

Preventive Measures on Causes of Accidents: A Nexus for Safety of Primary School Pupils in Kano State

Sa'adatu Sani Hanga PhD

Department of Curriculum
Aminu College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano

&

Umar Farouk Yola

Department of Curriculum
Aminu College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano

Abstract

This paper assessed the causes of accidents in primary schools. Accident is an unpleasant happening that occur un-intentionally, or un-planned and or un-expected. It can be minor or severe that may lead to injury, which can be treated, untreated or even lead to death. Accidents can happen at home, on the road, in a school or anywhere. A lot of things can cause accidents in school such as through leaving harmful or injurious objects at the reach of children. Example of such dangerous things includes nails, razor blade, broken bottles or seats, electricity switches, science chemicals, gas, petrol, soapy water, to mention a few. The paper also defined primary school as the first school a child is enrolled into or it may be the second school for those who received pre-primary education before starting the primary type. Similarly, the identified types of school accidents that occur are tripping, falling, slipping or as a result of boarding/disembarking from a means of transporting. Moreover, accidents do happen in the course of physical education, climbing the stairs and playing with sharp objects. However, to avoid occurrence of accidents, the paper identified some preventive measures to include not using soapy water in mopping the floor, wearing of sandals or canvas shoes by children while in school, and stairs should not be too steep or too high, amongst others.

Key words: accidents, education, prevention, primary, schools

Introduction

Accident is an unpleasant happening that occur un-intentionally, un-planned and or un-expected. An accident can be minor or severe, which may lead to an injury that can be untreated, treated or even lead to death. Accident can happen at home, on a road, in a school or anywhere. This paper, however, focuses on accidents that happen in basic schools, particularly those at the primary school education level where the children are of the ages of at least 3 to 15 years old. School, on the other hand, is a place where people are taught knowledge, lessons and or skills for self-development. A school can be informal or formal with the latter being regarded as a place where different types of people regardless of age, gender, tribe, or religion converge together to receive knowledge or skills under the guidance of a teacher(s) for the purpose of achieving an objective. A formal school has to be standard and based on stipulated

guidelines issued by government through its national policy on education outlining the types of learners, the educational programme to be delivered, and the kind of school to run such programme. However, for any school to be called formal and standard, it must, among others, be a safe environment where parents, especially of small children, can take their kids to be taken care of and at the same time be educated. Notwithstanding this, accidents seem to be frequently happening at the basic school level due to a number of factors, which this paper sought to identify and proffer suggestions.

School as a Citadel of Learning

A school can be referred to as a place where people acquire knowledge either theoretical (subject matter or idea) or practical (skills or construction) about something under the guidance of a teacher(s). It can also be considered as an environment where teaching and learning occurs. In a formal school setting, everything that takes place has been planned and developed by government through curriculum experts for implementation and subsequent evaluation. In Nigeria, schools are categorized and named based on the ages of learners, hence we have pre-primary (nursery), primary, secondary (junior and senior) and tertiary.

According to Wikipedia (2020), a school is an educational institution designed to provide learning spaces and environments for the teaching of students under the direction of teachers. The name of these schools varies from one country to another country, but generally they include primary school for young children and secondary for teenagers who have completed primary education. However, an institution where higher education is taught is commonly called college or university.

Primary School

A primary school is the first school a child is enrolled into or may be the second one for those who attended pre-primary school first. According to the National Policy on Education (2013), primary education is the education given to children aged between 6 to 12 years. According to Wikipedia (2022), however, a primary school, or elementary school or grade school, is a school for primary education of children who are 4 to 11 years of age.

Concept of Accident in schools

Accident is an unfortunate incident that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally, typically resulting to injury. According to Wikipedia (2022), an accident is an unintended, normally unwanted event that was not directly caused by humans. The term accident implies that nobody should be blamed, but the event may have been caused by unrecognized or unaddressed risks. According to Quora (2022), an accident is the end result of a chain of events that results in an unintended consequence. To Wiktionary (2022), accident is an unexpected event with negative consequences occurring without the intention of the one suffering the consequences and (in the strict sense) not directly caused by humans.

