

## EXPLORING LOW LEVEL VIOLENCE AS NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF SCHOOL CULTURE: IMPACT ON ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT OF LEARNERS

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### Abstract

*The main objective of the paper is to explore Low level violence in school in order to assess its impact on Academic self-concept of students. In view of this, some key concepts namely; school culture; low level violence and Academic self-concept were clarified. The paper also examined various forms of low level violence that are taken for granted as part of the school culture. On the basis of symbolic interactionism sociological theory, the article analyzed impact of such part of school culture in the formation of self-concept of students. Thus, the conclusion drawn by the paper was that Low level violence still remain neglected aspect of school culture and exist in different forms at all levels of education and it has impact on the Academic self-concept of students which is rarely taken into consideration by personnel in schools. Based on the conclusion drawn, the paper therefore put forward suggestions geared toward healthy school culture that promote development of positive academic self-concept. Among the suggestions was that school managements should devise measures aim at discouraging school culture that promotes physical and nonphysical level violence. It is essential that a needs assessment be conducted and all stakeholders be informed about the extent of different forms of low level violence in school and it threats which if ignored, can have negative impact on learners' Academic Self-concept.*

**Keywords:** School culture, Academic self-concept, Low Level violence, Interactionism

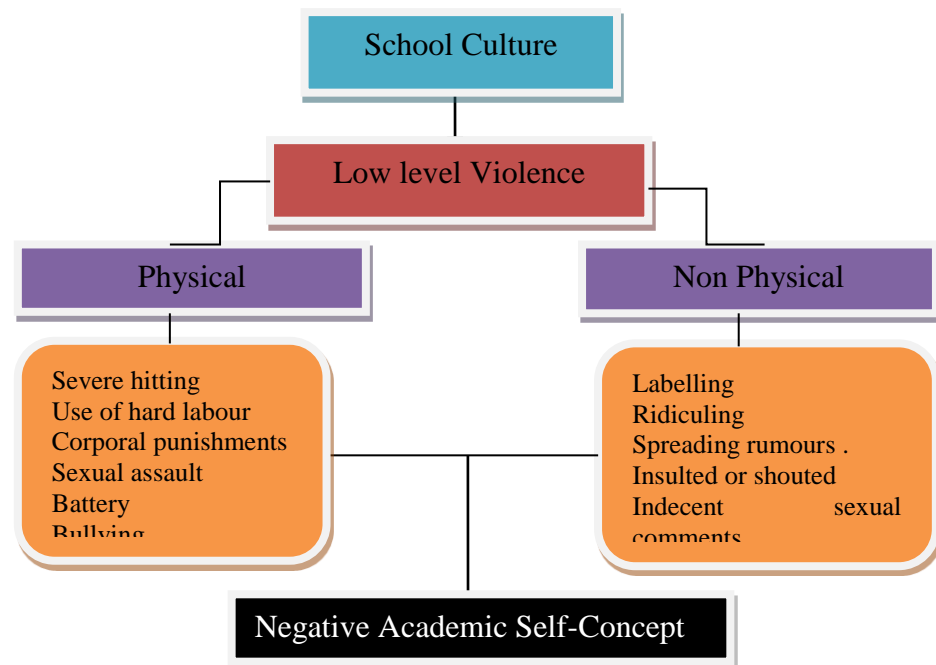
### Introduction

School is regarded as social institution saddled with responsibility of imparting knowledge and skills to learners as well as passing socially approved and cherished societal norms and values to younger ones. This responsibility is the expectation of most parents and guardians who send their wards to schools. Indeed, Mahuta (2016) opined that, School is assumed to be one of the safest institutions in the society for a child because of belief society has about the School culture. In school, there are network of social relationships and social interactions. Social relationship within school involves Head-teacher-teachers' relationship, Head-teacher-learners and teachers among themselves, teachers-learners and learners among themselves. The nature and manner of these types of social relationship are some aspects of school culture. Society largely expect that all these forms of social interaction as part of school culture are all but a healthy and positive aimed at imparting knowledge and skills as well as inculcating what the larger society termed as moral virtues like respect, loyalty, social control, discipline among others. Sociologists such as Parsons and Mead in Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, (2003) well acknowledge this school culture, but they point out that there are so many acts of violence imbedded in the school culture that are not been reported by media or those concerned because they are taken for granted even though they have impact.

