



Implementation of the Fundamental Human Right of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State

¹Akumah Grace, ²Prof. Adali Onele

Department Of Educational Foundations Faculty of Education Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

¹akumagracedu@gmail.com, ²oneleadali22@yahoo.com

Phone: ¹08108080392, ²07034537479

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the extent of implementation of fundamental human rights of students in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The population of the study was 6,888 SS2 secondary school students from 224 public secondary schools in Ebonyi state. The sample size was 356 respondents drawn through Stratified proportionate sampling techniques. Instrument for the data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: "Extent of Implementation of Students' Fundamental Human Rights Questionnaire (EISFHRQ)". The instrument was validated by three experts, two from Department of Educational Foundations (Admin and Planning Option) and one expert from Department of Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation option) all in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method. It was subjected to Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient which yielded a correlation index of 0.69. Mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) was used to answer research questions, while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that implementation of the fundamental human right of students in terms of rights to life, fair hearing, and peaceful association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State were to a low extent and there was no significant difference in the mean rating of males and female students on the extent principal implements students' rights. Thus, the study recommended that: Government should establish an agency that will ensure that students' lives are protected through enforcement of rule of law in secondary schools. School authorities should see that justice is done, fair hearing and judging wisely when they need arise among students for peaceful relations. Students should be encouraged by their schools and parents to join approved association in the school to avoid joining secret societies like cults in the school environment.

Keywords: Fundamental human rights, Implementation of Education laws, Principal, Secondary Education

Introduction

Education is human rights that should be accorded to all human being especially at the tender age. According to Ekeh (2018) there are a lot of International human rights instruments that provide for education as a fundamental human right. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the African charter on human and people's rights (1981) and the child right Act (1992). As long as life is concerned, education whether formal, non-formal education, remains the ultimate means of enlightenment. It acquaints the individuals with the necessary skills and attitude with which to live with others in the society. According to Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2022), education has always been the avenue through which values, skills, attitudes, and belief system as well as mankind are acquired; sustained, modified, and eventually passed from one generation to the other. Education is as old as man right from creation. It helps man to socialize in the society. It is for this reason that Chukwudi (2023) described education as “a social process whereby the individual receives through teaching and learning, the necessary skills and knowledge to live successfully in the society”.

Ayeni (2020) sees education as the best instrument for developing human intellect, technical skills, character, and effective citizenship for self-reliance and national development. Education is often seen as a prerequisite for quality manpower development and creation of wealth, a sure pact to success in life and service to humanity. Supporting this Ekeh (2018) observed that the greatest investment a nation can make for the development of the economic, sociological and human resources is that of education. In this study, education is perceived as acquisition of desirable skills, attitude and knowledge that equip individuals to contribute effectively in the society.

It is through education that the individual acquires the knowledge of his fundamental human rights and legal responsibilities that enables one to live successfully in the society. Example of human right includes, right to life, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to education etc. The ability of the individual to understand and imbibe his fundamental human rights helps the individual to know his social and legal responsibilities. Understanding the fundamental human rights depends on not just the teaching of the fundamental human rights to the students but more on the extent of the implementation of the fundamental human rights in the schools, mostly in the secondary schools by the principals and teachers. It has been discovered that the extent of

implementation of the fundamental human rights of the students has a lot to talk about academic life/character of student and by extension determines their academic performance, in secondary schools. The implementation of the fundamental human rights of the students primarily begins with principals and teachers.

Eimuhi (2014) said that implementation is the stage where the preparations made earlier, the plans, designs, and analysis proposed are tested to see the result. In respect to this very study, implementation is the act of putting the fundamental human rights of the students into practice by the teachers for the positive academic performance of secondary school students. The extent of the implementation of the fundamental rights as it relates to unrest among students in secondary schools has been generating worries among the researchers in the field of education. Opinion generally had it that most practitioners in educational field most often appears to be ignorant of the term “human right” as well as its applicability (Akuma, 2020).

