



Assessment of Safe School Environment Practices in Tertiary Institutions of Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the perceived extent of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A descriptive research design of survey type was employed. One (1) research question was formulated to guide the study. The population of the study comprise all lecturers in the three (3) federal government-owned tertiary institutions in Zamfara state. A total number of 129 respondents were selected to participate in the study using simple random sampling technique. For the purpose of data collection, a self-constructed questionnaire titled “Safe School Environment Questionnaire” was developed on a five-point Likert scale was developed with 19 items. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found that, the level of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions in Zamfara state was at a low extent with statistical score of (M = 2.39, SD = 1.11). Based on findings, it is recommended that, the federal government should increase funding of tertiary institution for the proper implementation of safe school environment policies provided by the federal ministry of education. Furthermore, institutions’ administrators should promote consistent consultations and partnerships with relevant security agencies for the protection of the school environment as well as the wellbeing of the staff members, students, and the entire universities communities.

Keywords: Safe school practices, tertiary education, school safety measures, Zamfara State, Nigeria

Introduction

Schools are unique environments in many ways. No other category of building can claim environmental qualities of a school building and characteristics (Frumkin, Geller, & Rubin, 2006). Due to such significance ascribed to school environment, school safety has been included as a dimension of educational quality in several school climate models (United States Agency for International Development, 2013). Safe school environment is seen critical to education. A safe school environment can be described as the extent to which school settings promote student safety and student health, which may include topics such as the physical plant, the academic environment, available physical and mental health supports and services as well as the fairness and adequacy of disciplinary procedures as supported by relevant researches and an assessment of validity (Zais,



2011). Conceptually, safety is the state of being safe, the condition of being protected against physical, social, spiritual, financial, political, emotional, occupational, psychological, educational failure, damage, error, accidents, harm or any other events which could be considered non-desirable. Safety can also be defined to be the control of acceptable level of risks, this can take the form of being protected from the event or from exposure to something that causes health or economical losses. It can include protection of people or of possessions (Awodiji, Gbudinkpa, & Osasuyin, 2015). School safety refers to the measures taken by educational institutions to ensure the safety and well-being of students, staff, and visitors. This can include a variety of strategies and technologies designed to prevent violence, theft, and other criminal activities. One important aspect of school safety is the physical design of the building itself. This can include features such as secured entrances and exits, surveillance cameras, and access control systems that limit entry to authorized individuals. Schools may also implement safety protocols that regulate who are allowed to enter the building, such as requiring visitors to show identification or sign in. A safer school creates a secure, safer, comfortable and healthy feeling to students and teachers both in normal and also in disaster situation. By implementing the standard of structures and infrastructures with resilience to disaster, and implanting the safer culture, schools are able to protect school community and surrounding environment from disaster risk (Mubita, 2021).

Problem Statement

Ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment is a fundamental responsibility of schools, as it is essential for enabling students and teachers to fully engage in the educational process. However, schools today encounter a multitude of safety challenges, ranging from preparedness for natural disasters to the prevention of school violence and the protection of students from health risks. These complex and evolving safety concerns place significant responsibility on school administrators, who are expected to implement effective measures to secure the well-being of students and staff within school premises (Montee, 2008; Ozmena, Dur, & Akgul, 2010). Despite the critical nature of these responsibilities, gaps remain in understanding the extent to which current safety protocols meet the needs of modern educational environments, particularly in regions experiencing unique safety challenges. Safety within schools is a major problem affecting students, teachers, and the community all over the world. Most of the schools have tried coming up with measures to ensure that students and the faculty as whole feel safe while in school (Arkoubi, 2016). Safety within schools is a major problem affecting students, teachers, and the community all over the world. Most of the schools have tried coming up with measures to ensure that students and the faculty as whole feel safe while in school (Peretomode & Bello, 2018). In recent years, public schools in Nigeria experienced several problems threatening school safety which make the school unsafe for the students and for the school personnel. This assertion was confirmed by Adebayo and Ileuma (2023) who discussed that, in Nigeria, the security situation in schools has been a cause for concern in recent years. Incidents of violence, theft, and vandalism are common, and teachers are often the victims. Violent attacks on tertiary institutions in Nigeria is raising for over a decade.



Specifically, Zamfara state is one of the states in Nigeria that have been experiencing a number of problems related to unsafe school environment that threatens the sustainability of the schools and heavily cause the downfall of the standards of education in the state. As a result of such scenarios, following the rampant attacks and abduction of hundreds of students in Zamfara State, on September 1, 2021 the Zamfara state government alongside the Nigeria Police Force jointly shutdown all public schools across the fourteen local government areas of the state for a prolonged period of time (Channels, 2021). Subsequently, after a partial reopening of some schools in the state, as at August 2022, a total of 75 public secondary schools shut since 2021 over unsafe environment reasons (TheCable, 2022).

