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## Safety in Work Environment and Teachers' Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examined Safety Management for the Enhancement of Staff Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The paper adopted the desk-study approach in which related literatures were reviewed in the area of safety management as it relates to the enhancement of staff performance in schools. The paper looked into safety measures available in Public Secondary schools in Rivers State, Impact of Safety Issues on Teacher Performance, Management Approach to handling Safety of Teachers and the concept of teacher performance. The paper decried the inadequate or in some cases unavailability of safety measures in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The paper concluded that there is need for management or employers of teachers to provide safety gadgets in the offices and ensure effective use of such resources by teachers. The teachers themselves cannot work in an unsafe environment. Both the employer of the teacher and the teacher himself have mutual role of ensuring safety in the workplace. When teacher are safe or feel safe it will enhance their job performance of effecting teaching and the overall benefit will be on the school organization producing or graduating quality students. The paper suggested that management should provide modern and up-to-date safety equipment for teachers both in the staff room and class rooms, among others.*

**Keywords:** Safety, management, enhancement, staff performance, public secondary schools, Rivers state.

## **Introduction**

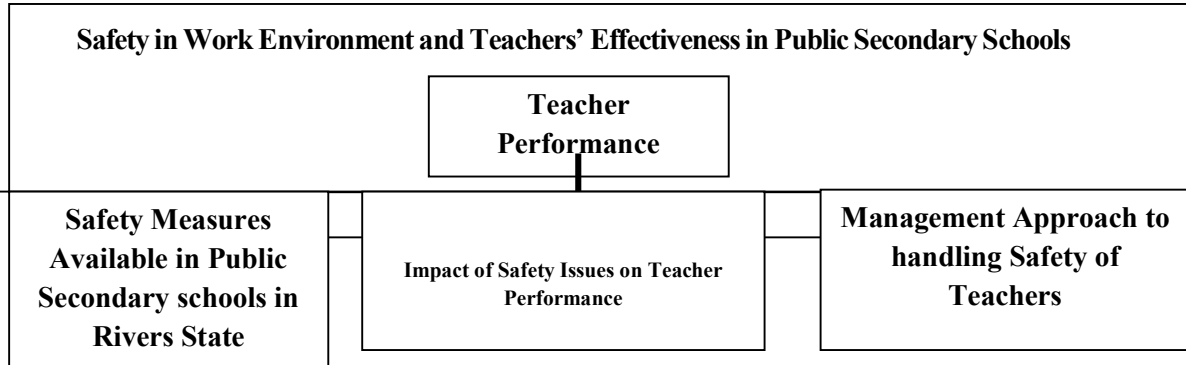
Safety concerns in public secondary schools are rife. Safety and health measure are hardly put in place to forestall injuries and performance obstruction of teaching staff. The impact of safety issues on teacher performance should be taken seriously by school administrators in our public schools. Management approach to handling safety of teachers should be taken with utmost priority. Teaching staff or any other staff for that matter that does not feel secure may not be in the right poise to perform or carry out assigned duty effectively. Among the obstacles facing its implementation are safety and health issues vis-a- vis students and staffs of secondary schools, safety and health are fundamental to achieving any goal in life. Safety is a state in which hazards and conditions that could lead to physical, physiological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and wellbeing of individuals and the property. This implies relative freedom from risks or harm or loss of lives and property. School environment should be such that exude serene atmosphere crucial for effective teaching and learning. The level at which violence incidences and bullying, rape, kidnapping and diseases –attacks occurs in senior secondary school in recently calls for concern. Studies have shown that many schools in Nigeria are not safe. The schools are often filled with obsolete structures, overcrowded classrooms with single doors, lack of emergency exit routes, fire extinguishers and etc are features of many universities in Nigeria.

