International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research 9(2):1-9, April-June, 2021

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School Administrators' Awareness and Protection of Child's Rights Act in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated School Administrators' awareness and protection of child's rights act in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study covered all the administrators in the 268 public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study was limited to only administrative heads in public secondary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District with the number of schools in each, comprising; Emohua 23, Etche 18, Ikwerre 13, Obi-Akpor 20, Ogu-Bolo 3, Omuma 4, Okirika 6, Port Harcourt 15, Local Government Area. (Source: Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, Port Harcourt. 1/7/2019). Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A sample of 80 administrative heads was drawn from the eight Local Government Areas. Random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study, out of 80 administrative heads, 55 male and 22 female. The instrument used for data collection for the study was questionnaire.
The findings revealed, among others, that school administrators are aware of the child rights act, but they are ignorant of the legal implications of its violations. This was discovered in the extent to which the school administrators protect the rights act of the child in the school. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made; that the school administrators should always sensitize teachers on the awareness of the child rights act and the legal implications of violating any of the child rights. More so, Education Law should be made a subject in order to create a wider awareness of Child's rights act in our society.
Keywords: School Administrators' Awareness, Protection, Child's Rights Act

INTRODUCTION

The broad goal of education as stated in the National Policy of Education is to prepare the individuals for useful living within the society and higher education (FRN, 2014). It becomes very essential that due consideration be given to the students' general welfare while undergoing this process in schools. In fact, children's rights has been a world focus since 1979, when the United Nations designated that year as the International year of the child and developed a list of children's rights (Akwara ,2010). Among the rights are the rights to love and understanding, adequate food and health, free education, play an identity and special attention to the handicapped regardless of colour, sex, religion and national or social origin (Rasaq and Osakue, 2008). For effectiveness of child's development and protection against any form of abuse or maltreatment, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was passed on November 20th 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly. Similarly, in Africa, the African Union at its Heads of State Summit in Addis Ababa in 1990 adopted a Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. The charter which derives from the United Nations

Convention takes cognizance of the socio-cultural peculiarities of the African Child. This Human Right is also provided in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution that the government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels of education. Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the right of every individual to dignity of his/her person. The section further prohibits all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and slavery, forced or compulsory labour. It therefore implies that children should not be subjected to any form of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, forced or compulsory labour.

The realization of these rights for children can only be accomplished through care and assistance of school administrators (Arop, 2015). As persons professionally involved in education, administrators ought to know the Educational law and rights of a child in the school system. This is where the roles of school administrators are essentially needed because if the learning environments become too tense for the students, they may drop out of school or decide to play truant. School administrators' awareness and protection of Child's Right Act has coverage in Education Law, which defines the legal boundaries of the work of the administrator. Today, law impacts significantly on many facets that govern most of their actions in schools, especially those ones that concern the students. According to Peretomode (1992), law relates significantly to many facets of education and school administrator, teachers and other education officials need to be aware of the legal issues facing them. This is because many issues in education have implications in the management of schools by the administrators. It is essential for school administrators and teachers to know the constitutional provisions and statues governing the regulations and control of the establishment of educational institutions and to be aware of the inalienable rights of those that must work within the school system and their students. Furthermore, since the educational industry attracts a large number of people with wide range of behavior and background, it becomes expedient that the schools should have rules and regulations that guide their actions and protect the Human Rights of every person within the education system. The maintenance of order is achieved through rules, laws and corresponding sanctions on deviants or rule breakers. For laws to be functional, the principals must be vested with power and authority to apply sanctions discretionally. The school administrators have the responsibility to plan and organize teaching-learning process in the schools by establishing learning environment. A conducive school climate incorporates the protection and promotion of human rights of persons within the school organization. These rights are seen as foundation of freedom, justice, peace, particularly as it relates to school administrators' performance effectiveness.

