

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS SENSITIVITY AND BULLYING OF HARD-OF-HEARING IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN INCLUSIVE LEARNING POST- COVID-19 ERA IN OWERRI



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri. Using a correlation research design of ex-post facto type, two standardized instruments were used to collect data from one hundred and fifty participants comprising of 100 teachers and 50 hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents using cochlear implants, hearing aids and other assistive devices to help facilitate their hearing ability in inclusive learning environment in Owerri. Data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance and the results revealed that teachers sensitivity correlates significantly with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) = 0.589, p < .05$. Also, teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying significantly correlate with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) = 0.376, p < .05$. It was recommended that teacher should ensure students express friendly and positive attitudes towards each other as a measure to reduce the occurrence of incidence of bullying among them so as to make the school and its classroom environment a safe zone or learning and social co-existence.

Keywords: *Bullying, COVID-19, Hard-of-hearing, Teachers sensitivity.*

Introduction

The world in early 2020 witnessed the contagious spread of a new virus tagged COVID-19 that destabilised the normal of human existence and inter global connectivity in an unprecedented made due to the ease in speed and transmission. The quick spread of the COVID-19 virus amazed the world considering the fact that despite it originated in December the last month of 2019 in far away Wuhan food market in China, it easily spread across borders to far countries round the globe affecting millions of people and equally causing the deaths of millions of people

without giving consideration to gender, age, religion, socio-economic status etc, (Banerjee, 2020).

The challenges of virus that causes COVID-19 stressed the mental, intellectual and professional research competencies of scientist and medical practitioners to daily strive to find solution on how to combat the ravage caused by the disease against human life and environment as to make human existence meaningful, save and secured. The compounding challenges attached to the experience of contacting the virus of COVID-19 is that when contacted, the individual will not immediately be conscious of it until after some days ranging from 2-2weeks before its symptoms will start manifesting. Symptoms such as lack of ability to breath well, fever, tiredness, sever cough, sore throat, bodily pains, runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea, etc will overwhelm the physiological wellbeing of the affected individual (Brooks, Amlôt, Rubin & Greenberg, 2020). These experiences made COVID-19 virus dreadful as it kills within a short while in an alarming rate and as such the global health body World Health Organisation (WHO) tagged it a pandemic in the year 2020. However, to reduce the rate of spread and control the damage done to human life and environment, World Health Organisation came up with treatment and preventive measures in the likes of making it compulsory for affected environment and individuals to be quarantine, people should wash their hands regularly, apply sanitizers, avoid hand shake or bodily embraces, implement social distancing rules and the wearing of face masks to control and limit the spread of the disease (WHO, 2020).

Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang and Jiang (2020) posit that in the quest to put the challenges of COVID-19 under control, a vital issue that concerns the implication of spread of COVID-19 virus on the social, emotional, psychological and educational wellbeing of adolescents, teenagers and toddlers seemed overlooked to the detriment of their developmental life experience(s). They made these assertions in view of the fact that as researchers in the field of developmental psychology, they found that environment plays a significant part in the life success and fundamental wellbeing of children as they grow up to develop basic life skills and competencies they need to be resourceful, functional and productive in life.

The global restriction due to the spread of COVID-19 gave rise to the initiation of preventive programmes such as school children learning from home via online instruction, closure of play ground, parks, and schools, religious and recreational centres. This initiative disrupted the life experiences of mostly children and could have made them experience distress, stress and confusion that would negatively impair the future wellbeing in all ramification. Furthermore, adolescents, teenagers and toddlers experiencing restrictions in movement are likely to express agitation, hostility, frustration, anger and impatience that may make them to suffer mental and physical deprivation from parents that are under undue pressure. Also, children can appear to be troublesome and aggressive to self and their immediate environment due to intolerance associated with the disappointment of not able to engage in face-to-face

contact with teachers, their classmates and friends. Again the fear of contacting COVID-19 infection could further trigger anxiety and apprehension among adolescents, teenagers and toddlers that might make them to be maladjusted and exhibit irrational behaviour (Wang, et. al. 2020).

This consciousness made nations to apply drastic measures to address the educational and social needs of physically challenged and disadvantaged vulnerable school children so as to make teaching and learning experience meaningful to them despite the COVID-19 crisis because if appropriate care is not taken, students learning experience with learning disability especially the hard-of-hearing in inclusive learning environment in post-COVID-19 era could be devastating, frustrating and challenging. This is so because their disability put them at greater risk of attaining success with the policy of social distancing in classroom and school learning environment in place. This experience could widen the gap of learning and friendly interaction between hard-of-hearing students, their peers and teacher.

