

**Child Rights Act in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State,
Nigeria: An Imperative for Sustainable Development**

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Abstract

This study investigated the Child Rights Act in the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria as an imperative for sustainable development. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive research design was adopted. The population comprised all the 7,492 teachers in the 322 public Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. A sample of 749 teachers (603 experienced and 146 less experienced), representing 10% of the population was drawn using both the simple random sampling and proportionate stratified random sampling techniques. The instrument that was used for data collection was a researcher-based 17-item questionnaire entitled: “Child Rights Act in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Questionnaire” and it was structured after the four-point modified Likert rating scale. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha formula. Reliability coefficients of 0.79 and 0.76 were obtained respectively for the two sections of the instrument, which showed that the instrument was reliable. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed, among others, that teachers’ level of awareness of Child Rights Act is still low in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State after two decades it was domesticated. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that workshops, seminars and conferences on Child Rights Act should constantly be organised for teachers so as to raise consciousness among them, and make them aware of their civic responsibilities for the children that are entrusted under their care.

Keywords: Child Rights Act (CRA), Education, Sustainable, Development, Orphans, Vulnerable Children.

Introduction

Children fall under one of the most vulnerable groups of human existence as a result of their physical fragility and mental immaturity that expose them to a lot of danger. In recognising how feeble and vulnerable children are, especially in a busy world like ours, the United Nations Member States promulgated the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 1989 to guide and protect every child from all forms of abuses and to create enabling environment for their proper

growth and development. It is pertinent to note that CRA a global law which is a follow up of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 on fundamental human rights. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2003) emphasised that CRA is a global law that makes provision for the protection of the rights of a child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's parents or legal guardian, sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

A child is statutorily defined as every human being below the age of 18 years. The Rivers State Child Rights Law (2009) defined a child as someone who has not reached the level of maturity and is dependent on his/her parents and older adults for his/her survival. Right from the creation of the world, children have been entrusted under the care of adults for provisions and protections. In order to ensure that CRA is implemented, the United Nations charged government, parents, guardians and adults to take appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination and punishment. Adieme and Onyeagbako (2018) posited that school administrators and teachers who play *in loco parentis* roles in schools must endeavour to protect the rights and welfare of the children in their schools. The Child Right Act is set to holistically address the welfare needs of all children in the world. Bell-Gam (2020) asserted that one of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the CRA, seeks to uphold the right of a child to free education, which will enable him or her to acquire the right knowledge and skills that make him/her useful in society.

Children have been variously categorised into different groups. Among these diverse groups are street children, physically challenged children, orphan children, vulnerable children, out-of-school children, among others. For the thrust of this study, Orphans and Vulnerable Children will be focused on. An orphan is a child who has lost both parents. World Bank Orphans and Vulnerable Children (1998, as cited in Bell-Gam 2020) categorised another class of orphans as social orphans, whose one or both parents may be alive, but unable to perform

parental duties because of illness or acute poverty. On the other hand, a vulnerable child is one who is at risk of suffering deprivation of basic needs, care and protection due to circumstances of birth or immediate changes in the environment where he or she is found. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2007) provided the characteristics of children who can be identified as orphan and vulnerable children as follows: street children, street beggars, out-of-school children, children with disabilities, trafficked children, children in exploitative labour, children who are abused or neglected, children from broken homes, internally displaced children, children who hawk on streets and abandoned children.

Orphans and vulnerable children have increasingly been fostered in our society due to myriads of challenges which range from poverty-related issues to premature death of one or both parents. Other challenges include: natural disasters, pandemic diseases, conflict situations, communal clashes, among others. The resultant effects of these include child abuse, child trafficking, high dropout rates, child labour, high child mortality rates, child prostitutions, house helps, among others. Bell-Gam (2020) noted that some children lose either parent or both; thereby, exposing them to child labour, hard environment, social and economic conditions which endanger their future. Thus, in the event of any of this occurrence, a child subsequently becomes vulnerable to societal manipulation, exploitation and dehumanisation. In order to address these issues, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. Adieme and Nwideeduh (2019) and Okoye (2011) pointed out that convention uphold children's entitlement to protection, participation, development, and non-discrimination.

