RELATIVE EFFECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL CLIMATE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SCHOOL SAFETY IN ONDO, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

AGOKEI,   R. C.
Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling
Adeyemi College of Education

and

OKOROAFOR, N. C.
Department of Early childhood and Care Education
Adeyemi College of Education

ABSTRACT

A critical analysis and understanding of secondary students' experiences and of safety in public schools are currently lacking in the literature and warrant further research. This study investigated the relative effects of psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate on secondary school student's school safety. Using the descriptive survey research design three hundred (300) secondary school students were randomly selected. Four standardized and validated questionnaires were used to collect data from the participants. Three research questions were raised for the study. The data collected in the study were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and multiple regression analysis. It was found that psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate have significant relationships with school safety. The three predictor variables contributed significantly to the prediction of school safety when combined and independent, accounting for a variation of about 47.6% of the criterion measure with psychological flexibility being the most potent predictor. Based on the findings from the study, recommendations were made for significant stakeholders' consideration of restructuring school safety policy.

Key words: *Psychological flexibility, Parental involvement, School climate, School safety*

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of formal school environment the issue of school safety, has been a burdensome concern to education stakeholders. However, in recent times, a critical analysis and understanding of secondary school students' experiences and perceptions of safety in public schools are currently lacking in the literature and warrant further research. This becomes worrisome when anti-intellectual and life threatening events such as cultism, teacher-student conflicts and bullying are seen as recurring, persisting occurrences in schools and largely undocumented. In addition there are cases where the school buildings, topography, surrounding environments as well as socio/religious threats to school functions pervade. According to Okorodudu (2010), the last two decades witnessed crimes ranging from minor stealing to major robberies and killings perpetuated by teenagers. All these acts have lingered for long and has made the society often unbearable. All these add up to create fear, anxiety and loss of dignity in the school environment. It is worth noting that schools are supposedly viewed as safe havens of learning (Warren et al, 2006), so that school violence represents a significant breach of trust.

In many American and European countries, many school districts have sponsored and implemented heightened security measures, such as metal detectors, video surveillance technology, armed security guards, and strict codes of conduct (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001; Schreck, Miller, & Gibson, 2003) to improve school safety. Despite these measures, public secondary school students self-report still indicate that they are unsafe in school (Utah State University: Center for the School of the Future, 2006). This may be as a result of the fact that factors contributing to students' self-reports of feeling unsafe in public schools remain under-analyzed (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kannas, 2006). Understanding and describing the students' inner worlds in regards to school safety is requisite to developing schools where students feel comfortable and safe. It is on this note

that this study explores the relative effects of psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate on secondary school student's school safety.

Psychological flexibility describes the ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being and changing or persisting in behavior in the service of chosen values (Biglan, Hayes, & Pistorello, 2008). According to Kashdan and Rotterburg (2010) psychological flexibility is seen as the measure of how a person: (1) adapts to fluctuating situational demands, (2) reconfigures mental resources, (3) shifts perspective, and (4) balances competing desires, needs, and life domains. Thus, rather than focusing on specific content (within a person), definitions of psychological flexibility have to incorporate repeated transactions between people and their environmental contexts. Contacting the present more fully' means willing to be present with difficult thoughts and emotions and to accept self as one is, not as one thinks should be. This is a critical difference, because research shows that trying to get rid of our difficult thoughts and emotions increases their frequency, strength and duration (Wegner, 1994). Psychological flexibility is the ability to use the right emotional resources at the right times in order to create the kind of lives expected. Perhaps, students' access of this quality may be related to perception of being safe or unsafe in school.

Parental involvement could be simply seen as parents' active role or participation in creating a caring educational environment for their wards. Parents become involved in schools through direct involvement in school management and choice, participation in special parenting programmes and providing support programmes. Researches had indicated that the students whose parents are involved in their education tend to have fewer behavioural problems and better academic performance (Adeyemo, 2005). Parent-school collaboration is a cooperative process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children, and community members to maximize resources for child achievement and development. In Nigeria, parents are perceived as less concerned about their wards, while parental involvement, mainly in the western world, has increasingly been gaining ground (Aremu 2005). Studies have shown that parental involvement is associated positively with students' performance in school (Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Although connections between parent involvement and school safety have rarely been studied, increased parent involvement can result in home environments that are more conducive to learning and improve communication and consistency between home and school. These changes can lead to safer, more responsive schools.