Understanding the challenges of learners with disabilities in an inclusive learning environment is imperative to have a clear perspective of what inclusive learning environment implies. Note that inclusive education is an American pedagogy that describes classroom learning experience where every learner is accommodated undermining their birth circumstances, background, social class and disability in the same classroom to learn and acquire knowledge as a pragmatic measure that would support the developmental wellbeing of individuals with disabilities irrespective of their circumstances. This implies that in line with global best practices school classroom learning environment should be inclusive in nature to give all learners irrespective of their disability opportunity to maximize their potentials through the use of different instructional measures accessible and meaningful children with disability (Harlacher & Rodriguez, 2018). Thus, the aftermath of COVID-19 saw many countries going into collaboration and becoming patterns working together in synergy to ensure school children have continue access to qualitative education and learning experiences undermining the global health and environmental challenges that serve as frustrating hindrance. Interestingly, efforts put in place have yielded remarkable success with increase in number of children enrolling and attending primary as well as secondary school education with ease in lots of countries across the globe (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). However, despite this recorded success, United Nation report noted that millions of school age going children with learning disability are not privileged to attend school due to the fear of being bullied and as such they are left behind. In view of this development, hard of hearing school children could be at risk of not attending school or dropping out of school due to consistent unpleasant bullying experiences (UNESCO 2020).

The term hard-of-hearing refers to individuals experiencing mild to severe hearing loss. Individuals with hard of hearing do have some measure of capacity to hear spoken words or sound. This implies that hard of hearing individuals could still

communicate using spoken language and equally use of assistive devices, cochlear implants and other hearing aids to enhance their ability to hear words spoken and communicated by others people. Thus, individuals with hard of hearing exhibit characteristics features of feeling that expressed words or sounds are silence and muted because they have significant trouble hearing and comprehending sounds effectively most especially in environment that is noisy. These challenges can be very difficult for other non-disabled students in inclusive learning environment to comprehend and when this happens in the case of hard-of-hearing students' requesting fellow students' to speak louder it might lead to conflict to such an extent of bullying the hard-of-hearing students using derogating words. Situations like this could undermine the self-concept, personality development and educational wellbeing of the hard-of-hearing student.

According to Pervanidou, Makris, Bouzios, Chrousos, Roma and Chouliaras (2019) bullying that occurs in school among peers is referred to as school bullying. School bullying is often occurs when a more powerfully strong student aggressively intimidate and subdue their peers by physical and verbal means to continually taking orders or to be submissive to their commands with outright obedience. This kind of experience could make bullied school children become anxious, frustrated, dejected, depress and express symptom of helplessness and possibility of contemplating suicide if care is not taken. Thus, consistent bully experience could discourage school children from going to school, feel insecure, and develop post panic and traumatic stress disorder or other severe mental health challenges and seek revenge on others (Pervanidou, et. al. 2019).

The research finding of Bonke (2010) highlights the fact that in Nigeria, among its school going adolescents of ages 11 to 15 years, 11% have experience been bullied by their peers, 13% have in turn bullied others, and 6% have also being bullied and they have equally bullied some of their peers too. And it is of note that globally, prevalence of bullying incidence among school children ranges from 10% to 27% among secondary school students. When self report made by teachers and peers were analyzed, concerning 1,985 students, 7% were found to be involve in act of bully, 9% have experience bullying as victims and 6% have being bullied and they have bullied others in same manner as revenge and despite the severity of bullying on the wellbeing of school children, the act of bullying in Nigerian schools have continually gone unattended to by appropriate authorities (Bonke, 2010).

Weiner, Day and Galvan (2013) investigated the occurrence of bullying in 11 school in USA among 812 hard of hearing and deaf students while making use of a well structured standardized self reporting multiple choice questions of Olweus Bullying Questionnaire that focuses on diverse aspect of school bullying problem for data collection. Disturbingly, the occurrence of acts of bullying was significantly present among hard of hearing and deaf students and the prevalence was 2 to 3 times higher than what was observed among non hearing impaired students. The reason is

that school authorities and personnel often fail to intervene and correct observable abnormal act of bullying expressed by hard of hearing and deaf students each time it occurs among them and this suggest the need to make school learning environment conducive and free from bullying aggression to enhance the attainment of fruitful teaching and learning experience for all students (Olweus, 2007b).

A number of different approaches have been taken by schools in order to combat bullying of vulnerable children especially those with learning disabilities. Generally, approaches seek to tackle the problem of bullying from one of four perspectives: social interactions, psychology, physical health, and government policy and intervention (Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). Counter to popular belief, bullying research has shown that having a high quality friendship alone does not act as a protective factor towards being a bullying victim (Bollmer, Milich, Harris & Moras, 2005), indicating that while social development is undoubtedly important in children's growth, a focus on it alone is not enough to adequately deal with bullying. Furthermore, giving clinical diagnoses to victims of bullying is seen to be ineffective in the process of treatment of a victim (Oneil et al., 2012).

