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**IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD'S RIGHTS LAW: ITS INFLUENCE ON LEARNERS' ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA****Oyeyemi AITOKHUEHI****&****Supo JEGEDE**

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**Abstract**

*The adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child in Nigeria seemed to have brought certain changes to school administration. This study examined the influence that the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) by Lagos State Government has on learners' engagement and overall school discipline of the schools. The population of the study consisted of all principals, vice-principals, year tutors (Heads of Departments), counsellors and class teachers of public secondary schools in Lagos state totalling about 10,000. The descriptive survey design was used for the study. Stratified random sampling was used to draw 360 sample participants from the study population. Instruments used for data collection were the questionnaire tagged CRLRQ and an in-depth interview of participants to validate the questionnaire responses. Two research questions guided the study. The data of the research questions were analysed using Frequency Counts, Percentages and Mean. The findings from the study indicated that the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has influenced learners' engagement and discipline in the schools. Recommendations include that the Lagos State Ministry of Education should have a constant reorientation training sessions for the different school management and teachers in Lagos State to imbibe the new implementation in the running of the schools to facilitate a better learners' engagement and overall discipline.*

**Keywords:** Child rights, Child Rights Act, Implementation of Child Rights Act, Learners' engagement, School discipline.

**Introduction**

The submission of a proposal to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights by the Polish government in 1978 initiated the process of developing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Quennerstedt, Robinson and I'Anson, 2018). The Convention was finally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, after 10 years of deliberation, and has been ratified by up to 196 states (United Nations Organisation, 1990). Two aspects of the Convention, articles 3 and 28(2) are of particular relevance to the running of schools. Article 3 states that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration. Article 28(2) requires that state parties shall take all

appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and conformity with the present convention (Archard, 2018).

Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention, which signified the country's adoption of the Convention. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was followed by its domestication, firstly nationally and then by the individual states. In Lagos State, the domestication of the Convention culminated into the promulgation of the Child's Rights Law in 2007 (Lagos State, 2007) while the implementation commenced in 2017. With the commencement of the implementation, the State Government sent out new directives to schools in the state on the need to adjust the mode of the discipline of students. Among the directives was the abolition of corporal punishment, such as the use of the cane, stooping, kneeling, cutting of grass and the like. They were allowed, however, to make the students wash toilet or re-bag refuse on the dumpsite.

Taking into consideration the fact that in the African culture, it was cultural to discipline children through the enforcement of corporal punishment, and the teachers were accustomed to it, what then would be the outcome of the new approach to discipline in schools? Specifically, what would have been the experience and perception of the school teachers, principals and vice-principals concerning the effect of the new guideline to school discipline and students' engagement?

Discipline is a set of behaviours, responses, and attitudes endorsed by those in higher hierarchical position to shape, guide, or mould those under their care or responsibility (Maldonado-Duran, Moro & McLaughlin, 2019). Whereas in Onderi and Ondera (2012), on their part, says, discipline means a system of guiding the individual to make a reasonable decision responsibly. It is the action taken by adults to help a child change his or her undesirable behaviour. School discipline, according to him, exposes students to the art of self-control, while social chaos can only be avoided if restraints are built into the character of students. Researchers have asserted that, discipline in schools helps in the achievement of goals, that adherence to school rules and regulation play significant roles in enhancing student's academic performance and that increase in discipline has a corresponding increase in academic performance (Ehiane, 2014; Simba, Agak & Kabuka, 2016).

Policies on implementing discipline in the school should create a disciplined and informed environment, which, according to Aboluwodi (2015), is the learning atmosphere that pervades the educational situation where the teacher acts with utmost confidence and students learn with little or no fear of class disruption.

In this study, student engagement is defined as the extent to which learners identify with and value child citizenship, learning outcomes, and participate in academic and non-academic school activities (Xiani, Muthukrishnan & Sidhu, 2019). According to Xiani, Muthukrishnan & Sidhu, 2019, the definition of engagement usually comprises the psychological and behavioural component. The psychological component pertains to learners' sense of belonging at school and acceptance of school values. The behavioural aspect, on the other hand, pertains to attitude towards participation in school/academic activities.

Studies have shown that student engagement promotes learning achievement of students, affects students' positive feeling towards school, increases students' interest in studying, has an effect on students' negative cognition, emotions, and behaviours reduces the tendency to drop out, be absent from school and show behavioural problems (Wonglorsaichon, Wongwanich &

Wiratchai, 2013; Kizildag, Dermitaz-Zorbac & Zorbaz, 2017; Konold, Cornell, Jia & Malone, 2018).

Students are provided with opportunity and time to learn, and teachers have clear expectations regarding what to teach and adequate time to teach; The school environment is safe and orderly, and cooperation and respect is stimulated; Positive home-school relations are fostered, and parental involvement in school are stimulated and lastly, student progress is frequently monitored and the results are used to improve their performance.

