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Secondary School Students' Perception of Physics Classroom Learning Environment in the Context of Insecurity Challenges in Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The consequence of insecurity on the disruption of schooling in Gusau, Zamfara State has been far-reaching, having the tendency to negatively influence their classroom learning environment. The aim of this study therefore seeks to investigate the secondary school students' perception of physics classroom learning environment in Gusau, Zamfara State. The study was guided by three (3) research questions. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population comprised 5,809 senior secondary students II out of which 134 students taken physics constituted the sample. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample schools while proportionate stratified random sampling was employed to select the sampled students. Questionnaire on Classroom Learning Environment was used to collect data from the sample. The instrument QCLE was validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State. Research questions were answered using frequency and percentage. It was reported that secondary school students' perception of physics classroom learning environment in Gusau, Zamfara State, were negative. Teachers-student relations in physics classroom learning environment was discouraging. The disciplinary climate created in secondary schools do not support physics classroom learning environment. Lastly, teachers did not stimulate secondary school students' engagement in studying physics. The implication is that, physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau should be improved on to support the needed transformation in 21st century. Also, Zamfara State government should encourage its citizen toward embracing formal education as well as contending insecurity challenges in the region.

Keywords: Classroom Learning Environment, Secondary School Students, Insecurity Challenges

Introduction

Secondary school education is the form of education children receive after primary education and before tertiary education. It is an intermediate education given to every Nigerian child with the aim of preparing them for a responsive living within the society and the world at large. Secondary school education offers different curriculum to meet the societal needs, opportunities and future roles to be played by individual after their secondary education. This curriculum therefore, help to inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence. To achieve the goal of secondary school curriculum, especially toward inspiring students at the senior secondary education level, the fields of studies in Nigeria were divided into four, namely: science and mathematics, technology, humanities and business studies (FRN, 2014), and each of this field of studies have different respective subjects. Physics is one subject (out of the eight available subjects) to be taken by secondary school students under Science and Mathematics. It occupies a unique position among various science subjects offered at the senior secondary school level; and a fundamental requirement



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for most core science-based courses (Ogundeji, 2025). With the sole aim of: providing basic literacy in physics for functional living in the society; acquire basic concepts and principles of physics as preparation for further studies; acquire essential skills and attitude as a preparation for technological application of physics; and stimulate and enhance creativity (FRN, 2014). Hence, the training of science students to acquire proper understanding of basic principles of physics as well as its applications becomes the aim of physics classrooms in the secondary schools. In an attempt to achieve these objectives, teaching methods, strategies, techniques adopted or employed by the physics teacher should facilitate classroom interaction among students. Also, physics teachers' classroom instructions ought to be backed up with appropriate demonstration, discouraging rote learning, updating teaching skills to embrace modern methodology and ensuring effective coverage of the syllabus (Chief Examiner Report for West Africa Examination Council, 2021). Qualified physics graduate should be recruited by government and equip school laboratories with apparatus for effective learning. Likewise, students should be more dedicated to their studies, and be exposed to more class work and assignment (Chief Examiner Report for West Africa Examination Council, 2022). Obviously, the suggestion by the chief examiners stated above centres on the quality of the classroom learning environment. Findings of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010) revealed that students perform better in orderly classrooms and with the support of engaged teachers. A classroom is an integral part of a school, where students' learning abilities are enhanced when effectively engaged. Consequently, classroom learning environments in the 21st century is envisioned as places where the learner is engaged in self-directed and co-operative learning activities, with its physical environment planned so that it can be routinely re-organised to mediate learning (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, in OECD, 2010).

The physics classroom learning environment in this context is composed of the physics learner, other students taking physics, the physics teachers and the physical environment. The interaction between the learner and the environment, in accordance to educational practice theory, affirms that the environment shapes the learner and the learners influence their environment. Obviously, in an innovative and sustainable classroom learning environments, learners are transformed and shaped by their transactions with others and their physical settings (OECD, 2016). Thus, the classroom learning environment in different schools can be related to the performance of the students. However, the indicators for measuring classroom learning environment as stated in OECD (2016) are six (6). However, only three (3) that borders on teachers and students in classroom will be mentioned in this study, namely: the teacher-student relations and behaviour, the disciplinary climates, and how teachers stimulate students' engagement in studying. Positive teacher-student relations are crucial in establishing an environment that is conducive to learning. Teacher-student relationships form the basis of the social context in which learning takes place (Furrer et al., 2019). Teacher-student relationship influences academic achievements, coping strategies, and social-emotional abilities through different mediating variables (Xiao, 2025). Supportive and positive relationships between teacher and students ultimately promote a sense of school belonging and encourage students to participate cooperatively in classroom activities (Hughes & Chen, 2022). The impact of positive teacher-student relationships on student outcomes remains stable across different stages of education; and when students view their teachers as caring and supportive, they tend to develop strong self-efficacy beliefs (Dangan, 2025). Conflicting relationships with teachers cause feelings of distress and insecurity in students, thereby restricting their ability to concentrate on learning (Hughes et al., 2022). Meaning that, Good teacher-students' interaction will create positive relationship in the classroom and promote effective learning.



