

ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILD FRIENDLY STATUS OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN UNIVERSITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA

Chukwu, Cynthia Chisom;¹ Ngwoke, Anthonia Nwakaego² & Nweke, Prince Onyemaechi³

^{1&2}Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, University of Nigeria

³Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract - The study assessed child-friendly status of school environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria. Three research questions and corresponding three hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 314 (171 federal and 143 state) teachers in 11 (5 federal and 6 state) public university primary schools from the South-East, Nigeria. The sample for this study comprised 251 (137 teachers from federal and 114 teachers from state universities) teachers from federal and state universities. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size using 80% of the population. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled: Child Friendly Status of Classroom Environment Rating Scale (CFSCERS). The instrument was face validated by three experts. Internal consistency reliability was done in this study through Cronbach Alpha which gave reliability coefficients of 0.89, 0.80, 0.74 for A, B, C instrument (CFSCERS) respectively. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent-sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that there is a very high level of child centeredness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria. The study revealed that teachers of primary schools in the federal and state universities agreed that there is a very high level of child inclusiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that teachers should sustain the level of hands-on teaching and learning strategies in primary schools for improved child centeredness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.

Keywords: Assessment, child friendly status, school environment, primary schools

Introduction

The quality of an individual's life is closely linked to their upbringing, particularly during early childhood, which spans from birth to the age of basic education. This period is crucial as children are most vulnerable to outside influences and undergo rapid growth and development (Güven & Azkeskin,

2016). The environment in which a child is raised and the education they receive during these formative years significantly impact their future. Investments made during this time are critical not only for the individual's development but also for the broader national economy and societal progress (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019). Education plays a fundamental role in a society's advancement towards a brighter future. To thrive and create safe, peaceful environments, communities must raise children in conducive and healthy settings. This includes providing opportunities for growth in line with their abilities through access to learning facilities, instructional materials, inclusiveness, teacher-pupil relationships, peer interactions, and adequate physical facilities (Kuyucu, Sahin & Kapicioglu, 2013).

Provisions for children during their early years should be comprehensive, addressing both quality and quantity. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2014), children need access to healthcare, nutritious food, educational opportunities, violence-free environments, and spaces for play. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 and to which Nigeria is a signatory, stated that children have the right to protection, social interaction, growth, freedom, active participation, relevant education, and access to healthcare. These needs must be met in educational environments after addressing the child's basic needs at home. Furthermore, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959, which envisioned ten principles for protecting child rights. These principles include providing a friendly environment and freedoms, ensuring the universality of the right to special protection from discrimination, and other essential protections. Interpretations of child rights range from allowing the child the capacity for independent action to enforcing their physical, mental, and emotional freedom from any form of abuse, though the definition of abuse can vary (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Report, 2009). Governments that ratify the child-friendly statutes commit themselves to maximally protect the child within society. In other words, governments agree to ensure children's rights and hold themselves fully accountable for this commitment before the international community (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2008). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on four core principles: the principle of non-discrimination; the best interests

of the child; the right to life, survival, and basic development; and considering the views of the child in decisions that affect them. Ensuring a child-friendly school environment in university primary schools, especially in South-East Nigeria, requires addressing these principles comprehensively. Teachers, school administrators, and policymakers must work together to create environments where children are respected, protected, and given ample opportunities to grow and learn. This commitment to child-friendly principles not only benefits the individual child but also contributes significantly to the development and well-being of the entire society.

Unfortunately, the condition of Nigeria's child today is inexcusable and measure of inadequacy in the world and has been allowed to degenerate to the current levels of lack of child protection in the society. The gains of previous decades are being rolled back by deepening impoverishment, continuing armed conflict (Nyandoro, Eric & Bor, 2017). Furthermore, Nigeria as a nation is not only faced by a moral imperative to put up the correct child rights and policy measures but also to correct legal obligations to ensure child rights are safeguarded. Interestingly, today, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and welfare are in force and moving decisively towards a new era of the rights of the child accepted and recognized in the international community and have assumed legal obligations that mark the fundamental shift in the way children issues and freedom are handled (Alston & Tobin, 2005). However, there is no any society that can exist without a child. Biologically, a child means a human being between the stages of birth and puberty, or between the developmental period of infancy and puberty. The legal definition of child generally refers to a minor, otherwise known as a person younger than the age of majority. The concept of child differs for different people (Adeyanju, 2010). Hence, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2013) opined that a child is every human being below the age of 18 years. One of the fundamental human rights of every child is the right to proper education since education has been seen as one of the natural occurrence associated with human development. That is why the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child declared that education is the fundamental human right. Under the Nigerian socio-cultural context, the definition of a child varies widely due to lack of uniformity in the cultural systems. In some ethnic groups, a boy remains a child until initiated into an age-grade society or until such person is

