

Safety in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State: The Role of Educational Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the roles of educational stakeholders in ensuring safety in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The paper reviewed the deplorable and unsafe state of infrastructure, environment, student and school personnel. The various educational stakeholders ranging from Parents, Host Community, Principals, Teachers, and School Management Board were ex-rayed and their roles outlined in ensuring safety in public secondary school environment. The paper emphasized the importance of basic first aid knowledge among personnel and adherence to simple safety tips. The paper pointed out that poor communication, untrained personnel, wrong location of school and inadequate finance as some of the challenges hampering school safety and suggested adequate funding, stakeholder collaboration with government, inclusion of safety management into school curriculum, regular safety training and use of safety gadgets in school as a way forward. The paper concluded that educational stakeholders should synergized with government to ensure safety in public secondary schools owing to the cost-effective nature of academic services and contribution to knowledge accordingly.

KEYWORD: Role, Stakeholder, Secondary School, Safety.

Introduction

Ensuring safety in schools is once again at the forefront of national debate, and how best to address school safety at the public secondary school level is a weighty issue with no easy answers. The emphasis on ensuring safety at the secondary school level of our educational system is perhaps, informed by the vulnerable nature of most secondary school environment to danger which if not curbed will continue to hamper effective and efficient teaching and learning process. Surech (2002) indicate that ensuring safety in schools entails the quality of teaching and learning environment that is not only supportive, but promoting the safety and health of the personnel, comfortable, secured and well facilitated for most effective learning. In the same vein, Knezevich (2015) noted the physical academic needs are met through provision of safe structure, adequate sanitary facilities, a balanced visual environment, appropriate thermal environment and sufficient shelter space, while emotional academic needs are met by creating pleasant surroundings, a friendly atmosphere and an inspiring environment.

From the foregoing, it is established that educational goals and objectives cannot be achieved in an environment where the state of educational infrastructure and services are in shambles, deplorable, dilapidated and diminished. Instead, educational goals and objectives will be highly realizable in an atmosphere where the teaching and learning conditions are obtained in an environment that is safe, healthy and the personnel assured that their operational base is safe, secured and healthy.

Ensuring safety in public secondary schools in Rivers State has raised concern and dialogue across the state, and this is as a result of the deplorable state of educational infrastructure and services in the public secondary schools in the state. In the opinion of Asuru (2009), it is crystal clear that a lot of hazards and risks abound in most public secondary schools in the state, which is indicative of the deteriorated and diminished state of the school environment both in quality and quantity. To a very great extent, this has generated a whole lot of responsibility that will require the government to collaborate with various educational stakeholders in ensuring safety in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Nwikina (2000) believed that education as a vital societal activity is capital intensive as money is required to actualize the short and long term plans of action on education. Money is needed to acquire the human and material resources, and money is also needed to execute all the projects and processes of ensuring safety in the secondary school system. As a result, the roles of educational stakeholders in ensuring safety in public secondary schools in Rivers State was examined and proffers tips on how school safety can be ensured.

Stakeholders in Education

Edward (2015) described a stakeholder as not just a shareholder, but an entity or group who owes a responsibility to a wider group other than a shareholder. Each stakeholder in a system is essential to the success of the system because, such a person or group must have an interest or concern in the system at hand. So, in relation to education, a stakeholder is someone who has vested interest in the success and welfare of a school or education. This includes all parties that are directly affected by the success or failure of an educational system as well as those indirectly affected. For instance, the federal and state ministries of education, schools' management board, administrators/school managers, Parent Teachers Association (PTA), students, NGOs, host communities, private agencies and other individuals that are working for the interest and success of the educational system are all regarded as educational stakeholders. Each of this entity wants their work or effort to have a positive impact on the school system and their jobs are directly affected by the success or failure of the school system. They ensure that their interest is well represented. For example, parents desire a successful educational system for their children while the students have an interest in receiving good education. This in return will influences the caliber of manpower that is turned into the community in particular and the society in general.

Moreso, as stated in the National Policy on education (FRN, 2014), Federal Ministries of Education are the main body or organ saddled with the responsibilities of the three tiers of government, their agencies and all other educational stakeholders including individuals that are working for the interest and success of the educational system. By implication, this is to ascertain that it will not be out of place for stakeholders to synergies with government within the state to facilitate safety at the secondary school level. This can be achieved by partnering with government to fund educational projects.

