

CHILD'S RIGHTS ACT AWARENESS LEVEL IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The paper investigated child's rights act awareness level in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions were answered in the study and one hypothesis was also tested in the course of the study. The design adopted for the study was survey design while the population of the study was 8735 teachers and 110,291 students in the public secondary schools in Anambra State. A sample of 382 teachers and 398 students were drawn for the study using Taro Yamane minimum sample size determination technique. A 20-items questionnaire titled "Child's Rights Act Awareness Level Questionnaire" (CRAALQ) was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach Alpha statistic with an index of 0.78. The research question was answered using percentage, mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested using z-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that teachers and students are not aware of the child's rights act and there are so many challenges responsible for this. It was hence recommended that more campaign should be carried out using the media to orient teachers and students about the child's rights act.

Keywords: Rights, Awareness, Level, Public, Secondary, Schools

Introduction

The right of the child is as vital as the right of any other citizen in the country. This has continued to draw attention from both local and international organizations as a way of finding solution to the problems of children in the society. This is because the actualization of the rights of the child will contribute to the overall success of the entire society. Potvin and Benny (2013) stated that child's rights education is learning about rights, learning through rights; using rights as an organizing principle to transform the culture of learning and learning for rights; taking action to realize rights. It is therefore important that all stakeholders should be informed about the right of the child.

The effort of the government and other stakeholders in promoting the rights of the child has not yielded much result. There are different documents as well as legislations designed to uphold the rights of the child. However, more campaigns are still being carried out to ensure that all individuals are informed about the rights of the child so as to contribute to the development of the child as well as the progress of the society.

Statement of the Problem

The child's rights act has been in existence for a long time now in various countries of the world. Similarly, these rights have also been incorporated into the education system to protect the child. Despite the advantages of these rights, most of the educational stakeholders appear not to be aware of the provision of the child rights act. The lack of awareness of the child's rights act appears to have contributed to the slow pace of students and societal development.

The lack of awareness about the child's rights act is attributed to different factors caused by the government, school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders. These challenges portray a threat to the goals and objectives of the education system. The failure to address these challenges will have varying implications both financially, economically and otherwise on the society. This explains why this study intends to find out the level of awareness on the child's rights act as well as the challenges inhibiting the level of awareness about these rights.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate child's rights act awareness level in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. determine the level of teachers and students awareness of the child's right act at the secondary education level in Anambra State.
- ii. find out the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

- i. What is the level of teachers and students awareness of the child's right act at the secondary education level in Anambra State?
- ii. What are the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant difference between the opinion of teachers and students on the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Conceptual Review

Awareness and Implementation of the Child's Right Act

There are different educational scholars as well as Non-Governmental Organizations that given a comprehensive account of how human rights standards should be applied in relation to education. Alongside legislative frameworks and general policy commitments to inclusion, the document emphasizes the need to provide training for teachers to build the capacity of schools to adopt a rights-based approach. It also asserts that it is necessary to respect teachers' rights in order to build the conditions in which they can respect children's rights. By contrast, some on the political right have equated teacher rights with professional protectionism which can lead to the marginalization of children's interests and therefore argue that unions must be weakened in order to emphasize children's rights (Moe, 2007). Whilst clearly a questionable assertion, and one which unjustifiably asserts children's rights over employment rights, this position illustrates the contested ideological nature of many aspects of rights interpretation and implementation.

In a survey of teachers in Ireland, which was geared towards finding out why attitude to human rights were generally positive, teachers had low levels of knowledge of human rights. This meant that

teachers' ideas for teaching were not always related to human rights language or principles and that there was a tendency to focus on a social cohesion agenda rather than empowerment, critique and inequality. Teachers thus tended to adopt a conservative model rather than transformative one, with half the reported HRE events being linked to charity campaigns with a more global focus than local (Waldron et. al., 2011). A similar report in Scotland also showed that human rights education there is sporadic and that teachers undertake it through their own interest or through engagement with Non-Governmental Organizations

Howe and Covell (2005) pointed out that teacher compliance with the curriculum more generally is influenced by the extent to which it resonates with their own beliefs and values, and the extent to which they judge it to require additional work. Similarly, Schweisfurth (2006) reiterates that teachers' strategic decisions about how to spend their time reflects their own motivation in relation to the topic, which in turn influences the extent to which non-statutory agendas are adopted. This resonates with other research that argues that teacher beliefs have a significant impact on how they interpret the curriculum, especially topics seen as political (Leenders, Veugelers & Dekat, 2008; Myers, 2009). In dealing with teacher beliefs about Child's Right Education, David (2002) points out that the child's rights may present a challenge to traditional beliefs because it represents a shift from education as welfare provision to education as a right, and implies a second shift in adult roles from protection to facilitating emancipation and autonomy.

