



Analysis of Safety and Security Measures in Early Childhood Education and Care Centres in Benin City

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Abstract. The central role of safety and security measures in early childhood education and care cannot be underestimated, as it remains the pillar of support for the smooth operation of the school system. This study, therefore, analyses the safety and security measures employed in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City. A survey research design was adopted, and the sample comprised 101 teachers and school managers selected through multistage sampling from public and private ECEC centres in Benin City. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the research questions while the hypothesis was tested with an independent t-test. The finding revealed that most ECEC centres made reasonably adequate compliance in the provision of some safety and security measures however, had insufficient provision in some key measures. The study further revealed a significant difference in safety and security measures between private and public schools' ECEC centres in favour of the private schools. Moreover, challenges in implementing safety and security measures include inadequate safety equipment and limited funding. Sequel to the findings, the study recommends that the Nigerian government at various levels, including private school operators, should strengthen existing safety and security measures through the installation of modern gadgets such as video surveillance, centre access control, promoting fire safety practices and strengthening pupils monitoring and supervision, among others, in early childhood and care centres across the country.

1. Introduction

Early childhood education spans from birth to age eight and sets the stage for early learning by building on the period of rapid brain development (UNESCO, 2025). The recognition accorded to this level of education across the globe is not fortuitous; rather, it

is an offshoot of a series of concerted efforts by most stakeholders in the educational sector, which culminated in international consensus and declarations that prioritise the safety and protection of children (Fowowe et al., 2022). It has been asserted that one of the primary goals of early childhood education is the holistic development of children. However, this goal can only be attained when there is adequate provision of a child-friendly learning environment that guarantees learners' health and safety. It is on this notion that the United Nations, in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, maintained that children are entitled to special care and assistance (United Nations, 1989). This assertion implies that the children's well-being should be the top priority. Consequently, early childhood education and care providers owe it as a point of duty to humanly, statutorily, ethically, and morally ensure the protection and safeguarding of children in their facility, without which effective learning can hardly take place.

In the context of early childhood education and care, safety and security measures are paramount based on the recognition of the vulnerability of early learners to exploitation by some unscrupulous elements, including some practitioners and operators (Monteserrat, 2004), as well as other persons within and outside the school environment who may pose a threat to the health and safety of learners. This view was evident in a study that identified child safety as a core determinant of parental preference in selecting early childhood care providers for their children (Appiah-Kubi, 2022). This whim is based on the acknowledgement that children spend substantial waking hours in a school environment; hence, it is expected that the environment be kept safe and free of any materials, objects, or conditions that endanger learners' health, including other individuals within the school community.

Safety and security are two terms often used interchangeably. However, there is a clear distinction between the concepts. Safety is associated with protection from unintended harm or danger, such as falls and fire, while security is more concerned with protection from intentional or malevolent acts, such as theft, kidnapping, and vandalism (Elmor, 2023; Ghazi, 2015). Recognising the state of safety and security in schools in recent times, UNICEF Nigeria alerted the country's authorities to ensure the implementation of a minimum standard safe school system with emphasis on vulnerable parts of the country (UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, safety and security measures in the school community target safeguarding young learners from harm: physical dangers, health risks, unauthorised entry, and emotional harm, through well-defined school protocols and security apparatus (Avigilon, n.d.). Noting that children, whether at home or in schools, are exposed to hazards that may require emergency response. However, the level of implementation of safety and security measures may differ depending on the school's ownership structure. In Nigeria, early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres is provided by government and non-state actors (such as private investors, faith-based organisations, and non-governmental organisations). While nearly all private early childhood centres are established for profit-making, government-owned centres remain free and operated within the primary schools settings. These operational practices may have implications for the quality of safety and security practices. Besides, private pre-school providers are foremost in the business, unlike the government, which entered the early childhood school system late; consequently, observations have been made of the state of some government pre-schools, featuring dilapidated buildings that pose a threat to teachers and their pupils (Okenyi, 2024). Hence, some surveys, such as those by Dike and Otu (2024) highlighted variations in compliance with safety and protection provisions between private and public pre-schools in Anambra State. From the aforementioned study, it was clear that most private ECEC schools lacked sufficient, safe, secure play space for early learners, fenced facilities, standardised first-aid kits, and antiseptics. Conversely, the public schools had sufficient fenced toilet facilities and first-aid kits but lacked a safe and secure environment, although the difference was not significant. Meanwhile, similar study in Lagos found that publicly owned pre-schools lacked safety and security measures, such as surveillance cameras around the premises and classrooms, gate passes, and identification systems, compared to privately owned schools, which have more of these measures (Nwabiankea & Idadi, 2024).

However, a recent survey in Enugu found that public pre-schools met 28 of 36 safety practices, compared to 24 for private pre-schools (Okechukwu, 2025), suggesting that some state governments might have been attempting to bridge the gap.

