

INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL SAFETY ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the Influence of School Safety on Students' Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 27,082 teachers and students comprising 25,077 students and 2,005 teachers in the 35 public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state. The sample size of the study was 727 respondents comprising 394 students and 333 teachers. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled; "School Safety and Students' Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SSSAAQ)". The instrument was validated by experts in educational measurement and test construction. The reliability of the instrument yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.77. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the formulated null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that, school safety in form of physical safety and emotional safety both influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state. The study recommended that, the Ministry of Education and school authorities should implement and enforce comprehensive safety policies that address physical and emotional safety in schools.

Keywords: Influence, School Safety, Academic Achievement, Secondary Schools, Students.

Introduction

School safety is a critical factor influencing students' academic achievement, particularly in public secondary schools. A secure and supportive learning environment fosters student engagement, reduces absenteeism, and enhances overall academic performance. Conversely, unsafe school conditions can lead to increased anxiety, distraction, and behavioural issues, all of which impede learning. School safety refers to the policies, procedures, and measures implemented within an educational institution to protect students, teachers and staff from threats, hazards, and disruptions. It encompasses physical security, psychological well-being, emergency preparedness, and a positive school climate that fosters learning and development (Osher et al., 2021). A safe school environment ensures that students can focus on their studies

without fear of violence, bullying, or external threats, thereby enhancing academic performance and emotional stability (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

School safety involves the prevention of violence, maintenance of discipline and the promotion of a supportive educational atmosphere (Jones & Williams, 2023). This includes installing security infrastructure such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors and emergency response systems, as well as implementing policies against bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Research has shown that students who feel safe in their schools exhibit better concentration, higher academic performance, and lower dropout rates (Brown & Miller, 2022). On the contrary, unsafe schools contribute to absenteeism, psychological distress, and reduced engagement in learning activities (Anderson, 2023). School administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders must therefore prioritize school safety initiatives to create a conducive learning environment. Physical and Emotional safety are two types of safety that influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools.

Physical safety refers to the protection of individuals from harm, injury, or danger in their environment. It encompasses measures and policies designed to prevent accidents, violence, and exposure to hazardous conditions in homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces (Anderson & Miller, 2022). Ensuring physical safety involves the implementation of security protocols, maintenance of infrastructure, and enforcement of regulations to minimize risks and create a secure environment (Johnson et al., 2023).

In educational system, physical safety includes securing school premises, maintaining emergency preparedness, and preventing bullying and violence among students (Smith & Williams, 2021). Research has shown that students who feel physically safe in school demonstrate higher academic performance, better social interactions, and reduced absenteeism (Brown, 2022). Similarly, in workplaces, adherence to occupational health and safety regulations reduces accidents and enhances employee productivity (Roberts & Taylor, 2023). A lack of physical safety can lead to stress, anxiety, and reduced engagement in daily activities. Studies indicate that school environments with inadequate safety measures contribute to higher crime rates, lower quality of life, and increased psychological distress among students (Parker, 2023). Therefore, ensuring physical safety is essential for overall well-being and societal development.

Emotional safety refers to an individual's sense of security in expressing thoughts, feelings, and experiences without fear of judgment, humiliation, or retaliation. It is a crucial aspect of psychological well-being, fostering trust, open communication, and a supportive environment in various settings, including schools, workplaces, and healthcare institutions (Brown & Smith, 2022). Emotional safety enables individuals to engage in learning, collaboration, and personal growth without anxiety or fear of negative consequences (Johnson et al., 2023). In educational settings, emotional safety plays a significant role in student performance and engagement. Research has shown that when students feel emotionally secure, they are more likely to participate actively in class, take academic risks, and perform better (Anderson & Miller,

2021). Schools that prioritize emotional safety implement policies against bullying, create inclusive environments, and encourage teacher-student relationships based on mutual respect (Parker, 2023). In workplace environments, emotional safety contributes to job satisfaction, teamwork, and overall productivity. Employees who feel emotionally secure are more innovative, willing to share ideas, and less likely to experience burnout (Roberts & Taylor, 2023). Similarly, in healthcare settings, emotionally safe environments enhance patient, trust and satisfaction, leading to better health outcomes (Thompson, 2022).

The absence of emotional safety can lead to stress, anxiety and withdrawal from social or professional interactions. Students in emotionally unsafe environments often struggle with self-esteem, experience decreased motivation, and may face long-term psychological consequences (Williams & Johnson, 2023). Thus, ensuring emotional safety is essential for fostering well-being, resilience, and positive interpersonal relationships.