old enough to contribute physically and financially to community development (Akwaru, Soyibo & Agba, 2010). Operationally, a child in this study is seen as a person within the primary school age. However, Children usually have less human rights and fewer dependability than adults. Hence, they are seen as not capable to make solemn resolution, and lawfully must be under the care of their parents or answerable to caregiver. Children are the leaders of tomorrow and their welfare and upbringing should be of paramount concern of every nation. It is an unarguable fact that any nation's development depends to a reasonable degree on the quality of care and education the child received while growing up.

Education is generally concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learners' potentials for national development. Education does not only liberate individuals from poverty, it also influences an individual's moral, spiritual, physical and intellectual personal life. Education is the process which allows individuals to be trained and to become good citizens by preparing them to live a high quality life (Adeyanju, 2010). Similarly, Umo (2013) noted that education is the bedrock for any meaningful and sustainable development hence the need for continuous emphasis on its attainment. Operationally, education can be defined as the process of inculcating knowledge and skills in children especially at primary school age. In Nigeria, education system is organized into pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Primary education, according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), is the type of education given to children within ages of 6 – 12 years. This level of education stands as a foundation upon which the rest of the education system is built. It is therefore, the key to the success or failure of the whole systems of education. The main focus of primary education in Nigeria is the development of basic life skills as well as proper attitude in young children and laying of strong and reliable foundation for further education. In specific terms, the objectives of primary education in Nigeria according to the FRN include: inculcation of permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively; laying of a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking; developing the child's ability to adapt to the changing environment among others. Adopting the definition of primary education as given in the Nigerian Policy on Education (NPE), this study focuses on children within six

to twelve years of age in primary schools. Hence, children in primary schools are known as pupils and they possess peculiar characteristics and needs.

A pupil is a young person who studies under close supervision of a teacher or a private tutor at school. Emelda (2016) defined pupil as a person or learner who is enrolled in an educational institution or school. The author further described pupil as someone who is under the direct supervision of a teacher because he is either a minor or has special needs (Emelda, 2016). According to Britannica (2018), pupil is defined as a person under the age of puberty orphaned or emancipated, and under the care of a guardian. Operationally, a pupil is someone who is currently being taught, particularly a child in school. According to Piaget (1947), pupils are within the concrete operational stage of intellectual development. Children at this stage of human development therefore need proper feeding to sustain their rapid physical growth, rich and interactive environment to explore. They also need rich, healthy and safe social environment for social interactions with adults and peers both at home and in school. Characteristically, pupils are physically active, energetic, playful with rapid physical growth; intellectually curious or inquisitive and explorative; socially gregarious and emotionally unstable. To achieve the objectives of primary education considering the characteristics and developmental needs of pupils therefore, the school environment should be safe and interactive enough for a whole child development. On the importance of primary education, Ajayi and Yusuf (2010) noted that primary education is the foundation of the nation's education system and its functionality determines the success and effectiveness of all other higher levels of education and the individual's performance in the world of work. The effectiveness of education in Nigeria appears to be on the downward trend alluding to the ineffectiveness of the basic education levels in Nigeria. In spite of the increasing enrolment rate in schools, many children appear to be learning far less than what they should learn in schools. Researchers like Sari, Setyosari, Kuswandi and Ulfa (2020) have attributed this ugly development to a combination of factors revolving around poor learning environment and poor teacher motivation, among others. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), a child learns best in an environment where the child feels happy, safe, involved and where his interests, rights and wellbeing are adequately considered. As a result, the

emphasis on creating conducive school environment for children help increase the child happiness and safety (UNICEF, 2011).