While a recent study showed improvement in the adequacy of safety tactics such as disaster prevention, playground, and cyber safety, unfortunately, most centres did not comply with the provision of short-circuit camera (CCTV), security guards, and fire safety management in early childhood schools in southwestern Nigeria (Nwhator & Adebayo, 2025). Remarkably, these safety and security measures challenges are not peculiar to Nigeria. For instance, Mwoma (2018) noted that, despite the promotion of guidelines and minimum standards, many informal pre-schools in Kenya continue to suffer from insufficient infrastructure, inadequate space and play equipment, overcrowded classrooms, and unfenced school compounds. This anomaly across developing nations is often ascribed to governments' failure to reinstate safety management in public schools, such as continuous training of the early childhood workforce, maintenance of facilities, sufficient funding for ECEC, and skilfully trained security staff (Igbinedion & Nworgu, 2016). This problem, if left unresolved, may put the health and well-being of young learners at risk, thus defeating the purpose of early childhood education and care. Disappointingly, there is sparse research evidence on safety and security measures in early childhood and care centres in Nigeria, particularly in Benin City; hence, the expediency of the current study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The spate of insecurity and safety challenges in Nigeria in contemporary times is rapidly becoming endemic across the nation, putting schools and other facilities housing particularly children on high alert. The implication of this situation is the need for concerned authorities, both government and non-state actors involved in early childhood education and care, to strengthen safety and security measures towards enhancing the well-being and protection of the children under their watch. Unfortunately, despite the obvious threats, such as kidnapping of children for ransom and rituals, there seems to be limited commitment towards the execution of this task of providing a safe and secure learning environment for the children. There have been speculations that some providers, including state-owned schools, tend to lag in implementing minimum safety standards, particularly in early childhood care centres. While there have been growing research efforts on safety in

some parts of the country, there appears to be little empirical evidence on safety and security measures in ECEC centres in Benin City, Nigeria. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap in the literature by analysing the safety and security measures employed by ECCEC centres in Benin City.

1.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What safety and security measures are implemented in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City?
- What differences exist in the implementation of safety and security measures between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City?
- What are the key barriers to the effective implementation of safety and security measures?

1.3 Hypothesis

Ho1: The implementation of safety and security measures do not significantly differ between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyse the safety and security measures in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City. The specific objectives are:

- To ascertain the safety and security measures implemented in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City.
- To find out if the implementation of safety and security measures significantly differ between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City.
- To determine the key barriers to the effective implementation of safety and security measures.

2. Research Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, and the population comprised all teachers and school leaders at private and public ECEC centres in Benin City. The sample comprised 101 teachers selected through a multistage sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was “perceived safety and security assessment questionnaire” designed by the researchers. The questionnaire had three sections: A to C. Section A sought demographic data such as school ownership, while Section B solicited responses on safety and security measures. The questions were designed to use a three-point scale: “Yes”=3, “Not Sure”=2, and “No”=1. Section C was designed into a four-point modified Likert scale format of “strongly agree”=4, “agree”=3, “disagree”=2, and “strongly disagree”=1. The questionnaire contained 20 items. The instrument was validated by three lecturers at the University of Benin. The instrument's internal consistency was established with Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability index of 0.91. Descriptive statistics (such as frequency distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations) was utilised in answering the research questions while inferential statistics (independent t-tests) was employed in testing the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

3. Results

Research Question One: What safety and security measures are implemented in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of safety and security measures implemented in ECCEC centres in Benin City (n=101)

Variables	f	%
CCTV surveillance	33	32.7
Perimeter fencing	82	81.2
Availability of security guards	62	61.4
Fire drills and emergency evacuation plans	42	41.6
First aid kits and trained staff	84	83.2
Supervision of pupils during play time	87	86.1
Procedure for handling emergencies	75	74.3
Children's use of pass cards to check move	58	57.4
Availability of fire extinguishers	42	41.6
Availability of staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents	77	76.2
Conducting background checks on staff before employment	74	73.3
Preventing misuse of play equipment	74	73.3

Table 1 presents the distribution of responses on safety and security measures in ECEC centres in Benin City. According to the table, 32.7% of schools have short-circuited cameras (CCTV) available. This is followed by 81.2% of centres having perimeter fencing and 61.4% having security guards. 41.6% have fire drills and emergency evacuation plans. 83.2% have first-aid kits and trained staff in first aid. 86.1% of the centres supervise pupils during playtime, and 74.3% have a procedure for handling emergencies. In addition, 57.4% of the centres use pass cards, 41.6% have fire extinguishers, 76.2% have staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents, 73.3% conduct background checks on staff before employment, and 73.3% prevent the misuse of play equipment.

