



Interpersonal relationships and pupils' social skills acquisition in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers state, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship that exists between interpersonal relationships and social skills acquisition among pupils in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The study determined to find out if the relationships that exist within the school, such as the relationship between pupils and teachers; pupils and head teachers; relationship between pupils and pupils, among others, can foster the acquisition of social skills in pupils in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Four objectives, four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The correlational research design was adopted for the study. Population of the study was 18,376 primary 5 pupils found in 354 public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Sample size for the study was 800 primary 5 pupils. Taro Yamane formula was used to select the sample of 35 primary schools which represented 10% of the total number of public primary schools; while simple random sampling technique through balloting by replacement was used to select the 800 pupils. A researcher-designed 48 items instrument titled: "Interpersonal Relationship and Pupils' Social Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (IRPSSAQ)" was used to collect data for the study. Test re-test method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument; while the validation of the instrument was ascertained by one primary school teacher and one head teacher. The reliability score of 0.82 was obtained from the reliability testing, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed in answering the research questions and testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed among others that there is a positive and strong significant relationship between teacher-pupils interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of active listening as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that teachers should guide pupils towards positive interaction/communication in the classroom.

Keywords: Interpersonal relationship, pupils' social skills acquisition, public primary schools, Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers state

Introduction

Social skills acquisition of pupils is a necessity because social skills are components of behaviour that help an individual understand and adapt across a variety of settings. These skills are critical for successful functioning of the individual. They enable individuals to be objective about what to say and how to say them, to make good choices and how to behave appropriately in different situations. Social skills are a collection of acquired behaviours which give the individual the ability to have an exerting relationship with others and to abstain from socially undesirable behaviours (Argan, Hughes, Thomas & Scott, 2016; Elliott, 2015; Gresham, 2016; Yoder, 2015) ^[3, 5, 7]. They represent the individuals' social, emotional and mental wellbeing (Lawles, 2016).

Social skills are skills that can help individuals to easily attach, socialize with people and survive better. These skills are similar to getting along and consist of the capacity to generate conversations with others in social settings that are decent and worthy according to societal and school norms (Morgan *et al.*, 2015) ^[11]. Social skills are an important factor in school success. Morgan *et al.* (2015) ^[11] defined social skills as the abilities needed by an individual (children inclusive) to acquire and sustain meaningful relationships with others.

Indeed, strong social skills in early childhood predict mental health and happiness later in life; hence, social skills acquisition should begin as early as early childhood stage (Trawick-Smith, 2014) ^[13]. Social skills are known for

making the classroom atmosphere enjoyable and inviting. Thus, social skills are a group of acquired behaviours that could give the individual the capacity to have good and desirable relationship with others, and refrain from anti-social actions.

Pupils who acquire social skills are able to communicate their needs and wants clearly. They offer ideas with a view to helping others; they make better friends; easily resolve conflicts; listen to other people's opinion on issues; while also respectfully making their own opinions known. In doing this, they engage in interchange of ideas for the benefit of all. These skills help pupils to accomplish tasks and collaborate with peers to achieve shared or set goals. Possessing good social skills helps pupils not only to relate well and accomplish tasks, it also helps them to relate well with peer groups and maintain good relationship with teachers (Gould, 2022).

There are acceptable and unacceptable social skills. Acceptable social skills are those qualities or traits that help people communicate effectively; foster and maintain relationship with others, and have positive self-image. It also lays the foundation of habits, attitudes, good behaviour, among others. Examples of acceptable social skills include good manners such as respect for people, and things, cooperation, empathy, obedience to rules and regulations, turn-taking, among others (Fabra-Brell & Remero-Naranjo, 2017) ^[6].

Having good manner is a way of showing others that you care about them and love them, making it easier for them to

feel comfortable with you. Respect means to have special regard for someone or something such as show of respect for self, God, parents, teachers, other people and even animals and objects. Pupils can show respect through the way they speak, greet, behave before peers, obey instructions and how they treat their belongings and other people's belongings. At school, pupils can work together with their peers on projects, assignments and other forms of group learning. This is known as cooperation or team work (Anokwuru, 2023) ^[2].

Empathy is another component of acceptable social skills. It is the ability to understand what a person or others are feeling or going through in a given situation by offering ideas with a view of helping and share mutual support for others in terms of difficulties. An empathic person understands what a sufferer is going through because he feels similar emotion.