A single occurrence of any form of High level violence in school such as murder, rape, possession of weapons, school shooting, cult activities among others grabs all the headlines and public attention as well as reported by different media platforms. Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) though acknowledged the gravity of high-level school violence, however observed that it is relatively rare. But low-level school violence such as bullying, peer sexual harassment, victimization based on unknown or pre-conceived assumptions or the psychological maltreatment of students by teachers are given relatively little attention. Although not as overtly serious as High level violence, they occur with greater frequency and has impact on students' academic self-concept. Sociologists such as Mahuta (2016) and Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) termed those risk factors imbedded in school climate or culture as low-level violence which are neglected as aspect of school culture. They are referred to as neglected because they are not often reported and they are taken for granted by larger society and the school personnel. However, different forms of Low level school violence have impact on academic Self-concept of learners.

### **Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework for the paper is illustrated as follows:



School Culture: The concept of School culture means the totality of school life. Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) coined the concept of school culture to refer to as beliefs and expectations apparent in a school's daily routine, including how colleagues interact with each other. Maslowski cited in Mahuta (2016) refers to school culture as "the basic assumptions, norms and values, and cultural artifacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school. On this basis, therefore beliefs, attitudes, and relationships, written and unwritten rules of a school can all be seen as aspects of school culture. Such beliefs, attitudes, relationship and rules that form the school culture emanate from the actions and inactions of stakeholders like students, teachers, administrators, and other staff. The term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the

degree to which schools embrace and celebrate racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity.

Similarly, policies, rules and regulations, guiding principles whether written or unwritten, official or unofficial that govern how school operates, or the principles on which the school was founded also constitute what is referred to as school culture. Written rules and regulations are the obvious. The unwritten rules are nonobvious but they are norms in school and their example is summed of by Emile Durkheim cited Ballantine & Spade (2012) as:

There is a whole system of rules in the school that pre-determined the child's conduct. He must come to the class regularly; he must arrive at a specified time and with an appropriate bearing and attitudes. He must not disrupt things in class, He must have learned his lesson, done his homework, and have done so reasonably well, etc. There are therefore, a host of obligations that the child is required to shoulder (p. 30-34).

The extract above constitutes some aspects of school culture. It is expected that through such practices, the school inculcates the spirit of discipline in the child. However, Social control is necessary for school to ensure compliance to its culture. In the process of enforcing school culture to students, some actions and inactions of staff and senior students often turn into what is referred to as low level violence.

Low level violence: Low level violence are practices or school culture that are violence themselves or source of violence but their impact is taken for granted or not reported because is not considered as serious problem but just regarded as part of the school culture. Low level violence sometimes emanate from written rules and they are often unwritten rules, beliefs, norms that are used in an attempt to inculcate in learners the principles upon which the school is founded. Jackson cited in Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) used the term “unofficial 3Rs that is Rules, Routines and Regulations” to describe unwritten rules of the school that learners are unconsciously socialized and must be learnt in order to survive comfortable in school. According to Jackson in Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003):

Pupils must learn to cope with the delay, denial and interruption that accompany learning experiences in schools. Delay occurs when pupils wait in the assembly, wait in corridors, wait for their turn on the apparatus, wait for the lesson to start, wait for the teacher to become available or wait to be invited to answer a question. Denial occurs when pupils are forbidden to talk to themselves, cannot ask question, cannot pursue a chosen activity or cannot have a turn on apparatus because time has run out. Interruption occurs when the bell rings in the middle of an activity, For most of the students, most of the time the classroom comes close to resembling a cage from which there is no escape (Pp. 10-11).