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The disciplinary climate is another component of classroom learning environment. It refers to the overall order, respect, and behavior management within the classroom. This requires first and foremost, keeping noise and disorder at bay and making sure that students can listen to what the teacher says and can concentrate on academic task (OECD, 2016). It directly affects how much effective learning time students have and how well teachers can deliver instruction. Research consistently shows that a positive disciplinary climate can significantly enhance students' academic achievement, even under differences in student backgrounds (Simon & David, 2020). They further noted that, maintaining an orderly classroom is a common trait of teachers who are particularly effective at improving student performance (Simon & David, 2020). To this end, OECD (2016) reported that meaningful and visible learning is more likely to happen in disciplinary climate learning environments. Teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in studying is another component of classroom learning environment. Students who are substantively engaged, that is, who are interested in what is being taught, learn much more than students who are only procedurally engaged, that is, who follow the rules and do assignments as required, or who have no interest in what is being taught. In OECD (2016), there is a positive and strong relationship between students' level of engagement with studying and how well they learn. Also, more interaction between teachers and students in the classroom is seen to promote substantive engagement. This occurs when teachers ask questions that require more than a simple recitation of received knowledge, and when teachers incorporate previous answers into subsequent questions and/or further discussion (OECD 2016). Also, when teachers foster supportive and caring classroom environments, students tend to develop stronger intrinsic motivation and perform better academically. The closer and more meaningful the connections students form with their teachers, the more likely learners stay motivated and achieve higher grades (Dangan, 2025). Hence, teachers' stimulation of students' engagement seems to promote students' enthusiasm to study in classrooms. Meanwhile, there are a couple of challenges that can hinder effective classroom learning environment. Mensah and Koomson (2020) mentioned administrative restrictions, teachers' attitude, and students' behaviour; and by extension, insecurity challenges as emphasized in this study. Insecurity challenges can cause trauma among students, leading to fear, anxiety, depression and difficulty concentrating in class (Sanchi et al., 2022). Depression being an emotional state is usually accompanied with poor self-worth, self-concept, self-efficacy, low self-worth and a state of dissatisfaction with self, environment and others (Amaeze, 2017). The consequence of insecurity in Gusau has been far-reaching, extending beyond the immediate disruption of schooling to encompass profound socio-economic implications.

Gusau is the capital of Zamfara State, one out of the six states in Northwest region of Nigeria; historically known to be cautious in embracing formal education but witnessed a positive shift with increased efforts from government and private investors to promote learning opportunities (Kanu et al., 2024). In recent times, this promising trajectory has been abruptly halted by the pervasive menace of banditry and kidnapping (Akpa-Achimugu & Ibeh, 2023). The escalating incidence of banditry, as evidenced by widespread kidnapping of students across all levels of education, has severely disrupted teaching and learning in the North-West region especially Zamfara State, instilling fear among students (Tanimu, 2023). The situation as led to frequent school closures, attacks on educational facilities, disruptions to the academic calendar and displacement of students and teachers, and significant learning gaps, making it difficult for students not to cover the full curriculum (Ogunode et al., 2022). Also, the shortage of qualified teachers has had a cascading effect on the quality of education and student learning outcomes, with overcrowded classrooms, poor quality of instruction and the learning environment, inability to provide individualized attention, loss



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of instructional time for students, and lack of specialized subject-matter experts contributing to a decline in the overall standard of education in affected areas (Kanu et al., 2024). Consequently, this constant attack and threat of attacks might have created a hostile classroom learning environment which may inhibit students' ability to learn effectively. It will be interesting therefore to find out how secondary school students perceive their physics classroom learning environment, in Gusau, Zamfara State, especially within the context of insecurity challenges; Since, no study within the reach of the researchers have reported the nature of physics classroom learning environment within this area of study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to find out the secondary school students' perception of physics classroom learning environment in Gusau, Zamfara State. Specifically, the study sought to find out the perception of students' regarding:

1. Teacher-student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau
2. Disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau
3. Teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the perception of students' regarding teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?
2. What is the perception of students' regarding disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?
3. What is the perception of students' regarding teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?

