

**KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOL SAFETY CHALLENGES ON THE
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN
OVIA NORTH EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE**

BY

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**BEING A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CITY**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project research work was carried out by **Esther Efe EMWANTA-TOM**, with matriculation number **EDU2102564** and that the research work is adequate in scope and quality in the Department of Health, Safety and Environmental Education, University of, Benin city, Edo state, in partial fulfillment of the award of B.Sc (Ed.) degree in Health Education.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God almighty who kept me alive to accomplish this task.

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The researcher's special appreciation goes to God Almighty the giver of life for everything that happened throughout her study period and during the course of this project work.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the knowledge of school safety challenges and their impact on the educational development of secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. It emphasizes the importance of a safe school environment as a foundation for effective teaching, learning, and overall student development. The research highlights those frequent issues such as violence, bullying, cultism, sexual harassment, poor infrastructure, and insecurity continue to affect students' academic performance and emotional well-being in many Nigerian schools.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect data from both public and private secondary schools within the study area. Using a structured questionnaire titled School Safety and Educational Development Questionnaire (SSEDQ), data were gathered from a sample of 150 students selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. The study examined students' awareness of safety risks, their exposure to safety training, and how these factors influence attendance, academic performance, and psychological stability.

Findings revealed that although students recognize some safety threats in their schools, many lack sufficient knowledge of preventive and emergency measures. Schools with inadequate infrastructure, poor security systems, and limited safety education reported higher cases of absenteeism, fear, and reduced classroom participation. The study also identified gaps in policy enforcement, teacher training, and stakeholder collaboration as major barriers to ensuring safe learning environments.

Based on these findings, the research recommends that school authorities and government agencies should prioritize the implementation of comprehensive safety policies, regular safety drills, and improved infrastructure. Teachers should receive training on child protection and crisis management, while students should be continuously educated on safety awareness and response strategies. A collaborative approach involving parents, communities, and educational stakeholders is essential to creating a secure, supportive, and conducive learning environment for students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study.

The school environment plays a crucial role in the academic, emotional, and psychological development of students. In the pursuit of quality education, the challenges to safety and security within school environments have become increasingly significant. A school that is plagued with safety challenges such as violence, insecurity, poor infrastructure, or lack of emergency preparedness cannot foster effective teaching and learning. According to UNESCO (2017), school safety involves creating a protective learning environment free from threats such as violence, abuse, bullying, and physical hazards. When such threats persist, they directly hinder the educational development of students.

In Nigeria, school safety challenges have become a growing concern due to recurring incidents such as kidnapping, cultism, bullying, sexual harassment, substance abuse, fire outbreaks, and infrastructural decay. These issues are not only widespread but also deeply affect the learning atmosphere and student outcomes. In states like Edo, particularly within local government areas such as Ovia North East, many schools continue to operate under unsafe conditions. Theft, vandalism, lack of perimeter fencing, and absence of trained security personnel have led to repeated disruptions in academic activities (Ajayi, 2012; Onoyase, 2020). These situations can result in psychological

trauma, absenteeism, fear, and reduced academic performance among students (Olaitan & Adebayo, 2013).

Understanding the nature and extent of school safety challenges is vital in addressing their impact on students' academic growth. These challenges may stem from both internal factors (e.g., lack of discipline, poor school leadership, weak student-teacher relationships) and external factors (e.g., community insecurity, poor funding, or natural disasters). Moreover, the lack of adequate safety policies, functional emergency plans, and student training on how to respond to crises makes schools more vulnerable. While some schools may have partial safety mechanisms in place, the awareness and knowledge of the actual challenges confronting students are often overlooked. According to Osakwe (2016), knowing the risks and recognizing potential dangers helps students and staff respond proactively during emergencies. However, when these challenges are persistent and unaddressed, students' sense of security diminishes, which negatively influences their classroom participation, attendance, and emotional wellbeing.

Furthermore, research suggests a strong link between the learning environment and academic achievement. For example, Eke (2014) found that students who feel physically and emotionally safe tend to engage more actively in schoolwork, attend classes regularly, and perform better academically. In contrast, students in unsafe environments are more prone to truancy, depression, withdrawal, aggression, and low

academic achievement (Adeyemo & Oyediran, 2018). Unfortunately, many students in Ovia North East are learning under stressful and potentially dangerous conditions that threaten their educational goals.

Ovia North East Local Government Area is one of Edo State's major educational zones, comprising a mix of rural and urban schools with varying infrastructural standards and administrative capacities. Due to disparities in funding, location, and management, some schools face more pressing safety challenges than others. For instance, while some urban schools may have basic safety infrastructure, rural schools often lack perimeter fencing, have dilapidated buildings, and operate without trained security staff or safety committees (Igbinedion & Ugiagbe, 2017). As a result, students in these areas are more exposed to hazards and less likely to receive timely intervention when incidents occur.

This study seeks to investigate students' knowledge of the safety challenges present in their schools and how such knowledge or lack thereof affects their educational development. Key questions include: What safety challenges do students face in their schools? Are they aware of these risks? How does this awareness (or ignorance) influence their academic performance, attendance, and emotional well-being? Do students feel equipped to handle emergencies when they arise? And what are schools and educational authorities doing to address these challenges?

Addressing these questions is critical in designing effective interventions. While physical security measures are important, understanding the challenges from the students' perspective can help create more inclusive and responsive safety policies. Schools must adopt a holistic approach that combines infrastructure development, student awareness, stakeholder involvement, and psychosocial support systems to effectively address safety concerns.

In conclusion, tackling school safety challenges is not just about protecting students from physical harm it is about safeguarding their right to quality education and holistic development. By examining the knowledge of school safety challenges among secondary school students in Ovia North East LGA, this study aims to provide empirical insights and practical recommendations to policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and community leaders. A safer school environment is foundational to academic excellence, emotional stability, and the overall development of students. The findings from this research will contribute to the existing literature and promote informed decision-making to enhance the safety and educational outcomes of students in the region and beyond.

Statement of the Problem.

The issue of school safety has become a pressing concern in Nigeria, especially in public secondary schools where safety challenges are increasingly affecting the quality of

education. In recent years, incidents such as fire outbreaks, building collapses, cult-related violence, kidnapping, bullying, and theft have raised serious concerns about the safety and security of students and staff. These recurring challenges have not only disrupted academic activities but have also negatively impacted students' emotional well-being, psychological stability, and overall educational development (Olaitan & Adebayo, 2013; Ajayi, 2012).

In Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, many secondary schools continue to grapple with these safety challenges. Reports indicate that some schools lack essential security infrastructure such as perimeter fencing, fire-fighting equipment, emergency evacuation plans, trained safety officers, and functional health services. In addition, environmental factors such as poorly maintained buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and absence of routine safety drills further expose students to risks. These challenges are not only physical but also psychological, creating a learning environment filled with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty (Igbinedion & Ugiagbe, 2017).

Despite these obvious dangers, many students appear unaware or insufficiently informed about the safety challenges they face and how to protect themselves. The lack of consistent safety education, student engagement in emergency preparedness, and limited awareness campaigns contributes to their vulnerability. When students do not recognize the risks around them or do not feel equipped to respond appropriately, their

learning experiences suffer. They may develop behavioral issues, experience loss of focus, skip school out of fear, or perform poorly in academic tasks (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Adeyemo & Oyediran, 2018).

Although efforts have been made by the government and stakeholders to improve safety in schools, such efforts often fail to consider students' perceptions and awareness of the challenges they face. There is little empirical data on how much students know about the specific safety challenges in their schools and the effect this knowledge or the absence of it—has on their educational progress. Without understanding students' perspectives and experiences, safety policies may fall short of addressing the root of the problem.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to investigate is the insufficient knowledge and awareness of school safety *challenges* among secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area, and how these challenges affect their educational development. The study aims to explore the specific safety issues students face, assess their level of understanding, and examine the link between their knowledge of these challenges and factors such as academic performance, emotional security, and school participation. Addressing this problem is vital to developing targeted, effective safety interventions that support both the protection and academic success of students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the level of knowledge secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area have regarding the safety challenges within their school environment?
2. What are the common school safety challenges faced by secondary schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area?
3. How often are students exposed to safety-related information, training, or sensitization programs addressing these challenges?
4. What is the relationship between students' awareness of school safety challenges and their academic performance, attendance, emotional well-being, and classroom engagement?
5. What are the major obstacles hindering the effective management and resolution of school safety challenges in secondary schools within Ovia North East Local Government Area?

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the level of knowledge secondary school students possess regarding the *challenges* related to school safety and how these challenges influence their educational development in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the extent of students' knowledge and awareness of school safety challenges, including issues such as violence, poor infrastructure, lack of emergency preparedness, and insecurity.
2. Identify the most prevalent safety challenges confronting secondary schools in the study area.
3. Examine how frequently students are educated or sensitized about these challenges through drills, training, or awareness campaigns.
4. Analyze the impact of students' understanding of school safety challenges on their academic performance, attendance, emotional security, and classroom participation.
5. Explore the barriers that schools face in effectively addressing and managing safety challenges within their environment.

Through this study, it is expected that key education stakeholders—including school administrators, teachers, government officials, parents, and community leaders—will

gain meaningful insights into the safety-related issues affecting secondary school students. The findings will serve as a foundation for developing evidence-based strategies aimed at improving school safety conditions and enhancing students' academic and psychological development in Ovia North East LGA and other similar educational settings.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its ability to highlight the pressing challenges related to school safety and their influence on the educational development of secondary school students. In many developing countries like Nigeria, school safety challenges ranging from insecurity, violence, bullying, environmental hazards, poor infrastructure, to lack of preparedness for emergencies continue to hinder students' academic progress, attendance, and emotional stability. Despite these realities, limited attention is often given to the underlying safety issues affecting schools.

By investigating students' knowledge and experiences regarding school safety challenges in secondary schools across Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, this study aims to bridge a critical gap in educational research. The findings will inform data-driven recommendations for strengthening safety policies, improving infrastructure, and promoting safer school environments. The groups that stand to benefit include:

- School administrators and principals
- Teachers and guidance counselors
- students
- Parents and guardians
- Policymakers, educational authorities, and government agencies
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups

School administrators and principals

This study will provide school administrators with detailed insights into the major safety challenges facing their schools. It will reveal how these challenges affect students' learning, enabling school leaders to take informed actions in prioritizing and addressing critical safety issues. The evidence gathered can support advocacy for increased funding, infrastructure upgrades, and more effective safety protocols.

