

**Peace Education Implementation as a Predictor of Harmonious Learning Environment in
Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State**

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Abstract

The study examined peace education implementation as a predictor of a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The correlational design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised all 230 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. These schools have a total number of 952 teachers of civic education. A stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting 571 Civic education teachers in the selected schools for the study. Data was collected using researchers' developed instruments, named Peace Education Implementation Scale (PEIS) and Harmonious Learning Environment Scale (HLES). The instruments were subjected to face validity by three (3) experts. The reliability of the PEIS and HLES was .81 and .86, respectively, determined using Cronbach Alpha. A simple regression statistical tool was used in answering research questions, while the z-test associated with simple regression was used in testing hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that Empathy instillation in students and students' physical well-being predict a harmonious learning environment in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to a very high extent. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made, among others that teachers should always consider the students' physical wellbeing since it could enhance a harmonious learning environment.

Key words: Peace education, Harmonious learning environment, Secondary schools.

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of education, the concept of a harmonious learning environment stands out as a pivotal factor in shaping students' overall development. Public secondary schools, serving as crucibles for the academic, social, and emotional growth of adolescents, play a crucial role in fostering an atmosphere where students can thrive collectively. A harmonious learning environment encompasses more than the mere transmission of knowledge; it involves the creation of a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where students feel safe, respected, and engaged in the educational process. Cohen (2019) asserts that a positive school climate, characterized by healthy relationships, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging, contributes significantly to students' academic achievement and overall well-being. In public secondary schools, the pursuit of harmony involves dismantling barriers to learning, ensuring inclusivity, promoting diversity, and creating an atmosphere where every student has the opportunity to thrive. A harmonious learning environment could depend on peace education.

Peace education implementation refers to the deliberate and systematic integration of principles, values, and practices aimed at cultivating a culture of peace within the educational framework. It involves the intentional incorporation of educational strategies, curricular content, and school policies that foster understanding, empathy, conflict resolution, and social justice. The goal is to create learning environments that not only impart academic knowledge but also actively contribute to the development of individuals who are committed to peaceful coexistence, social harmony, and the resolution of conflicts through non-violent means (Udoh, 2021). In public secondary schools, the implementation of peace education is critical for creating a harmonious learning environment that not only enhances academic performance but also nurtures the holistic development of students (Bassey, 2019). This study focuses on the key components of peace education implementation in public secondary schools, such as empathy instillation, physical and mental well-being nourishment, among others.

Empathy is a multidimensional psychological phenomenon that involves the ability to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others. It goes beyond mere sympathy or intellectual understanding, encompassing an emotional resonance that allows individuals to vicariously experience the emotions of someone else. Empathy is a fundamental component of peace education as it fosters understanding, tolerance, and compassion among students. Eisenberg

& Lennon (2023) argue that fostering empathy in students contributes to positive interpersonal relationships and reduces conflicts within the school environment. Implementing empathy-focused activities, such as role-playing scenarios, sharing personal experiences, and incorporating literature that highlights diverse perspectives, can help students develop a deeper understanding of others' feelings and experiences. Furthermore, studies have shown that schools that actively promote empathy contribute to a more positive and supportive learning atmosphere (Berkowitz & Grych, 2018). By integrating empathy into the curriculum and extracurricular activities, public secondary schools can create an environment where students feel understood, respected, and valued, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a harmonious learning community. Another peace education implementation considered is the physical well-being of students.

Physical well-being refers to the state of an individual's overall health and fitness, encompassing various dimensions of physical health, functionality, and vitality. It is a holistic concept that goes beyond the absence of illness and includes the presence of positive physical attributes and behaviors that contribute to an individual's overall quality of life. Physical well-being is closely linked to students' overall development and their ability to engage positively in the learning process. Basch (2021) highlights the connection between physical health and academic achievement, emphasizing the need for schools to address students' health as part of their educational mission. Implementing programs that focus on nutrition, physical activity, and overall health in public secondary schools contributes not only to better academic outcomes but also to the creation of a conducive and harmonious learning environment. For instance, integrating nutrition education into the curriculum and providing healthy food options in school cafeterias can positively impact students' physical well-being (Opara, 2022). Moreover, physical education programs and extracurricular sports activities not only promote physical health but also encourage teamwork and collaboration, fostering positive relationships among students.