Research Question Two: What are the key barriers to the effective implementation of safety and security measures?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of key barriers in the effective implementation of safety and security measures in ECEC Centres

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Limited funding resources	3.37	.88	Agree
Inadequate training of staff	3.17	.85	Agree
Poor infrastructure	3.09	.92	Agree
Overcrowded classrooms	3.32	.90	Agree
Lack of emergency preparedness	3.34	.80	Agree
Inadequate safety equipment	3.43	.75	Agree
Lack of cooperation from parents	3.31	.82	Agree

Table 2 shows the challenges ECEC centres face in implementing effective safety and security measures, ranging from 3.09 to 3.43, which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The table further indicates that the respondents agreed that inadequate safety equipment (Mn=3.43, SD=.75), limited funding resources (Mn=3.37, SD=.88), lack of emergency preparedness (Mn=3.34, SD=.80), overcrowded classrooms (Mn=3.32, SD=.90), lack of cooperation from parents (Mn=3.31, SD=.82), inadequate training of staff (Mn=3.17, SD=.85) and poor infrastructure (Mn=3.09, SD=.92) were identified as key challenges facing the effective implementation of safety and security measures in ECEC Centres in Benin City.

Hypothesis One: The implementation of safety and security measures do not significantly differ between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City.

Table 3: Independent T-test of the difference in the implementation of safety and security measures between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City

Variables		N	Mean	SD	t	p	Remark																																																																																																																																
Availability of CCTV	Private	51	2.22	.92	6.23	.000	Significant																																																																																																																																
	Public	50	1.24	.62				Availability of perimeter fencing	Private	51	2.88	.48	3.26	.002	Significant	Public	50	2.42	.88	Availability of security guards	Private	51	2.63	.75	3.60	.001	Significant	Public	50	2.02	.94	Fire drills and emergency evacuation plans	Private	51	2.47	.73	5.71	.000	Significant	Public	50	1.58	.84	First aid kits and trained staff,	Private	51	2.96	.28	4.07	.000	Significant	Public	50	2.44	.86	Supervision of pupils during play time	Private	51	3.00	.00	3.75	.000	Significant	Public	49	2.59	.76	Procedure for handling emergencies	Private	51	2.84	.54	3.78	.000	Significant	Public	50	2.30	.86	Children's use of pass cards	Private	51	2.52	.78	2.77	.007	Significant	Public	50	2.06	.91	Availability of fire extinguishers	Private	51	2.43	.81	5.45	.000	Significant	Public	50	1.54	.84	Availability of staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents	Private	51	2.98	.14	5.70	.000	Significant	Public	50	2.28	.86	Conducting background check on staff before employment	Private	51	2.86	.40	3.71	.000	Significant	Public	50	2.38	.83	Preventing misuse of play equipment	Private	51	2.88	.38	3.88	.000	Significant
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Table 3 shows an independent-samples t-test comparing the mean scores for safety and security measures between private and public ECEC centres in Benin City. There was a statistically significant difference in CCTV availability between private schools ($Mn=2.22$, $SD=.92$) and public schools ($Mn=1.24$, $SD=.62$), $t(99) = 6.23$, $p<.001$. Private early childhood centres reported greater CCTV availability than public centres.

Correspondingly, a statistically significant difference in perimeter fencing was found between private ($Mn=2.88$, $SD=.48$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.42$, $SD=.58$), $t(99) = 3.26$, $p=.002$. It implies that private schools have more perimeter fencing than public schools.

In addition, there was a statistically significant difference in the availability of security guards between private ($Mn=2.63$, $SD=.75$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.02$, $SD=.94$), $t(99) = 3.60$, p

$=.002$. Private early childhood centres had more security guards than public centres.

Similarly, the study found a statistically significant difference in fire drills and emergency evacuation plans between private ($Mn=2.47$, $SD=.73$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=1.58$, $SD=.84$), $t(99) = 5.71$, $p<0.001$. Private early childhood centres conduct more fire drills and demonstrate a higher level of emergency preparedness than public early childhood centres.

Furthermore, there was a statistically significant difference in the provision of first-aid kits and trained staff between private ($Mn=2.96$, $SD=.28$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.44$, $SD=.86$), $t(99)=4.07$, $p<.001$. Private early childhood centres were more likely to provide first-aid kits and trained staff than public early childhood centres.

Moreover, there was a statistically significant difference in the supervision of pupils during playtime between private ($Mn=3.00$, $SD=.00$) and public early

childhood centres ($Mn=2.59$, $SD=.76$), $t(99)=3.75$, $p<.001$. This difference indicates that private early childhood centres expressed greater concern about pupil supervision during playtime than public early childhood centres.

