

Managing Occupational Safety for School Performance in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper descriptively examined government, multinational, corporate organizations and individual efforts in promoting occupational safety for school performance, hence, enhancing educational development in Rivers State, Nigeria. Total of 50 schools comprised 250 head teachers and 1020 parents (respondents) were purposively chosen amongst schools that benefited from the largesse for this study. One research question and one hypothesis were analyzed and tested. Findings included a satisfaction level on infrastructure and instructional facilities provided, to have aided eliminating hazards for good academic performance. It recommended, that Government, multinational oil companies, individuals and corporate organizations in Rivers State should assist in physical, environmental and social development of academic communities through rehabilitation and reconstruction of schools, to include provisions of infrastructure and instructional facilities, sanitary, recreational, educational workshops, seminars and conferences to boost occupational safety for improved academic serenity and performance amongst others.

Key words: Occupational Safety, School Performance

Introduction

The development of education worldwide is propelled by many forces. No nation develops its education from one source alone. There are many privately owned institutions that have improved access to people than publicly sponsored institutions in terms of infrastructure, instructional facilities and behaviours. Investment in education is colossal whether in private or public settings. Educational system cannot achieve its goals for generation to generations in dwindling situations without stakeholders' interventions to salvage it from collapse. The unpalatable distributions of economic resources in Nigeria today obviously indicate that education will continue not striving well in the hands of government alone.

The continued deplorable conditions of schools demand high need for occupational safety practice to ameliorate astounding hazards facing academic conditions. Individuals and corporate organizations investing on education in Rivers State is key to achieving its treasured needs for educational development and growth. In other hand, commercialization of education entirely has enabled advancement and sustenance of occupational safety; else the poor status in public school system would have eroded entire quality of education in Rivers state in particular and Nigeria in general. According to the National Policy on Education on funding (Section 10:153) emphasized that education is a capital-intensive social service which requires adequate financial provisions from all tiers of government for successful implementation of its programmes. Having considered the implications of financing social service ventures, it stated that in this connection, government welcomes the participation of local communities, individuals and organizations (Section 10:154). (FRN, 2014). On this premise, Major (2011), opined that Ministry of Niger

Delta Affairs, NDDC, Oil Companies, organized private sector and government to get involved on educational development of the Niger Delta area which includes Rivers State. The apparent need for Multinationals, corporate organizations and individuals in Rivers State to be involved are advantages to change the educational narratives of the communities they lived and worked because of the vibrant resources available. They have not relented in doing this for their host communities.

Occupational safety in school is important index to ascertaining general serenity of the school as a working environment. It entailed absent of hazards in work environment and involved well provided modern Information Communication Technology (ICT) devices, infrastructure, instructional facilities, remunerations and staff welfare, environmental space, health care and research and development worked out and implemented for the overall benefit of teachers and learners.

Hazard free environment is necessary for teachers and learners in this 21st century classroom to teach and learn without physical, human and mental injuries. Teachers and learners can only function efficiently and effectively in safe work environment. To be effective, schools cannot rely on government efforts to provide befitting teaching and learning environment, multinationals, corporate organizations and individuals have great roles in educational development and sustainability for national and global competitiveness. It is important that their participation on community development should start with sound educational base for its people.

These propositions promote occupational safety in school for improved academic performance. The dividends of education collaboration have been the emergence of improved school standard in some places at 1st and 2nd tiers and quality of manpower development arising from private educational institutions. Even at this, education cannot be purely left in the hands of private investors because danger is apparent that many children from poor economic backgrounds may be denied access to proper basic education. Rather, it is necessary for these private and corporate bodies to amply support the sustenance of the public institutions for safe academic purposes. Importantly, no nation that wants to develop would depend on government as panacea to solving all its educational problems. Even though, that it is mandatory for government to provide its citizenries compulsory basic access to quality education (FRN, 2014). Unfortunately, successive governments have failed to meet requisite conditions of providing serene academic environment in the public schools especially at the 1st and 2nd tiers where most schools do not befit an academic environment due to highly bastardized facilities (Ugwulashi, 2016). Unlike the tertiary educational level boosted by major bodies like TETFUND, Banks, and Corporate entities academic environments look serene enhancing occupational hazards safety for good teaching and learning with funds to manage the institutions. Majority of public schools at 1st and 2nd levels lack physical and academic safety. There should be concerted efforts by State government, multinationals, corporate organizations and individuals to continuously reconstruct, rehabilitate and equip schools with modern facilities, train staff, better welfare packages for enhancement of occupational safety in meeting specified international standards.

