

SCHOOL SAFETY AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN OYO STATE

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Abstract

To learn, "normal" and students with special needs need to feel safe and supported. A healthy, safe and supportive learning environment enables students and those with special needs to learn in powerful ways. The study examined school safety and students' academic performance in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State. The study employed descriptive research design of survey type. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 5 Principals, 53 teachers with bias in special education and all the 228 students with special needs in the five sampled public secondary schools which cater for the education of students with special needs in Oyo State. A researcher designed questionnaire tagged: "School Safety and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (SSSAPQ)" was used. The questionnaire was validated using face and content validity method. Test re-test reliability technique was employed. This yielded reliability coefficient of 0.70. Frequency count, percentage and mean score were used in answering the two research questions while Pearson product-moment correlation statistics was used to test the only hypothesis. The findings revealed that emotional and physical safety measures were insufficiently provided in the sampled schools. It was recommended among others that government and other stakeholders should collaborate in providing these safety measures in the sampled schools since they are critical to the safety and education of students with special needs.

Key words: Safety, school safety, disabilities, students with disabilities and academic performance.

Background to the Study

A healthy, safe and supportive learning environment enables “normal” students and those with special needs to learn in powerful ways. Such an environment promotes innovatory enquiry, and risk taking. Moreover, such an environment reinforces and enhances the leadership capacity in the school because competent, excellent, and dedicated educators want to work under such conditions (Bernard, 2010). School safety has been a topic of concern for educators, parents, and researchers for decades (Connell, 2018). It is important for students to have a safe learning environment to ensure they have the best possible opportunity to succeed academically.

Every student needs and deserves to feel respected and free from physical harm, intimidation, harassment, and bullying (Pat, 2018). To ensure a safe learning environment, school administrators should attend to all aspects of daily life in schools. They should ensure safety at bus stops and on playgrounds, as well as in lunchrooms, bathrooms, hallways, and classrooms. Mayer and Cornel (2010) refer to teasing, hateful language, and social exclusion as factors of “low-level incivility that impact a student's adjustment and psychological well being”

Creating a safe school environment requires thoughtful and constant attention to the security and safety of the facilities, creation of clear policies and procedures for students and staff conduct, frequent and effective communication with parents, families, and the school community; and attention to classroom management as well as the requisite professional development. Without these conditions in place, learning cannot become a school's focus (Osher, Dwyer & Jimerson, 2006).

Ensuring school safety goes hand in hand with the development of optima working conditions for teachers and students. Hirsch & Emerick (2006) examined working conditions for teachers in North Carolina and found that student learning increases when schools create safe, supportive and trusting school climate. They also found that teachers and students viewed such a climate as directly related to their working conditions, when safe and trusting, they felt compelled to do all they could to enhance student learning.

Students suffer from various forms of emotional and physical insecurity in schools. Bullying is an example of the lack of physical and emotional insecurity many students experience (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara & Kernic, 2005). The prevention of all forms of bullying including threats, harassment, social isolation or spreading rumours particularly towards students with special needs which are at the risk of being victimised by bullying is typical of schools with a safe environment (Osher, Dwyer & Jimerson (2006).

Students with special educational needs are those with physical, intellectual, social, emotional, cultural and linguistic characteristics or other conditions that make it difficult for them to be educated in the normal way without special intervention (Garuba, 2006). Such special

intervention include the provision of emotional and safety measures which in turn promote learning and improves academic performance.

Obani (2006) saw people with special educational needs as those who experience/manifest more than the usual difficulties and problems in learning and training as normally offered in regular schools. For example, students with hearing impairment are subjected to all forms of deprivation. Due to their low academic performance, Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) categorised them as fools who cannot reason, he queried further that even if they reason, what is the quality of their reasoning? Socially, they are seen as second class citizens. Physiologically, apart from being hearing impaired, they develop other second order of problems such as appearing malnourished, aphasia, cerebral palsy, brain injury etc. Because of the fact that we hear more than we see and that 85% of what we acquire is through speaking and hearing, persons with hearing impairment tend to perceive so low, have low memory, low concept formation ability and low creative ability (Ademokoya, 2003).