Many research studies were conducted on safe school environment and school safety strategies all over the world due to the essentiality of the need for safety and security in school as teaching and learning environment especially in the developed country. However, from the literature reviewed and synthesise in this study, it was observed by the researchers that, there were very little or no abundant research works conducted on the assessment of the safe school environment practices among public institutions in Zamfara state. Furthermore, most of the prior related research studies were made on secondary schools without putting into consideration the safety of schools' environment among tertiary institutions. Thus, to fill literature gap, this study attempts to assess safe school environment practices in tertiary institutions with reference to Zamfara state which happens to be one of the states of the federation that are facing lack of safety and security measures as result of insurgencies, banditry and targeted attacks on schools which negatively affected the conduciveness of school environment and hindering the proper development of education in the state.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to assess the level of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions of Zamfara State, Nigeria. Other specific objectives are:

1. To assess the implementation level of safe school environment measures in tertiary institutions of Zamfara State.
2. To identify the gaps in safety practices of safe school environment measures in tertiary institutions of Zamfara State.
3. To provide recommendations for enhancing school safety among tertiary institutions of Zamfara State

Research Questions

This study attempts to provide answers to the following research objectives:

1. What is the level of the implementation level of safe school environment measures in tertiary institutions of Zamfara State?
2. What are the gaps in safety practices of safe school environment measures in tertiary institutions of Zamfara State?
3. What are the recommendations for enhancing school safety among tertiary institutions of Zamfara State?



Review of Related Literature

Concept of School Environment

The concept of school environment has been defined by different scholars and researchers in the field of educational studies. According to Obi, Johnson and Lawani (2004), school environment connotes all human and material resources available in the school, in which a child can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, feel and respond to. In their contributions, Miller and Cunnighan (2011) maintained that the issue of school environment is multi-dimensional in nature. According to them it possesses the physical, social, and academic demons. According to them, the physical dimension of school environment includes: the school size, appearance of school building and classrooms, order and organization of classrooms in the school, ratio of student teacher in the classroom, instructional materials, libraries, laboratories, hostels, sporting games and recreational facilities, and the availability of resources to afford safety and comfort. In the academic dimension, Miller and Cunnighan (2011) also proclaimed that the academic dimensions of the school environment include: the quality of instruction given to the students, and the teachers expectations for good achievements from students. Furthermore, Glew, Fan, Katon, Revera, and Kernic (2005) upheld that school environment or climate refers to the way students and staff feel about being at school each day. It could be conceived as settings in which young people can learn a sense of membership in and obligation to a group.

Concept of Safe School Environment

This is defined as an environment in which the business of education is conducted in an organized and efficient manner. Each participant in the educational process knows his/her role and is given the means and methods whereby to complete tasks which are assigned according to that role (Wilson, 1988). School safety is the job of the entire school community. This effort requires leadership and coordination by school administration, and participation from all sectors of the school community. Planning, conducting drills, and participating in exercises with law enforcement, fire, emergency officials and other members of the school community ensures a comprehensive, unified approach to school emergency response planning. Building relationships and community engagement are vital to building a safer school community (New York Codes, Rules and Regulation, 2023). Furthermore, a safe environment also considers other threats to the school environment including violence, accidents, disease outbreaks, and other emergencies. Therefore, an essential component to the school physical environment is establishing a comprehensive school safety plan which includes physical and psychological safety measures, crisis plans, and school safety response teams (Brock et al., 2010). In his dedication, Crowe (2000) stressed that physical safety is focused on the physical structures of the school environment, which include natural access control (i.e. locked doors) and surveillance (i.e., security cameras). Psychological safety measures focus on the well-being of students and staff by promoting school climate and connectedness (Wilson, 2004). The development of school safety teams requires collaboration between school personnel, emergency responders, and community resources. Crisis plans include protocols and procedures for the school crisis team and delineated roles and

responsibilities of how to respond effectively (Reeves, Zwarenstein, Goldman, Barr, Freeth, Koppel, Hammick, 2010).