The concept of Occupational Safety

The lack of occupational safety has made most schools environment not befitting for teaching and learning, being bane to quality education. There are numerous hazards making school unsafe for teachers, students and visitors. Hazards included anything with the potentials to cause harm, illness, or injury, damage to property, products, environment; production losses thus, increased liabilities to its operators. Physical, social, material and psychological constraints that limit the potentialities are hazards. In school hazards include lack of quality assurance processes like educational facilities, classroom compositions, sanitary conditions, quantity and quality staff compositions, poor staff welfare conditions, behaviours amongst others. Through risk assessment (RA) these hazards are identified, assessed, eliminated or managed. Every school is expected to develop its School Observation Check Lists (SOCL) to follow actions to mitigating or eliminating these hazards as to restoring confidence in the school.

Nanotechnology safety (2013) maintained that occupational safety and health (OSH) as a term meant to protecting workers and technology in the work place and minimizing accidents to the lowest possible level. The main purpose of school occupational safety is key to ensuring that potential injuries to personnel resulting from incidents associated with the poor environment, teaching and learning are removed. Ordinarily, assurance of safety at work environment and task increase productivity. It has arrays of provisions in line with Occupational health and safety management systems (ISO 45001:2018) and Educational Organizations Management System (ISO 21001:2018). According to Cash and Twiford (2010) schools should be thought of as workplaces for students and teachers rather than being held to their own, different standards. They inferred that as workers are more productive in better work environments data supports that teachers and students have higher morale and are also more productive in better work environments. There calls for greater need for safety in schools. Characteristically, it involved strategically putting in place proper risk management process to ensure occupational safety. It dwelled on identifying, assessing and managing hazards whether physical and behaviours potentially harmful to learners, teachers and interested stakeholders within school facilities. Usually school generic risk assessment may be entire school system and specific risk assessment for particular subset like faculty, department, classroom, hostel, sports field, library and laboratory amongst others.

In carryout generic risk analysis, hazards are identified in all parts of the school (faculty, department, classroom, hostel, and laboratory) etc, while specific risk assessment like in a classroom environment (teacher and pupil behaviour, class size and composition, limitations of space, layout, equipment, facilities, poor ventilation and lighting amongst others are some potential harms to be identified in a typical classroom risk assessment (Worknest.com, 2023, Ugwulashi, 2014).

From the findings, classrooms where there are high level of risk because in these condition teaching and learning will be very difficult. A school deficient in all these can be characterized as high risk school lacking occupational safety, while, in the contrary low risk school has occupational safety, teachers, students and visitors would prefer such a place for their activity. Occupational safety is very important in internal and external grading of school, determining safeness, academic performances and reputation. Eventually, unsafe conditions and unsafe behaviours are two variables for incidents occurrence that school risk assessment provides measures for corrections and preventions when properly followed.

In nutshell, occupational safety in school cannot be measured by physical and environmental factors alone without human elements because the impact is on human propelling the system. If the wrong behaviours and knowledge are imparted on the learners it will be difficult to erase. Ensuring good health and safety practices inspired the need for institutional best practices in teaching and learning spaces. There is no misplacement that good physical infrastructure, instructional facilities, school behaviour, motivations, personnel, good human relationships, financial and risk management are essentials for enhanced occupational safety for school performance.

