

**DEVELOPMENT OF SECURITY CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG
STUDENTS FOR SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN
AKWA IBOM STATE: THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

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Abstract

A secured and accommodating atmosphere is essential for learners of every age grade as it enables students to build self-reliance and face their studies. This portrays that when an environment is prone to threat, an individual's focus on their academics would not be at its best. Based on this note, this study conceptually considers the role of effective guidance and counselling in the development of security consciousness among students for a safe school environment in Akwa Ibom State. Different concepts such as security, security consciousness, safe school environment, development of security consciousness among students, role of guidance and counselling, among others were explored, while human needs theory provided theoretical explications. It is concluded that students must be guided and counselled to understand patterns and indicators of security threats and dangers. The paper observed that with awareness, prevention within schools is inevitable, and guarantees a safe school environment. It is recommended among others that government should employ guidance/counsellors in secondary and tertiary institutions to help students develop security consciousness to engender a safe school environment for effective teaching and learning that can propel the development of Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: Security, Consciousness, Safe school environment, Role of guidance and counselling, Human needs

1.0 Introduction

A safe and secure environment is a sine qua non for students of all ages since it helps learners to develop confidence and focus on their studies (Iwatt *et al.*, 2022). This assumes that students' concentration to their academics would be, at most, minimal in a hostile or dangerous atmosphere. While many schools, specifically privately-owned schools hold a prominence in providing a safe learning atmosphere, most government owned schools and small scale private schools do not have such chances (Umoh, 2020). The frequency of both man-made and natural disasters that affect schools nationwide, particularly kidnapping, sexual harassment, drug abuse, and other forms of violence, supports the idea that more needs to be done to protect students from harm and even death. Regretfully, kidnappers continue to find ways to support their horrific trade even as the federal and state governments continue their valiant efforts to put an end to the age of terrorists and other lawbreakers ambushing schools with the intent to kill or abduct numerous students in a way that calls into question the nation's security protocols and the abilities of its protection services.

School safety is crucial, safeguarding everyone from various threats and ensuring a conducive learning environment. It protects students from negative experiences and promotes their well-being. Schools should be safe havens, especially considering the mental stress many children face due to various factors. A safe environment allows students to focus on learning and development, promoting active participation in school activities. Without this sense of security, students may become disengaged and reluctant to attend school or participate in extracurricular activities.

A safe and secure environment is crucial for students as it allows them to maintain academic focus and perform well. Insecure environments can negatively affect students' academic performance and overall well-being. Okon (2018) emphasises the link between insecurity and poor academic performance, highlighting the importance of safety for students' success. As a result, decision-makers prioritise safety in educational settings, recognising its significance for students and teachers alike.

The primary responsibility of the Akwa Ibom State government is to ensure the security and well-being of its citizens. However, the state is grappling

with various security challenges, including kidnapping, robbery, cultism, and ethnic conflicts, which have adversely affected students in secondary and tertiary institutions. These issues have created a pervasive sense of insecurity, characterised by vulnerability, fear, and anxiety. As a result, the state is experiencing a high frequency of incidents that threaten the lives and psychological well-being of its residents.

The security situation in Nigerian schools faces various challenges including kidnappings, violence, and other crimes. Recent news reports like the abduction of five students and two members of staff in Ogun State, and the death of two students as a result of cult clash in Edo State highlight alarming cases of kidnappings and cult-related violence, creating an environment that hinders educational goals. These circumstances necessitate the urgent development of security consciousness among students to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment.

Ozoemena (2019) proposed that developing security consciousness among staff and students is crucial for combating insecurity in schools. This involves aligning attitudes and values with current security realities and implementing policies that raise awareness and educate the school community about protecting themselves from threats. Longman (2019) further emphasised that creating security consciousness encompasses educating students on security measures and appropriate responses to threats, aiming to protect themselves and their schools. Ultimately, it promotes a proactive approach to safety, enabling students to identify and respond effectively to potential dangers, ensuring a secure learning environment.