School environment generally encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, including the physical setting, the psychological environment created through social contexts, and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviors. School environment is the environment the teacher creates in school both within and outside the classroom that will maximize instructional time, help pupils feel secured and supported and motivate them to play, learn and succeed. It includes the choice of the teacher on rules and expectations, reward and discipline system, class procedure, seating arrangement as well as play activities. It is how consistent pupils are held accountable for what the teacher is able to achieve. School learning environment, according to Malik and Rizvi (2018), is a dynamic social system which includes not only teachers' behaviour and teacher-pupil interaction but pupil as well. School learning environment carries a variety of meanings. It generally refers to the total climate, structures, processes, ethos within and outside classrooms which are integral elements affecting pupils' learning (Miller & Cunningham, 2011). A classroom setting has two major components, namely, physical component and human component. Physical component comprises all the physical objects present in the classroom e.g. chalk board, furniture, lightings, projector, books, computers, among others, whereas the human component comprises individuals, that is, teachers and pupils in the classroom. It generally involves the nature of interaction of teachers with pupils and pupil-pupils as well. This pattern of interaction generates a particular atmosphere, which forms an aspect of the child's learning environment (Aldridge & Fraser, 2011). This aspect is also called the psychosocial environment of the classroom (Malik & Rizvi, 2018). It is from the classroom environment and its activities that a school is said to be child seeking or not. It is the quality of the school environment that determines whether it meets up with the major characteristics of child-friendly school environment such as child seeking, child centered, inclusive, gender sensitive, effective in gaining knowledge, encourages home/school collaborations, healthy and safe for the learners.

A child-friendly school environment connotes an environment which is endowed with infrastructure, facilities, teachers, human resources and as well,

promotes moral, social and behavioural conduct of the child. Sari, Setyosari, Kuswandi and Ulfa (2020) defined a child-friendly environment as a democratic environment based on children's rights, where all learners are accepted, teaching-learning processes are organized according to children's interest, needs, health, safety and protective measures are taken for children and gender-based discrimination is not provided. UNICEF (2009) viewed child-friendly school environment as a model that is based on the simple premise that schools can operate in the best interests of the child. Furthermore, a child friendly school environment is an environment that is equipped with the fundamental enabler of the child's adaptation and adjustment away from home. These enablers facilitate emotional, psychological, social, mental and moral transformation and perception of the child (Morrison & Nwokobia, 2015). According to UNICEF (2009), such school environments must be safe, healthy and protective, staffed with trained teachers, equipped with adequate resources and offering conditions appropriate for learning. For the purpose of this study, child-friendly school environment is seen as an environment that will help to increase children's academic achievement, improve the quality and variety of learning outcomes, prevent negative attitudes towards school and learning, and to reduce grade repetition and dropout rates. Therefore, the child-friendly school environment is a very important factor to be considered in achieving the objectives of primary education. In this context, child friendly school environment can be defined is a progressive environment based on children's rights, where all pupils are accepted, teaching and learning activities are planned around the interests of the pupils, protective, health, and protective measures are put in place, and gender-based discrimination is not permitted.

A child-friendly school environment is an environment, which works and goes out of their way to identify pupils who are excluded for one reason or the other and help them out especially in becoming an active participant in the learning process. The child-friendly school environment ensure that pupils are treated as subjects with their own right and privileges not withstanding their ages, tribes, races, ethnic affiliation and religious inclination (Obinaju, Fakrogha & Igbogi, 2015). The child seek school environment sees the holistic upbringing of the child as their duties and because of that, they have the obligation of fulfilling the aspiration and future ambitions of the child including making sure that the right and privileges of the child are respected

not only in the school but outside the school environment as well. Hence, the school strives to promote and help to monitor the wellbeing of the child, above all, ensures that the children's welfare is respected and as such they are said to be child centered. In child centered school environment, teachers and other adult care givers act in the children's best interest and help children develop their full potential and also are concerned about their health and wellbeing. They are driven by the children's right philosophy and ensure that every child develop in accordance with their potentials regardless of their tribe, race, religion or culture. The school ensures that the children are not excluded in any way by ensuring that the school facilities, programmes and activities are child centered and age appropriate. In child centered school environments, inclusiveness is highly encouraged.