Causes of School Accidents

A lot of things can cause accidents in school either accidentally or due to carelessness. Though schools may be circumspect in storing harmful but useful things where they are supposed to be kept, it is common knowledge that some children due to curiousness can go to any length in order to fulfil their quest. In that regard, such inquisitiveness at times lead to accidents, especially while wanting to know things that they are asked not to touch, taste, or even go near them. On the other hand, when objects that are not supposed to be of easy reach to pupils/students due to their dangerous nature are carelessly kept cause accidents to occur. An example of such objects can, amongst others, be nails, razor blade, broken bottles or seats, exposed electric wires, laboratory chemicals, gas, petrol, and soapy water.

According to Island Now (2020), accidents are very likely to occur at school because children are always running and playing around. They usually will not have developed a sense of things that may be potentially dangerous to them thereby leading them to get into all sorts of accidents most of the time. Some children, though, are more protective of themselves than the others. Hence, they may not want to participate in games that other children are playing because they may recognize them as harmful. However, this does not guarantee that they will stay out of trouble because other children may pick on them for choosing to stay safe.

Types of School Accidents

A school is supposed to be a safe environment where both pupils/students and staff can live in and move freely without any problem, be it physical or emotional throughout the school hours. A school where different people stay for hours should serve as a home away from home both for staff and children. However, everyone knows that there is no such thing as a truly safe environment, and accidents at school do happen. Children are naturally curious about their surroundings, and young children in particular may not yet have a clear concept of the dangers that may surround them. In turn, a school has a duty of care to ensure the safety of every child while at school or involved in school activities that are carried out elsewhere. Parents and guardians fully expect that every precaution is taken to ensure children's safety and that they are adequately supervised at all times to prevent any chance of injury. According to Get Insurance Today (2022), there are many types of school accidents but the most common four types of school accidents in Nigeria are:

1. **Falling from trees or climbing over fence or building:** It is a school accident that occurs when a student climbs the trees in the school compound or jumps the fence. In this type of accident, the students involved are likely to be injured. The school needs to raise the fence as high as possible, so students would not be able to jump or set a required punishment for anyone who tries to climb the tree or jump the fence.
2. **Getting hit by a car while coming to school:** It is a school accident that occurs when a car crashes with another vehicle at a school. In this type of accident, both the driver and

passengers are likely to be injured. Car accidents are another common type of school accident in Nigeria. If a car hits a school bus full of children, it can result in injuries or death for everyone involved. Some children may also be injured when they get caught up in traffic while trying to get home from school late at night or early morning hours after working all day long without any rest time during breaks.

3. Getting injured by a sharp object on their way to school or within the school: This type of accident happens when pupil walks into an object on his way to school, within the school compound or back from school and gets hurt badly by it. Injuries within the school can be taken care of by the school authorities through making sure that all sharp objects like logs of fallen trees, damaged tables and chairs are properly kept.
4. Falling from the roof/step: This type of accident is also called a “trip and fall accident”. It occurs when a student trips and falls on the staircase of the school or near it. In this type of accident, a student can also climb the roof to get an item he or she throw up and it gets stuck on the roof and falls and gets injured badly.

School playgrounds are supplied with equipment that is designed for children. They are made very carefully and are very age-appropriate to prevent any injuries. However, if a teacher isn't there to supervise, children may not use this equipment for its designed purpose. Many accidents occur from the improper use of playground equipment, resulting in major injuries. For example, some children may climb up slides or slide down with their heads facing downward. They may not even wait for other children to get off the slide safely before sliding down. Apart from the afore-mentioned common accidents that occur in schools, others do also happen. These ranges from during physical education lessons, through tripping or falling or slipping, transportation, bullying, food poisoning to playground equipment.

Physical Education in Primary School Curriculum

It is well known that physical education is an aspect of school curriculum, especially at the basic school level. However, some of the activities that take place, in particular those that involve physical exercise are not danger-free because accidents do happen during such sessions. For instance, there is always the competition to emerge victorious by one team over the other when two teams slug it out in a football match hence, some players do end up getting minor or even major injuries in their quest to achieve that objective. Hardly do other games involving the use of heavy balls such as volleyball, basketball or other sports like high jump, long jump and running end without recording some accidents such as sprains, a pulled muscle, dislocation of a joint or even breaking of limb and in some cases, an injury leading to bleeding.