Another factor examined in this study is the school climate. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures. It also encompasses the totality of all subjective emotional conditions that make up a school system as well as the ambience. These include feelings towards the physical and material facilities in form of buildings, school site and the environment that embody the school. To these, perception of school climate may either be positive or negative. Establishing a healthy school climate is an essential element of a safe school. Research reviews have shown that effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts are correlated with safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Greenberg, et. al. 2003). Hence, the attainment of an effective teaching and learning is therefore closely related to the location of the school, the organization and arrangement of the physical structures and other educational facilities in the school (Ojerinde, 2004; Fehintola, 2009) which describes its climate. Thus, Abdulkareem (2003) and Abayomi (2009) remarked that the physical appearances and general condition of school facilities are the striking bases upon which many parents and friends of educational institution make their initial judgment about the qualities of what goes on in the school.

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship existing between the psychological flexibility, parental involvement, school climate and secondary school student's school safety. The combined and relative effects of psychological flexibility,

parental involvement and school climate on secondary school student's school safety will also be investigated.

Research questions
The following research questions were raised for the study
1. Would there be significant correlations between psychological flexibility, parental involvement, school climate and secondary school students' school safety in Ondo?
2. Would there be any joint effect of psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate on secondary school students' school safety in Ondo?
3. Would there be any relative effect of psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate on secondary school students' school safety in Ondo?

Design
The design used in this study was the descriptive survey design. The study employed descriptive design since it sought to explain current existence without the researchers' manipulation.

Population and sampling procedure
The target population of study consisted of all secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government, Ondo State. The sample comprised 300 students from ten (10) randomly selected secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government, Ondo State. With thirty (30) students selected from each of the ten schools the sample consisted of 150 female and 150 male students. The age range of the participants was from 14 to 17years, with a mean age of 15.6 years and a standard deviation of 7.2.

Research Instrument
The following instruments were used in this study.
 Psychological flexibility scale: this was a 20-item psychological flexibility developed by Ciarrochi, Bilich, & Godsell, (2010) which measure the flexibility in adolescent. Typical examples of the items are: "It's OK if I remember something unpleasant", "My painful experiences and memories make it difficult for me to live a life that I would value". It has a reliability coefficient of 0.87 using Cronbach-alpha method.

School Climate scale: The Organizational Climate Index (OCI) was used to measure school climate. It is a short descriptive measure for schools (Hoy et al., 2002). The OCI is a combination of the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ) and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI). It is a 27-item Likert-type scale that assesses critical aspects of the school workplace. The OCI has four dimensions: collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, and institutional vulnerability to the community. In previous studies (Hoy et al., 2002) the reliability scores for each dimension were as follows: Collegial Principal Behavior (.94), Professional Teacher Behavior (.88), Achievement Press (.92), and Institutional Vulnerability (.87).

Parental Involvement Scale (PIS): The Parental Involvement Scale by Hicks (2006) was used to measure the levels of the parental involvement in their child's education. The scale is a 10-item likert scale with options from one (1) – Strongly Agree to four (4) – Strongly Disagree. The items in the scale include "My parents feel that I can achieve good grades in school", "My parents tell me that if I want to be successful in life I must work hard in school", "My parent value education and achievement". The scale has a Chronbach alpha of 0.87.

School Safety Questionnaire: This is a self-constructed scale with fifteen items designed in a 5-point likert format. Response format ranged from, 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree**.** The scale covered items exploring students' perceptions of safety with

regards to physical environment, personal belongings, harassment, intimidation and violence, emotional/psychological safety and school safety policies. After subjecting the scale to psychometric conditions, it has revealed a cronbach alpha of 0.71 and a two-week test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.79.

Procedure

The researchers personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaire from the students. Participants were adequately informed of confidentiality and the need to be precise and truthful in filling the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then filled and returned by the participants after adequate understanding. The data collection lasted for a month. The data was analyzed using the Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC), and multiple regression analysis to ascertain the patterns of relationship and the contribution of the independent variables to the criterion measure. In each case, the level of significance set for acceptance or rejection was 0.05.