Joint ventures interventions on educational development

The notion of public management of education has been anchored primarily on government alone. This assumption on public services has long denied educational system of opportunities arising from individual and corporate organizations interventions. The Niger delta region specifically faced these predicaments even in the presence of continued booming oil resources despite hues and cries by host communities. Fubara (2002) in Okoji (2013) opined that these rich natural endowments have however not translated into concrete development of the region. Rather, the region has a catalogue of human and infrastructural problems that have been largely unattended to while its resources are being exploited. Corporate social sustainability approach by stakeholders in education can help save the educational woes by rehabilitating and reconstructing schools especially at 1st and 2nd tiers in Rivers State for good academic performance. Their participation enhanced good school-community relationship propelling safe working environment. Previous and current governments in Rivers State have invested enough in education. Many schools were rebuilt to modern standard in the 1st and 2nd tiers. Modern primary schools were completely built and equipped in all the Local governments, although, some were abandoned by the contractors. At the secondary level, some colleges were rebuilt and equipped in some local governments. Many in the hinterland are left to teach and learn in their previous dilapidating and shabby states.

Multinationals like Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Nigerian Agip oil company /OANDO (NAOC), Total (Elf), Chevron, Mobil and Addax and subsidiaries amongst others have been in joint venture arrangements with federal government of Nigeria as sustainable social

corporate responsibility have made significant impacts in school projects at 1st and 2nd tiers benefitting many communities in core operating areas in the Niger delta area, although, not enough. There are continued worrisome infrastructure and instructional facilities that needs attentions for occupational safety to maintain education standard. Corporate organizations and individuals are no exception as many have helped in boosting better-quality academic environment in many communities even, at levels of privately-owned befitting schools.

Okoji (2012) posited that the corporate response of the multinational oil corporations to the socio-economic problems in Niger Delta, Nigeria could be properly explained through two major concepts; these are micro and macro corporate social responsibility. Having differentiated both, he stated that micro corporate social responsibility projects benefit both companies' reputation and community development and whatever decision a multinational oil corporation decided to embark upon, it is obvious that the two strategies will benefit the oil corporation's reputation and the development of the host countries. Reyes (2013) stated that the aim of education is to create teaching and learning environment that would bring about desired changes in the learners such as making them more knowledgeable, skillful or acquired positive attitudes and values. This implies that without meaningful academic environment the teaching and learning process invariably may not achieve good result. The outcome of teaching and learning is measured by academic performances in a school. Ugwulashi (2014) viewed educational facilities as foremost hazard affecting school safety climate that needs to be curbed to enable efficient and effective school administration. School facilities must be appropriate to enhance academic environment.

Balogua (2009) cited in Okoji (2013) asserted that the infrastructure vital for quality education is grossly lacking, thus leading to high school dropout rates in Niger delta region. Joint venture intervention in education tended to ameliorate problems faced by schools through provisions of basic needs that facilitate good teaching and learning activities. The factor of corporate integrity for these interventions, Okoji, (2012) considered a strong mean rating that corporate integrity which is bounded by morally justifiable principles and values enhances the third parties (stakeholders) participations to improve school deplorable states for effective school performance in Rivers State.

Importance of occupational safety in school management

These include but not limited to:

- 1) Increased enthusiasm to come to school and reduces truancy because of proper health safety policy in place. Through risk assessment unsafe conditions and unsafe acts tantamount to disrupt academic environment are controlled.
- 2) Helped reduce incidences capable of illness, injuries and poor school performances.
- 3) Removed fears and threats in school. Creating awareness, security, and just-in-time approach to incidents that will affect school business. Answers are provided to issues identified as teaching and learning can only be efficient and effective in highly secured

environment. School routes are completely safe mostly by good school-community relationship.