According to Mcgee (2018), wearing inappropriate clothing during physical education exercises can lead to injury. Players should wear sneakers or other comfortable shoes with

rubber soles for most activities while dangerous equipment should be stored away when not in use.

Tripping, Falling and Slipping

Children can slip or fall in school when the floor is wet, especially if the water is soapy. They can also fall or slip when ascending or descending the stairs, which may even result to more severe accident such as nail or tooth/teeth breakage or loss, back or neck or head or even brain injury, to mention just a few. To Parker Law Firm (2022), water and debris in bathrooms, slippery floors from cleaning, book bags and other items strewn on classroom floors and food as well as drink spills in the cafeteria are a few of the causes of slip and fall accidents at schools. Children can suffer broken bones, spinal injuries, traumatic brain injury, and other serious injuries if they injure themselves in a fall.

According to Lauren Marshall (2019), keeping schools clean, tidy and well-maintained is an endless task. Such maintenance can involve wet, slippery surfaces due to cleaning or polishing and uneven surfaces due to running repairs- this can often lead to slips and trips. As such, it is part of the school's duty of care to provide warnings about any potential dangers from surfaces and the supervision of younger children.

Transportation of Pupils to Primary School

Pupils/students should be monitored when using the school bus or their parents' means of transportation while being taken to school or returning home, especially if their number exceeds one. Whoever is transporting them should ensure that each child get seated on a seat, none of them has his hand by the door handle and nobody should open or get down of the bus/car until has been asked to do so. Island Now (2020), stated that if there is no proper supervision, school bus accidents can be very frequent; if children are horsing around on the bus, they can fall or trip. Some buses also lack seat belts, resulting in injuries if the driver suddenly hits the brakes. And there are also too many instances where the children refuse to put on their seatbelts or take them off later on. During hot weather, some children faint or suffer from heat strokes if the bus is not well ventilated and does not have air conditioning. Although school bus injuries are off-school campuses, they are still the school's responsibility.

Parker Law Firm (2022), pointed out that negligent bus drivers can cause a tragic accident that can result in injuries to students in the bus or when they are pedestrians. Driver negligence, lack of training by the school district or bus maintenance issues are some of the causes of school bus accidents. Many school buses do not have seat belts, which can make the injuries that children suffer even worse. In addition, accidents can happen when children are horsing around on the bus without proper supervision from bus staff.

Another means of transportation through which accidents can occur is the use of bikes by pupils/students in the school zones especially during rush hour traffic congestion. If there is no proper traffic regulation near the school, accidents can occur due to reckless drivers or students who lack pedestrian behavior knowledge. It is also possible that children may fall off their bikes or the bike may malfunction. In addition, passing cars are not necessarily always alert to these accidental mishaps, particularly if they are traveling at high speed. As school routes are not always safe and children not always very familiar with them, teaching and non-teaching staff have a duty to do everything reasonable to protect students from accidents that could lead to severe injuries or death.

Bullying of Pupils in Primary School

Bullying, which is the act of abusing or mistreating someone by another person who is stronger, can often result in serious accident leading to different types of injuries. Such injuries can be bodily noticeable or psychologically harmful to the bullied person. Teachers should, therefore, monitor and supervise pupils/students more particularly the younger ones both inside and outside the classroom. However, some children tend to become bullies when angry and they lose control resulting in beating and abusing the vulnerable ones. Moreover, these bullies do not bother to think on the consequences of their action to their victims, which in many instances results into serious injuries.

According to Wikipedia (2022), school bullying, like bullying outside the school context, refers to one or more perpetrators who repeatedly act aggressively towards their victim. Bullying can be verbal or physical. The different types of school bullying include ongoing physical, emotional, and/or verbal aggression. Parker Law Firm (2022), stated that both bullying and fighting are common at school, and a school cannot be held responsible for every conflict. However, a school can be found negligent if it fails to properly supervise students at the time of the incident, knowing that the aggressor is a trouble maker and takes no action or know that a fight or other dangerous situation is likely.