The concept “human rights” have been constantly evolving throughout human history” (Sus Eko, 2021). Fundamental human rights are those basic rights that human beings are entitled to as long as the human being exists. According to Mbama, Azegba and Igwe (2016) human existence is synonymous with rights which makes an individual a true and free member of the society. in the same line of thought Ukegbu, Adebayo, Uche and Anyaoha (2012) believe that fundamental human rights are the basic natural rights which are essential for human existence and every citizen in is entitled to them and is expected to enjoy them in full without hindrance or discrimination. Mbama, Azegba and Igwe (2016) traced the historical development of the human rights but for them Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a document which was issued by the United Nations on December 10, 1948 seems to embody the best scheme of human civil and political rights, socio-economic and cultural rights.

The principles of modern human rights have its origin traced back to at least two strands of Western philosophical and political thoughts. These have to do with natural law and the Enlightenment (Dalacoura 2018:6; Windsor 1995:177). Natural law was first an idea introduced by Stoic philosophers in the Hellenistic period and later expounded by philosophers of the Roman period. They underscored that the individual is distinct from the citizen, worthy of rights and duties because of their human attributes rather than their membership of the city-state. The idea of natural rights then spread as the economic frontiers expanded. In the same respect, natural law led to natural rights, which are most closely associated with modern human rights. The idea of natural

rights prevails in the minds of many in the West. The relationship between human nature, human rights, and political society is dialectical. Human rights shape political society so as to shape human beings, so as to realize the possibilities of human nature which provided the basis for these rights in the first place.” The assertion of Donnelly goes a long way to reflect that the extents to which students’ fundamental right are implemented in school especially secondary level determines the students’ achievement academically and otherwise (Donnelly, 2013).

Right to life is a phrase that describes the belief that a human being has an essential right to live, particularly that a human being has the right not to be killed by another human being. It is stipulated clearly in the chapter IV section (33) subsection (1) of the Nigeria constitution that “every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprive of his life intentionally” (FRN, 1999). According to Amnesty International Report (2024), Human rights are the basic moral principles or norms for certain standards of human behavior and are regularly protected in municipal and international law (Alston, 2022). This is why the fundamental human rights are regarded as the basic inalienable rights, which citizens are by nature entitled to and which the government and any other institution cannot deny citizens except through the due process of law. Thus, it is a universal principle binding all as an international customary law which needs no ratification or signature. Thus, fundamental right entails those standards that recognize and protect individual human beings insofar as they live in a society with each other, as well as their relationship with the state and the obligations that the state has towards them.

Human rights are basic and fundamental rights which ought not to be denied by any individual or any government. Fundamental human rights are those natural rights that are due for every existing human person. According to Omoregbe 2017 “the natural rights are the fundamental human rights. They are basic to human existence and necessary for man’s self-fulfillment and happiness. That is why Ukegbu, Adebayo, Uche and Anayeoha (2012) insisted that fundamental human rights are the basic natural rights which are essential for human existence and every citizen is entitled to them and is expected to enjoy them in full without hindrance or discrimination

In the context of this study, human right refers to the rights of a citizen are the benefits and privileges to which an individual is entitled to enjoy as a citizen of the country, while implementation refers to putting into action. It means carrying out instructions towards accomplishment of goals. Secondary school students are likely to enjoy the following right among others while in school. Right to life, right to dignity of human person, and right to fair hearing.

Right to life in the view of Lawpadi (2020) is the belief that human beings individually have essential rights to live so that every human being has the right not to be killed by another. According to Ogbu (2022) every person including student has the right to exist. Hence, the protection of the life of the students in secondary schools is one of the fundamental duties of the principals and teachers. When a student feels that his or her life is protected, he or she will develop the sense of belonging and will invariably, boosting effective learning and as such enhances the students' academic performance.