Results

Table 1: Correlation matrix of Predictor variables and school safety

Variables	School safety	Psychological flexibility	School climate	Parental involvement
School safety	1			
Psychological flexibility	.393**	1		
School climate	.284**	.266**	1	
Parental involvememt	.253**	.169	.182	1
Mean	52.74	85.37	92.84	36.29
S.D.	6.42	5.91	7.34	7.66

**correlation is signification at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The result above indicates the mean standard deviation and relationships among the variables investigated. There were positive relationships among all the variables with that of psychological flexibility and safety being the most potent (r = .393; p >0.05).

Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis on School safety

R = .694; R^2 = .481 ; Adj R^2 = .476; STD. Error of Estimate = 5.47024					
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	P.
Regression	1508.272	3	502.757	31.546	0.05
Residual	4717.648	296	15.938		
Total	6225.92	299			

From the table above, the magnitude of the effect of Psychological flexibility, School climate and Parental involvement to predicting school safety is reflected in the values of coefficient of multiple regressions (0.694) and in multiple R2 adjusted (0. 476). The F – ratio value of 31.5 is significant at 0.05 levels.

Table 3: Relative Effect of predictor Variables to School safety

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	P.
	B	Std. Error	β Values		
(Constant)	11.382	3.119		3.	.001
Psychological flexibility	.287	.089	.187	4.16	.001
School climate	.181	.074	.177	3.61	.007
Parental involvement	.164	.063	.132	3.13	.016

The result above shows the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of the criterion measure (school safety) in varying weights. The results indicated that the following beta weights which represent the independent variables were observed according to order of potency. Psychological flexibility (β = .187, p <.05), School climate (β = .177, p >.05),), and Parental involvement (β = .132, p <.05).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of relationship among psychological flexibility, parental involvement and school climate and school safety as shown in the correlation matrix indicates that there is a positive and significant correlation among the variables studied and the secondary school student's school safety. This suggests that psychological flexibility, parental involvement and School climate could predict school safety of the participants. The finding further affirms previous findings (Ciarrochi, Bilich & Godsel, 2010; Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). An individual that can regulate his/her emotions as well as assume confidence in his/her ability would be expected to challenge anxious situations. The finding therefore implies that as psychological flexibility, parental involvement, School climate increases positively, school safety increases for the participants.

As shown, the multiple regression analysis indicates that psychological flexibility, parental involvement and School climate could predict school safety of secondary school students. The magnitude of this relationship in predicting school safety is reflected in the values of coefficient of multiple regressions (0.694) and in multiple R^2 adjusted (0. 476) as shown in table 2. Thus, it can be said that 47.6% of the total variance in school safety of secondary school students is accounted for by the combination of psychological flexibility, parental involvement and School climate. The F – ratio value of 31.5 is significant at 0.05

levels. This further affirms to the fact that the predictive capacities of the independent variables are not due to chance.

Concerning the extent to which each of the three independent variables contributes to the prediction, it could be ascertained that psychological flexibility, is the most potent predictor in this study. From this finding, it can be understood that an individual's ability to connect with the present moment fully, as a conscious human being, and to change or persist in behavior that is in line with identified values may readily be accustomed with the individual's perception of safety, particularly in schools. An understanding of the mechanism of action of psychological flexibility may also be a plausible explanation for the current finding. According to Ciarrochi, Bilich and Godsel, (2010) psychological flexibility transcends experiential acceptance to having the ability to markedly regulate overt behaviour in ineffective ways due to the inability or failure to notice the process of thinking (context) over the products of thinking (content) (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Pierson, Gifford, Smith, Bunting, & Hayes, 2004) using cognitive verbal processes (such as thoughts). Succinctly, individuals shift their energies away from control of experiences towards valued activity, and to consistently choose to act effectively, even in the presence of difficult private events such as perceived unsafe situations.

The findings revealed that parental involvement made significant contribution to the prediction of school safety among secondary school students. This is an affirmation of related study (Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). As earlier noted, parent-school collaboration is a cooperative process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children, and community members to maximize resources for child achievement and development. As studies has shown that parental involvement could promote students' performance in school, it is more likely that students perceptions of being safe in school could be connected to their parents concern and participation in their school activities. Hence, students' belief that their parents are concerned and involved in their understanding of what they experience in school could be a promoting factor for their feeling of safety.

