Investigating Bullying as a Violation of Human Rights among Students in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

Lawrence Odumah, (PhD)

(HOD) Social Studies Department, University of Education-Winneba, Ghana

E-mail: lawodumah@yahoo.com.

Abstract

This study examined bullying as a form of violence among Ghanaian Senior High School students. The problem identified was that notwithstanding Ghana Government`s intervention in promoting and defending children`s rights through Human Rights Education, coupled with the remarkable efforts being made by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in enlightening the citizenry of their rights and freedoms, much violence is prevalent among students in Ghana. The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the extent to which students violate the fundamental human rights and freedoms of their fellow students. Descriptive survey and quasi-experimental pre-test/ post-test control group design were adopted for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was applied to arrive at a sample of 180 for the study. Questionnaire was the main instrument used to collect the data. The test-retest method was employed to determine the reliability of the instrument. The data collected were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. The research question raised for the study was analyzed using frequency distribution and percentages. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance, using a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The findings of the study revealed that the treatment package administered to the experimental group produced a positive effect because bullying diminished among the participants who were exposed to treatment than those in the control group. It is, therefore, recommended that co-operative and pro-social ways of thinking must be promoted among students. In this way, the school ethos which contains elements that often foster intimidatory behaviours can be changed.

Keywords: Bullying. Violence. Violation. Human Rights. Human Rights Culture.

1. Introduction and Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) specifies that education shall be directed to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equity of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin (Article 29). Similarly, the Code of Conduct for Teachers in Ghana states that a teacher shall not subject a pupil/student to or encourage other pupil/student to subject a pupil/student to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Ghana Education Service, 2008).

Children are, therefore, supposed to be educated in a school environment which is safe, protective and harmonious to ensure that they develop positive attitudes, values, skills and good behaviour and avoid using their power to bully or harass others. These measures notwithstanding, many children endure bullying on daily basis in schools. This type of abuse is a violation of the human rights of the affected children. This view is affirmed by Egbochuku (2007) when he asserted that bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences on the general school climate and on the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fears.

The responsibility to protect children from all forms of abuse, including bullying is therefore, the collective responsibility of parents, teachers, and other adults in the community who are in contact with children. Traditionally, concerns about bullying have been focussed on adults as the only perpetrators. Research on bullying, however, shows that children need to be protected from `forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse` at the hands of their peers. For every one child concerned about being sexually abused by adults, there are three children concerned about being beaten up by peers (Finkelhor, Assdigan & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995, as cited in Williams et al, 1996).

In Ghana, many studies associated with bullying and its effect on children, have been examined. However, there has been no study or little evidence is available to the researcher on how bullying constitutes brazen violations of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the affected students. It is against this backdrop that there is the need to investigate the extent to which bullying among students in Ghanaian Senior High Schools infringes upon the rights of the victims.

Notwithstanding Ghana Government's intervention in promoting and defending children`s rights through human rights education, coupled with the remarkable efforts being made by non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and other civil society organisations (CSOs) to enlighten the citizenry of their rights and freedoms, violence in the form of bullying still prevails among Ghanaian senior high school students. Leach & Mitchell (2006) and Dunne (2007) affirmed the existence of this problem when they asserted that many students experience bullying and

many other forms of violence on day-to-day basis within the school system.

The academic environment of a school is supposed to be a safe, protective, and harmonious place where effective facilitation should take place. However, bullying, aggression, and other forms of violence in schools appear to blight students` experiences of formal education and their abilities to make the best of the opportunities they have (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2007; United Nations, 2005). More specifically, violence against students may result in higher levels of absenteeism (Rigby & Slee, 1993), greater truancy (Cullingford & Morrison, 1996) and increased likelihood of drop out (Leach & Mitchell, 2006, as cited in Dunne, Bosomtwi-Sam, Sabates & Owusu, 2010).

In Ghana, although many studies have been conducted on bullying, there seems to be absence of research on the extent to which bullying constitutes violation of the fundamental human rights of the victims. The current study, therefore, aimed to establish the incidence of bullying, the extent to which it infringes upon the fundamental human rights of the affected students, and the use of an intervention package to determine its effects on the participants.

