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Status of the Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the status of the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive research design was adopted. The population comprised all the 322 principals in the 322 public junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Out of these 322 principals, 217 are males while 105 are females. A sample of 200 principals (120 males and 80 females), representing 62% of the population was drawn using both the simple random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. The instrument that was used for data collection was a validated self-designed 17-item questionnaire entitled: "Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Questionnaire (ICRLEOVQCQ)," and it was structured after the four-point modified Likert rating scale. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability coefficients of 0.69 and 0.82 were obtained respectively for the various sections of the instrument, which showed that the instrument was reliable. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed, among others, that Child Rights Laws are being implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State at a high extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that school administrators should ensure that children learn in a friendly environment that is devoid of threats, bullying, corporal punishments, child labour, child abuse among others in order to make schooling a worthwhile experience for every child.

Keywords: Implementation, Child Rights Laws, Education, Orphans, Vulnerable Children.

Introduction

Education has been widely acknowledged as a veritable tool for the development of an individual for useful living in the society. Based on this premise, most developed countries of the world do not compromise with children's education as they ensure they are adequately protected and provided for in order to ensure continuity in the global community. Because of how important and precious children are to the family as well as the nation, their rights are being advocated globally. In recognition of the role children play in nation building, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) stipulated in its National Policy on Education that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities. Thus, Nigeria has been making concerted efforts to ensure that her citizenry, especially children have access to free, uninterrupted and compulsory basic education by introducing the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act. The UBE is planned to accommodate and equip children in primary and junior secondary schools, who are within the age brackets of 6-15 years with required knowledge and skills.

A child is statutorily defined as every human being below the age of 18 years. This means that children in both primary and secondary schools fall under this category. The Rivers State Child Rights Law (2009) defined a child as someone who has not reached the level of maturity and is dependent on his parents and older adults for survival.

Having realised the vulnerability of a child in a very busy society like ours, the Rivers State Government has recommended that a child's protection, interest, and wellbeing shall be given paramount consideration. Adama (2016) noted that the survival and continuity of a nation's socioeconomic development depend upon the protection, preservation, nurture and development of the child. Adiemi and Nwideduh (2019) emphasised that providing the child with a good start in life and ensuring that his or her basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, safety) and emotional needs are adequately met are the responsibilities of every adult, under whose custody a child is. Thus, it is expected that teachers play parental roles (*in loco parentis*) to the pupils and students under their custody.

Children have been variously categorised into different groups. Among these diverse groups are street children, physically challenged children, orphan children, vulnerable children, out-of-school children, among others. For the thrust of this study, Orphans and Vulnerable Children will be focused on. An orphan is a child who has lost both parents. World Bank Orphans and Vulnerable Children (1998) as cited in Bell-Gam (2020) categorised another class of orphans as social orphans, whose one or both parents may be alive, but unable to perform parental duties because of illness or acute poverty. This group of children have been fostered in our society due to myriads of challenges which range from natural disasters to pandemic diseases. Other challenges include: premature death of one or both parents, natural disasters, conflict situations, communal clashes, among others. On the other hand, a vulnerable child is one who is at risk of suffering deprivation of basic needs, care and protection due to circumstances of birth or immediate changes in the environment where he or she is found. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2007) provided the characteristics of children who can be identified as Orphan and Vulnerable Children as follows: street children, street beggars, out-of-school children, children with disabilities, trafficked children, children in exploitative labour, children who are abused or neglected, children from broken homes, internally displaced children, children who hawk on streets and abandoned children.

In order to protect children from inhuman treatment and vulnerability, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promulgated the Child Rights Act in 1989. The United Nations (1989) as cited in Adiemi and Nwideduh (2019) asserted that the Convention was necessary to uphold a child's entitlement to harmonious development, protection and active participation in society without any discrimination irrespective of his tribe and family background. After the Convention, it was agreed that every Member State of the United Nations should implement the Act. The African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child domesticated it in 1990. However, Nigeria domesticated both the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child in 2003 and mandated her States to adapt and implement the Act accordingly. According to Child Rights Act (2003), the Act mainly seeks to protect the child from all forms of abuses and to create an enabling environment for his or her proper growth and development. It should be noted that the United Nations has made several Laws to safeguard the rights of children, but the most prominent of them all is the Child Rights Act.

