INFLUENCE OF INSECURE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
A positive safe and secure school environment is a panacea for effective teaching and learning. This paper examined the influence of insecure school environment on student's learning in Benue state. The study adopted a survey design. A sample of 384 students were randomly selected from the three geo political zones in Benue State from a population of 104,123 students. The main instrument for data collection was a self constructed questionnaire titled, “Insecure School Environment and learning” (ISEL) Mean, percentages and Standard Deviation were used in answering the research questions. Results showed that 60.29% of respondents attested that students' hostile behaviour to one another could affect security and learning. 56.1% indicated teachers' authoritative style of leadership and a school in a neighborhood or community that is affected by political violence, ethno-religious crises or communal crises could lead to parents’ withdrawal of children with a low percentage of 49.8%. Victims of violence and harassment attend school less frequently as these incidents lead to classroom disruptions. It is recommended that government can improve security by building fences around schools so that students can be checked in and checked out to ensure weapon free schools. Secondly, community leaders should encourage peaceful dialogue to avoid escalations of differences into violence and finally teachers, guidance counsellors, school administrators and community leaders must all work together to create a safe environment that would discourage violence.

Keywords: Insecure School Environment, Students' and Learning.
Introduction
The secondary school as described by the National Policy on Education (2006) has a broad goal of preparing individuals for useful living within the society and higher education. It comprises of individuals who are in the age range of 10-19 years. This stage requires adequate attention as most characters are developed and nursed to maturity. If wrong behaviour is adopted, it will eventually affect an entire community. The school is where a child spends reasonable amount of time and an avenue where he explores independence outside the intervention of his parents as a result there is a tendency to exhibit characters which are never shown at home. These characters according to Timothy (2008) include reluctance to pay respect to constituted authority and disregard to school rules and regulations. Alidzulwi (2000) observed that severe disciplinary problems have been noticed and experienced in secondary schools and that some schools have been turned into battle fields as learners bring series of weapons to school. It has been reported that most times learners stab fellow learners, educators and school administrators. There are also other observable cases of learner violence such as burning down of infrastructures, attack on teachers, and setting cars on fire among others. All these incidents pose security challenges to the school, classroom disruptions and students missing classes for fear of other students.

Insecurity is also experienced in the school when the teacher-student relationship is threatened by the authoritative style of administration exhibited by teachers and management. Paul (2006) stated that when teachers use the traditional form of discipline which involves bossing, scolding, warning, belittling and punishing these methods can only keep behavior under control for a while. They often produce sad effects such as uneasiness, evasiveness, fearfulness, avoidance, dishonesty, undesirable attitude towards learning and over all dislike for school and teachers. All these happen when insecurity within and around the school is not checked. For instance lack of fence around the school, a thorough fare through the school, and infrastructure that distracts learning pose difficulty in learning.

Added to the factors that pose challenges to the child’s learning, is the environment where the school is situated. Encarta dictionary (2014) defined environment from three (3) perspectives;

i. Natural world: The natural world, especially when it is regarded as being at risk from the harmful influences of human activities.

ii. Set of Inductions: A set of external conditions, especially those affecting a particular activity (usually in combination) the home environment or a simulating learning environment

iii. Surrounding Influences: These are all the external factors influencing the life and activities of people, plants and animals.

To further buttress the above definition, environment is where one lives or stays to
conduct business activities. Schools are situated / located in the environment, hence whatever crises/ insecurity affects the environment affects the school. The high rate of insecurity in Nigeria has reached its peak within the last four years. Some of the causes of conflict and insecurity in the environment which could also affect the school include: Ethno –religious conflict, political violence and communal crises. Communal and societal conflict according to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2000) have emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious conflict which have assumed alarming rates. It has occurred in places like Shagamu, (Ogun State), Jos, Taraba, Kano, Abia, Enugu and Lagos states respectively. At the time these various conflicts occurred, school activities were disrupted.

Another dimension of community based insecurity could be in the form of political violence. Between 1975 and 2005, thirty seven (37) conflicts involving communities in the Benue valley were identified (Best, 2006). Of these, eleven (11) were located in the urban areas and were related to politics varying from party affiliation, results of elections or chieftaincy issues. Amiseh (2014) identified crises in the Benue valley when she pointed out the violent crises between the Tiv people in Benue, Nassarawa and Taraba states over boundary disputes as common occurrence. The Agatu district in the zone C senatorial district has also experienced several insurgency attacks for a very long period of time.

Some of the above crises happened in places where schools were strategically located and parents quietly withdrew their children from such environment. By implication, the learning of the child has become seriously affected for that period of time. Psychologically students develop negative attitudes such as fear, anxiety and depression and sometimes these students are recruited into the war fronts and vigilante groups.