Inclusive environment is a situation whereby children or learners with diverse ability levels and disabilities, including the mentally disadvantaged, physical and other forms of developmental challenges, learn together in the same classroom. In the inclusive classroom setting, the curricular and other facilities/support services are developed in such a way that it can integrate the diversity of the learners (Clough & Corbett, 2020). It makes it possible for the diverse groups of learners to have the opportunity to interact with each other, making relationship, developing friendly environment and mutual understanding which moves towards the social inclusion of special needs children (challenged) in the mainstream society from the beginning. Inclusion approach seek to address the learning needs of all children with special needs especially those who are vulnerable to being marginalized and excluded on the account of their different ability levels. Inclusive classroom environment, according to Salazar, Norton and Tuiff (2016), is a classroom whereby all pupils feel: supported to learn and explore ideas; safe to express their views in a civil manner; and respected as individuals and members of groups in such a way that they view themselves as people who "belong" in a community of learners. Inclusive classroom supports rigorous academic work and deep learning by all pupils (Clough & Corbett, 2020). Hence, one can conceive inclusive classroom to be a place in which thoughtfulness, mutual respect and academic excellence are valued and promoted. An inclusive environment in this study therefore describes an environment whereby pupils study and play together in the same classroom and outside classroom settings irrespective of

their abilities and disabilities.

From the discussions so far, Child-friendly school environment is defined in this study as a school environment where the classroom and outside classroom environments are child centered, inclusive and gender sensitive. Classroom environment here has to do with the physical facilities such as the buildings, chairs/lockers, tables, instructional/learning materials as well as physical classroom sitting arrangement. It also has to do with psychosocial aspects such as teacher-pupil ratio, teacher-pupil relationship, pupil-pupil interaction, teacher effectiveness and other personality factors. Outside classroom environment on the other hand relates to such areas as assembly ground, play ground and play facilities, school entrance, school library, conveniences, waste disposal system, among others. The quality of classroom and outside classroom environment to a great extent determines the quality of learning and development of life skills by pupils in school. To ensure effective classroom management, quality social interactions, and pupils' active participation in school activities, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, stipulated a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35; that teaching-learning process should be participatory, exploratory, and experimental and child centered (FRN, 2014). With the increasing enrolment rate in Nigerian primary schools, one wonders whether the government stipulations are still being monitored, observed and assessed in schools.

Assessment ordinarily can be seen as a process whose ultimate goal is to improve the performance of an individual or a system and not necessarily for making judgment. It is often based on a given guidelines. Omer (2020) viewed assessment as the process of gathering and discussing information from various sources and activities in order to develop a deep understanding of what pupils know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences. David (2005) defined assessment as the systematic field for reasoning about the development of pupils and the evaluation of the program and the effectiveness of the educational activities. It is the process of planning, implementing, clarifying, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and re-designing to increase children's learning and development. The assessment has a greater impact on children learning than teaching; assessment exceptionally influences how pupils react to their studies (David, 2005). According to the author assessment informs children what their teachers

regard as important and thus what they should pay attention to. Thus, assessment acts as a guideline to study in a targeted way. Operationally, assessment is defined as the process of determining the child-friendly status of classroom and outside classroom environment in university primary schools in terms of child centeredness, inclusiveness and gender sensitiveness with a view to providing information on areas where urgent interventions need to be provided.

Gender sensitiveness is the process by which individuals comprehend and consider socio-cultural norms and discriminations in order to recognize the different rights, roles, and obligations of men and women in the community, in addition to the relationships between them. Rank (2021), simply put gender sensitiveness as a behaviour that avoids discrimination by understanding and accepting the multiple differences between men and women. It is a way of thinking that fosters respect and compassion for others regardless of these differences. Gender sensitiveness among children teaches them to rely less on subconscious assumptions and generalizations and more on individual personality traits (Rank, 2021). The author further posited that one of the major impact of gender sensitivity is that it can induce restructuring of gender roles based on efficiency and can help realize higher productivity of men and women within and outside the school learning environment or in household and outside school through rational and effective use of resources including available time (Rank, 2021). Similarly, Tanisha (2021) referred to gender sensitiveness as a way to reduce the barriers caused due to discrimination and gender bias. According to the author, creating the right kind of gender-sensitive environment leads to mutual respect regardless of their gender (Tanisha, 2021). Operationally, gender sensitiveness is the process by which individuals become aware of how gender influences their interactions with others. Gender relations are present in all education systems, and gender sensitivity is particularly obvious in acknowledging privilege and discrimination based on race. Women are therefore, generally perceived as being disadvantaged in society. Gender sensitivity training sessions, according to Barodia (2015), are used to educate people, usually employees, about the importance of gender in their lives and workplaces. Interestingly, gender sensitiveness is growing rapidly in the United States, especially in the service industries such as primary healthcare and primary education where professional teachers are been engaged (Barodia,

2015).