More so, the findings revealed that School climate made significant contribution to the prediction of school safety. As earlier noted, research reviews have shown that effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts are correlated with safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Greenberg, et. al. 2003). Further, positive school climate has been associated with higher academic achievement and healthy behavioral outcomes for students (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Patton et al., 2006; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). It should be noted that school climate is a broad term used to describe the school environment, and while it has no consensus definition, reviews of the topic have identified several recurring themes. However, it is understood that the quality and character of school life based on patterns of school life experiences reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices and could explain beliefs of safety in schools.

Implication of the study

The current findings have critical implications for stakeholders in education. First, evidence from both evolution and social psychology indicates that humans (and other organisms) possess a bias toward detecting and avoiding danger. Not being sensitive to danger would then imply not desiring survival. The mechanism of action of psychological flexibility is understood as to consciously connect with the present experience and to modify behavior to be in congruence with environmental demands, promotes survival within challenges identified particularly in schools. With this understanding, promoting psychological flexibility leads to people becoming more caring, then increasing the prevalence of psychologically flexible people may be critical in fostering the evolution of a variety of benefits practices. Thus, behavior analysts with concerns about ensuring that the behavioral sciences make a difference on all of society's most important problems could

advance those efforts by conducting research on how to increase the prevalence of psychological flexibility.

Parenting is a complicated occupation that requires many different skills that work in concert to influence a child's behaviour. Parent plays a major role in the life of the adolescents, particularly in curbing antisocial behaviour and taming the child as well as helping them direct their energy and strength in the right direction. In Nigeria, parental involvement in the schooling of their wards mainly has been neglected. For many socio/economic demands as well as meeting with rising standard of living, many parents do not have the time for their children's' educational activities, as required. As a result the demand for parental involvement in the schooling process of their children has been left unscrutinized. In some cases even primary and pre-primary pupils are unfortunately engulfed in this quagmire or poor parental involvement in their wards educational engagement. Research has shown that students who feel unsafe or threatened at school fail to perform to their academic potential, and some students avoid school altogether when they are afraid of being harassed or harmed. In cognizance with the current finding, parents can serve as critical resources for schools to maintain a safe, positive, and welcoming climate so students are better able to achieve academic success. Therefore it is recommended that parents become more involved with the existing safety policies and procedures and precautionary issues at their children's school. This would make the parents more familiar with the school as well understand expected behavioural conducts and disciplinary measures meted on their wards. That school climate is perceived to be related to perception of students' school safety also have implications for educational stakeholders. School location, surrounding environment, quality and character, topography and administration are factors that influence the school climate. For instance, location of a school close to a motor park or market places may lead to disturbances within the school that can inhibit effective learning. A safe school sets high academic standards and clear, consistent rules of behaviour and discipline that are consistently and uniformly enforced. A safe school prepares for emergency situations and practices its plans. By employing strategies of a safe school and implementing them, school administrators would enhance a better quality for the teaching-learning experience of their students.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The present study aims to evaluate the relationship between four variables. The results revealed: a significant positive correlation between flexibility, parental involvement and School climate and school safety. The results further indicate that these variables could contribute to increasing school safety. Adequate utilization of the functionaries of these variables could be vital for addressing the problem of school safety. While psychological flexibility is advocated to be promoted among the students, parents should take out more time to be involved in the schooling of their wards. Fresh breath should be given to the parents-teacher association by ensuring mandatory participation of parents. More so, school administrators, teachers and related significant models in the school should become more conscious of factors that promotes positive school climate in order to present the school with needed ambience for safety and success. Finally, with regards to generalization, it is suggested that further research should be conducted on school safety in different stages of academic development and across the other states.

References

Abayomi, R. A. O. (2009). A practical approach to effective utilization and maintenance of physical facilities in secondary schools. *African Journal of Educational Planning and Policy Studies, 7 (2), 204-216.*

Abdulkareem, A. Y. (2003). An analysis of school plant maintenance practices in Kwara State post primary schools. *Journal of Studies in Education, 4 (2), 102-113.*

Adeyemo, D. (2005). Parental involvement, interest in schooling and school environment as Predictors of academic self-efficacy among fresh secondary school students in Oyo State, Nigeria. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 3*(1), 163-180.

Aremu, A. O., Jones, A.A & Babalola, A.. (2005). Predictors of Organizational Commitment of Nigerian Policein Lagos: Some Counselling Implications. *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal.*

Berkowitz, M. W. & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education:* A report for policy makers and opinion leaders. (Character Education Partnership). Retrieved September 10, 2005. Retrieved January 20 th2005,   from   http://www.character.org/atf/cf/{77B36AC3-5057-4795-8A8F9B2FCB86F3EB}/practitioners_518.pdf.

