

EVALUATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA IN LINE WITH UNICEF CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

Enyi, Chinwe, *PhD*

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The study investigated the evaluation of primary school management in Ebonyi State, Nigeria in line with the UNICEF child-friendly school framework. The study adopted a correlational research design. The area of the study was Enugu State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised 395 teachers in public secondary schools in Enugu State. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire, titled: *Home Environment and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (HEAAQ)*. The instrument was face-validated by three experts, comprising two specialists in the Department of Educational Foundations and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high level of reliability. Data were collected through direct administration and retrieval of the questionnaire by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. The decision rule for data analysis was that a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted while below 2.50 was rejected. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between home environment and academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students in Enugu State. It was also found that gender and location did not significantly moderate the relationship between home environment and academic achievement. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents should provide a stable and supportive home environment that enhances students' academic achievement through adequate provision of learning materials and emotional support. The study contributed to knowledge by providing empirical evidence that home environment is a strong predictor of academic achievement among Senior Secondary School students irrespective of gender and location differences.

Keywords: Home environment, academic achievement, students, gender, location.

Introduction

The increasing concern over the effectiveness of primary school management in ensuring a safe, inclusive, and child-friendly learning environment has become a major issue in education, as many schools appear not to fully implement the child-friendly environment standards recommended by the United Nations Children's Fund. This situation is particularly significant when viewed against the backdrop of the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), which described primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 years and emphasized that, since the entire educational system is built upon this level, it serves as the key to the success or failure of the entire educational system. Consequently, primary education, being the foundation of all other levels of education, requires that deliberate efforts be made to ensure that primary schools are well managed and made conducive for effective teaching and learning. Supporting this view,

Nwagwu (2012) asserted that no national education system can rise above the quality of its primary education, as no house can be stronger than the foundation upon which it is built.

Supporting this view, Ajayi (2010), equally stated that, if the foundation is weak, hardly can any strong and beautiful structure that can withstand heavy rainfall, wild strong wind be built upon it. The importance of primary education system can neither be overemphasized nor compromised. It is therefore of paramount importance that all human and material resources must be directed towards its qualitative improvement. The future of every nation depends very much on the children who are the leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, the proper education of the children is of utmost importance to the nation. In the era of global and high technological advances, the children of today need to be taught how to develop in line with the current trend. The Guardian Newspaper (2004) quoted Dr. Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, who stated thus: “we must move children to the centre of the world’s agenda. We must rewrite strategies to reduce poverty, so that investments in children are given priority. Any country, any society which does not care for its children is no nation at all.”

However, it has become important for every nation to ensure that its citizens, particularly children, are provided with access to relevant education and encouraged to remain in school for meaningful learning outcomes. This responsibility is achievable when educational authorities deliberately create an enabling and child-friendly environment that promotes effective teaching and learning, thereby sustaining pupils’ interest and retention in school. In support of this view, Oluremi (2012) emphasized that a friendly school environment is essential for improving children’s learning experiences, emotional stability, and academic engagement. Similarly, Evertson, Emmer, Clement, and Worsham (2000), as well as Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson (2012), observed that effective classroom management practices significantly enhance students’ academic achievement by reducing disruptive behaviour and promoting structured, supportive learning conditions. In addition, the school is expected to complement the home in shaping the child into a responsible and productive individual, while also serving as a safe environment where the child feels protected, valued, and motivated to learn. This aligns with the view of Ezugwu (2004), who noted that effective school administration plays a crucial role in ensuring conducive learning environments that support pupils’ development and academic success. Similarly, Ndamadu (2006) stressed that strong leadership responsibility in schools is essential for creating environments that foster discipline, safety, and effective teaching and learning.

