

## PROMOTING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS THROUGH AWARENESS OF THE CHILD RIGHTS ACT

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined awareness of child rights act for effective leadership in secondary schools in Nigeria. Awareness and enforcement of child rights enhance a leader's credibility and legitimacy among staff, students, and parents. It fosters trust and strengthens stakeholder relationships. When school leaders understand the Child Rights Acts, they are better equipped to create a safe, inclusive, and child-friendly school environment. This involves implementing policies that prevent bullying, corporal punishment, and discrimination. Awareness and enforcement of child rights enhance a leader's credibility and legitimacy among staff, students, and parents. School leadership knowledge of child rights acts provides a moral and legal compass for school leaders, helping them make informed and ethical decisions that prioritize the best interest of the child. The paper concluded that school leaders' awareness of child rights acts ensures the effective management of situations between students, or between students and teachers which reduces incidences of abuse and promotes peaceful coexistence in the school environment. The paper further suggested that Ministries of Education and teacher training institutions should include Child Right Acts in leadership development programs for principals and educational administrators, and regular capacity-building workshops should be organized for school staff on the provisions and implications of the Child Right Acts to ensure effective leadership in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Child, Child Right Acts, Awareness, Leadership, Fundamental Human Rights.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children are considered as treasurable gifts from God. It is somewhat curious and disastrous that these same children are exposed to, maltreated, abused and neglect. Children have the right to partake in decisions and policies that may have effect on their lives, survival, improvement and development and right to be protected. Perhaps it is in acknowledgement of this reality and fact that Fulan (2002) explained that children's rights have gained world attention since 1979, when the United Nations designated that year as the Global Year of the Child and developed a list or record of child's rights. Child Rights are fundamental and basic freedoms and the essential rights of all humans below 18 years. Atonuje (2011) observed that the violation of child rights takes different and numerous forms such as imposition of too much punishment (corporal punishment), refutation of students' access to learn, sexual abuse and harassment by teachers of opposite sex, cruel treatment of student, imposition of illegitimate or illegal fees and levies among others. These rights apply to all children, regardless of the child's parent's/legal guardian's, sex, race, colour, religion or other position/status.

Article 4 (1) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child provides that "in all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority, the best interests of the child shall be primary consideration". This provision has been entrenched by Section 1 of the Child Rights Act 2 in our law, which provides that "in every action concerning a child, whether undertaken by an individual, public or private body, institutions of service, court of law, or administrative or legislative authority, the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration". A replica of the provision is also found in Article 3 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The fact that the CRC has been ratified by almost all the member States of the United Nations Organization, the "best interest of the child" principle would appear to be the norm presently, both internationally and otherwise. A consensus on the phrase is one thing but how to actualize it, is the more important. It involves determining what is the best interest of the child in every conceivable situation, entrenchment through positive legislation and the issue of enforcement. More so, the fact that the best interest of the child "shall be a primary consideration" in the decision affecting the child is an indication that it will not always be the single, overriding factor to be considered, but in the administration of justice, there may be competing or conflicting human rights interest; for instance, between children, different groups of children and between children and adults.

For Njoku and Oladiji (2009), the challenges facing children in the 21st century are immense and will need to be faced if we are to achieve the goal of the Child's Rights Act. In putting into practice child rights, teachers are considered to be the "chief implementers". This shows that teachers are capable of making their own contributes to the implementation of the child rights (Ertmer, 2005). Changing teachers' opinion of the child rights rest upon some changes or transformation in teachers' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). These attitudes and this knowledge then have an impact on classroom activities which, at the same time, have an effect on the successful or efficacious implementation of the child right curriculum in practice. Lots of studies have paid attention and concentrated on the role of teachers as human rights educators who understand the issues, create learning environments premised on human rights principles, serve as role models for students and inspire them to act and behave in ways that recognise the principles of human rights (Osler & Starkey, 2010; Jennings, 2006). Ahsan and Burnip (2007) suggested that teachers are not willing to teach the fundamental rights of the child. Harding & Darling (2003) argued that teachers' views are

important in making any change in their classroom practices. This suggests that the view of teachers about child rights may influence their capability and skills to adapt, including their classroom performance in the teaching and learning process. This is because teachers are the ones that work very closely with the pupils (Burke & Sutherland, 2004), and the classroom philosophy and environment are shaped by teachers' perception and teaching styles (Charema & Peresuh, 1996).