Blindness results in developmental delays, poor concept formation and development and learning problems (Mason, 1992). Blindness inhibits the acquisition of incidental information. Students with visual impairment lack the ability to observe, imitate and participate in activities at home and at school (Ayoku, 2006). Hence, appropriate safety measures that will cater for individual needs of the group become a matter of concern for educators and other stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

A safe school, no doubt, is a sine qua non to live saving for the “normal” students and teachers alike. School safety refers to schools and school related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment and substance use. Students with hearing impairment and those with visual impairment who are part of every regular classroom lack the ability to effectively communicate and interact within the school. The inability to perceive environmental sounds through the conventional means as a result of low vision or total blindness, hard of hearing or total deafness creates additional barrier towards ensuring personal safety for students with disabilities. Therefore, these categories and other categories of students with disabilities deserve special consideration in form of safety measures put in place in their learning environment. It was in view of the foregoing that the study was designed to examine the emotional and physical safety measures which exist in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State vis-à-vis the relationship with their academic performance.

Purpose of the Study

The study intended to examine the relationship between school safety and students' academic performance in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to:

- (i) Examine the availability of emotional safety measures in public secondary schools for

students with special needs in Oyo State.

- (ii) Measure the availability of physical safety measures in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated to guide the study:

- (i) Are emotional safety measures available in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State?
 (ii) Are physical safety measures available in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State?

Research Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between school safety and students' academic performance in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State.

Scope of the Study

The study was limited to determining the relationship which exists between school safety and students' academic performance in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State. School safety was the independent variable while academic performance was the dependent variable. The study delved into emotional and physical safety as sub-variables of school safety in the sampled schools. The schools used in the study were the five public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State. These were: Adeniran Memorial Grammar School, Ogbomoso, Aperin Oniyere Grammar School Ibadan, Durbar Grammar School, Oyo, Ijokodo High School, Ibadan and Methodist Grammar School, Bodija-Ojurin, Ibadan. Only students with visual impairment and those with hearing impairment were covered in the study.

Methodology

The design adopted for the study was descriptive research design of survey type. Population for the study comprised all the school Principals, teachers and students in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State. Sample for this study comprised the Principal, teachers with bias in special education and students with special needs in the five schools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 5 Principals, 53 teachers with bias in special education and all the 228 students with special needs in the sampled schools. A researcher designed questionnaire was administered on the respondents. The questionnaire was tagged: "School Safety and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (SSSAPQ). It contained three sections. Section A & B examined the availability of emotional safety and physical safety measures respectively while section C centered on respondents' bio-data. Face and content validity of the research instrument were ensured by subjecting it to critical examination by expert in measurement and evaluation. Test re-test reliability technique was employed. This yielded reliability co-efficient

of 0.70. The questionnaire was personally administered on the respondents. Frequency count, percentage and mean score were used in answering the two research questions. The 2019 West African Examination Council results of the students with disabilities in the sampled schools were obtained from the various schools through the school heads. Pearson product-moment correlation statistics was used to test the only hypothesis.

Results and Findings

Answering the Research Questions:

Research Question One: Are emotional safety measures available in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State?

Table 1: Availability of emotional safety measures in Oyo State public secondary schools for students with special needs:

S/N	Emotional Safety Measures	Yes	%	No	%
1	Students are allowed to make use of mobile phones within the school	06	12	280	98
2	Students are allowed to leave the school premises only if they have pass from security post	250	87	36	13
3	Medical services are provided when required	88	31	198	69
4	Counselling services are provided in my school	197	69	89	31
5	Clear policies and procedures are created for students and staff	72	25	214	75
6	There exists frequent and effective communication with parents, families and the school community	93	33	193	67
7	Attention are paid to classroom management as well as the requisite professional development	178	62	108	38
8	There is optimal working condition for staff and students	134	47	152	53
9	There are laws against bullying	210	73	76	27
10	Students are trained on security related subjects	170	59	116	41
11	Conflict resolution strategies are taught in my school	120	42	166	58
12	Procedures and strategies that promote character building values are put in place throughout the school	200	70	86	30
13	Teachers model good values by respecting themselves	155	54	131	46
14	Students and staff are involved in decision-making through regular meetings and consultation	240	84	46	16
15	Teachers develop empathy for the feelings of others	90	31	196	69
16	Teacher use methodology which cater for different learning styles and multiple intelligence	110	38	176	62
17	Parents and care giver are reached to support school's value at home	142	50	144	50
18	Classroom are made stress free by making jokes and spurring curiosity	95	33	191	67
19	Teachers encourage participation, not perfection	105	37	181	63
20	Students are motivated to learn	73	26	213	74
	Mean score	136.4		149.6	

Table 1 shows a mean score of 136.4 (47.69%) for the provision of emotional safety measures as against 149.6 (52.31%) which stood for non-provision of emotional safety measures.