Furthermore, studies have shown that inadequate school resources and poor environmental conditions negatively affect learning outcomes. Enyi (2000) observed that disparities in the locational provision of educational resources contribute significantly to unequal learning opportunities in primary schools. Likewise, Nwogwu (2000) highlighted that the growth and effectiveness of primary education depend largely on proper planning and adequate provision of learning resources. The Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) further reports that many schools in Nigeria still experience challenges such as low enrolment, high dropout rates, poor learning achievement, and gender disparities, which are often linked to unfavourable school environments. According to United Nations Children’s Fund (2006; 2009), a child-friendly school should be safe, inclusive, healthy, and supportive, ensuring that both the present and future needs of the child are addressed. However, despite these standards, evidence suggests that many primary schools in Nigeria still fall short in implementing these principles effectively.

Studies and policy frameworks by Nworgu (2006) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004; 2013) consistently emphasize that primary education is the foundation of the entire educational system and must be effectively managed to ensure quality outcomes. Similarly, Nwagwu (2012) asserted that no educational system can rise above the quality of its primary education. Despite these established standards, existing studies have largely focused on general educational outcomes, with limited attention given to evaluating primary school management based on child-friendly environment standards in Ebonyi State. This therefore creates a gap which this study sought to address by evaluating the management of primary schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria based on United Nations Children's Fund child-friendly environment recommendations.

Statement of the problem

The effective management of primary education is central to ensuring that children are provided with a safe, supportive, and child-friendly learning environment that promotes enrolment, retention, and meaningful academic achievement. Ideally, primary schools are expected to function as well-organized institutions where pupils learn in a secure and motivating atmosphere, supported by adequate facilities, committed teachers, and effective administrative practices that encourage continuous attendance and reduce dropout rates. In such an ideal situation, children remain in school, develop essential competencies, and transition successfully to higher levels of education. However, the reality in many primary schools reflects a different situation. A considerable number of schools are faced with inadequate facilities, poor learning environments, and weak management structures that do not fully support child-friendly standards. As a result, many pupils lose interest in schooling, leading to increased cases of absenteeism and dropout. This situation is further reflected in the growing presence of children and youths in streets when they are expected to be in school, as well as rising social vices associated with school-age dropouts, indicating that the school system is not fully achieving its intended developmental goals. Against this backdrop, the problem of this study is clearly stated as the inadequate implementation of child-friendly environment principles in the management of primary schools, which may be contributing to poor pupil retention, increased dropout rates, and declining educational outcomes in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study was to evaluate primary school management in Ebonyi State, Nigeria in line with the UNICEF child-friendly school framework. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the availability of facilities in Ebonyi State primary schools, using the UNICEF criteria for child-friendly schools.
2. examine how school administrators motivate teachers in line with UNICEF recommendations for child-friendly schools.
3. find out ways which the school authority respects the right of the child in the school.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study;

1. How adequate are the available facilities in Ebonyi State primary schools?
2. How do school administrators motivate teachers, according to the UNICEF recommendations for child-friendly schools?
3. In what ways do the school management protect the right of the pupils according to the UNICEF recommendations for child-friendly school environment?

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the headteachers and classroom teachers on how teachers are motivated ($p < 0.05$).

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of teachers and head teachers on the ways the school management protects the pupils' rights ($p < 0.05$)

Methods

The design for this study was a descriptive survey. According to Nworgu (2006) and Ali (1996), descriptive survey is a method in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from a representative sample considered to reflect the entire population. The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria, covering Senior Secondary Schools located in both urban and rural areas across the Local Government Areas of the state. The population of the study consisted of 395 teachers in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire, titled: *Home Environment and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (HEAAQ)*. The questionnaire was structured into two sections, with Section A requesting personal information from the respondents, while Section B contained items designed to elicit responses on home environment and academic achievement of Senior Secondary School students. The instrument was constructed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was face-validated by three experts, comprising two specialists in the Department of Educational Foundations and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. However, corrections, comments, and suggestions were carefully incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure its validity. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test administered to respondents outside the study area. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data were collected using the direct delivery and retrieval method. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents and retrieved them immediately or on an agreed later date for those that were not completed on the spot. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypotheses were rejected when the calculated t-value was greater than the critical value; otherwise, they were accepted.

Results:

Research Question One: How adequate are the available facilities in Ebonyi State primary schools?

