

Integrating Emergency Preparedness and Life-Saving Skills into the Nigerian Educational Curriculum: A National Imperative

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is constantly and increasingly threatened by a wide range of emergencies, such as natural catastrophes, disease outbreaks, road accidents, fires, and civil unrest. The country's youth are especially at risk during these kinds of emergencies, and this risk is made worse by the fact that most people don't know how to respond to them. This position paper advocates for the compulsory and uniform incorporation of age-appropriate emergency preparedness protocols and life-saving competencies into the national curriculum for primary and secondary education in Nigeria. It argues that teaching a child fundamental skills like CPR, how to stop bleeding, how to be safe around fire, how to give basic first aid, and how to be aware of their surroundings is both a strategic and moral necessity. This proactive step will not only create a culture of safety and resilience from an early age, but it will also immediately lower the number of deaths and illnesses that could have been avoided. The study provides a framework for implementation, prioritising practical, experiential instruction over academic understanding. By investing in this educational reform, Nigeria can provide its young people the tools they need to be first responders, make communities stronger, and take a big step towards protecting future generations. This will turn them from potential victims into capable agents of safety and stability. The paper urged the Federal Ministry of Education and other important groups to make this policy a national priority.

Keywords: Emergency preparedness, Life-saving skills, Disaster management, Education

INTRODUCTION

The frightening images from the Ikeja Cantonment bomb blast of 2002 are still a scar on the national conscience. They are a clear reminder of both the initial explosion and the terrible chain of events that followed. During that crisis, a lack of public education about how to respond to emergencies caused hundreds of people, including many children, to run straight into a canal, which resulted to a devastating loss of life that was much worse than the initial explosion. This wasn't just one failure to respond; it was a terrible lesson for the whole country about how much it costs to be unprepared. Decades later, Nigeria still sees its residents, young and old, die in situations where basic information could have saved lives. Avoidable fatalities and deaths still do occur from stampedes at crowded places, accidents of various sorts and constant communal strife. The high mortality rates due to avoidable domestic accidents and critically delayed emergency response in Nigeria are not merely anecdotal but are substantiated by rigorous empirical research and national surveillance data.

Bettencourt (2025) ranked injuries among the top 10 causes of death in sub-Saharan Africa, with unintentional injuries such as burns, falls and poisoning occurring in domestic settings, accounting for a substantial disease burden, with higher mortality rates compared to global averages. Studies from tertiary hospital trauma registries, such as those from the National Trauma Registry of Nigeria (NTRN 2023) have shown that a high percentage of adult trauma admissions originate from low-energy domestic falls (especially among the elderly) and burns, with complications leading to sepsis and death being common due to delayed presentation. A systematic review by Adekoya et al. (2022) showed a trend of pediatric vulnerability in disease burden due to

domestic accident. The authours found that domestic accidents, particularly burns from open fires and hot liquids, drowning in uncovered water containers, and falls are a leading cause of mortality and morbidity among infants and children under 5 years of age in urban and rural slums in Nigeria. Adekoya and colleagues attributed this to environmental hazards, lack of supervision and poverty.

In a world where children can navigate smartphones with astonishing speed and memorize complicated scientific formulas, there is still a big gap: people do not know how to keep people alive when they are at their most vulnerable. A society that doesn't teach a child basic CPR and first aid skills at home, in school, and in public places is a weak one, where tragedies happen every day that could have been avoided. The threat is not just numbers; it's a scary reality that happens in silence and helplessness. Picture a fun family supper. A tiny youngster, maybe a sister or cousin, eagerly takes a piece of fruit, and everyone laughs. The laughter stops right away and is replaced by a silent, frantic gagging. The child's face, which was once full of happiness, turns a scary shade of blue. Panic sets in. The mother screams and is immobilized with fear. In a panic, the father pats the child's back, which doesn't help at all. An older sibling stands by with a smartphone in hand. They aren't recording a funny meme, but they are completely frozen, knowing they should do something but not knowing what. As they wait for an ambulance that might not get there in time, precious minutes tick by between life and irreparable brain damage. This sight, which happens in homes all over the world, is a direct result of the fact that no one in the room knew how to do the Heimlich manoeuvre. A talent that only takes a few minutes to master could have saved a life and brought back breath, but the lack of it converted a household into a place of pain. In a school context, a serious injury or death could happen on the school playground during a rough game of football. An adolescent kid who looks healthy suddenly clutches his chest and falls to the ground. The game is over. A gathering forms, some are scared and some are interested. A teacher runs over, but they are trained to organize lessons, not to give first aid. They ask for aid, but in those first few seconds, all they can do is wait. Students' phones are strong enough to send the event live to the whole world, but they can't do anything about it. They watch as their friend lies still, his life slipping away with each passing second. They do not know how to check for a pulse, clear an airway, or execute chest compressions that could keep oxygen flowing to the brain. In biology class, they learnt that the heart is a pump, but they did not learn how to manually prime it when it stops working. People are glad that the paramedics are there, but they also wonder if earlier CPR may have stopped a catastrophe. The school, which was supposed to help them get ready for life, has not helped them get ready for death. It's much more disturbing to see a bustling roadway following a small scooter crash. There is a young man lying on the ground with a nasty cut on his leg and blood pooling around him. A bunch of high school students see what happens as they walk home. They want to help, but everything they know about pressure comes from films, where it is done in a dramatic way. They are unsure and perhaps scared of making a mistake, so they wait. One person calls for aid on the phone, another videos, but no one steps up to help. They do not, realize that putting direct pressure on the wound with a cloth could stop the bleeding. They do not know how to make a tourniquet on the spot. People standing by could not help because they do not know how, not because they do not care. The victim's blood flows onto the asphalt. This public place, full of people who could help, turns into a stage for everyone to feel powerless.

