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**SCHOOLS' SAFETY, HEALTH AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN
NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.**

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Abstract

Ethics and standard are both important factors in the quality of a school. This paper examines the basic knowledge on how to deal with school safety and health issues in a learning environment. Every school manager needs a working knowledge of the occupational safety and Health Act, its purpose, standards, managements' roles in safety, as well as staff/students' and school management rights and responsibilities. Occupational safety law i.e the legal environment, Breach of statutory duty and causes of accidents were also discussed. The paper suggested that in preventing accidents in order to ensure school's health and safety, the school must perform two basic activities: reducing unsafe conditions and reducing unsafe acts so as to promote effective learning environment. In conclusion, instituting a basic facility security programme involves analyzing the current level of risk and then installing mechanical, natural and organizational security systems. Recommendations were made among which are that there should be formulation of school safety and health committee which should comprises of all representative of the school stakeholders. As part of pre-requisites for establishment of educational institutions, safety and health should be given priority.

Keywords: School safety, health, learning environment, unsafe conditions and unsafe acts.

Introduction

School plant includes the site, the building, the development of permanent and semi-permanent structures such as workshop, laboratory, sport centre, office tools, furniture, school bus and chalkboard, among others calls for safety. It is imperative to know that in sub-sahara Africa especially in Nigeria education is exposed to threats such as: Ebola, kidnapping and high level of insurgent attacks which almost paralyzed the educational system with reference to 200 chibok girls in 2014. These had lead to the initiative tagged ‘safe-school initiative’ by Federal Government of Nigeria and supported by international bodies such as UNESCO, World Bank and others.

Safety and accident prevention concern managers for several reasons, one of which is the staggering number of workplace accidents. The U.S. Department of Labour says workplace accidents in the United States cause over 3.8 million occupational injuries and illnesses per year. Such figures may actually underestimate the real number of injuries and illness by two or three times (Tahira, 2006). Injuries are not just problems in dangerous industries like construction. Injuries and illnesses occur at manufacture of computers and computer peripherals, commercial kitchens have hazards like knives and slippery floors, new computers contribute to “sick building syndrome” symptoms like headaches and sniffles, which some experts blame on poor ventilation (Hofstede, 1992). An office work is susceptible to other health problems, including “repetitive trauma injuries related to computer use, respiratory illnesses stemming from indoor air quality and high levels of stress” (Moretz, 2000). But even facts like these do not tell the whole story, they do not show the human suffering incurred by the injured workers and their families or the real economic costs incurred by employers, nor do they reflect the legal implications. Yet, there are employers who seem to take safety less serious than they should.

Students and staff (teaching and non-teaching) safety in schools must be placed as top priority. Safety is an issue that both students and staff must take very seriously. Accidents can occur at anytime and anyplace, but if people are aware of the safety measures, the majority of the time accidents can be avoided, everyone must take responsibility for his/her own safety and must also take action to help stop harm to others. Adebayo (2009), Ogunsola, Baba, Sheu and Abdullahi (2014) found out that if one breaks the rules of preventive health, one will surely see the repercussion.

Safety is the state of being safe, the condition of being protected against physical, social, spiritual, financial, political, emotional, occupational, psychological, educational failure, damage, error, accidents, harm or any other events which could be considered non-desirable. Safety can also be defined to be the control of acceptable level of risks, this can take the form of being protected from the event or from exposure to something that causes health or economical losses. It can include protection of people or of possessions.

Students' health makes reference to health care services that are provided in the school, by government and other stakeholders in the educational programme, it also includes keeping teachers healthy while they are at work. By providing staff with a safe working environment, school management is to ensure that their staff are taken care of and also show concern for their staff welfare. Not only is the work environment a safe one physically, but it ought to be a safe emotional and mental place as well, mental health is just as important as physical health (Nicole, 2014).

Roles of Management in School Safety and Health.

Reducing accidents often boils down to reducing accident-causing conditions and accident-causing acts. When you open premises, you become legally responsible for the health

and safety of occupants, visitors or people nearby. School occupants have a legal duty under the Health and Safety Information for employees' regulation. It is a school management's duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their students and staff. School must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this. This means making sure that student and others are protected from anything that may cause harm, effectively controlling any risks to injury or health that could arise in the school.