After the Convention, it was agreed that every Member State of the United Nations should implement the Act. The African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child domesticated it in 1990. However, Nigeria domesticated both the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child in 2003 and

mandated her States to adapt and implement the Act accordingly. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1999) has also made efforts to safeguard the rights of children in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution and established agencies that cater for the violation of the rights of a child. The Rivers State Government, after adapting the Child Rights Act in 2009, promulgated the Child's Law, which provided that every person, institution, service, agency, organisation, and body responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform to the standards established by the appropriate authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, welfare, and competent supervision (Rivers State Child's Law, 2009). The United Nations (1989, as cited in Adieme and Nwideduh 2019) asserted that the Child Rights Act was necessary to promote a child's entitlement to harmonious development, protection and active participation in society without any discrimination irrespective of his/her tribe and family background.

The Child Rights Act consists of three Parts and 54 Articles. Part 1 spells out children's rights, Part 2 sets out how governments/state parties should work together to make them available to all children and Part 3 sets out the conditions of being an active Member State. The Act centres on children's entitlement to development, protection, participation and non-discrimination. Hence, the thrust of this study lies on Parts 1 and 2 respectively. The Child Rights Act as cited in Olakanmi (2007), stipulated the following as some of the rights of the child as agreed and endorsed by United Nations Member States:

- **Article V:** Every child shall be given appropriate direction and guidance necessary for his wellbeing.
- **Article VI:** Every child has the inherent right to life – survival and development.
- **Article XIII:** Every child has the right to freedom of expression.
- **Article XIV:** Every child shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- **Article XV:** Every child shall have the right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

- **Article XIX:** State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
- **Article XXVII:** every child shall have the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- **Article XXVIII:** Every child shall have the right to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.
- **Article XXXII:** Every child shall have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (pp. 54-74).
- **Article XXXVII:** No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Child Rights Act aims at protecting the child from all forms of abuses and creating an enabling environment for his or her proper growth and development. The Child Rights Act is viewed as fundamental human rights which every child is entitled to. The Nigerian Government also made provisions for safeguarding these fundamental rights of the child in her Constitution. Some of the fundamental rights as enshrined in Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1999) include: right to life; right to dignity of human person; right to personal liberty; among others. This Section of the Constitution renders unconstitutional any act of torture or degrading treatment of persons in Nigeria. Hence, the Federal Republic of Nigerian Constitution emphasises the need to protect a child against all manners of exploitation. The Nigerian Government through her laws and policies, has initiated many steps to ensure effective implementation of the Child Rights Law across the thirty-six States including the Federal Capital Territory.

Awareness on CRA is central to the effective implementation. Akwara et al. (2010) defined awareness as the state of being conscious or aware of something. Child Rights Act (2003) emphasised that there is need to bring consciousness among the people so that they may

be aware of their civil rights and duties. The successful implementation of any law is a function of the literacy level of the people, their willingness to protect the law and the availability of financial resources to implement it. Hence, Federal Republic of Nigeria is legally obligated to create awareness on CRA to her citizenry after domesticating the Laws. However, researchers have conducted different studies on CRA in Nigeria, and found out that children's rights are not being protected due to lack of awareness. Bell-Gam (2020) discovered that ever since Rivers State domesticated CRA, little has been done in advocacy, awareness and social mobilisation as regards the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children. In a related study, Adieme (2016) revealed that the major challenge facing Orphans and Vulnerable Children's education in Rivers State is parents' lack of awareness of the violation of CRA. Similarly, Okoye (2011) observed that the implementation of the Child Rights Act has continued to be a problem in Nigeria because people are not aware of the Act, and do not have knowledge of the basic provisions of the Act.

There should be public awareness campaign to increase the knowledge of the rights of a child in Nigeria and the penalties for violating them. Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia Canada (2011, as cited in Okoye 2011) posited that public awareness on Child Rights Laws can lead to: increased political will, implementation and monitoring, increased advocacy, positive proactive response, realisation of children's rights and improved wellbeing. The findings of Okala (2023) revealed that some parents encourage their children to hawk in order to raise money for their school fees, augment family income, among others, not knowing that CRA prohibits such. Under the CRA, Article 28, it is a punishable offence for parents and guardians to deny their children/wards right to education (Adieme & Onyeagbako, 2018). Adama (2016); Nigel (2011) pointed out that Articles 12 to 17 of CRA emphasised on children's fundamental rights to freedom of expression, movement, association, thought, conscience, religion and peaceful assembly, but due to lack of knowledge, most adults

ignorantly think they are not applicable to children. Thus, any of these rights shall however, be restricted if it shall be harmful to the child.