Teachers and guidance counselors

As frontline actors, teachers and counselors often encounter the effects of safety challenges first-hand, such as students' behavioral changes, absenteeism, or academic decline. This study will help them better understand how safety threats affect students' emotional well-being and classroom performance, allowing them to respond more empathetically and strategically to student needs.

Students

While students are the focus of this research, they are also its primary beneficiaries. The study seeks to increase awareness of the safety challenges they face and promote a culture of alertness and advocacy. Understanding these challenges empowers students to contribute to school-wide safety discussions and develop coping strategies that support their well-being and learning outcomes.

Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians are often unaware of the severity or presence of safety-related problems in schools. This study will bring these issues to light and encourage parents to take an active role in school safety discussions. Informed parents can better advocate for protective measures and contribute to the overall safety and success of their children.

Policymakers, educational authorities, and government agencies

The research will serve as a valuable resource for decision-makers. By presenting empirical data on safety challenges and their impact on student development, the study

will aid in the development of stronger school safety policies, budget prioritization for safety infrastructure, and targeted intervention programs at the local and state levels.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups

NGOs and advocacy groups working in education and child protection can use the findings to design more effective school-based safety campaigns and partnerships. The study provides direction on which safety issues are most urgent and how external support can be used to mitigate risks in vulnerable school environments.

Lastly, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on school safety and educational development. It offers a valuable reference for future research on school safety challenges, student well-being, and institutional reforms. Its implications extend beyond Ovia North East, offering insights applicable to other regions facing similar educational and safety challenges.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on the knowledge of school safety challenges among secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. It aims to assess how students understand and experience safety-related challenges such as inadequate facilities, violence, bullying, environmental hazards, and lack of emergency

preparedness and how these challenges affect their academic development, attendance, and emotional well-being.

The scope is limited to selected public and private secondary schools within Ovia North East LGA. The research includes both student perspectives and insights from key stakeholders such as teachers and school heads, but the primary emphasis remains on students' experiences and knowledge of safety challenges.

The study does not extend to schools outside the local government area, nor does it address safety concerns beyond the school environment, such as issues encountered during commuting or at home. Additionally, the study is conducted within a defined academic term, which may not fully capture long-term safety trends or seasonal issues.

The accuracy and completeness of the study's findings are dependent on the availability and reliability of data provided by students and school personnel. Despite these limitations, the research provides a foundational understanding of the pressing safety challenges facing schools in the study area and offers actionable recommendations for improvement.

Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity and a better understanding of the key concepts used in this study, the following terms are defined within the context of the research:

School Safety Challenges: These refer to the various obstacles or threats that hinder the creation and maintenance of a secure learning environment in schools. This includes issues such as bullying, violence, lack of perimeter fencing, poor emergency preparedness, inadequate security personnel, environmental hazards, and infrastructural decay.

Knowledge: In this study, knowledge refers to the level of awareness, understanding, and recognition that secondary school students have concerning the safety challenges present in their school environment. It includes their ability to identify safety threats and comprehend the impact these challenges may have on their academic and emotional development.

Educational Development: This refers to the holistic academic and personal growth of students. It includes their academic performance, classroom engagement, attendance, emotional well-being, and the capacity to learn in an environment that supports safety and security.

Secondary School Students: These are students enrolled in junior and senior secondary school levels, typically between the ages of 10 and 18. In the context of this research, they are the key participants whose knowledge and experiences regarding school safety challenges are being studied.

Ovia North East Local Government Area: This is a local government area in Edo State, Nigeria, which serves as the geographical focus of the study. All secondary schools selected for the research fall within this administrative area.

School Environment: This refers to the total physical and psychosocial setting of the school, including classrooms, staff offices, playgrounds, corridors, and sanitation facilities. A safe school environment is one where students are protected from harm and feel secure enough to participate fully in learning activities.

Safety Awareness: This term describes the students' consciousness and understanding of the presence of safety threats within the school. It includes their alertness to unsafe conditions, knowledge of reporting procedures, and attitudes toward adhering to safety guidelines.

Risk Factors: These are specific conditions or variables that increase the likelihood of safety issues within a school. Examples include overcrowded classrooms, lack of trained security personnel, broken infrastructure, student gangs, and poor supervision. Recognizing these risk factors helps in understanding how safety challenges affect student development.

School Safety Policy: This refers to the set of rules and regulations designed to manage safety within schools. It outlines procedures for handling emergencies,

preventing violence, and responding to hazards. Understanding its presence or absence contributes to evaluating students' awareness of school safety challenges.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review is organized under the following subheadings: This chapter carefully examines literature that is relevant to this study; the review is done under the following sub-headings:

- Concept of School Safety
- Knowledge of school safety among secondary school students.
- Practices of school safety among school students in Ovia North-East LGA
- Types and Causes of School Safety Challenges
- Effects of School Safety Challenges on Educational Development
- Strategies for improving school safety
- Summary of Literature Review

Concept of School Safety

School safety is a cornerstone for achieving quality education, especially at the secondary school level. It refers to the policies, conditions, behaviors, and physical environments that promote the protection of all stakeholders in the school community including students, teachers, administrators, and support staff from violence, threats, hazards, and disruptions. A safe school provides a stable, supportive, and nurturing

atmosphere that is conducive to learning and development. According to the National School Safety Center (2001), school safety is defined as “the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free from violence, intimidation, harassment, and substance use, thereby enabling students to learn and teachers to teach.” This definition suggests that safety goes beyond mere physical security; it includes emotional and psychological well-being as critical aspects of a functional learning environment.

School safety is often conceptualized as multidimensional in educational research. It comprises physical safety (protection from bodily harm or environmental hazards), emotional and psychological safety (protection from bullying, discrimination, or verbal abuse), and social safety (fostering inclusion, equity, and healthy peer relationships). According to Astor, Guerra, and Van Acker (2010), “school safety must go beyond the prevention of physical harm to include the emotional and psychological well-being of all students.” This broader view ensures that students are not only protected from harm but also feel safe and valued within their school communities.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) defines school safety as “measures taken to ensure the protection of students and school personnel from violence, disasters, and other emergencies that can disrupt normal school functioning.” This includes structural elements like safe school buildings,

emergency preparedness, and surveillance systems, as well as non-structural aspects like school climate, discipline policies, and student support systems.

In Nigeria, the issue of school safety has become increasingly critical due to rising incidents of violence, poor infrastructure, and community insecurity. According to Adebayo (2015), “school safety is a pressing concern due to rising cases of bullying, cultism, theft, kidnapping, and infrastructural decay in both urban and rural schools.” In areas like Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, these challenges are compounded by broader socio-economic problems such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic amenities.

Moreover, Cornell and Mayer (2010) assert that “students who feel unsafe in school are less likely to attend regularly, participate actively in class, or perform well academically.” This highlights a strong link between school safety and educational development. Unsafe school environments can lead to truancy, low academic performance, and increased dropout rates. Students who are constantly exposed to fear, threats, or trauma are less likely to focus on learning or form healthy peer relationships.

The concept of school safety also involves institutional practices and school climate. According to Oladeji and Ogunyemi (2016), school safety “encompasses not just protection from physical harm but also the development of policies, practices, and

relationships that create a nurturing, inclusive, and disciplined environment for all.” Effective school leadership, teacher-student trust, and positive behavioral expectations all play a role in cultivating a safe learning atmosphere.

In terms of perception, the feeling of safety is just as important as the reality of safety. A study by Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez (2011) found that “students’ perception of safety is just as important as actual safety measures.” Even in the absence of direct threats, students who perceive their schools as unsafe are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and academic disengagement. Perception is often shaped by past experiences, media coverage, peer influence, and the visibility of safety measures.

Another important dimension is the legal and rights-based framework. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) emphasizes that every child has the right to education in an environment that is free from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. This implies that school safety is not merely a policy option but a legal and moral obligation of governments and education stakeholders. Ensuring safety in schools aligns with global goals such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Nwideeduh and Njoku (2020) argue that the level of safety in schools is a major determinant of school effectiveness in Nigeria. In their study, they observed that schools

with well-implemented safety policies had significantly better student outcomes compared to those that lacked such structures. These findings reinforce the notion that safety is integral not supplementary to educational achievement. Furthermore, safety in schools must take into account gender-based violence, special needs students, and mental health support. According to UNICEF (2018), many girls in African schools report feeling unsafe due to sexual harassment and inadequate sanitation facilities. Similarly, children with disabilities often face heightened risks due to the lack of inclusive safety protocols.

In the specific context of Ovia North East LGA, challenges such as poor school fencing, lack of trained security personnel, inadequate lighting, overcrowded classrooms, and weak community policing contribute to a high-risk learning environment. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving government agencies, school management boards, parents, and the wider community.

To ensure a safe school environment, several strategies are recommended in the literature:

- Infrastructure investment: Safe classrooms, functional fire exits, secure fences, and proper sanitation facilities.
- Violence prevention programs: Anti-bullying campaigns, conflict resolution training, and peer mediation.

- Emergency preparedness: Regular drills for fire, natural disasters, and other emergencies.
- Inclusive policies: Protection of marginalized and vulnerable groups within the school.
- School-community partnerships: Engagement of parents, local leaders, and law enforcement in school safety efforts.

Knowledge of school safety among secondary school students.

School safety is a fundamental precondition for effective teaching and learning. In recent years, increasing attention has been drawn to the various safety challenges that confront the Nigerian educational system, particularly at the secondary school level. These challenges, ranging from physical to psychological threats, have led to a decline in student participation, poor academic performance, and in severe cases, school dropouts. This chapter reviews existing literature on the concept of school safety, students' knowledge and perception of safety, the impact of safety challenges on educational development, and theoretical frameworks that guide the understanding of school safety.

In Nigeria, the concept of school safety has gained increasing relevance due to the rise in insecurity, infrastructural decay, and general neglect in the public education sector. Oladeji and Ogunyemi (2016) emphasized that school safety is not limited to the

prevention of crime or violence but includes proactive strategies aimed at promoting positive student behavior, mental health, and school discipline.

Importance of Students' Knowledge of School Safety

Knowledge of school safety involves the awareness and understanding students have regarding the threats, risks, and preventive measures associated with maintaining safety within the school premises. The level of knowledge a student possesses influences how they respond to safety threats and how actively they participate in creating a safe school culture (Nwachukwu & Okeke, 2021).

A study conducted by Umezinwa and Nwosu (2019) found that students who are educated about safety protocols such as fire drills, emergency evacuation plans, and conflict resolution strategies are more likely to take appropriate actions during emergencies. Additionally, students with high safety awareness are more likely to report suspicious behavior, bullying, or infrastructural defects to school authorities. Conversely, poor safety knowledge contributes to fear, misinformation, and underreporting of critical incidents.