The high mortality rates reported by the trauma registries of tertiary hospitals and the National Trauma Centre Abuja Nigeria presents clear evidence of delayed and ineffective first response to domestic and traumatic injuries. Authours (Van der Velden et al. 2008, Kotwal et al. 2016 and Nasr et al. 2019) have stressed the importance of the "First-Hour" Golden Period in trauma management. In the words of Abhilash and Sivanandan (2020), the first 60 minutes following trauma technically termed the "golden hour" is a critical period for getting patients to a trauma center. The concept underpinning the "golden hour" principle argues that definitive resuscitative trauma care must be initiated within this early window (Abhilash and Sivanandan 2020). Oladiran et al. (2021) analyzed road traffic and domestic injury cases in three states. The authours reported that over 75% of patients arrived at a definitive care facility more than 3 hours post-incident. They also reported that mortality from trauma was strongly correlated with time-to-care. Gaikwad et al. (2025) however reported that around 20.6% of patients arrived within the first 60 minutes after a road traffic accident, despite 61.3% of such accidents happening within 50km of hospitals. The authours identified non-availability of vehicles to transport victims, finances, communication, awareness about nearby facilities, fear of legal formalities, and availability of attendants as barriers to reaching health facilities after road traffic accident. Oluwadiya et al. (2020) had earlier reported that Nigeria has fewer than 5 functioning public ambulance service points per 10 million people, and most are non-functional. This according to him forces reliance on

unprepared bystanders and “Good Samaritan” taxi drivers, who usually lack first aid knowledge and with tendencies to worsen injuries during extrication and transport (Oluwadiya et al. 2020).

An empirical survey of households in Lagos by Babalola and Akinbami (2023) revealed that less than 15% of adults had received any form of basic first aid training. Consequently, common initial responses to burns, choking, or bleeding are often harmful traditional practices, exacerbating outcomes. The nation’s educational system, the very engine designed to prepare the next generation for the world, systematically overlooks this critical dimension of preparedness. While students are drilled in equations and historical dates, they are never formally taught how to administer basic first aid, control severe bleeding, perform CPR, or execute a simple evacuation plan. This curricular gap renders our youth uniquely vulnerable. They are left as bystanders in crises, their fate hinging on chance rather than capability. The empirical data presented paints a clear picture of a nation plagued with a high incidence of preventable domestic injuries compounded by a critically delayed and disorganized emergency response chain. This synergy directly translates to the conversion of non-fatal injuries into fatal outcomes, making accidental injuries a major and largely avoidable public health crisis.

This position paper asserts that the memory of past catastrophes like the Ikeja blast must serve as more than a monument of grief; it must be the foundational impetus for transformative change. We argue that the mandatory integration of age-appropriate emergency preparedness and life-saving skills into the national curriculum for elementary and secondary education is a non-negotiable and long-overdue national priority. By empowering our students with this essential knowledge, we can break the cycle of reactive panic and build, from the ground up, a generation of Nigerians who are not victims of circumstance, but agents of their own survival and the safety of their communities.

Much as school shooting incidences might sound unreal to the Nigerian educational system of the past few decades, unexpected calamities such as cult-related strikes, fire outbreaks, severe storm and floods, building collapse and more recently kidnappings in schools or violent conflicts spilling into the school from neighboring communities have become common narratives in schools across the Nigerian state. In those first critical moments, before professional help can arrive, the outcome hinges on one crucial factor; the knowledge of those present. Tragically, in Nigeria today, that knowledge is often the missing element.