The school is another place where children rights are required to be provided and protected after home, therefore after parents, teachers must focus on child rights and they should try to ensure the requirement related with child rights at school. In order to defend and taking care of the children rights, there is dire need to explore an understanding of teacher's knowledge, attitude and practice about child rights at secondary schools. The practical implementation of policies regarding child rights in school is the major issue which is needed to take immediate attention of all stakeholders specially, teachers. To measure sensitivity level about knowledge, attitude and practice of teachers working with young children at schools is a serious policy discourse.

However, it has been observed that there is unwillingness on the part of teachers to teach the fundamental rights of the child. The perception or views of teachers' is very important and a key factor in bringing any change in their classroom practices. This suggests that the perception, sensitivity and feeling of teachers about child rights may influence their ability to adjust, and their classroom teaching of child rights. Teacher's perception can also affect the success/fruitful implementation of the curriculum on the child rights. These existing views or opinion of teachers of the child rights may not relate to their classroom practices and with the real world issues. It is based on this fact that this paper examined awareness of child rights act for effective leadership in secondary schools in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper employs a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data sources, including journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and legal frameworks. The paper critically examines existing literature on the Child Rights Act (CRA), its implementation in Nigerian secondary schools, and its implications for school leadership. The paper uses document analysis as the primary data collection method. Relevant materials were sourced from, The Child Rights Act (2003) and its adoption status across Nigerian states, Nigerian educational policies on child protection and rights, scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals (2009–present) discussing child rights awareness and school leadership, reports from international organizations (e.g., unicef, unesco) on child rights education in Nigeria. A content analysis approach was adopted to systematically examine themes related to; Awareness levels of secondary school leaders regarding the Child Right Acts, the role of school leadership in enforcing child rights, challenges and strategies for effective Child Rights Acts implementation in schools. This paper focuses on secondary schools in Nigeria, analyzing how principals, teachers, and school administrators understand and implement child rights within their leadership practices and does not include primary schools or higher education institutions. Since this paper is based on secondary data, there is no direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical research practices were upheld by ensuring proper citation and adherence to intellectual property rights. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive review of existing literature, providing a

strong foundation for advocating enhanced awareness and implementation of the Child Rights Act in Nigerian secondary schools.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Concept of a Child**

Looking at the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, one cannot find any definition of “a child”. Black’s Law Dictionary defined a child as a person under the age of majority. The Labour Act defines a child as a young person under the age of twelve years and a young person as one under the age of fourteen years. The Children and Young Person’s Act,<sup>9</sup> defined a child as a “person under the age of fourteen years and a young person to mean “ a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child defined a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years” The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person below the age of eighteen years except in the law applicable to the child, the age of majority is attained earlier. The provision to this definition renders it nothing more than a suggestion. According to Section 277 of the Act, a child is a person below the age of eighteen years. It must be noted that the legislation on issues concerning children in Nigeria is in the residuary legislative list and as such depends on the States. Individual States are meant to adopt and adapt the Child Rights Act. Most States of the Federation like Abia, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa, Kwara, Lagos, Nassarawa, Ogun, Ondo, Rivers, Taraba, have adopted the Child Right Acts (CRA). In the process of adapting, some states have changed the definition of “a child”. In some States, a child, is a young person under the age of thirteen years. In other States like Akwa Ibom State, he/she is a young person under the age of sixteen years. The writers are of the view, that the perception of age as a definition of a child in Nigeria, depends on who is defining and varies according to cultural background. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive definition that is applicable throughout the nation, is an all encompassing handicap with regard to the just application of the provisions of the law.