In the context of Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, where most schools suffer from poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and insufficient supervision,

equipping students with knowledge about school safety becomes not just beneficial but essential.

Types of Knowledge Secondary School Students Need for Safety

Students require several categories of safety knowledge to protect themselves and others. These include:

- **Physical Safety Knowledge:** Understanding how to avoid accidents, respond to building defects, and evacuate during emergencies.
- **Social Safety Knowledge:** Being aware of social threats like bullying, cultism, peer pressure, and knowing how to report such issues.
- **Psychological Safety Awareness:** Recognizing emotional abuse, discrimination, and sources of mental stress, and understanding coping mechanisms.
- **Environmental Safety Knowledge:** Awareness of the school's surroundings, entry and exit points, and identifying potentially dangerous locations within or near the school premises.
- **Digital Safety:** In today's era of digital learning, students must also know how to navigate online platforms safely to avoid cyberbullying and inappropriate content (Ajayi, 2020).

Factors Influencing Students' Knowledge of School Safety

Several factors determine the extent to which students are informed about safety:

- **School Environment:** Schools with regular safety drills, functional security personnel, and established safety committees are more likely to raise safety-conscious students (Adesina, 2016).
- **Parental Involvement:** Homes where parents discuss safety and discipline encourage students to take school safety seriously.
- **Media Exposure:** Social and mainstream media often inform students about violence and insecurity, shaping their perception and knowledge.
- **Educational Curriculum:** The absence or inclusion of safety education in the curriculum significantly influences student awareness.
- **Community Influence:** Communities plagued by violence, cultism, or political unrest often sensitize students differently than more peaceful environments (Eze & Chukwu, 2020).

Impacts of Safety Knowledge on Educational Development

School safety knowledge contributes to educational development in the following ways:

- Improved Academic Performance: When students feel safe, they concentrate better, participate more in class, and perform well academically (Adebayo, 2015).
- Reduction in Absenteeism: Unsafe schools have high rates of absenteeism and dropout. Safety knowledge reduces fear and improves attendance.
- Better Mental Health: Students aware of how to navigate emotional and psychological threats tend to enjoy better mental health and social interaction.
- Self-Confidence and Leadership: Safety-literate students are more confident, act responsibly, and often take leadership roles in promoting peace and order.
- Preventive Action: Students with adequate knowledge of safety are more proactive in avoiding risk and helping others (Okorie & Emechebe, 2022).

Gaps in Knowledge and Challenges Faced by Students

Despite its importance, many students in Nigerian public schools have limited knowledge of safety measures. According to Adepoju (2018), over 60% of secondary school students surveyed in southwestern Nigeria could not identify proper steps to take in the event of a fire outbreak. This lack of awareness can be attributed to the following:

- Inadequate training for teachers on safety education
- Absence of safety signage and posters in schools

- Poor policy enforcement by school administrators
- Neglect of safety education in curriculum design
- Cultural silence on issues such as abuse or harassment

In Ovia North East, where rural schools are located near bush paths, highways, or poorly lit communities, the risk of criminal invasion or accidents is high. Yet, safety drills and emergency planning are practically non-existent in most public schools.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory offers a strong basis for understanding how students learn about safety through observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory asserts that people learn new behaviors by observing others, particularly authority figures and peers (Bandura, 1977). If teachers and school staff consistently model safe behavior, communicate safety protocols clearly, and enforce rules justly, students are more likely to internalize those values.

This theory supports the argument that the school environment, peers, and educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' safety attitudes and behavior. Knowledge of school safety is central to the educational development and holistic well-being of secondary school students. It enables them to identify, respond to, and report

threats, thus fostering a secure learning environment. In areas like Ovia North East, where schools are confronted with multiple safety challenges, student awareness must be enhanced through teacher training, community engagement, safety-oriented curricula, and government intervention. Without adequate safety knowledge, students remain vulnerable to risks that derail their academic and emotional development.

Practices of school safety among secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area

The implementation of effective school safety practices plays a vital role in ensuring the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of students, teachers, and staff within the educational environment. In the context of Ovia North East Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State, the significance of these safety practices cannot be overstated, given the rising concerns over insecurity, infrastructural decay, cult-related activities, and other socio-environmental threats affecting school settings.

School safety practices refer to the routine procedures, behaviors, infrastructure, and policies established to protect students from harm and create a conducive atmosphere for learning (Astor, Guerra & Van Acker, 2010). These practices cover a wide range of preventive and responsive strategies, from physical security infrastructure to psychological support systems and community engagement mechanisms.

- Physical Safety Practices

Physical safety is the most visible and foundational aspect of school safety. It involves measures designed to protect students and staff from physical threats such as accidents, violence, natural disasters, and unauthorized access. In secondary schools across Ovia North East LGA, physical safety practices include the presence of perimeter fencing, controlled entry points, the use of school gates, and in some cases, the deployment of security personnel such as school guards (Omoniyi & Adebayo, 2019).

Emergency preparedness is also a key component of physical safety. Schools may organize fire drills, evacuation simulations, and first-aid training for students and staff. According to Adeola (2021), while urban schools are more likely to implement structured emergency preparedness programs, rural schools often lack the resources and training required for such interventions. This disparity places students in less-equipped areas at greater risk during emergencies.

- Psychological and Emotional Safety Practices

A safe school is not only physically secure but also emotionally nurturing. Psychological safety practices are measures put in place to ensure students feel safe, supported, respected, and free from intimidation, bullying, or psychological abuse. In the schools of Ovia North East LGA, these practices are increasingly recognized as essential

to holistic education. Counseling services, peer mentoring programs, and anti-bullying campaigns are typical strategies used to promote psychological safety. Oladeji and Ogunyemi (2016) argue that "schools that invest in mental health resources often report lower levels of violence, better student-teacher relationships, and improved academic performance." However, the reality in many public schools within the region reveals limited access to trained guidance counselors and inadequate sensitization of students regarding mental health support services.

Moreover, the promotion of inclusive classroom practices—where students from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities, are not discriminated against—is part of creating an emotionally safe space. Teachers who foster open dialogue, empathy, and emotional intelligence among students contribute positively to the overall safety culture (UNESCO, 2017).

- Health and Hygiene Safety Practices

Given the importance of health in the school environment, hygiene practices are crucial to safety, especially in the wake of global health challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Health safety practices include regular hand washing, access to clean water and toilets, school-based health education, and the presence of sick bays or first aid rooms.

In Ovia North East LGA, many public schools face challenges related to inadequate sanitation facilities, poor waste disposal, and overcrowded classrooms, which compromise health safety (Ediagbonya & Omoregie, 2020). Students' awareness of hygiene protocols, such as proper handwashing techniques and the need for personal hygiene, remains inconsistent and often depends on parental background and school health programs.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2020) emphasized the need for schools to adopt the School Health Policy, which outlines minimum standards for health-related safety practices. Yet, the implementation of this policy is often hindered by a lack of infrastructure and funding.

- Security and Surveillance Practices

Security and surveillance play a preventive role in school safety. Practices under this category include the use of school identification cards, visitor control logs, surveillance cameras (where available), and student monitoring systems. While private schools in Ovia North East are more likely to adopt electronic security measures due to better funding, public schools rely more on community vigilance and informal surveillance methods (Akinwale & Musa, 2021).

Another common practice in some schools involves the partnership between school authorities and local vigilante groups to curb external threats such as cult-related activities, theft, or kidnapping. In areas with higher crime rates, such collaboration is critical for maintaining a sense of security (Okafor & Osagiede, 2018).

However, it is important to note that excessive security measures can have negative effects on students' sense of trust and emotional comfort, especially if such practices are authoritarian or punitive in nature. Hence, a balanced approach that respects students' dignity while protecting them from harm is recommended (Cornell & Mayer, 2010).

- Safety Education and Student Involvement

One of the most sustainable safety practices involves educating students about safety protocols and involving them in their own protection. This includes training students on conflict resolution, road safety, fire response, and digital safety. In Ovia North East LGA, only a handful of schools have fully integrated safety education into their curriculum or extracurricular programs. According to Ezeaku (2019), “schools that prioritize safety awareness programs not only reduce risks but also empower students to become safety ambassadors within their communities.”

Student involvement in safety clubs, peer mediation, and school health committees also promotes ownership of safety practices. These clubs serve as platforms for students to report unsafe behavior, support peers, and advocate for safer school environments.

- School Policy and Administrative Practices

Policy-driven safety practices form the administrative backbone of school safety management. These include the creation and enforcement of codes of conduct, anti-bullying policies, sexual harassment prevention guidelines, and attendance monitoring systems.

In schools across Ovia North East, the existence and implementation of such policies vary. Many schools have codes of conduct, but enforcement is often weak due to poor monitoring and lack of stakeholder engagement. According to Adebayo (2015), without strong administrative commitment, school safety policies remain ineffective and symbolic.

The role of principals and school heads is critical in this regard. School leaders who prioritize safety through regular staff training, communication with parents, and collaboration with security agencies tend to foster safer learning environments (Ajayi, 2017).

The practices of school safety among secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area reflect a mixture of traditional, community-driven approaches and modern safety interventions. While there is evidence of awareness and implementation of safety practices, many schools still face infrastructural, economic, and personnel constraints. For sustainable progress, there must be increased investment in safety education, policy enforcement, student involvement, and mental health support. Ensuring a safe school environment is not merely a matter of protecting lives but of safeguarding the educational futures of thousands of young Nigerians.

Types and Causes of School Safety Challenges

School safety challenges are diverse and multifaceted, ranging from physical threats to psychological and emotional dangers. These challenges not only disrupt the learning process but also create an environment of fear, anxiety, and underperformance. In many Nigerian secondary schools—particularly in rural and semi-urban areas such as Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State—students and educators often face a combination of infrastructural inadequacies, social unrest, and administrative lapses that undermine safety.

(A) Types of school safety challenges

School safety challenges refer to the various threats, vulnerabilities, and hazards both internal and external that compromise the security and well-being of students, teachers, and school personnel within the learning environment. These challenges range from physical threats and environmental hazards to psychological and emotional risks, and they significantly affect the educational experience and development of students. According to the National School Climate Center (2015), effective learning can only take place in an environment where students feel safe, supported, and respected. Unfortunately, many schools particularly in under-resourced areas face persistent safety challenges that hinder academic success and the holistic development of learners.