Roles of Education Stakeholders in Ensuring Safety in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Education stakeholders as part of the agencies clarified in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), to support education services through funding and partnership. They also have the role of providing a conducive learning environment, developing and accessing, improving educational programmes, enhancing teaching and improving the competence of teachers, making learning experiences more meaningful and realistic for children, ensuring education is more cost effective, promoting in-service education, enhancing access to

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learning and to develop and promote effective use of innovative materials in school. In relation to ensuring safety in secondary schools, education stakeholders are to support by providing facilities such as libraries, classroom blocks, sanitary, a friendly environment that will guarantee learning, health and safety.

Parental Role as a Stakeholder in Ensuring School Safety

According to the general Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) guideline (2014), good housekeeping is the general cleanliness, orderly arrangement and storage of equipment, tools, and supplies, as well as tidiness on the jobsite (school and home) "a place for everything and everything in its place". By implication, parents should take up the responsibility of educating and creating 'safety awareness' into their children right from the home front. Parents are to ensure that basic safety rules and culture is inculcated into the children and parent should exercise supervisory control by ensuring adherence to the realization of safety consciousness at the home that will compel children to act safely in every bit of their actions even while in school.

Teachers Role as a Stakeholder in Ensuring School Safety

The role of a teacher in school safety in the opinion of Kalagbor (2015), stated that teachers are extension of parents as stated in the principles of "in-loco parentis", they are in charge of the classroom and also held responsible for the safety of students. Therefore, teachers should adequately direct students in the care and use of equipment they will be operating. This implies that teachers should ensure safety rules are adhered to by students to promote safety and avoid injuries to students and damages to school property. For instance, if a teacher assigned to a playground leaves the post for no good cause and a student is injured in a hazardous or dangerous condition, there may be tort liability because of negligence. In addition, teachers are to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful and realistic for students and pupils.

The Community Role as a Stakeholder in Ensuring School Safety

The Nigerian educational system is essentially community based and oriented, and as such host community play key roles in schools, such as ensuring good site for school location (where the school area is not close to a high way, where accident cases might be frequent). In the opinion of Kenkwo (2012), host communities have the responsibility of ensuring there is no extension of their cultural practices to the school, such that can threaten the peace and safety of the school. In addition, host communities should exercise supervisory control by offering assistance to instructional programmes, acting in consulting capacity, where the school is lacking, making available to the school resources in form of manpower, equipment and finances as well as a local security plan that will ensure safety of life and property within and outside the school environment.

Principal Role as a Stakeholder in Ensuring School Safety

In the opinion of Robert-Okah (2014), the principal as an administrator or a school leader should first and foremost understand what it means and how it operates to be in a better position to influence his subordinate towards goal achievement. This is to imply that appropriate leadership trait should take upper hand through the ability of the principal to act as follows:

- **Address, Maintain and Enforce Discipline:** This should be done in a manner that both school personnel and students would adhere to specific rules and regulation as regarding safety assurance in the school environment. The principal should be firm in following up safety updates and modalities and as well be strict about penalty against defaulters, bearing in mind that discipline is meant to improve and establish rules based on self-control.
- **Effective Supervision:** In ensuring safety in public secondary school in Rivers State, the principal has the role of ensuring effective supervision to bring about safety in the school. In doing this, effective standard for both manpower and facilities will be achieved and assurance of safety in place. Little wonder

the National Policy on Education (FRN) 2014, emphasized that government has established and will continue to rim good and well staff service for all levels of education. Therefore, the principal should complement this government effort through effective supervision to bring about safety in the secondary school environment.

- **Establishment of a Standard First Aid Department:** The Nigeria Red Cross society manual (2017), defined first aid as the immediate skilled care of assistance given someone in need before the attention of a doctor is obtained. In the same vein, Kalagbor (2018) opined that first aid is the immediate care that is given to someone with an illness or injury before someone with more advanced training arrives and takes over. School administrators or principal should ensure that standard first aid outfit is situated in the schools as a way of ensuring safety in schools. After this is archive, it is also the role of the school administrators to ensure that trained personals are put to manage the first aid department. It is one thing to have a standard first aid outfit, and another thing to ensure that those stationed there have basic knowledge of attending or arresting an emergency situation that will warrant first aid. As already known, illnesses and or injuries does not announce before they strike, they simply occur not minding whether one is prepared or not. That means that both injuries and illness may occur when and where there may be no medical services. It is that effort of a first aider that is needed to sustain or revive the victim before the arrival of a trained medical practitioner or before taking the victim to the hospital. First aid could be given on minor illnesses and injuries as well as severe ones.