From the above, a correlation can be deduced between school discipline and student engagement. It is on this basis that the study purposed to explore the influence that the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has on Nigerian secondary schools, with a specific focus on Lagos State. The specific purpose of the study was to determine the influence that the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Right's Law has had on secondary schools in Lagos State, specifically with relation to learners' engagement and school discipline. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent has the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influenced learners' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools?
2. What is the influence of the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) in Lagos State secondary schools on the overall discipline of the school?

### **Methodology**

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. This was supported by an in-depth interview to validate the questionnaire responses. The population of the study comprised all the teachers including principals and vice-principals in Lagos State public secondary schools totalling 10,000. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted for the study. The schools, arranged according to their classification and the two levels (Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School), were involved in the study. There are six Education Districts in Lagos State and four districts randomly chosen, were used for the study. Six secondary schools comprising of Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) were randomly selected in each of the four districts. In all, 360 respondents, comprising of Principals, Vice-Principals, Guidance Counsellors, Year Tutors and Teachers were used for the study. The instruments for data collection were the questionnaire and Semi-structured Interview guide. The questionnaire tagged CRLRQ was a 36-item modified four-point Likert scale options, with response format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The score of each statement item is also presented. The score was determined by assigning weights of 1, 2, 3 and 4 to SD, D, A and SA response items, respectively, and multiplying by the frequencies. The percentage for each score shown is defined relative to the range of the weights. The instrument was validated by experts in the field of Education. The reliability of the research instrument (the questionnaire) was determined using Cronbach's Alpha which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The questionnaire was administered to School Principals, Vice-Principals, Guidance and Counsellors, the Year Tutors (Heads of Departments) and Teachers. The research questions were analysed using frequency counts, Percentages and Mean. For the semi-structured interviews, principals, vice-principals and the year tutors were interviewed. The responses were transcribed and analysed.

## Results

A total of 360 respondents returned the questionnaire survey. Of this, 5 responses were deemed unusable due to respondents not completing the entire survey. The results of the data analyses were presented in tables according to research questions.

**Research Question One:** To what extent has the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influenced learners' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools?

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' perception of how the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has influenced learners' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools. Mean and standard deviation of the data collected on research question 1 were obtained and summarized in Table 1 as shown below:

**Table 1: Extent to which Implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influenced Learners' Engagement**

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	The implementation of the child's rights law has reduced rate of school attendance.	65 (18%)	91 (26%)	125 (35%)	74 (21%)	2.41	1.01
2	The implementation of child's rights law has improved punctuality in the school.	73 (21%)	96 (27%)	108 (30%)	78 (22%)	2.46	1.05
3	Students feeling of being accepted and valued by teachers has increased since the implementation of child's rights law.	61 (17%)	197 (55%)	71 (20%)	26 (7%)	2.82	0.80
4	Students have not been doing their homework regularly since the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007).	54 (15%)	123 (35%)	143 (40%)	35 (10%)	2.55	0.87
5	My students mostly complete their school homework on time even with the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007)	37 (10%)	118 (33%)	153 (43%)	47 (13%)	2.41	0.85
6	Students participation in sporting activities is still high irrespective of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) enforcement in schools	111 (31%)	200 (56%)	37 (10%)	7 (2%)	3.17	0.68
7	The implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has helped the students have a sense of belonging to the school.	116 (33%)	137 (39%)	87 (25%)	15 (4%)	3.00	0.86
8	The implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has not improved the learners' attachment to the school.	46 (13%)	131 (37%)	151 (43%)	27 (8%)	2.55	0.81
<b>Mean</b>	<b>70 (20%)</b>	<b>137 (38%)</b>	<b>109 (31%)</b>	<b>39 (11%)</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.87</b>	

Table 1 presents the respondents' perception of the extent to which implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law influenced learners' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools. Item 1 (The implementation of the Child's Rights law has reduced rate of school attendance) has a mean value of 2.41 which means that the respondents disagreed with the item. Item 2 (The implementation of child's rights law has improved punctuality in the school.) has a mean value of 2.46 which means that the respondents also disagreed with the item. Item 3 (Students feeling of being accepted and valued by teachers has increased since the

implementation of child's rights law) has a mean value of 2.82 which means that the respondents agreed with the item. Item 4 (The Students have not been doing their homework regularly since the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007)) has a mean value of 2.55 which means that the respondents agreed with the item. Item 5 (My students mostly complete their school homework on time even with the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007)) has a mean value of 2.41 which means that the respondents disagreed with the item. Item 6 (Students participation in sporting activities is still high irrespective of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) enforcement in schools) has a mean value of 3.17 which means that the respondents agreed with the item. Item 7 (The implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has helped the students have a sense of belonging to the school) has a mean value of 3.00 which means that the respondents agreed with the item. Item 8 (The implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has not improved the learners' attachment to the school) has a mean value of 2.55 which means that the respondents agreed with the item. The data in Table 1 revealed an average mean score of 2.67. This implies that the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights law influenced students' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools is high using a benchmark of 2.50.