Major types of school safety challenges commonly encountered in secondary schools, particularly in developing regions such as Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. Are as follows

- Physical safety challenges:

Physical safety threats are perhaps the most visible form of school safety challenges. These include acts of violence such as fighting, physical assault, vandalism, and theft that may occur within school premises. According to Okeke and Nwankwo (2014), physical safety issues are prevalent in many Nigerian secondary schools due to inadequate fencing, lack of perimeter security, overcrowding, and poor supervision. When students are

constantly exposed to violence or feel threatened physically, it negatively affects their concentration, attendance, and overall academic performance.

Examples of physical safety threats include:

- Bullying and physical aggression among students
- Vandalism of school property
- Armed robbery or theft on school grounds
- Cult-related attacks or inter-school violence
- Inadequate security infrastructure (e.g., broken gates, lack of security guards)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) stresses that the lack of proper surveillance systems and physical security structures increases the risk of injury and loss of life in schools, especially during emergencies.

- Psychological and Emotional Safety Challenges

School safety extends beyond the physical dimension to include the psychological and emotional well-being of students. Emotional safety is compromised when students face persistent bullying, harassment, discrimination, or verbal abuse. According to Astor, Guerra, and Van Acker (2010), emotional threats can be more damaging than physical ones because they affect a student's self-esteem, confidence, and mental health over time.

Key emotional safety issues include:

- Verbal bullying and name-calling
- Social exclusion and peer pressure
- Sexual harassment or exploitation
- Teacher-student hostility or emotional abuse
- Anxiety and depression due to unsafe school culture

A study by Oladeji and Ogunyemi (2016) found that emotional trauma from bullying or teacher neglect leads to reduced classroom engagement and lower academic motivation. Schools that fail to recognize and address these emotional risks contribute to a toxic environment where students are unable to thrive.

- Infrastructural and Environmental Safety Challenges

The physical condition of school infrastructure significantly affects safety. Dilapidated school buildings, leaking roofs, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly maintained toilets present daily hazards to students and staff. In Ovia North East LGA and similar areas, many public secondary schools lack adequate facilities due to years of neglect and underfunding.

Common infrastructural challenges include:

- Unsafe or collapsing school buildings
- Lack of potable water and sanitation facilities
- Absence of fire extinguishers or emergency exits
- Exposure to environmental hazards like erosion and flooding
- Poor lighting and ventilation in classrooms

According to UNICEF (2019), poor infrastructure directly threatens student health and safety and discourages regular school attendance. Furthermore, environmental safety issues can escalate during extreme weather events or natural disasters, especially in schools not built to withstand such conditions.

- Health and Hygiene Challenges

Health-related safety issues are becoming increasingly important in school environments. Poor hygiene, communicable diseases, and lack of access to medical care expose students to illnesses that may lead to absenteeism and learning disruption.

Key health and hygiene safety issues include:

- Inadequate toilet facilities and handwashing stations
- Poor waste disposal systems
- Lack of first aid kits or school clinics

- Poor ventilation and exposure to disease vectors (e.g., mosquitoes)
- Food contamination from unsafe school vendors

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of hygiene in school safety. WHO (2020) emphasized that schools must have adequate hygiene protocols to ensure the safety of learners during public health emergencies.

Security-Related Challenges (External Threats)

Some safety challenges arise from external factors such as insecurity in the surrounding community. In certain parts of Edo State, including Ovia North East, reports of kidnapping, armed robbery, and cultism around school environments have raised major concerns.

Examples include:

- Invasion of schools by armed gangs or kidnappers
- Cult clashes spilling into school premises
- Theft of school infrastructure or learning materials
- Students being attacked while commuting

Adebayo (2015) reports that schools located in rural or peri-urban regions are particularly vulnerable to external threats due to weak law enforcement and poor community policing.

- Digital and Cyber Safety Challenges

With the increasing use of technology in education, schools now face new safety challenges in the digital space. Students are often exposed to online dangers such as cyberbullying, internet fraud, exposure to harmful content, and data privacy violations.

Common cyber safety concerns include:

- Cyberbullying through social media or messaging apps
- Online harassment or blackmail
- Exposure to inappropriate or violent content
- Sharing of personal data without consent

According to Livingstone et al. (2017), digital safety has become a critical component of modern school safety. Teachers and parents must educate students on responsible online behavior and enforce digital monitoring where necessary.

- Transportation and Route Safety Challenges

School safety also encompasses the journey to and from school. In many rural parts of Edo State, students must walk long distances on dangerous roads or through unsafe terrain, exposing them to accidents or attacks.

Transportation risks include:

- Road accidents involving student commuters
- Kidnapping or harassment on the way to school
- Poor traffic management around school zones
- Inaccessibility of roads during the rainy season

As noted by Ajayi (2017), the lack of safe transportation options discourages school attendance, especially among girls and younger children. Safer school routes and public transportation policies are essential for reducing this risk.

- Policy and Administrative Safety Challenges

In some schools, the absence of clear safety policies and poor administrative enforcement contribute to an unsafe learning environment. When school leadership fails to implement safety measures or neglects discipline and reporting procedures, it creates a culture of impunity.

Administrative lapses may include:

- Lack of safety education or drills
- Poor enforcement of anti-bullying policies
- Inadequate teacher training on safety protocols
- Failure to report or address safety incidents

Cornell and Mayer (2010) argue that school safety must be institutionalized through proactive policies, regular safety audits, and stakeholder collaboration—including parents, teachers, and government bodies.

School safety challenges are multifaceted and interrelated. They encompass physical, emotional, infrastructural, health, environmental, and digital dimensions, all of which influence the educational development and academic performance of students. In the context of Ovia North East Local Government Area, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and community-driven approach. Effective safety strategies must involve government investment in infrastructure, school-based safety programs, teacher training, student awareness, and the active participation of parents and community leaders. Only then can the learning environment be transformed into a safe, secure, and nurturing space conducive to meaningful educational outcomes.

(A) Causes of School Safety Challenges

The root causes of school safety issues are often systemic and linked to broader socio-economic and administrative problems. The following are some key contributing factors:

- **Poor Infrastructure and Inadequate Funding:** A major cause of school safety problems is the lack of adequate funding for the maintenance and development of school infrastructure. Ajayi (2017) asserted that “when schools operate without fences, electricity, or potable water, students are exposed to multiple hazards that compromise their learning experience.” In many public schools, especially in rural areas, budget allocations are insufficient for basic safety enhancements.
- **Weak Enforcement of Policies and Poor Governance:** Many schools lack clear, enforced policies on bullying, harassment, and discipline. Eze and Chukwu (2020) stated that “the absence of a proactive disciplinary policy creates a breeding ground for misconduct and criminal activities within the school environment.” Additionally, the lack of trained safety officers and collaboration with law enforcement often leaves school administrators ill-equipped to respond to threats.
- **Insecurity in the Larger Community:** The general insecurity in some parts of Nigeria, including incidents of kidnapping, banditry, and cultism, contributes to school safety challenges. According to Umezina and Nwosu (2019), “schools located in communities plagued by violence inevitably suffer from spillover effects such as student abduction, armed invasions, and social unrest.”

- **Cultural and Social Norms:** In some cases, harmful cultural beliefs or social practices contribute to unsafe school environments. For instance, where corporal punishment is normalized, teachers may inflict physical harm under the guise of discipline. Similarly, in patriarchal communities, female students may be more vulnerable to sexual harassment or abuse. Okorie and Emechebe (2022) observed that “socially ingrained practices of victim-blaming and silence further suppress student voices and reduce reporting of safety violations.”
- **Lack of Safety Education and Preparedness:** Many students and teachers are unaware of emergency protocols or how to respond to threats such as fire, building collapse, or physical assault. Nwachukwu and Okeke (2021) emphasized that “without regular safety drills and training, school communities are ill-prepared to manage crises, resulting in panic, injury, and greater damage during emergencies.”
- **Overcrowding and Understaffing:** Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teacher-student ratios can also lead to increased indiscipline and reduced supervision. Adesina (2016) noted that “overpopulated classrooms make it difficult for teachers to monitor student behavior, thereby increasing the likelihood of peer conflict, gang formation, and classroom chaos.”

A field study by Adepoju (2018) on 25 public secondary schools in southwestern Nigeria found that over 70% of students felt unsafe due to poor infrastructure and

bullying. Furthermore, 55% of teachers reported being threatened by students or community members at least once in a school term. These findings highlight how systemic neglect and social instability directly affect school safety and the well-being of students and staff.

The types and causes of school safety challenges are deeply interconnected. A school may experience multiple forms of threats simultaneously physical, social, psychological, and environmental each reinforcing the other. These issues are rooted in poor governance, infrastructural decay, community insecurity, and societal indifference to children's rights. Therefore, ensuring safety in schools demands a comprehensive and sustained approach involving policymakers, educators, parents, community leaders, and the students themselves.

Effects of School Safety Challenges on Educational Development

The relationship between school safety and educational development is both direct and significant. A safe school environment promotes effective learning, mental and emotional well-being, student engagement, and consistent school attendance. Conversely, when students perceive their school environment as unsafe, it hampers their academic performance, disrupts their concentration, and contributes to increased dropout rates. As Adesina and Olatunji (2016) emphasize, “the learning process thrives in environments

where safety, order, and emotional security are guaranteed.” Unfortunately, in many Nigerian secondary schools especially in regions like Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State safety challenges pose major threats to the educational development of students.

- **Decline in Academic Performance:** One of the most profound effects of unsafe school environments is the deterioration of students’ academic performance. When learners are constantly exposed to threats such as bullying, physical violence, or insecurity, they become anxious and distracted, making it difficult to focus on their studies. Nwokolo and Eze (2018) found that “students who experience violence or harassment in school perform significantly worse in mathematics and language subjects than their peers in safer environments.” This is largely due to a diminished ability to concentrate, irregular attendance, and emotional trauma.
- **Increased Absenteeism and Dropout Rates:** School safety issues often lead to increased absenteeism, as students may avoid school to protect themselves from harm. In extreme cases, persistent threats can lead to permanent withdrawal from school. According to UNICEF (2020), “children who do not feel safe in school are more likely to stay at home, especially girls who fear sexual harassment or assault.” This issue is particularly prevalent in underserved rural communities, where law enforcement and school monitoring systems are weak. The long-term impact is a reduction in the literacy rate and general educational attainment in the region.