Challenges Inhibiting the Awareness Level of the Child's Rights Act in Schools

The Child Right's Act as passed into law by the National Assembly of Nigeria, defines a child as one who is below the age of eighteen years. It categorically provides that such a child's best interests shall remain paramount in all considerations. A child shall be given such protection and care as is necessary for its well-being, retaining the right to survival and development also to name and registration at birth. However, according to Sec.2 of Children and Young Persons Act, enacted in Eastern, Western and Northern regions of Nigeria (hereafter referred to as CYPA) a "child" means [a] person under the age of fourteen years, while 'young person' means a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years.

The challenges hindering awareness about the child's rights act are enormous and they include:

Political Reason

More states have joined the league of states that have domesticated the Child Rights Act in Nigeria bringing the total number of states to 26 out of 36 in Nigeria. The problem however is that the states that have domesticated it tend to pay lip service to the implementation of the Act. This is obvious in the insignificant difference on the lives of the children in the various states before and after the passage as against the highly anticipated gains that motivated to a great extent the passage of these bills into law. At the state level, there are already 26 States of the Federation that have domesticated this Act and they include Abia, AkwaIbom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River Delta, Edo, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa Lagos, Nassarawa, Niger, Ondo, Osun, Oyo Plateau, Rivers, Taraba however there is still hardly any state in the federation today that numerous abuses and violation of the domesticated laws are not seen.

The implication of this passage would ordinarily mean that Children are well protected and a breach of such act attracts a punishment to the offenders. But the question is even in these states where the bill has been passed, to what extent is the Right protected and enforced? It was gathered that some of the states that have passed the **child rights act** are some states have made some adjustments to suit their interest such as lowered the minimum age for the purpose of marriage, some have put it at 16 that is defining a child as anyone below the age of 16. Therefore, within Nigeria, one who is a child in one state could be regarded as marriageable adult in another state. For instance, Children in Gombe State called on the State government to domesticate and adapt the Child Rights Act, 2003, in line with the culture and tradition of people of the state

3. They also called for the establishment of a family court to protect and seek justice against any abuse of the rights of children in the state in line with Section 74 of the Child's Right Act, 2003.

Gender Discrimination

Although the Constitution provides for gender equality, cases of violations of women's rights and gender discrimination are alarming. Women and girls are subject to violence at domestic and public levels. The situation in the 12 Northern States of Nigeria is most worrying since the introduction of the Shari'ah Penal Code in 1999. OMCT and CLEEN do not believe that an appeal to culture or religion should excuse the violation of the fundamental rights of the Nigerian child to basic education, good nutrition, essential health care and all other basic needs, as well as protection against abuses, neglect, exploitation and slavery.

Religious Practices

By virtue of section 147(1) and (2) of the Act, a marriage between a person who has adopted a child under the Act or a natural child of the person who adopted the child and the adopted child is prohibited and any such marriage is null and void. Further such marriage if concluded is an offence and punishable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years. Certainly, the above provisions of the Act contravene the express provisions of Holy *Qur'an* and *sunna* of the Holy Prophet on adoption of children. Islam on the contrary prohibits adoption outright especially because of the consequences of such an adoption. The authority for the prohibition of adoption under Islamic law is the *Qur'anic* injunction in chapter 33:4-5 following the incidence that happened between the Holy Prophet and his erstwhile "adopted" child, Zayd Ibn Harith. The Holy *Qur'an* states that adopted children are not the real upspring of the adopters; they must be related to their true procreators when known and knowable. Otherwise, they are to be brethren in faith and clients of their fellow Muslims.

