

## PRESCHOOL OWNERS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ENSURING HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN ILORIN WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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### Abstract

*The study focused on preschool owners' and teachers' perception of ensuring health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government of Area of Kwara State. Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The population of the study comprised all primary schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten percent of the total number of private and public preschools, which is 27 private preschools and six public preschools respectively, two teachers were selected from each public and private preschool. Eighty-one respondents participated in the study. Two instruments were used for this study with reliability index of 0.73 and 0.74 respectively. From the study, it shows that preschool owners' perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State is positive (WA = 3.24); preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State is positive (WA = 2.95). There is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara ( $t = -2.488$ ;  $df =$*

*3.  $p > 0.05$ )), there is significant difference between public and private preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara ( $t = -1.226$ ;  $df = 52$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). It was therefore recommended that, Government and preschool owners should ensure safety measures are put in place for children in public and private primary schools in Kwara State, Government and preschool owners should pay more attention to the health and safety issues in public schools, in order to reduce risk of injuries in schools.*

**Keywords:** *Preschool owners, preschool teachers, perception, preschool, health and safety.*

## Introduction

One of the stated objectives for early childhood education in the national policy of education is to provide care, protection and stimulation for children when their parents are at work. This objective is supposed to make the health and safety of children the priority for both teachers and school owners. Every child deserves the best possible start in life, with the opportunity to develop in a healthy environment that is safe and secure. Parents who use early years services should be able to do so with the utmost confidence that their children will get the best possible experiences and are protected from harm at all times. Educating children in a safe, secure, and stimulating environment is necessary for child's development; pupils' health and safety are important to the process of learning, access to high health care standards and professional teachers, are the basic rights of a growing child. Children themselves cannot provide their needs for education and health care, the educational environment should be prepared to facilitate this and promote physical, psychological and social development of a child (Salami, 2016).

The school, as second home, should be attractive and optimally demanding to promote interest of the pupils in the educational program. A beautiful and sanitary school could provide a stand for learning and flourishing talents, as unhealthy and inappropriate school could destruct learning opportunity (Murray, 2018). Unfortunately, a considerable amount of Nigerian schools is in an undemanding educational state. Broken tables, unclean walls, inappropriate toilets, are among undemanding situations and attaining educational targets under these conditions is considerably unrealistic. Despite best efforts from teachers, achieving favorable output is impractical, hence improving health factors of the educational environment could lead to better outputs (Nakpodia & Achugbue, 2012). Before the pupils can learn, they must first feel safe and secure, the school is a vital place for learning, acquiring skills and basic attitudes, which are retained with the pupils all along their life. Flourishing maximum talents and requiring high levels of learning need optimal levels of health and welfare environment. Hence investigating in education affairs is of most strategic and the most important way of increasing development and attaining maximum outputs. In the absence of optimal levels of healthy strategies, the education programs can fail resulting in academic failure and poor return of investment.

A school does not start and end with the pupils, teachers, and the headteacher there are a number of governing bodies, charities, and employers that assist other members of staff. It is usually the employer that decides what health and safety rules should be executed, and they are responsible for ensuring that potential risks to the children or staff are managed in a reasonable way. (Mungai & Digolo, 2017). Pre-school pupils are at a critical age to impart good educational, health, and environmental values. Undemanding health situations of the educational environment could impose a variety of devastating consequents to the pupils. Some of the consequences may appear after a relatively long incubation time; hence health considerations at schools are not only necessary but are also of priority. On the other hand, the school, as a second home, should be attractive and optimally demanding to promote the interest of the pupils in the educational program. In

recent times, it has been observed that teachers' perspectives to the challenge of health and safety standards in Nigerian nurseries and preschools are hard to come by. Most of the available reports about sub-standard schools are sourced from media reports which are, which oftentimes lack a scientific basis (Ogunyemi, 2013).

Schools provide an important environment for the care and development of children at the nursery/primary level. School attendance at the preschool and primary levels bridges the gap in home care and lays the foundation for future learning. Unless children are raised in a healthy and safe school environment during childhood, their future development could be seriously hampered. A healthy and safe learning environment is essential for pupils of all ages. Without it, they are unable to focus on learning the skills needed for a successful education and future, health is a major element in man's existence, and without good health, productivity in whatever sphere of activity is at its lowest state (Murray, 2018). Safety is a condition or a state of being which results from modification of human behavior or designing of the environment in order to reduce the possibility of hazards, thereby reducing accidents. School safety is a paramount human concern that every school and community must take seriously and strive continually to achieve. It is also a legal concern as schools can be held liable if they do not make a good effort to provide a safe and secure school environment. Safety precaution should be one of the fundamental objectives of any school administrator (Hamilton, 2012).