Table I: Mean ($\bar{x}$) and Standard Deviation (SD) scores of the opinions of the respondents on the adequacy of available facilities in the schools.

S/No	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	DEC
1	The toilet facilities in the school	2.18	1.26	NA
2	The Electricity facilities	1.44	1.01	NA
3	The school water supply	1.72	1.13	NA
4	Materials in Library	1.58	0.98	NA
5	Medical facilities	1.45	0.94	NA
6	The Classroom space	2.71	1.75	A

7	Staff room	1.78	1.09	NA
8	Physical building	2.31	1.16	NA
9	Games facilities	1.50	0.96	NA
10	Classroom arrangement	2.34	1.11	NA

Key: A = Adequate NA = Not Adequate

The result in Table 1 shows that, out of the 10 items on the adequacy of the available facilities in the schools, 9 items: 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9 and 10 on toilet, electricity, water supply, Library, medical facilities, staff rooms, physical building, games facilities and classroom arrangement respectively, were rated not adequate by the respondents. However, only item 6 which were on the classroom space was rated adequate.

Research Question Two: How do school administrators motivate teachers according to The UNICEF recommendations for child-friendly schools?

Table 2: Mean Ratings ($\bar{x}$) and Standard Deviation (SD) scores on how classroom teachers are motivated

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	DEC
1	The headteachers respect teachers' opinions	2.97	1.07	A
2	Teachers are encouraged to air their views on matters concerning the school	3.24	1.29	A
3	The headteacher discusses future plans and expectations with the teachers	3.08	0.87	A
4	The headteacher encourages teachers to go for in service training	3.22	0.91	A
5	The school head puts suggestions made by staff members into operation	3.02	0.78	A
6	The school head rewards all worthy efforts	2.27	1.02	D
7	The headteacher makes teachers feel at ease when talking to them	3.26	1.29	A
8	The headteacher is concerned with the welfare of the teachers	2.80	0.97	A
9	The headteacher does not rebuke his staff in the presence of the pupils	3.05	0.94	A

The data on Table 2 show that the teachers agreed with 8 out of the 9 items, on how they are motivated. They scored the highest mean of 3.26 on item 7 which states that the headmaster makes teachers feel at ease when talking with them, though it has a standard deviation of 1.29, which is considered a bit high, indicating that their agreement is not very homogenous. Items which state that teachers are encouraged to air their views on matters concerning the school have a mean score of 3.24 with a standard deviation of 1.29, indicating that a greater number of the teachers are in agreement with it. The lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.27$) was recorded on item 6, which states that the headmaster rewards all worthy efforts. It has a standard deviation of 1.02. this item was rejected because the mean rating of 2.27 fell below the mid-point of 2.50.

Research question Three: In what ways do the school management protect the rights of the pupils according to the UNICEF recommendations for child-friendly school environment?

Table 4: Mean Ratings ($\bar{x}$) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the opinions of respondents on the ways the school management protects the rights of the pupils.

S/No	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec
1	The school helps the children have a general knowledge of democracy by assigning responsibilities to them	3.48	0.75	A
2	The school authority is always willing to report any parent that physically abuse this child to the police	1.94	0.91	D
3	The school ensures that pregnant girls are allowed to enroll and participate in school activities	1.39	0.83	SD
4	The school encourages human rights by informing the pupils before deciding on matters that affect them	2.63	0.94	A
6	The school protects all children from abuse inside and outside the school	2.04	0.91	D
7	Children with disabilities are included in the regular classroom activities	2.35	0.99	D
8	Non-aggressive styles of discipline instead of physical punishment are used for pupils	2.68	0.95	A

