

## THE NEED FOR TEACHING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY EDUCATION AS SEEN BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE

OSAYANDE ERIC IYOBO Ph.D. & AIDEYAN OSARENWMANTA DANIEL

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### Abstract

*The main thrust of this paper is to appraise the need for the teaching of occupational health and safety education as seen by secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Occupational safety education is an advocated subject that emphasizes on developing knowledge, skills and attitude of safety practices in any defined work environment. This has been reemphasized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), to be taken as a matter of urgency in order to enable its elementary introduction in the school system. To ascertain its relevance in secondary schools, descriptive research design was adopted and the random and systematic sampling techniques were utilized to obtain 242 students from the selected secondary schools in the Local Government Area. Self-structured questionnaires to gather information about the need for occupational safety education among students of Egor Local Government Area were used. It was revealed that the secondary schools students demonstrated a positive desire towards occupational safety education as school subject to enable them have better career choices and to practice safety measures effectively in order to avoid injuries and other work environment related hazards. It was therefore recommended that the school curriculum reform should advocate and present to the Ministry of Education and National Education Research and Development Commission the need to implement the introduction of occupational safety education in secondary schools.*

**Key words:** Occupational health and safety education, hazard, teaching and work environment.

### Introduction

Work place safety has today become an important and complicated problem, but only a few people are aware of this. Workers form the core of every country's economy and are the breadwinners of their family. Without doubt, the health, safety and wellbeing of these workers are of great importance.

Occupational health is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) (2010) as "the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental, and social wellbeing of workers in all occupations; the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working

conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health. The placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities and to summarize the adaption of work to man and each man to his job (Schwartz, 2000; Nwachukwu, (2000). Safety means freedom from the occurrence or risk of injury or loss (Aswathappa, 2004). He described industrial or employee safety as the protection of workers from the danger of industrial accidents.

The work environment is the aggregate of all living and working conditions that may influence the life and health of the workers (Achal, 2000)). This work environment includes lifestyle, culture, value, beliefs, perception of quality, stakeholders, perception of value for money, current situation (history), benefits or risks of those changes and health promotion strategies. The work environment consists of various factors which introduce new dimensions to health causing diseases and injuries which include, work accidents and exposure to hazards. Emeharole & Iwok (1997) asserted that occupational stress results from negative environmental factors associated with job.

Occupational safety and health also commonly referred to as work place safety and health is an aspect of public health programme concerned with protecting the health and welfare of people engaged in work or employment (Utech, 2004). It was established to ensure that the health status of everyone on any occupation is protected, maintained and promoted. Occupational safety and health as a course or subject deals with the study of health problems employees face in their work environment and how these health problems are managed to protect their health status and those of their family (Ergor, Demiral & Kiran, 1999). Dembe, Erickson & Delbos, (2004) explained that the prevention of accidents, improvement of working conditions and enforcement of standards are often seen as a cost of business, little is known about the cost of preventing accidents.

The legislative and other changes to occupational health and safety practices in Nigeria have mediated an increased need for education and training at all levels (Nwankon, 2003). He further stressed that the principal objective of training is to meet the needs of the marketplace, while that of education is to shape that marketplace and improved occupational efficiency. The school being a formal

pedagogical setting will help to convey vital and proven information that is beneficial to the learners and help correct misconceptions about occupational safety practices. Asogwa (2007) explained that through adequate safety education, students should be able to,

- (i) ensure the development, implementation and monitoring of an effective programme for the workplace,
- (ii) identify potential and current health and safety hazards within the workplace and recommend a systematic approach to the assessment and control (Ladue, 2006);
- (iii) locate, evaluate, interpret and provide occupational safety and health information appropriate to the workplace,
- (iv) collect, analyse, interpret and use workplace data in a systematic way with appropriate attention to ethical, legal and confidentiality requirements,
- (iv) apply knowledge of relevant legislation, standards and codes of practice in day to day activities.

It is on these objectives that the study necessitates appraising students' opinion on introducing the teaching of occupational health and safety education in secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state.