In addition to having a standard first aid outfit, the school principal should ensure to provide accident preventive materials and substances in case of any emergency or accident to curtail further occurrence. Hull, (2010), suggested that it is important for a first aid aider to take serious precautions when blood and other fluids are involved. The first aider is advised to use appropriate protective materials such as hand gloves, nose mask and other equipment that can prevent the first aider from contacting an infection or sustaining injury in the course of offering first aid. The first aider is also advised to wash hands with soap and enough water after removing the hand gloves. The use of hand sanitizer with soap and water is highly recommended in order to avoid contacting germs that could harm the first aider. In his further suggestion, four areas were identified as those that would frequently demand first aid attention though not limited to the following:

- ✓ Heart attack
- ✓ Bleeding
- ✓ Bites
- ✓ Stings
- **Good School and Host Community Relation:** This is an essential role every school principal should not neglect. The principal is expected to maintain a good working relationship with the immediate community and also ensure continuous contact with the ministry of education in the area where the school is situated. Kenkwo (2012), explained that this is achievable where the school principal is able to manage information between the school and the host community positively, thereby giving room for friendly ties and mutual relationship. between the school and the host community. When this is achieved according to him, there will be clear line of communication between the host community and the school such that there will be no misunderstanding, and actions the community that could tamper with the safety of the school.
- **Record Keeping as a Way of Ensuring Safety in School:** School heads are responsible for keeping records in schools also as a means of ensuring safety. In line with the word of Amanchukwu (2013), recordkeeping in schools are important documents kept in the school for the easy administration. Such

records speak for itself in the sense that anybody who wants to know what about the school will simply pick them up and be furnished with enough information. School record talks about the persons, facilities, proposals and activities in and about. These records are for ready communication purpose between the ministry of education or schools board as the case may be. The record serves as referral in case of any outbreak of epidemic, sickness among manpower. Whenever reports of this nature originate from one super-ordinates, it is directed towards pacifying fear and tension among the management staff, teachers, students and the society at large.

Roles of Schools Management Board in Ensuring School Safety

The Secondary School Management Board as stated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2014) is the body saddled with the responsibility of providing strategic guidance for the school and to effectively oversee and review the school’s management. With regards to ensuring safety in secondary school, the schools board has the role of;

- **Formulating safety policies for school:** Safety policies are health and safety statement written down by an employer (school board) stating the board's commitment for the protection of the health and safety of schools. These polices will serve as an endorsed commitment by the school management board to its schools (personnel, facilities and resources).
- **Adoption of safe academic environment:** The board is to ensure that academic environments are not only free from dangers, but built environment involving such matters as architecture and construction, lighting, space, facilities and safety plans and also free from violence, physical threat, verbal abuse, threatening gesture. sexual harassment and tribal tendencies.
- **Reinforcing the core value and ethics on safety:** This is simply acknowledging good behavior and ensuring that the behavior becomes stronger and spread. When simple safety behaviors are positively rewarded, that behavior is more likely to be repeated.
- **Overseeing the safety management system of schools:** Health Safety and Environment (HSE) manual (2014), stipulates that overseeing safety management system entails involving all concerned in safety planning, providing clear safety instructions, focusing safety effort on most likely, issues and maintaining a safe and healthy environment.
- **Developing and maintaining safety links with stakeholders:** The school board has the role of developing and maintaining safety relationship with stakeholders so that safety management system can be improved in school. This is achievable by actively building strong relationship from start, involving stakeholders, scheduling periodic touch-base sessions and keeping your words.
- **Monitoring safety standard and adherence:** The board can do this by identifying hazards in school’s environment and taking steps to eliminate or minimize them. In addition, it is the board's responsibility to measure, monitor and evaluate safety and health performance of schools and provide for school’s cooperation and compliance with safety rules and procedures.
- **Provision of first aid and supporting medical needs:** The board has the role of ensuring safety in school by ensuring that there is first aid in schools via: sickbay and dispensary unit.