### **Child Right Act**

The disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and the eventual emergence of the United States of America as the world power heralded the International campaign for Liberal democracy in all nations of the world. America’s emergence as the world police intercepted the world balance of power and consequently empowered America to advance her foreign policy and national interest across Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The Child Rights Act therefore, is a brainchild of the United States of America which they pursue through the instrument of United Nations (U.N). According to Olakanmi (2007), the Child Rights Act was inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was promulgated on December 10, 1948 through the General Assembly of the United Nations. Sequel to this historic event, the Assembly called upon all member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and “to cau/se it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distraction based on the political status of countries or territories”.

In the preamble of the Declaration as stated by Olakanmi (2007), it reads that whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the

human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. On 20th November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on the Rights of the child (CRC), while the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Assembly of Heads of States and Government also adopted the African Union charter on the Rights and welfare of the Child in July, 1990 (Odum & Wariowe, 2015).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria as a member state of the United Nations signed the convention and international instruments and ratified them in 1991 and 2000 respectively. To Obiaraeri in Nnorom (2015), international instruments contain universal set of standards and principles for survival, development, protection and participation of children. It reflects children as sacred human beings as total subjects of their own inalienable rights. Nigeria has by a decision duly reached in accordance with its constitutional processes, agreed to ratify the U.N's convention on the rights of the child. In the words of former Nigerian Military President in the 21st day of March, 1991, it is revealing that the Child Rights Act arrived the shores of the country in a grand style.

Now therefore, I, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, President, commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, on behalf of the Federal Military Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria do hereby ratify the aforesaid United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child, the text of which was adopted on the 20th day of November, 1989. In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to be affixed to these present.

In a bid to domesticate the convention on the Rights of the Child, the Child Rights Act was given birth to. The convention mandates that countries who are signatories should vigorously disseminate the convention's principles and take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the Rights recognized as the present convention. Ten years after, several heads of government came and went, there were heated debates among parliamentarians which resulted to the eventual passing of the Child's Rights Bill into law in July, 2003. It was assented to by the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in September 2003 and promulgated as the child's right act, 2003.

## **Awareness**

Awareness is the state of consciousness, wakefulness and knowledge of something. It believed that the awareness of one type of idea or issue naturally fosters an awareness of another idea. Awareness as defined by Richardson (2017) is knowledge or understanding of a particular subject or situation. It could be an awareness of the environment, politics and social situation. It is also the ability to notice something using one's senses, and the attribute of action. Doing one thing while taking heed of other relevant occurrences are not two parallel lines of action but a specific way of pursuing lines of action, namely to do it heedfully, competently, mindfully, accountably. Here awareness does not refer to some special category of mental state existing independently of action but to a person being or becoming aware of something. Schmidt (2002) saw awareness as an integrated aspect of practice and must be investigated as such. Stressing further he state that it is the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, or sensory patterns. More broadly, it is the state or quality of being aware of something, while biologically it is defined as a human or an animal's perception and cognitive reaction to a condition or event (Agharuwhe, 2013).

## **Child Rights Provision and Protection**

Any human being under age of 18 years, provided any state law applicable fall in the category of Child. Legally a child is considered as minor being younger than the age of majority (Cangelosi, 2015). Protection of human rights means to ensure that people are enjoying the entitlements of decent human living. Provision of human rights facilitative environment is the core function of any state and also protect human rights as basic civic principle. States should make laws to ensure equal opportunities of human rights, which will not only provide the structural, legal platform for the citizens but also will pave a path of human rights supportive culture. It is the state function to maintain, preserve and protect the life of people through human rights violators. However, it is observed that many Governmental Organizations and Non-Governmental Organisations are taking part in the protection of people's human rights. In any society, every human being has an obligation to respect the others rights, which calls for protection and sanctions for violations (National Human Right Commission, 2010).

Child rights and adult rights seem different terms but these are human rights and sides of one coin. Being vulnerable part of society, children have specific rights which help children to maximize their full potential. In society, children must not be considered as helpless, deserve for charity or property family. A child is part of family and community having specific rights and responsibilities at developmental stage. Children should enjoy the minimum standard of life (basic human rights principles) rather than privileges. Every child irrespective of gender and age is unique in character and has equal importance in terms of human dignity and respect. Moreover, children must be given opportunity to share in all matters and decisions. Children must be listened to and the opinion of every child on serious matters should be respected.