Data on Table 3 indicates that the teachers “agree” with items 1, 4, 6 and 8 which state that the school helps children have a general knowledge of democracy by assigning responsibilities to them ($\bar{x} = 3.48$); informs the pupils before deciding on matters that affect them ($\bar{x} = 2.62$) and uses non-aggressive style of discipline instead of physical punishment on the pupils ($\bar{x} = 2.68$). their SD values are: 0.75, 0.97, 0.91, 0.99 and 0.95 respectively. However, the respondents disagree with items 2, 5, 6 and 7, which state that the school authority is always willing to report any parent that physically abuses his or her child to the police ($\bar{x} = 1.94$; SD = 0.91). children’s academic performances are not announced publicly in order not to humiliate poor performances ($\bar{x} = 2.33$; SD = 1.01) include children with disabilities in the regular classroom ($\bar{x} = 2.35$) and strongly disagree with item 3 which states that the school ensures that pregnant girls are allowed to enroll and participate in school activities ($\bar{x} = 1.39$; SD = 0.83). Respondents also “disagree” that the school protects all children from abuse and harm both inside and outside the school.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the head teachers and teachers on how teachers are motivated.

Table 5: t-test analysis of the difference between the mean ratings of headteachers and teachers on how teachers are motivated

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	Level of Significance	t.cal	t-critical	Dec
Headteachers	106	2.54	0.46	139	0.05	0.79	1.68	Not rejected
Teachers	514	3.14	0.50					

Data contained in Table 5 shows that the t-calculated value is 0.79 at 39 degree of freedom (df) and 0.05 level of significance. Given that the t-calculated value of 0.79 is less than the t-critical (1.68), the null hypothesis is not rejected, implying that there is no significant difference in the responses of headteachers and teachers on how teachers are motivated.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of teachers and headteachers on the ways the school management protects the pupils’ rights.

Table 6: t-test analysis of the difference between the mean ratings of teachers and headteachers on the ways the school management protects the pupils' rights.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	Level of Significance	t cal	t-critical	Decision
Headteachers	106	2.51	0.41	131	0.05	0.498	2.12	Not rejected
Teachers	514	2.53	0.49					

Data on Table 6 reveal that the mean scores of headteachers and teachers are 2.51 and 2.53, with standard deviation scores of 0.41 and 0.49, respectively. Data also show that the t-calculated value of 0.498 is less than the t-critical value of 2.12 at 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the opinions of the respondents on the ways the school management protects the pupils' rights.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed important insights into the management of primary schools in relation to UNICEF child-friendly school recommendations. The result of research question one indicated that most of the facilities in the schools were rated as not adequate. Specifically, essential facilities such as toilet facilities, water supply, library materials, staff rooms, classroom furniture and arrangement, physical buildings, and games facilities were found to be inadequate. Only classroom space was rated as adequate, while electricity and medical facilities were also rated as inadequate. These findings suggest that many primary schools do not provide the minimum standards required for a conducive learning environment. This supports the position that many schools are not yet environmentally suitable for effective teaching and learning and are therefore not aligned with child-friendly school standards, which emphasize adequate water, sanitation, safety, and a healthy and supportive learning environment for children.

The findings further revealed that school administrators play a role in promoting some aspects of child-friendly school practices, particularly in encouraging democratic participation and respect for human rights within the school system. For instance, pupils are assigned responsibilities, and they are informed before decisions affecting them are taken, which reflects elements of participation and respect for the child's voice. In addition, school administrators were found to motivate teachers through various strategies such as encouraging them to express their views, implementing their suggestions, supporting in-service training, attending to their welfare needs, and maintaining professional respect by avoiding public criticism in front of pupils. These findings are consistent with the view that teacher motivation and professional development are essential components of effective school management and contribute significantly to the realization of child-friendly school objectives.

However, findings on the protection of children's rights revealed a less encouraging picture. The results showed that schools generally do not adequately protect the rights of children, as respondents disagreed with most of the items measuring child protection practices. It was particularly observed that children are not sufficiently protected from abuse and harm, and that learners with disabilities are not consistently included in regular classroom activities. This indicates gaps in inclusiveness and safeguarding practices within primary schools. These findings highlight weaknesses in the implementation of child protection principles and suggest that many schools still fall short

of creating fully safe and inclusive environments for all learners. Generally, the results indicate that while some elements of child-friendly school practices are present, particularly in teacher motivation and limited democratic participation, significant deficiencies exist in infrastructure provision and child protection mechanisms. These shortcomings limit the extent to which primary schools can be described as fully child-friendly in line with UNICEF recommendations.