A teacher is a person who helps others to acquire basic knowledge, skills, competences or values. Teacher is a designation for the office, position, and profession for someone who devotes in the field of education through patterned educational interaction, formal and systematic. The teacher is a figure of the greatest role in determining the quality of learning in the school environment (Wati, 2018). According to Ngalim (2014), teachers who can understand the difficulties of the children in terms of learning and other difficulties beyond learning problems, especially those that can inhibit learning activities of pupils. Arroyo (2021) defined a teacher as a person employed to help children to acquire knowledge, skill, competence or virtue which is their main role, to teach others in a formal education context, such as at a school. Similarly, Jukić (2019) defined a teacher as a humanist, organizer, and leader of the teaching process, coordinator and supervisor, motivator, rightful stakeholder, facilitator, and predictor of the school culture improvement. Operationally, a teacher is someone who helps other people to learn. It is commonly used to refer to anyone who facilitates teaching and learning, including in the institutions of learning. However, considering the role of primary education in the whole education system, one may begin to worry over the quality of learning outcomes in Nigerian schools. The quality of learning outcomes in Nigerian primary schools –public, private, as well as university staff schools has been a source of worry to researchers and child advocates (Ajayi & Yusuf, 2010). Since environment play a critical role in ensuring quality learning and development especially for growing children, the unimpressive learning outcomes in schools especially in university primary schools may be attributed to the status of the school environments. It is worrisome that University staff schools that should serve as model schools experience poor learning outcomes possibly due to poor classroom and outside classroom environment. It is pertinent therefore to assess the child-friendly status of University primary school environments in Nigeria especially in Southeastern states of the country for any meaningful intervention to be provided.

Statement of the Problem

Education is seen in Nigeria as an instrument per excellence for social and economic reconstruction of the nation. Primary education on the other hand is defined as the education given to children aged 6-12 years. The fundamental purpose of primary education in Nigeria revolves around development of basic

life skills and laying of solid foundation for further education. Quality education has been identified as one of the fundamental rights of the child according to the Convention on the Rights of Children of which Nigeria is a signatory. In line with that, there is increasing enrolment in primary schools across the nation. Unfortunately, the quality of learning outcomes and skill development that pupils exit primary school with is disheartening. Pupils have peculiar developmental characteristics and learning needs. The poor learning outcomes in primary school could therefore imply that their developmental and learning needs as pupils are not properly observed and addressed. Researchers have attributed this ugly development to the paucity of classroom and outside classroom environments in Nigeria primary schools ranging from inadequate physical facilities, inadequate and sometimes complete lack of instructional material, lack of appropriate play equipment and materials, poor teaching methodologies, unfriendly classroom interactions, among others. In other words, both classroom and outside classroom environments appeared not to be child-friendly.

This observation cuts across private, public and even university staff schools. It is a well-known fact that environment is a critical element in the process of education of young children due to their developmental characteristics and needs. It is therefore worrisome that even the university primary schools that should be model schools cannot boast of child-friendly school environment. In the light of the above, for any improvement to be made in the quality of primary education, the environment where pupils play and learn must be child friendly. By implication, there is need for urgent intervention in upgrading the primary school environment to a child-friendly status. Thus the focus of this study is on assessment of the child-friendly status of university primary school environment in South East, Nigeria so that appropriate and relevant interventions can be provided accordingly.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is the assessment of the child-friendly status of school environment in the university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to assess the level of:

1. child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria;
2. child inclusiveness in classroom environment in the university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria;

3. child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria;

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?
3. What is the level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho₁:** There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria;
- Ho₂** There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria;
- Ho₃** There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria;