Students' academic achievement refers to the extent to which learners attain their educational goals, demonstrating mastery of knowledge, skills, and competencies in various subject areas. It is typically measured through assessments such as grades, standardized test scores, and overall performance in coursework (Steinmayr et al., 2021). Academic achievement is a key indicator of students' intellectual progress and is influenced by multiple factors, including teaching quality, school environment, parental involvement, and students' motivation (Ghazarian & Buehler, 2022). Academic achievement is often categorized into cognitive and non-cognitive domains. The cognitive domain includes subject-specific knowledge such as mathematics, science, and literacy, while the non-cognitive domain involves skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). High academic achievement is associated with increased opportunities for higher education, career success, and overall life satisfaction (Heckman & Kautz, 2022).

Research suggests that students' academic performance is significantly affected by psychological and environmental factors. A supportive school environment, well-structured curricula, and effective teaching strategies contribute positively to academic achievement (Zhang & Ziegler, 2023). Furthermore, self-regulated learning and intrinsic motivation have been found to play essential roles in enhancing students' performance and academic success (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students' academic achievement is a multifaceted concept that goes beyond mere grades, encompassing a broad spectrum of cognitive and behavioral competencies that prepare individuals for future personal and professional success. Ensuring quality education, fostering motivation, and creating conducive learning environments are crucial for improving students' academic outcomes.

In the context of Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state, recent studies have highlighted the importance of school safety in educational outcomes. For instance, a study by Osuji and David (2021) examined the perceived influence of COVID-19 safety measures on teachers' instructional delivery in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The findings underscored the significance of implementing safety protocols to ensure effective teaching and

learning processes. Furthermore, research by Ogan (2023) investigated teachers' awareness of the tort of negligence and its impact on students' safety in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The study revealed a significant relationship between teachers' understanding of their duty of care and the safety of students, suggesting that increased awareness among educators contributes to a safer school environment. Despite these insights, there remains a paucity of comprehensive research exploring the direct correlation between school safety and students' academic achievement in secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, academic achievement among students in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state Nigeria has remained alarmingly poor despite the efforts of stakeholders in the education sector. According to the records from the Rivers state Ministry of Education (2020-2024), the average pass rate in core subjects such as Mathematics, English, Biology, and Economics in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) and Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) has consistently declined. For instance, in 2020 the average credit pass rate was 52.3%, which dropped to 47.1% in 2021, 45.6% in 2022, and further declined to 43.4% in 2023, before a marginal increase to 44.2% in 2024. This downward trend in academic performance raises serious concerns about the underlying factors affecting students learning outcomes, especially in a city considered to be the economic and educational hub of the state.

Many previous studies have attributed poor academic achievement to factors such as inadequate teaching materials, poor instructional methods, overcrowded classrooms, and socio-economic challenges, there is growing evidence that school safety may play a critical but often overlooked role. School safety refers to the extent to which students feel physically and emotionally secured within the school environment. Issues such as bullying, violence, cultism, vandalism, lack of perimeter fencing, unsafe toilets, absence of emergency protocols, and even frequent threats from outside the school environment contribute to insecurity in the schools. When students perceive school as unsafe, it leads to chronic absenteeism, psychological stress, poor concentration, and ultimately poor academic performance. In Port Harcourt metropolis, reports of violent incidents in and around public schools, including assaults on students and teachers have become more frequent, yet their impact on students' academic achievement remains under-investigated.

This study is therefore necessitated by the existing gap in research concerning the influence of school safety on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Despite numerous interventions aimed at improving instructional quality and providing educational resources, the persistent low achievement suggests that more deep-rooted environment and psychological factors such as school safety may be significant contributors. Hence, this study seeks to explore the extent to which school safety influences academic achievement among students in public secondary schools within Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers State Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study was to examine the influence of school safety on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers state, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the extent to which physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.
2. Find out the extent to which emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between physical safety and students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between emotional safety and students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 27,082 teachers and students comprising 25,077 students and 2,005 teachers in the 35 public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria. The sample size of the study was 727 respondents comprising 394 students and 333 teachers. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamene's formula. The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample size. The instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire titled; "School Safety Students Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SSSAAQ)". Responses to the

questionnaire items were structured on a four- point summated rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) – 4points, High Extent (HE) – 3points, Low Extent (LE) – 2points and Very Low Extent (VLE)-1point. The instrument was validated by experts in educational measurement and test construction. The reliability of the instrument gave a Cronbach Alpha index of 0.84 which was considered reliable. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the formulated null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does physical safety influences students’ academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings on physical safety and students’ academic achievement

S/N.	Questionnaire Items	Students (394)			Teachers (333)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Physical safety Enhances Concentration and Focus among students.	3.26	1.15	HE	3.18	1.09	HE
2.	Physical safety reduces students’ absenteeism.	2.13	1.10	LE	2.28	1.17	LE
3.	Physical safety Improves Student-Teacher Interaction.	3.20	1.18	HE	3.11	1.06	HE
4.	Physical safety boosts academic performance.	3.47	1.13	HE	3.43	1.09	HE
5.	Physical safety encourages positive behavior among students.	3.18	1.16	HE	3.28	1.04	HE
6.	Physical safety Enhances Extracurricular Participation	3.33	1.11	HE	3.26	1.19	HE
7.	Physical safety strengthens parental confidence in schools.	3.21	1.15	HE	3.08	1.10	HE
Grand Mean		3.11	1.14	HE	3.09	1.11	HE

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 revealed the extent to which physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria. Majority of the respondents agreed with all the items in the table except item 2. The grand mean scores of

3.11, 3.09 and standard deviation scores of 1.14 and 1.11 for students and teachers respectively indicate that physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state at a high extent rating.