Food Poisoning

Another type of accident that occurs in schools but which is mostly preventable is food poisoning. Teachers, and especially caregivers, should therefore, make it always a duty to check and ensure that children's food and drinks are not spoiled or contaminated before allowing them to eat or drink such provisions. Children should not be allowed to eat any contaminated, expired or provisions that have become exposed or in contact with flies in order to protect them from food poisoning. Similarly, they should always be asked to wash their hands before and after eating so that it becomes part of their eating habits so as to minimize incidences of food poisoning.

Parker Law Firm (2022), stated that when cafeteria workers do not properly prepare and store food or an outside vendor provides tainted food, children can become seriously ill from food poisoning when they eat breakfast, lunch or other food provided by the school. According to NHS Inform (2022), food poisoning is an illness caused by eating contaminated food. It is not usually serious and most people get better within a few days without treatment.

The signs and symptoms of food poisoning includes:

- i. Feeling nauseous
- ii. Vomiting
- iii. Diarrhea, which may contain blood or mucus
- iv. Stomach cramps and abdominal pain
- v. Lack of energy and weakness
- vi. Loss of appetite
- vii. High temperature (fever)
- viii. Aching muscles
- ix. Chills

Playground Equipment Accidents

Accidents do occur also in the playground through the equipment installed therein. As such, it is important to ensure that play equipment is properly arranged to facilitate free and easier movement by the children. Similarly, it is imperative that children are always supervised whenever they are in the playground notwithstanding their number or age. According to Compensation Experts (2021), school have a responsibility to make sure that playgrounds are safe for children. Climbing equipment should not be too high, and the ground underneath the climbing equipment must be soft enough to stop a child being badly injured. Maintenance and checks must also happen regularly on any equipment that children use. This is to ensure that children are not injured on broken equipment.

Why Accidents Occur in a School

Accidents do usually or frequently occur in schools, especially at the basic school level where majority of the learners are very young in terms of age. Due to their young age, such learners do not normally know what is right or wrong neither good or bad let alone what may easily harm or injure them. They just like what they want, particularly during play time without considering the likely consequences of their actions. According to Island Now (2020), accidents are very likely to occur at school because children are always running and playing around. They usually will not have developed a sense of things that may be potentially dangerous to them; this will lead them to get into all sorts of accidents most of the time. Some

children, though, are more protective of themselves than the others. They may not want to participate in games that other children are playing because they recognize they may cause them harm. However, this does not guarantee that they will stay out of trouble because other children may pick on them for choosing to stay safe.

To Parker Law Firm (2021), personal injury accident can be more tragic when it involves children, especially if they suffer catastrophic injuries or death. It can be particularly concerning when the accident occurs at a child's school where parents entrust their children daily to the care of teachers and other school staff. If a child is injured in an accident caused by the negligence of a school, his injuries could affect him for the rest of his life. As a parent, one can pursue a claim for compensation against the negligent school, but it is very difficult to win a case.

Preventive Measures for Accident Occurrence

Accidents are preventable through taking certain measures, which among others include:

- a. Floor tiling should not be the slippery type both inside and outside the classroom
- b. Soapy water should not be used when moping the floor
- c. Pupils should wear sandal or canvas shoes and not slipper while coming to school
- d. Stairs in school should not be slippery, steep and protected by side railing
- e. Electric switches should be fixed at places that are not easily accessible to the reach of children
- f. Injurious objects should be removed and kept in safer places
- g. Broken seats and or damaged facilities should be kept out of the reach of children
- h. Keeping the playground neat by removing all wanted materials
- i. Swings and other playing materials should always be checked and where damaged, should be repaired
- j. Burning of waste or rubbish should always be after school closure and should be carried out far from the classrooms or playground
- k. Stopping children from running inside the classroom, in between objects, and jumping over high fence or things
- l. Stopping children from playing with doors (shutting and closing them)
- m. Filling all holes around the classrooms and the school compound as a whole
- n. Checking children's food and drinks to ensure that they are not contaminated in one way or another
- o. Monitoring children when they are boarding a bus, car or any means of transportation
- p. Teachers and caregivers should always be vigilant and monitor the movement of children known to be bullies