### **Statement of the problem**

Workplace safety has today become an important and complicated problem, but only a few people are aware of this. Since workers form the core of every country's economy and are the bread winners of every family, the health, safety and wellbeing of these workers are of great importance. It is worthy of note that the school serves as a formal setting for teaching and learning, therefore introducing occupational safety education could result to mixed attitude towards its acceptance in relation to the benefits of safety and overall curriculum development.

Health and safety has not been given enough attention in work environment in Nigeria thereby making the working population prone to accidents from time to time. Literatures on the subject has provided recommendations of introducing occupational safety education in school or specified units in workplaces to provide knowledge and skills for accident control. The learners are the hub of every school. It is therefore necessary to ascertain their opinions on the introduction of occupational safety and health in the school curriculum in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

- i. What is the need for teaching occupational safety as a subject in secondary schools in Egor Local Government Aea of Edo state?
- ii. Are secondary school students aware of the benefits of being enlightened in the field of occupational safety in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state?
- iii. Can workplace accidents and ill-health be curtailed through teaching of occupational safety in secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

### **Methods and Materials**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The survey research design is often used to access thoughts, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behavior of people (Punch, 2005).

The population of the study consisted of four selected secondary schools under Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The total number of public secondary schools in Egor Local Government is 12 (Ministry of Education, Edo State, 2015).

The sample used in the study was 242. This was drawn from the 6 randomly selected secondary schools. These 6 public secondary schools had a total of 726 students Thereafter the systematic random sampling technique was adopted to select every third student after the first had been randomly selected amounting to 242 students as respondents .

### **Instrumentation**

A self-structured 24 item questionnaire was developed to elicit information on students' perception of the teaching of occupational health and safety. It consisted of two parts, part one eliciting information on sociodemographic data with 5 items while part two tested students' opinions on the teaching of occupational safety education in secondary schools with 20-test items. The instrument was validated by two experts each in health education and safety and the reliability tested using split half approach by administering 20 questionnaires and responses divided into odd and even numbers and thereafter subjected to Pearson product moment correlation with coefficient of 0.81.

## **Data analysis**

### **Research question 1**

What is the need for teaching occupational health and safety as a subject in secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state?

Table 1: n=242

S/N	Items	F	%
1	Occupational health will equip workers knowledge of occupational hazards.	174	72
2	Occupational health and safety education can ensure workers to be insured and protected of occupational safety laws.	113	47
3	Occupational health and safety education will help me in making career choice.	212	88
4	Occupational safety education will help workers adapt to stress	157	65
5	Occupational safety education will help workers relate adequately work and personal health.	143	59

Table 1 above revealed that the students possess desirable and intense need to the teaching of occupational health and safety as a subject in secondary school in Egor local government area, Edo state. 72% and 88% of the respondents show opinion of occupational safety education to equip workers knowledge of occupational hazard and making career choice respectively.65% agreed that occupational safety education will help workers to adapt to stress, while 47% of respondents agreed to the insurance and protection of occupational safety laws due to occupational safety education.

### **Research question 2**

Are secondary school students aware of the benefits of being enlightened in the field of occupation safety in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

Table 2: n=242

S/N	Items	F	%
1	Occupational health and safety education will increase my knowledge on first aid.	148	61
2	Occupational health and safety education will help me increase my right as a future employee or worker.	220	91
3	Occupational health and safety education will help workers to prevent occupational diseases	152	63

4	Occupational health and safety as a subject aims at promotion and maintenance of health or wellbeing.	172	71
5	Occupational safety education will ensure safety regulations are implemented.	208	86
6	Occupational safety education will ensure workers are knowledgeable about need for compliance to safety policies.	203	84

Table 2 above shows that students are aware of the benefits to be derived from occupational safety education .61% and 91% of the respondents had a strong opinion about improved knowledge on first aid practices and right as future employees when exposed to occupational safety education respectively.63%, 71% and 84% of the respondents attested that occupational safety education would help prevent occupational diseases and improved wellbeing and provide knowledge on the need to comply to safety regulations.