The Child rights Act (2003) emphasised that the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration of adults, who cater for their welfare and safety. Adama (2016) pointed out that children's right to participation in the society is being infringed upon due to lack of knowledge and awareness. Children should be allowed to participate in the decision-making process of all matters that concern them, as provided in the Participatory Act. Nigel (2011) revealed that students' rights to rest, leisure, play, sports, recreational activities, participate fully in cultural and artistic activities are yet another participatory rights of the Nigerian child that are often denied by teachers. Thus, governments, persons, institutions, agencies, organisations and bodies responsible for the care and welfare of the child are under obligation to ensure that at all times adequate opportunities are available for the child to enjoy the participatory rights. Okala (2023) observed that in spite of the passage of CRA into Law in Nigeria, the rights of most children are still being violated in schools. Adieme and Nwideduh (2019) maintained that teachers' awareness of CRA is an effective tool for eradication of child labour and child abuse in the society.

Sustainable development is meeting the developmental needs of the present without compromising or hampering the abilities of the future generations. Bruntland Commission (1987) cited in Onyeike and Adieme (2014) defined sustainable development as the development pattern which encourages and addresses the plethora of living problems of the present while making adequate plans for, and not compromising the place of the future needs. However, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] (2016) warned that present day developmental needs must not have adverse effects on the abilities of upcoming generations in meeting their own unique developmental needs. In recognition of the enormous roles education plays in driving sustainable development, the United Nations

declared this 21st century, as the era of Education for Sustainable Development. In order for education to be sustainable in Nigeria, and in Rivers State particularly, the kind of education that is offered to learners must be holistic, inclusive and functional. Teachers therefore must be aware and knowledgeable of CRA, and implement them accordingly.

Statement of the Problem

Knowing the vulnerability nature of children in a volatile world, and their importance in sustainable national development, the United Nations enacted CRA in 1989 to advocate for children's rights to protection, survival, development, non-discrimination and participation. The Federal Republic of Nigeria domesticated the Act in 2003, and has been committed to providing free, compulsory, uninterrupted and qualitative Universal Basic Education (UBE) to every Nigerian child. Rivers State domesticated CRA in 2009, and stipulated in Article 10 Section 15 that every child has the right to free, compulsory and universal basic education as and when practicable, and it shall be the duty of the Government to provide such education with special protection on learners. In order to ensure that every child has access to equal educational opportunities without discrimination, the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 4 precisely, introduced Inclusive Education, which makes it possible for special needs (vulnerable) children to learn together with other children in mainstream schools.

However, in spite of the efforts in ensuring that every child attend school, and the passage of the CRA into Law in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular, most children's rights to protection and participation appear to still being violated in schools. A cursory glance at the Nigerian daily newspapers will convince one of the degrading treatments meted on students by their teachers, who ought to play *in loco parentis* roles to them. Some of these inhuman treatments have resulted in death of some students, drop outs, truancy, absenteeism, fear, apprehension, ill-health, poor academic performance, among others. The researchers are bothered and wondering whether teachers do not know the legal implications of infringing or

violating the rights of students. Are teachers aware of CRA and the penalties for violation of any of the Laws? Do they know that ignorant of the law is not an excuse? These unanswered questions underscored this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria: An imperative for sustainable development. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State; and
2. determine the level of awareness on violation of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the level of awareness on violation of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated at 0.05 alpha level:

- Ho₁ There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Ho₂ There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness on violation of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all the 7,492 teachers in the 322 public junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Out of these 7,492 teachers, 6,030 are experienced while 1,462 are less experienced (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, 2023). A sample of 749 teachers (603 experienced and 146 less experienced), representing 10% of the population was drawn using both the simple random sampling and proportionate stratified random sampling techniques. This was determined by the Taro Yamane Formula which gave a minimum sample size of 379 teachers. The instrument that was used for data collection was a researcher-based 17-item questionnaire entitled: “Child Rights Act in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Questionnaire.” The questionnaire was structured after the four-point Likert rating scale of Very High Level, High Level, Low Level and Very Low Level with weights of: 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. The instrument was duly validated by three experts in Test and Measurement Department and Educational Management Department of Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt.

The internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.78 for the instrument was computed using Cronbach’s Alpha. The subscales’ reliability for level of awareness of Child Rights Laws in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children and the level of awareness on violation of Child Rights Laws for the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children are 0.79 and 0.76 respectively. Hence, they were adjudged to be reliable for the study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to ascertain “High Level” or “Low Level” for the research questions. The decision rule therefore was that any mean score less than the criterion mean of 2.50 were tagged “Low Level” while mean scores of 2.50 and above represented “High Level.” The acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses was based on the critical value of z-test, which is ± 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Opinions of Experienced and Inexperienced Teachers on the Level of Awareness of CRA in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

S/N	Level of Awareness of the Child Rights Act	Experienced Teachers = 602		Less experienced Teachers = 146		\bar{X}_1 \bar{X}_2	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
1.	Mainstream schools run inclusive education for both physically challenged and non-physically children.	2.79	0.29	2.58	0.62	2.69	High Level
2.	Every student has a right to protection against inhuman treatment.	3.15	0.28	3.10	0.57	3.13	Very High Level
3.	Teachers provide safe learning environments for every student in their class.	2.92	0.29	2.97	0.58	2.95	High Level
4.	Every decision taken in the school must be to the best interest of the students.	2.16	0.32	2.19	0.65	2.18	Low Level
5.	Every student has a right to fair hearing before taking any action against him/her.	1.69	0.34	1.24	0.73	1.47	Very Low Level
6.	Every student has a right to be treated equally in the class.	2.83	0.29	2.91	0.59	2.87	High level
7.	Every student is entitled to right to participate in extra-curricular activities.	2.88	0.29	2.73	0.60	2.81	High level
8.	Every student has a right to freedom of religion; hence, should not be compelled to participate in activities that are against his/her religious belief.	1.45	0.35	1.22	0.73	1.34	Very Low Level
9.	Corporal punishment should not be meted on any student.	1.79	0.33	1.68	0.69	1.74	Very Low Level
Aggregate Mean/SD		2.41	0.31	2.29	0.64	2.35	

NB: Very High Level = 3.00-3.50; High Level= 2.50-2.99; Low Level= 2.00-2.49; Very Low Level = 0.00-1.99

Table 1 reveals the mean responses of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Their responses indicate that teachers' level of awareness of CRA is still low. These include: every decision taken in the school must be to the best interest of the students; every student has a right to fair hearing before taking any action against

him/her; every student has a right to freedom of religion; hence, should not be compelled to participate in activities that are against his/her religious belief and corporal punishment should not be meted on any student.

Research Question 2: What is the level of awareness on violation of the Child Rights Act in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Opinions of Experienced and Inexperienced Teachers on the Level of Awareness on Violation of CRA in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

S/N	Level of Awareness on Violation of the Child Rights Act	Experienced Teachers = 602		Inexperienced Teachers = 146		\bar{X}_1 \bar{X}_2	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
10.	Corporal punishment is a punishable offence by Rivers State Government.	1.89	0.33	1.78	0.68	1.84	Very Low Level
11.	There are penalties for violation of any of the Child Rights laws.	1.54	0.34	1.39	0.72	1.47	Very Low Level
12.	Forcing students to sing the National Anthem when it is against their belief is an act of violating their rights to participation.	1.76	0.34	1.68	0.69	1.72	Very Low Level
13.	Depriving students of their recreational time is infringing on their right to movement.	2.77	0.29	2.67	0.61	2.72	High Level
14.	Subjecting students to torture, abuses, rebukes, etc is infringing on their right to protection.	2.96	0.29	2.89	0.59	2.93	High Level
15.	Not involving students in decision-making on matters that concern them is violation of their rights to participation.	1.38	0.35	1.29	0.72	1.34	Very Low Level
16.	Interrupting a student when he/she is making an attempt to answer a question in class is violating his right to freedom of thought.	2.83	0.29	2.78	0.60	2.81	High Level
17.	Sending students out of the classroom when lessons are going on in order to manage disruptive behaviour is violation of their right to education.	1.78	0.34	1.57	0.70	1.68	Very Low Level
	Aggregate Mean/SD	2.11	0.32	2.01	0.66	2.06	

NB: Very High Level = 3.00-3.50; High Level= 2.50-2.99; Low Level= 2.00-2.49; Very Low Level = 0.00-1.99

Table 2 shows the mean responses of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness on violation of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Their responses indicate that teachers' level of awareness on violation of CRA is low. These include: corporal punishment is a punishable offence by Rivers State Government; there are penalties for violation of any of the Child Rights laws; forcing students to sing the National Anthem when it is against their belief is an act of violating their rights to participation not involving students in decision-making on matters that concern them is violation of their rights to participation and sending students out of the classroom when lessons are going on in order to manage disruptive behaviour is violation of their right to education.