Biglan A, Hayes S., C., & Pistorello J. (2008). Acceptance and Commitment: Implications for Prevention Science. *Society for Prevention Research. 9,* 139-152*.*

Brand, S., Felner, R. D., Shim, M., Seitsinger, A.,& Dumas, T. (2003). Middle school improvement and reform: Development and validation of a school-level assessment of climate, cultural pluralism, and school safety*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 95, 570–588.*

Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E. M., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Centre Working Paper 90, Norwich: Tyndall Centre, available from http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/publications/ working_papers/twp90.pdf

Ciarrochi, J. Bilich, L., & Godsel, C.(2010). *Psychological flexibility as a mechanism of change in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.* In Ruth Baer's (Ed), Assessing Mindfulness and Acceptance: Illuminating the Processes of Change.(pp. 51-76). New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: Oakland, CA.

Fehintola, J. O. (2009). Comparative analysis of West African school certificate examination and National examinations council results in Mathematics, English and Biology from 2001-2006 in Oyo state, *Nigeria. Journal of Applied Education and Vocational Research, 7 91),* 65-71*.*

Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J.E.,Fredericks,L.,Resnik,H.,&Elias,M.J.(2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youthdevelopment through coordinated social and emotional learning. *American Psychologist, 58,*466–474*.*

Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J. B., Bond, F. W., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 44 (1),* 1-25.

Kashdan, T.B., & Rottenberg, J. (2010). Psychological flexibility as a fundamental aspect of health. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30,* 865-878*.*

Kupchik, A., and T. Monahan. 2006. The new American school: Preparation for post- industrial discipline. *British Journal of Sociology of Education 27(5):*617 /63*.*

Nyarko, K. (2011). Parental school involvement: The case of Ghana. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, 2(5),* 378-381*.*

Ojerinde, Dibu (2004) *Examination Malpractice in our Educational System; The NECO Experience.* A Faculty of Education Lecture Delivered at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Okorodudu, G. N (2010) Influence of Parenting Styles on Adolescent

Delinquency in Delta Central Senatorial District. *Edo Journal of Counselling, 3, 1 58-86*

Patton, G. C., Bond, L., Carlin, J. B., Thomas, L., Butler, H. Glover, S. Bowes, G. (2006). Promoting social inclusion in schools: A group-randomized trial of effects on student health risk behavior and well-being. *American Journal of Public Health, 96,* 1582-1587*.*

Pierson, H., Gifford, E. V., Smith, A. A Bunting, K., & Hayes, S. C. (2004). *Functional Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Scale.* Unpublished manuscript, Reno, NV

Ryan-Arredondo, K., Renouf, K. L., Egyed, C., Doxey, M., Dobbins, M., Sanchez, S., & Rakowitz, B. (2001). Threats of violence in schools: The Dallas Independent School District's response*. Psychology in the Schools, 38,* 185–196.

Samdal, O., Nutbeam, D., Wold, B., & Kannas, L. (1998). Achieving health and educational goals through schools—A study of the importance of the school climate and the students' satisfaction with school. *Health Education Research, 13,* 383-397

Schreck, C. J., Miller, J. M., & Gibson, C. L. (2003). Trouble in the school yard: A study of the risk factors of victimization at school. *Crime & Delinquency, 49,* 460-484*.*

Topor, D. R., Keane, S. P., Shelton, T. L., & Calkins, S. D. (2010). Parental involvement and student academic performance: A multiple mediational analysis. *Journal of Prev Interv Community, 38(3),* 183-197*.*

Utah State Office of Education (2006). *Utah performance assessment system for students.* Retrieved March 16, 2006,   from

HUhttp://bionic.usoe.k12.ut.us:8080/upassweb/UpassServlet?upassReportCode=M&gradeLow=06&gra deHigh=07&schoolID=821&schoolNumber=310&schoolyear=2004&district=800&school=821-800-310&report=30&Submit=GOU

Warren, R., N. Arnell, R. Nicholls, P. Levy, and J. Price (2006): '*Understanding the regional impacts of climate change'*, Research report prepared for the Stern Review, Tyndall

Wegner, D. M. (1994). Ironic processes of mental control. *Psychological Review,101,* 34–52.