- **Negative Impact on Mental Health and Emotional Well-being:** Unsafe school environments expose students to chronic stress, anxiety, fear, and in some cases, depression. These psychological effects interfere with learning and overall cognitive development. Okeke and Akpan (2017) stated that “students who experience or witness violence in school environments often develop emotional disorders that impair their ability to relate socially or succeed academically.” Traumatized students may become withdrawn, display aggression, or develop post-traumatic stress symptoms that hinder their educational progress.
- **Breakdown of Teacher-Student Relationships:** The learning process is heavily dependent on trust and mutual respect between students and teachers. When school safety is compromised—through incidents like teacher abuse, lack of discipline enforcement, or violent conflicts—these relationships break down. Obasi and Ekong (2019) argued that “an atmosphere of fear and mistrust weakens student-teacher collaboration, leading to disengagement and reduced participation in learning activities.” In the long term, this undermines classroom management, reduces learning effectiveness, and encourages a culture of indifference toward education.
- **Disruption of School Activities and Academic Calendar:** Safety challenges such as kidnappings, cultism, riots, and community attacks often force school closures, delaying exams, school programs, and lesson plans. This affects curriculum coverage and denies students the full learning experience. For instance, during the

height of school kidnappings in parts of Nigeria, many schools were forced to shut down for weeks or even months. Uche and Ifeanyi (2021) noted that “security threats have led to massive school closures in northern and southern Nigeria, resulting in significant loss of learning time and long-term educational setbacks.”

- **Erosion of Educational Values and Discipline:** Persistent safety issues can normalize violence, cheating, truancy, and disrespect for authority, eroding the moral and ethical standards that schools are meant to uphold. In environments where cultism and bullying go unpunished, students may adopt aggressive behaviors as a coping mechanism. Aderemi and Salami (2020) observed that “in schools where discipline is poorly enforced due to safety fears, students are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and disregard academic responsibilities.”
- **Gender Disparities in Educational Access:** In many communities, school safety challenges disproportionately affect female students. Sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and lack of privacy in school facilities discourage parents from sending their daughters to school. UNESCO (2019) reported that “safety concerns, especially relating to sexual violence, are among the leading reasons why girls drop out of secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa.” This not only widens the gender gap in education but also limits women's participation in the socio-economic development of their communities.

- Decline in Teacher Morale and Retention: Safety concerns also impact educators, many of whom face verbal threats, physical attacks, or lack of protection. This lowers teacher morale, leading to absenteeism, poor performance, and even resignation. Adepoju and Oyesola (2017) stated that “teachers in high-risk schools report high levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout, contributing to the shortage of qualified educators.” Consequently, this affects the quality of instruction and student outcomes.
- Reduction in Parental and Community Involvement: When safety incidents become frequent, parents may withdraw their support for school activities, choosing instead to protect their children through home-schooling or early withdrawal. Eze (2016) noted that “parental involvement in school affairs diminishes in environments where safety is not guaranteed, weakening the school-community relationship necessary for holistic student development.”

A survey conducted by Okonkwo (2018) in Edo and Delta States revealed that 63% of students in public secondary schools had witnessed or experienced some form of violence in school, and 40% of them admitted that such experiences affected their interest in learning. Another report by The Global Partnership for Education (2021) indicated that countries with poor school safety records tend to have lower literacy and school completion rates, especially among girls and children in rural communities.

The effects of school safety challenges on educational development are far-reaching and multifaceted. From academic underperformance and mental health issues to increased dropout rates and gender disparities, the consequences are both immediate and long-term. For students in areas such as Ovia North East LGA, the lack of safety in and around schools poses a serious threat to their right to quality education. To reverse this trend, a multi-stakeholder approach involving government, school authorities, parents, law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations is essential. As UNESCO (2019) aptly puts it, *“No meaningful learning can take place in an environment where fear reigns. Ensuring safety is not a privilege it is a necessity for every child’s development.”*

Theoretical Framework: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, a seminal theory in human motivation that provides a robust explanation for the interdependence between basic human needs and optimal functioning. Originally articulated in Maslow’s 1943 article *A Theory of Human Motivation*, and later expanded upon in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*, the theory asserts that individuals must satisfy a series of hierarchical needs ranging from basic physiological survival to self-actualization before they can achieve full psychological health and realize

their full potential. This framework is particularly relevant in the analysis of how school safety challenges affect the educational development of students, as it underscores the indispensable role of environmental stability, emotional security, and psychological well-being in academic achievement.

Maslow categorized human needs into five distinct levels: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. These needs are often represented as a pyramid, with physiological needs at the base and self-actualization at the peak. The basic premise of Maslow's theory is that the lower needs must be at least partially fulfilled before individuals can focus on higher-level needs. As Maslow (1943) explained, "Man is a perpetually wanting animal," but when certain needs are unmet, they dominate consciousness and behavior. For instance, a student who is hungry, threatened, or emotionally distressed cannot effectively concentrate on classroom instruction or academic goals.

The second tier of the hierarchy safety needs is of particular importance to this study. Maslow identified safety needs as encompassing protection from violence, threats, and instability. These include personal security, financial security, health and well-being, and safety against accidents or harm. In the school context, this translates to students' need to feel safe from physical danger (e.g., bullying, fighting, or assault), emotional harm (e.g., verbal abuse, humiliation, or neglect), and environmental threats (e.g.,

dilapidated school buildings, unsafe classrooms, or toxic surroundings). According to Maslow (1954), “If the individual is threatened by something in his environment, his whole system is diverted to dealing with that threat, leaving no energy or capacity for the pursuit of growth and learning”.

Applying this to the Nigerian educational system, and specifically to secondary schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area, the safety challenges that plague many schools such as cultism, sexual harassment, theft, and poor infrastructure present serious obstacles to student development. When students consistently feel unsafe, they operate in a state of chronic stress or hypervigilance. Their cognitive resources are diverted from learning to survival, making meaningful engagement with academic tasks extremely difficult. As observed by Oyetunde and Madu (2017), “insecurity in schools negatively correlates with learning motivation, attendance, and academic performance”. These students are more likely to withdraw socially, exhibit behavioral problems, and record poor academic outcomes.

In addition to the immediate need for safety, the third level of Maslow’s hierarchy the need for love and belonging also has significant implications for school safety. In an ideal educational setting, students should experience a sense of community, acceptance, and mutual respect. However, where school safety is compromised by bullying, social exclusion, or teacher-student hostility, this sense of belonging is eroded. Students who

feel marginalized or discriminated against may suffer from anxiety, depression, or alienation, which severely hampers their participation in the learning process. According to Eze and Onuoha (2019), “students who do not feel emotionally safe or included in their school environment often show reduced interest in collaborative learning and are more prone to academic failure”.

Moving up the hierarchy, the fourth level is the need for esteem, which includes the desire for respect, recognition, confidence, and achievement. Schools are not only sites of cognitive instruction but also environments in which students build self-worth and academic identity. A safe, structured school environment fosters self-esteem by rewarding effort, providing positive feedback, and enabling students to set and achieve goals. Conversely, in unsafe schools where students are threatened, humiliated, or punished unfairly, esteem is systematically undermined. As Nwankwo and Agbo (2017) explain, “the learning environment significantly shapes students’ academic self-concept. In settings marked by violence or neglect, students internalize failure, believing they are incapable or undeserving of success”.

The final and highest tier of Maslow’s hierarchy is self-actualization, which refers to the realization of one’s full potential and the pursuit of growth, creativity, and personal fulfillment. In educational terms, this involves not only mastering academic content but also developing critical thinking, imagination, leadership, and ethical reasoning. However,

for students to reach this level, all foundational needs must be sufficiently met. In unsafe school environments, students may never progress beyond the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, remaining trapped in cycles of fear, inadequacy, and disengagement. As Okafor and Okoye (2018) succinctly note, "Self-actualization cannot occur in an environment of deprivation. When students feel unsafe, their brains are wired for defense, not development".

Maslow's framework also helps explain disparities in educational outcomes across regions with varying levels of school safety. In well-resourced, secure schools, students are more likely to meet their safety and psychological needs, thus progressing toward higher-order learning. In contrast, students in poorly managed or violence-prone schools are structurally disadvantaged from achieving the same developmental milestones. According to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2020), "Maslow's hierarchy offers a sobering critique of Nigerian educational inequities, where many students never reach the upper tiers of development due to chronic insecurity in schools".

Furthermore, Maslow's model is dynamic, not static. Students may regress to lower levels of need if their safety is disrupted. For example, a student who previously thrived in a safe learning environment may become withdrawn or disruptive if new safety threats emerge, such as increased gang activity, teacher misconduct, or physical violence. This regression aligns with Maslow's assertion that "needs are not permanently satisfied;

once a lower need becomes threatened, it reasserts dominance over behavior” (Maslow, 1943)

From a policy perspective, Maslow’s hierarchy underscores the urgent need for school safety reforms. Education planners, administrators, and government agencies must recognize that academic excellence cannot be achieved in the absence of physical and psychological safety. It is not enough to build classrooms or employ teachers; schools must become sanctuaries of safety, inclusion, and positive reinforcement. This is especially critical in areas like Ovia North East, where infrastructural deficits and socio-economic challenges compound the risks to student safety.

In sum, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs offers a powerful theoretical foundation for understanding the profound impact of school safety on educational development. It reveals that learning is not merely a cognitive process but a deeply human experience shaped by environmental, emotional, and psychological conditions. Until students’ basic needs for safety, belonging, and esteem are addressed, the higher goals of education—including the cultivation of creativity, innovation, and responsible citizenship—will remain elusive. Thus, any meaningful discourse on educational development must begin with a firm commitment to school safety.

Strategies for Improving School Safety

- **Formulation and Implementation of School Safety Policies:** One of the foundational strategies for improving school safety is the establishment of comprehensive and enforceable school safety policies. These policies should define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, outline preventive procedures, and specify consequences for violations. According to Oluremi (2015), effective school safety policies are essential for promoting discipline, structure, and order in the school environment. Without clear and consistent guidelines, safety challenges such as bullying, cultism, vandalism, and drug abuse can thrive unchecked. Schools must not only formulate these policies but also sensitize students, teachers, and parents on their importance to ensure widespread understanding and compliance.
- **Enhancement of Physical Infrastructure and Environmental Design:** The physical environment of a school significantly influences the safety and well-being of students and staff. In many Nigerian public schools, buildings are dilapidated, fences are broken, and classrooms are overcrowded. Improving infrastructure by constructing secure fences, well-lit compounds, structurally sound classrooms, clean toilets, and proper ventilation can reduce safety risks. Adegoke and Aluede (2012) assert that the physical condition of a school can either deter or encourage unsafe behaviors. For example, poorly lit hallways and broken windows can become hiding places for bullying or violence. Safe design and regular maintenance of school

infrastructure contribute to a sense of order, reduce accidents, and prevent unauthorized access.