Methodology

The research design for this study is descriptive survey design. It is the type of research design which aimed at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). This study was conducted in public secondary schools in Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State. The population of the study comprised 5,809 science students of the 2022/2023 session in 27 public senior secondary schools in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State (Zamfara State Ministry of Education, 2023). The sample size for this study was 134 physics students drawn from the total population. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 5 senior secondary schools used for the study. Reason being that the researchers were interested in public secondary schools of good reputation within the metropolis. However, the selection of the physics students for the study was done using proportionate stratified random sampling techniques. Reason been that the schools selected for the study were in different strata. The research instrument used for the study was questionnaire, titled: Questionnaire on Classroom Learning Environment (QCLE). This instrument was made up of two sections. Section A of the instrument contains students' demographic information such as: the name of school, their class and gender and section B has three cluster A- C which contains 10, 5, 6, items respectively to make a total of 21 items. QCLE was design on four-point scale with options strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The instrument was subjected to face validity by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State. Prior to conducting the study, the researchers contacted the sampled schools and approvals were granted by heads of



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the schools. The researchers then visited the sampled schools on different days to distribute the instruments to science students taking physics in SS3. The questionnaires were administered under exam-like condition. The method of delivery employed was direct delivery method. The researchers then finally score and record the retrieved instruments. The research questions were answered using frequencies and percentages.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the perception of students' regarding teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentage of students' regarding their perception of teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau

S/N	Item Statements	Students View (n= 134)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Teachers help students to develop competence skills in physics	2(2)	16(12)	48(36)	44(51)
2	Physics Teachers have good communication skills	24(18)	14(10)	44(33)	52(39)
3	Teachers use real-life examples when teaching Physics concepts	22(16)	14(10)	56(41)	42(31)
4	Physics teachers get along well with their students	6(5)	48(36)	68(51)	12(9)
5	Physics teachers help students to make accurate observations during practical work	4(3)	0(0)	74(55)	56(42)
6	Physics teachers are interested in the well-being of their students	8(6)	22(16)	56(42)	48(36)
7	Physics teachers do listen to their students if they have any challenge	0(0)	36(27)	98(73)	0(0)
8	Students receive extra helps from their physics teachers	0(0)	4(3)	78(58)	52(39)
9	Physics teachers do treat students fairly	8(6)	20(15)	54(40)	52(39)
10	Students do ask their physics teachers questions in areas they don't understand	12(9)	10(6)	84(63)	28(21)
Overall		10 (6.5)	19 (13.5)	66 (49.2)	39 (30.7)

Percentages are in bracket (); n is the number of respondents; Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents regarding their perception of teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. The overall frequencies and percentages of their views were 10(6.5), 19(13.5), 66(49.2) and 39(30.7). From the highest frequencies and percentage of the responses of the respondents (66, 49.2%), it implies that students' Disagreed (D) to the above items regarding teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. Meaning that, teachers teaching physics in secondary schools in Gusau contribute little or nothing to students' development of competence skills in physics because they do not use real-life examples in teaching physics concepts nor help students to make accurate observations during practical work. It seems they are not interested in the well-being of their students because they do not treat students fairly. Finally, students do not border asking their physics teachers questions on areas they don't understand, because they will not receive extra helps from their physics teachers.

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Research Question 2: What is the perception of students' regarding disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentage of students' regarding their perception of disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau

S/N	Item Statements	Students view (n =134)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Physics students don't listen to what their teacher says	2(2)	66(49)	66(49)	0(0)
2	There is often noise and disorder in physics classes.	0(0)	74(55)	60(45)	0(0)
3	Physics teacher have to wait a long time to settle down.	0(0)	74(57)	58(43)	0(0)
4	Students are not comfortable in physics classes.	78(5)	56(42)	0(0)	0(0)
5	Most physics teachers are rude on their students during classes.	76(5)	56(42)	2(2)	0(0)
Overall		31 (23.4)	66 (52.2)	37 (27.8)	0 (0)

Percentages are in bracket (); n is the number of respondents; Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents regarding their perception of disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. The overall frequencies and percentages of their view were: 31(23.4), 66(52.2), 37(27.8) and 0(0). Meaning that, at the highest frequencies and percentage of the responses of respondents (66, 52.2%); physics students' Agreed (A) to the above items regarding their perception of disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. They were of the opinion that, physics students do not listen to what their teachers say. They prefer to make noise and cause disorder in physics classes, to the extent that teachers sometimes have to wait a long time for them to settle down. Also, most physics teachers are also rude to their students.

Research Question 3: What is the perception of students' regarding teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau?

