

## PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE

BY

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### Abstract

*This research study investigated parents' understanding of the right of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The design of the research was a descriptive research design. The population for this research comprised all the parents in Jos North Local Government Area. The sample of the research consisted of a total of fifty (50) parent drawn through convenience sampling technique. A self-constructed questionnaire titled; "Parents' Understanding of the Right of the Child Questionnaire (PUIRCQ)" was used to collect data from the respondents. The validity of the instrument was ascertained through experts' validation. Also, the reliability coefficient for the Parents' Understanding of the Right of the Child Questionnaire (PUIRCQ) was determined to be 0.83. All the research questions raised were answered using mean score. From the analysis of data collected, it was discovered that parents in Jos North LGA have a good understanding of the rights of the child as however, the major issue lies with implementation of the rights. The rights of the child have not been maximally implemented and enforced in Jos North LGA. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that there is need to engage all effort and resources necessary for the effective adoption and implementation of the rights and principles enshrined in the Child Right Act 2003 in Jos North, Plateau State.*

**Keywords:** *Parents, Understanding, Rights, Child, Education*

### Introduction

Human right is of great value to human dignity. However, a fundamental challenge in child advocacy is determining the best way to implement and enforce child's right for the maximum protection of children in Nigeria. The notion of human rights embodied in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, religion, language, sex, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status (United Nations, 1948). For a better understanding of child's right, we need to first understand who the child is. A child according to the Nigerian Labour Act (2015) is a young person under the age of twelve years and a young person as one under the age of fourteen years. The Children and Young Person's Act (2000), defined a child as a person under the age of fourteen years and a young person to mean a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1995) defined a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years. According to Section 277 of the Act, a child is a person below the age of eighteen years (Murray, 2018).

The roots of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child can be traced backed to 1923 when the founder of Save the Children – Eglantyne Jebb summarized the rights of children in five (5) parts. Her Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 and the five points subsequently became known as the Declaration of Geneva. Following the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations concentrated on producing the Universal declaration of Human Rights which was adopted in 1948. This Declaration though including the Rights of Children was felt by many to be insufficient and the needs of children justified an additional separate document. In November, 1959, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Declaration of the Rights of the child. This consisted of ten (10) Principles and incorporated the guiding principles of working in the best interest of the child. The 1959 declaration however, was only a statement of general principles and intent and was not legally binding. In 1978, during the preparation for the international year of the child, Poland proposed that the event be marked by a treaty giving Children Rights the force of law.

In 1979, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on request by the General Assembly of the United Nations set up a working group to draft a Convention (Gasiokwu, 2018).

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20th November, 1989, exactly thirty years after the 1959 Declaration. The Convention was signed by sixty one (61) countries on 26th January, 1990. On 2nd September, 1990 after the ratification of twenty countries had been obtained, the Convention entered into force as International Law. The Convention is the most universally accepted Human Rights Instrument in history. In the same year (1990), during the Heads of State Summit of Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, a Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted. This Charter looks at the Rights of the Child from the African perspective. In Nigeria, in 1943, the British Colonial government passed the Children and Young Persons Act which was a Law to protect children, but related primarily to juvenile justice. This Law was later revised and incorporated into Nigeria's Federal Law in 1958. The legal provision of this Law fell short of the rights of the Convention on Child Rights and African Charters on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), thus Nigeria signed the UNCRC and ACRWC in 1991 and 2001 respectively. In 1993, the first Bill of the Child Right Act was opposed by many, but finally adopted into Law in 2003 by the National Assembly (Dawood, 2014).

Furthermore, public international law recognizes children's right to education as a fundamental human right which guarantees the full enjoyment of all other rights as contained in international legal instruments. In fact under international law every individual, irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religious or political preference, age or disability is entitled to a free elementary education. This right was explicitly enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 which stated thus, "everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages, Elementary education shall be compulsory. This instrument recognized the critical importance of education especially at the rudimentary and foundational stages of human life. It is believed that the UNDR actually set the pace for the development and the recognition of the right to education under International law (Araoye, 2013). Nigeria made a breakthrough in 2003, when the Child Rights Act was enacted into law by the National Assembly. However, since Nigeria operates a Federal system of government where the states are autonomous and equal, with each state operating its own legislative system many states are yet to enact state legislations on child rights. In these states the Act has not been given its due recognition which has made its enforcement far from being functional (. Individual States are meant to adopt and adapt the Child Rights Act. Most States of the Federation like Abia, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa, Kwara, Lagos, Nassarawa, Ogun, Ondo, Rivers, Taraba, have adopted the Child Right Act. In the process of adapting, some states have changed the definition of "a child". In some States, a child, is a young person under the age of thirteen years. In other States like Akwa Ibom State, he/she is a young person under the age of sixteen years (Bevan, 2019).