Lack of attention to security challenges in schools has resulted in numerous incidents of violence and crime against students, violating their constitutional right to security and welfare (section 14 subsection 2 (b) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution). Owonikoko (2021) gave details of school abduction cases, which included 344 male students of Government Science Secondary school in Kankara, Katsina State. They were abducted on the 11th day of December 2020; 80 pupils of Islamiyya School, Mahuta, Kaduna State were abducted on the 20th day of December 2020; 39 students of the Federal College of Forestry

Mechanisation, Afaka, Kaduna State were abducted on 26th of February, 2021; 23 students of Greenfield University, Kaduna State were abducted and 4 were killed on the 11th day of March, 2021; 3 students of the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Benue State were abducted on the 24th day of April, 2021. Okorafor (2012) defines safety as the comprehensive effort, resources, commitment, and use of institutions to implement and ensure adequate protection of individuals and property.

Aliero et al. (2022) highlight that guidance and counselling is a collaborative process where a counsellor helps individuals address challenges and find self-determined solutions. Counsellors play a crucial role in ensuring student safety by providing accurate information, offering various options, and assisting students in understanding their motivations, feelings, and security needs. Okoro (2018) emphasises that guidance and counselling can effectively curb security challenges in schools by guiding students towards appropriate behaviours. Bashar (2020) further states that guidance and counselling not only helps students solve academic problems but also equips them with information to address security issues within their schools. This information is essential for students to meet the requirements and standards of secondary and tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

The current global landscape is marked by a growing concern over insecurity, with issues like theft, abduction, and violence threatening peace and hindering societal progress. School environments are particularly vulnerable, as young people are at a higher risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. While security measures like guards are important, fostering individual security consciousness is equally crucial. By addressing the holistic security needs of students, schools can create a conducive learning environment that enables them to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Achumba et al. (2018) characterised insecurity as the opposite of security, leading to descriptors like fear, harm, and uncertainty. It stems from a lack of knowledge, control, and protection reflecting the absence of the fundamental human need for safety as outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Egwu (2019) defined insecurity as a state of fear or anxiety arising from a perceived

lack of protection. This insecurity in Nigeria is attributed to the government's failure to ensure safety, resulting in inequality and injustice, forcing citizens to take matters into their own hands (Jimoh, 2020).

Insecurity in schools, characterised by conflict, violence, and social issues, creates uncertainty and hinders educational progress, contributing to underdevelopment. While definitions of insecurity vary, a common understanding is that it arises from the absence or inefficiency of systems meant to protect lives and property. Onifade et al. (2020) define insecurity as a state of vulnerability caused by internal or external factors, often influenced by weak economic, military, and resource conditions. To address the challenges of insecurity in schools, it is important to have effective systems in place to protect people's lives and property. These systems may include law enforcement, security personnel, and educational programs that teach students about safety and security. It is also important to address the root causes of insecurity, like poverty and inequality. Working together, we can create a safer, safer environment for all.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Security Consciousness

Security consciousness is a continuous state of awareness, crucial for recognising and responding to potential threats. Individuals unaware of security risks can unknowingly become victims highlighting the importance of knowledge and awareness in achieving safety, a key tenet of Social Learning Theory. Being security conscious involves understanding the implications of surrounding events and responding effectively. This awareness stems from knowledge, as informed reactions are impossible without understanding a situation's potential impact.

Security consciousness in schools involves recognising unusual circumstances, behaviours, or potential threats. It's the awareness of risks, vulnerabilities, and protective measures, and the knowledge and attitudes students possess regarding the safety of their information, networks, and schools. This awareness can be crucial in distinguishing between safety and danger, ultimately contributing to a secure learning environment.

As asserted by Okunola (2021), security consciousness empowers students with the knowledge and skills required to protect themselves and their environment from threats. It also, involves safeguarding their safety and education as echoed by the principles of social learning theory. Akpan (2021) views security consciousness as a combination of strategies, actions, knowledge, and precautionary measures that prevent individuals from engaging in criminal activities. It refers to students' understanding of and responsibility for ensuring the safety of both themselves and their schools.