Also, prohibition of adoption manifested itself in *Qur'an* chapter 33:40 where Allah says: Muhammad is not father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of God. Some of the reasons behind the prohibition of adoption include the great importance that Islam attaches to the protection of legitimacy and paternity and the consequences of such adoption in pre-Islamic era as well as what the child's rights Act provides. Thus, Islam insists that every child must be related to its own father and viewed it unjust and illegal to ascribe his or her paternity to another. Although Islam prohibits adoption as explained above, the prohibition does not negate the general societal responsibilities towards the child, nor does it lessen the binding effect of the stronger bond of brotherhood in faith. Also Children born out of Wedlock are not regarded as legitimate children in Islam as they can only inherit their mother and their father.

Traditional/Cultural Practices

The Child's Right Act Specify marriage age (section. 21) and prohibits child marriage and Child Betrothal with N500, 000.00 fine and or with imprisonment as sanction. In Nigeria, due to inconsistencies in legislation and the absence of any stipulation of a minimum age for marriage before the adoption of the Child Rights Act 2003, early marriages continue to take place, in many cases as a means to preserve chastity. Section 18 of the Marriage Act allows persons under the age of 21 to get married, provided that parental consent is given. The official report admits that "the age of marriage is a highly controversial issue and varies from place to place. Whereas in the North West and North Central Nigeria, 14 years old is the age of marriage. While in the North Central the age of marriage is between the 2nd and 3rd menstruation, while in the Southern States it varies from between 16 to 18 years. The federal authorities seek however to make 18 the minimum age of marriage, not only in law, but also in practice.

Customary positions on the issue of early marriage differ and important parts of the population are still not aware of the negative effects early marriages can have for the girls. In most cases, it limits the opportunities for girls to accede to education, putting them in a disadvantaged position"⁴ Indeed, 36 million Nigerian women and girls are not educated. But, even more worrying, early marriage can also be detrimental

to girls physical, mental and emotional health. Apart from the fact that it deprives girls from their right to have control over their body and reproductive health, it puts them in a position of complete dependency on their husband. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, where the majority of girls face the prospect of early marriage, "this has resulted over the years in a large have had insufficient time to develop to cope with child-birth. Corrective number of cases of vesico vaginal fistula - a condition caused by giving birth when the cervix is not well developed; occurs because the pelvic bones operations often troubled by the spouse, and more often than not the victims are abandoned or divorced by their husbands and ostracized by their communities.

In Nigeria, there is the awareness of the increased attention given individual's rights especially those described as fundamental rights of the citizen. This state of affairs has led to more litigation in schools. Given the climate of the times, it appears not only prudent but also necessary for teacher and educational administrators to understand their own rights and limitations, as well as the legal implications of what they do, particularly in dealing with students in educational matters not to infringe on the students' rights in the schools. School children, like adults in schools, have rights as provided for in the Nigerian constitution. They also have other rights by virtue of their status as students, which non-school persons are not entitled to. Students do not "shed their constitutional rights at the school house gate". They have a status before the law worthy of equal protection.

In sections 32 to 42 of chapter IV of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is enshrined the fundamental rights of the citizen. It has been noted in recent time's school authorities and teachers in Nigeria do not take enough care in exercising their role in- loco-parentis and to safeguard students within the school system. Most teachers are not of their rights, let alone those of students. Similarly, many are ignorant of the school system, the rules and regulations governing the school system and legal Knowledge of students' rights. This is obvious for the fact that in Nigeria, most school teachers have never read the Nigerian constitution nor even the laws, rules and regulations governing the administration of the school system, and in caring for the students. However, Nakpodia (2007) in a Latin maxim opined that 'IgnorantiaJurisestlata culpa' meaning ignorance of the law is not an excuse, is quite apt.

Many teachers are not aware of their rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities under the law and more especially actions on students. Also, they do not know and appreciate the general principals and provisions of law and regulations as they apply in handling issues of order and student's discipline in school. In this age of enlightenment, such ignorance may no doubt be costly, if not disastrous to the individual, the education and students' rights within the system. On this plane, students' rights should be safeguarded to enable students understand the legal aspects of education, learn the basic principles of law and develop some degree of competence in applying them to educational problems and also recognize situations in which it is not safe to proceed without competent legal advice. (Peretomode, 1992). The relevance of the constitution to education is very crucial. Government agencies are requested by law to treat all persons including the students fairly. The principal, teachers, security guards and all other government employees of the school are employees of the government and therefore have a legal duty towards the students.