The school authority is saddled with the responsibility of instilling discipline in the students because they play the roles of parents. More so, the students come from different family backgrounds with different training. A chaotic and unfriendly school climate is most likely to provide a negative tone in the environment for the school learning activities. This scenario has implications for the teaching and learning environment which is expected to guarantee a conducive and pedagogically friendly school climate. However, in trying to instill discipline in the students, their rights must not be encroached upon. The school administrators are expected to operate within the rule of law and must therefore anticipate the consequences of their actions and avoid unnecessary excesses. They should also bear in mind that they are responsible of their teachers' actions and be on their toes at all times to ensure that the right things are done at all times. Hence, it is against this backdrop that the researcher investigates school administrators' awareness and protection of the rights of child in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Article 4 (1) of the African Chartered on the Rights and Welfare of a Child provides that in all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration. This provision has been entrenched by Section 1 of the Child Rights Act in Charter, which provides that in every action concerning a child, whether undertaken by an individual, public or private body, institutions of service, court of law, or administrative or legislative authority, the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration. Furthermore, sections 6(2) and 8(1) of the child's Right Act (1998) states that: every child has the right to life, dignity, respect, leisure, liberty, health, education and shelter from his parents; no person shall deprive a child access to education, immunization, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention or any other thing required for his development respectively (Sofoluwe, 2012). As a means of developing national-level principals to adhere to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Union

Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Nigeria adopted the Child's Rights Act in 2003. Similarly, Nigerian Strategic Framework for Violence free Education in Nigeria (2007), expected children to be nurtured in a safe and friendly environment, by the teachers and school management, they have their views respected, be guided morally and otherwise, be supported, participate/be involved in school activities, be encouraged and motivated; as well as be disciplined or corrected fairly. Despite these provisions in the United Nations Convention and the Nigerian Constitution, children in Nigeria suffer cruelty, abuses, inhuman and degrading treatment, child labour and some are forced into prostitution (Holmes & Jones 2010). These saddening experiences have strong emotional impact on the victim. Often times, abused and neglected children are overwhelmed and shattered. This usually results in emotional imbalance which eventually manifest in delinquency and deviance. It is probably that in Nigeria, youth crime and breeding in the street are direct consequences of child abuse and neglect. There are glaring cases of unfair punishment to school children, high rate of school dropout, poor academic performances, misunderstanding between school and community, denting the image of the child, distorting the future of the child and reducing the academic morale of the child (Buck, 2011). These situations are capable of hindering effective implementation of educational objectives of the millennium development goals in Nigeria. Scholars believe that one of the problems why it is difficult to implement the Child's Right Act is because people are neither aware of the Act nor do they have knowledge of the basic provisions of the Act. The Director General of the Legal Aid Council in Nigeria, Mrs. Joy Bob-Manuel is of the view that the Child's Rights Act have not receive sufficient awareness and acceptance since its domestication because of a general but undue apathy as a result of lack of understanding and full appreciation. According to her, the child as a vulnerable member of the society falls into special needs group and must not be left without proper care and it is this objective that the CRA sets out to achieve (Babalola, 2011). Consequently, school personnel should be concerned about laws with regard to child's rights and education. This is because; the school personnel are legally obligated, held strictly accountable for actions and inactions of their students. According to Gullatt and Tollett (1995), since school teachers and administrators function in a complex environment with numerous legal ramifications, school personnel need to be aware of the requirements mandated upon them by the courts and the legislatures of the state. Unfortunately, Teachers' programmes often do not prepare teachers to understand the relationship of the constitution, statutes, and judicial decisions to the daily process of delivering instruction and providing supervision (Dunklee and Shoop, 1986). However, Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs and Thurston (1992) suggested that school administrators may have a larger responsibility than other professionals to understand the legal process as well as the substantive requirements of certain landmark decisions and their effects on school policies. Very few studies have targeted creating child's rights awareness on various stakeholders; and average Nigerian school administrators who are meant to propagate efficient observance of the Child Right Act seem not to be aware of the provisions of the Child Rights Bill need. According to Buck (2011), there seem to be perceptions that the status, academic level or disposition and age of school administrators, and lack of training make them deviate from protecting the rights of the students in their schools. The researcher is challenged about this scenario; and so poised to investigate the relationship between school administrators' awareness and child right protection in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of school administrators' awareness and protection of Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. Assess the level of school administrators' awareness on the implication of the Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Determine the level to which school administrator violate Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. Evaluate the level of school administrators' strategies for protecting the Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following questions were posed to guide the study:

1. To what extent are the school administrators aware of the implication of the child's rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

2. To what extent do the school administrators violate child's rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. To what extent do the school administrators create strategies for protection of child's rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of the study and the research questions, the following null hypotheses were stated:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads on the impacts on child's rights act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads on the violation of child's rights act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads on the strategies set for protecting Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

School Administrators' Protection on Rights of Child in Secondary Schools

The principal, as the chief teacher in conjunction with the vice principals, senior tutors and other teachers run the school in the frame of law establishing it. These groups of persons who run the school are employed for the purpose of the students who are left in their custody within the period of stay in school. It is to this point that the doctrine of in-loco parents becomes prevalent. The school heads who are the administrators of the school are in their protective custody while in school and to provide necessary protection for them against any form of oppression, inhuman treatment, torture and several other unfair treatment that will infringe on the rights of the child.

The protection of child in school is a role of the school principal which he must be aware of. Alexander in Igwe (2015) while discussing the role of the school principal in the context of in-loco parentis indicated that the principals or teachers in charge of a public school is subject to the school board and must enforce rules and regulations adopted by the board for the government of the school and execution of all its lawful orders in that behalf. The principal stands for the time being as a parent to his pupils and due to that relationship, he must necessarily exercise authority over them in many things concerning which the board may have remained silent. It is therefore expected that the school administrators monitor and supervise every activity that is going on in their schools in order to ensure that a child's rights are not violated. Igwe (2015) advocated that the principals and teachers should be properly informed of the constitutional provisions relating to the fundamental rights as well as the legal challenges and implications they pose in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Considering this fact, Fayokun and Adedeji (2006) opined that in the conduct of the public schools, it is essential that power vested in school heads in order to maintain discipline and promote efficiency. The right of the school authority has never been in doubt. What has been in doubt is the type and degree of punishment (Arop, 2015). For the schools to run efficiently there must be laws, rules and regulations. Parents enter into a sort of contract with school authorities by delegating the power of parental control to them, which they expect must be conducted in a manner that will be of the best interest of the children.

The school administrators are vested with the responsibilities of planning and coordinating teaching and learning processes in the schools. They perform these intricate tasks with the help of teaching and non teaching staff in their schools. The human resource or personnel need to have a good general knowledge and understanding of the laws that guide their various actions, especially their relationships with the students. Furthermore, the school administrators must take full responsibility of the actions of their staff on daily basis. This vicarious liability mandates them to be fully aware of the right of a child as declared in the United Nations Conventions and the ones in the Nigerian Constitution. The implementations are to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the students in their schools. They should also ensure that the teachers are aware of these rights and know the legal implications of violating them. Thus, in the course of instilling discipline in the students, they should be very careful and reasonable, bearing in mind that the students have rights that are being protect by law.

Some school administrators are ignorant of educational laws and so abuse their statutory responsibilities and obligations to their students (Arop, 2015). Nwagwu in Peretomode (1992) succinctly observed that most school administrators and teachers are not aware of the duties, rights,

obligations and responsibilities and that many others are ignorant of the rules governing their employment and schools system in which they work.

Nwagwu further stressed that school administrators must conduct their affairs with due regards to the human rights of persons under them. Thus, the need for school administrators to be aware of the Fundamental Human Rights enshrined in 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria becomes not only imperative but eminent. Among such rights are: Right to life, Right to dignity of human person, right to fair hearing, Right to Personal Liberty, right to private life, Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, Right to Freedom of Expression and the Press, Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association, right to freedom of movement and Right to Freedom from Discrimination. Therefore, the school administrators should know the law of vicarious liability and be up and doing in order to protect the rights of the students under their custody. Whatever the type of punishment, school authorities must bear in mind that it should be moderate, reasonable and administered in good faith (Abraham, 2003). Arop (2015) succinctly enumerated three cannons which punishment must conform with. These cannons include retributive punishment, reformative punishment and deterrent punishment. Any punishment that lacks all or at least one of these cannons may be tantamount to torture; and therefore violation of students' right to dignity.