- 4) Maintained and improved integrity as a secured school environment has good reputation. People preferred identifying to work and live in such an environment. Parents preferred their children to attend school in peaceful community.
- 5) Improved academic performance: - teachers, pupils and visitors felt secured while in the school for any purpose of their choice. This brings cordial relationship and willingness to teaching and learning.
- 6) Ensured positive academic environment - the quality of care increased more in a serene and healthy environment than in unsafe physical, environmental and behavioural conditions. Lack of occupational safety makes teaching and learning stressful. Presence of emergency alarm, modern toilet facilities, sick bay, clean classroom properly ventilated, class size amongst others facilitate teachers to work and pupils to learn with ease.
- 7) Increased school value in terms of identity and conduct. Teachers work and pupils learn with happiness and joy in their mind; this is extended to the community thereby encouraging better school- community relationship amongst others.

Research question

In what ways can managing occupational safety in school improves academic performance in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Analysis of Research Questions

Table 1: - Analysis of mean ratings and rank order on ways managing occupational safety in schools improve academic performance in Rivers State, Nigeria?

S/N	Questionnaire items	Head Teachers n = 250		Parents n = 1020		Mean set	Rank order	Remarks
	Ways managing occupational safety in school can improve school performance in Rivers State, Nigeria?	\bar{x}	sd ₁	\bar{x}	sd ₂			
1.	Construction of new model school classroom blocks	4.00	0.4	4.00	0.4	4.00	1 st	Agreed
2.	Rehabilitation of old library, laboratory, staff room, staff quarters etc	3.60	0.36	3.73	0.37	3.67	7 th	Agreed
3.	Good water supplies	3.70	0.37	3.60	0.36	3.65	8 th	Agreed

4.	Safe teaching and learning instructional facilities	3.80	0.38	3.80	0.38	3.80	5 th	Agreed
5.	Scholarships scheme	2.80	0.39	2.60	0.35	2.70	9 th	Agreed
6.	Increased rate of attendance in the schools	3.90	0.39	3.87	0.39	3.89	3 rd	Agreed
7.	Improved teaching and learning conditions	4.00	0.4	4.00	0.4	4.00	1 st	Agreed
8.	Improved health and safety in the schools	3.94	0.39	3.86	0.39	3.90	2 nd	Agreed
9.	Reduced lateness, truancy and absenteeism	3.90	0.39	3.80	0.38	3.85	4 th	Agreed
10.	Constant interactions with host communities amongst others	3.75	0.38	3.65	0.37	3.70	6 th	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.74	0.37	3.63	0.35	3.71		Agreed

Mean: 0.00 - 2.49 = Disagreement; 2.50 - above = Agreement

The calculated mean scores ranged from 3.60 to 4.00 higher than the criterion mean score of 2.50. All the items were agreed by head teachers and parents as ways managing occupational safety in school can improve school performance in Rivers State, Nigeria? This includes construction of new model school classroom blocks, improved teaching and learning conditions, good water supply system, modern toilet facilities, improved health and safety practice in the schools amongst others.

Hypothesis

Ho1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of head teachers and parents on ways managing occupational safety in school can improve academic performance in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 2: - Mean (\bar{X}), standard deviation (SD) and z-test statistical analysis between the mean ratings of head teachers and parents on ways managing occupational safety in school can improve academic performance in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Variable	n	\bar{X}	sd	z – cal.	z- crit.	df	Level of Significance	Decision
Head teachers	250	3.74	3.5	0.100	1.96	106	0.05	Ho1 Accepted
Parents	1020	3.63	3.46					

Table 2, showed that the z – calculated value of 0.107 is less than the z – critical value of 1.96 at 106 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. We accept the null hypothesis and therefore established that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of head teachers and parents on ways managing occupational safety in school can improve academic performance in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

Even though, it has been the responsibility of the government to put in place educational facilities to enable effective teaching and learning, multinationals, corporate organizations, and individuals also be involved in other to mitigate poor academic environment for school occupational safety. These collaborations totally will eliminate collapse of the educational system, because school cannot exist in emptiness. The need arises for stakeholders to maintain good relationship within host communities in making education at the 1st and 2nd tiers worthy.