Child Rights Law or Act is a global law that is made to protect the rights of a child in the world. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2003, p. 3) defined Child Rights Act as "a national law that makes provision for the protection of the rights of a child without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child's parental background, sex, ethnicity, religion, disability or other status." It should be noted that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes the most authoritative and comprehensive statement of fundamental rights of children which must be protected (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2003). The Child Rights Act consists of three Parts and 54 Articles. Part 1 spells out children's rights, Part 2 sets out how governments/state parties should work together to make them available to all children and Part 3 sets out the conditions of being an active Member State. The Act centres on children's entitlement to development, protection, participation and non-discrimination. Hence, the thrust of this study lies on Parts 1 and 2 respectively.

The Child Rights Act as cited in Olakanmi (2007) stipulated the following as some of the rights of the child as agreed and endorsed by United Nations Member States:

- **Article V:** Every child shall be given appropriate direction and guidance necessary for his wellbeing.
- **Article VI:** Every child has the inherent right to life – survival and development.
- **Article XIII:** Every child has the right to freedom of expression.
- **Article XIV:** Every child shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- **Article XV:** Every child shall have the right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- **Article XIX:** State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child 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.

- **Article XXVII:** every child shall have the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- **Article XXVIII:** Every child shall have the right to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.
- **Article XXXII:** Every child shall have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
- **Article XXXVII:** No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Thus, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) outlines the human rights to be respected and protected for every child under 18 years and requires that these rights be implemented.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has also made efforts to safeguard the rights of children in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution and established agencies that cater for the violation of the rights of a child. The Rivers State Government, after adapting the Child Rights Act in 2009, promulgated the Child's Law, which provided that every person, institution, service, agency, organisation, and body responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform to the standards established by the appropriate authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, welfare, and competent supervision (Rivers State Child's Law, 2009). In an effort to uphold the rights of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2007) facilitated a five-year National Plan of Action 2006-2010 in response to accelerate the actualisation of protecting, supporting and caring for children. The Plan is carefully planned to holistically address the welfare needs of all children in the Nigeria. Hence, it is expected that the Child Rights Act be implemented at home, school and in fact, anywhere a child inhabits.

Implementation in the educational system is the process of carrying out a plan, a policy, a programme, a law, an act, a task, an initiative, a decision, among others, which are geared towards achieving educational objectives and goals. Educational managers or school administrators are charged with the responsibility of implementing educational policies, laws and programmes. It should be noted that one of the fundamental human rights the Child Rights Law advocates is the protection of a child. The findings of Adiemi and Onyeagbako (2018) revealed that it is the sole duty of educational administrators to ensure that the Child Rights Laws are implemented effectively by providing adequate protection for all the children in their schools, caring for their welfare and putting their interests first in any decision-making. Adiemi and Nwideduh (2019) posited that it is the sole responsibility of the school administrators to protect the rights of the child against torture, in-human treatments or punishments by promoting a good school climate and improving the conditions under which the students are meant to learn both in and outside the classroom environment. In a related study, Okala (2023) observed that when students perceive they are loved equally by their teachers, they feel at home and learn better.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child emphasised that the best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning the child. Adama (2016) posited that States are required to assist care givers/teachers to implement the Child's Right Act by providing material assistance, security and financial assistance with a view to achieving equal educational opportunity. Similarly, Adiemi and Nwideduh (2019) suggested that the most strategic ways to achieve the Child Rights Act is to ensure that all children have increased access to essential services such as education and primary health care. It is interesting to note that Rivers State Child Rights Law (2009) promulgated that every child has the right to free and compulsory Universal Basic Education and it shall be the duty of the government to provide such education. The findings of Adiemi and Onyeagbako (2018) revealed that supervision of every action that relates to the students' discipline in school helps in the implementation of the Child Right Laws. In corroboration, Olumodeji (2008) posited that child welfare matters should be issues of primary concern in any society that means well for the child. Akwara et al. (2010) pointed out that all children have the right to rest, leisure, engage in play, sports and recreational activities. Hence, every child has the right to participate fully in extra-curricular activities in school.