Research Question Two: Are physical safety measures available in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State?

Table 2: Availability of physical safety measures in Oyo State public secondary schools for students with special needs:

S/N	Physical Safety Measures	Yes	%	No	%
1	Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) are installed in my school	-	-	286	100
2	My school compound is fenced and gated	250	87	36	13
3	Security personnel are stationed at my school gate	200	70	86	30
4	Staff and students are always in possession of their Identity card	58	20	228	80
5	Central security alarm are installed in the school premises	-	-	286	100
6	Clearance are given to any visitor before entering the school premises	65	23	221	77
7	Proper security check are conducted before the admission of staff and students	-	-	286	100
8	Security committee exist in the school	-	-	286	100
9	Students' bags are being searched from time-to-time	-	-	286	100
10	Law exists to guide against bullying in school	20	07	266	93
	Mean score	59.3		226.7	

Table 2 shows that there was virtually non-provision of physical safety measures in the five public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State with a mean score of 226.7 (20.73%) as against 59.3 (79.27%) which stood for provision of physical safety measures.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis one was tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient statistics technique.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between school safety and academic performance of students with special needs in public secondary schools in Oyo State.

Table 3: Correlation analysis between school safety and academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
School	286	70.12	10.88			
Safety				.412	.006	Ho ₁ Rejected
Academic Performance	286	61.35	13.72			

P<0.05

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 3 shows that the P-value (.006) was less than 0.05 level of significance. Hence, hypothesis 1 which stated that there is no significant relationship between school safety and academic performance of students with special needs in public secondary schools in Oyo State was rejected. This implied that school safety was significantly related to students' academic performance in public secondary schools for students with special needs in Oyo State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show a lack of provision for emotional and physical safety measures in public secondary school for students with special needs in Oyo State. Provision of emotional safety measures has a mean score of 136.4 (47.69%) as against 149.6 (52.31%) which stood for non-provision of emotional safety measures. In the same token, non-provision of physical safety measures has a mean score of 226.7 (20.73%) as against 59.3 (79.27%) which stood for provision of physical safety measures. With the P-value of .006 which was less than 0.05 level of significance, there was a significant relationship between school safety and academic performance of students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Oyo State. This finding was in line with Hirsch and Emerick's (2006) finding. They examined working conditions for teachers and found that student learning increases when schools create, safe, supportive and trusting school climates. They also found that teachers and staff viewed such a climate as directly related to their working conditions; when safe and trusting, they felt compelled to do all they could to enhance student learning. This was also in line with Jimerson & Farlong's (2006) that students with fear for their safety will be distracted and unable to fully focus their attention on learning. This was further corroborated by Bowen & Bowen (1999) and Ratner, Chiodo, Convingon, Sokol, Anger & Delaney-Black (2006) who found that exposure to crime and violence in school negatively impacts academic involvement and performance. To Cote-Lussier, Fitzpatrick (2016), students who feel unsafe at school were less engaged in classroom activities.

Conclusion

Secondary schools for students with disabilities in Oyo State are lacking in the provision of emotional and physical safety measures. As such, students with disabilities suffer various forms of emotional and physical insecurity in secondary schools where they are being mainstreamed in Oyo State. Whereas, students' learning increase when schools create safe, supportive and trusting school climate with adequate provision for emotional and physical safety measures. Safe, supportive and trusting environment are also directly related to teachers' working conditions and students' academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Emotional and physical safety measures were inadequate in the sampled schools. School administrators and teachers should imbibe the spirit of ensuring emotional safety measures for

students with special needs. Government and other stakeholders should collaborate in putting in place physical facilities that guarantees safety for students with special needs.

2. School administrators and teachers should do more in terms of motivating their students with special needs to learn. Classroom should be made stress free by making jokes and spurring curiosity among students with special needs.
3. From time-to-time, students with special needs should be trained on security related subjects. This will awaken their consciousness as to what is required of them to experience safe learning environment.

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