Research Question 2: To what extent does emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean ratings on emotional safety and students' academic achievement.

S/N.	Questionnaire Items	Students (394)			Teachers (333)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
8.	Emotional safety enhances concentration and learning.	3.30	1.08	HE	3.10	1.07	HE
9.	Emotional safety reduces anxiety and stress Among students.	3.01	1.12	HE	3.05	1.13	HE
10.	Emotional safety boosts self-confidence in students.	2.02	1.17	LE	2.10	1.15	LE
11.	Emotional safety encourages student engagement in school activities.	3.10	1.10	HE	3.20	1.14	HE
12.	Emotional safety improves teacher-student relationships.	3.48	1.13	HE	3.41	1.17	HE
13.	Emotional safety reduces bullying and peer pressure among students.	3.31	1.07	HE	3.19	1.20	HE
14.	Emotional safety supports mental well-being of students.	2.15	1.11	LE	2.04	1.16	LE
	Grand Scores	2.91	1.11	HE	3.01	1.15	HE

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2 revealed the extent to which emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state. Majority of the respondents agreed with all the items in the table except item 10 and 14. The grand mean scores of 2.91, 3.01 and standard deviation scores of 1.11 and 1.15 for students and teachers respectively indicate that emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state at a high extent rating.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between physical safety and students’ academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.

Table 3: Z-test analysis on physical safety and students’ academic achievement.

Category of Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	A	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Students	394	3.11	1.14	0.05	725	0.24	±1.96	Ho
Teachers	333	3.09	1.11					Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

From table 3, the calculated z-value of 0.24 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 725 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Given the above, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between physical safety and students’ academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state is rejected. The implication of this is that students and teachers consented that physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between emotional safety and students’ academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state, Nigeria.

Table 4: Z-test analysis on emotional safety and students’ academic achievement.

Category of Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	A	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Students	394	2.91	1.11	0.05	725	-1.17	±1.96	Ho
Teachers	333	3.01	1.15					Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

From table 4, the calculated z-value of -1.17 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 725 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Given the above, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between emotional safety and students’ academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state is hereby rejected. The implication of this is that students and teachers agreed that emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study for research question one revealed that physical safety influences students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis

of Rivers state Nigeria at a high extent rating. With grand mean scores of 3.11 and 3.09 which are greater than the criterion means of 2.50. The corresponding hypothesis one also revealed that there is a significant difference between physical safety and students' academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state Nigeria. This finding is in line with the finding of Parker (2023), which revealed that, lack of physical safety can lead to stress, anxiety, and reduced engagement in daily activities. Studies indicate that environments with inadequate safety measures contribute to higher crime rates, lower quality of life, and increased psychological distress among individuals. The finding is also in line with Anderson & Miller (2022) who opined that, physical safety encompasses measures and policies designed to prevent accidents, violence, and exposure to hazardous conditions in homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

The findings of the study for research question two revealed that emotional safety influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers state Nigeria at a high extent rating. With grand mean scores of 2.91 and 3.01 which are greater than the criterion means of 2.50. The corresponding hypothesis two also revealed that there is a significant between emotional safety and students' academic achievement in public secondary schools. This finding is in line with the view of Williams & Johnson (2023) who mentioned that, the absence of emotional safety can lead to stress, anxiety, and withdrawal from social or professional interactions. Students' in emotionally unsafe environments often struggle with self-esteem, experience decreased motivation, and may face long-term psychological consequences.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that, school safety in form of physical safety and emotional safety both influences students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers state, Nigeria. School safety plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers state. A secure and conducive learning environment fosters students' concentration, engagement, and overall performance. However, persistent safety challenges such as bullying, violence, cultism, and inadequate security measures continue to hinder effective teaching and learning in many schools. These issues not only create fear and anxiety among students but also impact teachers' ability to maintain discipline and deliver quality education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthening Security Measures:** The government and school authorities should implement stricter security protocols, including the installation of CCTV cameras,

perimeter fencing, and the presence of trained security personnel to monitor school premises and prevent unauthorized access.

2. Enforcement of Anti-Bullying Policies: Schools should establish and enforce strict anti-bullying policies to protect students from physical and emotional harassment. This can be achieved through awareness programs, counseling services, and disciplinary measures for offenders.

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