However, in spite of the passage of the Child Right Act into law in Nigeria, and measures adopted to ensure that the rights of Orphans and Vulnerable Children are protected, implementing it has not been easy in Nigerian education system. Taiwo (2004) as cited in Okala (2023) observed that children often face degrading or inhuman treatment of different kinds such as child abuse, child labour and child neglect which have negative influence on them. Bell-Gam (2020) conducted a study on Child Rights Law for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State, and discovered that challenges in the implementation include: non-functional technical structures, unavailability of trained experts for data collection, poor knowledge of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children's right and lack of State Laws. Onyango and Lynch (2006) noted that despite various efforts to improve legislation and the policy framework to protect children, the resources needed to make a real difference in school are

inadequate.

A cursory look on our roads, especially during the holidays has shown that children's rights are still being violated. Okoye (2011) pointed out that the implementation of the Child Rights Act has continued to be a problem in Nigeria because people are neither aware of the Act nor do they have knowledge of the prohibitions of the Act. Adiame (2016) observed that some children of school age still hawk on streets in Rivers State during and after school hours. Similarly, Akwara et al. (2010) emphasised that it is an offence under the Child Rights Law for parents to deny their children education, keep them at home or use them as helpers instead of being given opportunity to explore their environment for future relevance. In the same vein, Adama (2016) argued that poverty has compelled some parents to expose their children to street hustles; thereby subjecting them to dehumanising conditions and abuses. Thus, it should be noted that Articles 32 and 35 of the Child Rights Act promulgate the right to protection from various forms of exploitation. From the reviewed literature, there is dearth of empirical works on the extent of the implementation of the Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State; hence, this is the gap this study intends to fill.

Statement of the Problem

Children all over the world are vulnerable to different attacks, abuses and all manners of inhuman treatment. In realising the vulnerability nature of a child, the United Nations enacted the Child Rights Act to ensure that children's rights are protected at all times. The Child Rights Act is aimed at using education as a tool to develop every child including the Orphans and Vulnerable Children to become useful members of the society. In recognition of the numerous roles education plays in the lives of individuals, the Federal Republic of Nigeria domesticated the Child Rights Act in 2003, and thereafter introduced free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities. The Rivers State Government domesticated the Child Rights Law in 2009, and has been making concerted efforts to ensure that all children have equal access to educational opportunities and that their rights are fully safeguarded in both at home and in schools. However, it seems the Orphans and Vulnerable Children do not have access to equal educational opportunities as some vulnerable children are still found on streets hawking and begging during and after school hours. This problem underscores this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the status of the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State; and
2. identify the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What are the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated at 0.05 alpha level:

- Ho₁ There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Ho₂ There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all the 322 principals in the 322 public junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Out of these 322 principals, 217 are males while 105 are females (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, 2023). A sample of 200 principals (120 males and 80 females), representing 62% of the population was drawn using both the simple random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. This was determined by the Taro Yamane Formula which gave a minimum sample size of 36 principals. The instrument that was used for data collection

was a researcher-based 17-item questionnaire entitled: “Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Questionnaire (ICRLEOVQC).” The questionnaire was structured after the four-point Likert rating scale of Very High Extent, High Extent, Low Extent and Very Low Extent; Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with weights of: 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. The instrument was duly validated by three experts in Test and Measurement Department and Educational Management Department of Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt.

The internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.76 for (ICRLEOVQC) was computed using Cronbach’s Alpha. The subscales’ reliability for implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children and the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws for the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children are 0.69 and 0.82 respectively; hence, they were adjudged to be reliable for the field study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to ascertain “High Extent” or “Low Extent” for research question one. The decision rule therefore was that any mean score less than the criterion mean of 2.50 were tagged “Low Extent” while mean scores of 2.50 and above represented “High Extent.” In addition, any mean score from 2.50 and above was agreed upon, and the mean below 2.50 was disagreed upon for research question 2. The acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses was based on the critical value of z-test, which is ± 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Opinions of Male and Female Principals on the Extent to which Child Rights Laws are Implemented in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

S/N	The Extent of to which Child Rights Laws are Implemented in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children	Male Principals = 120		Female Principals = 80		\bar{X}_1 \bar{X}_2	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
1.	To what extent are Orphans and Vulnerable Children offered free education in your school?	2.63	0.68	2.58	0.83	2.61	High Extent
2.	To what extent do Orphans and Vulnerable Children complete the compulsory basic education?	2.54	0.68	2.53	0.84	2.54	High Extent
3.	To what extent are safe learning environments provided for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in your school?	2.79	0.66	2.82	0.81	2.81	High Extent
4.	To what extent are the Orphans and Vulnerable Children protected from inhuman treatments from teachers, students, etc in the school?	3.10	0.63	3.05	0.78	3.08	Very High Extent
5.	To what extent is the teaching-learning process delivered with appropriate instructional materials in order to make learning fun for Orphans and Vulnerable Children?	2.73	0.67	2.69	0.82	2.71	High Extent
6.	To what extent do the Orphans and Vulnerable Children participate in extra-curricular activities?	2.96	0.65	2.88	0.80	2.92	High Extent
7.	To what extent do you check the Attendance Register to know when any of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children is absent from school?	2.82	0.66	2.87	0.80	2.85	High Extent
8.	To what extent do you call, send messages or visit any of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children’s parents/guardians to know why they are absent from school?	2.35	0.70	2.46	0.85	2.41	Low Extent

9.	To what extent are decisions made in the best interest of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children in your school?	3.12	0.63	3.09	0.78	3.11	Very High Extent
	Aggregate Mean/SD	2.78	0.66	2.77	0.81	2.78	

NB: Very High Extent = 3.00-3.50; High Extent = 2.50-2.99; Low Extent= 2.00-2.49; Very Low Extent = 0.00-1.99

Table 1 shows the mean responses of male and female principals on the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Their responses indicate that Child Rights Laws are being implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children to a high extent. This is evidenced in their aggregate mean scores of 2.78 and 2.77 respectively. These include: Orphans and Vulnerable Children offered free education and they complete the compulsory basic education. They learn in a safe environment; protected from inhuman treatments; the teaching-learning process is delivered with appropriate instructional materials to make learning fun; they participate in extra-curricular activities and decisions are made in the best interest of them.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Opinions of Male and Female Principals on the Challenges in the Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

S/N	Challenges in the Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Include:	Male Principals = 120		Female Principals = 80		\bar{X}_1 \bar{X}_2	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
10.	Lack of awareness of Orphans and Vulnerable Children's right to equal educational opportunities.	2.88	0.65	2.73	0.82	2.81	Agreed
11.	Lack of knowledge of violation of the Child Rights Laws.	3.03	0.64	3.01	0.79	3.02	Agreed
12.	Poverty.	3.15	0.63	3.18	0.77	3.17	Agreed
13.	Inadequate learning facilities that enhance engaged classroom learning.	2.79	0.66	2.85	0.80	2.82	Agreed
14.	Hostile/Unfriendly learning environment.	1.96	0.74	1.47	0.96	1.72	Disagreed
15.	Inability to make decisions in the best interest of children, especially the Orphans and Vulnerable Children.	2.32	0.70	2.28	0.87	2.30	Disagreed
16.	Lack of supervision of the kinds of punishments meted on the Orphans and Vulnerable Children.	2.27	0.71	2.32	0.86	2.29	Disagreed
17.	Lack of political will to implement the penalty policy on defaulters of the Child Rights Act in the State.	2.89	0.65	2.91	0.80	2.90	Agreed
	Aggregate Mean/SD	2.66	0.67	2.59	0.83	2.63	

Table 2 displays the mean responses of male and female principals on the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Both male and female principals agreed on items: 10, 11, 13, 14 and 17 in the Table with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. However, they disagreed on items: 15 and 15, which are less than the criterion mean of 2.50. Their aggregate mean scores of 2.66 and 2.59 respectively, indicate that they agreed that there are challenges that are faced in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. These include: lack of awareness of Orphans and Vulnerable Children's right to equal educational opportunities; lack of knowledge of violation of the Child Rights Laws; poverty; inadequate learning facilities that enhance engaged classroom learning and lack of political will to implement the penalty policy on defaulters of the Child Rights Act in the State.