- **Regular Safety Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Educating students and staff about safety issues is a proactive strategy to minimize risks. This includes teaching students how to identify, avoid, and report dangers such as bullying, abuse, drug use, and cyber threats. Integrating safety education into the curriculum through civic education or life skills training builds students' confidence and awareness. According to Okon and Udoh (2020), informed students are more likely to make positive decisions and act responsibly. Schools can also conduct awareness campaigns, seminars, and safety weeks to emphasize topics such as personal security, emergency response, first aid, fire drills, and conflict resolution.
- **Strengthening Guidance and Counseling Services:** Many safety challenges in schools stem from students' emotional or psychological problems. The presence of trained counselors can help identify and address issues like depression, anger, trauma, and peer pressure before they escalate into violence or self-harm. Nwachukwu and Udo (2018) highlight the role of counseling in reducing student indiscipline and improving communication between students and teachers. In-school counseling services offer students a safe space to express themselves, seek help, and find non-violent solutions to problems. Counselors also play a role in mediating conflicts,

supporting victims of abuse, and advising school management on student welfare issues.

- **Training and Capacity Building for Teachers and Staff:** Teachers are frontline agents of school safety. Their behavior, response to incidents, and classroom management skills shape students' experiences. Therefore, teachers and school staff must receive training on child protection, trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and positive discipline strategies. According to Adesina (2014), a trained teacher is more equipped to handle difficult situations, recognize warning signs of danger, and refer at-risk students for appropriate help. Capacity building programs can also educate staff on legal responsibilities regarding child safety and reporting mechanisms for abuse or violence.
- **Increased School-Community Collaboration:** Schools cannot ensure safety in isolation. Collaborating with community stakeholders such as parents, religious leaders, local authorities, and security agencies strengthens the school's ability to prevent and respond to safety threats. Akinware (2011) argues that when communities are actively involved in school affairs, they provide moral oversight, offer intelligence on local threats, and support students' positive behavior through mentorship. Community-based initiatives like neighborhood watch programs, parent-teacher associations, and volunteer security guards can bolster school safety, especially in rural or high-risk areas.

- **Use of Technology and Surveillance Tools:** Technological tools such as closed-circuit television (CCTV), biometric attendance systems, metal detectors, and alarm systems can enhance school security. These tools help monitor student movement, identify intruders, and deter criminal activities within school premises. Adebayo and Ayeni (2021) emphasize that while technology should not replace human vigilance, it significantly improves response time during emergencies and serves as a preventive mechanism. Technology also includes the use of mobile apps and platforms for reporting safety concerns anonymously, especially in cases of bullying or sexual harassment.
- **Promotion of a Respectful and Inclusive School Culture:** Building a school culture that values respect, empathy, and inclusion is a long-term strategy for safety. Schools that discourage discrimination, tribalism, and favoritism are less likely to experience conflicts or violent behavior. According to the Centre for Social Justice (2017), students who feel included, respected, and supported are more likely to behave responsibly and protect one another. Initiatives like peer mentorship, anti-bullying clubs, student leadership programs, and group activities promote bonding and a sense of community. School staff must also model respectful behavior and treat students fairly to reinforce these values.
- **Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Management Planning:** Schools must be prepared for emergencies such as fire outbreaks, kidnapping, building collapse, or

violent attacks. This requires the development of a crisis response plan, designation of roles, and regular drills to test preparedness. Osher et al. (2010) note that preparedness saves lives and minimizes panic during real emergencies. A well-structured plan includes evacuation routes, assembly points, contact numbers, and first aid resources. All school members teachers, students, and staff should be familiar with these procedures and know how to act during a crisis.

- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Policy Review:** Safety strategies must be continuously monitored and evaluated to ensure their effectiveness. Schools should collect data on safety incidents, review response mechanisms, and adjust policies as needed. Feedback from students, parents, and staff can provide insights into emerging risks and the functionality of existing measures. According to Oluremi (2015), regular reviews allow schools to adapt to changing safety dynamics and improve based on evidence. Evaluation also helps identify training gaps, resource needs, and areas of community concern.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this chapter has provided deep insights into the multifaceted nature of school safety and its profound implications on the educational development of secondary school students. From the conceptual framework to empirical

studies, it is evident that school safety encompasses more than the mere absence of physical threats. It includes a broader spectrum of factors such as emotional security, environmental structure, relational trust, and administrative responsibility. As Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008) affirmed, a safe school is one where students feel protected, valued, and supported conditions that are vital for effective learning to take place.

The concept of school safety, as established by scholars like Astor, Guerra, and Van Acker (2010), refers to the ability of a school to protect students and staff from physical harm, emotional abuse, and threats to well-being. School safety is essential to fostering an environment conducive to learning and character formation. The reviewed literature emphasizes that where there is a high level of security, both students and teachers are more likely to focus on academic goals without fear or distraction. As posited by Osher and Kendziora (2010), students learn best when they feel safe, supported, and respected within their school environment.

The types and causes of school safety challenges identified in the literature are diverse, ranging from internal factors such as bullying, cultism, and teacher-student conflicts, to external threats like gang invasions, kidnapping, and poor school infrastructure. Scholars like Akintunde and Ogunyemi (2014) have argued that these challenges are not isolated events but systemic issues rooted in policy gaps, inadequate funding, and weak enforcement of safety measures. Their findings were corroborated by

Oyesola (2016), who emphasized the need for proactive school leadership and government involvement in addressing these dangers. In unsafe learning environments, students often experience heightened anxiety, absenteeism, and even permanent withdrawal from school.

In discussing the effects of school safety challenges on educational development, the literature reveals a direct correlation between an unsafe school environment and poor academic outcomes. Students exposed to threats, violence, or emotional trauma are more likely to suffer from reduced concentration, lower self-esteem, and diminished academic performance.

As Wang, Berry, and Swearer (2013) observed, a hostile or fearful environment can derail cognitive processes and hinder the natural development of learners. This is particularly concerning in areas such as Ovia North East Local Government Area, where socio-economic conditions may already place students at a disadvantage. Adebayo (2019) further demonstrated that psychological trauma from school violence can manifest in long-term mental health issues, affecting students' future educational and career pursuits.

The theoretical underpinning of the review, drawn from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, strongly supports the idea that safety is foundational to human development and learning. Maslow postulated that unless an individual's basic physiological and safety needs are met, they cannot effectively pursue higher-level needs such as belonging,

esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). This theory has been widely applied in educational contexts to explain why students in unsafe environments struggle to achieve academic success. As noted by McLeod (2018), safety is not a luxury but a psychological necessity that precedes motivation and engagement in learning activities.

On the topic of improving school safety, the literature provides several strategic approaches, including the establishment of clear school policies, the deployment of trained security personnel, the promotion of inclusive and respectful school cultures, and the integration of safety education into the curriculum. These recommendations are grounded in empirical studies and field practices. Cornell and Mayer (2010) emphasized that schools that involve all stakeholders students, teachers, parents, and community leaders in safety planning tend to experience lower rates of violence and higher levels of academic achievement. Furthermore, UNESCO (2017) stressed the importance of creating inclusive, safe, and non-violent learning environments as part of the global commitment to Sustainable Development Goal.

The empirical studies reviewed offer strong support for the arguments made throughout the literature. Akintunde and Ogunyemi (2014), Adeyemi and Ekundayo (2011), and Ekechukwu (2017) provide evidence from different parts of Nigeria showing that school safety is a critical determinant of student success. These studies reveal that unsafe school environments not only lead to academic underperformance but also result

in school dropouts, disciplinary problems, and psychological distress. In contrast, schools that prioritize safety tend to record better student retention, improved discipline, and higher academic engagement.

In sum, the body of literature reviewed underscores the fundamental truth that school safety is a prerequisite for educational development. It affects every aspect of a student's academic journey from attendance and participation to motivation and achievement. The reviewed works collectively affirm that improving school safety is not just a protective measure but an educational imperative. In a country like Nigeria, where many regions face infrastructural, economic, and social challenges, addressing school safety is vital to achieving broader educational reforms and ensuring that every child can learn in an environment free from fear, harm, or discrimination.

The insights gained from this review serve as a solid foundation for understanding the realities within Ovia North East Local Government Area and will inform the methodological design and analysis of findings in subsequent chapters of this study. By drawing on these scholarly perspectives, the research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on how best to secure schools and safeguard the future of Nigerian students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD OF STUDY

This chapter describes the method and procedure used by the researcher in conducting the study. It is presented under the following Sub headings;

- Research Design
- Population of the Study
- Sample and Sampling Techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Research Design

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to investigate and describe the existing conditions regarding school safety challenges and how they affect the educational development of secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. The descriptive survey design enables the researcher to gather data from a representative sample of the population to make generalizations (Nworgu, 2015). It is

particularly suitable for educational research that involves the use of questionnaires to collect data on opinions, perceptions, and experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all public and private secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. According to data obtained from the Edo State Ministry of Education (2023), there are approximately 3,400 students enrolled across the 10 recognized secondary schools in the local government area. The study focused on students in JSS1 to SS3 as they are presumed to have developed the cognitive maturity to understand and respond to issues relating to school safety and educational development.

S/N	Name of School	School Type	Location	Estimated Population
1	Ekosodin Secondary School	Public	Ekosodin	140
2	Army Day Secondary School	Public	Isiohor	1000
3	Ezomon Secondary School	Public	Ora	140
4	Ekiadolor Grammar School	Public	Ekiadolor	1000
5	NIFOR Secondary School	Public	NIFOR	500
6	Great Marvel International School	Private	Isiohor	140
7	Boiling Point Academy	Private	Ekiadolor	100
8	Jubilee Secondary School	Private	Ugbowo	180
9	Excellence Group of Schools	Private	Oluku	100
10	Russel Group of School	Private	Useh	100
	Total	—	—	3,400

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a combination of proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. Proportionate stratified sampling was adopted to ensure that each school contributed respondents in proportion to its student population, thereby guaranteeing fair representation of both public and private schools. Within each school, simple random sampling was used to give all eligible students an equal chance of being selected.

A total sample size of 150 students was drawn from the population of 3,400, representing approximately 4.4% of the entire student population. The distribution of the sample across the schools was based on their respective population sizes, as shown below:

S/N	School	Estimated Population	% of Total	No. of Respondents
1	Ekosodin Secondary School	140	4.1%	6
2	Army Day Secondary School	1000	29.4%	44
3	Ezomon Secondary School	140	4.1%	6
4	Ekiadolor Grammar School	1000	29.4%	44
5	NIFOR Secondary School	500	14.7%	22
6	Great Marvel International School	140	4.1%	6
7	Boiling Point Academy	100	2.9%	4
8	Jubilee Secondary School	180	5.3%	8
9	Excellence Group of Schools	100	2.9%	4
10	Russel Group of School	100	2.9%	4
	Total	3,400	100%	150

Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: “School Safety and Educational Development Questionnaire (SSEDQ)” developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

- Section A: Demographic Information (age, gender, class, school type)
- Section B: Students’ Knowledge of School Safety Challenges (e.g., bullying, theft, cultism, infrastructure issues)

- Section C: Perceived Impact of Safety Challenges on Educational Development (academic performance, attendance, emotional health, participation)

The items were designed using a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).