Right to the dignity of human person on the other hand according to Lawpadi (2020) is the fundamental right which emphasizes that no human being shall be subjected to torture or inhuman treatment and that no citizen should be held in circumstances which amount to slavery. This means that no secondary student should be subjected to forced labor or maltreated in form of punishment. Right to fair hearing means that a person should be allowed to say, on his or her own part, what happened in a crime he or she is suspected of. However, it is appalling that the implementation is very poor. It has shown that when a student is accused of insulting a teacher and the case comes to the table of the principal, the student seems not be permitted to present his/her own part of the case before it will be judged. In the same manner, when a junior student has a problem with a senior colleague, it is often the case that the junior student cannot be heard out before judgment. Finally, right to peaceful assembly and association gives individuals the right to join any association of his/her choice and to have a non-violent gathering. In view of this Agena (2021) opines that there exist many associations to which citizens can voluntarily belong which may be social, religious, political, or even economic. In furtherance, right to peaceful assembly and association is the right of the individuals to come together and collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend their collective or shared ideas (Eseni, 2021). It is quite disheartening that principal of some secondary schools appears to interfere in the students' formation of associations such rotary clubs, academic association, prayer groups, etc. It is therefore the priority of the principal as the chief administrator of the secondary school education where he/she is, through his/her proper supervision promote tranquility and checkmate any form of violence in the school environment that may lead to bullying or death of a student.

In this sense, principals' implementation of students' fundamental human right points to the realization of an application and execution of a plan, idea, model, design, specification,, and standard towards the favorable study of the students (Ogbu, 2022). That is why Ndubuisi (2019)

noted that the implementation of the students' fundamental human rights in the secondary schools by principals and teachers is a process of making something active and effective in the school system and the process of moving an idea from a concept to reality as regards the enforcing and ensuring the effective recognition of students' fundamental human rights in the secondary school system. It is therefore a necessity that all the students who enrolled into a given secondary school in Ebonyi State should be accorded their Fundamental Human Rights through its implementation by the principals and teachers.

Some students appear to pay less attention to academic activities when the demands for their rights are neglected. That is when their human rights are restricted wrongly by the school principals and other members of the staff. Denying of students right seems to be the exploitation of the students by the school authority. In such situations, most students become helpless, defenseless, weak, lack experience and appear to be ignorant of their rights, it was against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the extent of implementation fundamental human rights of students in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers' personal experiences portray that some students are unduly prevented to exercise their right, hence preventing them from joining any club of their choice while in school or not listening to their complaints which could have improved their relationship in school, and academic progress. Additionally, some teachers appear to intimidate students that normally report their absenteeism and negligence of duties to the principal. Students appear to be intimidated when their rights appear to be deprived. The researcher, observes that when adequate attention are not given to students' right in the school; the student may not actively engage in the learning process, some of them tend to lose interest in attending to classes. They may become bored with their education in such a learning environment; this could lead to conflict poor academic performance. Furthermore, this situation may deprive many young adolescents of education, so many students seem to live in fear and uncertainties and this may lead some of them to withdraw from school without the knowledge of their parents and teachers. The ugly situation if unchecked could result to truancy or skipping of classes among students.

In the same vein, denial of rights and privilege, refusal of school authority to allow students have a means of seeking redress, seems to indicate how implementation of fundamental human rights in school setting appears. The researchers posit that if this ugly incidence is not properly addressed

by the education stakeholders especially in Ebonyi State, the objectives of secondary education may appear difficult to be actualized. Based on the above developments, the researcher was moved to examine further into the extent of implementation of fundamental human rights of students in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study focused on the extent of Implementation of students' fundamental human rights in Ebonyi State public Secondary Schools.

Specifically, this research sought to:

1. Determine the extent of implementation of students' right to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state.
2. Ascertain the extent of implementation of students' right to fair hearing in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state
3. Examine the extent of implementation of students' right to peaceful assembly/ association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the extent of the implementation of students' right to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state?
2. To what extent do the implementation of students' right to fair hearing in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state?
3. To what extent is the implementation of students' right to peaceful assembly/ association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study.