Conclusion

The effective management of primary schools within a child-friendly environment requires the concerted efforts of school headteachers, teachers, parents, families, and the wider community. The study established that improving primary education is not only about increasing access to schooling but also about ensuring quality learning environments that support pupils' safety, participation, and academic achievement. When both access and quality are adequately addressed, pupils are more likely to remain in school, complete their basic education, and achieve the expected learning outcomes necessary for personal and national development.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School authorities should ensure equal access to education for both boys and girls by eliminating gender stereotypes, promoting equal enrolment opportunities, and encouraging respect for dignity, rights, and equality among pupils, while also providing girl-friendly facilities and safe learning conditions that support full participation of all learners.
2. Government and relevant education stakeholders should prioritize the provision of adequate basic amenities such as clean water, functional toilet facilities, electricity, classroom furniture, library resources, and recreational facilities in order to create a healthy and conducive learning environment for pupils.
3. Community participation should be strengthened through active collaboration between schools and surrounding communities to support pupils' learning and smooth transition from home to school, including the use of mother tongue instruction in early education to enhance understanding.
4. Schools should promote the physical, emotional, and social well-being of both teachers and pupils by creating supportive environments that reduce stress, encourage positive relationships, and improve overall school climate.
5. School administrators should ensure prompt response to pupils' needs by upholding child-friendly values that protect children from abuse, discrimination, fear, and harm, while ensuring inclusive practices that accommodate pupils with disabilities and diverse backgrounds in a fair and transparent manner.

References

- Ali, A. (1996). *Fundamentals of research in education*. Awka, Nigeria: Meks Publishers.
- Emmer, E. T., Evertson, C. M., Clement, B., & Worsham, M. (2000). *Classroom management for secondary teachers* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Emmer, E. T., Evertson, C. M., & Anderson, L. (2012). Effective classroom management at the beginning of the school year. *Elementary School Journal*, 2(1), 219–232.
- Ezeiofor, G. (2012). *Protection of human rights under the law*. London, England: Butterworths.

- Ezugwu, P. C. (2004). *A handbook of educational administration*. Enugu, Nigeria: Meks Publishers Ltd.
- Enyi, D. (2000). School locational provision of educational resources in primary schools. *Nigerian Journal of Empirical Studies in Psychology and Education*, 1(2), 47–52.
- Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., Clement, B., & Worsham, M. (2013). Effective classroom management at the beginning of the school year. *Elementary School Journal*, 9(2), 119–132.
- Ndamadu, K. N. (2006). Improving the leadership responsibilities of the principal. In Faculty of Education Training Workshop Services (pp. 106–120). Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.
- Nwogwu, N. A. (2000). The purpose and growth of primary education. In R. O. Oluche & A. Ali (Eds.), *Development of primary school teacher education in Nigeria*. Enugu, Nigeria: Summer Educational Publishers.
- Nworgu, B. G. (1991). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Wisdom Publishers.
- Nworgu, B. G. (2006). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology*. Nsukka, Nigeria: University Trust Publishers.
- Oluremi, O. F. (2012). Creating a friendly school learning environment for Nigerian children. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(8), 56–63.
- Sherleka, S. A. (2012). *Modern business organization and management: System-based contingency approach to the organization and management of business* (3rd ed.). New Delhi, India: Himalaya Publishing House.
- Staw, B. N. (2000). Motivation research versus the art of faculty management. *The Review of Higher Education*, 6(4), 34–42.
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2006). *Child-friendly schools: A framework for rights-based, child-friendly schools*. New York, NY: UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2009). *Child-friendly schools manual*. New York, NY: UNICEF.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National policy on education*. Lagos, Nigeria: NERDC Press.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2013). *National policy on education*. Lagos, Nigeria: NERDC Press.
- Nwagwu, N. A. (2012). *Educational management and administration: Theory and practice*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co.