A safe and healthy environment is a prerequisite for productive learning. It is important that a safe and healthy environment is established in which children and adults can work together with confidence. It is the responsibility of the senior management team and the governing body to ensure this is the case. Research continues to illustrate children who feel unsafe at school perform worse academically and are more at risk for getting involved in delinquency. Prevention is often the best form of safety, and so taking the time to plan a hazard-free classroom environment can go a long way toward minimizing the chance of injuries (Napodia & Achugbue, 2012). According to the Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices (DEC-RP) well-designed healthy and safe classroom environments help to: Support responsive caregiving, foster independence and feelings of competence in young children, encourage staff efficiency, promote children's engagement, decrease challenging behavior, facilitate appropriate social interactions among children, provide good structure. The first responsibility of a professional teacher is ensuring the safety of the pupils in a healthy environment, as it is stated in the National Policy of Education 2013 as one of the objectives of early childhood care and education which is to provide care, protection, and stimulation for children when their parents are at their place of work. Achieving this objective it's a shared responsibility between the school owners and the teachers. School owners referred to individuals or groups of people that come together to establish a school with a particular primary objective, usually "providing qualitative education" as a way of achieving the goals of education in Nigeria, whereby such individuals or groups of people could be referred to as private investors.

Most school owners are aware and understand the need to follow the national minimum standard in establishing a school. However, school owners are mostly concerned about the profit to be made in the school as it is seen as a business and not a call of duty, whereby the safety need and creation of a healthy environment for pupils could be easily met if the establishment is in line with the national minimum standard developed by the government, but due to the existing loopholes in the government, most schools that could not even measure up to the average requirement of the national minimum standard have been approved as a standard school and which makes it to be recognized by the parent as they have been given the authority to operate as an educational agency (Ogunyemi 2013). The school owner's perception of health and safety could be understood from the appearance of the school and the environment in which the school is set up as they might or might not feel it is their responsibility to ensure that everything provided should be safe and secured in such a way that it won't be harmful or appear as source of injury to the users. A teacher is not a mere person who stands up in front of a group in order to teach lessons, he/she should treat the boys and girls with patience, affection, and care, preparing them to work for a decent standard of living, as well as reinforcing social role models that promote gender quality.

The teacher is the yardstick that measures the achievements and aspirations of the nation, the worth and potentialities of a country can be evaluated in and through the work of the teachers. Teaching in safe conditions makes the work so interesting and motivating. Teachers are well-motivated to work and can contribute more inputs for high academic performance resulting in their enthusiasm to teach within a safe workplace (Mahon, 2018). The need to safeguard the health and safety of children in their foundational years is founded on research in neuroscience, environmental studies, and developmental psychology. Children experience the most rapid growth in their lives during the first five years of life, and a supportive environment is needed for their optimal development (Mungai, Mwangi & Digolo, 2017). Different controversies have been raised with issues related to gender and school type, various research findings revealed that female teachers are more safety conscious and always consider pupils' health and safety as their responsibility than male teachers, also some research findings state that male teachers are more safety conscious and always consider pupils health and safety as their responsibility than female teachers, furthermore some findings also revealed that private schools presume pupils health and safety as their priority and take it as responsibility unlike public schools where pupils health and safety is not presume to be a shared responsibility as it should be, some research findings also state otherwise (Ogunyemi, 2013).

Another variable of interest in this study is gender, if female teacher is more safety conscious and also consider children health and safety as their responsibility more than male teachers or vice versa. The study also seeks find out if private schools are more safety conscious and consider health and safety of the pupils to be their responsibility more than public schools or vice versa. Therefore this study investigated the perception of preschool owners and teachers about the health and safety of children in Ilorin West Local

Government Area of Kwara State. It has been observed that most preschool owners and teachers did not prioritize the health and safety of pupils in their establishments by not putting in place the necessary measures as instructed by the federal government of Nigeria in the guideline policy developed to guide the establishment of schools, including the preschool section. However, different researchers have tried to solve the problem using different independent variables such attitude, influence, awareness and compliance with guidelines related to health and safety in preschools but the problem still persists. However, none has looked at the perception of preschool owners and teachers about ensuring the health and safety of children in preschool, which is the research gap this study aims to fill. A safe school is foundational to the success of the academic mission. It is on this premise that the researcher found it necessary to look into the perception of preschool owners and teachers about ensuring the health and safety of children in preschool.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the perception of preschool owners about ensuring the health and safety of children in schools?
- ii. What is the perception of preschool teachers about ensuring the health and safety of children in schools?

### **Hypotheses**

Ho1. There is no significant difference between public and private preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety in schools.