UNICEF (2013) posits that the aim of giving acknowledgement to children's rights is to prevent them from harm and to actively safeguard the best interests of children. However, children all over the world experience numerous challenges that hampered their survival and thriving, which was the underlying reason why the United Nations took a giant stride in articulating the rights of children. On the 20th November 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by 189 heads of countries in Jomtien, Thailand (Akande, 2018). The Organization of African Union (OAU) Assembly of Heads of States and Governments came up with the African Union Charter of the document known as, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In 1991 and 2000 respectively, Nigeria adopted the two documents making them binding and legal documents for implementation in the country. The universal standards and principles in the documents are survival, development, protection and children participation in issues that have to do with their development. The broader implication of these documents is that children are human beings and have their own rights which must be granted to them by virtue and they must be protected by rule of law (Ayua & Okagbue, 2016).

Listing through the contents of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), OAU Charter and Child's Rights Act 2003 (CRA), found is little difference, which is to indicate that at the global, regional and national level, the child is highly esteemed and whatever is in the best interests of the child shall remain paramount to all the spheres of the system. Therefore, the child, irrespective of its sex, ethnicity, religion or even disability should be given adequate protection and care to maintain its wellbeing, and must be accorded the right to survival and development and to a name and registration at birth as stipulated in all the documents. Pathetically, out of the thirty-six states in Nigeria at present, only 26 states have ratified, adopted or domesticated the Act. The remaining ten states have not, for the reasons best known to them, which is against the children's best interests. Even in the states that have domesticated the Act, implementation and enforcement of the content is still not encouraging (Edeh, 2017). According to Falae (2018), the evidence of different types of abuse of varying degrees, neglect and other forms of violence against children pervade the country. Lack of understanding or knowledge about the issue especially on the part of the parents has been militating against the implementation and enforcement of the Act (Falae, 2018).

If parents do not have the suitable knowledge of what is required of them in upholding and protecting the rights of children as stipulated in the Act, it might be difficult to prosecute anybody and implement the right of the child (Edeh, 2017). It is therefore, imperative to state that parents' understanding of the Child Act is imperative to successful protection of children's right in the society. According to Olumodeji (2008), the society should, out of necessity, give serious acknowledgement to the welfare of every child because once the needs of the child are met at the suitable time; it will influence all the aspects of their development and the general well-being of the society as a whole. Unfortunately, in many societies like Nigeria, children have often been neglected with their welfare being trampled upon. In the light of the foregoing, this study is therefore prompted to investigate parents' understanding of the rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

### **Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to investigate parents' understanding of the rights of the child in Jos North. The specific objectives of the study include:

- i. To investigate the parents' understanding of the education right of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.
- ii. To investigate parents' understanding of protection rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State
- iii. To investigate parents' understanding of the child's right to health services in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State

### **Research Questions**

For the purpose of this study, the following questions have been formulated;

1. What is the level of parents' understanding of the education rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?
2. What is the level of parents' understanding of protection rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?
3. What is the level of parents' understanding of the child's right to health services in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

### **Methodology**

The design of the research was the descriptive research design and it guided the researcher in investigating parents' understanding of the rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The population for this research consisted of all the parents in Jos North Local Government Area. The sample of this research consisted of a total of fifty (50) parents. Convenience sampling technique was adopted in the research. The researcher sampled the respondents based on availability and willingness. The parents who are available and willing to participate in the research were sampled for the study and presented with copies of the questionnaire to

respond to. A self-constructed questionnaire titled; “Parents’ Understanding of the Right of the Child (PUIRC)” was used to collect data from the respondents. The validity of the instrument was ascertained through experts’ validation. Also, the reliability coefficient for the Parents’ Understanding of the Right of the Child Questionnaire (PUIRCQ)” was determined to be 0.83. All the research questions raised were answered using mean score. The criteria mean was established against which score of each variable were judged. Only mean scores of items greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 were accepted as being significant.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** What is the level of parents’ understanding of the education right of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

**Table 1: Parents’ understanding of the education right of the child in Jos North LGA**

s/n	Statement	SA	A	D	Rating		Decision
					SD	Mean score	
1	Children have a right to qualitative education	21	19	6	4	3.14	Agreed
2	My child/children are gainfully enrolled in school	31	14	2	3	3.46	Agreed
3	Children should be in school rather than hawking or working to support their families	30	10	4	6	3.28	Agreed
4	I do everything possible to provide qualitative education to my children	22	23	4	1	3.32	Agreed

The table above shows the responses of the respondents to research question one on level of parents’ understanding of the education right of the child in Jos North LGA. The statement on whether parents see children as having a right to qualitative education was rated with a mean score of 3.14 and was therefore agreed with. The following statement on whether parents enroll their children in school was rated with a mean score of 3.46 and was also agreed with. The next statement on whether parents agree that their children should be enrolled in school rather than hawking or working to support the family was rated with a mean score of 3.28 and was agreed with. The last statement on whether parents do everything possible to provide qualitative education to their children was rated with a mean score of 3.32 and was agreed with. From the analysis above, it could be deduced that parents have a good understanding of the child’s right to education in Jos North LGA.