H₀₁: There would be no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent of implementation of students' right to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₂: There would be no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which principals implement their right to fair hearing in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₃: There would be no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent of implementation of students' right to peaceful assembly/ association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey. The population of the study consisted of 6,888 SSII students in 224 secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The researchers employed proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The schools were stratified into three Education zones in Ebonyi state. Twelve, thirteen and ten secondary schools were selected from Abakaliki, Onueke and Afikpo Education Zones. Eleven students were randomly drawn from thirty-five secondary schools used for the study giving the sample size of three hundred and eighty-five (385) respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information and data from SSII students. The validation of the instrument was carried out by three experts, two of them were in the Department of Educational Foundations (Administration & Planning option) and one expert from Department of Science Education; Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient statistic was used to establish the reliability co-efficient of the instrument that yielded co-efficient index of 0.69. The researchers with two research assistants administered the questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered to 385 respondents in the selected secondary schools for the study but 356 was retrieved and used for this study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the questions while the hypotheses were analyzed using t-test statistic.

Results

Research question 1: To what extent do principal implementation of students' rights to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the extent of principals' implementation of student's right to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

S/N	ITEMS STATEMENT	N	X̄	SD	Decision
1	Principals involve school security guards to protect the lives of students when there is danger in school	356	2.07	1.16	LE
2	Principals moves around to monitor student's movement in the school.	356	2.12	1.05	LE

3	Students are adequately supervised to avoid being bullied among students themselves.	356	2.18	1.01	LE
4	Principals improve the security of the school to protect life of the students	356	2.23	1.07	LE
5	Fighting among students are seriously handled with care by teachers	356	2.14	0.95	LE
Grand Mean (\bar{X})			2.14	1.04	

The result of the data analysis presented in table 1 revealed the extent to which principal's implement students right to life in public secondary school in Ebonyi State. As shown in table 1 item 1-5 obtain mean value that where less than 2.50 and a grand mean of 2.14. The 2.14 was less than the criterion point of 2.50. This implies that in Ebonyi State public schools, implementation of student's right to life by the principals of the schools where to a low extent (LE).

Research Question 2: To what extent do principal implementation of students' right to fair hearing in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the extent principal implement students' right to fair hearing.

S/N	ITEMS STATEMENT	N	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
6	Principals give the students opportunities to defend themselves over alleged offences	356	2.39	1.15	LE
7	Ensure that no student is made to suffer under any disguise without hearing from him/her.	356	2.21	0.91	LE
8	Principals set up disciplinary committee to settle conflict among students.	356	2.32	1.18	LE
9	Principals gently correct students for expressing opinion that is against the school policy.	356	2.22	1.12	LE
10	Principals involve students in decision making especially when it concerns their welfare	356	2.23	1.23	LE
Grand Mean (\bar{X})			2.27	1.11	

The result of the data analysis presented in table 3 revealed the extent principals implement students' right to fair hearing in secondary schools as shown in the table 3, items 11-15 obtained mean values that were below 3.00. The grand mean yielded 2.27 which is less than the criterion level of 3.00. It showed that the extent secondary school principals implement students' right to fair hearing was to a low extent (LE) in Ebonyi state public secondary schools.

Research Question 3: To what extent do principals implement students' rights to peaceful association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the extent of principals’ implementation of students’ right to peaceful association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

S/N	ITEMS STATEMENT	N	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
11	Principals give students opportunity to belong to good study group.	356	2.61	1.17	LE
12	Principals encourage the formation of social clubs in school.	356	2.27	1.12	LE
13	Principals allow students to belong to one social club or the other.	356	2.45	1.11	LE
14	Principals encourage teamwork among students	356	2.42	1.19	LE
15	Principals grant students audience for peaceful protest.	356	2.42	1.16	LE
Grand Mean (\bar{X})			2.44	1.15	