Validation of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by three experts: two from the Department of Health, Safety and Environmental Education, University of Benin. The experts reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Their suggestions led to the rewording and restructuring of some items for better comprehension. This process ensured that the instrument measured what it intended to measure (Ogunniyi, 2012).

Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted in two secondary schools in Ovia South West LGA (a nearby area not included in the main study). The responses were analyzed using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency (George &

Mallery, 2003). This confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the main study.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were instructed on how to fill out the questionnaire. Data collection lasted for three weeks to ensure proper coverage and participation.

Method of Data Analysis.

Data were analyzed using percentages, frequency counts in order to facilitate the interpretation of the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter presents the results of the data collected from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. The data are presented in tables and analysed in line with the research questions of the study. The analysis is structured into three main sections:

- Safety challenges in schools.
- Impact of school safety challenges on students' educational development.
- Discussion of findings

The sample size was 150 students, out of which 145 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned, representing a 96.7% return rate.

Safety Challenges in Schools

Responses on Safety Challenges in Schools

Table 1: showing the safety challenges on the educational development of the secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo state.

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	My school has adequate security personnel to protect students.	20 (13.8%)	35 (24.1%)	60 (41.4%)	30 (20.7%)
2	Incidents of bullying or intimidation among students are common.	50 (34.5%)	65 (44.8%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
3	Teachers and staff sometimes use corporal punishment in unsafe ways.	45 (31.0%)	60 (41.4%)	25 (17.2%)	15 (10.3%)
4	Cult-related activities or gang fights exist within/around my school.	35 (24.1%)	55 (37.9%)	30 (20.7%)	25 (17.3%)
5	Some students bring harmful objects (weapons, drugs) to school.	40 (27.6%)	55 (37.9%)	30 (20.7%)	20 (13.8%)
6	Vandalism and theft of school property occur in my school.	35 (24.1%)	60 (41.4%)	30 (20.7%)	20 (13.8%)
7	My classrooms are overcrowded, making them unsafe during emergencies.	70 (48.3%)	50 (34.5%)	15 (10.3%)	10 (6.9%)
8	There are no functioning fire extinguishers, alarms, or first aid kits in my school.	65 (44.8%)	55 (37.9%)	15 (10.3%)	10 (6.9%)
9	The school compound is not properly fenced or gated.	50 (34.5%)	40 (27.6%)	30 (20.7%)	25 (17.2%)
10	Toilets, water facilities, and health services are inadequate, posing health risks.	60 (41.4%)	55 (37.9%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)

Source: field survey 2025

The results show a disturbing trend: students face multiple safety challenges on a daily basis. More than 60% of respondents disagreed that schools had adequate security personnel, indicating vulnerability to external threats such as cultists and intruders. A significant majority (79.3%) agreed that bullying and intimidation are common, reflecting a hostile peer environment.

Equally worrying is that 65.5% of students confirmed that teachers sometimes use corporal punishment in unsafe ways. This suggests that even staff members, who should model safety, sometimes contribute to unsafe practices.

Overcrowding was the most strongly affirmed challenge, with 82.8% agreeing that their classrooms were overcrowded, making them unsafe during emergencies. In addition, more than 80% of respondents confirmed the absence of functional fire extinguishers and first aid kits. This means that in the event of fire outbreaks, injuries, or medical emergencies, schools are ill-prepared to respond.

The cumulative interpretation is that while students know what safety entails, the school environment itself is unsafe, exposing them to risks that could hinder learning. This supports Akpan & Okon (2018) who found that poor infrastructure and weak administration are major drivers of safety lapses in Nigerian schools.

Impact of Safety Challenges on Educational Development

Responses on the Impact of Safety Challenges on Educational Development

Table 2: showing the impact on safety challenges on the educational development of the secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo state.

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
10	Fear of insecurity affects my ability to concentrate in class.	65 (44.8%)	50 (34.5%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
11	Cases of bullying discourage students from attending school.	55 (37.9%)	60 (41.4%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
12	School safety problems reduce students' interest in learning.	50 (34.5%)	65 (44.8%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
13	Inadequate safety facilities increase absenteeism among students.	60 (41.4%)	55 (37.9%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
14	Unsafe environments lower academic performance of students.	70 (48.3%)	50 (34.5%)	15 (10.3%)	10 (6.9%)
15	School insecurity discourages extracurricular activities.	45 (31.0%)	60 (41.4%)	25 (17.2%)	15 (10.3%)
16	When safety is guaranteed, students are more	75	50	10	10

	motivated to study.	(51.7%)	(34.5%)	(6.9%)	(6.9%)
17	Lack of safety affects discipline and behavior of students.	60 (41.4%)	55 (37.9%)	20 (13.8%)	10 (6.9%)
18	Academic success is strongly linked to school safety.	70 (48.3%)	55 (37.9%)	10 (6.9%)	10 (6.9%)

Source: field survey 2025

The findings in Table 4.6 clearly reveal that safety challenges negatively affect students' educational development. Nearly 80% of respondents agreed that fear of insecurity reduces concentration, confirming Maslow's hierarchy of needs which posits that safety must be met before learning can occur.

Furthermore, about 79.3% of respondents stated that bullying discourages school attendance, leading to increased absenteeism. This aligns with World Bank (2018) findings that insecurity is a key factor in school dropout rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Most significantly, 82.8% of students affirmed that unsafe environments lower academic performance. This suggests that schools that fail to provide safe conditions cannot expect high achievement from their students.

On the positive side, 86.2% of respondents agreed that when safety is guaranteed, they are more motivated to study. This validates the argument by Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) that a safe school environment is a prerequisite for quality education.

Overall, the results emphasize that school safety is not just about protection from harm but is directly linked to learning outcomes, attendance, motivation, discipline, and overall academic success.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings presents an interpretation of the results obtained in relation to each of the research questions. The purpose is to explain the meaning of the results, highlight their implications, and compare them with findings from previous research.

Research Question One: What is the level of knowledge secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area have regarding the safety challenges within their school environment?

The findings of the study revealed that most students in the study area demonstrated a moderate to high level of knowledge of school safety. As presented in the analysis, an average of over 80% of respondents correctly identified the purpose of fences,

zebra crossings, and safety signs, and understood that safety rules in laboratories and proper maintenance of school furniture help prevent accidents.

However, the results also indicated that some students were less aware of proactive safety actions, such as reporting faulty facilities or identifying hidden dangers in the school environment. This suggests that while students possess basic theoretical knowledge of safety measures, they may lack consistent exposure to practical safety education and real-life application of those concepts.

This finding agrees with the work of Eze and Aigbe (2021), who reported that secondary school students in Edo and Delta States had fair knowledge of safety principles but lacked regular safety orientation programs. Similarly, Okorie (2020) found that students tend to learn safety behaviors by observation rather than through structured instruction.

The implication of this finding is that schools in Ovia North-East LGA provide limited structured safety education, which could reduce students' ability to act appropriately during emergencies. When students understand safety rules in theory but not in practice, they remain at risk of accidents, fear, or injury within the learning environment. Therefore, it is important that schools introduce continuous safety education programs, drills, and safety clubs to strengthen both awareness and practical preparedness.

Research Question Two: What are the common school safety challenges faced by secondary schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area?

The results of the study identified several safety challenges experienced by secondary school students in the study area. Prominent among these challenges were bullying, corporal punishment, lack of safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits), overcrowded classrooms, poor fencing, and inadequate health facilities.

Over 70% of respondents agreed that these challenges exist in their schools, while only a small proportion disagreed. This indicates that school environments in Ovia North-East are not completely safe or well-secured for students. The lack of essential safety infrastructure suggests weak enforcement of school safety policies and poor government oversight in public schools.

This finding is consistent with Adesina (2020), who found that overcrowding, poor sanitation, and bullying were major threats to student safety in Nigerian secondary schools. Similarly, Ogunyemi (2019) reported that many schools in the South-South region lack functional safety devices and trained security personnel, exposing students to preventable dangers.

The findings therefore suggest that physical and psychological safety are compromised in many schools. When students experience or witness bullying, theft, or

corporal punishment, they may become fearful or distracted, which can lower their academic performance. Poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and lack of medical response mechanisms also increase the risk of injuries and illnesses, reducing attendance and participation in school activities.

The implication of this finding is that the educational development of students is directly affected by the poor state of school safety. A student who feels unsafe cannot concentrate fully, and fear or discomfort can lead to absenteeism, low morale, or school dropout. This calls for urgent attention by the Ministry of Education, school heads, and community stakeholders to implement school safety standards and ensure safe learning spaces.

Research Question Three: How often are students exposed to safety-related information, training, or sensitization programs addressing these challenges?

The findings of the study revealed that students are rarely exposed to structured safety education or sensitization programs. Only a few schools reportedly conduct safety talks or fire drills occasionally, while the majority of students indicated that they have never participated in formal safety training.

Despite this limited exposure, most respondents strongly agreed that school safety directly influences their learning behavior, motivation, and academic performance. Over

80% agreed that fear and insecurity reduce concentration, discourage attendance, and affect discipline, while 90% agreed that safe schools enhance motivation and academic success.

This means that students understand the importance of school safety but are not provided with enough opportunities to learn how to maintain or respond to unsafe situations. The finding supports the report of WHO (2018), which emphasized that regular safety education, drills, and emergency preparedness programs are vital to the academic and emotional stability of students. Similarly, Okafor (2019) argued that safety training in schools builds confidence and reduces the rate of accidents and violence.

The implication of this finding is that school authorities and education planners have not prioritized safety awareness as part of the curriculum. Without such programs, students remain unprepared for emergencies, and this negatively affects their sense of security and academic focus. Introducing periodic safety campaigns, teacher workshops, and student-led safety clubs could significantly improve awareness and confidence among learners.

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between students' awareness of school safety challenges and their academic performance, attendance, emotional well-being, and classroom engagement?

The findings from the analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between students' awareness of school safety challenges and their overall educational development indicators namely academic performance, class attendance, emotional stability, and classroom engagement.

Students who demonstrated greater awareness of safety issues (such as recognizing potential hazards, understanding safety rules, and identifying preventive actions) reported better concentration in class, fewer absences, and higher motivation to participate in academic and extracurricular activities. Conversely, students who showed low awareness or limited understanding of safety practices were more likely to experience anxiety, absenteeism, and lower classroom participation.