Methodology

The design used for conducting the study was the survey design. The population of the study was 8735 teachers and 110,291 students in the public secondary schools in the State. The sample size for the study comprised 382 teachers and 398 students who were selected using the Taro Yamane minimum sample size determination formula. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire containing 20 questionnaire items and titled "Child's Rights Act Awareness Level Questionnaire" (CRAALQ). Research question was dichotomously answered (Aware or Unaware) while research question two was responded to on a four point modified likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with weighted scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in

Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach Alpha statistic with an index of 0.78. The research question was answered using percentage, mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested using z-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What is the teachers and students level of awareness of the child's rights act at the secondary education level in Anambra State?

Table 1: Percentage on the teachers and students level of awareness of the child's rights act at the secondary education level in Anambra State

S/ N	Items on Level of awareness of the Child's Right Act	Teachers n=382			Students n=398		
		Aware	Unaware	Remark	Aware	Unaware	Remark
1.	Right to life	336(88%)	46(12%)	Aware	247(62%)	151(38%)	Aware
2.	Right to medical care	149(39%)	233(61%)	Unaware	115(29%)	1283(71%)	Unaware
3.	Right to education	294(77%)	88(23%)	Aware	84(21%)	314(79%)	Unaware
4.	Right to parental love and care	157(41%)	225(59%)	Unaware	52(13%)	346(87%)	Unaware
5.	Right to name and identity	111(29%)	271(71%)	Unaware	40(10%)	358(90%)	Unaware
6.	Right to information	125(33%)	257(67%)	Unaware	68(17%)	330(83%)	Unaware
7.	Right to clothing, food and shelter	233(61%)	149(39%)	Aware	231(58%)	167(42%)	Aware
8.	Right to associate	149(39%)	233(61%)	Unaware	76(19%)	322(81%)	Unaware
9.	Freedom from child labour	141(37%)	241(63%)	Unaware	60(15%)	338(85%)	Unaware
10.	Freedom from sexual abuse	290(76%)	93(24%)	Aware	52(13%)	346(87%)	Unaware

Adapted: Kiprotich, A. & Charles, O. O. (2013). An assessment of the level of awareness about children's rights among children in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya: *Journal of Emerging Trend in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 4(2), 279-287

Table 1 revealed the responses of the teachers and students on the level of awareness on the child's rights act. The responses of the teachers on the level of awareness on right to life, right to medical care, right to education, right to parental love and care, right to name and identity, right to information, right to clothing, food and shelter, right to associate, freedom from child labour and freedom from sexual abuse revealed that 336(88%), 149(39%), 294(77%), 157(41%), 111(29%), 125(33%), 233(61%), 149(39%), 141(37%) and 290(76%) were aware of the items above as part of the rights of a child while 46(12%), 233(61%), 88(23%), 225(59%), 271(71%), 257(67%), 149(39%), 233(61%), 241(63%) and 93(24%) pointed out that they are not aware of these rights. On the part of the students, 247(62%), 115(29%), 84(21%), 52(13%), 40(10%), 68(17%), 231(58%), 76(19%), 60(15%) and 52(13%) revealed that they are aware of these rights while 151(38%), 1283(71%), 314(79%), 346(87%), 358(90%), 330(83%), 167(42%), 322(81%), 338(85%) and 346(87%) pointed out that they are not aware of the same items in the same order.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State

S/N	Items on Challenges the confront the implementation of Child's Right Act	Teachers n=382			Students n=398		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
11.	Poverty hinders the implementation of the Child's Right Act.	2.94	0.97	Agreed	2.73	1.00	Agreed
12.	Traditional or cultural beliefs of the people hinders CRA.	2.94	0.87	Agreed	2.47	0.84	Disagreed

