

## IMPACT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS ON RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the impact of the Middle East crisis, particularly tensions involving Iran, on research development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study adopted a systematic review model, drawing from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and credible economic and educational analyses. Findings revealed that the crisis has significantly affected research development through multiple channels, including reduced funding for research, increased cost of research materials, disruptions in international collaborations, and limited access to global research training opportunities. The study also found that inflation, exchange rate instability, and economic uncertainty have weakened institutional research planning and contributed to brain drain among academic staff. These challenges have collectively slowed research productivity and innovation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study concludes that global*

*geopolitical crises have far-reaching implications for academic research systems in developing countries. It recommends diversification of research funding, strengthening of local research capacity, improved government intervention, and the adoption of resilient research management strategies to sustain research development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Middle East Crisis, Research Development, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria, Academic Research, Economic Shocks*



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## INTRODUCTION

Research development is a core mandate of tertiary institutions worldwide, serving as a foundation for knowledge creation, innovation, and national development. In Nigeria, universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are expected to generate research outputs that address socio-economic challenges and contribute to global scholarship. However, the effectiveness of research development in these institutions depends largely on adequate funding, access to modern facilities, international collaboration, and a stable economic environment [1]. In recent years, global geopolitical tensions, particularly the Middle East crisis involving Iran, have introduced new challenges to economic and institutional stability across many countries. Although Nigeria is geographically distant from the Middle East, its economy is highly integrated into global markets, especially in the oil and gas sector. As a result, conflicts in the Middle East often lead to fluctuations in oil prices, inflationary pressures, and exchange rate volatility in Nigeria [2], [3]. These economic disruptions have far-reaching implications for various sectors, including education.

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are particularly vulnerable to such external shocks due to their dependence on government funding and imported research infrastructure [4]. Rising inflation increases the cost of laboratory equipment, research materials, and digital tools required for academic work. At the same time, economic instability often leads to reduced government spending on education, thereby limiting the availability of research grants and institutional funding. In addition, international collaborations, which are essential for advancing research capacity, are often disrupted during global crises due to travel restrictions, funding reallocations, and geopolitical uncertainties [5].

The crisis has implications for human capital development within the academic community. Academic staff and postgraduate students rely on international exposure, training programmes, and collaborative networks to enhance their research skills. However, instability in global academic systems reduces opportunities for such engagements [6]. This situation not only affects individual researchers but also weakens the overall research capacity of tertiary institutions. Despite the importance of research development for national growth, there is limited comprehensive analysis linking global crises such as the Middle East conflict to research performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Most studies focus on macroeconomic impacts without adequately addressing their implications for academic research systems. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by systematically reviewing existing literature to examine how the Middle East crisis has influenced research development in Nigeria's tertiary institutions [7]. The study is significant as it provides insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and researchers on strategies to strengthen research resilience in the face of global uncertainties.

## Conceptual Terms

### Concept of Middle Crisis

The Middle East crisis, with particular focus on Iran, represents one of the most significant contemporary geopolitical conflicts, rooted in long-standing political, ideological, and strategic tensions involving Iran, the United States, Israel, and their regional allies. The current phase of the crisis escalated dramatically in February 2026 when the United States and Israel launched coordinated military strikes against Iran, targeting its nuclear facilities, military infrastructure, and leadership after



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the breakdown of diplomatic negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme . These developments marked a turning point in decades of hostility, which had previously been characterized by sanctions, proxy conflicts, and intermittent confrontations rather than full-scale war. At the core of the crisis is Iran's nuclear ambition and its strategic influence across the Middle East [8]. Iran has long been accused by Western powers of pursuing nuclear weapons capability, a claim it denies, asserting that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. However, repeated failures to revive agreements such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and growing concerns over Iran's ballistic missile programme and regional alliances particularly with groups like Hezbollah and Hamas have heightened tensions. These issues, combined with ideological rivalry between Iran and Israel and broader geopolitical competition with the United States, have made Iran a central actor in Middle Eastern instability [9].

The crisis escalated into open conflict when large-scale airstrikes were launched on Iran on February 28, 2026, resulting in significant destruction and the killing of key Iranian leaders . In response, Iran carried out retaliatory attacks targeting U.S. military bases, Israeli infrastructure, and allied interests across the Gulf region, including missile and drone strikes . This exchange of attacks has transformed the situation into a broader regional conflict, drawing in multiple actors and raising fears of a prolonged war. Another critical dimension of the crisis is its impact on global energy security [10]. The Middle East, particularly the Persian Gulf, is a major hub for global oil and gas supply. Iran's strategic position along the Strait of Hormuz a key maritime route for oil transport has made the conflict especially consequential. Disruptions in this region have led to sharp increases in oil prices and volatility in global energy markets. Recent international reports indicate that the conflict has caused one of the largest disruptions to global oil supply in history, affecting a significant proportion of global energy flows and contributing to inflation and economic instability worldwide. This highlights the global reach of what might otherwise appear to be a regional conflict [11].