Politics in the current dispensation like the previous republics have displayed politics of anxiety which has played down on dialogue, negotiation and conscientious. The anxiety is as a result of perceived or real loss of power by the elite strata. Before, the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, politicians were strategizing about the control and retention of power. Thus to this end, inter and intra-political conflicts have become rife in which politicians deployed larger sources to undo each other changing the rules of the game. Party meeting became war zones where sophisticated weaponry were used. Again some of these activities happened where schools were located affecting teaching and learning process.

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stated that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary responsibility of the government.” Unfortunately government on this constitutional responsibility has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, property, the conduct of business and even school activities and educational development at large. Issues of security are
left in the hands of the populace, Kabala (2005) claimed that when parents want to send their children to school they watch out for communities that are secured, enclosed buildings with fences, high school disciplinary tone and qualified teachers. From the above it can be deduced that the following three components are very important for safety in the school: students, teachers and security in the community.

Idu & Ojedapo (2011) reiterated that maintaining a high standard of behaviour is critical for conducive teaching and learning process as well as the smooth running of the school to achieve the educational objectives with ease. When there are issues that create problems for a child, he or she is bound to experience failure.

However, Haigh (2008) stated that children need to feel safe in order to learn effectively and this according to him can be achieved if students know their routines; what to do; what happens next and with this a child is able to maintain his calm and caring self. In a similar development, Evertson, Emmer & Worsham (2009) explained that a school rule identifies general expectations for what is appropriate and a major start towards establishing a positive classroom and school environment that would be devoid of unruly behaviour from students. Rules are the foundation for every school conduct or behaviour. It is essential that students understand exactly what behaviour are acceptable in schools and which ones are not. This should be communicated through clear guidelines and rules, appropriate channels of seeking justice must be clearly maintained from prefects to teachers and then head teachers. A punishment book should also be kept by the school. Farrant (1970) stated that the purpose of punishment as a record book is to protect the child from unreasonable punishment from teachers and to protect teachers from unwarranted criticism by parents or other resulting from exaggerated reports of punishment given. The punishment record should not only contain when corporal punishments are given, if this record is well kept, it will help the school administration discover the root cause of a child's problem and consequently eliminate it.

Empirical evidence by Paul (2006) showed that positive teacher-learner relationship has the potential of creating a conducive learning environment in the classroom which in turn such environment brings about an atmosphere that is devoid of unruly behaviour in the entire school environment. This will also determine whether or not a learner can gain from teaching learning situations. The teacher should be aware of the need for a positive, loving relationship if learning is to be effective. Effective teacher-learner relationship could promote discipline which will in turn help in keeping acts of indiscipline which pose security problems. Similarly, Rosen (1997) also maintained that humor, friendly greeting and non verbal supportive behaviour may also improve such relationship but warned that teachers must avoid humor targeted at the learner.

Akem & Ortese (2006) asserted that an environment with enough learning facilities
and equipment can also make learning interesting and enjoyable. A well fenced environment guarantees the safety of the child. The physical state of the school including spatial configurations noise, temperature, lighting and air quality are essential. Students need clean air, good light, quiet and comfortable classrooms in order to achieve at their highest levels. The organization of classrooms, including the arrangement of furniture can impact minimum disruptions and distractions maintaining an orderly and effective learning environment. In order for students to be successful at school, they need to feel safe, secure, and connected to the school.

Statement of Problem
Insecurity is one of the reasons why schools experience a lot of drawbacks. Lack of security within the school and the host community hamper the effective learning of the child. Within the school, the students may experience difficulty in learning if there is no harmonious relationship among students themselves when they take arms against each other. Teachers' threat to students could also affect students' concentration and lack of proper infrastructure and well-fenced environment to guarantee the safety of the child in the school environment can affect learning. Similarly, if the host community where the school is sited is not free from crises it could lead to constant closure of school and school dropout. For learning to be effective there is need to maintain peace within the school and the host community. This study is therefore poised to determine the specific influence of insecure school environment on learning among Secondary School students in Benue State.

Significance
This study is significant because it will unveil some environmental challenges within and outside the school that pose security challenges to teaching and learning specifically emphasis will be on student/student relationship, teacher/student relationship and insecurity in the host community of the school.

Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of this study is to investigate some of the issues and challenges affecting learning and outside the school environment. Specifically the study seeks to:

1. Explore student/student relationship that would ensure proper security and learning
2. Examine teacher/student relationship that would ensure proper security and learning
3. Examine the influence of physical structures of school structures on security and learning
4. Examine the influence of insecurity in the community and school learning.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:
1. How does student/student behaviour influence safety and learning?
2. How does teacher/student relationship influence security and learning?
3. What is the influence of physical school structure on safety and
learning?
4. What is the influence of communal crises on the safety of students and learning?

Scope of the Study
The study was limited to six (6) selected schools in the three (3) political Zones in Benue state. In zone A, Government College Makurdi and PADOPAS Secondary school were used. In zone B, Government secondary school Gboko and Bristow secondary schools were selected. In zone C St Francis Otukpo and Oeya Memorial College were used. The researchers carefully selected schools that are well secured with fences and those without perimeter fences.

Methodology
The study made use of the survey design.