The current research landscape reveals a significant gap in understanding how peace education implementation and a harmonious learning environment in schools intersect and mutually influence each other in the academic context. Therefore, the researcher was encouraged to investigate how peace education implementation predicts a harmonious learning environment in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Problem

The educational landscape is not only a bastion of academic knowledge but also a crucible where the social, emotional, and psychological development of students takes place. In recent times, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of fostering a harmonious learning environment within public secondary schools, recognizing that a conducive atmosphere is fundamental for effective learning and holistic student growth. However, despite this acknowledgment, various challenges persist, hindering the realization of a truly harmonious educational space.

One pressing challenge is the insufficient emphasis on empathy instillation among students, often sidelined in traditional academic settings. The absence of structured programs leads to deficits in understanding, tolerance, and compassion, fostering heightened conflicts and a fragmented school community. Physical wellbeing, integral to overall students' development, faces hurdles in public secondary schools. Neglect of students' physical health, including nutrition and exercise, hampers engagement in learning, potentially leading to health concerns, absenteeism, and compromised academic performance. Similarly, mental well-being takes a backseat in educational discourse, with rising stress, anxiety, and depression among students. Scarcity of initiatives focusing on mental health nourishment results in a less resilient student body, impacting their ability to cope with academic pressures and hindering a positive school atmosphere. Compromise and cooperation introduce lag, contributing to challenges in conflict resolution and interpersonal relationships. Without guidance on negotiation skills, students struggle to navigate disagreements, fostering an environment marked by tension and division.

Inclusivity remains elusive, with biases and stereotypes persisting. The failure to foster an inclusive attitude leads to a fragmented school community, hindering the creation of a harmonious learning environment that celebrates diversity. Democracy's integration into educational institutions is not always effective. Absence of participatory decision-making and an understanding of democratic values contributes to power imbalances, limiting opportunities for students to actively shape their educational experiences. The principle of non-violence faces challenges, with aggressive behaviors and conflicts prevalent. Without a systematic approach to teaching non-violent conflict resolution, a culture accepting violence persists, impacting emotional

well-being and hindering a truly harmonious educational setting. Gender inequality, affecting students and educators, remains pervasive. Biases and unequal opportunities contribute to discrimination and hinder the creation of a truly harmonious and inclusive learning environment.

Therefore, the rationale for conducting research on peace education implementation as a predictor of a harmonious learning environment stems from the need to address the complex challenges posed by the transformation of education. Hence, this present study determined how peace education implementation predicts a harmonious learning environment in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined peace education implementation as a predictor of a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In specific terms, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which empathy instillation in students predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To determine the extent to which students' physical well-being predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered in this study:

1. To what extent does empathy instilment in students predict a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
2. To what extent does students' physical well-being predict a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in the study at a .05 alpha level of statistical significance:

1. There is no significant prediction of empathy instillation in students in a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

2. There is no significant prediction of students' physical well-being on a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The Correlational research design was adopted in the study. All the 230 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. These schools have a total population of 952 teachers of civic education. The sample of the study was 571 Civic education teachers out of the total number of 952. These numbers represented 60% of the total number of teachers. They were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. Two researcher-made instruments, titled Peace Education Implementation Scale (PEIS) and Harmonious Learning Environment Scale (HLES) were used for data collection. The instruments were subjected to face validity by three experts. Two of the experts were from the Department of Educational Management and Planning, and one expert was in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Psychological Foundations, University of Port Harcourt. Cronbach Alpha was used for reliability coefficient determination. The reliability Coefficients obtained for PEIS and HLES were .81 and .86 respectively. A simple regression statistical tool was used in answering research questions, while z-test associated with simple regression was used in testing hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does empathy instilment in students predict a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the extent Empathy Instillation in Students predicts Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom state

Model	R	R ²	Extent of Relationship	Adjusted R ²	Remarks
1	0.890	0.793	79.3%	0.791	Very High Extent

Data in Table 1 presents the summary of simple regression analysis on the extent empathy instillation in students predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. With the model as 1, the regression score came out as 0.890, the

regression square as 0.793, while the adjusted square resulted in 0.791, and the coefficient of determination remained at 79.3%. When reference is made to the scale of measurement, 79.3% falls between 76 - 100% (very high extent). Based on the observations, the result shows that empathy instillation in students predicts a harmonious learning environment in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to a very high extent.