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which is suitable for obtaining data to describe the current state of a phenomenon. The population of the study comprised all lecturers in the three federal government-owned tertiary institutions in Zamfara State. A total of 129 respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique. This approach ensured that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included in the study, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample. For data collection, a self-constructed questionnaire titled “Safe School Environment Questionnaire (SSEQ)” was developed. The instrument consisted of 19 items designed to measure various dimensions of a safe school environment, such as physical safety, emotional safety, and institutional policies. The items were structured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1. Very Low Extent, 2. Low Extent, 3. Moderate Extent, 4. Great Extent, and 5- Very Great Extent to capture the perceptions of the respondents. The validity of the instrument was established through experts’ review. Two professionals in educational management and research methodology, measurement and evaluation evaluated the questionnaire for content relevance, clarity, and coverage of the study variables. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot study conducted achieving a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.88, indicating a very high level of internal consistency. The data analysis was computed through Descriptive Statistics using Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) were employed as primary statistical tools to determine the levels of the safe school environment practices in the selected tertiary institutions.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Constructs Related to the Level of Safe School Environment

Statements	Mean	SD	Extent Level
SSE1 In my institution, fences and entrance gates are strong	2.21	1.20	Low Extent
SSE2 In my institution, there are burglary doors and iron window protectors	2.16	1.11	Low Extent
SSE3 In my institution, there are close circuit television (CCTV) in strategic locations across the school environment	1.41	0.9	Very Low Extent
SSE4 In my institution, infrastructural facilities are well-constructed, well-maintained, and free from physical hazards	2.49	0.96	Low Extent



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SSE5 In my institution, there is regular lightning in classrooms, hallways, and school ground for safety	2.67	1.07	Moderate Extent
SSE6 In my institution, there are designated security personnel who regularly oversee and control movements of the people in the school premises	2.78	1.08	Moderate Extent
SSE7 In my institution, visitors to the school are properly screened before being allowed access to school premises	2.17	1.13	Low Extent
SSE8 In my institution, there is a comprehensive safety policy that is clearly communicated to all staff members and students	1.91	1.15	Low Extent
SSE9 In my institution, there is a clear and effective emergency response channels in case of armed violent attack, fire outbreak, natural disaster, or accidents	1.88	1.17	Low Extent
SSE10 My institution has a cordial relationship with institution-based community	2.01	1.00	Low Extent
SSE11 My institution observes local referral services to clinics, counsellors, and psychologists	1.92	0.98	Low Extent
SSE12 My institution has strong connection and partnership with the tertiary education trust fund (TETFUND)	3.57	1.31	Great Extent
SSE13 My institution has strong connection and partnership with teacher professional development (TPD) programmes	3.27	1.17	Moderate Extent
SSE14 My institution maintains consistent consultation with local/national disaster risk management (DRM) authorities and their services	1.88	1.18	Low Extent
SSE15 My institution has strong relationship with other research institutes and libraries	2.91	1.20	Moderate Extent
SSE16 My institution maintains consistent consultation with security agencies	2.99	1.15	Moderate Extent
Overall Mean Score	2.39	1.11	Low Extent

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 presented above shown that item SSE12 “My institution has strong connection and partnership with the tertiary education trust fund (TETFUND)” has the highest mean score (M =



3.57, SD = 1.31) which indicates that lecturers perceived that their institutions partners with the tertiary education trust fund (TETFUND) at a great extent. This was followed by SSE13 “My institution has strong connection and partnership with teacher professional development (TPD) programmes” with mean score (M = 3.27, SD = 1.17), which expresses that, lecturers believed that their institutions participate in teacher professional development (TPD) programmes at a moderate extent. Item SSE16 “My institution maintains consistent consultation with security agencies” with mean score (M = 2.99, SD = 1.15), expressing that, tertiary institutions in Nigeria maintains a synergic consultation with the security agencies for safeguarding the school environment at a moderate extent. This was followed by item SSE15 “My institution has strong relationship with other research institutes and libraries” with mean score value of (M = 2.91, SD = 1.20) which revealed that tertiary institutions in Nigeria cordially relates with their counterparts at a moderate extent. This was followed by item SSE6 “In my institution, there are designated security personnel who regularly oversee and control movements of the people in the school premises” with mean score (M = 2.78, SD = 1.08) which denotes that, tertiary institutions in Nigeria regularly oversee and control movements of the people in the institutions at a moderate extent. This was followed by item SSE5 “In my institution, there is regular lightning in classrooms, hallways, and school ground for safety” with mean score (M = 2.67, SD = 1.07) which shows that the institutions provide regular lightning in classrooms, hallways, and school ground for safety of the school environment at a moderate extent. This followed by item SSE4 “In my institution, infrastructural facilities are well-constructed, well-maintained, and free from physical hazards” with mean score (M = 2.49, SD = 0.96) which explains that infrastructural facilities are well-constructed, well-maintained, and free from physical hazards in Nigerian tertiary institutions was at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE1 “In my institution, fences and entrance gates are strong” with mean score (M = 2.21, SD = 1.20) which exposed that, the strength of fences and entrance gates in the institutions was at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE7 “In my institution, visitors to the school are properly screened before being allowed access to school premises” with mean score (M = 2.17, SD = 1.13) which indicates visitors screening before being allowed access to institutions’ premises was at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE2 “In my institution, there are burglary doors and iron window protectors” with mean score (M = 2.16, SD = 1.11), which shown that availability of burglary doors and iron window protectors among tertiary institutions in Nigeria was at a low extent. Next is item SSE10 “My institution has a cordial relationship with institution-based community” with mean score (M = 2.01, SD = 1.00) which indicates that school-community relationship was at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE11 “My institution observes local referral services to clinics, counsellors, and psychologists” with mean score (M = 1.92, SD = 0.98), which revealed that, tertiary institutions in Nigeria observe local referral services to clinics, counsellors, and psychologists at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE8 “In my institution, there is a comprehensive safety policy that is clearly communicated to all staff members and students” with mean score (M = 1.91, SD = 1.15) was at a low extent. This was followed by item SSE9 “In my institution, there is a clear and effective emergency response channels in case of armed violent attack, fire outbreak, natural disaster, or accidents” with mean score (M = 1.88, SD