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey research design, according to Nworgu (2015), is one which aims at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population usually using a fraction of the population called a sample. Therefore, this design is considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researchers to describe the child friendly status of school environments in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 314 (171 federal and 143 state) teachers in 11 (5 federal and 6 state) public university primary schools from the South-East, Nigeria. The sample for this study comprised 251 (137 teachers from federal and

114 teachers from state universities) teachers from federal and state universities. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size using 80% of the population. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled: Child Friendly Status of Classroom Environment Rating Scale (CFSCERS). The instrument was face validated by three experts. Internal consistency reliability was done in this study through Cronbach Alpha that gave reliability coefficients of 0.89, 0.80, 0.74 for A, B, and C instrument (CFSCERS) respectively. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained for the instrument which is high enough for the study. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent-sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule for the research questions are Very Low Level (0.99-1.00), Low Level (1.10-2.00), High Level (2.10-2.99) and Very High Level (3.00-4.00). Also for the hypotheses testing, any t-value with level of significant above 0.05 is not rejected while the researcher rejects t-value with significant level equal to or less than 0.05.

Results

Research question 1: What is the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?

Table 1: mean and standard deviation of the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

S N	Use the response options in the columns provided to rate the level of child centeredness in classroom environment in:	Teachers in federal university primary schools			Teachers in state university primary schools		
		Mean	Std	Decision	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Opportunities that allow the pupils autonomy to make choices	3.04	.66	VHL	3.41	.55	VHL
2	Classroom activities base on pupils' interest	3.32	.77	VHL	3.26	.49	VHL
3	Collaborative classroom interaction	3.15	.93	VHL	3.42	.51	VHL
4	Provision for pupils' reflection on class activities	3.37	.78	VHL	3.42	.49	VHL
5	Provisions for individual-paced classroom activity	3.45	.87	VHL	3.27	.47	VHL

6	Provision of needed classroom materials for the day-to-day activities	2.65	.48	HL	3.26	.49	VHL
7	Individual exploration of classroom environment to determine the strength and weakness	2.76	.74	HL	3.26	.49	VHL
8	Communicating the goals of the classroom instruction to the pupils	3.15	.85	VHL	3.27	.50	VHL
9	Providing mechanism to monitor child's progress in the classroom	2.82	.72	HL	3.41	.55	VHL
10	Promoting flexible instruction model by teachers	3.46	.71	VHL	3.42	.51	VHL
11	Provisions for rewarding prosocial behaviours of pupils in the classroom	2.58	.91	HL	3.56	.52	VHL
		3.07	0.77	VH L	3.36	0.51	VHL

Very Low Level (0.99-1.00), Low Level (1.10-2.00), High Level (2.10-2.99) and Very High Level (3.00-4.00).

Data on table 1 revealed that items with serial numbers 1 to 11 have their various mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean values of 3.07 and 3.36 with standard deviation of 0.77 and 0.51 indicating that teachers of primary schools in the federal and state universities that there is a very high level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 2: t-test calculation on the mean difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools on the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment

School type	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-cal.	Sig.	Alpha value	Decision
Teachers from primary schools in federal universities	13 7	33.75	5.97	249	4.80	0.00	0.05	Significant
Teachers from	11	36.98	4.39					

primary 4
 schools in state
 universities

Data on table 2 showed that teachers of primary schools from the federal universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 33.75 and 5.97 while those from primary schools in state universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 36.98 and 4.39 respectively. With a degree of freedom of 249, the calculated t-value of 4.80 is significant because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child centeredness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria.

Research question 2: What is the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

S/ N	Use the response options in the columns provided to rate the level of inclusiveness in classroom environment in:	Teachers in federal university schools		Decision	Teachers in state university primary schools		Decision
		Mean	Std		Mean	Std	
12	Giving every pupil an opportunity to be heard	3.24	.71	VHL	3.27	.46	VHL
13	Accommodating all pupils in teaching/learning activities in class	2.70	.92	HL	3.43	.49	VHL
14	Attending to the pupils with special needs	3.07	.87	VHL	3.28	.47	VHL
15	Dealing with low level disruption in a sensitive way	3.12	.76	VHL	3.42	.49	VHL
16	Supporting pupils to work at their own pace	2.64	.77	HL	3.41	.51	VHL
17	Providing opportunities for pupils to share their own experiences	2.66	.65	HL	3.14	.35	VHL
18	Encouraging low achieving pupils to participate in class activities.	2.69	1.01	HL	3.42	.49	VHL
19	Paying attention to the specific needs of every child in the classroom	2.72	.72	HL	3.43	.49	VHL