**Research Question Two:** What is the level of parents’ understanding of protection rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

**Table 2: Parents’ understanding of protection rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State**

s/n	Statement	SA	A	D	Rating		Decision
					SD	Mean score	
1	Every child has a right to be protected from harm and danger	24	19	6	1	3.32	Agreed
2	I ensure that my child /children are protected from all harm and danger	24	26	-	-	3.48	Agreed
3	I understand that it is one of my responsibility as parents to shield my child/children from any action or actor that may harm them	25	22	2	-	3.40	Agreed

Table 2 shows the responses of the respondents to research question two on parents’ understanding of protection rights of the child in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The statement on whether parents have the understanding that every child has a right to be protected from harm and danger was rated with a mean score of 3.32 and was agreed with. The following statement on whether parents ensure that their child /children are protected from all harm and danger was rated with a mean score of 3.48 and was agreed with. The last statement

on whether parents understand that it is one of their responsibilities to shield the child/children from any action or actor that may harm them was rated with a mean score of 3.40 and was therefore agreed. From the analysis above, it could be deduced that parents in Jos North LGA have a good understanding of the protection right of the child.

**Research Question Three:** What is the level of parents’ understanding of the child’s right to health services in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

**Table 3: Parents’ understanding of the child’s right to health services in Jos North**

s/n	Statement	SA	A	D	Responses		Decision
					SD	Mean score	
1	Children have a right to quality health services	30	14	3	3	3.42	Agreed
2	It is the right of the children to be provided with immunizations and vaccinations against chronic illnesses	23	25	2	-	3.42	Agreed
3	It is the right of the children to access qualitative medical services to children when they are ill	27	23	-	-	3.54	Agreed

Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents to research question three on parents’ understanding of the child’s right to health services in Jos North. The statement on whether parents have the understanding that children have a right to quality health services was rated with a mean score of 3.42 and was agreed with. The next statement on whether parents have the understanding that it is the right of the child to be provided with immunizations and vaccinations against chronic illnesses was rated with a mean score of 3.42 and was agreed with. The last statement on whether parents have the understanding that it is the right of the children to access qualitative medical services to children when they are ill was rated with a mean score of 3.54 and was therefore agreed with. From the analysis above, it could be deduced that parents in Jos North Local Government Area have a good understanding of the right of the child to healthcare services.

**Discussion**

Research question one which sought to know the extent of parents’ understanding of the child right to education in Jos North LGA is analysed. From the analysis of data collected, it was discovered that parents have a good understanding of the child’s right to education in Jos North LGA. This finding however, contradicted the findings of Akande (2016) who discovered that a good number of school-age children are not enrolled in school.

The result of the analysis of research question two on parents’ understanding of the child right to protection is analysed. From the analysis of data collected, it was discovered that parents in Jos North LGA have a good understanding of the protection right of the child. This finding however, contradicts the findings of Araoye (2013) who discovered a high rate of child abuse in Nigeria.

Research question three on the extent of parents’ understanding of the child’s right to health services in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State is analysed. From the analysis of data collected, it was discovered that parents in Jos North Local Government Area have a good understanding of the right of the child to healthcare services. This is evident in the fact that they responded that they are aware that children have the right health services and they understand that it is the right of the children to be provided with immunizations and vaccinations against chronic illnesses as well as accessing qualitative medical services to children when they are ill. This finding however contradicted the findings of Ajayi (2016) who discovered that most children in Nigeria do not have access to quality medical and health care services.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study of this study revealed that parents in Jos North LGA have a good understanding of the rights of the child as stipulated in the Child Right Act of 2003. However, the major issue lies with implementation of the rights. The rights of the child have not been maximally implemented and enforced in Jos North LGA. Therefore, it is concluded in this study that there is need for more enlightenment and enforcement of the rights of the child in the study area.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made;

1. There is need to provide the necessary information for proper understanding of the issues of the Rights of the Child.
2. There is need to engage all effort and resources necessary for the effective adoption and implementation of the rights and principles enshrined in the Child Right Act 2003 in Niger State.
3. Incidence of child abuse and neglect should be checked by the government and concerned NGOs at the family and societal level.

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