Child protection means to protect the children from violent behavior, mistreatment, cruelty and neglect. There are several terms like abusive and ill-treatment with the children or vehemence are rotating in the society and all are used to refer physical, sexual, spiritual and emotional abuse. The basic aim of child protection to provide a shelter and safe guard from all above mentioned forms to the victim segment of the society and to develop human dignity in all settings despite any race, society, department, under private or government authority in the result of carelessness or consciously. CRC had already been chalked out various means to make sure the child protection from all the above mentioned forms of abuse, violence and neglect especially in the Article 19 (Richardson, 2017). The Convention was enforced in 1990 under Human Rights Chapter IV, in accordance with article 49(1) (UNCRC). There are 140 signatories" States while 197 gave ratification, acceptance, accession and/or succession of Convention (UNCRC). In research literature, rights in UNCRC are categories into three main parts, known as the „3 P"s": provision of basic needs (e.g. food, services relating to education, health, leisure etc.), protection (against harmful acts or practices, social or emotional abuse) and like adults, children participation in communities (Munro, 2015). Teachers" role cannot be ignored as teacher is the second important stakeholder after parents who inspire the child in promoting value system and sense of Child rights in students. In Pakistan, the frequency of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence has increased a lot as compared in past in Pakistan (Memon, 2007).

## **Leadership**

Leadership is of huge importance in management and educational administration because of its far-reaching effect on the accomplishment of educational goals. Because of its key role in the

success or failure of organizations, leadership has long been a focus of study by students, theorists, researchers and practitioners, particularly in the last five decades. Leadership means inspiring people to do their best to achieve a desired result. According to Nwabueze et al., (2017), leadership is the ability to successfully integrate and maximize available resources, within the internal and external environments for the attainment of institutional or national goals. Ololube (2024) asserted that leadership involves developing and communicating a vision for the future. A leader is someone who directs, organizes, controls and manages the activities of an organization aimed at achieving the goals and objective of that organization. Leadership plays an important role in the outcome of any organized effort aimed at achieving a particular goal or set of goals. It determines the quality of process and output of the educational system to the extent that, without it, goals may be difficult to achieve. Leadership can be seen as a process by which individuals at the helm of affairs, change the minds of others, with the intention of moving their institutions forward towards accomplishing specified goals and objectives (Nwabueze et al., 2017). Leadership positions are practiced by those who are at the helm of affairs in the school system known as 'leaders'.

Educational leaders are charged with the task of handling administrative and academic matters with transparency in schools for productivity and institutional development. It is in this wise, that Ololube (2024) opined that leaders should lead by example by demonstrating responsible behavior in their own actions. A leader is an administrator who oversees the activities of a group, motivating them to achieve organizational objectives. In this regard, it is the duty of the leaders to initiate, organize, motivate and direct the activities of the teachers and students to achieve set goals. They attract voluntary commitment from followers, energize them and transform institutions into new entities with greater potential for growth, excellence and global competitiveness. Before one can be a good leader, he must first learn to be a great follower. This implies that the best leaders are those who have served many apprenticeships in the school system. However, the strength of any institution is a direct result of the strength of its leaders as well as their functional performances.

The leader administers the school with teaching and non-teaching activities for institutional growth and improvement. They perform their duties by providing the right kind of leadership to effect the kind of climate which is conducive for teaching, learning and development of teachers and students (Ukala et al., 2017). In order words, to produce an effective school with excellent academic achievement, there is the need for effective and excellent leadership for effective administration of schools and quality service delivery. This implies that, every organization needs an effective leader to achieve its goals. Leaders help the organization to do things at the right time. They set direction, build an inspiring vision and crate something new for the achievement of institutional goals and objectives. Leadership is all about working as a team to create dynamic, exciting and inspiring programmes for organizational competitiveness. While leaders set the direction and build an inspiring vision, they must possess leadership skills in order to guide subordinates to the right destination in a smooth and efficient way.

