



Psychological Needs of Primary School Child Beyond Classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

Iseyechinbo A. Godfrey-Kalio
Early Childhood and Primary Education
Faculty of Education
University of Port Harcourt
Iseyechinbo.godfrey-kalio@uniport.edu.ng

Ibimina F. Osiri-Eme
Early Childhood and Primary Education
Faculty of Education
University of Port Harcourt
ibimina.osiri@uniport.edu.ng

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain psychological needs of primary school children beyond classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The study focused on the psychological needs of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey design and correlation design were adopted, and purposive random sampling technique used in selecting the study sample of 120 head teachers from the population of 300 head teachers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, who responded to a structured questionnaire, tagged 'Psychological Needs of Primary School Child Questionnaire' (PNPSQ) designed by the researchers after the modified Likert scale mode which had its reliability index established at 0.90. For answering the research questions 1, mean and standard deviation statistics were used while t-test was used in testing the hypotheses 1 at 0.05 level of significance. Research question 2 was answered using Pearson Product Moment of Correlation (PPMC) and t test was used to analyze the hypothesis 2. Major findings from the study stated that primary school children in Nigeria, like children everywhere, have various psychological needs beyond the classroom that are essential for their overall development and well-being. These psychological needs include; emotional support, social interaction and moral and values development among others for emotional, social and cognitive growth. The study concluded that primary school child in Nigeria needs psychological growth beyond classroom. The study, therefore, recommended that primary schools in Nigeria should continue to develop psychological needs beyond classroom.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Emotional Support, Social Interaction, Moral Values and Psychological Needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Children's education is crucial to their development likewise other parts of their lives also have an impact on their general psychological health. A primary school pupil needs emotional assistance in a variety of settings from kind adults. Homes, schools, and neighbourhoods are all included in this (Buchanan et al., 2016). The youngster needs to experience acceptance, understanding, and value from peers, instructors, and families. Developing healthy connections with important adults and promoting candid conversations offer safe environments where children can express their feelings and grow emotionally resilient.

During their formative years, children go through various emotional experiences and face challenges that can greatly impact their well-being and development. Providing them with emotional support is vital for their overall psychological health. Emotional support helps children understand and regulate their emotions effectively. When children receive validation and empathy in their emotional experiences, it promotes a sense of safety and trust. This, in turn, enables them to manage their emotions in a healthy manner, rather than resorting to disruptive or harmful behaviors. In contemporary societies, children are confronted with a variety of situations which are frequently associated to negative consequences on the social-emotional and academic development, and also on the long term well-being. Many studies reported that an optimal social-emotional functioning reduces the inadaptability risk, dysfunctional relationships, interpersonal violence, and substance abuse and increases the civic engagement and well-being (Zins et al., 2004). Moreover, it seems that the emotional and social competences present a relatively stable pattern through time, from preschool years to adolescence.

Usually, the children's behavioural problems are derived from the lack of emotional and social competences and are conceptualized as internalizing and externalizing problems. Externalizing problems, including aggressive, defensive and hyperactive behaviours, are displayed when the child cannot control, self-regulate or inhibit the disruptive behaviours. These children have difficulties in understanding others' emotions and motivation and in social relations. Externalizing problems are related to lack of social functioning and academic problems in adolescence (Hinshaw, 2002). On the other hand, internalizing problems imply a high control and refer to behaviours as sadness, social withdrawal anxiety. These behaviours are related to the lack of social and academic functions, but also with low career planning abilities (Ololube, 2017). More than that, children who developed anxiety and depression are more exposed to these symptomatology in adulthood and also have suicidal behaviour.

Internalizing problems are more specific to girls than to boys. In childhood, boys show more externalizing problems than girls, but regarding anxiety and depression there is no difference by gender. Girls are twice as predisposed to become depressed and anxious as boys, a pattern which continues also into adulthood. Results sustain that the presence of internalizing and externalizing problems in childhood is related to multiple negative effects in adolescence and adulthood. More than that, both behavioural problems become more and more resilient to change in time (Tremblay, 2000). Regarding the stability in time of externalizing and internalizing problems, previous research results are contradictory. Some authors claimed that externalizing problems are more stable, other researchers suggest that the differences are small or even absent. Also, the comorbidity between internalizing problems, depression and disruptive behaviours in children is reported in many studies. There is a lot of evidence-based results which show the fact that children living in a low economic status family develop deadaptive behaviours and

deficiency in social and emotional functioning more than children living in families with high socio-economic status

Poverty was related to juvenile delinquency, internalizing, externalizing and attention problems in children and adolescents from 5 to 14 years old. Encouraging positive social interactions among primary school children is essential for their psychological well-being. Providing opportunities for socialization, fostering friendships, and promoting teamwork can contribute to their social development and emotional stability. It is during childhood that stable friendships develop, and these friendships are less transient and superficial than those experienced at younger ages (Edwards et al., 2006). Children's capacities for high levels of trust and self-disclosure develop in their friendships. Children who enjoy good friendships also experience benefits such as better capacity to cope with stress. Importantly, children's friendships have an enduring impact. The choices children make and the experiences they have within their friendships play an important role in children learning the rules that govern social interactions. This learning impacts their future development (Howes & Aikins 2002). Children who experience friendships have higher self-worth as young adults. The positive aspects of friendships tend to promote stable psychological functioning (e.g., increased security and affection) and adjustment (e.g., aiding sociability, and conflict resolution) in children (Berndt, 2004; Moore & Keyes, 2003; Rubin et al., 2011).