Importantly, at these levels teaching and learning require appropriate academic environment to enhance realization of knowledgeable, skillful and positive attitudes and values (educational goals). Space, natural lighting, modern technology and safety are requisite for effective school. This assertion supports hazard mitigation to give a better environment for teaching and learning. As postulated in Skinner's theory individual can be motivated by proper design of their work environment (Babalola, 2008 in Babalola & Ayeni 2008, Cash & Twiford, 2010).

Obviously, head teachers and parents agreed that physical state of academic environments influence entire processes of what a school should be. Educational facilities help to achieve desirable educational results for national development. Stakeholders complementing government is better way of managing occupational safety in school through rehabilitation of school infrastructure, there is positive reinforcement or behaviour modification as academic environments have high occupational safety while low occupation safety demotivate many teachers and learners including parents alike (Ugwulashi,2014).

The study further indicated no significant difference on the perception of head teachers and parents on the ways managing occupational safety can improve academic performance in Rivers State. The participation of multinationals, corporate and individuals are of significant importance in ensuring occupational safety by providing facilities that encouraged academic performance in school. A typical instance recently is NAOC JV collaboration with the State government to equip and furnish the Primary Health Centre and 14 Block Classroom School built by the State Government, both in Rumueme Kingdom, Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Similarly, in Omoku Central Communities, the Nigerian Agip Oil Company and its JV Partners commissioned six mini water schemes in various primary schools in the area. The benefitting schools include St. Stephen Primary School, St. Mary Primary School, St. Michael Primary School, Universal Basic Primary School, (UBE), Community Primary School and Community Model Primary School respectively. Also, Ogodia community in Ahoada West LGA of Rivers

State an ultra-modern, multi-purpose Civic Centre and Library Project and in Okwuzi-Egbema in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government library was built and commissioned. These multinationals have replicated educational projects many in other host communities as well as renovation of schools amongst others.



(Pictures showing primary school built with potable water scheme at Omoku central communities)

Many multinationals' effort in educational development supported Okoji (2012) assertion as to socioeconomic problems in Niger Delta, Nigeria, hence, that the corporate response of the multinational oil corporations to the socio-economic problems in Niger Delta, Nigeria attention, hence, these are ways of managing occupational safety for improved academic performance in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The prevailing deplorable conditions of most schools in Rivers State especially at 1st and 2nd tiers of school system required attention to mitigating awaiting physical and mental dangers. The lack of safety in school environment has meaning to what stale academic activity can be. Proper risk assessment should be in place regularly to identify impending hazards and make recommendations for continuous improvement. To maintain high occupational safety, physical,

environment and social environment has to be given facelifts. Academic activity can improve when all these are fulfilled. Renovations, infrastructure and instructional facilities, recreational facilities, health, safety and security are some fundamentals in managing occupational safety in school for improved academic performance in Rivers State.

Recommendations

1. Providing and extending of educational facilities to catchment schools to avoid overcrowding and pressure to existing facilities. In the other hand, build more classrooms for adequate class ratio.
2. Multinational to always engage host communities to finding out necessary measures to be followed in providing responsive projects for human capital development.
3. There should be high maintenance of health, safety and environment standards in school through inspection and audit process of school facilities.
4. Providing emergency response plans (medical, fire and security). Importantly, in low land areas are periodically affected by flooding. Academic activities between September through December are disrupted requiring mitigation plans in place.
5. There should be training and retraining of staff in modern methods for carrying out activities especially new technologies introduced to the school.
6. There should be high disciplinary methods to controlling staff and students. Adult care is expected to be carried out by teaching and non-teaching staff in mitigating behaviours like truancy, lateness, and abuse of facilities in the school.
7. Maintaining good school-community relationship with other interested parties to facilitate development for occupational safety amongst others.

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