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## **Fundamental Human Rights**

Fundamental human right has become a global issue. The fundamental rights are generally regarded as a set of legal protections in the context of a legal system, wherein such a system itself is said to be based upon this same set of basic, fundamental or inalienable “rights.” Such rights thus belong without presumption or cost of privilege to all human beings under such jurisdiction. The concept of human right has been promoted as a legal concept in large part owing to the idea that human beings have such “fundamental” rights, such that transcend all jurisdictions, but are typically reinforced in different ways and with different emphasis within different legal systems. According to Ukegbu, et al., (2012) 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. The Nigeria constitution has several articles as fundamental rights of man. They include: The right to life, right to dignity of human person, the right to personal liberty, the right to fair hearing as well as right to peaceful assembly (Nwandike and Kalu (1998).

Akande (1982) also maintained that fundamental rights are better backed up by the constitution of the land and argues that the theory of constitution as a superior law is well known. The courts apply the constitution as law to the cases before them but they do not enforce any law which, in their opinion is forbidden by the constitution. Mejieobi (1994) reported that certain rights are perceived as sacrosanct, basic, divine, natural and fundamental to the very existence of



man in a civilized society and therefore be deprived or subjected to reckless abuse or infringement. This has made the attainment of equal rights to remain a constant struggle. The existence, validity and content of human rights continue to be the subject of debate in philosophy and politics. However it is defined in both domestic and international laws, and there is a great variance between how human rights norms are perceived and defined in various ways both in context and how they are upheld in different countries of the world.

In addition, the concept of human rights deals with small subset of values that should be available for implementation by individuals or government. These values are clearly stated in the constitution and are based on the legal and political traditions of every country including Nigeria. It is not a thing of surprise therefore that the Nigerian constitution, contains fundamental rights which constitute inalienable and supreme rights of the individuals. Human rights are generally regarded as a set of entitlements in the context of a legal system, where in such system it is said to be based upon this same set of basic, fundamental, or inalienable entitlements or rights. Such rights thus belong without presumption or cost of privilege to all human beings under such jurisdiction, but are typically reinforced in different ways and with different emphasis within different legal systems.

In countries like Canada, the Charter of Right and Freedoms outlines four fundamental freedoms as freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, press and other media of communication and freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association. Also in the United States, fundamental rights have special significance under the 14th Amendment to the constitution. Thus, all human beings are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these being Rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In Nigeria also, as earlier noted by the researcher, sections 32-42 of chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is enshrined the fundamental human rights of the citizens (FRN, 1999). From these various points of view, fundamental human rights are the basic universal inalienable rights which should be enjoyed by all human beings regardless of their religion, race, ethnic, gender and status. In other words, fundamental human rights are rights that belong to all as human beings and citizens of a country. The concept is held inalienable and belongs to all human and that is why rights are clearly written in the constitutions of nations.

### **Salient Provisions of the Child Rights Act**

The following are salient elements of the child rights act although they are not all-encapsulating owing to the fact that the fundamental human rights which envelop the Child Rights Act are part of the infinite political salience:

- Right to a name, acquire Nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
- Right to preserve identity, nationalism, family and relation as recognized by law without unlawful interference.
- The child should have the right to form his or her own views and the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.
- The Right to freedom of expression: This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

- Right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Right to freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.
- Right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. Right to free, compulsory and universal primary education
- Right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities Right of the unborn child to protection against harmful social and cultural practices. Right to freedom from discrimination
- Right not to be imprisoned with the mother Freedom from buying, selling, hiring of children for purpose of begging, hawking, prostitution or for unlawful immoral purposes. Violations of these rights are punishable by long terms of imprisonment. Other rights of the child as contained in the child right act include:
  - Right to freedom from betrothal and marriage of children.
  - Right to freedom from causing tattoos or marks, and female genital mutilation, trafficking of children, use of narcotic drugs or use of children in any criminal activity and employment of children as domestic helps outside their own home or family environment.
  - Freedom from sexual abuse, general exploitation which is considered to be prejudicial to the welfare of the child, recruitment into the Armed Forces and exploitation of children through media publications.