Table 3: Summary of z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on the Extent Child Rights Laws are Implemented in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	Critical Value	Remarks	Decision
Male Principals	120	2.78	0.66	198	0.09	± 1.96	Not Significant	Failed to Reject
Female Principals	80	2.77	0.81					

Table 3 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The result shows that z-calculated value of 0.09 is less than the critical value of ± 1.96 ; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is no significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on the Challenges in the Implementation of Child Rights Laws in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools In Rivers State

Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	Critical Value	Remarks	Decision
Male Principals	120	2.66	0.67	198	0.07	± 1.96	Not Significant	Failed to Reject
Female Principals	80	2.59	0.83					

Table 4 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The result shows that z-calculated value of 0.07 is less than the critical value of ± 1.96 ; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is no significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that the extent to which Child Rights Laws are implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State is to a high extent. These include: free education, completion of basic education, learning in a safe environment; protection from inhuman treatments; the teaching-learning process is delivered with appropriate instructional materials to make learning fun; participation in extra-curricular activities and making decisions in the best interest of them. This finding implies that the Rivers State Government runs inclusive education that offers free and compulsory basic education for all children. The finding is in agreement with Adieme and Onyeagbako (2018), who conducted a study and discovered that welfare of students are prioritised in primary education system in Rivers State. The finding is also in line with Okala (2023), Adama (2016), who observed that children are excited to go to school when they perceive they are loved and safe. It is also corroborated with Adieme and Nwideduh (2019), who found out that the rights of students are protected against torture, in-human treatments or punishments in a good school climate.

Another finding of the study revealed that there are challenges that are faced in the implementation of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. These include: lack of awareness of Orphans and Vulnerable Children's right to equal educational opportunities; lack of knowledge of violation of the Child Rights Laws; poverty; inadequate learning facilities that enhance engaged classroom learning and lack of political will to implement the penalty policy on defaulters of the Child Rights Act in the State. This finding agrees with Bell-Gam (2020), Okoye (2011), who conducted different studies and discovered that the implementation of the Child Rights Act has continued to be a problem in Nigeria because people are neither aware of the Act nor do they have knowledge of the prohibitions of the Laws. It is also in consonance with Onyango and Lynch (2006), who observed that despite various efforts to improve legislation and the policy framework to protect children, the resources needed to make a real difference in schools are inadequate. In underscoring, the findings of Adama (2016) revealed that poverty has compelled some parents to expose their

children to street hustles; thereby subjecting them to dehumanising conditions and abuses. The finding corroborated Adiame (2016) findings of some children of school age still hawking on streets in Rivers State during and after school hours. Thus, the implication of this finding is that some parents/guardians are still not aware of the Child Rights Laws and the violations in Rivers State.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Child Rights Laws are being implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State at a high extent. This shows that the Rivers State Government runs inclusive education that offers free and compulsory basic education for all children; hence, there is no excuse for any child not to be enrolled in a school. However, the challenges that are encountered in the implementation of the Child Rights Act must be addressed in order to ensure that every child receives equal access to education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Rivers State Government should start implementing penalties for the violation of the Child Rights Act so as to reduce child abuse, street children-hawkers, illiteracy and all sorts of inhuman treatments against the Orphans and Vulnerable Children.
2. School administrators should ensure that children learn in a friendly environment that is devoid of threats, bullying, corporal punishments, child labour, child abuse among others in order to make schooling a worthwhile experience for every child.

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