Taking turns means doing things in succession, or one after the other, in order to share a task. For instance, during play, taking turn can occur when one pupil is playing with a toy and the other or others are waiting.

Obedience to rules and regulations entails social skill employed when laid down rules and regulations are spelt. Obedient pupils abide by those rules and regulations by making effort not to default. This is done to exhibit the virtue of law-abiding.

Unacceptable social skills are the direct opposite of acceptable social skills. It is an umbrella term that houses anti-social behaviours such as bullying, aggression, disobedience, disrespect, inability to show empathy and cooperation. Those who have these unacceptable social skills find it difficult to make and keep friends. They also lack consideration for the well-being of others; they display conducts that can harm and are disruptive to others.

Bullying is an unacceptable social skill; an intentional, repeated hurtful act, word, or other behaviours by an individual or individuals against another. Bullying come in the forms of physical harm, verbal poking, threat, humiliation, among others. Bullying has adverse effects on both the victims (those bullied) and the perpetrators. The bullied experience low-self-esteem, rejection, absenteeism from school, poor academic performance in school, anxiety and depression. The bullied themselves do not adjust well in school and they perform poorly in academics (Anokwuru, 2023) ^[2].

Aggression is a kind of unacceptable or anti-social behaviour that comes from anger and often results in fighting (Whilson, 2022). It is a manifestation of social skills deficit. Some pupils are aggressive as a way of attracting attention to themselves, while others are aggressive as a way of venting built up frustration. There are physical and relational aggression. Physical aggression has the intent of hurting or causing physical injury on someone through pushing, hitting and kicking; while relational aggression uses words or language to hurt others. Generally, aggressors are unfriendly, uncooperative and lack empathy, often rude to teachers, peers and are unable to make good friends.

The acquisition of social skills, be it acceptable or unacceptable, can be affected by a variety of factors, among which is pupils' interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships refer to a mutual, social and emotional interactions between two or more individuals in an environment. It also involves a close association between

individuals who share common goals and interest. Interpersonal relationships are and have always been the core of a social system since the dawn of civilization. Pupils' interpersonal relationships within the school therefore, refers to the relationships that exist between pupils and other members of the school community, such as pupils and pupils, pupils and teachers, pupils and parents, pupils and head teachers, among others (Anokwuru, 2023) ^[2].

Pupils-pupils interpersonal relationship develops in the process of interaction between peers. Peer interaction teaches pupils how to make and keep friends, work, learn and play together (Kim, Boldt & Kochanska, 2015) ^[10].

Pupils-teachers relationship is another type of interpersonal relationship. It is a positive relationship formed between teachers and their pupils in an effort to gain and establish trust and respect for one another. This interpersonal relationship between teachers and pupils promotes a supportive teaching atmosphere that helps pupils develop social competence, problem-solving abilities, active listening, autonomy and a feeling of a bright future.

Parents-pupils' interpersonal relationship is a kind of interpersonal relationship every child and parent can enjoy and nurture. It lays the foundation for pupils' personality, life choices and overall behaviour. It nurtures the physical, emotional and social development of the child. Pupils who grow with a secure and healthy attachment to their parents stand a better chance of developing happy and contented relationship in school. It enables both parties to have open and meaningful communication; hence, such pupils are able to go to their parents with their problems rather than seek help from strangers (Kim *et al.*, 2015) ^[10].

Head teachers-pupils interpersonal relationship is another relationship formed within the school. Head teachers are responsible for a lot of things that go on in the school, such as creating policies and procedures, mentoring, care for school morals, as well as the quality of interaction that take place in the school; all of which pupils are beneficiaries directly or indirectly. This kind of relationship makes it possible for pupils to approach their head teachers when they have both personal academic problems.

Other pupils' interpersonal relationships may exist, but this study is delimited to the four discussed above. This study therefore is geared towards investigating the relationship between pupils' interpersonal relationship and pupils' social skills acquisition in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Statement of the problem

In some culture, social skills are transmitted as norms. Such social skills include respect, empathy, obedience to rules and regulations and cooperation. These norms are highly valued. Social skills are components of behaviour that help an individual understand and adapt across a variety of social settings. These skills are crucial for successful functioning of the individual. They enable individuals to be objective about what to say and how to say them; to make good choices and how to behave appropriately in different situations. It has been however observed that disobedience to laid down rules and regulations; disrespect; aggression; bullying; lack of cooperation and impatience are still prevalent in the lives of pupils in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Could these

be traceable to lack of social skills acquisition? Or could it be that head teachers, teachers and parents have failed in their duties to impact social skills and values on pupils through interpersonal relationships? Could it even be that pupils and peers do not interrelate among themselves. This is the problem of the study which instigated the conduct of the study so as to find answers to the above questions.