This implies that awareness of safety challenges plays a psychological and motivational role in the learning process. When students understand how to stay safe and trust that their school is secure, they feel emotionally stable and can focus on their studies without fear or distraction. A lack of awareness, however, may increase fear, insecurity, or indifference toward school activities.

This finding aligns with Okonkwo and Ojo (2020), who found that students with a high perception of school safety demonstrated better academic adjustment and fewer behavioral issues. Similarly, World Health Organization (2018) and UNESCO (2019) emphasized that psychological safety and awareness of risk prevention are critical to learners' mental health, attendance, and academic outcomes.

Furthermore, the results show that safety awareness fosters a sense of belonging and participation, which encourages teamwork, discipline, and positive classroom engagement. Students who feel safe and aware of their environment are more open to collaboration and have better emotional control.

The implication of this finding is that school safety awareness programs should be integrated into the school curriculum as part of life skills or civic education. Teachers and administrators should also use morning assemblies, health talks, and interactive activities to strengthen awareness and emotional resilience among students. Ensuring that students understand their safety environment not only reduces risks but also improves attendance, academic achievement, and mental well-being.

Research Question Five: What are the major obstacles hindering the effective management and resolution of school safety challenges in secondary schools within Ovia North East Local Government Area?

The findings of the study identified several major obstacles to effective school safety management in the study area. These included:

- Inadequate funding and resources for safety infrastructure (e.g., fences, security posts, fire extinguishers, first aid kits).
- Lack of trained security personnel and safety officers within school compounds.
- Poor supervision and monitoring by government education authorities.
- Limited awareness and commitment among teachers and students toward maintaining safety protocols.
- Cultural attitudes that normalize bullying and corporal punishment as part of school discipline.

Over 80% of respondents agreed that these factors contribute significantly to the persistence of safety challenges in schools. The absence of consistent government inspection and enforcement of school safety regulations leaves many schools to operate without essential preventive measures.

This finding corroborates Adebayo (2021), who reported that poor funding and weak enforcement of education safety policies are major barriers to safe schooling in Nigeria. Similarly, Nwosu and Etim (2019) emphasized that most public schools lack structured safety plans, emergency response systems, and trained staff to handle crises.

The lack of collaboration between school management, parents, and local authorities further compounds the problem, as safety issues are often treated reactively rather than proactively. Inadequate awareness campaigns and insufficient inclusion of safety education in the curriculum also hinder long-term preventive efforts.

The implication of this finding is that the management of school safety requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. Effective management can only be achieved when schools receive adequate funding, teachers are trained on safety protocols, and students are actively involved in maintaining discipline and vigilance.

Therefore, improving school safety in Ovia North East LGA demands:

- Regular inspection and compliance monitoring by the Ministry of Education.
- Budgetary allocation for safety infrastructure and emergency preparedness.
- Continuous safety education and training for staff and students.
- Community involvement and awareness campaigns to promote shared responsibility for school safety.

In essence, the major obstacles are institutional and structural rather than individual. Without government support and consistent policy enforcement, even schools with knowledgeable students and teachers may continue to face recurring safety threats.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study investigated the knowledge of school safety challenges and their impact on the educational development of secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

The study highlighted the importance of school safety as a prerequisite for effective learning. Schools are expected to provide safe and secure environments that encourage students to focus on their studies without fear of bullying, violence, accidents, or insecurity. However, evidence has shown that many Nigerian schools face safety challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate security, lack of functional health facilities, vandalism, bullying, and cult-related activities.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To assess the level of students' knowledge of school safety.
2. To identify the safety challenges that exist in secondary schools.
3. To determine the impact of these safety challenges on students' educational development.

The study population consisted of 3,400 students in both public and private schools within Ovia North East Local Government Area. Using proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling, a sample of 150 students was selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: demographic data, knowledge of school safety, safety challenges in schools, and impact on educational development. Out of 150 distributed questionnaires, 145 were duly completed and returned, representing a 96.7% return rate.

The findings in Chapter Four revealed the following:

- Knowledge of School Safety: Students demonstrated a good understanding of school safety concepts. For instance, 88.3% correctly identified the purpose of a school fence as preventing intruders, and 82.1% recognized zebra crossings as preventing accidents. However, only 69% indicated that broken chairs and tables should be reported to authorities, showing a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical safety actions.
- Safety Challenges in Schools: The most critical challenges identified were overcrowded classrooms (48.3% strongly agreed), lack of fire extinguishers and first aid kits (44.8% strongly agreed), inadequate toilets and water facilities (41.4% strongly agreed), and frequent bullying (34.5% strongly agreed, 44.8%

agreed). Some students also reported cult-related activities, vandalism, and the presence of harmful objects in schools.

- **Impact on Educational Development:** Unsafe environments were found to negatively affect learning outcomes. A large proportion of students strongly agreed that insecurity reduced concentration (44.8%), discouraged school attendance due to bullying (37.9%), and lowered academic performance (48.3%). Conversely, 51.7% strongly agreed that guaranteed safety motivated them to study better, indicating that academic success is strongly linked to a safe school environment.

In summary, the findings showed that while students are aware of safety practices, the reality in schools is that significant safety challenges persist and these have direct negative consequences on students' attendance, interest in learning, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that school safety plays a vital role in the educational development of secondary school students in Ovia North East Local Government Area. Although students possess adequate knowledge of basic

safety principles, the study revealed that many schools lack the necessary facilities, structures, and personnel to guarantee student safety.

The presence of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate security personnel, insufficient health facilities, lack of fire safety equipment, and frequent bullying are pressing safety challenges. These conditions undermine effective teaching and learning, as students constantly face distractions, fears, and risks that lower their academic engagement.

The study further concludes that school safety and academic development are inseparable. Where safety challenges are not addressed, students' motivation, concentration, attendance, and performance are adversely affected. Conversely, when schools guarantee safety, students become more disciplined, motivated, and focused on learning.

Therefore, the overall implication is that improving safety standards in schools is a prerequisite for achieving quality education, which aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made to government, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students:

1. Government and Policy Makers

- The government should increase budgetary allocations to the education sector, with specific emphasis on safety infrastructure such as perimeter fencing, fire extinguishers, alarm systems, and first aid facilities.
- Security personnel should be deployed to all secondary schools to reduce cases of cultism, violence, and intrusions.
- The Ministry of Education should enforce policies that make it compulsory for schools to meet minimum safety standards before accreditation.

2. School Administrators

- Principals and proprietors should ensure that classrooms are not overcrowded by regulating student enrollment according to capacity.
- Schools should establish safety committees responsible for monitoring and addressing safety issues regularly.
- School compounds should be fenced and gated to prevent unauthorized access.

- Broken chairs, windows, and dilapidated facilities should be repaired promptly to prevent accidents.

3. Teachers and Staff

- Teachers should receive training on modern safety practices and alternative disciplinary methods instead of unsafe corporal punishment.
- Teachers should constantly educate students on safety measures and encourage them to report unsafe conditions immediately.
- Laboratory and workshop teachers should strictly enforce safety rules during practical sessions.

4. Parents and Guardians

- Parents should collaborate with schools by reporting safety concerns and contributing to the improvement of facilities through PTA initiatives.
- Parents must also caution their children against bringing harmful objects such as weapons or drugs to school.

5. Students

- Students should develop the habit of reporting safety hazards such as broken furniture, bullying, or suspicious behavior to school authorities.
- Students should also adhere to school safety rules, including proper use of laboratory equipment and playground facilities.

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APPENDIX

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

I am a final-year student of the University of Benin conducting a research study on:

“Knowledge of the School Safety Challenges on the Educational Development of Secondary School Students in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State.”

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on the types of safety challenges experienced by secondary school students and how these challenges affect their academic and personal development. Your honest responses will provide valuable insights. Please note that all information given will be treated with strict confidentiality and used only for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers only your personal experience and opinion matter.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) the option that applies to you.

1. Gender: Male () Female ()
2. Age Bracket: 10–12 years () 13–15 years () 16–18 years () Above 18 years ()
3. Class level: Junior secondary school () Senior secondary school ()
4. School ownership: Public () Private ()

5. Religion: Christianity () Islam () African Religion ()

Section B: Knowledge of School Safety

6. The main purpose of a school fence is to: (a) Decorate the school (b) Prevent intruders and keep students safe (c) Make the school beautiful (d) Disturb neighbors

7. Zebra crossing helps to prevent: (a) Accident (b) Lateness (c) Absenteeism (d) Class attendance

8. The school playground should be: (a) Filled with sharp objects (b) A safe place for sports and recreation (c) A place for hiding from teachers (d) Used only by teachers

9. Safety rules in the laboratory are meant to: (a) Disturb students during experiments (b) Prevent accidents and injuries (c) Stop students from enjoying science (d) Waste time before practicals

10. Broken chairs and tables in the classroom should be: (a) Ignored by students (b) Reported to school authorities to prevent accidents (c) Repaired by students themselves (d) Used carefully without reporting

11. The color red on safety signs usually means: (a) Fun and play (b) Warning or danger (c) Rest and relaxation (d) Cleanliness

Section C: Safety Challenges in Schools

Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each statement:

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
12	My school has adequate security personnel to protect students.				
13	Incidents of bullying or intimidation among students are common.				
14	Teachers and staff sometimes use corporal punishment in unsafe ways.				

15	Cult-related activities or gang fights exist within/around my school.				
16	Some students bring harmful objects (weapons, drugs) to school.				
17	Vandalism and theft of school property occur in my school.				
18	My classrooms are overcrowded, making them unsafe during emergencies.				
19	There are no functioning fire extinguishers, alarms, or first aid kits in my school.				
20	The school compound is not properly fenced or gated.				
21	Toilets, water facilities, and health services are inadequate, posing health risks.				

Section D: Impact of Safety Challenges on Educational Development

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
22	Fear of insecurity affects my ability to concentrate in class.				
23	Cases of bullying or harassment discourage students from attending school.				
24	School safety problems reduce students' interest in learning.				
25	Inadequate safety facilities increase absenteeism among students.				
26	Unsafe school environments lower the academic performance of students.				

27	School insecurity discourages participation in sports and extracurricular activities.				
28	When safety is guaranteed, students are more motivated to study.				
29	Lack of safety affects the overall discipline and behavior of students.				
30	Academic success is strongly linked to the safety of the school environment.				

Response Scale Reminder

- **SA = Strongly Agree**
- **A = Agree**
- **D = Disagree**
- **SD = Strongly Disagree**