequate post-programme support constitute structural pressures that can drive youth back to illegitimate means. Similarly, Push and Pull Factors Theory explains how persistent poverty, coupled with lack of acceptance, may serve as "push" factors, while promises of belonging and financial incentives from insurgent groups act as "pull" factors.

Objective Three (3): Strategies to Strengthen Rehabilitation and Reduce Recidivism

The findings suggest that holistic approaches are necessary to consolidate rehabilitation outcomes. Respondents emphasised the role of community acceptance (mean = 3.17) and peer influence (mean = 2.97) in sustaining behavioral change. Within SIT, this confirms that identity transformation is not an isolated process; it requires the validation of new group identities by the broader community. When ex-combatants find recognition and belonging in supportive peer groups the probability of relapse declines.

However, sustainability challenges, including weak monitoring (mean = 2.57) and long-term funding deficits (mean = 2.53), point to structural gaps. These echo Themnér (2019) and Munive (2020), who stress that DDR programmes without long-term investment risk superficial success. For SIT, sustainability is about maintaining and reinforcing new identities over time; without consistent reinforcement, individuals may regress into old affiliations. Therefore, embedding monitoring mechanisms, market-driven vocational programmes, and institutional trust-building efforts is essential. Overall, the findings demonstrate that rehabilitation programmes in Northern Nigeria have achieved notable progress but remain hindered by structural and social barriers. SIT provides a strong explanatory framework by showing how shifts in group identity,

shaped by vocational, psychosocial, and religious interventions, reduce recidivism. Yet, without community validation, sustained funding, and institutional trust, these identity shifts remain fragile.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSION

This research critically assessed the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes in mitigating the risk of recidivism among youth ex-combatants in Northern Nigeria. Findings demonstrate that vocational training, psychosocial counseling, and religious re-orientation significantly enhance reintegration prospects by equipping ex-combatants with employable skills, addressing trauma, and dismantling extremist ideologies. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, these interventions create new in-groups that reframe ex-combatants' identities around peaceful, productive roles, weakening ties to insurgent factions.

However, persistent barriers remain. Community stigma undermines reintegration, while limited trust in state institutions and inconsistent funding weaken programme sustainability. Structural deficits, such as weak monitoring systems and inadequate post-programme support, leave ex-combatants vulnerable to relapse into violence. These findings confirm insights from Social Learning and Strain Theories, which highlight the role of environment, opportunity, and coping mechanisms in shaping behavior.

In conclusion, rehabilitation in Northern Nigeria has demonstrated moderate effectiveness but requires greater systemic support. Sustainable reintegration depends not only on individual transformation but also on collective acceptance, institutional reliability, and long-term investment. Without these, the risk of recidivism remains significant. Thus, holistic, youth-sensitive, and community-driven strategies must be prioritized to consolidate peace and reduce insurgency relapse.

5.2 PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The findings of this research hold practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders engaged in peacebuilding and DDR processes.

i. Vocational and market-driven training should be institutionalized as the cornerstone of rehabilitation. Partnerships with private sector actors can enhance employability by aligning training with labor market demands, thereby increasing sustainability of livelihoods.

ii. Psycho-social and religious interventions should be expanded and mainstreamed. Counseling must be scaled up to adequately address trauma, anger management, and emotional resilience. Religious re-orientation, when guided by credible clerics, can counter extremist narratives and foster inclusive ideologies.

iii. Community sensitization programmes are urgently needed to address stigma and rebuild trust. Community-driven dialogues, reconciliation initiatives, and public campaigns can reduce suspicion and facilitate acceptance. This ensures that ex-combatants' new identities are validated by society, a critical factor highlighted by Social Identity Theory.

iv. Institutional frameworks must prioritize sustainability. Monitoring mechanisms should track ex-combatants' post-graduation, offering mentorship, microcredit, and job placement schemes. International donors and government agencies may consider committing to multi-year funding cycles, preventing disruption in service delivery.

v. Trust-building between the state and ex-combatants is essential. Consistency, transparency, and inclusivity in programme implementation will enhance institutional legitimacy and long-term adherence to peaceful norms.