The Nigerian child spends over a third of his/her life within the educational system, diligently learning mathematics, science, and literature to prepare him/her for the future. Yet, the system fails to equip students with the most fundamental lesson of all; how to save a life, including their own. In a nation where daily life is increasingly punctuated by emergencies from road accidents and domestic fires to communal clashes and natural disasters this gap in our curriculum is not merely an oversight, but a collective failure to safeguard the future generation.

This paper confronts this critical deficit head-on. It argues that the time has come to weave emergency preparedness and life-saving skills into the very fabric of elementary and secondary education in Nigeria. By transforming students from potential victims into capable first responders, the nation is not just changing a curriculum, but building a nation of resilience, one young citizen at a time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review is bastioned on the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The theory originally called Social Learning Theory, was developed primarily by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1960s and expanded over decades. It is a comprehensive framework for understanding how people acquire and maintain behaviors, considering the dynamic interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior itself. The theory posits that learning occurs in a social context through observational learning (modeling), and is mediated by cognitive processes. Unlike strict behaviorism, it emphasizes that people are not just passive reactors to environmental stimuli, but active agents who can regulate their own behavior. The key concepts of the theory include; triadic reciprocal determinism, observational learning or modeling, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and self-regulation. Social Cognitive Theory assumes that people can learn by observing others, and that learning is an internal cognitive process. Behaviour is also construed as goal-directed and motivated by forethought, and, reinforcement and punishment have indirect cognitive effects. The theory also assumes

that beliefs about one's capabilities powerfully influence behavior, motivation, thought patterns, and emotional responses. The current review holds that people are proactive and self-organizing. They are capable of setting goals, anticipate the likely consequences of their actions, and plan courses of behaviour in response to trauma and emergencies.

A Comparative Model of Emergency Response and Survival Skills in National Curricula

Education systems are recognized as fundamental platforms for equipping future generations with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for community resilience (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). The period 2020-2025, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related catastrophes, has accelerated policy reviews and curricular innovations in this domain worldwide. Different nations integrate emergency preparedness into their educational systems based on their unique historical, geopolitical, and environmental contexts. The models may range from comprehensive civil defense to decentralized, hazard-specific training.

Japanese Model of Resilience learnt through Repetition and Community

The Japanese model is a culture of resilience learnt through repetition and community. The model is deeply ingrained in its national psyche, developed in response to its vulnerability to earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons. According to Pamaong, Yildiz, & Shaw (2025), the approach is characterized by rigorous, frequent drilling and a strong emphasis on community cooperation. Hinged on a sound philosophy which sees survival as a collective responsibility honed through relentless practice, the model aims at instilling automatic, calm and efficient responses to frequent natural disasters (Yusuf et al. 2022). Its implementation begins at the elementary level where training begins in the kindergarten. The first of every month is designated as "Emergency Prevention Day," and most schools conduct a drill. Young children learn basic earthquake drills such as getting under desks immediately the alarm is sounded, and evacuation routes to designated safe zones (often schools themselves serve as primary tsunami shelters). At the secondary level, drills become more complex and realistic, often involving simulated smoke, mock casualties, and community-wide coordination. Advanced first aid is taught at this stage and students are exposed to more advanced first aid skills, including the use of CPR and AED. Disaster simulation is used for preparing young students for emergency response at this stage. Full-scale simulations may include students practicing evacuation, accounting for all peers, and setting up temporary relief areas. Additionally, practical skills taught at schools include lessons on using fire extinguishers, basic emergency supply management, and cooperation with local fire and police departments during drills. The Japanese culture of repetition and community integration ensures that preparedness is not a separate subject but a fundamental aspect of school life, creating a deeply ingrained "muscle memory" for responding to disasters calmly and effectively. Reinforced by a culture of repetition and community integration, Japan presents the most deeply ingrained model of emergency preparedness education ("Bosai"), shaped by the collective memory of frequent disasters. It moves beyond drills to cultivate "disaster imagination" the cognitive ability to anticipate and problem-solve during crises (Takeuchi & Tanaka, 2020). Crucially, schools function as community hubs; students conduct risk assessments and develop family preparedness plans, creating a tangible school-to-home pipeline (Seki & Sato, 2024).