20	Varying the teachers' instructional method to accommodate pupils with diverse learning styles	3.16	.91	VHL	3.58	.49	V HL
21	Making provisions for pupils to choose preferred mode of showing what they have learned	3.45	.87	VHL	3.43	.49	V HL

Very Low Level (0.99-1.00), Low Level (1.10-2.00), High Level (2.10-2.99) and Very High Level (3.00-4.00).

Data on table 3 reveals that items with serial numbers 12 to 21 have their various mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean values of 3.45 and 3.43 with standard deviation of 0.87 and 0.49 reveals that teachers of primary schools in the federal and state universities agree that there is a very high level of child inclusiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test calculation on the mean difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools on the level of child inclusiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

School Type	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-cal.	Sig.	Alpha value	Decision
Teachers from primary schools in federal universities	137	29.46	6.09	249	6.67	0.00	0.05	Significant
Teachers from primary schools in state universities	114	33.82	3.71					

Data on table 4 showed that teachers of primary schools from the federal universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 29.46 and 6.09 while those from primary schools in state universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 33.82 and 3.71 respectively. With a degree of freedom of

249, the calculated t-value of 6.67 is significant because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child inclusiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria.

Research question 3: What is the level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria?

Table 5: mean and standard deviation of the level of child gender sensitiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

S/ N	Use the response options in the columns provided to rate the level of gender sensitiveness in classroom environment in:	Teachers in federal university primary schools			Teachers in state university primary schools		
		Mean	Std	Decision	Mean	Std	Decision
22	Ensuring gender balance in forming group	2.65	.48	HL	3.41	.51	VHL
23	Protection of every pupil against molestation irrespective of gender	2.76	.74	HL	3.42	.51	VHL
24	Assignment of responsibility such as class leadership based on ability irrespective of gender.	3.02	.68	HL	3.27	.47	VHL
25	Encouraging seating arrangement that promote positive gender interaction.	3.29	.79	HL	3.42	.51	VHL
26	Using of educational materials that are gender friendly for both boys and girls	3.12	.94	VHL	3.42	.49	VHL
27	Swapping of gender words during classroom interactions	3.33	.79	VHL	3.28	.45	VHL
28	Disciplining offenders uniformly irrespective of gender	3.42	.90	VHL	3.28	.45	VHL
29	Mixing boys and girls to work on assignment irrespective of their strengths	2.63	.49	HL	3.28	.45	VHL
30	Ensuring that both males and females participate in activities like cleaning, moving furniture etc	2.75	.77	HL	3.29	.46	VHL
31	Promotion of gender equity through classroom illustrations	3.12	.85	VHL	3.42	.51	VHL

			VH			VH
	3.01	0.74	L	3.35	0.48	L
Very Low Level (0.99-1.00), Low Level (1.10-2.00), High Level (2.10-2.99) and Very High Level (3.00-4.00).						

Data on table 5 revealed that items with serial numbers 22 to 31 have their various mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean values of 3.01 and 3.35 with standard deviation of 0.74 and 0.48 indicating revealed that teachers of primary schools in the federal and state universities agreed that there is a very high level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria;

Table 6:t-test calculation on the mean difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools on the level of child gender sensitiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria

School Type	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-cal.	Sig.	Alpha value	Decision
Teachers from primary schools in federal universities	137	30.09	5.23	249	0.08	0.94	0.05	Not significant
Teachers from primary schools in state universities	114	30.04	5.19					

Data on table 6 showed that teachers of primary schools from the federal universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 30.09 and 5.23 while those from primary schools in state universities have mean and standard deviation scores of 30.04 and 5.19 respectively. With a degree of freedom of 249, the calculated t-value of 0.08 is not significant because the significant

value of 0.00 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, there is no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria.