Research questions

The following research questions were stated and answered to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between pupils-teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skill of active listening in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State?
2. How does pupil-pupils interpersonal relationships relate with pupils' acquisition of social skill of cooperation in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
3. What is the relationship between pupils-head teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skill of respect in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State?
4. How does parents-pupil interpersonal relationship relate with pupils' acquisition of the social skill of empathy in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to further guide the study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between teacher-pupils interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skills of active listening in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Ho₂: Pupil-pupils' interpersonal relationship does not significantly relate to pupils' acquisition of social skill of cooperation in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Ho₃: Pupils-head teachers' interpersonal relationship does not significantly relate with pupils' acquisition of social skills of respect in the public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between parents-pupils' interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skills of empathy in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Delimitation of the study

The study focused on the relationship between pupils' interpersonal relationships and social skills acquisition of pupils in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The study was delimited to pupils' interpersonal relationship with teachers, fellow pupils, head teachers and parents and social skills acquisition of active listening, cooperation, respect and empathy.

Significance of the study

The study will be significant to pupils, teachers, head teachers, parents and future researchers.

Empirical literature review

A study was conducted by Veldman *et al.* (2020) ^[14] on young children working together in cooperative learning and its effect on group behaviour in primary schools in the Netherlands, using 3 research questions, with 3 hypotheses that guided the study. The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design. 168 pupils formed the intervention group, while 144 pupils formed the control group that participated in the study. Instrument for data collection was an observation instrument (video observation). Data obtained were analyzed using multi-level analysis. The result obtained showed that the intervention group showed more positive group work behaviour and less negative group work behaviour compared to the control group. Based on the findings, it was recommended that young primary school pupils should be introduced to group activities under the guidance of the teacher. This reviewed study relates with the present study in the sense that they both considered cooperation among pupils an important act that can lead to positive outcome.

Bosah, Aleke and Asiegbu (2015) ^[4] carried out a study on enhancing positive teacher-pupils relationships for quality learning outcomes in primary schools in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. 400 respondents formed the population of the study. The sample size for the study comprised 20 public primary school pupils and 20 teachers randomly selected. Questionnaire structured on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree= 4; Agree= 3; Disagree= 2 and Strongly Disagree= 1 was the instrument for data collection. The findings of the study showed that teachers accepted that for positive teacher-pupils relationships to be enhanced in schools, the teachers much create an atmosphere of love, care, friendliness, trust, cooperation and motivation. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended among others that the state government through the ministry of education should annually organize capacity building workshops and conferences for public primary school teachers in the state on the ways and need to encourage and sustain positive teacher-pupils relationships in primary schools for quality learning outcomes. This study relates to the present study in that it emphasizes positive teacher-pupils relationship as a springboard for enhancing effective relationship in the primary school.

Adelotan (2021) ^[1] conducted a study on principals' interpersonal relationship skills and administrative effectiveness in public secondary schools in Lagos State. The study adopted a descriptive and correlational research designs. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. A researcher-designed instrument titled: "Principals' Interpersonal Relationship Skills and Administrative Effectiveness in Public Senior Secondary Schools Questionnaire (PIRSAEPSSQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated through face and content validity. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a test-retest method and a coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. A total population of 1000 respondents were used for the study, through purposive sampling technique. Data obtained were answered and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Findings of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between principals' human relations skill and administrative effectiveness. Based on the findings, the study recommended that principals should be adequately trained

and enlightened with more robust supervision strategies through seminars and conferences. The study relates with the present study in that they both agree that positive head teacher relationship with pupils can lead to positive outcomes.

Kim and Rohner (2003) conducted a study on perceived parental acceptance and emotional empathy among university students in Korea. 3 research questions and 3 null hypotheses guided the study. 725 students participated in the study. 2 researcher-designed self-report questionnaire were used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficient. Alpha coefficient of 0.86 and 0.95 were obtained. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the difference in perception of male and female students. The result of the analysis revealed that irrespective of gender, parental acceptance has a strong relationship with students' development of empathy. Based on the findings, it was recommended that in addition to parental acceptance, parental practices such as tendency to reason with children, to explain why parents approve or disapprove of specific behaviours and especially the use of inductive approach should be adopted.