Good friendships provide benefits such as companionship, sociability, feelings of self-worth, emotional security, affection, and well-being (Berndt, 2004; Rubin et al., 2011). Research has described children's well-being in terms of factors that prevent negative, or promote positive, behaviors (Moore & Keyes, 2003). Both positive well-being and good friendships promote self-worth, sociability, characters and affection. The extant literature supports the idea that positive aspects of friendship serve to complement children's happiness, while negative aspects diminish children's happiness (Goswami, 2012; Holder & Coleman, 2009). Understanding the role of friendships in children's well-being is limited because most of the research on relationships and well-being is based on samples drawn from populations of adults and adolescents, not children. As an illustration of this, in the book "Understanding Peer Influence in Children and Adolescents", the words "adolescent" and "adolescence" appear in five of the eleven chapter titles but "Child", "Children" and "Childhood" do not appear in any (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008).

Being involved in positive social interactions can have a significant impact on the self-esteem and confidence of children. This, in turn, leads to a more positive and healthy perception of oneself, as well as overall mental well-being and outcomes. By participating in constructive and uplifting social engagements, children can develop a stronger sense of self-worth and belief in their abilities, enabling them to navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and positivity. When children are surrounded by supportive peers and adults who encourage their growth and individuality, their self-concept flourishes, promoting a healthier mindset and emotional state. Thus, it is crucial to foster an environment where positive social encounters are prioritized to empower children and contribute to their overall personal and psychological development.

Positive interactions play a crucial role in helping children foster strong and meaningful relationships with their peers, teachers, and other adults. These interactions serve as vital sources of support, especially during difficult times. Engaging in positive encounters empowers children to build a network of relationships that offer encouragement, guidance, and understanding when they face challenges. By nurturing these connections, children can rely on a solid foundation of support, which greatly contributes to their overall well-being and growth.

Recognizing and respecting the cultural diversity of primary school children in Nigeria is important for promoting inclusivity and also crucial for meeting their psychological needs. Incorporating cultural elements into education and activities can enhance their sense of identity, belonging, and overall psychological health. High levels of childhood adversity are associated with a range of negative behavioral, learning, emotion processing, psychological, and health outcomes across the lifespan. These long-term outcomes appear to be attenuated by the presence of sensitive and supportive relationships early in children's lives (Gunnar et al., 2015; Jaffee, 2017). Traditionally, scientists have construed early social relationships as a moderator between exposures to events and children's outcomes. An alternative conceptualization is that the presence of sensitive and supportive social relationships influences whether children experience or construe a particular event as being adverse (Smith & Pollak, 2020). In other words, events themselves are not pathognomonic, and biological and psychological responses to adversity do not occur until the child has interpreted their circumstances as being adverse. According to this perspective, the presence of social support may decrease the likelihood that a child construes events as adverse.

The Nigerian society is a rich tapestry of different ethnic groups, languages, traditions, and belief systems. Embracing and valuing this diversity helps create an environment where children feel safe, respected, and accepted for who they are.

Cultural awareness and inclusivity in schools allow for the celebration of various cultural practices, customs, and holidays, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among students. It is essential for teachers and educators to acknowledge and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, ensuring that all students' experiences are represented and recognized.

By recognizing and respecting cultural diversity, schools can actively combat stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. This helps to create a positive and inclusive learning environment where children can develop a strong sense of self-esteem and cultural identity. It also encourages empathy, understanding, and open-mindedness among students, enabling them to value and appreciate different ways of life.

Moreover, when children see their cultures and traditions represented in the classroom, it enhances their engagement and motivation to learn. It provides them with a sense of connection to their heritage, promoting a positive attitude towards education and fostering a love for learning. Additionally, understanding and respecting cultural diversity helps address the psychological needs of primary school children. When children feel respected and recognized for their cultural background, they experience a greater sense of belonging, which boosts their self-confidence and overall well-being. It reduces feelings of isolation and enhances their social interactions, leading to stronger relationships with their peers and teachers.