Collectively, these applications ensure that DDR moves beyond short-term rehabilitation to deliver enduring reintegration and peace-building outcomes.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 POLICY AND PROGRAMME RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen vocational training by aligning curricula with labor market demands and establishing public-private partnerships.
2. Expand psychosocial counseling through recruitment of trained therapists and provision of long-term trauma care.
3. Institutionalize religious re-orientation with credible clerics and interfaith dialogue to dismantle extremist ideologies.
4. Implement community sensitization campaigns to reduce stigma and enhance reconciliation between ex-combatants and communities.
5. Establish monitoring and mentorship systems to track reintegrated individuals and provide continuous support.
6. Secure sustainable funding through multi-year donor commitments and government budgetary allocation.
7. Enhance institutional trust by promoting transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in DDR operations.

5.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach to track long-term outcomes of rehabilitated ex-combatants, offering deeper insights into sustainability.

2. Comparative research across regions in Nigeria could illuminate contextual differences in rehabilitation effectiveness.
3. Quantitative studies with larger samples could strengthen causal inferences about the impact of rehabilitation on reducing recidivism.
4. Research exploring gendered experiences of rehabilitation would shed light on the specific challenges faced by female ex-combatants.
5. Finally, integrating digital monitoring tools in future research can enhance data collection and follow-up of reintegrated youth.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

Kindly take a moment to fill out your most valued opinion on the questionnaire to enable the researcher complete a study on, "Study of Rehabilitation Programme and Risk of Recidivism among Non-State Armed Groups in Northern Nigeria." Your identity and responses will be treated with the highest level of discretion and information will only be utilized to achieve the objective of the research

Part-A: Demographic Information

1. Gender

Male [ ] Female [ ]

2. Age

18–25 Range

26–35

36–45

46 and above

3. Educational Level

No formal education

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

PART-B

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

1. The rehabilitation programme addresses my psychological needs.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD [ ]

2. Vocational training has improved my chances of lawful employment.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD [ ]

3. Religious and moral re-orientation helps reduce extremist tendencies.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD [ ]

4. The programme provides adequate counseling services.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD [ ]

5. Reintegration support (housing, cash, and start-up tools) is sufficient.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

6. Community acceptance influences my decision not to rejoin armed groups.

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

7. I have developed trust in state authorities after joining the programme

   SA[ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

8. Rehabilitation reduces the likelihood of relapse into violence.

   SA[ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

9. I have experienced stigma from community members

   SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

10. There are gaps in programme funding and logistics.

SA [ ] **A[ ]** **D[ ]** **SD[ ]**

11. Peer influence in camps encourages positive behavior.

SA [ ] **A[ ]** **D[ ]** **SD[ ]**

12. Vocational training aligns with market opportunities.

SA [ ] **A[ ]** **D[ ]** **SD[ ]**

13. The programme effectively monitors rehabilitated ex-combatants.

SA [ ] **A[ ]** **D[ ]** **SD[ ]**

14 Lack of community support increases risk of recidivism.

SA [ ] A[ ] D[ ] SD[ ]

15 The programme is sustainable in the long term

SA [ ] **A[ ]** **D[ ]** **SD[ ]**

PART C- INTERVIEW

1. How effective would you consider the rehabilitation programmes?
2. What challenges have you faced getting reintegrated to the community?
3. What would you say are the challenges facing the programme sustainability?

DICKSON AGWU CHIBUEZE

Student's Biography

Date of Birth: 15 April 1988

Place of Birth: Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Educational Qualifications

- B.Sc. Mass Communication (Second Class Upper), Ebonyi State University, 2010
- Certificate in Academic and Professional Courses, Foreign Service Academy (FSA), 25th Regular Course, 2022–2023
- Certificate in Fundamentals of Public Service, Foreign Service Academy, 2022–2023
- Certificate in "Security and Diplomacy in Wartime: Ukrainian Experience," 2023
- Certificate of Proficiency, Nigerian Institute of Management, 2012
- Computer Training Certificate, Nucleus Technology, Abakaliki, 2009
- Senior Secondary School Certificate, GSS Lafia, 2005
- First School Leaving Certificate, Lafia East Primary School, 1999

Working Experiences

- Foreign Service Officer, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria (2019–Present)
- Consular Officer and Second Secretary, Embassy of Nigeria, Thailand (2023–2026)
- Operations Manager, Hammersmith Group of Companies, Abuja, Nigeria (2016–2017)
- Teacher (Literature-in-English), Aladja Senior Grammar School, Delta State – NYSC (2012–2013)
- Peer Educator Trainer (PET), National Youth Service Corps
- Editor-in-Chief, *The Watch Newspaper*, Ebonyi State University (2010/2011)
- Merchandiser/Sales Representative, Pricerite Products Ltd., Abuja (2014)
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- Industrial Training: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Lafia – News Reporter (2008)
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