Challenges of Ensuring Safety in Public Secondary Schools

The following may challenge safety in public secondary schools in Rivers State;

Inadequate Funding: Procuring safety gadgets in schools are expensive project that most public schools are not capable of handling due to insufficient fund.

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Unsafe Environment: Surech (2002) described a safe environment as such that is safe, comfortable, secured and well facilitated. But the reverse is the case in most public secondary school in Rivers State, where the buildings are dilapidated, gully and pits, sewage disposal and thick forest are all around the school environment. All these pose great challenges to safety.

Improper Location of Schools: Most of the schools in the rural areas are poorly located and this has posed safety challenges. For instance, some schools are right at the mouth of the ocean without means of access, some are right inside the forest without motorable roads. These are all safety challenges.

Lack of Trained/Skilled Personnel: In an emergency situation where there are no trained safety personnel like first aider to handle situation, safety is hampered. And presently most public secondary schools in the state have no trained personnel on ground to handle any case of emergency.

Poor Communication: Most safety tips and policies have not been properly communicated to the school either between the board and the school or between the principal and personnel and this has negatively impacted on the behavior, morale and general attitude of people in the school environment towards safety.

Importance of School Safety

Maintaining and ensuring safety in schools allows children (students) to anticipate being in an encouraging setting that encourages social and creative development. When fundamental school safety needs are not provided, students risk not feeling at ease at school and may discontinue attending or remain on edge during the school day. Promoting school safety opens up and gives a safe area for students to explore, learn, and grow. When violence is present in the educational context, all children are affected in the same way. Even if a kid is not the real victim of violence in school, there is a very good probability that the (child) student will witness violence during the educational years. Children who feel unsafe at school do less academically and are more likely to become involved in drugs and criminality, according to research (Safe School Report, 2015).

Safety Tips for Schools

The following safety tips will ensure safety in public Secondary School in Rivers State.

- 1) Keep the school environment clean and attractive. When the school environment littered and untidy, the impression readily gotten is that the school is uncared for and thus invites trouble. Murals can help deter vandalism.
- 2) Fence round the school building.
- 3) Post signs that security cameras are in use, if indeed they are in use.
- 4) Have a tag and badges for visitors and they should be changed regularly to avoid reuse.
- 5) Inform school staff/authority about health and emotional challenge.
- 6) Talk with students regularly about safety.
- 7) Learn and teach the school emergency procedure.
- 8) Know and teach students possible exits and travel routes in and around the school environment.
- 9) Known and adhere to school security and safety rules.
- 10) Be involved in safety practice.

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Conclusion

A safe learning environment is crucial for children of all ages; without it, they are unable to focus on the skills required for a successful educational future. It is critical to provide secondary school safety in order to protect students, school workers, and property from accidents, crime, and all types of violence. Due to the cost-effective nature of academic services, stakeholders in the education setting ranging from the school management board to the parent are saddled with essential duties that must be synergized for safety to be a reality in the secondary school environment. However, basic knowledge of first aid & safety tips are of uppermost important in case of any emergency for both the principal, school staff and student as the surest and cheapest way of ensuring safety in the secondary school environment.

Suggestions

The following were suggested as means of ensure safety in school:

1. Adequate Funding: Government and stakeholders should make funds available for schools for the purpose of upgrading the safety standards in secondary schools. The cost of procuring educational services is cost effective, most school administrators cannot single handedly handle this, hence, government and stakeholders should assist in providing adequate funds to schools.
2. Safety Professional and NGOs should collaborate with government in managing safety in secondary schools due to the massive deterioration inmost schools, there is a great need for NGOs to synergies with government in ensuring safety in public secondary schools.
3. Curriculum planners should integrate safety management into the school curriculum. As a sure way of ensuring safety in secondary schools, there should be policy on ground mandating curriculum planners to include safety management system as a core area of study in the school curriculum.
4. Safety trainings should be organized regularly for students and staff of secondary school. There should be a routine training of staff and students in modern safety modalities and updates as a way of ensuring safety in schools.
5. The use of safety gadgets and signs should be encouraged or introduced in secondary schools. This is an imperative if safety would be assured in secondary schools because it will be given room for practice and real safety consciousness among school personnel.

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