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentage students' regarding their perception of teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau

S/N	Item Statements	Students View (n=134)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Physics teachers sometimes ask students to explain the meaning of a text	6(5)	54(40)	74(55)	0(0)
2	Physics teachers sometimes ask probing questions that challenge the understanding of the students	6(5)	46(34)	82(61)	0(0)
3	Physics teachers sometimes give students enough time to think about their answers.	12(9)	14(10)	108(81)	0(0)
4	Physics teachers sometimes recommend a book or another author to read.	18(13)	8(6)	108(81)	0(0)
5	Physics teachers encourage students to express their opinions about what they have learnt.	12(9)	22(16)	100(75)	0(0)



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6	Physics teachers help students to relate the concepts they have learnt to real-life situations.	14(10)	10(8)	110(82)	0(0)
Overall		11	26	97	0
		(8.5)	(19)	(72.5)	(0)

Percentages are in bracket (); n is the number of respondents; Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents regarding their perception of teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. The overall frequencies and percentages of their view were: 11(8.5%) showed strongly agree, 26(19%) showed agree, 97(72.5%) showed disagree. Meaning that, at the highest frequencies and percentage of the responses of respondents (97, 72.5%) Disagreed (D) to the above items regarding their perception of teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. They were of the opinion that, physics teachers in Gusau secondary school do not use to explain the meaning of what they teach very well, they don't ask challenging questions and not to talk of giving students time to think or express their opinion about what was learnt, and finally, they can't connect or help student to connect what they are teaching to real life situation.

Discussion of Findings

The study sought to find out secondary school students' perception of physics classroom learning environment in the context of insecurity challenges in Gusau, Zamfara State. The teacher-student relations and behaviour in the classroom, the disciplinary climates in the classroom, and how teachers stimulate students' engagement in classroom learning was used as indicators for measuring classroom learning environment in this study. Findings of the study revealed that students' Disagreed (D) at highest frequencies and percentage of 66 and 49.2% to the items regarding teacher - student relations in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. This indicated that, teachers teaching physics in secondary schools in Gusau do not get well along with their students. Also, they do not have good communication skills. They contribute little or nothing to students' development of competence skills in physics because they do not use real-life examples in teaching physics concepts nor help students to make accurate observations during practical work. Physics teachers do not listen to their students if they have any challenge. It seems they are not interested in the well-being of their students because they do not treat students fairly. Finally, students do not border asking their physics teachers questions on areas they don't understand, because they will not receive extra helps from their physics teachers. These findings were not in agreement with the findings of the recent studies (Hughes & Chen, 2022; Dangan, 2025) that supportive and positive relationships between teacher and students ultimately promote student outcomes like promoting sense of school belonging, encouraging students to participate cooperatively in classroom activities, developing strong self-efficacy beliefs, among others. Although, the findings of the review studies on teacher-students' relations were positive, that of the present study was negative. Negative teacher-students relationship of the physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau can be traced to the uniqueness of the area of the study like cautiousness in embracing formal education and insecurity challenges.

Also, findings of the study revealed that students' Agreed (A) at highest frequencies and percentage (66, 52.2%) to the items on the disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. This is an indication that, physics students do not listen to what their teachers say, they prefer to make noise and cause disorder in physics classes, to the extent that



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teachers sometimes have to wait a long time for them to settle down. These findings are in consonance with the findings of the study of OECD (2016) who reported the disciplinary climate in an innovative classroom as: keeping noise and disorder at bay and making sure that students can listen to what the teacher says and can concentrate on academic task. Meaning that, the disciplinary climate in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau are poor; and could promote poor academic performance. Since positive disciplinary climate can significantly enhance students' academic achievement, even under differences in student backgrounds (Simon et. al. 2022). The poor nature of disciplinary climate of the physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau could be as a result of situation of the area of the study, like its carefulness in embracing formal education and insecurity challenges. Finally, findings of the study revealed that students' Disagreed (D) at highest frequencies and percentage (97, 72.5%) to the items on the teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau. They viewed that, physics teachers in Gusau secondary school do not use to explain the meaning of what they teach very well, they don't ask challenging questions and not to talk of giving students time to think or express their opinion about what was learnt, and finally, they can't connect or help student to connect what they are teaching to real life situation. These findings were not in agreement with the findings of the recent studies (OECD, 2016; Dangan, 2025) who reported that more interaction between teachers and students in the classroom promoted substantive engagement, because many of the professional teachers' who can stimulate students' engagement in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools might have left Gusau as a result of insecurity challenges.

Conclusion

The researchers based on the findings of the study concluded that secondary school students' perception of physics classroom learning environment in Gusau, Zamfara State, were negative. Teacher-students relationship, Disciplinary climate, and Teachers' stimulation of students' engagement in studying were perceived poor. The reason for poor physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools in Gusau were traced to cautiousness in embracing formal education and insecurity challenges.

Recommendations

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

1. Security in the secondary schools in Gusau should be enhanced.
2. Gusau society should be serious with embracing formal education.
3. Zamfara State Government should encourage the migration of qualified teachers into the state through teachers' recruitment.
4. Physics teachers should encourage teacher-students relationship in physics classroom learning environment in secondary schools.
5. Teachers should create a good disciplinary climate that enhance learning in physics classroom.
6. Physics teachers should ensure the stimulation of students' engagement in studying physics.

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