Healthful secondary schools in Rivers State environment is critical for productive instructional delivery. According to World Health Organization (1948) health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. As encompassing as and complex this definition is, it is important to recognize that health has gone beyond state of completeness when considering the emerging intricacies that have greeted medical field in recently. Huber and Lownsborough (2004) contend that health be viewed from the context of ability to adapt and manage. This implies that health transcends freedom from illness to managing health issues, and chronic conditions, in order to sustain healthy living. Management is an on-going exercise that involves planning, organizing, coordinating and decision –making with a view to utilizing and optimizing organizational scarce resources effectively in order to achieve institutional set goals. The teachers are the backbone of management. The secondary school is a social system, that engender interaction within its fold and the public, is headed by the principal who doubles as safety officer-is responsible for the safety of the teachers. Safety and health management is organizational management function planning activities, assessing responsibilities, establishing procedures and allocating resources for evolving, implementing and sustaining safety and health programmes for the promotion of safety and health of students and staffs. Safety management is an on-going process of indentifying hazards, assessing and controlling of risks, evaluating and reviewing measures to ensure that they are effectively implemented. The implementing safety and health policies in universities can at best be said to differ from one secondary schools to another. The lack of safety statements, dilapidated infrastructure such as toilet facilities, portable water supply system and poor funding, location of schools to hazard prone areas, lack of health disposition among others constitute safety and health issues to teachers in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Security is one of the primary needs of man after food. The increasing rate of insecurity in all facets of the Nigerian economy and educational system leaves a lot to be desired. The security situation around teacher in secondary schools appear to have grown to concerning stage especially as members of staff attached to top management. Teachers and their employers have become under threat in recent times. The emergency platforms, health care centres, office safety tools and general secondary schools in Rivers State ambience appears not to portray readiness to cope with health and safety cases in the secondary schools in Rivers State.

This study will therefore look into security challenges in secondary schools run by Rivers State Government as it affects teaching and learning in the educational institutions as required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or contemporary environment.

**Conceptual clarification**



**The concept of safety in work place**

According to Ellen (2014), the best place to start when examining office security is the physical layout of the office itself, or the layout of the larger building of which the office is a part. Staff room design should stress wide, open areas with clear sight lines. Hallways and teacher offices should be open and have no nooks or crannies where an intruder could hide in the shadows. All areas should be well lit, especially after hours when employees might be working alone or in small groups. Mirrors in stairwells and inside and outside of elevators allow employees to see around corners or past obstructions. Doors and windows are the most obvious access points to the staff room and should be secured. Avoid double doors because they are easily hinged open. Ideally, entranceway doors particularly those used for deliveries, etc. should be steel, or steel-sheathed. This helps with security and also aids in fire prevention. Door hinges should face inward whenever possible; use non-removable pins and screws if it is not possible. Simply upgrading hinges and door locks is one of the cheapest and most effective security steps a school environment can take. Deadbolt locks are best, whether they are electronically controlled or manual in nature. Combination locks on washrooms and other common areas are also an excellent option. Teachers don't have to carry keys and the combination can be changed frequently. All windows should use key locks, and windows near the ground level or fire escapes should have steel bars or lockable gates that meet local fire codes (Allen 2014). This is a very powerful tool to maintain a high level of security in secondary schools. It is also very useful to be used as the preventive security measures as well as incident tracking mechanisms. A robust surveillance helps to strengthen workplace security in real time environments. The monitoring of critical points such as entrance, exit, class rooms, critical data center and others should be fully monitored through robust CCTV surveillance systems. Security lighting is very important aspects of a robust workplace security. It is not only helpful for surveillance system, but also used for manual guarding and light interruption systems to take preventive security measures at the workplace. The security alarm system is much needed for preempting any security breach or malicious activity.

The badges and tokens are used to differentiate the internal and external peoples so that a proper surveillance and monitoring can be used more effectively. Normally, this is very useful for the large workplace security areas.

A comprehensive workplace security is very important because it will reduce liabilities, insurance, compensation and other social security expenses to be paid by the company to the stakeholders. Thus, you increase your school environment revenue and reduce the operational charges that incur on your school environment budgets. Heffes, (2013) states that ergonomics which is an aspect of work place safety requires that all workplace security aspects are done in accordance with regulatory school environment such as safety electronics. The following steps could be taken to ensure safety aspects for the teachers:

- ❖ Evaluate and assess the safety needs of the workplace
- ❖ Devise a comprehensive policy to cover all of the above aspects
- ❖ Consult with regulatory consultants or contractors to add recommendations from the regulatory school environment
- ❖ Get entire aspects installed through third party contractors based on the agreed scope of work
- ❖ Get the system tested and verified as per requirements
- ❖ Commission the system for real world operations
- ❖ Keep maintaining the systems as per workplace security policy

### **Safety measures and facilities in school workplace**

There have been security challenges in public secondary schools requiring putting safety and security measures in place in order to allow for effective teacher performance. Harzards to safety and health concerns are hardly addressed in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Issues such as students involvement in cultism, faulty furniture, unrepaired facilities. The provision of sick bays or campus clinics for prompt attention to injury issues at work are not available in public schools in developing countries, like Nigeria (Brady, 2000). Heffes, (2013) affirms that improvements in electronics, computers, and other high-tech security features have given school environment owners new tools to fight crime in recent years. Perhaps the most common electronic tools are closed-circuit surveillance systems and access-control systems. Electronic security in offices exist in the dimension of closed-circuit surveillance systems use television cameras to monitor specific areas of a company's workspace. Signals from the cameras are fed back to a central monitoring post, where a security guard or company employee watches for signs of abnormal activity.

These systems are effective both during school environment hours and after hours. But while video technologies can be an effective deterrent and investigative tool, a closed-circuit system only works as well as the people monitoring it. The guard or employee must give the video monitors his or her complete attention. Access-control systems start with establishing "point of control" access over an office. That means that all tenants and guests are routed through a control area before admittance is authorized. The control point can be as low-tech as a sign-in sheet or as high-tech as an elaborate system to scan the fingerprints or retinas of visitors (most security experts understandably cite the former as an inadequate measure, in and of itself). Most common is the use of access cards, or "swipe" cards. These cards are electronic "keys the user passes a part of the card through an electronic reader stationed outside a door, and, if the person is authorized to enter, the door is unlocked. Newer versions of the swipe cards include video imaging. A central computer stores a photo of the employee and as much pertinent information as the company desires, including work hours, emergency contact numbers, license plate numbers and make of car, and other information.

Electronic cards are preferable to metal keys because an electronic key can be deactivated at a moment's notice if an employee is fired or deemed a security risk.

If metal keys are used, every lock in the building has to be replaced if a security breach is suspected (US Department of State, 2013). Other electronic systems that are being used by security-conscious firms include tiny hidden cameras, panic buttons that summon security when pressed, and electronic door chimes that make it easy to tell when someone has entered a workspace. The tiny cameras are perhaps the most popular innovation. They are small enough to be hidden in a clock face or a heating vent, yet provide a powerful tool for monitoring employees in areas where employee theft is suspected. Use of the cameras only works if their existence is kept a secret from the employees that are under suspicion (Kote, 2014). However, Marshal (2014) raised alarm that these security electronics are rarely found in our secondary schools or government/public institutions thereby putting the life of the employees in jeopardy. Finally, identification tag systems are an increasingly popular tool in many school environments. Laminated photo identification cards are inexpensive to produce and update, and they can instantly identify employees and the department from which they hail. These photo ID cards can be particularly useful for larger, diversified enterprises in which employees may not know or interact with every other member of the workforce.

Alarm systems are another popular office security tool. There are two primary types of alarm systems: those that sound a loud siren or other noise when a break-in is detected, and those that send a silent alarm directly to a security company or to the police, who then respond to the alarm. The type of alarm chosen depends in large part on where the school environment is located. Loud alarms work well in small towns or in low-crime areas, but school environments located in urban or high-crime areas have found that nearby residents have often become so used to alarms going off that they ignore them. In that case, a silent system linked directly to the police may be preferable (Kote, 2014). Systems can range in complexity and price. However, any alarm system must cover all the doors and windows into a school environment to be effective. Most common are motion sensors that detect movement where it is not supposed to be occurring, or window glass bugs that are activated when glass is broken. Examples of advanced systems include combined audio and video alert systems that are triggered by noise. When the sounds of a break-in are detected, the security company is alerted and can listen in to what is occurring at the site. The security company can then activate video monitors to see what is happening at the site, or the cameras can be set up to begin recording automatically when the first sound is detected. As with the closed-circuit television systems, the key to a good alarm system is that it must be monitored at all times. If an alarm goes off and no one is there to notice, or if it is ignored, then office security has not been enhanced at all. In fact, the alarm may have provided a false sense of security that kept a company from pursuing other security measures (Allen, 2014).