Population of the Study: All secondary school students in Benue State made up the research population. There are one hundred and four thousand, one hundred and twenty three (104,123) students in Benue state. This figure consists of thirty nine thousand and forty eight in zone A (39,048), thirty six thousand two hundred and twenty nine (36,229) in zone B and twenty eight thousand eight hundred and forty six in zone C (28,846). (State Teaching Service Board figures 2015).

Sample and Sampling Procedure. The sample size of 384 students were randomly selected from schools in each geo-political zone with each contributing 128 senior and junior school students. (Krejecie & Morgan 1970).

Research Question One: How does student/student relationship influence safety and learning?

Results from table one showed that the mean score for all the items is 2.78 (+1.11) implying that the respondent have accepted that student/student relationship and safety of environment influences their learning.

Research Question Two: How does teacher/student relationship influence security and learning?
Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation on influence of teacher/student relationship and learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Derogatory statements made by my teachers puts me off in learning</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Friendly attitudes of my teachers makes learning interesting</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Motivation shown by my teachers makes learning interesting</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The cordial relationship with my teachers encourage me to learn and obey school rules</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result from table 2 shows that the mean score positive influence on their learning.

for all the items is 2.65 (±0.99). This means that the respondents have agreed that a cordial relationship with their teachers has

Research Question Three: What is the influence of physical structure on safety and learning?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation on infrastructure and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A fence around my school makes me feel safe and this promotes learning</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A thorough fare in my school compound makes the school unsafe for learning</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The laboratory equipments in my school have safety tips to safeguard student from harm</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I feel safe reading in the school library rather than sitting anywhere to read</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result from table 3 revealed that the mean score for items tested is 3.03 (±0.94). This implies that the respondents have confirmed that infrastructure has positive influence on learning.

Research Question Four: What is the influence of communal crises on safety and learning of students?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on communal crises on safety and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iN</th>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>My school was disrupted because of communal crises which affected learning</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I am sometimes afraid of going to school because of fear of attack from unknown persons and this delays learning</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Some students in my school were asked to participate in communal crises thus disrupting their learning.</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>My parents changed my school because of unsafe school location</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mean | 191 | 193 | 2.4  | 1.25 |
| (49.8%) | (50.2%) |
Result from table 4 showed that the mean score for all items is 2.4 (±1.25) implying that communal crises within the study area has relatively less influence on learning.

**Discussion of Findings**

In any research work the discussions are very important because it is the means by which result are interpreted and communicated to the public. From the analysis on research question (i) which sought to find out the influence of student/student relationship on insecurity of school environment and learning, results showed that 60.29% of the students agreed that their relationship with each other influence safety in the school/environment while 39.8% disagreed. This finding agreed with Alidzulwi (2000) when he lamented that schools are turned into battle fields as learners bring series of weapons into the school compound and sometimes even stab their fellow students. There are also observable cases where student’s violent behaviour has led to burning down of property and even attacks on neighbors and passer by’s. Senior students are not left out as they often embark on revenge missions of bullying younger students thereby causing dislike for school.

In research question two results show that respondents agreed to the fact that cordial relationship between the teachers and the student enhances security in the school. This result is supported by Paul (2006) when he argued that when teachers use traditional forms of punishment such as scolding, bossing, warning, belittling, and punishing, these methods keep students behaviors under control for a little while. In the long run they produce effects such as fearfulness, avoidance, dishonesty, uneasiness and above all dislike for school and learning.

In research question three sought to find out the influence of physical infrastructure on learning the result showed that 64.9% of respondents agreed that infrastructure influences safety and school learning. This finding is supported by Akem and Ortese (2006), when they asserted that a well fenced school environment guarantees the safety of the child. Added to that, students need clean air, good light, comfortable library and laboratories to carry out their assignments and research.

The fourth research question addressed the influence of communal crises and learning. Results show that 50.29% of the respondents disagreed that communal crises affected their learning. This result agrees with the fact in the Benue valley that conflicts are usually political, religious and communal, school children are normally not the target. As a result normal school activities go on undisturbed. This dimension of violence is different from the one that is seen in North Eastern Nigeria where the insurgents' usually attack school children thereby affecting learning. However, Kabala (2005) claimed that when parents want to send their children to schools, they look for schools that are secured with fences.

**Conclusion**

Safety of school environment is very essential for learning. Students must learn to
be one another’s’ keeper, since the students are trusted under the care and discipline of teachers they too must do all they can to ensure safety of the school environment.

**Recommendations**

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

1. Students should be thoroughly searched against bringing arms into school the school compound.
2. Teachers should adopt new forms of behaviour modification which are friendly ways of creating a good relationship among students rather than employing traditional forms of punishment which generate dislike for school.
3. A fence should be built around the school to avoid thoroughfare. This will secure school infrastructure and enhance learning.
4. Community leaders should encourage peaceful dialogue to avoid escalations of differences into violence. This when not checked can disrupt school learning.

**References**