Treatment of Accidents in Schools

Only minor injuries as a result of accidents should be treated in school by administering first aid treatment on the injured child. However, if the injury sustained is major, the child's parents should be called or notified before referring the victim to a hospital. It is also important to stress that first aid can be given to a victim even when the injury is major before taking him to the hospital. According to Classnotes.ng (2020), the steps to take when accidents occur in the school are:

1. Report accidents to parents/elderly person/teacher
2. Give first aid care
3. Take victim to a nearby hospital or clinic
4. Remove what caused the accident

Conclusion

Though accidents are unavoidable in schools, yet it is imperative to put measures in place to prevent or at least minimize them. Children are usually prone to accidents particularly while playing but they sometimes happen due to negligence. To avoid occurrence of accidents, schools are supposed to be safe by putting out of sight any harmful thing in the environment to prevent both staff and children from having accidents. Monitoring and supervision must always be the practice by involving both the teaching and non-teaching staff in discharging such duties.

Suggestions

Based on the aforementioned the following suggestions were made:

1. Teaching and non-teaching staff should supervise and monitor children, especially during play periods.
2. Children should not be allowed to come to school with harmful objects such as razor blade, needle, nail or any other sharp object.
3. Seats arrangement in classrooms should be properly done to allow free movement for both the teacher and the children.
4. Ensuring classroom and environmental neatness through mopping spilled water or oily substance and proper disposal of broken and other harmful objects.
5. Ensuring that broken doors, windows, play equipment and glasses (where provided) are repaired or replaced without delay while broken furniture are put in safer place pending their repair.
6. Orientation should be given to new intakes on how to use the toilet, play equipment, stairs etc.

References

ClassNotes.ng (2020). Accidents in The School. Retrieved 27th January, 2023 from <https://classnotes.ng> > new-lesson-137

Get Insurance Today (2022). The 4 types of School Accident in Nigeria. Retrieve 31st January, 2023 from <https://www.getinsurance.ng/types-of-school-accidents/>

Island Now (2020). Common Causes of Accidents in Schools. Retrieved 1st March. 2022, from <https://theislandnow.com/blog-112/common-causes-of-accidents-in-schools>

Marshall L. (2019). Common causes of accidents in the school playground
27th Jun 2019 <https://watermans.co.uk/examining-school-accidents-the-most-common-causes/>

MCGEE K. (2018). Common Accidents in School. Retrieved 1st March, 2022 from <https://classroom.synonym.com/common-accidents-school-6683696.html>

National Policy on Education (2016) and 4-Year Strategic Plan For The Development of The Sector:2011-2013 of Rukayyatu Ahmad Rufa'i, GON Honorable Minister Printed by NERDC Press Yaba Lagos – Nigeria.

NHS inform (2022). Food Poisoning. Retrieved 4th January, 2023 from <https://www.nhsinform.scot> > food-...

Parker Law Firm (2022). School Accidents Can Cause Children to Suffer Injuries or Death. Retrieved 1st March 1, 2022 from <https://www.parkerlawfirm.com/library/school-accidents-can-cause-children-to-suffer-injuries-or-death/>

Quora (2022). What is Accident? Retrieved 8th February, 2023 from <https://www.quora.com> > what-is-ac...

The Compensation Experts (2021). The Most Common Accidents In Schools. Retrieved 29th January, 2023 from <https://the-compensation-expert.co.uk/news/the-most-common-accidents-in-schools/>

Wikipedia (2022). School Bullying. Retrieve 4th January, 2023 from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> > wiki

Wikipedia (2020). School. Retrieved 13th March. 2022 from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Wikipedia (2022). Primary School. Retrieved 29th January, 2023 from <https://en.wikipedia.org> > wiki

Wikipedia (2022). Accident. Retrieved 8th February, 2023 from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> > wiki

Wiktionary (2022). Wiktionary. Retrieved 8th February, 2023 from <https://en.m.wiktionary.org> > wiki