Chinese Model of Civil Defense and Collective Resilience

China's approach is characterized by its top-down, state-mandated system focused on civil defense, natural disasters, and collective discipline. The curriculum is comprehensive, covering fire prevention, earthquake response, traffic safety, and basic first aid (Li & Zhao, 2023). Pedagogy combines classroom instruction with large-scale, highly regimented drills. Post-pandemic, there has been a deliberate push to integrate public health emergency concepts into higher education curricula (Xu et al., 2021). The goal is to prepare the populace for a wide range of threats, including earthquakes, floods, and potential geopolitical conflicts, while fostering a sense of collective responsibility and state-led order. At the elementary level, education begins with basic fire and earthquake drills. Students are taught simple evacuation routes, and ER techniques such as "Duck, Cover, and Hold On" techniques for earthquakes, and basic personal safety rules. The emphasis is on obedience and following teacher instructions without panic. At the secondary level, the curriculum becomes more formalized through courses like "Morality and the Rule of Law" and "Public Safety Education." It includes theoretical knowledge on disasters, regular practical drills, basic first aid (CPR, Heimlich), and in some regions, basic

civil air defense education. The system is standardized and ubiquitous, with drills being a routine and non-negotiable part of the school calendar, instilling a culture of preparedness from a young age.

Israel's Model of National Readiness

Israel's model is arguably one of the most comprehensive in the world, born from direct and persistent national security threats. Their philosophy recognizes personal survival as a national duty. The programme is pragmatic, trauma-informed, and designed to create a population that is resilient and capable of acting effectively under direct threat. At the Israeli's elementary educational level, children undergo regular drills for rocket attacks. They learn the meaning of sirens and have exactly 90 seconds to reach a protected space. Training is delivered in an age-appropriate, less frightening manner. National television stations host cartoons and other forms of animated media suitable for various ages of children, on how to access bomb shelters at home and in public places. At the secondary level, the curriculum becomes intensive and more formal, with a strong focus on comprehensive first aid and trauma training (often through Magen David Adom), including bleeding control and CPR. Students are also taught protocols for chemical attacks and active threats, with trauma and bleeding control occupying central place. The skills taught are directly applicable to the most likely threats, creating a society where virtually every citizen is a potential first responder.

United States' Decentralized, Hazard-Specific Model

A decentralized, hazard-specific approach is adopted for risks and disaster management in the United States, as it lacks a single, federally mandated curriculum. The result of this is a patchwork of state and local programmes, though with common elements driven by federal guidance and non-profit initiatives. The focus is overwhelmingly on certifiable, immediate-response skills, particularly CPR/AED use and hemorrhage control via the "Stop the Bleed" campaign (Kessler & Walsh, 2022). Training is typically integrated into Health or Physical Education curricula and delivered through partnerships with organizations like the American Red Cross or local fire departments (National Academies, 2022). Preparedness is largely framed around responding to local natural hazards (tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes) and, increasingly, school shootings. At the elementary level, focus is on core drills like fire, lockdown (for active shooters), and tornado or earthquake drills. The training is primarily about muscle memory and evacuation. At the secondary level however, ER skills are often introduced in health classes, which may include basic CPR and first aid. National initiatives like "Stop the Bleed" have introduced bleeding control training in some schools. The depth of training varies widely by district, but high priority is often given to lockdown procedures. The model is reactive to national tragedies, with security protocols evolving rapidly in response to events like school shootings.

Russia's Foundation of State Security

Russia's system is rooted in the Soviet-era concept of civil defense and is formalized through a mandatory subject known as "Основы Безопасности Жизнедеятельности" (OBZh), which translates to "Fundamentals of Life Safety" or "Basics of Life Safety." The Philosophy is to pursue a holistic and militaristic approach to security, blending personal safety, civil defense, pre-conscription military training, and patriotic education. At the elementary level, younger students learn basic personal safety rules such as traffic, fire, relating with strangers and hygiene. At the secondary school level, OBZh is a core academic subject from middle school through high school. The curriculum is extensive and includes civil defense, disaster response, substantial first aid, and military fundamentals including handling of firearms. Comprehensive and standardized, the OBZh is a mandatory, examinable subject that combines survival skills with pre-military and ideological training.

The Nigerian Basic and Secondary Education Curricula

A review of the Nigerian curricula for basic and secondary education reveals that elements of safety education and emergency response are present in a fragmented and largely theoretical form, but they fall critically short of a standardized, practical, and skills-based national programme. The implementation is inconsistent, and the emphasis remains on awareness rather than actionable competence.