Jackson's unofficial 3Rs can be source of low level violence themselves. Similarly, process in which school uses to enforce them in some cases turn into low level violence. For example, actions and inactions taken by staff and senior students to ensure compliance with the school culture although not approve are physical low level violence such as severe hitting, punching, battery and bullying among others. There are also nonphysical low level violence such as labeling and belittle of children. In addition, the compliance measures taken by staff and senior students may be non-physical that include insulting or shouting, indecent comments, gestures, labeling and addressing students with negative phrases like idiot, empty head, you only know how to eat, ridiculing and belittling students among others. Indeed, Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) termed Low level violence as largely neglected aspects of culture underlying violence in schools.

Different forms of low level violence which are taken for granted as part of school culture can have impact on learners. The impact according to Dupper & Adams, (2020) ranges from afraid to go to school, frustration and anger, students' inability to concentrate, and alienation, engagement in delinquency, truancy, absenteeism, indiscipline and dropping out of school, loss of esteem and feeling of isolation among others. Such consequences can have direct bearing on self-concept of learners.

**Self-Concept:** Self-concept is the notion of an individual about himself. Malami (2006) posits that literally, self-concept refers to the picture or image a person has of himself. Academic self-concept is therefore when such image learner has about who he is, relates to his academic performance. Self-concept is derived from the root word "self" a concept in social sciences that drew the imagination of philosophers and great thinkers for centuries. For example, Socrates saw the self as the soul of a person, while Rogers argued that 'The self is an awareness of being', While according to Hattie, cited in Marsh and Martin, (2012) William James who is considered the father of the psychological study of self, developed the important distinction between I (self-as-knower or active agent) and Me (self-as-known or the content of experience) distinction.

From Sociological view, proponents of symbolic interactionism have significant number of works regarding self-concept and its formation. Prominent among them are, George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Mead made analysis of Self-concept by dividing the personality of individual into two structures. That is "I" and "ME". According to Mead "I" part is generic in origin, the continuing part of personality while "ME" is basically social reflection of society's demand. Each individual is made of many ME relating to various social roles. The demand and expectations of various others (people) influence the image individual has about who he is. These others are divided into two, namely significant others and generalized others. The generalized others means general notion that a person has of the common expectations that community have about his actions, thoughts and behavior. On the other hand, significant others mean general notion that a person has of the common expectations of people that are more intimate to an individual's life.

### **Theoretical framework**

Symbolic interactionism sociological perspectives provided theoretical basis for this research that explored the impact of school culture on academic self-concept of learner. The main view that guided symbolic interactionists in their analysis of society according to Ogunbameru (2010) is that, society is a loose network of related parts in a constant state of flux, which means that society can sometimes be harmonious, open and flexible

and sometimes can have some or all the above in a contradictory state of affairs. This means that according to this Micro perspective, instead of individuals being forced by patterns of society or pulled by the strings of society; individuals create society everyday by their social actions. In this view, meaning is seen as being negotiated by social actors rather than being imposed upon them. There are many sub-theories under symbolic interactionism, however this article limits its explanation to theory of self and self-fulfilling prophecy or labeling theory.

The theory of self is postulated by George Herbert Mead to explain how the individual mind and self arises out of social process. As cited Haralambos and Holborn (2012), Mead summarizes human beings as creative intelligent and interpretative creatures capable of creating their own social environment. The concept of self, according to Mead is developed through Man's interaction with his environment. In other words, self does not exist at birth but is developed through interaction with others.

The concept of "others" is used in the theory of self to mean categories of people in the school culture that contribute in the formation of self-concept. They can be divided into two categories namely: Significant and Generalized others. In school culture, a teacher can be considered among those significant others and his expectations shape the image individual (pupil) has about who he/she is. A teacher who develops negative expectation towards pupil can interact with pupils in the classroom through making negative comments on such pupils, such comments include empty head, dull, donkey and these statements can affect the self or image individual has about himself. Consequently, when an individual views himself as dull, empty head as a result of teachers comment such can have negative effects on his academic performance because an empirical study conducted by Ladan (2015) found the effects of negative comments on pupils to include loss of confidence, tension during class work or continuous assessment or examination, negative attitudes toward learning and passivity in the classroom.