School management has duties under health and safety law to assess risks in the school premises. School managers must give information about the risk in workplaces and how to be protected, also instruct and train staff and students on how to deal with these risks. The school head has a prerogative role for the safety and health of the school and its occupants. This role includes planning for and administering the day to day safety and health arrangement at the school in order to provide children with a safe, secure healthy and peaceful environment in which learning can occur.

Management must consult students, teaching staff and non-teaching on health and safety issues. Consultation must be either direct or through a safety representative that is either elected by the students or appointed by a trade union. Policies like these start at the management level. Ideally, safety is an integral part of the system woven into each management competency and a part of everyone's day-to-day responsibilities (Pierce, 2000).

The school management should institutionalize top management commitment with a safety policy, and publicize it. It should give safety matters high priority in meetings. Also analyze the number of accidents and incidents and then set specific achievable safety goals.

Occupational Safety Law (The legal environment)

The law here is governed by the Factories Act, (CAP 126 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990). The main and relevant provisions are contained in parts IV, V and VI of the Act.

Summary will be given only of the important provisions here.

I. Health Provisions

Cleanliness: Every school premises shall be kept in a clean state and free from effluvia arising from any drain, sanitary convenience or nuisance.

Overcrowding: A classroom shall not, while teaching and learning is carried on, be so overcrowded as to cause risk of injury to the health of the students and staff therein and it is overcrowding for each such person to have less than four hundred cubic feet of space.

Ventilation: Effective and suitable provision shall be made for securing and maintaining the circulation of fresh air in each classroom/offices which should be at least nine feet high between the floor and the ceiling and must be adequately ventilated and suitably lit in every part. Schlimme (2002) observed that by building a conducive and well ventilated house for living, will make life livable and satisfying.

Lighting: Effective provision shall be made for securing and maintaining sufficient and suitable lighting, whether natural or artificial in every part of the school in which students/teachers are working or passing.

Drainage of floors: Where any process is carried on which renders the floor liable to be left to some extent that the wet is capable of being removed by drainage, effective means shall be provided and maintained for draining off the wet.

Sanitary Conveniences: Sufficient and suitable sanitary conveniences for both teachers and students in the school shall be provided, maintained and kept clean; such conveniences shall

afford proper separate accommodation for students and teachers .e.g. toilet, waste bin e.t.c. Adebayo (2009) submitted that having access to safe water and sanitary facilities as well as better hygienic practices can reduce morbidity rate of water related diseases.

Protective Clothing and Appliances: In case of a process which involves excessive exposure to any injurious or offensive substance, students and staff must be provided with suitable protective clothing. e.g glove, helmet, lab coat, goggles e.t.c for students & staff during practical.

II. Safety Provisions

The provisions are concerned, among other things, with fencing the school from burglary to keep the students, staff and property safe. Also, all prime movers and transmission machinery and the provision of a safe means of access to every place at which any person has at any time to work. All machinery used in the workshop including flywheels, prime movers, transmission machinery or other machinery that have some dangerous parts, are expected to be fenced in such a way as not to constitute danger to those who work in the premises.

There must be a safe means of access to every place at which any person has to work. Precaution must be taken in all places where dangerous fumes are liable to be present; suitable breathing and reviving apparatus, belts and ropes, must be provided and maintained so as to be readily available. For prevention of fire, the Act provides that every factory must be provided with readily accessible means for extinguishing fire which must be adequate and suitable having regard to the circumstances of the case. Goggles or effective screens must be provided for the use of workers/students engaged in certain specified processes. With regard to the training and supervision of inexperienced employees, the Act provides as follows:

No person shall be employed at any process, being a machine or process liable to cause bodily injury, unless he has been fully instructed as to the dangers likely to arise in connection therewith and the precautions to be observed, and,

- (a) has received a sufficient training in work at the machine or in the process; or
- (b) Is under adequate supervision by a person who has a thorough knowledge and experience of the machine or process.

In order to avoid unnecessary accidents, most organization set up safety committees. The duty of the safety committee is to instruct all employees on safe methods of working. A large number of the accidents that happen in manufacturing industries are not always due to breach of statutory duty by employers, but are mainly due to the carelessness of employees. In some cases the employees are ignorant of what to do. This is where the safety committee can be useful.