This study is anchored on Kant`s (1930) theory of ethics otherwise known as duty-focussed theory or obligation-based theory which argues for the respect of human individuals as ends-in-themselves. This means that each human being has intrinsic value which must never be compromised. A duty-oriented theorist will therefore support programmes which respect the inviolability of these moral obligations. This study is applicable to Kant's theory in the sense that the main purpose of school-based human rights education in Ghana is to strengthen respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms. In addition, it is to value human dignity and develop individual self-respect and respect for others.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate and determine the extent to which students in Ghanaian senior high schools violate the fundamental human rights and freedoms of their fellow students through bullying. Specifically, the objective is to: ascertain the extent to which bullying violates the fundamental human rights of the affected students in Ghanaian senior high schools. The research sought to answer the question: To what extent does bullying infringe upon the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the affected students in Ghanaian senior high schools? The following research hypothesis guided the study - *H0:* There is no significant difference in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools; *H1:* There is significant difference in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools.

It is hoped that the findings of the study would help identify the extent to which bullying takes place in the schools. This would enable the Ministry of Education to formulate a meaningful policy on Human Rights Education in Ghana since human rights issues tend to permeate every aspect of human endeavour. Literature on children's rights issues is scarce in Ghana. Consequently, publications of the findings of this study would improve on the literature on human rights in the country. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the civil society organisations (CSOs) may find the findings useful as a basis for re-examining and improving their intervention policy, planning and implementation. It is hoped that the results of the study would bring to the fore, areas for further research, so as to provide improvement in human rights education in the senior high schools in Ghana.

Different forms of student-on-student violence such as sexual harassment, threats to attack others, misuse of power under the prefectorial system, discrimination between boys and girls, juniors and seniors, children with disabilities etc take place in Ghanaian senior high schools**.** This study is, however, confined to bullying as a form of violence. The study is also confined to the final year students in 6 schools which are located in the Northern, Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana. These regions, though randomly picked, one was selected from the northern sector (Northern Region), another from the middle sector (Eastern Region) and the third was picked from the southern sector (Central Region). These regions are representatives of major cultural groups such as the Dagomba, the Akan and Fante in the country. Moreover, the regions constitute representatives of the socio-economic groups in Ghana. Educationally, these regions are noted for common curriculum and uniform secondary school system. These commonalities could make generalisation of the findings of the study less controversial.

2. Literature Review on Bullying as a Violation of Human Rights

Bullying among children is understood as repeated, negative acts committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts may be physical or verbal in nature, for example, hitting, kicking, teasing or taunting, or they may involve indirect actions such as manipulating friendships or purposely excluding other children from activities (Limber & Nation, 2004). Smith and Sharp (1994) perceived bullying as a form of aggressive behaviour in which there is an imbalance of power favouring the perpetrator(s) who repeatedly seek to hurt or intimidate a targeted individual. Farrington (1993) defines bullying as repeated oppression of a less

powerful person, physical or psychological, by a more powerful person. Smith & Sharp (1994) defined bullying simply as the systematic abuse of power.

It is discernible from the foregoing definitions that bullying encapsulates a desire to hurt others, it involves a harmful action, a power imbalance, an unjust use of power, an evident enjoyment by the aggressor and generally a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.

Bullying can be classified into two, namely: traditional bullying and cyber bullying. Traditional bullying involves hitting, kicking, teasing or taunting (verbal and physical bullying), manipulation of friendships or exclusion of some children from activities.

Technology provides a new medium for bullying using the internet and mobile phones. This has given rise to a new term known as cyber bullying. Kim, Koh & Levethal (2004) shared these sentiments when they stated that with the development and increased accessibility of electronic technology in the form of computers and mobile phones, the opportunities for peer victimisation has greatly increased.

Pinheiro (2006) is on the same wavelength with Rigby and Smith when he stated that the internet and mobile phones have provided new opportunities for bullying through e-mails, online chat lines, personal web pages, text messages and transmission of images. Cyber bullying, according to Kim et al (2004), is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, pre teen or teen using the internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones. From the foregoing definition, it is clear that cyber bullying has to have a minor on both sides, or at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor.