Similarly, as noted by Geisler cited in Ladan, (2015) the phrase self-fulfilling prophecies was introduced early on by Merton (1910-2003). Self-fulfilling prophecy theory means a situation whereby a teacher predicts or makes prophecy on learning outcomes of pupil and pupil himself fulfills teachers' prophecy by behaving based on teacher's prediction. In the classroom therefore self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when pupils live up to the labels imposed on them by the teacher. With regard to this Rothental and Jacobson cited in Giddens (2010) found that, when teachers labeled pupils as bright and praised them, the pupils react in a positive way and the original prediction is fulfilled- a self-fulfilling prophecy, on the other hand, they found that when teachers labeled pupils as thick and ignored them, the pupils react in a negative way and the original prediction is fulfilled – a self-fulfilling prophecy. The development of the self-fulfilling prophecy begins with an often incorrect expectation of a pupil, but it is ultimately the series of steps after this expectation that fulfills the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Consequently, if the expectation developed by the teacher towards pupils is negative, academic self-concept of pupil is affected.

### **Low Level Violence as Part of the School Culture**

Low level violence is imbedded in the school culture and scholars therefore found prevalence of different forms of violence in schools at different levels (Duffer and

Meyer-Adams 2020, Mahuta 2016 and UNICEF 2007). Duffer and Meyer-Adams, (2020) while reporting on the high schools in the United States found that, Bullying, peer sexual harassment and psychological maltreatment of students by teachers and senior students as the most common low level violence. According to them, Bullying refers to unprovoked physical or psychological abuse of an individual by one or a group of students overtime to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse. It comprises direct behaviors (e.g., teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing) and indirect behaviors (e.g, causing a student to be socially isolated by spreading rumors).

On the other hand, Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) referred to peer sexual harassment as nonphysical and physical forms which can take any of these namely making sexual comments, spreading sexual rumors, flashing, touching, grabbing, and pinching among others. Among these low level violence as Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) further found, the most common form as reported by 65% of girls and 42% of boys in US public schools, was being the target of sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks. While the second most common form of harassment was being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way. The third form of low level violence, Psychological maltreatment of students by teachers and senior students was described as discipline and control technique that are based on fear and intimidation. It also involves use of screaming and sarcasm, threats, ridicule to control students.

Similarly, in Nigeria, different types of violence have been documented in schools. However, UNICEF (2007) cited the following as types of violence found in the Basic education level in Nigeria. They are as follows;

- a. Physical Violence
- b. Psychological Violence
- c. Sexual Violence
- d. Gender-Based Violence
- e. Health-Related Violence

According to the report, Physical violence 85% and psychological violence 50% accounted for the bulk of violence against children in schools. Other types of violence reported among learners in Basic education level in Nigeria included gender –based violence which accounted for 5%, while sexual violence 4% and health-related violence 1%.

In addition, Mahuta (2016) observed that low level violence indulged in by staff, senior students and among peers in our schools can be broadly divided into two main forms, namely physical and non-physical. The Physical low level violence according to Mahuta (2016) can take forms not limited to the following:

Severe hitting (punching, slapping, spanking, kicking, beating)

#### **Use of hard labour**

- i. Corporal punishments for violation of school rules and regulations.
- ii. Sexual assault on both female and male students.
- iii. Battery which is the crime of attacking somebody.

On the other hand, non-physical low level violence in the words of Mahuta (2016) are those forms of violence that are intended to belittle, humiliates, threatens or scare an individual student or teacher. They consist of but not limited to the following:

- i. Students being insulted or shouted at by staff or senior students.
- ii. Indecent sexual comments, gestures and jokes on students.
- iii. Coerced sexual intercourse with students in exchange for gift, money or grade.
- iv. Labelling and addressing students with negative phrases like idiot, empty head, you only know how to eat.
- v. Ridiculing and be-littling students because of his appearance or on the basis of his
- vi. parental socio-economic status.
- vii. Spreading rumours against students.