### **Principals Awareness of Students Discipline for Effective Leadership of Public Secondary**

Rules are a set of explicit or understood regulations or principles governing conduct or procedures within particular area, in this context, a schools' regulations are usually more official than rules because they are drawn up by the school board, definite set of standards that must be adhered to at all cost else there will be consequences legal or otherwise (Ndeto, 2013) while Kwayu (2014) opined that rules and regulations are principle or order which guide behaviours in schools and regulations are official rules or orders intended to control the running of the school.

Rules and regulations are often than not school internal law that guide students towards good conduct and behaviour in order to maintain general discipline and order necessary for effective teaching and learning (Peretomode, 2004). Peretomode (2004) went further to state that rules and regulations are meant to guide students towards good conduct and behaviour in order to maintain general discipline for school achievement. School rules and regulation are for the maintenance of peace and orderliness within and among the members of the school community (Maduagwu & Nwogu, 2014). School rules and regulations are designed in the best interest of the students and they are meant to keep us and help us to learn in the best environment possible. Like government policies and rules or delegated legislation, school rules and regulations carry the force of the law if they are reasonable and constitutional (Peretomode, 2004). In the same way, anyone who breaks or flaunts school rules and regulations does so at his or her own risk, the person can be punished as if he or she has broken a common law. Peretomode (2004) Opined that any action on the part of a student that goes contrary to these school rules and regulation is often considered as an offence and an act of indiscipline which attracts disciplinary actions. The effectiveness of school rules according to Gorton as cited in Peretomode (2004) depends of some factors. Three of these factors include:

- Rules and regulations on student behaviour should be stated in positive form as much as possible, and student responsibility rather than misbehaviour should be stressed, The emphasis on student behaviour should be on that which is desired, not on behaviour which unacceptable.
- The policies and procedures governing student behaviour should be written in clear, understandable language and are reviewed from time to time.
- The consequences of violating a rule or regulation should be made explicit and commensurate with the nature of the violation so that student will have the opportunity to take that information into consideration before they violate a rule or regulation.

Teachers are in-charge of the classroom and also held responsible for the safety of students. The main responsibility of the school administrator with regard to classroom activities is to ensure that a teacher is present at all times. Failure to ensure the presence of a teacher in the classroom for the purpose of student supervision could result in students taking advantage of the absence of the teacher to embark on dangerous play or activities that could cause injuries. The school administrator may be charged for negligence for injuries sustained by students in such circumstance. Also, laboratory facilities present more hazards than any other in the school.

The hazards of operating equipment empowered by gas or electricity or the use of chemicals are apparent. It is therefore important that teachers adequately direct students in the care and use of equipment they will be operating. If there is evidence that a student has been permitted or requested to use particular equipment before being trained, negligence will be difficult to disprove. When students are supervised regularly, a negligence charge in the cause of injury is less likely. On the other, if a teacher assigned to a playground leaves the post for no good cause and a student is injured in a known hazardous or dangerous condition, there may be tort liability because of negligence. The school administrator in providing for the organization of playground use has responsibility in three major aspects – first, proper rules of behaviour which is in accordance with good safely practices must be put in place, second, the school administrator should provide adequate teacher supervision, and third the school administrator should provide for regular inspection of the areas and report any hazardous condition (Ololube, 2024).

### **Principals Awareness of Students Safety for Effective Leadership in Secondary Schools**

Safety is a state of being protected, uninjured, out of danger, secured, not involving risk. All safety directed to the child is to keep him/her alive and secured. In a school environment, every student is entitled to safety from harm, safety from abuse (e.g. rape), safety from disease, safety from malnutrition, safety from hazardous activities, safety from substance abuse and safety from road accidents.