Safety Committee in secondary school

Composition: The committee that is in charge of school safety in Nigerian secondary schools is made up of:

- The Principal/Headmaster
- School Counsellor
- School Admin officer/Vice Principal (Administration)
- Hostel master/Mistress
- Head of Departments
- Sport master / Farm manager
- Laboratory/workshop attendant
- Students' representative.

Objectives of the School Safety Committee in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The objectives should include the following:

- (a) to examine and recommend changes in existing procedures to reduce environmental hazards;
- (b) to advise on matters affecting the safety and health of both staff and students;
- (c) to organize periodic and regular inspection of safety and fire appliances and to report on their adequacy and condition;
- (d) to educate staff and students in the correct use of safety equipment and appliances;
- (e) to ensure that the provisions of the Factories Act and its regulations are followed, and to report care or non-observance of safety regulations;
- (f) to stimulate the interest of staff and students in accident prevention;
- (g) to enquire into the circumstances of all accidents in the school and to recommend amendments to procedures to prevent recurrences.

Apart from cases of emergency when the Committee has to meet, the norm should be to meet once a month during working hours.

A burden is placed on the school management to report any individual accident which happens in the school. Accident causing loss of life or disabling a staff or student for more than five days from the school must be reported immediately to the nearest inspector of the school on the prescribed form and accompanied by the prescribed particulars. With regard to occupational diseases so specified, it is the duty of the member who believes or suspects, or has reasonable ground for believing or suspecting that a case of occupational disease has occurred in the school, shall immediately send a written notice of such case, in the prescribed form and accompanied by the prescribed particulars, to the nearest inspector of schools.

A legal action for school stakeholder's injury may be instituted either at common law or for breach at statutory duty. A worker who is injured on the job by the negligence of another person can claim damages from that person. Such a person may be a fellow worker/student, a stranger, an occupier of premises to which the worker is sent, a manufacturer of appliances which the worker/student uses; but in most cases he will be the school management. An employee can sue both the fellow worker, if he wishes, and claim compensation for injury caused by the fellow workers' negligence on the job.

Below are the school managements' duties:

- (a) competent staff of men
- (b) safe place for teaching and learning
- (c) safe system of teaching and learning
- (d) adequate building, laboratory and equipment .

Awareness on waste management, safety and health will strengthen

Breach of Statutory Duty

If the school management breaks one of his statutory duties e.g. to fence a machine/ equipment as provided in the factories Act and that breach causes damage to the staff/student of the kind that statute aimed to prevent, the staff/ student usually has the right to sue the school management for damages.

Both school management and school stakeholders have rights and responsibilities under the occupational safety Health Act as provided by the factory Act of (1990). Employers are responsible for providing "a work place free from recognized hazards", and for examining work place conditions to make sure they conform to factory Act standards. Employers have the right to

seek advice and off-site consultations, request and receive proper identification and to be advised by the compliance officer the reason for an inspection.

School stakeholders also have rights and responsibilities, they are responsible for example, for complying with all applicable Acts standards, for following all the employers safety health rules and regulations and for reporting hazardous conditions to the inspection. School stakeholders have a right to demand for safety of the job without fear of punishment.

Causes of Accidents

There are three basic causes of school accidents: chance occurrences, unsafe conditions, and employees' unsafe acts.

Chance occurrences (such as walking past a window just as someone hits a ball through it) are more or less beyond management's control. This paper will therefore focus on unsafe conditions and unsafe acts.

Unsafe Conditions and Other Work-Related Factors

Unsafe conditions are the main causes of accidents. They include things like:

- Improperly guarded equipment
- Defective equipment
- Hazardous procedures in, on, or around, workshops, sport centre, laboratory etc.
- Unsafe storage – congestion, overloading, overcrowding etc
- Improper illumination – glare, insufficient light.
- Improper ventilation – insufficient air change, impure air source (Dan Peterson, 2000)
- Lack of fence and security personnel.

The solution here is to identify and eliminate the unsafe conditions. The school's safety department and the school heads should take responsibility for identifying unsafe conditions.