Therefore, one would think that with the prominent role that teachers play in the classroom, their awareness and sensitivity of classroom dynamics, and their potential to form deep and meaningful relationships with their students would help in managing and preventing bullying incidence among challenged children in inclusive learning environment. Regrettably, the opinions of teachers as regards their observance of incidence of bullying are often not sought after. Thus, concern teachers expressed that the major barrier to curtailing the occurrence of the incidence of bullying among school children is lack of laid down procedures that would be adhered to in reporting, dealing and preventing the occurrence of bullying among students (Nordhal, Poole, Stanton, Walden & Beran, 2008; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Teachers themselves perceive a number of barriers to dealing with bullying effectively (Marshall, 2012), and this perceived helplessness can lead to a lack of action and make teachers to appear to be insensitive to the plight of vulnerable children in school.

Therefore, this study is anchored on the postulations of theory of reason action. The reasons are that this theory is used to understand human expressed attitudes and behavioural dispositions. This theory enables an individual to project into why people behave the way they do and intentions behind their actions. This implies that it is human basic intention that motivates an individual to act in a particular way and manner. For example, the intention of a secondary school student to have dominance over the peers would motivate the student to intimidate and bully his peers physically and verbally to submission so as to have the desired dominance and control over them (Glanz, Rimer & Viswanath, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The manifestation of characteristic traits of bullying in the life of an adolescent is typical of their development because of the critical nature of their developmental stage and life experiences. They battle for recognition and formation of identity which might lead them to express aggression as a measure to dominate their environment and institute domineering authority. The quest to attain this height could make adolescents express bullying antisocial behaviour as the only way out at the detriment of the wellbeing of others individuals in the society. Therefore, the disposition of bullying behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools in Nigeria could make the possibility of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents attaining and maximizing their full potentials seems a mirage. Based on this context therefore, this study investigated the relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to empirically investigate relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

Research Hypotheses

There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

Methods

Correlation research design of ex-post facto type was adopted for this study. Population of the study consist of teachers and hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent's using cochlear implants, hearing aids and assistive devices to help facilitate their hearing ability in inclusive learning environment in Owerri. The samples for this study were one hundred (100) teachers and fifty (50) hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning environment in Owerri. The teachers were randomly selected from ten public secondary schools in Owerri, while hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents were purposively selected due to their peculiarity.

Instruments

Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire (BPQ) of Rigby and Slee (1999) was used to measure incidence of bullying expressed by in-school adolescents. It is a twenty item instrument that has being used across culture and proven to be reliable. It has

items such as: I like to get in fights with someone I can easily beat: I like to make others scared of me etc. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.84. It will be adapted for use.

Teachers' Sensitivity to Bully Questionnaire (TSBQ) of Kandel, Denise, & Lessor, (1972) was used to assess teachers' consciousness of students' interpersonal relationship activities in school. It is a 7-item standardized instrument. This The question reads: As a teacher I monitor students on playing field to observe acts of bullying; I ensure students resolve their misunderstanding in class to avoid conflict and bullying situation; when I observe unnecessary quietness of a student I make sure interview the student to understand the challenge, etc. It has 5-point likert response format of: "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "a lot of times" or "always". The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .92. This questionnaire was adapted for use being a standardized instrument.

Procedure for Administration

Permission was obtained from Principals of schools. Also classroom teachers' assistance was sought for in selected schools used for this study. The consent of teachers and hard-of-hearing students was sought for and the essence of the study was explained to them. Thereafter the instruments were administered on them and collected back for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse data collected for this study at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Hypothesess One: There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

Table 1: PPMC summary table showing significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	df	P
Bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era	150	15.60	2.949	.589	148	Sig
Teachers sensitivity	150	15.77	2.823			

Table 1: shows that teachers sensitivity significantly correlates with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) =$

0.589, $p < .05$, the mean and standard deviation for teachers sensitivity was 15.77 and 2.823 respectively. This implies that when teachers are vigilant and observant of happenings in classroom and school environment, they are able to modify students' anti-social behaviour positively. However, when they fail in this responsibility, students could freely expressed bullying behaviour and be engaged in act of bullying.

Research Hypotheses Two: There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri.

Table 2: PPMC summary table showing significant relationship between teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying and bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescent in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era in Owerri

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	df	P
Bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era	150	15.60	2.949	.376	148	Sig
Teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying	150	13.55	2.839			

Table 2: shows that teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying significantly correlate with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) = 0.376$, $p < .05$, the mean and standard deviation for Teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying was 13.55 and 2.839 respectively. This indicates that with good orientation, students would desist from bullying.