**Research Question Two:** What is the influence of the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) in Lagos State secondary schools on the overall discipline of the school?

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' perception of how the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) has influenced discipline in Lagos State secondary schools. Mean and standard deviation of the data collected on research question 2 were obtained and summarized in Table 2 as shown below:

**Table 2: Influence of Child's Right Law Implementation on School Discipline**

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Please indicate your opinion as to what extent that the Child's Rights Law implementation has affected discipline with respect to the following:							
1	Lateness to school	100 (28%)	130 (37%)	95 (27%)	30 (8%)	2.85	0.93
2	Lateness to class	90 (25%)	159 (45%)	91 (26%)	15 (4%)	2.91	0.82
3	Loitering outside the school compound during school hours	69 (19%)	151 (43%)	116 (33%)	19 (5%)	2.76	0.83
4	Cheating in examination	69 (19%)	130 (37%)	132 (37%)	24 (7%)	2.69	0.86
5	Absenteeism	97 (27%)	130 (37%)	108 (30%)	20 (6%)	2.86	0.89
6	Unacceptable Dressing/Violating dress code	90 (25%)	109 (31%)	116 (33%)	40 (11%)	2.70	0.97
7	Making noise/ Classroom disturbance	105 (30%)	151 (43%)	84 (24%)	15 (4%)	2.97	0.84
8	Using profane words	65 (18%)	159 (45%)	102 (29%)	29 (8%)	2.73	0.85
9	Vandalism	72 (20%)	134 (38%)	116 (33%)	33 (9%)	2.72	1.00
10	Stealing in school – Books & other materials	56 (16%)	117 (33%)	145 (41%)	37 (10%)	2.54	0.85
11	Intimidation/verbal abuse of other students	73 (21%)	168 (47%)	86 (24%)	28 (8%)	2.80	0.85
12	Intimidation/verbal abuse of teachers or staff	69 (19%)	163 (46%)	86 (24%)	37 (10%)	2.74	0.89
13	Physical injury to other students	54 (15%)	142 (40%)	107 (30%)	52 (15%)	2.56	0.92
14	Physical injury to teachers or staff	45 (13%)	111 (31%)	136 (38%)	63 (18%)	2.39	0.92
15	Use/possession of illegal drugs	46 (13%)	121 (34%)	131 (37%)	57 (16%)	2.44	0.91
16	Alcohol use/possession	55 (15%)	110 (31%)	146 (41%)	44 (12%)	2.50	0.90
17	Weapon use/possession	62 (17%)	106 (30%)	144 (41%)	43 (12%)	2.53	0.92
18	Inappropriate sexual behavior	55 (15%)	142 (40%)	121 (34%)	37 (10%)	2.61	0.87
19	Gang fight	58 (16%)	146 (41%)	110 (31%)	41 (12%)	2.62	0.89
20	Bullying other students	79 (22%)	143 (40%)	86 (24%)	47 (13%)	2.72	0.96
21	Gambling within and around the school premises	91 (26%)	129 (36%)	93 (26%)	42 (12%)	2.76	0.97
22	Dodging lessons	58 (16%)	159 (45%)	102 (29%)	36 (10%)	2.67	0.87
Mean		72 (20%)	136 (39%)	111 (31%)	36 (10%)	2.69	0.90

Table 2 presents the respondents' perception on the Influence of Lagos State Child's Right's Law 2007 Implementation on School Discipline in Lagos State secondary schools. As shown in the table, the highest mean value was 2.97 which was the extent that the Child's Rights Law implementation has affected discipline concerning making noise and Classroom disturbance followed by the extent that the Child's Rights Law implementation has affected discipline with respect to lateness to class with a mean value of 2.91. It was further observed that the items with low values of mean are extent that the Child's Rights Law implementation has affected discipline concerning physical injury to teachers or staff which has a mean value of 2.39 and the extent that the Child's Rights Law implementation has affected discipline concerning the use and possession

of illegal drugs which has a mean value of 2.44. Table 2 revealed a mean score of 2.69 This implies that the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influence on the overall Discipline of Schools in Lagos State secondary schools is high using a benchmark of 2.50.

### **Interview Summary**

The following are a summary of the responses from a few of the participants to some of the interview questions, separated into key themes, on the Influence of the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) to Lagos State Secondary Schools:

### **Effects on the Teacher**

On the issue of change in the discipline format of the school, one Principal said that as the head the law does not go well with us, especially in public schools. The enforcement of the Act has made it stressful for the administrator and teachers to handle the students. Students now confront the teachers that they are not to punish or spank them again, and as such they misbehave. When a child is beaten or merely seeing a cane, the child feels sober and for a law to say children should not be beaten is affecting the school system generally. It is affecting the morale of teachers.