Cultural awareness and inclusivity in schools play a crucial role in fostering a sense of pride and belonging among students by allowing for the celebration of various cultural practices, customs, and holidays. This can be achieved through programs and practices organized by teachers, the development of interpersonal roles of students, and the reinforcement of cultural and heritage awareness by teachers. Additionally, teachers need to engage in Cultural Humility, which involves self-reflection and personal critique, to support racially and ethnically diverse students and create an inclusive learning environment. Oral storytelling can also contribute to ethnic awareness and pride among students, as it has been a traditional method of passing on cultural history. Furthermore, disability-awareness instruction embedded in cultural diversity curriculum can improve students' awareness and attitudes towards disabilities, promoting a more inclusive and respectful school environment

Research Questions

- What are the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria?
- How do the psychological needs beyond the classroom impact the well-being and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female head teachers on psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.
- There is no significant relationship between psychological needs and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design and correlation design were adopted, and purposive random sampling technique used in selecting the study sample of 120 head teachers from the population of 300 head teachers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, who responded to a structured questionnaire, tagged 'Psychological Needs of Primary School Child Questionnaire' (PNPSQ) designed by the researchers after the modified Likert scale mode which had its reliability index established at 0.90.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of male head teachers and female head teachers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State

S/N	Teachers' Development Programmes	Head Teachers in Okrika LGA.				Remark
		Male (60)		Female (60)		
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
1	Emotional Support	2.80	1.07	2.61	1.15	Agree
2	Encouraging Positive Social Interactions	3.05	1.20	3.40	0.78	Agree
3	Promoting Teamwork	2.50	0.65	2.53	0.68	Agree
4	Respecting Cultural in Diversity	3.14	1.10	2.95	1.05	Agree
5	Social Skill Development	2.80	0.75	3.20	1.14	Agree
	Mean summation / $\sum \bar{X}$ / $\sum SD$	14.29	4.77	14.69	4.80	
	Aggregate \bar{X} / SD	2.86	0.95	2.94	0.96	Agree

Table 1 represents the mean scores and standard deviation of male head teachers and female head teachers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State on the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Both male head teachers and female head teachers agreed to items 1 to 5 of the various psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. This is because the mean scores are all above the criterion mean score of 2.5. This is an indication that these are some of the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: How do the psychological needs beyond the classroom impact the well-being and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Relationship between psychological needs and academic performance of primary school children

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal
Psychological Needs (X)	60	241.00	249.33	725.56	770.30	736.69	0.543
Academic Performance (Y)	60						

The data presented in Table 2 shows that the correlation coefficient between psychological needs beyond the classroom impact the well-being and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State is (r-cal. = 0.543). This value shows that a positive and moderate relationship exists between psychological needs beyond the classroom impact the well-being and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. This implies that as psychological needs beyond the classroom increases, effectiveness of academic performance of primary school children increases and vice versa.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female head teachers on psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 3: z-test of difference between the mean score of the male and female head teachers on psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Respondents	N	$\sum \bar{X}$	$\sum SD$	df	Z-cal.	Z-critical	Decision
Male Head teachers	60	14.29	4.77	58	0.69	1.96	Accepted
Female Head teachers	60	14.69	4.80				

Table 3 shows z-test analysis of differences between the mean scores of the male and female head teachers on psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

The result shows that at 58 degrees of freedom, the z-calculated yielded 0.69 at 0.05 alpha level of significant. This value is less than the z-critical of 1.960, the researcher therefore accepts the null hypothesis, and this shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female head teachers on psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between psychological needs and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between psychological needs and academic performance of primary school children

Variables	N	df	r-cal	Sig. level	P-Value	Decision
Psychological Needs (X)	60	58	0.543	0.05	0.000	Rejected
Academic Performance (Y)	60					

The result in Table 4 shows that r-value of 0.543 at significant level of 0.05 yielded p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was a significant relationship between psychological needs and academic performance of primary school children in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that social relationships, including the quality of one's friendships, are important contributors to psychological needs of children which was agreed by Demir and Weitekamp (2007). Additionally, Hills and Argyle (1998) stated that when children participation in activities, it enhanced well-being and strengthen their psychological needs which often include social dimension. For example playing on sports teams is associated with well-being and often involves creating and maintaining friendships volunteering and belonging to a religious group are linked to well-being and social support (Cohen, 2002). Otake et al. (2006) agreed that when children demonstrate kindness towards others can increase well-being and involves a social component, which eventually increase their academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, and how these needs impact their well-being and academic performance. The results indicate that emotional support, encouraging positive social interactions, promoting teamwork, respecting cultural diversity, and social skill development are crucial psychological needs identified by both male and female head teachers. Furthermore, there is a positive and moderate relationship between psychological needs beyond

the classroom and the academic performance of primary school children. The findings suggest that addressing psychological needs beyond the classroom is essential for enhancing the overall well-being and academic performance of primary school children. Emotional support, positive social interactions, teamwork, and cultural inclusivity contribute significantly to creating a conducive environment for children's holistic development. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural diversity in meeting the psychological needs of children, particularly in culturally diverse societies like Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Schools and educational authorities should prioritize the provision of emotional support and create safe spaces where children can express their feelings and concerns freely. Training programs for teachers on emotional intelligence and counseling techniques could be implemented to enhance their capacity to provide adequate support to students.
- Strategies to encourage positive social interactions and teamwork among primary school children should be integrated into school curricula and extracurricular activities. This could include cooperative learning exercises, peer mentoring programs, and collaborative projects that promote teamwork and social skill development.
- Schools should embrace and celebrate cultural diversity by incorporating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum and organizing events that showcase the traditions and customs of different ethnic groups. This fosters a sense of belonging and respect for cultural differences among students.
- Further research and collaboration between educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals are needed to develop comprehensive intervention programs that address the psychological needs of primary school children beyond the classroom.

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