According to Nwagwu in Arop (2015), teachers demonstrate an unfortunate destitution of the general principles and provisions of law relating to their noble profession. Nwagwu also stated that perceived power of Omnipotence ascribed to administrators has become nothing but a mere myth. School managers must conduct their affaires with due regards to the human rights of persons under them.

There is need for the protection of the right of the child in our schools. This is because high rate of in disciplinary acts have become the order of the day. In bid to control the exuberant nature of students, teachers have devised many disciplinary measures that may infringe on the students' rights. This scenario has serious implications for teaching and learning. The school administrators should be aware that a conducive school climate incorporates the protection and promotion of human rights of persons with the school organization (Arop, 2015).

Students Rights

The students have the right to learn and to be free to express their opinions, feelings- and ideas; they also have the responsibility to work hard, to do their best, to complete assignments and respect others opinions, feelings and ideas Ashwood (2018). Specifically, the students' rights as shown below;

i. They have right to be located fairly and with respect.
ii. Right to be valued as an individual with unique learning styles in order to maximize their potentials.
iii. Access to the school network services.
iv. They should be provided with exemplary role models by staff of the institution.
v. Participate fully in school educational programme.
vi. Expect a learning programme that meets their individual needs.
vii. Be regularly informed of their progress of the school.
viii. Be involved in decision making process of the school.

School Legal Issues and Law that helps the students

Parents believed and agree that their number goal in sending their child to school is to give them the opportunity to learn in a good, safe, peaceful and secured environment. But, the parents should also know and understand the following legal issue and law that pertain to school safety below;

a. **Bullying in school:**

This is a very serious issue at school that the school authority has been fighting that occurs on school campuses across the nation. This threatens students' right to attend classes on school campuses that are safe and discipline.

Federal and state government have recognized students need for safety and have laws in place, the federal and state government, have established clause and order aimed at making sure schools authority provide equal protection and constitutional right to all citizens including students and any student who does it are often suspended or expelled if his/her behaviour violates student conduct codes and other laws. But the school can as well enforce code of conduct that typically addresses various types of behaviour of students on campuses.

b. **Students Code of Conduct and Discipline Policies**

Most schools have sort of student code of conduct and others discipline policies which generally outline the students' right and responsibilities within the student body. The types of behaviour exhibited by the students are also included in the policies that are acceptable or inappropriate in school. Therefore, school safety is an important issue and not just important for students to feel safe and secured in their school surroundings, it is also important for their learning growth as well.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Research Question 1: *To what extent do the school administrators aware of the implication of child's rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on items of School Administrators Awareness of the implication on Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Rivers State

S/NO.	School Administrators Aware of the impact on Child's Right in public secondary schools in Rivers State	Response			
		Male $\bar{X}$	Female $\bar{X}$	mean Set	Remarks
1	Every child has a Right to life which must be safeguarded against corporate punishment in the school	3.30	3.58	3.44	Agreed
2	Students' Right to Dignity of Human Persons will be violated if they are subjected to forced manual labour	3.24	3.52	3.38	Agreed
3	Students' Right to Fair Hearing will be infringed upon when they are not given opportunity to be heard before meting out punishment on them	3.53	3.56	3.55	Agreed
4	A child's Right to Freedom of Religion is violated when he is compelled to participate in a religious activity that is against his belief	3.24	3.08	3.16	Agree
5	Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association of a child is infringed upon when he is not allowed to join any school club of his choice	3.20	3.33	3.27	Agreed

Table 1 shows that both male and female administrators agreed to the legal implications of the child right so must be kept and followed.

Research Question 2: *To what extent do the school administrators violate child rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on items of School Administrators Violation of the Child Rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State

6	Corporal punishment is commonly administered in this school	3.33	3.41	3.40	Agreed
7	Cases of bullying of students by their seniors have previously been reported in this school	3.27	3.22	3.25	Agreed
8	There is no sexual harassment of students by teachers	3.11	3.16	3.14	Agreed
9	Students are not involved in coming up with decisions on matters that affect them.	1.70	1.64	1.67	Disagree
10	Students discriminate against each other due to teachers influences	1.80	1.85	1.83	Disagree

The information in Table 2 above indicates that the respondents accepted questionnaire items 6-8. But they disagreed with questionnaire item 9 and 10; the grand total shows that school administrators' violation of the Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools is ineffective.