The principal, as the chief teacher in conjunction with the vice principals, senior tutors and other teachers run the school in the frame of law establishing it. These groups of persons who run the school are employed for the purpose of the students who are left in their custody within the period of stay in school. It is to this point that the doctrine of in-loco parents becomes prevalent. The school heads who are the administrators of the school are in their protective custody while in school, and to provide necessary protection for them against any form of oppression, inhuman treatment, torture and several other unfair treatment that will infringe on the rights of the child. The safety of the child in school is a role of the school principal which he

must be aware of. Alexander in Igwe (2015) while discussing the role of the school principal in the context of in-loco parentis indicated that the principals or teachers in charge of a public school is subject to the school board and must enforce rules and regulations adopted by the board for the government of the school and execution of all its lawful orders in that behalf.

The principal stands for the time being as a parent to his pupils and due to that relationship, he must necessarily exercise authority over them in many things concerning which the board may have remained silent. It is therefore expected that the school administrators monitor and supervise every activity that is going on in their schools in order to ensure that a child's rights are not violated. Igwe (2015) advocated that the principals and teachers should be properly informed of the constitutional provisions relating to the fundamental rights as well as the legal challenges and implications they pose in the discharge of their responsibilities. Considering this fact, Fayokun and Adedeji (2006) opined that in the conduct of the public schools, it is essential that power vested in school heads in order to maintain discipline and promote efficiency. The right of the school authority has never been in doubt. What has been in doubt is the type and degree of punishment (Arop, 2015).

For the schools to run efficiently there must be laws, rules and regulations. Parents enter into a sort of contract with school authorities by delegating the power of parental control to them, which they expect must be conducted in a manner that will be of the best interest of the children. The school administrators are vested with the responsibilities of planning and coordinating teaching and learning processes in the schools. They perform these intricate tasks with the help of teaching and non-teaching staff in their schools. The human resource or personnel need to have a good general knowledge and understanding of the laws that guide their various actions, especially their relationships with the students. Furthermore, the school administrators must take full responsibility of the actions of their staff on daily basis. This vicarious liability mandates them to be fully aware of the right of a child as declared in the United Nations Conventions and the ones in the Nigerian Constitution. The implementations are to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the students in their schools. They should also ensure that the teachers are aware of these rights and know the legal implications of violating them. Thus, in the course of instilling discipline in the students, they should be very careful and reasonable, bearing in mind that the students have rights that are being protect by law. Some school administrators are ignorant of educational laws and so abuse their statutory responsibilities and obligations to their students (Arop, 2015).

Nwagwu in Peretomode (2004) succinctly observed that most school administrators and teachers are not aware of the duties, rights, obligations and responsibilities and that many others are ignorant of the rules governing their employment and schools system in which they work. Nwagwu further stressed that school administrators must conduct their affairs with due regards to the human rights of persons under them. Thus, the need for school administrators to be aware of the Fundamental Human Rights enshrined in 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria becomes not only imperative but eminent. Among such rights are: Right to life, Right to dignity of human person, right to fair hearing, Right to Personal Liberty, right to private life, Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, Right to Freedom of Expression and the Press, Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association, right to freedom of movement and Right to Freedom from Discrimination. Therefore, the school administrators should know the law of vicarious liability and be up and doing in order to protect the rights of the students under their custody. Whatever the type of punishment, school authorities must bear in mind that it should be moderate, reasonable and administered in good faith (Abraham, 2013). Arop (2015) succinctly

enumerated three cannons which punishment must conform with. These cannons include retributive punishment, reformative punishment and deterrent punishment. Any punishment that lacks all or at least one of these cannons may be tantamount to torture; and therefore violation of students' right to dignity.

According to Nwagwu in Arop (2015), teachers demonstrate an unfortunate destitution of the general principles and provisions of law relating to their noble profession. Nwagwu also stated that perceived power of Omnipotence ascribed to administrators has become nothing but a mere myth. School managers must conduct their affaires with due regards to the human rights of persons under them. There is need for the protection of the right of the child in our schools. This is because high rate of in disciplinary acts have become the order of the day. In bid to control the exuberant nature of students, teachers have devised many disciplinary measures that may infringe on the students' rights. This scenario has serious implications for teaching and learning. The school administrators should be aware that a conducive school climate incorporates the protection and promotion of human rights of persons with the school organization (Arop, 2015).