Ho2. There is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety in schools.

### **Methodology**

In this study descriptive survey method was adopted to look into the perception of preschool owners and teachers in ensuring the health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government of Kwara State. The target population comprises all public schools with nursery facilities as well as officially registered private nursery/preschools, which comprises all preschool teachers in Ilorin West Local Government Area. There are 61 public primary and 266 private schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area. Simple random sampling techniques was used to allow every element in the sample to have an equal opportunity of being selected for the study. Two questionnaires were used to collect data for this study and the questionnaires were tagged preschool owners' perception about ensuring health and safety of children questionnaire (POPEHSQ), preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of children questionnaire (PTPEHSQ). Each of the instrument was divided into two sections, section A for demographic information and section B with five and 10 items respectively. Validity of the instrument was done by experts in the field of education, also the reliability of the instrument was tested using test and re-test method, which was subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC)

and the reliability index of 0.73 and 0.74 were obtained respectively. According to Kwara State Annual Census Report of 2018-2019, Ilorin West Local Government Area has 61 public preschools and 266 private preschools, and the researcher used simple random sampling techniques to select ten percent of the total number of private and public preschools, which is 21 private preschools and 6 public preschools respectively, 2 teachers were selected from each public and private preschool. Eighty-one respondents were used for the study in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. The research question was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count percentage and mean, while the hypotheses were tested using independent sample t-test, and the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The hypotheses will be rejected if the significant value is less than 0.05 while it will not be rejected if the significant value is greater than 0.05.

## Results

### Answering the Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** What is the perception of preschool owners in ensuring the health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State?

**Table 1: Preschool Owners' Perception of Ensuring Health and Safety of Children in school**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN
1	I feel it is my responsibility to provide health and safety inspections for my school.	16 (59.3)	5 (18.5)	2 (7.4)	4 (14.8)	3.30
2	I consider ensuring blunt edge furniture are provided for the classrooms as my responsibility	13 (48.1)	9 (33.4)	3 (11.1)	2 (7.4)	3.19
3	I believe it is my duty to ensure that the classrooms are well ventilated	12 (44.4)	12 (44.4)	3 (11.1)	- - -	3.22
4	I presume providing safe and healthy place for the children is important and my responsibility	12 (44.4)	11 (40.7)	1 (3.7)	3 (11.1)	3.26
5	I think ensuring that slippery materials are not used for the classroom's floors, is my duty	15 (55.6)	6 (22.2)	2 (7.4)	4 (14.8)	3.26
<b>Weighted Average = 3.24</b>						

Decision: the preschool owner's perception about health and safety in schools is positive because the weighted average mean obtained which is 3.24 is greater than 2.49

Table 1 shows that preschool owner's perception of ensuring health and safety of children in schools is positive (WA = 3.24). The detailed analysis is as follows: I feel it is my responsibility to provide health and safety inspections for my school (mean = 3.30), I



consider ensuring blunt edge furniture's are provided for the classrooms as my responsibility (mean = 3.19), I believe it is my duty to ensure that the classrooms are well ventilated (mean = 3.22), I presume providing safe and healthy place for the children is important and my responsibility (mean = 3.26), I think ensuring that slippery materials are not used for the classroom's floors, is my duty (mean = 3.26).

**Research Question 2:** What is the perception of preschool teachers in ensuring the health and safety of children in schools Ilorin West Local Government of Kwara state?

**Table 6: Preschool Teachers' Perception of Ensuring Health and Safety of Children in School**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN
1	I think my duty is to ensure that cleaning products and other harmful substance are kept out of reach of children	32 (59.3)	22 (40.7)	-- --	-- --	3.59
2	I presume it is important to make sure that learning and play materials are made from non-toxic substance	34 (63.0)	20 (37.0)	-- --	-- --	3.63
3	I consider arranging the classroom and organize the space for easy movement of children as my responsibility	29 (53.7)	25 (46.3)	-- --	-- --	3.54
4	I believe it is my obligation to ensure that all electrical outlets are safely covered and cannot be removed by children	32 (59.3)	22 (40.7)	-- --	-- --	3.59
5	I think ensuring that bathrooms and toilets in the school are clean and easily reach by children is my duty	16 (46.3)	18 (38.9)	15 (27.8)	2 (3.7)	2.65
6	I consider supervising children at all times as my responsibility	25 (46.3)	21 (38.9)	6 (11.7)	2 (3.7)	3.20
7	I reckon with ensuring that chairs and tables (furniture's) in the classroom is safe and appropriate for children use is my duty.	28 (51.9)	25 (46.3)	1 (1.9)	-- --	3.48
8	I think it is important to make sure that sanitizing and disinfecting are done when children are not near by	26 (48.1)	24 (44.4)	4 (7.4)	-- --	3.33
9	I feel that providing first aid box for the classroom is my duty	16 (29.6)	13 (24.1)	18 (33.3)	7 (13.0)	2.50
10	I consider prompt response to children need as my responsibility	35 (64.8)	19 (33.2)	-- --	-- --	3.65
<b>Weighted Average = 2.95</b>						