Research Question 2

To what extent does students' physical well-being predict a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the extent students's Physical Well-being predicts Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom state

Model	R	R ²	Extent of Relationship	Adjusted R ²	Remarks
2	0.511	0.261	26.1%	0.259	Low Extent

Data in Table 2 presents the summary of simple regression analysis on the extent students' physical well-being predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. With the model as 2, the regression score came out as 0.511, the regression square as 0.261, while the adjusted square resulted in 0.259, and the coefficient of determination remained at 26.1%. When reference is made to the scale of measurement, 26.1% falls between 26 - 50% (low extent). Based on the observations, the result shows that students' physical well-being predicts a harmonious learning environment in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to a low extent.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant prediction of empathy instillation in students in a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Summary of Analysis of Variance on the Prediction of Empathy Instillation in Students on Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	472.062	1	472.062	2178.573	.000*
	Residual	123.293	569	.217		
	Total	595.356	570			

a. Dependent Variable: Harmonious learning environment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy instilment

*= Significant at .05 alpha level. Source: Researcher's survey (2024)

Data in Table 3 shows that the significant value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance with 1 and 569 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that there is no significant prediction of empathy instillation in students on a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State was rejected. This means that there is a significant prediction of empathy instillation in students in a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant prediction of students' physical well-being on harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Variance on the Prediction of Students' Physical Wellbeing on Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	155.616	1	155.616	201.359	.000*
	Residual	439.740	569	.773		
	Total	595.356	570			

a. Dependent Variable: Harmonious learning environment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Student's physical well-being

*= Significant at .05 alpha level. Source: Researcher's survey (2024)

Data in Table 4 shows that the significant value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance with 1 and 569 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that there is no significant prediction of students' physical wellbeing and harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State was rejected. This means that there is a significant prediction of students' physical well-being on a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

Empathy instillation in students as a predictor of Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The first finding of the study is that empathy instillation in students predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to a very high extent (79.3%). Also, a corresponding finding from a test of hypothesis showed that there is a significant prediction of empathy instillation in students in a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. These findings are in agreement with Eisenberg and Lennon (2023), Davis 2019, Smith (2016), Ibanga (2017), Eisenberg and Fabes (2018), Ubong (2020), Decety (2018), Hogan (2019), Brackett 2009, Noddings 2015, Ekpo 2016), and Baston (2015). Others include David (2022) and Acharys 2013. These researchers and scholars have, in their scholarly and research contributions, made impressive findings relating to empathy instillation and a harmonious learning environment. A possible explanation for the trend in the findings may be the fact that the civic teachers who served as respondents in the study have themselves been involved in empathy instillation. Since joining the teaching profession, through which involvement, they would have been exposed to the benefits of empathy instillation to a harmonious learning environment in secondary schools. Based on this explanation, the findings of the study have validated the fact that empathy instillation contributes to a harmonious learning environment in schools. These findings imply that empathy instillation is very relevant to schools that want to achieve a harmonious learning environment.

Students' Physical Well-being as a Predictor of Harmonious Learning Environment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State

The second finding of the study is that students' physical wellbeing predicts a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to a low extent (6.1%).

This finding disagrees with Hills (2015), Dan (2018), Fred (2015), Eguzoo (2019), Ndeoho (2018), World Health Organization (2021), Akpan (2021), Moses (2017), Sunday (2015), Curvie (2022), Jackson 2021 and Njorko (2017) who in their research and scholarly positions emphasized that students' physical wellbeing as a means of ensuring harmonious learning environment. The below-average reduced incidence of extra-curricular activities in some schools, arising from overwhelming curriculum activities. Quite differently, a corresponding result from the test of hypotheses establishes that there is a significant prediction of students' physical well-being on a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. These later finding agrees with Hills (2015), Dan (2018), Fred (2015), Akpan (2021), Ezuzo (2019), Ndioho (2018), World Health Organization (2021), Moses (2017), Sunday (2015), Currie (2022), Jackson (2021) and Nyorko (2017) whose contributions stand vitiated. A possible explanation for the trend in the findings may be the question of the choice of statistics and application. While the use of simple regression for research questions appear to be of lower order, the use of z-test associated with simple regression brought out some differences because of the rigorous nature of their applications, as the former investigated the extent of prediction and the latter significant prediction. Therefore, they cannot invalidate the fact that there is a prediction of student physical wellbeing in a harmonious learning environment. These findings imply that secondary schools that want to maintain a harmonious learning environment should promote students' physical well-being.

Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings of this study that empathy instillation in students and students' physical well-being significantly predict a harmonious learning environment in public senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should always empathize with their students since it could enhance a harmonious learning environment.
2. Teachers should always consider the students' physical well-being since it could enhance a harmonious learning environment.

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