Again, a significant difference was evident in the procedures for handling emergencies between private ($Mn=2.84$; $SD=.54$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.30$; $SD=.86$), $t(99)=3.78$, $p<.001$. Private early childhood centres followed better procedures for handling emergencies than public centres.

Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in the use of pass cards between private ($Mn= 2.52$, $SD=.78$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.06$; $SD=.91$), $t(99)= 2.77$; $p= .007$. Private schools demonstrated better use of pass cards than public schools.

Still, there was a significant difference in the availability of fire extinguishers between private ($Mn=2.43$, $SD=.81$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=1.5$, $SD=.84$), $t(99) = 5.45$, $p<.001$. Private early childhood centres demonstrated more fire extinguishers than public centres.

Similarly, there was a significant difference in the availability of staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents between private early childhood centres ($Mn=2.9$, $SD=.14$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.28$, $SD=.86$), $t(99)=5.70$, $p<.001$. Private early childhood centres are more likely to provide after-school hours care pending the arrival of parents or guardians.

Similarly, the study found a significant difference in the frequency of conducting background checks on staff's prior employment between private ($Mn=2.86$, $SD=.40$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.3$, $SD=.83$), $t(99) = 3.71$, $p <.001$. Private early childhood centres are more likely to conduct staff background checks before hiring than public centres. Finally, a statistically significant difference was established in the prevention of misuse of play equipment between private ($Mn=2.88$, $SD=.38$) and public early childhood centres ($Mn=2.36$, $SD=.88$), $t(99)=3.88$, $p<.001$. Private schools demonstrated greater commitment to preventing misuse of play equipment than public early childhood centres.

The overall results, therefore, indicated that all variables have p-values ranging from .000 to .007, which are lower than the alpha value of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which states "The

implementation of safety and security measures do not significantly differ between public and private early childhood education and care centres in Benin City", was rejected. By implication, there is a significant difference in the implementation of safety and security measures between private and public ECCE centres in favour of the private centres.

4. Discussion of Findings

The objective of the study was to analyse safety and security measures in early childhood education and care centres in Benin City. The finding revealed that large proportion of the early childhood centres made adequate provision for some safety and security measures as the found that majority supervises pupils during play time, have first aid kits and trained staff on first aid, perimeter fencing, staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents, procedure for handling emergencies, conduct background check on staff before employment, have security guards and uses of pass cards to monitor pupils movement. However, the centres lacked adequate provision for CCTV cameras, fire extinguishers and fire safety drills. This finding aligns with an earlier study that found that most centres did not comply with provisions for short-circuit camera (CCTV) and fire safety management, among others, in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria (Nwhator & Adebayo, 2025).

The study further revealed a significant difference in the implementation of safety and security measures between private and public schools' ECCE centres in favour of the private schools. This finding corroborates a previous study that found that publicly owned pre-schools lacked safety measures and security, such as surveillance cameras, gate passes, and identification systems, compared to privately owned schools, which have more of these measures (Nwabiankea & Idadi, 2024). However, the study contradicts Dike and Otu's (2024) survey, which found no statistically significant difference in safety compliance based on school ownership.

Finally, the study found that challenges affecting the implementation of safety and security measures in early childhood and care centres include inadequate safety equipment, limited funding, insufficient emergency preparedness, overcrowded classrooms, limited parental cooperation, inadequate staff training, and poor infrastructure. These findings support previous research outcomes, which posit that failure of the government's re-enactment of safety management in public schools, such as continuous training of early childhood personnel, maintenance of facilities, sufficient funding of ECEC, including skilfully trained

security staff, constitutes challenges in managing safety (Igbinedion & Nworgu, 2016).

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that early childhood centres in Benin City demonstrated appreciable safety and security consciousness in some key areas, such as supervision of pupils during play time, procedure for handling emergencies, perimeter fencing, availability of staff who look after children pending the arrival of parents/guardians, conducting background checks on staff before employment, and preventing misuse of play equipment. With fair use of security guards, a pass card for pupils. However, CCTV surveillance, fire extinguishers, fire drills, and emergency evacuation plans were poorly implemented. The availability of safety and security measures was significantly higher in private than in public ECEC centres. However, the key challenges affecting safety and security measures include inadequate safety equipment, Limited funding resources, and overcrowded classrooms, among others.

6. Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings of the study the following recommendation were made:

The Nigerian government at various levels, including private school operators, should strengthen existing safety and security measures through the installation of modern gadgets such as video surveillance, centre access control and communication systems.

Government and other stakeholders in the educational sector, particularly the Universal Basic Education and private school operators, should, as a matter of urgency, take the lead by providing periodic staff training on modern safety, security, and safeguarding techniques in Schools including promoting fire safety practices.

Parents should support the safety and security of children in schools through partnerships by reinforcing safety rules at home, such as stranger awareness, and by volunteering to supervise during school events, among other measures.

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