The contemporary Middle East crisis as noted by Suleiman, & Gladstone particularly the conflict involving Iran, has emerged as one of the most consequential geopolitical developments shaping global economic and social systems in recent times. Central to this crisis is Iran's strategic position in global energy politics, especially its control and influence over the Strait of Hormuz through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes. For a country like Nigeria, whose economy is heavily dependent on crude oil exports and vulnerable to external shocks, the ripple effects of the Middle East crisis are particularly profound [12]. While rising oil prices may temporarily boost government revenues, the associated increase in domestic fuel costs, inflation, and exchange rate instability often outweighs these benefits. Evidence suggests that higher global oil prices translate into increased transportation, production, and living costs within Nigeria, thereby constraining public spending and weakening key sectors such as health, tourism, sport and education especially tertiary education.

## Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is an education designed for national development through manpower training and retraining. Tertiary institutions are an industry for manpower development via teaching, research, and community service. The word tertiary simply means of the third rank or order, and the tertiary level of education in Nigeria, based on the aforementioned meaning, implies that tertiary education in Nigeria is the third order of education, which can also be referred to as higher education [13]. Tertiary education is a front liner amongst the tiers of education and is considered as the icon for national development and transformation, implying that every skill, knowledge and information gained



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through this means is the vehicle for productivity, wealth creation, prosperity, good health and healthy living, competitiveness, communication, expansion, scientific and technological advancement [14].

National Policy on Education FRN, defined tertiary education as an education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI) [15].

## Concept of Research

Research involves organized activities meant to solve problems in societies. Research are programme of tertiary institutions, carried out by academic staff, students and researchers. Research encompasses a range of activities aimed at identifying problems, gathering new data, and finding solutions through carefully designed procedures and logical analysis. It represents an intensive and extensive search for solutions to societal issues, including those within the realm of education. Research can simply be defined as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Research is an important tool for advancing knowledge for promoting progress, and for enabling scholars to relate more effectively to the environment, to accomplish their objectives, and to resolve conflicts.

Research is often based on two types of definitions: conceptual definition and operational definition according to National Open University and they includes the following;

- i. Conceptual definitions are definitions that describe concepts by using other concepts. As an example, a conceptual definition for “political violence” might be an “aggressive behaviour toward political institutions and persons occupying political roles.” One conceptual definition of “intelligence” might be “the ability to think in an abstract manner.” Another might be “the ability to solve problems.”
- ii. Operational definitions attempt to bridge the gap between the theoretical-conceptual level and the empirical observational level [16]. An operational definition involves a series of instructions describing the operations that must be carried out by a researcher in order to demonstrate the existence, or the degree of existence, of an empirical occurrence represented by a concept.

The conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprised Universities, Polytechnics, Monothechnics and Colleges of Education. The academic staffs of these institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions are primarily based on their research outputs. Apart from the academic staff being promoted through research publications, research activities enhance their credibility, status, and also add value both to their immediate community and the larger global community [17]. Ogunode & Abubakar opined that research is the second cardinal programme of higher institutions. Research is very important to the development of the society. Research is conducted mostly in the higher institutions environment with the objectives to solve problems affecting the society. The academic staff is saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out researches in the universities. Conducting research is one criterion for measuring their performance [18].



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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a systematic review model to analyze existing literature on the impact of the Middle East crisis on research development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The review method was considered appropriate because it allows for the integration and synthesis of findings from diverse sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Data for the study were obtained from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, government publications, and credible media reports. Relevant materials were sourced from databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, institutional repositories, and official government websites.

The inclusion criteria for selecting materials were as follows:

- (1) studies published between 2015 and 2026;
- (2) literature focusing on global conflicts, particularly the Middle East crisis or oil-related geopolitical tensions;
- (3) studies addressing economic impacts on developing countries, especially Nigeria; and
- (4) publications linking economic conditions to education or research development.

Exclusion criteria included studies that lacked empirical or analytical relevance, unpublished materials without credible sources, and works not related to education or research systems.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, where key themes such as research funding, cost of research, international collaboration, research capacity development, and institutional planning were identified. The findings were then synthesized to explain the various ways in which the Middle East crisis has affected research development in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ON IMPACT OF MIDDLE EAST CRISIS ON RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT IN TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The Middle East crisis, particularly tensions involving Iran, has had significant indirect effects on research development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, largely through economic, academic, and institutional pathways. Although Nigeria is geographically distant from the conflict zone, its higher education and research system is deeply connected to global economic and academic networks, making it vulnerable to external shocks.

One major way the crisis has affected research development is through reduced funding for research activities. The conflict has contributed to rising global oil prices and inflation, which directly impact Nigeria's economy. While higher oil prices may temporarily increase government revenue, Dickson, observed that the accompanying inflation raises the cost of goods and services and strains public finances. As noted in economic analyses, the crisis transmits its effects through inflation, exchange rate instability, and fiscal pressure, which ultimately affect public expenditure priorities. In such situations, government spending on tertiary education and research is often reduced or deprioritized. This leads to inadequate funding for research grants, laboratory development, and academic projects, thereby slowing the pace of research development in Nigerian universities.