Discussion of Findings

It was found that teachers sensitivity significantly correlates with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) = 0.589$, $p < .05$, the mean and standard deviation for teachers sensitivity was 15.77 and 2.823 respectively. This implies that when teachers are vigilant and observant of happenings in classroom and school environment, they are able to modify students' anti-social behaviour positively. However, when they fail in this responsibility, students could freely expressed bullying behaviour and be engaged in act of bullying. This is consistent with Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang and Jiang (2020) assertion that in the quest to put the challenges of COVID-19 under control, a vital issue that concerns the implication of spread of COVID-19 virus on the social, emotional, psychological and educational wellbeing of adolescents, teenagers and toddlers seemed overlooked to the detriment of their developmental life experience(s). They made these assertions in view of the fact that as researchers in the field of developmental psychology, they found that environment plays a significant part in the life success and fundamental wellbeing of children as they grow up to develop basic life skills and competencies they need to be resourceful, functional and productive in

life. This further gives credence to findings of Weiner, Day and Galvan (2013) investigation of the occurrence of bullying in 11 school in USA among 812 hard of hearing and deaf students while making use of a well structured standardized self reporting multiple choice questions of Olweus Bullying Questionnaire that focuses on diverse aspect of school bullying problem for data collection. Disturbingly, it was revealed that the occurrence of acts of bullying was significantly present among hard of hearing and deaf students and the prevalence was 2 to 3 times higher than what was observed among non hearing impaired students. The reason is that school authorities and personnel often fail to intervene and correct observable abnormal act of bullying expressed by hard of hearing and deaf students each time it occurs among them and this suggest the need to make school learning environment conducive and free from bullying aggression to enhance the attainment of fruitful teaching and learning experience for all students (Olweus, 2007b).

Likewise, the second hypotheses finding revealed that teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying significantly correlate with bullying of hard-of-hearing in-school adolescents in inclusive learning post-COVID-19 era, $r(148) = 0.376$, $p < .05$, the mean and standard deviation for Teachers' sensitivity on orientating students on danger of bullying was 13.55 and 2.839 respectively. This indicates that with good orientation, students would desist from bullying. This is an affirmation of the fact that a number of different approaches have been taken by schools in order to combat bullying of vulnerable children especially those with learning disabilities. Generally, approaches seek to tackle the problem of bullying from one of four perspectives: social interactions, psychology, physical health, and government policy and intervention (Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). Counter to popular belief, bullying research has shown that having a high quality friendship alone does not act as a protective factor towards being a bullying victim (Bollmer, Milich, Harris & Moras, 2005), indicating that while social development is undoubtedly important in children's growth, a focus on it alone is not enough to adequately deal with bullying. Furthermore, giving clinical diagnoses to victims of bullying is seen to be ineffective in the process of treatment of a victim (Oneil et al., 2012). Therefore, one would think that with the prominent role that teachers play in the classroom, their awareness and sensitivity of classroom dynamics, and their potential to form deep and meaningful relationships with their students would help in managing and preventing bullying incidence among challenged children in inclusive learning environment. Regrettably, the opinions of teachers as regards their observance of incidence of bullying are often not sought after. Thus, concern teachers expressed that the major barrier to curtailing the occurrence of the incidence of bullying among school children is lack of laid down procedures that would be adhered to in reporting, dealing and preventing the occurrence of bullying among students (Nordhal, Poole, Stanton, Walden & Beran, 2008; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Teachers themselves perceive a number of barriers to dealing with bullying effectively (Marshall, 2012), and this perceived helplessness

can lead to a lack of action and make teachers to appear to be insensitive to the plight of vulnerable children in school.

Conclusion

The outcome of this study revealed that teachers holds it as a responsibility to be more sensitive in observing the occurrence of expressed act of bullying among hard-of-hearing secondary school adolescents as to come up with necessary measures that would be put in place to control, reduce and put an end to the incidence of bullying among secondary school students.

Recommendations

Teachers should ensure they create enabling and conducive social and educational environment where warmth will be expressed and acceptance felt among all students to allow effective collaboration to take place among them and teachers alike.

Teacher should ensure students express friendly and positive attitudes towards each other as a measure to reduce the occurrence of incidence of bullying among them so as to make the school and its classroom environment a safe zone or learning and social co-existence.

Teachers should positively reinforce students that express good behaviours to their peers through praises and specifically describe such positive behaviour to provide positive feedback to children who exhibit appropriate social behaviours as a means to encourage others students to emulate.

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