### **Effects on school discipline**

One teacher said that the implementation has increased late coming.

A year tutor said that students now love punishments that keep them out of classes like picking litters or washing the toilet. These, therefore, do not have the expected effect

Another teacher said that Most of the students, when not punished or spanked, do not comply with school rules

The interview summary corresponds with the outcome of the research questions. Majority of the responses, like what obtains in the interview summary, indicate that the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influence on students' engagement and school discipline seem to be having a negative effect on the school and therefore affecting the administration of the school negatively.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Research question one sought the perception of respondents on the extent that the implementation of the Child's Rights Law influenced learners' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools. Research question one showed an average mean score of 2.67 which implies that the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights law influenced students' engagement in Lagos State secondary schools is high using a benchmark of 2.50. Findings from the research conducted by Xiani, Muthukrishnan & Sidhu, 2019 and Wonglorsaichon, Wongwanich and Wiratchai, 2013 posited that student's engagement involves their psychological well-being of an attitude of fitting into school and acceptance of school values and participation in school and academic activities. It has been shown that student engagement encourages learning accomplishment of students, encourages students' disposition towards school which can help to promote students' love for studying which then ultimately promotes students engagement. The outcome of this study, therefore, may imply that the implementation of the Child's Rights Law would have implication for some of the above-mentioned indices.

Research question two sought the perception of the respondents on the influence of the introduction of the Child's Rights Law in Lagos State secondary schools on the overall discipline of the school. The analysis revealed a mean score of 2.69 which implies that the introduction of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) influence on the discipline in Lagos State secondary schools is high using a benchmark of 2.50. The outcome of this study showed that the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) in Lagos State has contributed to the discipline in secondary schools in the state. According to Iguh and Nosike (2011), children need to be protected, but they also need to be disciplined. They went further to state that for this reason, the opponents of corporal punishment, in their view, are wrong in saying that physical punishment should never be inflicted. Another issue was the lack of consideration of culture in the development of the UN Children Convention. Macdonald-Duran et al (2019), stated that the effects of a disciplinary method are determined by the child's perception of the legitimacy of the method or how reasonable it is. So, in a culture that widely endorses spanking/punishment, according to him, the child may not perceive spanking as an unusual or cruel disciplinary technique.

The analyses of the research questions on the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law showed the influence on the discipline and student's engagement of secondary schools in Lagos State. The study further revealed that the status of the teachers and their experience level were related to their perception of the influence the Lagos State Child's Rights Law implementation had on schools. In other words, their responses on their perception of the effect of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) implementation will be from a status and experience perspective.

The results were corroborated by the summary of the analyses of the in-depth interview by the principals, vice-principals and year tutors (Heads of Department). A major observation, from the outcome of the interview part of the study, was the loss of respect for the teachers by the students. A respondent reported the case of a student that went to pull a teacher's hair in the presence of his mates, based on the confidence that the power of the teacher was limited. The interviewees further stated that the abolition of corporal punishment had encouraged learners' misbehaviour, making class/schools control more difficult. This, according to them, had increased the stress inherent in the execution of the teacher. One of them stated that "the enforcement of the act has made it stressful for administrators and teachers to handle learners". Another stated that it is affecting the morale of teachers and had increased late coming by students. The status and years of the interviewees could impact their perception as shown in the data analyses.

Lastly, an important issue is the interpretation of the clause, "the best interest of the child" in the implementation of the Convention. Alston's examination of 'the best interest of the child' principle showed that, although article 3 was discussed at some length by the working group, the *meaning* attributed to the 'best interest of the child was never debated, not even when one representative in the final year of drafting objected to the inherently subjective character of the principle, and warned about dangers associated with the potential for large variations in interpretation. This lack of consensus on this very important clause has made its implementation problematic and making it look as if the best interest of every child in every nation is uniform.

## Conclusion

The study was carried out to examine the perception of the respondents on the implementation of Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) by Lagos State Government to



learners' engagement and discipline in the schools. Learners' engagement and discipline in the secondary schools in Lagos State has been impacted with the implementation of the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007). Other findings showed that teachers' status and years of experience affected the outcome of the implementation in schools. It was further stated that the lack of consensus on what is the best interest of the child's, as well as lack of consideration of culture were impacting negatively on the Lagos State Child's Rights Law (2007) implementation.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Lagos State Ministry of Education should embark on a mass retraining the Principals, Vice-principals and teachers in Lagos State Secondary schools on the various ways that discipline can be effected in secondary schools.
2. The Lagos State Ministry of Education in conjunction with other stakeholders, especially the teachers and school administrators should review the Lagos State Child's Rights Law to see what necessary amendments needed to be done in other to make the implementation more effective.

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