Joseph (2019) opines that security consciousness involves students' knowledge and behaviour regarding the protection of environmental and educational resources. Scott et al. emphasise the necessity of formal security awareness training for students upon enrolment and periodically thereafter, as it significantly impacts academic performance and enrolment rates supporting the idea that security is a foundational need according to Maslow's hierarchy. A safe school environment, characterised by tranquillity and non-violent activities, is crucial for effective teaching and learning. Students have a responsibility to ensure the safety of themselves and their institutions, as their identities are closely linked to their schools. In the face of criminal activity, students often take local measures, sometimes seeking external assistance depending on the severity of the threat, demonstrating the interconnectedness of individual and systemic security within the framework of systems theory. Vimeo (2018) asserts that security consciousness in educational institutions is fundamental for safeguarding against security risks. Schools must be aware of potential threats to both physical and informational security to effectively defend themselves. Security awareness not only protects individuals within the school community but also educates them about potential security challenges; both internal and external, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of security as advocated by systems theory.

2.2 Safe School Environment

Shuaibu (2015) suggests that a secure school environment fosters tranquillity, positive relationships, and an absence of disruptions, violence, and discrimination. A safe school environment encompasses emotional, physical, and overall well-being, and can be categorised into psychological, social, pedagogical, and physical dimensions (Okon, 2018).

The psychological learning environment is influenced by the academic atmosphere and tone. The social learning environment includes all educational systems that facilitate information exchange among trainers, students, and associates. The pedagogical learning environment encompasses instructional design, including the selection of educational materials and teaching methods. The physical setting refers to the location for teaching and learning. Furthermore, a safe and sound educational environment comprises psychological, social, pedagogical, and physical aspects that ensure the safety and protection of students, faculty, and staff from both accidental and intentional harm.

In addition to violence, a safe school environment considers other dangers like accidents, disease outbreaks, and emergencies. Therefore, a comprehensive school safety plan encompassing crisis management, response teams, and psychological and physical safety measures is crucial. Physical safety focuses on aspects like surveillance and access control, while psychological safety prioritises student well-being through a supportive and connected school environment.

A secure learning environment is crucial for fostering genuine learning and personal growth. It safeguards students from both physical and psychological harm, creating a space where they feel valued, understood, and safe. Beyond physical safety, it encompasses emotional and psychological well-being, promoting respect, self-expression, and confidence in tackling challenges. This safe environment enables students to reach their full potential by fostering holistic development, enhancing their confidence and engagement. Without this foundation, true education remains unattainable. Therefore, these safe spaces must be prioritised and nurtured in all educational institutions due to their significant impact on academic outcomes.

Student safety is critical to overall development. Creating a safe learning environment involves more than just removing physical hazards. Open communication, respect, and emotional intelligence are key factors in fostering a secure classroom where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear. Recognising and accommodating diverse learning

styles through varied teaching approaches is also essential. Educators must go beyond academic achievements and constantly adapt to the evolving needs of their students for a truly holistic approach to education.

3.0 Theoretical Framework - Human Needs Theory

Human needs theory (HNT) was developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a theory of human behaviour though as an offshoot of Maslow (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. It is based on the hypothesis that humans have basic *needs* that have to be met in order to maintain stable societies. As Burton (1990 cited in Awak, 2014) asserts that the human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs - needs such as security, identity, recognition, and development. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs.

According to Awak (2014), there are fundamental universal values or human needs that must be met if societies are to be stable. That, this is true provides a non-ideological basis for the establishment of institutions and policies. Unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies, unless in every social system, there is a distributive justice, a sense of control and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability, insecurity and conflict are inevitable.

If the hypotheses of this theory are correct, if there are certain human needs including security infrastructure and consciousness of the people that are required for human development and social stability, then the solution to insecurity and social conflict must be the ability to create an environment in which these needs can be met by all segments of societies, Awak (2014) enthused. The position of the theory is explicit of the focal points of this paper since educational institutions cannot thrive in an environment filled with rancour, social strife and ignorance.