Discussion

The study found a very high level of child-centeredness in the classroom environment of university primary schools in South-East Nigeria. This finding aligns with Sani, Karfe and Garba (2021), who observed that child-centered classroom environments are practiced in schools, contributing to students' happiness as they are treated with respect and dignity. Similarly, Nguyen, Ca, and Huynh (2020) supported the study's findings, noting the implementation of child-centered classroom environments. Evidence from Sally, Mirain, Chris, and Sam (2018) demonstrated that pupil progress and well-being are enhanced in settings where child-centered principles are closely followed. Pereira and Smith-Adcock (2011) also indicated that schools practicing child-centered environments foster empathy, responsibility, and pro-social behaviors in children. Child-centered classroom practices are crucial as they allow children to explore and express behaviors while being guided by teachers. Respondents agreed that child-centeredness is highly practiced, allowing children to freely express themselves in the school environment.

The study revealed that teachers of primary schools in the federal and state universities agreed that there is a very high level of child inclusiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria. The finding of this study is in line with that of Joseph (2012) who posited that encouraging child inclusiveness in classroom environment in the schools is a welcome improvement. Similarly, Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) found that teachers and caregivers are improving their attitudes in the practice of inclusiveness of child classroom environment in schools. This is because devices such as audiotapes, video recordings and computers are incorporated in the teaching processes in order to draw the attention of the children in the classroom environment. Stemming from the findings, the teachers may also have demonstrated keen interest in the effective use of the available resources in their teaching of the inclusive classrooms as a reflection of resourcefulness to achieve the desired results. Further analysis showed that there is a significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools in the level of child

inclusiveness of classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East, Nigeria. This significant difference between primary schools in federal and state universities in their level of child inclusiveness in classroom environment could be as a result of the level of provisions of the basic instructional resources needed to promote child inclusiveness of classroom environment.

The study revealed that teachers of primary schools in federal and state universities agreed there is a very high level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East Nigeria. This finding contradicts the study by Eze and Kalu-Uche (2013), which found that the classroom environment in Nigeria is not conducive for girl-child education. Similarly, Yuden, Chuki and Dorji (2020) reported that teachers were not gender-sensitive in their pedagogical practices at the secondary education level. This discrepancy indicates that many schools in Nigeria lack gender sensitivity awareness, leading to gender inequality in the classroom environment. Moreover, some teachers tend to give more attention and instructional time to male pupils, thereby discriminating against female students. The hypothesis revealed no significant difference between teachers in state and federal university primary schools regarding the level of child gender sensitiveness in the classroom environment in university primary schools in South-East Nigeria. This result implies that gender sensitivity is practiced uniformly across primary schools, regardless of whether they are located in federal or state universities in South-East Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that university primary schools in South-East Nigeria exhibit a highly child-friendly school environment. Specifically, the components of a child-friendly environment, including child-centeredness of the classroom environment, child inclusiveness, gender sensitivity within the classroom, as well as child-centeredness and gender sensitivity in the outside classroom environment, are all practiced at a very high level. This comprehensive approach ensures a supportive and nurturing environment for children in these schools.

Educational Implications

The findings of the study highlight several educational implications for school teachers to ensure an effective child-friendly school environment in university

primary schools in South-East Nigeria. Teachers should focus on preparing and maintaining a child-centered classroom learning environment, promoting inclusiveness within the classroom, and ensuring gender sensitivity both inside and outside the classroom. These practices, when implemented at a high level, contribute significantly to a supportive and nurturing educational setting for children.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive assessment of the child-friendly status of school environments in university primary schools in South-East Nigeria. It highlights the importance of child-centered, inclusive, and gender-sensitive environments both inside and outside the classroom. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and school administrators on the critical components that constitute a child-friendly school environment. Hence, by identifying the high level of implementation of these components, the study underscores the positive impact of such environments on children's educational experiences and well-being. Additionally, the research provides a framework for other regions to assess and improve their own school environments, fostering a more supportive and equitable education system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The teachers should sustain the level of hands-on teaching and learning strategies in primary schools for improved child centeredness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.
2. The teachers should gainfully engage the child in all the school activities in order to sustain inclusiveness in classroom environment in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.
3. The level of child gender sensitiveness in classroom environment should be sustained by the school authority in university primary schools in SE, Nigeria.

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