Another critical impact is the increase in cost of conducting research. Research activities in Nigerian tertiary institutions depend heavily on imported equipment, laboratory materials, and digital tools.



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Due to exchange rate volatility and inflation caused by the crisis, the cost of importing these materials has increased significantly. Kasimu, Lawan, Pajo, and Okoh. (2026) indicated that the Middle East crisis has led to increased production costs and economic instability in Nigeria. For researchers, this means higher costs for experiments, data collection, and publication processes. As a result, many research projects are either delayed, scaled down, or abandoned entirely, reducing overall research productivity.

The crisis has also led to disruptions in international research collaboration, which is essential for research development in tertiary institutions. Nigerian universities often partner with institutions in different parts of the world, including the Middle East, for joint research, conferences, and knowledge exchange. However, instability in the region has weakened these collaborations. Evidence indicates that conflicts in the Middle East have disrupted academic networks, reduced opportunities for joint research, and limited participation in international conferences. This reduces access to global funding opportunities, expertise, and modern research methodologies, thereby affecting the quality and visibility of research outputs from Nigerian institutions.

The crisis has contributed to reduced access to international scholarships and research training opportunities. Many Nigerian academics and postgraduate students depend on scholarships, fellowships, and exchange programmes in foreign institutions to enhance their research capacity. However, political instability and security concerns in parts of the Middle East have limited such opportunities. Research findings show that the crisis has reduced student mobility and academic exchange programmes. This limits exposure to advanced research environments and reduces opportunities for skill acquisition, ultimately affecting the development of research capacity in Nigerian universities.

Another important dimension is the diversion of global research funding and priorities. During major global conflicts, international organizations and donor agencies often redirect research funding toward humanitarian and conflict-related issues. This shift reduces the amount of funding available for research projects in developing countries like Nigeria. As a result, Nigerian researchers face increased competition for limited grants, which negatively affects research output and innovation. This aligns with broader observations that global crises can reshape funding priorities and reduce support for education systems in non-conflict regions.

The Middle East crisis has also caused economic hardship that affects institutional research planning and development. Inflation and financial instability make it difficult for universities to plan long-term research programmes. Budget uncertainties affect the procurement of research equipment, maintenance of laboratories, and funding of academic conferences. According to reports, the crisis has worsened inflation in Nigeria and increased economic uncertainty. This unstable environment discourages long-term investment in research and innovation, thereby weakening institutional research development strategies.

The crisis has had a psychological and academic impact on researchers and students, which indirectly affects research productivity. Continuous exposure to global conflict news can create anxiety and reduce concentration among students and academic staff. Studies on the impact of the Middle East crisis indicate that it can lead to emotional stress and reduced academic engagement. In Nigerian universities, this may manifest in reduced motivation for research, lower academic output, and decreased participation in scholarly activities.



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The crisis has contributed to brain drain and reduced attractiveness of academic careers. As economic conditions worsen due to inflation and reduced funding, many researchers seek better opportunities abroad. Poor research funding, inadequate facilities, and unstable economic conditions make academic careers less attractive in Nigeria. This leads to the migration of skilled academics, which weakens research capacity and institutional development.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the Middle East crisis, particularly tensions involving Iran, has had significant indirect effects on research development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Through economic transmission mechanisms such as inflation, exchange rate instability, and rising operational costs, the crisis has reduced funding for research, increased the cost of conducting research, and disrupted international academic collaborations. It has also limited access to global training opportunities and weakened institutional research planning. These challenges have collectively slowed research productivity and innovation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study highlights the vulnerability of Nigeria's research system to global economic shocks and underscores the need for more resilient and adaptive research management strategies.

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

1. **Increased Government Funding for Research:** The Nigerian government should prioritize and increase budgetary allocation to research in tertiary institutions to cushion the effects of global economic shocks.
2. **Diversification of Research Funding Sources:** Universities should explore alternative funding sources such as private sector partnerships, international grants, and alumni contributions to reduce dependence on government funding.
3. **Strengthening Local Research Capacity:** Institutions should invest in local production of research materials and development of indigenous technologies to reduce reliance on imported equipment.
4. **Promotion of Digital and Virtual Collaboration:** Tertiary institutions should leverage digital platforms to sustain international research collaboration despite global disruptions.
5. **Capacity Building for Researchers:** Continuous training programmes should be organized for academic staff and postgraduate students to enhance research skills and adaptability.
6. **Stable Economic and Education Policies:** The government should implement policies that promote economic stability and protect the education sector during global crises.
7. **Retention Strategies for Academic Staff:** Improved welfare packages and research incentives should be provided to reduce brain drain and retain skilled researchers in Nigerian institutions.

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