### **Principals Awareness of Students Record Keeping and Students Effective Management**

Student record keeping is an integral aspect of school administration and management. It involves the systematic documentation of student-related information such as personal data, academic performance, behavioral records, attendance, health history, and disciplinary actions. Principals, as the instructional and administrative leaders of secondary schools, play a crucial role in ensuring that records are accurately maintained and utilized for effective student management. The awareness of principals in this regard determines the efficiency of school operations and the extent to which students' needs are adequately addressed.

According to Okorie (2001), school records serve as the foundation for administrative decision-making, communication, and evaluation. Principals who understand the importance of maintaining comprehensive and updated student records are better equipped to manage student affairs, monitor academic progress, and enforce discipline. Accurate student records provide a basis for identifying students who need academic or emotional intervention, thereby promoting inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The principal's awareness of record keeping practices also ensures compliance with national education policies. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) emphasized the importance of accurate data management for planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programmes. As such, principals are expected to understand not only the types of records that need to be kept but also the legal and ethical obligations surrounding their handling. This includes protecting students' privacy and ensuring data is stored securely.

Record keeping also aids in accountability. Ukeje et al. (1992) stress that educational institutions must be accountable to stakeholders such as parents, school boards, and government agencies. Principals who are conscious of their responsibilities in this regard utilize records as evidence of school performance and student development. This awareness is particularly vital in student discipline, where records can support fair and consistent application of school rules.

Furthermore, the increasing demand for data-driven decision-making in education makes principals' understanding of record management essential. Fayokun and Adedeji (2006) argued that school leaders must be capable of interpreting student data to improve instructional delivery, allocate resources effectively, and support teacher performance. Without adequate awareness,

school administrators may underutilize valuable information that could enhance school outcomes.

However, research has shown that not all principals possess the requisite knowledge or training in record keeping. Igwe (2015) observed that many school leaders do not prioritize documentation due to workload or lack of professional development. Consequently, some schools suffer from poor documentation practices, which can lead to inefficiencies, miscommunication, and student neglect.

Thus, school administrators must receive regular training on modern record management systems, including digital tools for data storage and retrieval. Principals must also inculcate a record-conscious culture among staff, ensuring that all departments maintain up-to-date and accurate records that feed into the overall management of the school. The awareness of student record keeping is essential for principals to manage students effectively. Proper documentation supports instructional leadership, enhances accountability, ensures student welfare, and aligns school practices with policy requirements. Investing in the professional development of principals in this area is key to achieving effective and responsive school leadership.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of effective leadership in secondary schools cannot be overstated, especially when it concerns the protection and promotion of students' rights. In Nigeria, the domestication and implementation of the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003 offer a legal framework for safeguarding the rights of children within the educational setting. Education is a fundamental human right that plays a pivotal role in the development of any nation. For this reason, leadership in schools must align with legal and ethical standards that prioritize the welfare of students. **The** Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, which domesticated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), sets out the rights of every Nigerian child and provides a legal basis for their protection. However, effective implementation in schools largely depends on the awareness and commitment of educational leaders. Effective school leadership entails guiding, protecting, and empowering students while creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. Awareness of child rights influences policy formulation and implementation. This entails that leaders who understand the Child Right Acts are more likely to integrate child-friendly policies that uphold students' rights, including protection from corporal punishment and bullying.

## Suggestions

From the discussions of this paper, the following are suggested for improved leadership in secondary schools:

- Ministries of Education and teacher training institutions should include Child Right Acts in leadership development programs for principals and educational administrators.
- Regular capacity-building workshops should be organized for school staff on the provisions and implications of the Child Right Acts to ensure effective leadership in secondary schools.
- School administrators should create committees to ensure that the rights of students are respected and that any violations are promptly addressed to effective leadership in schools.

- Government agencies should strengthen school inspection frameworks to include child rights compliance assessments.
- State governments should fully adopt and implement the Child Right Acts, ensuring uniformity in child protection laws across the country for effective leadership of secondary schools.

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