Decision: the preschool teachers' perception about health and safety in schools is positive because the weighted average mean obtained which is 2.95 is greater than 2.49

Table 2 shows that Preschool Teachers' perception of ensuring health and safety of children in school is positive (WA = 2.95). The detailed analysis is as follows: I think my duty is to ensure that cleaning products and other harmful substance are kept out of reach of children (mean = 3.59), I presume it is important to make sure that learning and play materials are made from non-toxic substance (mean = 3.63), I consider arranging the classroom and organize the space for easy movement of children as my responsibility (mean = 3.54), I believe it is my obligation to ensure that all electrical outlets are safely covered and cannot be removed by children (mean = 3.59), I think ensuring that bathrooms and toilets in the school are clean and easily reach by children is my duty (mean = 2.65), I consider supervising children at all times as my responsibility (mean = 3.20), I reckon with ensuring that chairs and tables (furniture's) in the classroom is safe and appropriate for children use is my duty (mean = 3.48), I think it is important to make sure that sanitizing and disinfecting are done when children are not near by (mean = 3.33), I feel that providing first aid box for the classroom is my duty (mean = 2.50), I consider prompt response to children need as my responsibility (mean = 3.65).

### Testing the Hypotheses

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference between private and public preschool teachers' perception of ensuring health and safety of Children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government of Kwara state

**Table 3: T-test showing Difference between private and public preschool teachers' Perception of Ensuring Health and Safety of Children in Schools**

Variable	n	Mean	Std.d	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Perception							
Public	12	30.500	3.343				
				-2.488	52	0.043	Significant
Private	42	33.928	4.413				

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between private and public preschool teacher perception of ensuring health and safety of children in school in Ilorin West Local Government Area ( $t = -2.488$ ;  $df = 57$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Private school had higher mean score (33.93) than public school (30.50). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception of ensuring health and safety of children in schools.



**Table 4: T-test showing Difference between Male and Female Preschool Teachers' Perception of Ensuring Health and Safety of Children in Schools**

Variable	n	Mean	Std.d	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Perception							
Male	14	31.928	4.028				Not
				-	57	0.397	Significant
				1.226			
Female	40	33.600	4.505				

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception of ensuring health and safety of children in schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara ( $t = -1.226$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is not rejected.

## Discussion

Preschool owner perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools is positive while the review conducted by Hamilton-Ekeke (2017) findings of the study indicated that staff and pupils in the participating primary schools in Bayelsa State are at risk as there are no safety measures in place in the schools. The finding of the study is not line with Nwadiuto (2011) who reported that none of the schools studied had safety patrol team, fire extinguishers and food service area. Also, response collated for research question two indicated that toilet/latrine facilities in the selected schools are not adequate, but it concurs with the research study of Ogunyemi (2019) that health and safety standards of schools were significantly related to ownership of school.

Preschool teacher perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools is positive which is not in line with the research findings of Chithirai (2017) who found out that teachers' perception on various health measures adopted by the schools is negative. Teachers' perception, discloses that among the various safety measures considered, 'provision of uniform' is ranked as first followed by 'fire extinguishers', 'first aid box', 'security guards', 'vehicle stand for parking', 'emergency exit', 'fire alarm system', 'traffic control board' and 'security camera. There is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of children in schools, this may be attributed to the fact that everyone values life and love children regardless of the gender. This finding corroborate with the research study of Ogunyemi (2019) who found out that gender, and class taught (nursery/primary) did not significantly relate to the perspectives of teachers about ensuring health and safety in schools. Finally, the research findings revealed that there is significant difference between private and public preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools, this can be attributed to the consciousness and professional ethics of teachers in private schools. This is in agreement with the research findings of Ogunyemi (2019) which reveals

that Teachers' perspectives on health and safety standards were significantly related to school type.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that preschool owners and teachers have positive perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils, also that there is no significant difference between male and female preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools, also that there is significance difference between public and private preschool teachers' perception about ensuring health and safety of pupils in schools.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with the view that if implemented, primary schools will be safe and secure for pupils to learn:

1. Government and private school owners should ensure that Safety measures are put in place for preschool children in Kwara State.
2. Government and private school owners should pay more attention to the health and safety issues in public schools, in order to reduce risk of injuries in schools.

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