= 1.17) was found at a low extent. Furthermore, item SSE14 “My institution maintains consistent consultation with local/national disaster risk management (DRM) authorities and their services” with mean score ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.18$) was found at a low extent. Finally, item “SSE3 In my institution, there are close circuit television (CCTV) in strategic locations across the school environment” recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 0.9$) which revealed that the availability of CCTV among tertiary institutions in Nigeria was found at a very low extent. On overall, from the results of statistical score value of ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.11$) obtained in the table 1 presented above, it was revealed that, the level of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions in Zamfara state, Nigeria was found at a low extent.

Discussions

From the descriptive analysis presented above, the level of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions in Zamfara state was found at a low extent. This finding is in harmony with that of Sokpuwu and Enoch (2023) who conducted a study on the provision of school safety devices for administrative effectiveness of tertiary institutions in rivers state and found that only few school safety devices were available and provided for administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers state. However, Sokpuwu and Enoch’s was conducted in Rivers state, while the current study was conducted in Zamfara state. Findings of this study is in agreement with that of Ekpoh, Edet and Ukpong (2020) who investigated on the security challenges in universities: implications for safe school environment, where it was found that safe school environment challenges are escalating in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Furthermore, Ogunnowo, Okonji, Ngozi, Nduka, Helen, David, and Ezinwa (2022) conducted a study on assessment of security facilities in federal tertiary institutions of Enugu State, Nigeria, wherein the researchers proclaimed that safety security facilities and mechanisms are not adequate in federal tertiary institutions of Enugu State. However, the study of Ogunnowo et al differs from the current study, as the former was conducted in Enugu state while the latter was conducted in Zamfara state.

In addition, it was observed by Idochi (2018) that inadequacy of safety facilities and personnel, poor planning and management of safety and health in the tertiary institutions, mostly owned by government, has been observed to be developing into a culture bound to pose significant level of security and health threat to students and staff alike, and which may impair the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, Ogunode (2020), Monday and Mallo (2021) found in their studies that lack of safe school environment has been among the major challenges affecting higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study assessed the extent of the level of safe school environment practices among tertiary institutions in Zamfara state, Nigeria. Results in the study proved that the level of safe school environment practices among federal government-owned tertiary institutions in Zamfara state, Nigeria was found at a low extent.

Recommendations



Based on findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The federal government should increase funding of tertiary institution for the proper implementation of safe school environment policies provided by the federal ministry of education.
2. Government should improve the partnership measures with international organisations for the enhancement of safety in Nigerian tertiary institutions in terms of the improvement of school building's structure and strength, provision of modern technologies in ensuring security and safety of the institutions.
3. Government should train and re-train staff members of tertiary institutions on the prevention of threats militating against safety in school environment as well as skills for the immediate response to emergencies.
4. Institutions' administrators should promote consistent consultations and partnerships with relevant security agencies for the protection of the school environment as well as the wellbeing of the staff members, students, and the entire universities communities.
5. Institutions' administrators should develop a safe school environment policies and blueprints in consideration with the specific safety needs of their respective schools due to the geographical difference that exists from one institution to another.

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