### **Teacher performance and safety in workplace**

The teacher cannot work under duress. Tension is the bane of comfort in a modern office situation. It is common knowledge that a security system is only as secure as its weakest link. In many cases, that weak link is the company's employees. Untrained in security measures and prone to the attitude that "it can't happen to me," many employees are their own worst enemies when it comes to security. When a company installs a new security system, it should take the time to bring in a security consultant to speak to employees about what they can do to increase their own safety and improve the company's security. Among the measures according to Heffes (2014) the consultant will advise are:

- Do not leave valuables unattended.
- Lock doors after hours.
- Do not go into poorly lighted areas after dark.
- Bolt down or secure equipment if possible.

- Engrave identification numbers on office equipment and keep a list of serial numbers to give to the police and insurance schools in case of theft.
- Provide each employee with a drawer that locks.
- Verify identification and purpose of visit before letting non-employees into office space.
- Deposit checks and cash daily.
- Never leave visitors unsupervised.
- Try to leave with at least one other employee if working late.
- Do not advertise vacation plans.
- Keep emergency numbers posted at every phone.
- Make sure confidential files are secured when the office is closed.

As computers have become an everyday part of almost every school environment, schools have found it harder and harder to protect their proprietary information and their money. (Only failed attempts at espionage lead to arrests and quantifying the problem is difficult.) According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, espionage and espionage-related matters cost the nation an estimated \$100 billion per year. This does not include the estimated \$250 billion American schools lose to copyright piracy annually. Much of that theft occurs electronically. Unfortunately for most schools, the greatest risk of theft or sabotage, often comes from the organization's employees themselves. In fact, many experts believe that a significant percentage of small school environment failures are directly related to internal theft of money, property, information, and time. Few occurrences are as potentially destructive to a school environment as employee theft, embezzlement, or misappropriation of company funds (Heffes, 2014). Nweke (2018) alarms that Internal computer theft has become one of the most common forms of employee theft now that computers have become more common in nearly every industry sector. Indeed, employees often are more computer literate than their supervisors, which may strengthen the temptation to abscond with proprietary information or otherwise engage in illicit activities. Computer theft can take many forms, including false data entry, which is almost impossible to track; slicing off small amounts of data or money that add up over time; superzapping, which occurs when a computer network security bypass code falls into the wrong hands; and scanning, or using a high-speed computer to locate data that would be impossible to find by hand, then using that data for illegal purposes.

Sabotage, which can also cost millions, almost always involves disgruntled current or former employees and can take almost any form, from defacing company property to deleting or altering important company data. As mentioned above, using access-control cards for employees that can be easily deactivated makes it easier to keep ex-employees out of the workplace and track the activities of current employees (Heffes, 2014). Employee theft is so prevalent and so costly to schools, school administrators need to take every precaution and use every means possible to stop employee theft. According to Nweke (2018) some of the steps that can be taken are:

- Making sure that security starts at the top. School administrators should set a good and honest example. Establish a clear policy on theft and security and distribute it to all employees.
- Install a security program that meets your company's needs.
- Follow up on references provided by prospective new hires.
- Keep checkbooks locked up.
- Control cash flow and have good documentation on where money is spent.
- Do not leave bookkeeping to just one person without checks and balances.
- Audit internal financial documents frequently using independent auditors.
- Only allow a few people to have authority to sign checks.
- Check all invoices to make sure they match what was delivered.

### **Management role in safety in school environment**

Safety of teachers in secondary schools is the responsibility of management. The resurgence of cultism in secondary schools have left teachers bare to harmful students (Heges, 2012). There are hardly adequate security gadgets and manpower to boost internal physical and electronic security of the both manpower and office equipment. There could be inherent office safety in ergonomics such as pains in back, neck or arms. Poorly set up computer or office workstations, over reaching or stretching, repetitive tasks such as data entry, poor ergonomics of software. Equipment cuts, electric shock, the right environment and ergonomics should be maintained and provided by management to enable teachers carry out their job effectively. Possible causes identified include Faulty equipment, no or poor maintenance of equipment, user inattention (Kote, 2014).