Unsafe Acts

The question is what causes unsafe Acts. Unsafe acts can undo even the best attempts to reduce unsafe conditions. The problem is that there are no easy answers to the question of what causes people to act recklessly. It may seem intuitively obvious that some people are simply accident prone, but the research is not that clear (Pater & Russel, 2009). However, there is growing evidence that people with specific traits may indeed be accident prone. For example people who are impulsive, sensation seeking, extremely extroverted, and less conscientious (in terms of being less fastidious and dependable) are more likely to have accidents. (Douglas, 2005).

Measures against accident in a school

In practice, prevention is said to be better than cure, accident prevention boils down to two basic actions: (1) reducing unsafe condition (2) reducing unsafe acts. In large facilities, the school chief safety officer is responsible for this. In schools, school heads, including those from administrator, laboratory technician, sport directors, HOD, Home economics head, safety prefect, school farm manager and School managers, share these responsibilities.

Reducing Unsafe Conditions

Reducing unsafe conditions is always on employer's first line of defense in accident prevention; safety engineers should design jobs to reduce physical hazards.

Reducing Unsafe Acts

Although reducing unsafe conditions is the first line of defense, human misbehaviour can short-circuit even the best safety efforts. Sometimes the misbehaviour is intentional, but often it's not. Reducing unsafe acts will also require reducing potential distractions, such as noise, heat and stress. Ogunsola et al (2014) recommended that people need to be adequately informed on

environmental composition and their importance. Then, carefully screen and train staff as suggested below:

- Reducing unsafe act through selection and placement;
- Reducing unsafe acts through training;
- Reducing unsafe acts through motivation: posters, incentives, and positive reinforcement;
- Use behavior-based safety;
- Use staff/students participation; and
- Conduct safety and health audits and inspections (Lisa Cullen, 1999).

Needs for Safety and Health in Nigerian Secondary schools

Addressing safety and health issues in the school saves the school management money, encouraging learning and adds value to the school when students and staff stay whole and healthy, the direct cost – savings to school include:

- Lower teachers and students' compensation insurance costs
- Reduced medical expenditures
- Smaller expenditures for return to work programs
- Encourage teaching –learning process
- Reduce drop-out rate
- Lower costs for job accommodations for injured staff/students'
- Less money spent for overtime benefits, safety and health also make by reductions in indirect costs due to:
 - Increased promotion rate

- Increased morale which will invariably enhances teachers' commitment and students' learning process.
- It will promote better students/management relationship.
- Reduced turnover of staff, as there is provision for their safety and health which gives a job security.
- Better use of human resources, teachers, student and their family benefit from safety and health because:
- Their incomes are protected because provision had been made for their safety and health and their family lives are not hampered.
- They have less stress on what would have posed danger to teaching-learning process.

Implications of school safety and health on learning.

1. It will promote effective teaching and learning activities of schools where both the teacher and students are sure of good health and safety.
2. It will also enhance students' academic performance as environment play a vital role in students learning outcomes.
3. It will influence enrolment rate of school age population where the parent are sure of the safety of their children, they will gladly release them and students themselves will be eager to be in school.
4. Schools with safety and healthy environment will experience moderate staff retention rate and productivity as they are conscious of job security.

Conclusion and recommendations

Most employers today have occupational security and safety programs. Instituting a basic facility security programme involves analyzing the current level of risk and then installing

mechanical, natural and organizational security systems. It is obvious that life itself is a risk, but to promote learning in our educational institutions, safety, security and health should be paramount to school management.

As part of recommendations, schools and education administrators can adopt the following:

1. Formulation of school safety and health committee which should comprise of all representative of school stakeholders.
2. As part of pre-requisites for establishment of educational institutions, safety and health should be given priority.
3. There should be a bye-law that guides the operation of school in term of safety and health so that the school management will be informed on making learning environment secured and saved for effective learning. These can begin from following structural standard, preventive tools, appointment of safety or security officer etc.
4. Safety and health should be part of curriculum of the school so as to educate the students on its importance.
5. There school should be proper supervision and monitoring by top administrator (Ministry of Education) to ensure standard and implementations.
6. Schools can also be insured under any insurance policy; this will enhance proper implementation and enable the restoration of lost or risk in the long run.

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