This study is related to the present study in the sense that they both looked at parent-child relationship as an important factor for development of empathy. The studies differ however in area of the study, research design, instrument for data collection, method of analysis and reliability testing. The reviewed study also was unable to state the population of the study and the sample and sampling technique for the study.

Theoretical review

The study anchored on Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and John Bowlby's attachment theory (1958).

Methodology

Research design: Correlational research design was employed.

Population of the Study: 18,376 primary five pupils found in 354 public primary schools were used for the study.

Sample Size: 800 primary five pupils selected through Taro Yamane formulae formed the sample size for the study.

Instrumentation: The researchers' designed 48 items questionnaire titled: "Pupils' Interpersonal Relationships and Social Skills Acquisition of Pupils Questionnaire (PIRSSAPQ)" was the instrument for data collection.

Reliability score: 0.82

Administration of the instrument: 800 copies of the questionnaire were administered but 792 were retrieved and used for the study.

Method of Data analysis: Pearson product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for answering research questions and for testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and analysis

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between teacher-pupils interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of active listening as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State

Variables	n	r-crit	Df	r-cal	t-crit	Decision
Teacher-pupils interpersonal relationship	792	0.45	790	14.03	±1.96	Rejected
Acquisition of active listening						

Level of significance: 0.05

Judging from table 1 above, it is evident that the t calculated value of 14.03 is greater than the t-critical value 0 ± 1.96 . Based on this, there is a significant positive relationship between teacher-pupils interpersonal relationship and social skills acquisition of active listening among primary school pupils.

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between pupil-pupils interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of cooperation as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District

Variables	n	r-crit	Df	r-cal	t-crit	Decision
Pupil-pupils interpersonal relationship	792	0.35	790	11.04	±1.96	Rejected
Acquisition of cooperation skill						

Level of significance: 0.05

From the results as shown on table 2 above, the t-calculated value of 11.04 is greater than the t-critical value of ± 1.96 ; hence, there is significant positive relationship between pupil-pupil interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of the social skill of cooperation.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between pupils-head teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skill of respect in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State

Variables	n	r-crit	Df	r-cal	t-crit	Decision
Pupils-head teacher interpersonal relationship	792	0.45	790	6.03	±1.96	Rejected
Acquisition of respect						

Level of significance: 0.05

Table 3 above revealed that the t-calculated value of 6.03 is greater than the t-critical value of ± 1.96 ; therefore, significant positive relationship exists between pupils-head teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of the social skill of respect.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between pupils-parents interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skill of empathy in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State

Variables	n	r-crit	Df	r-cal	t-crit	Decision
Pupil-parents interpersonal relationship	792	0.39	790	8.02	±1.96	Rejected
Acquisition of social skill of empathy						

Level of significance: 0.05

The result on table 4 above showed that the t-calculated value of 8.02 is greater than the t-critical value of ± 1.96 . This indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between pupil-parents interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of social skill of empathy.

Findings of the study

Following are findings of the study

1. There is a positive, strong and significance relationship between pupils-teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of active listening as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
2. There is a positive, strong and significant relationship between pupils-pupils interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of cooperation as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
3. There is a positive, strong and significant relationship between pupils-head teacher interpersonal relationship and pupils' acquisition of respect as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
4. There is a positive, strong and significant relationship between pupils-parents interpersonal relationship and pupils acquisition of empathy as a social skill in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was hereby concluded as follows: social skills acquisition such as active listening, cooperation; respect and empathy can positively and significantly be enhanced in primary school pupils through pupils-teacher; pupils-pupils; pupils-head teacher and pupils-parents interpersonal relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should involve pupils in positive interactions in the class, model appropriate social skills and reinforce social skills displayed by pupils through praise and correct or redirect pupils' inappropriate behaviours.
2. Inclusive environment and methods such as collaborative group learning strategies should be encouraged and utilized to enable pupils cooperate and socialize with peers.
3. Head teachers should have cordial relationship with pupils, explain and model social expectations for pupils to understand and observe; so as to create the opportunity for them to learn and practice social skills needed in a particular social context (in school or elsewhere).
4. Parents should be encouraged to use structured discussions and social stories to help pupils identify their feelings and how others feel. This will teach pupils how to manage their impulses.

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