The result of the data analysis presented in table 5 revealed the extent to which the principal implements the students’ right to peaceful association in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State. As shown in the table, all the items that is item 21 - 25 obtained mean values that were less than 3.00. The grand mean resulted to 2.44 which was less than the criterion level of 3.00. Therefore, it implies that principals’ implementation of students’ right to freedom of expression was to a low extent in Ebonyi state public secondary schools.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teachers and students on the extent to which principals implement students’ right to life in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Table 4: T-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which principals implement students’ right to life in public secondary schools.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	T	Sig
Male	188	2.01	1.13			
Female	168	2.13	1.20	354	0.97	0.154

SD= Significant difference, NS = NO Significant difference

Results in table 4 showed that the t-test is 0.97, while the P value is 0.154. Since the P value is greater than 0.05 level of significance, we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the main ratings of male and female students on the extent to which principals implement students, right to life in public secondary school in Ebonyi State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which principal implements their right to fair hearing in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 5:T-test of difference in the mean difference of teachers and students on the extent to which the principal implements the right to fair hearing in public secondary school students.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	T	Sig
Male	188	2.23	1.10			
Female	168	2.20	1.23	354	0.25	0.03 SD

Results in table 5 indicated that t-test value is 0.25 why the P value is 0.003. Since the P value is less than 0.05 level of significance, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent principals implement right to fair hearing of students in public secondary schools.

HO₃: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent of implementation of students’ right to peaceful assembly in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 6: t- test of different in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent to which the principal implement students’ right to peaceful assembly in public secondary schools.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	T	Sig
Teachers	188	2.05	1.09			
Students	168	2.29	1.16	354	0.19	0.49 SD

Result in table 6 show that the t-test value is 1.99, while the P value is 0.49. Since the P value is less than 0.05 level of significance, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent to which principals implements students’ rights to peaceful assembly in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Discussion of findings

The result of the data analysis presented in table 1 shows that principals’ implementation of students’ right to life was to a low extent in public secondary schools. More so, table 4 revealed

no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students as relate to the extent to which principal's implement student's rights to life. The result of the study is in line with the findings of federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1999 who noted that teachers ought not to infringe on the right of students to life as this will violate their human rights.

The result of the data analysis in table 2 indicated that principal implementation of students' rights to fair hearing was to a low extent. The result of the hypothesis as presented in table 5 revealed a significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students as regard to principal's implementation of students' rights to fair hearing. Nakpodia (2010) is of the view that the students in the secondary schools especially in Ebonyi state should be given opportunity for fair hearing in any presumed case that they involved in prior to suspension, expulsion or before any decision that affects the students' right is taken.

The result of the data analysis presented in table 3 indicated that principal's implements student's right to peaceful assembly and association to a low extent. The result of the hypothesis as presented in table 6 revealed that there is significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent principal implement students' right to peaceful assembly/ association in public secondary school. The result of the study is in line with the findings of Ezeani (2011) who stated that students' rights to peaceful assembly/ association as well as right to join an association and gather for a common purpose or pursue common goals are not usually granted in public secondary schools.

Conclusion

The study concluded that human rights of the students should be safeguarded and measures implemented by the principal this will enable the students' interest to be protected. When rights are infringed upon, it can give room for students' demonstration, boycott of classes and other disruptive behaviours. This situation will threaten students' liberty, freedom of expression and freedom of association. But policies that are favourable to students like free and fair election of students' union leaders will motivate students to exercise their rights without bias. It is believed that when students receive fair hearing from their schools and parents, there will be peaceful co-existence and improved academic performance in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study include:

1. Government should establish an agency that will ensure that students' lives are protected through enforcement of rule of law in secondary schools.
2. School authorities should see that justice is done, fair hearing and judging wisely when they need arise among students for peaceful relations and effective learning.
3. Students should be encouraged by their schools and parents to join approved association in the school to avoid joining secret societies like cults in the school environment.

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¹Akumah Grace, ²Prof. Adali Onele

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