### **Impact of School Culture on Self-Concept of Students**

Different forms of low level violence though neglected as part of the school culture are found to have impact on the self-concept of the children. The nonphysical violence such as Labeling and addressing students with negative phrases are found to contribute to the formation of negative self-concept. Indeed, in a study conducted by Ladan (2015), it was found that one of the major effects of negative comments on pupils include loss of confidence, negative attitudes toward learning and passivity in the classroom. Indeed, one of the students (P2) involved in the study narrated his experience with a teacher that usually labels him:

any time that teacher is in the class, he (P2) will not have confidence to contribute something. When the teacher ask question even if I have an idea I will not raise my finger because I am not sure of myself. I always try to make myself invisible for the teacher.

The implication of the above is that some learners who decide not to participate in the class do so not because of their learning deficiency but for the fear of being intimidated by the teacher. Similarly, the act of bullying has long-term implications on students. Hazler in Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) found that the impact of bullying on its victims includes a loss of self-esteem and feelings of isolation which can last into adulthood. He stated that learners' grades may suffer because their attention is being drawn away from learning. According to Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) Low-level violence whether physical or non-physical angers and alienates many students and contributes to a hostile school environment. It is on this basis that, Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) contend that students' alienation contributes to academic self-concept problems. They stress the need to consider more social aspects of schooling such as the relationship that teachers build with their students. They studied whether affective dimension of teacher-student relationships predicts academic progress and behavior problems and the researchers therefore concluded that students who had more positive views of their teachers did better and had fewer problems in school. They consider good student-teacher relationships to be a resource to schools and the students and should be promoted as such. Facilitating interpersonal relations, from a sociological viewpoint, is important to keeping students committed to the educational process.

Teacher-students relationship also forms an important aspect of school culture that can be positive. It can also be negative culminating into nonphysical low level violence. In view of this, Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) also conducted a study that showed that students' perceptions of teacher influence were related to cognitive outcomes. The higher a teacher was perceived on the influence dimension, (an interpersonal perception profile), the higher the outcomes of students on a physics test. In their study, teacher influence was the most important variable at the class level. They reported that the more teachers were perceived by their students as cooperative, the higher the students' scores were on cognitive tests. Hamre and Pianta (2006) also investigated the importance of teacher-student relationships. They posit that positive relationships between teacher and student serve as a resource to students as it helps maintain their engagement in academic pursuits. This extended engagement leads to better grades.

As indicated by different scholars, school culture has a great influence on student's classroom academic achievement. Regarding to this, Hoy and Miskel (2001) for example, noted that each culture describes the shared beliefs of teachers in the school. School with strong cultures of efficacy, trust and academic optimism provide higher levels of students' academic achievement otherwise it will intimidate the socio-emotional development of students. Moreover, an effective and a healthy school culture facilitate teacher-student, teacher-teacher and student-student relationships. It also gives opportunities and avenues for togetherness, discussing fundamental values, taking responsibility, coming together as a community and celebrating individual and group success.

## **Conclusion**

The paper examined aspects of school culture particularly low level violence. Based on the discussion, it is apt to say that, Low level violence still remain neglected aspect of school culture that exists in different forms at all levels of education, yet many school personnel take it for granted and do not acknowledge that low-level violence is a serious problem. Similarly, low level violence has impact on the Academic self-concept of students which is rarely taken into consideration by personnel in schools.

## **Suggestions**

Based on the foregoing discussion and conclusion drawn, the following suggestions were made:

1. School managements should devise measures aim at discouraging school culture that promotes physical and nonphysical level violence. It is essential that a needs assessment be conducted and all stakeholders be informed about the extent of different forms of low level violence in school and its threats which if ignored, can have negative impact on learners' Academic Self-concept.
2. Low level violence should not be regarded as neglected aspects of school culture and not be taken for granted by stakeholders. Instead, the media should adequately report it and be made to grab headlines like High level violence leading to concerted efforts at reducing it.
3. Teachers should help pupils develop positive image of themselves and good academic self-concept through positive reactions, expectations and comments on



- pupils that can encourage learning. Conversely, they should desist from making negative reactions towards pupils' actions that give learners negative self-concept.
4. Supervisors and inspectors of schools should adopt strategies toward discouraging and reducing prevalence of low level violence in school through ensuring adherence to violence prevention programmes and encouraging learner friendly school culture that promote good teacher-learner relationship.

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