Table 3: Summary of z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Experienced and Less Experienced Teachers on the Level of Awareness of CRA in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	Critical Value
Experienced Teachers	603	2.41	0.31	747	2.05	± 1.96
Less Experienced Teachers	146	2.29	0.69			

Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	Critical Value
Experienced Teachers	603	2.41	0.31	747	2.05	± 1.96
Less Experienced Teachers	146	2.29	0.69			

P < 0.05

Table 3 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness of CRA in the education

of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The result reveals that z-calculated value of 2.05 is greater than the critical value of ± 1.96 ; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is significant difference on the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Experienced and Less Experienced Teachers on the Level of Awareness on Violation of CRA in the Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	Critical Value
Experienced Teachers	603	2.11	0.32	747	1.78	± 1.96
Less Experienced Teachers	146	2.01	0.66			

P < 0.05

Table 4 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness on violation of the Child Rights Act in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The result shows that z-calculated value of 1.78 is less than the critical value of ± 1.96 ; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced teachers on the level of awareness on violation of CRA in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that teachers' level of awareness of CRA is still low in junior secondary schools in Rivers State after two decades of it was domesticated. These include: every decision taken in the school must be to the best interest of the students, every

student has a right to fair hearing before taking any action against him/her every student has a right to freedom of religion; hence, should not be compelled to participate in activities that are against his/her religious belief and corporal punishment should not be meted on any student. Hence, this implies that teachers are neither aware nor knowledgeable of CRA. This finding agrees with Bell-Gam (2020), who discovered that ever since Rivers State domesticated CRA, little has been done in advocacy, awareness and social mobilisation as regards the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children. It is also in line with the findings of Adieme (2016) that revealed that the major challenge facing Orphans and Vulnerable Children's education in Rivers State is parents' lack of awareness of the violation of CRA' The finding equally corroborated that of Okoye (2011), who observed that the implementation of CRA has continued to be a problem in Nigeria because people are not aware of the Act, and do not have the knowledge of the basic provisions of the Act.

The study also discovered that that teachers' level of awareness on violation of CRA is low. These include: corporal punishment is a punishable offence by Rivers State Government; there are penalties for violation of any of CRA; forcing students to sing the National Anthem when it is against their belief is an act of violating their rights to participation; not involving students in decision-making on matters that concern them is violation of their rights to participation and sending students out of the classroom when lessons are going on in order to manage disruptive behaviour is violation of their right to education. Thus, the implication of this study is that most students will not be eager or excited to go to school because of the ways the teachers treat them. This finding is in agreement with Okala (2023); Okoye (2011), who conducted different studies and discovered that most adults including teachers deprive children of their rights due to lack of knowledge of the violations of the laws. The finding is in consonance with Adama (2016); Nigel (2011), who observed that that children's right to

participation in the society is being infringed upon due to lack of will power to prosecute offenders.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that teachers' level of awareness of CRA is still low in junior secondary schools in Rivers State after two decades it was domesticated. Thus, the study revealed that students' rights to protection, participation and non-discrimination are often violated by teachers as they are ignorant of most of their actions. This has a serious implication on access to equal educational opportunities in Rivers State. It is pertinent to note that children as vulnerable members of the society fall into special needs group, and must not be left without proper care and protection in the schools. For CRA to be effectively implemented in the education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rivers State, school administrators' and teachers' awareness of the Act is very critical. This buttresses the saying: "Ignorant of the law is not an excuse."

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Rivers State Government should engage the media in creating public awareness of CRA, and also make them emphasise on prosecutions for offenders in order to reduce the number of out-of-school children, child abuse, street children-hawkers, illiteracy, drop outs, among others.
2. Workshops, seminars and conferences on CRA should constantly be organised for teachers so as to raise consciousness among them, and make them aware of their civic responsibilities for the children that are entrusted under their care.

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