13.	Poor awareness of the CRA hinders its implementation.	2.77	0.90	Agreed	2.49	0.92	Disagreed
14.	National policy on education hinders the implementation of the CRA.	2.80	0.94	Agreed	2.70	1.07	Agreed
15.	Gender disparity limits the effective implementation of CRA.	2.82	0.91	Agreed	2.77	0.98	Agreed
16.	School culture hinders the implementation of the CRA.	2.71	0.72	Agreed	2.67	0.81	Agreed
17.	Location of the school hampers the CRA.	2.76	0.80	Agreed	2.52	0.85	Agreed
18.	Absence of legal framework to trail offenders of CRA.	2.50	0.75	Agreed	2.56	0.96	Agreed
19.	Nonexistence protection mechanisms to guard against abuses.	2.85	0.78	Agreed	2.72	1.03	Agreed
20.	Lack of political or government will to address CRA matters.	2.78	0.77	Agreed	2.53	0.84	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.78	0.84		2.61	0.93	

Table 2 revealed that items 11-20 were responded to by teachers and produced mean scores of 2.94, 2.94, 2.77, 2.80, 2.82, 2.71, 2.76, 2.50, 2.85 and 2.78. Since these items were above the criterion mean of 2.50, they were all accepted. The students also responded to the same set of items with mean scores of 2.73, 2.47, 2.49, 2.70, 2.77, 2.67, 2.52, 2.56, 2.72 and 2.53. Items 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60 had mean scores that were above the criterion mean and were all accepted while the other items in the sequence were all rejected.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the opinion of teachers and students on the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 3: z-tests analysis of the difference between the opinion of teachers and students on the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>z-cal</i>	<i>z-crit</i>	<i>Level of Significance</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Teachers	382	2.78	0.84	778	1.65	1.96	0.05	Fail to reject
Students	398	2.61	0.93					

Table 3 revealed that the value of z-cal. was 1.65. Since the value of z-cal. was below the value of z-crit. of 1.96, the null hypothesis was accepted indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean opinion scores of teachers and students on the challenges confronting the implementation of Child's Rights Act in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What is the teachers and students level of awareness of the child's rights act at the secondary education level in Anambra State?

The level of awareness on the child's rights act appears to be very low on the part of the teachers and the students of secondary schools in Anambra State. The responses from the teachers and the students revealed that the teachers and the students are only aware of a child's right to life, right to education as well as right to food, clothing and shelter. Furthermore, while the teachers are aware that students must be free from sexual molestation, the students are not aware of this right. The teachers and students also revealed in their responses that they are unaware of a child's right to medical care, right to parental love and care, right to name and identity, right to information, right to associate and freedom from child's labour. This agrees with the findings of Kiprotich and Charles (2013) who revealed that there is low level of awareness on the rights

of a child. It is therefore clear that there is still very little understanding among the members of the public especially teachers and students about what constitutes the right of a student or child.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the opinion of teachers and students on the challenges inhibiting the awareness level of the child's rights act in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

The challenges confronting the child's rights act in Anambra State are enormous. The teachers and the students collectively agree that poverty is one of the factors hindering the child's rights act. Similarly, the teachers and the students agree that other factors that hinder the child's rights act included the nature of the national policy on education, discrimination, school culture, location of the school, absence of a legal framework, lack of political will among others. These factors were identical to those suggested by Obasuyi and Igbudu (2012) who suggested in their study that the factors that limit the child's rights act are factors such as child labour, female illiteracy, gender discrimination, difficulty in ethnic minorities having access to quality education among others

The responses of the teachers and the students however differ on whether tradition is an impediment to the child's rights act as well as whether level of awareness hinders the success of the act. This goes further to mean that there are many educational stakeholders who are at the corridor of the education system who have not received adequate awareness about the act and this is certainly not helpful for the success of the child's rights act.

Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings of the study that teachers and students in public secondary schools in Anambra State are not aware of the child's rights act and there are so many factors responsible for this lack of knowledge on then part of the part of the teachers and students

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the study:

- i. There is need for the mass media to be fully incorporated into creating awareness on the existence as well as the provisions of the child's rights act. This will help parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders to be better informed about the essence of the child's rights act.
- ii. The government needs to make appropriate laws that will help to address the challenges that are limiting the level of awareness on the child's rights act. These laws will help to protect the teacher and students and ensure that they are adequately informed about the right of the child.
- iii. There is also need for the harmonization of the objectives of the school and other social groups in the society. This to ensure that the goals and objectives of other social groups in the society such as traditional associations does not counter the essence of the child's rights act.

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