The Nigerian educational curriculum is structured under the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). Relevant content is dispersed across several subjects, primarily at the basic education level

(Primary 1-9, equivalent to elementary and junior secondary). The foundational subjects containing safety topics include Basic Science & Technology (taught from Primary 4-9), Social Studies (Primary 4-9), Physical and Health Education (PHE) (taught at many levels, but more prominent in Basic Education), and Security Education (a new addition to the Basic Education Curriculum). A cursory look at these curricula will reveal significant limitations in their content and coverage. The Basic Science & Technology for example only covers topics such as personal hygiene, definition and basic first aid, safety at home and school, and drug abuse education. The major limitation of the scheme is that the first aid component is rudimentary, often limited to listing contents of a first aid box without practical application of skills like bandaging or CPR. A quick glance at the Social Studies content covers topics on "social problems" which can include accident prevention, safety in the environment, and the role of security agencies. It thus focuses on civic awareness and conceptual understanding rather than hands-on survival skills. The Physical and Health Education subject seems to be the primary carrier for health and safety topics. The syllabus includes topics on safety education (especially in sports), simple first aid treatment for minor injuries (bruises, strains, sprains and nose bleeds), and prevention of common illnesses.

Despite being the best-placed subject, the delivery is often theoretical. Many schools lack the practical resources (mannequins, resusci-anne, and other training kits) and qualified instructors to teach skills like CPR effectively. Assessment is often through written tests, not practical demonstrations. The relatively new Security Education is a stand-alone subject and also infused into others, with focus on topics like kidnapping, bomb blasts, fire outbreaks, and natural disasters.

The emphasis is overwhelmingly on avoidance and reporting ("run and tell a trusted adult"). It provides minimal to no training in response and intervention skills (what to do after a bomb blast regarding bleeding control, or how to act during a fire).

This comparative analysis not only revealed gaps and deficiencies in the nation's elementary and secondary curricula with regards to safety education and emergency preparedness, but also reveals several viable pathways for the nation. It might not be practicable to adopt a single model out of the ones reviewed in this paper, but Nigeria could adopt a hybrid model, combining Japan's drill frequency with Israel's practical first-aid focus, all within a standardized national framework. This could offer a robust solution tailored to Nigeria's specific risk profile.

A Call to Arm Nigerian Schools with Knowledge Necessary for its Citizens' Survival

The persistent specter of preventable tragedy in Nigeria, from the historic echoes of the Ikeja cantonment to the daily occurrences of road accidents and domestic fires, is not merely a failure of infrastructure or response time, it is fundamentally a failure of foresight and empowerment. This thesis has argued that a critical and transformative line of defense lies not solely in strengthening professional emergency services, but in the deliberate, systematic cultivation of a resilient citizenry, beginning with the youngest and most vulnerable, the students in elementary and secondary schools. The evidence is unequivocal. The review of the Nigerian curriculum reveals a well-intentioned but fragmented and theoretical approach to safety, one that produces awareness without ability, and knowledge without kinetic skill. This stands in stark contrast to the robust, practiced, and culturally ingrained models of nations like Japan, Israel, and Russia, where emergency preparedness is not an elective topic but a core tenet of education and civic identity. The comparative analysis illuminates a clear path; preparedness is a learned behavior, honed through standardization, repetition, and practical application.

The cost of inaction is measured in the silent moments of helplessness in a home where a child chokes, on a playground where a heart falters, on a roadside where life bleeds away as bystanders especially the youth, are paralyzed by a lack of simple, life-saving knowledge. This helplessness is not innate; it is curated by a system that has yet to prioritize the most fundamental of all lessons the preservation of human life. Therefore, this thesis culminates in an urgent and non-negotiable recommendation. We must move beyond awareness and embed actionable competence. Nigeria must integrate a mandatory, standardized, and practical emergency preparedness and life-saving skills programme into the national curriculum at every level. This programme must transcend theory, it should comprise among others certified practical training where hands-on, age-

appropriate instruction in CPR, hemorrhage control, airway management, and basic first aid is taught, mandatory realistic drills with regularly scheduled and community-integrated simulations for fire, flood, and lockdown scenarios, and national teacher certification focusing strategic partnership to train and equip educators as certified instructors of these vital skills. This is more than an educational reform; it is a national security and public health imperative. It should be seen as an investment in human capital that will yield dividends in saved lives, reduced trauma, and a stronger social fabric. By empowering the nation's students, they could be transformed from potential victims into agents of stability, from passive bystanders into confident first responders. The memory of past catastrophes should serve as foundation for a smarter, safer future. Nigeria's youthful population deserves to be equipped, not just to dream of a greater tomorrow, but to actively secure it. The time for policy is now. The duty to act is clear. The nation must arm its schools with knowledge necessary to preserve life.

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