Research Question 3: *To what extent do the school administrators create strategies for protection of child's rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on items of School Administrators creation of strategies for the protection of Child's Rights in public secondary schools in Rivers State

11	Government constantly organize public right awareness campaign on Child's Right Act in schools	3.52	3.53	3.54	Agreed
12	School administrators create a student-friendly learning atmosphere in schools.	3.41	3.46	3.44	Agreed
13	Principals organize workshops for teachers on the legal implications of violating the student's right periodically	3.57	3.59	3.58	Agreed
14	Policy on every child matters is constantly implemented in schools	3.38	3.47	3.43	Agreed
15	School administrators involve students in decisions that concern them in schools	2.74	3.05	2.09	Disagreed

The information in Table 3 above indicates that the respondents accepted questionnaire items 11-14. But they disagreed with questionnaire item 15, the grand total shows that school administrator' strategies for protecting Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools is effective.

Testing the Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Table 4: z-test of the difference between mean ratings of male and female heads on the level to which school administrators are aware of the implication of the rights of the child in public secondary schools in Rivers State

Status	N	X	Df	Z-Cal	Critical Value	Decision
Male Heads	47	28.19	74	-0.30	±1.96	Not Significant
Female Heads	29	28.64				

P<0.05

Ho_1: There is a significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads on the level to which school administrator are aware of the implication of the rights of the child in secondary in Rivers State. This is because the tabulated z-score (-0.30) < z – critical of 1.96.

Hypothesis 2

Table 5: z-test of the difference between mean ratings of male and female heads on the level to which school administrators violates the rights of the rights of the child in public secondary schools in Rivers State

Status	N	X	Df	Z-Cal	Critical Value	Decision
Male Principals	47	28.19	74	-0.30	±1.96	Not Significant
Female Principals	29	28.64				

P<0.05

Ho2: Table 5: shows that, there is a significance difference between the mean rating of male and female heads on the level to which school administrators violate the child right acts in secondary school in rivers state this is because the tabulated z- score (-0.40) z-critical of 1.96.

Hypothesis 3

Table 6: z-test of the difference between mean ratings of male and female heads on the level to which school administrators creates strategies to protect the child in secondary schools in Rivers State

Status	N	X	Df	Z-Cal	Critical Value	Decision
Male Heads	47	23.38	74	-0.50	±1.96	Not Significant
Female Heads	29	23.77				

P<0.05

Ho_2: Table 6 reveals that there is a significant different between the mean ratings of male and female head on the level to which school administrators create strategies to protect the child in secondary school in please. This is because the tabulated z score (-0.50) < z critical of 1.96.

Tables reveals the z-test analysis of the difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads (school administrators) for protecting the child's rights act in public secondary schools in the Local government areas covered in this study. The result shows that z-calculated value is less than the critical value at significant level. We therefore accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female heads on the level to which school administrators' are aware for protection of the child right acts in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

From the above study it clearly predicts that the child rights awareness of school administrators does not differ based on gender. We therefore conclude that school administrators are aware of the Child's Right Act, but to a large extent are ignorant of the legal implications of the Act in Rivers State. We also conclude that the Child's Right Act is usually violated by the school administrators in discharge of their duties. This portrayed the extent in which they protect the rights of the child under their custody in school environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School authorities should increase the channels for positive impact on child's rights act to include holding rights awareness seminars in schools, formation of child rights clubs to advocate for their interest at school level, strengthening students' representative's council or body and academic councils and creating child's right awareness to members of staff.
2. School administrators should constantly carry out sensitization programmes tagged "a stop to child's rights violations" for the teachers as required in the Laws of Federal Republic of Nigeria and the legal implications of violating the laws.
3. The government should make Education law a compulsory subject of study for pre-service teachers in Teacher Education as one of the strategies to protect child's rights, to avoid the challenges school administrators encounter with teachers in an effort to instill discipline in schools.
4. Punishment for the violation of the child right act should be active and not passive.
5. The school child should be well guided on the legal and societal implications of child right acts.
6. There should be explicit strategies on how to protect the child right act in schools

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