### **Teacher effectiveness**

Jennifer and George (2006), argued that the performance of teachers contribute directly to an organization's level of effectiveness, efficiency and even towards the achievement of administrative goals. It also stated that a corporation's failure to certify that its workers are motivated has a negative influence on its organizational effectiveness and efficiency thereby affecting employee's productivity levels concerning expected goals and objectives. According to Antomioni (1999) a worker's level of productivity is reliant on the extent at which workers believe that certain safety desires will be fulfilled stating that workers become demoralized as such less productive once they perceive that their desires can't be met or gratified. Mathis and John (2003) suggested that productivity refers to a measure of the quantity and quality of work done, bearing in mind the cost of capital used. The greater the level of organizational productivity, the greater the competitive edge. This is because the costs associated with the production of goods and services are lesser. Better productivity ratios does not automatically mean that more output is manufactured; it could also mean that less workers or less financial resources and time were utilized in producing the similar output. McNamara (2003) stated that productivity may be denoted in form of quality, quantity, time and cost. He also stated that evaluating productivity has to with measuring the length of time it takes an average employee to produce a specified level of output in a safe environment. Although measuring productivity may seem difficult, it is however very significant since it directly affects organizational profitability. Brady (2000) claimed that none of the resources utilized for production in the workplace are so thoroughly examined as the human capital. Most of the activities carried out in HR Systems are intended to influence worker or organizational productivity. Compensation, evaluation systems, training and development, recruitment, job characteristics are HR responsibilities directly aimed at productivity. Bernardin (2007) clearly stated that the importance of motivational factors cannot be underestimated by an organization in increasing the productivity levels of a workforce especially when trying to gain competitive advantage. He also stated that productivity may be hard to measure, but it can be evaluated in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of workers. Teachers are expected to deliver their teaching mandate effectiveness but they must feel safe doing so.

### **Impact of safety and health on teachers' performance**

In general, effectiveness is referred to as the degree to which set objectives are accomplished and policies achieve what they were designed to achieve. In this regard effectiveness refers to both the employee and the employer. The employer has the role of ensures the right environment is provided for the teacher (employee) while the employee is to ensure judicious use of the available resources (Yesufu, 2000). It focuses on affecting the purpose that is achieving the required or projected results. A program or service is said to be effective if such a program is able to accomplish set objectives or estimated outcomes. As regards workers, it is a measure of how well workers productivity levels meet set goals and objectives of the organization (Yesufu, 2000).

Therefore an employee is said to be effective when he/she is able to achieve desired results in line with organizational goals and objectives in the right environment of safety. Efficiency on the other hand is productivity of estimated effects; specifically productivity without any form of waste. This has to do with workers abilities to work productively with minimum waste in terms of energy, time and cost. Efficiency is more or less a contrast between the use of inputs in a clearly defined process and generated outputs. For instance, given a specified number of input or resources, a decision making entity be it individual, corporate, administrative institution, or a state realizes a level of output considered to be the maximum achievable based on the present conditions, then such an entity is assumed to be efficient. However if it generates lesser than what it is estimated to generate it is said to be inefficient. As such efficiency stems from the correlation between inputs and outputs, and is referred to basically as the degree to which outputs are produced while minimizing manufacturing costs (Harris, 2001).

### Conclusion

There is need for management or employers of teachers to provide safety gadgets in the office and ensure effective use of such resources by teachers. The teachers themselves cannot work in an unsafe environment. Both the employer of the teacher and the teacher himself have mutual role of ensuring safety in the workplace. When teacher are safe or feel safe it will enhance their job performance of effecting teaching and the overall benefit will be on the school organization producing or graduating quality students.

### Suggestions

Based on the reviewed literature, the following suggestions have been reached:

1. Management should provide modern and up-to-date safety equipment for teachers both in the staff room and class rooms.
2. Teachers' safety should be prioritized by themselves as well as their employers for effective delivery of the teachers' role in the school system.
3. Management should from time to time organize safety drill for teachers.

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