### **Research question 3**

Can workplace accidents and ill health be reduced through teaching of occupational safety and health in secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state?

Table 3: n=242

S/N	Items	F	%
1	Occupational health and safety education will teach me how to cope with emergencies and hazards.	201	83
2	Occupational health and safety education will make one more safety conscious in preventing work accident.	196	81
3	Occupational health and safety education will help me know different hazards involved in different occupations.	182	75
4	Occupational safety education will help prevent worksite injuries.	186	77
5	Occupational safety education will help promote emotional health among workers.	215	89

Table 3 above provides data on students’ responses to capability of occupational safety education to prevent workplace accidents and ill health. It was observed that 83% of respondents believed that they would be able to cope with emergencies and hazards when exposed to occupational safety education.77% and 89% respondents had opinion to be able to prevent worksite injuries and promote sound emotional health when exposed to occupational safety education.

## **Discussion of Results**

The findings of this study revealed the opinion of secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state on the need for teaching occupational health and safety.

It was revealed that occupational health and safety when taught in secondary schools has its prospective benefits for graduates and other individuals for domestic and workplace activities. The secondary school students believed the need for occupational health and safety to help them in making career choice and adequately provide workplace emotional wellbeing as in agreement with Asogwa (2007). Stress adaptation is necessary in workplace and human daily living and this was agreed by the respondents to the need for teaching occupational health and safety and in line with explanation of Emerhaole & Iwok (1999). Occupational health and safety education helps to provide knowledge and skills about occupational hazards and possible ways to prevent and control it and this agreed with the statements made by Aswathappa (2004) and Asogwa, (2007). However, the teaching of occupational health and safety in providing protection in relation to safety laws were negatively opined by the respondents but in concordance with the statements of Dawson, Poynton & Stevens (1999).

It was also revealed that the secondary schools students have an intense awareness of the benefits of being exposed to occupational health and safety. First aid practices help in effective response to domestic and other setting accidents and the statement is in accordance with opinion of Utech (2007). It was revealed that occupational diseases relating to workplace activities of using machines, overcrowding and other hazards such as radiation shows high opinion of students to gain awareness from being exposed to occupational health and safety. The study revealed that exposures to occupational health and safety teaching would help provide knowledge to compliance to safety regulations and promote wellbeing and this is in corroboration to the findings of Ergon, Demiral & Stevens (1999).

The study also revealed the specific need for the teaching of occupational health and safety to prevention of workplace accidents and ill-health. It was revealed that knowledge from occupational health and safety will help individuals to cope with emergencies and hazards in homes and outside the domestic chores and preventing work accidents. This is in agreement with what was revealed, that occupational safety education would help prevent worksites injuries and promote emotional health among workers. This corroborated with the statements of Dawson, Poynton & Stevens (1999).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that occupational health and safety is an important subject matter that will help influence student behavioral content towards safety measures in home, school and community. This will enhance students' career choice, prevent avoidable accidents and emergencies and ensure individuals are knowledgeable about the needs and benefits to comply to safety regulations. Stress and workplace fatigue can be well managed via exposure to occupational safety education in secondary schools.

It is therefore exemplified that the school provides a suitable setting for teaching occupational safety education for prospective graduates and help manage public hazards.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made by the researchers;

- Occupational health and safety education should be introduced in secondary schools as a basis to inculcate knowledge, attitude and skills towards safety measures.
- There should be school curriculum reforms to accommodate contemporary societal needs of providing knowledge which occupational safety education is inclusive. Educational managers and curriculum experts should present to Ministry of Education and National Educational Research Development Commission (NERDC) proposal to include safety education as subjects taught in secondary schools.
- Health educators, safety professionals should periodically exhibit forums and seminars that address occupational health and safety to boost motivation among students on the need to be safety conscious.
- Government should ensure adequate in training activities for teachers of related fields to enable them convey vital information to the students.

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