To Oni (2016) security is the constancy and consciousness of means of living, expectedness of everyday life, protection from wrongdoing, liberty from mental hurt, and preservation against emotive hassle, which leads from the

certainty of knowing that one is accepted, wanted, or loved and protected in one's community and by individuals nearby a specific neighbourhood. While this description has diverse extents, it can be summarised as the defence contrary to every dimension of emotional, bodily and monetary harm (Adeyemi & Olotu, 2020). In contrast, insecurity is characterised by vulnerability to harm or threats, or by a lack of protection. The anxiousness that comes with feeling unconfident or uncertain is also included. In general, security refers to being secure, protected from harm, and free from risk. Humans have an innate desire to make the most of their possessions so as to maintain their physical, physiological, and mental health. Security is more than being safe from danger. This is because of the prevalence of sexual assault and rape at the school and in the surrounding community, some female students may feel intimidated. However, national security is attained if disputes are settled amicably and there is perpetual peace. National security, as defined by Francis (2019) is focused on surviving and the state of affairs of people living which includes peace, development and justice because the absence of all these creates the conditions for conflict and national insecurity.

4.0 Development of Security Consciousness in Students

Vimeo (2018) emphasises that schools must prioritise raising security awareness among students and staff to ensure their safety. This is because security consciousness is a crucial first line of defence against threats. Students who are unaware of potential security risks are unable to protect themselves. Therefore, they need to be aware of risks to both physical and informational security, enabling them to defend the school if security is compromised. Vimeo further states that security consciousness not only safeguards individuals but also educates the school community about emerging security issues, both within and outside the school premises.

Idris (2018) highlighted that the Nigerian government launched the "Safe School Initiative" in response to the alarming rise of threats, rape, kidnapping, and other vices in schools. This initiative, launched in May 2014, aims to protect students from various forms of violence, including abductions, cultism, and forced intercourse. Adebayo (2018) explained that the initiative was a direct response to the disturbing frequency of insecurity in Nigerian

schools, particularly targeting students. It aimed to raise awareness about protecting students from violence and potential threats, which school administrations might not openly address to avoid jeopardising their educational goals. Consequently, the government and educational stakeholders have taken on the responsibility of implementing effective strategies to safeguard students from violent attacks.

To address the urgent need to protect the educational system and students in Akwa Ibom State, the Safe School Initiative integrates three primary management systems. The United Nations Development Programme (2018) outlines these approaches as: 1) School-based interventions, 2) Community interventions to protect schools, and 3) Special measures for schools in high-risk areas. These strategies aim to address the primary challenges of frequent attacks on students in Akwa Ibom State schools.

4.1 Guidance and Counselling

Nwachuku (2017) views guidance and counselling as a systematic academic support service provided by qualified professionals to students of all ages. It aims to facilitate self-understanding, environmental awareness, and identification of personal interests, potential, and opportunities, ultimately empowering students to achieve fulfilling lives. This aligns with social learning theory's emphasis on the role of cognitive processes and social interactions in shaping behaviour.

Modo et al. (2016) and Egbule (2016) emphasise the role of guidance and counselling in helping individuals define goals, instil security consciousness, and create a safe school environment. In the context of school security, guidance and counselling can play a crucial role in promoting security consciousness among students.

4.2 Role of Guidance and Counselling in Development of Security Consciousness

Counselling not only addresses deviant behaviour but also fosters security consciousness, improving student safety. Security, a fundamental human need, is crucial for effective learning and overall well-being. Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasises that basic needs like food, shelter, and security

must be met before pursuing higher needs like education and intellectual development. Unmet security needs can lead to stress and hinder personal growth.

Nwafor (2018) emphasised that security awareness involves the absence of conflict or violence, fostering an environment free from fear, coercion, and harm. Understanding the importance of security is vital for both national development and effective teaching and learning. This view is supported by international agreements, such as the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, which recognised a safe school environment as a human right and a crucial tool for achieving educational goals. Additionally, the World Congress of Education International affirmed the right to a peaceful and safe school environment and pledged support for conflict and violence-free schools.

Umar (2019) recognised the importance of guidance and counselling in promoting security consciousness among students. This includes helping students cope with challenges, preparing them for adulthood, fostering unity and patriotism, and equipping them with skills to avert conflict and promote peace. Additionally, it emphasises instilling values such as kindness, fairness, and non-violence to enhance moral development and create a safe school environment.

Crawford and Bodine (2019) argued that developing security consciousness in students is crucial for effective education and preparing them for responsible citizenship. Schools in Akwa Ibom State need to prioritise safety and implement security measures to create a secure learning environment and foster individual behavioural changes. Francis (2019) suggested that security measures involve peaceful conflict resolution strategies like arbitration and mediation. Okolie-Osemene (2019) viewed the development of security mindfulness as a process of acquiring skills, values, and knowledge that promote positive interactions among students.

When security consciousness is inculcated, imbibed and practised by students in schools, the schools will be safe and there will be an appreciable level of effective teaching and learning that lead to development (Nwafor, 2018). When there are no crises or crimes in schools, it will be safe for students

to learn. Nonetheless, advice and counselling can aid in fostering a security consciousness, enabling educators and students to learn about matters pertaining to peace, violence, conflict resolution, crises, and their interconnection.

According to Iwatt *et al.* (2022), this consciousness makes it probable for individuals to embrace peace, which means more than a mere nonexistence of antagonisms, but slightly an absenteeism of skirmish. This awareness teaches and reveals a person to the proper methods and procedures for resolving conflicts, disagreements, and problems.

Okoro (2018) argues that security is enhanced when students shift from conflict to collaboration, working together to find mutually beneficial solutions. Promoting concord mindfulness among students is crucial for advancing security consciousness. This involves fostering an environment of tolerance, equality, social justice, democracy, literacy, respect, non-violence, and respect for rights. Additionally, respect for human rights, gender equality, diversity, cultural identity, environmental protection, justice, coexistence, and mutual growth are essential aspects of creating a secure school environment.

Ozoemena (2019) suggests that counsellors can foster a safe school environment by promoting understanding, interaction, and collaboration among students with diverse backgrounds. Umoh (2020) adds that when security consciousness is instilled in students, schools are less likely to experience delinquency. Furthermore, it's crucial to teach students critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and expose them to topics that promote safe learning environments, national identity, and patriotism. Through interactions with guidance counsellors, students can develop mindfulness and contribute to a secure school atmosphere.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper sheds light on the critical role of security consciousness in fostering safe school environments. It underscores the interconnectedness of individual awareness, institutional policies, and societal factors in shaping security within educational settings. By highlighting the potential of guidance and counselling to cultivate security consciousness among students, this paper offers a pathway towards creating schools where students feel safe, empowered, and capable of reaching their full potential. This paper suggests that a proactive and comprehensive approach, encompassing both physical and psychological security measures, is essential for creating a truly conducive learning environment in Akwa Ibom State.

6.0 Recommendations

- The Akwa Ibom State Government should employ guidance counsellors in secondary and tertiary institutions to help students develop security consciousness, fostering a safe school environment for effective teaching, learning, and state development.
- School administrators should proactively implement guidance and counselling policies and measures, ensuring students acquire the necessary security consciousness to mitigate insecurity and create a safe school environment in Akwa Ibom State.
- School administrators should integrate guidance and counselling services as a crucial component in enhancing school safety, significantly reducing threats to students' lives and property in Akwa Ibom State.
- Students should actively participate in counselling, recognizing its importance in building a safe school environment and utilising it as a resource for addressing discipline issues and conflict resolution.
- Counsellors should provide guidance and counselling services proactively, intervening before conflicts arise, and offering support beyond academic concerns. Schools should also integrate diverse strategies, such as involving inspectors, security personnel, and educating students about laws and rules, to complement counsellor's efforts in promoting school security.

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