Bullying, irrespective of whether it is verbal, physical or cyber, has adverse effects in the school and on the well being of the children. Studies of bullying suggest that there are short- and long-term consequences for both the perpetrators and victims of bullying. Students who are chronic victims of bullying experience more physical and psychological problems than their peers who are not harassed by other children (Williams, Chambers, Logan & Robison, 1996). It is not only victims who are at risk for short- and long-term problems; bullies also are at increased risk for negative outcomes. One researcher found that those elementary students who were bullies attended school less frequently and were more likely to drop out than other students (Byrne, 1994).

This current study goes a step further to discuss more issues or forms of bullying other than the above in many ways. It attempts to broaden the scope of the investigation into bullying. In addition, it seeks to find out how bullying infringes upon the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the affected students.

3. Methodology

Descriptive survey and quasi-experimental pre-test / post-test control group designs were adopted for the study. One major advantage of adopting the quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design is that because established classes or groups are selected, possible effects from reactive arrangements are minimized (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The choice of descriptive survey is influenced by the fact that it is appropriate for research questions about self reporting beliefs or behaviours (Burke & Larry, 2008).

The accessible population for the study comprised all final year (SS3) students of the selected 6 senior high schools from the Northern, Eastern, and Central Regions of Ghana.

Multi-stage sampling technique was applied to generate a sample of 180 for the study. Firstly, through simple random sampling technique, three regions were selected for the study. In each of the selected regions, one rural and one urban schools were randomly selected. The stratified sampling technique was then used to select 15 boys and 15 girls from each school. The study used simple random sampling technique to assign schools and their participants into experimental and control groups made up of 90 participants each.

The main instrument used to collect the data for the study was a 6 - item researcher designed questionnaire. With the staff identification card from University of Education, Winneba, the researcher first introduced himself to the headmasters and headmistresses of the sampled schools to seek permission to carry out the research in their schools. This was followed by an explanation of the objectives for carrying out the study and the wider implications the findings will have for the schools and the educational enterprise as a whole to the heads of the schools. The research assistants were then assigned to the three regions and for that matter, the three experimental schools, while the researcher played a supervisory role. The study was carried out in three phases.

Phase 1: During the first phase, pre-test was conducted to both the experimental and the control groups in order to collect the baseline data for the study. It was carried out to ascertain the extent to which the participants were aware of the existence of their fundamental human rights and freedoms, investigate the extent to which they performed their responsibilities and also, to examine the extent to which they respected the fundamental human rights and freedoms of their fellow students by doing nothing, particularly through bullying to violate them. Consequently, questionnaire was administered to them and this segment of the study revealed that some of the participants were not fully aware of the existence of their own rights and freedoms. Also, some of them did not perform their expected responsibilities. Additionally, violence through bullying prevailed among students in the

schools which were selected for the study.

Phase 2:   In phase two, a treatment package which lasted for six consecutive weeks was taught to the experimental group. The various topics treated with the participants in the experimental group, using child-centred techniques such as group discussion, debate, brainstorming etc are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: The Treatment Package Administered to the Experimental Group.

Week	Topics Treated to the Experimental Group	The Control Group
1	Fundamental Human Rights and their Limitations	Received no special treatment but were taught human rights issues via Social Studies Syllabus by their teachers
2	Responsibilities of the Individual as Enshrined in the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana	Received no special treatment
3	Violation of Children`s Rights in Schools: Bullying	Received no special treatment
4	Origin of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Received no special treatment
5	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	Received no special treatment
6	Relationship between Human Rights, Peace and Security	Received no special treatment

Detailed Treatment Package on Bullying

The broad topic treated as indicated in Table 1 above was `*Violation of Children`s Rights in Schools: Bullying*`. It was debate technique which was used**.** The participants in each experimental group were arbitrarily sub-divided into two groups of 15. One group constituted the pros while the other comprised the cons. The topic debated upon was `Human rights are inherent in each human being and must accordingly be respected in all learning environment devoid of bullying`. The two sides presented their arguments in turn with most of the participants speaking. At the end of the debate, the pros carried the day. The points they raised were then summarized on the chalkboard for a whole class discussion. This produced the desired results because the participants became privy to the fundamental human rights and freedoms they are entitled to and the need to respect the rights of others.

Phase 3: During the final phase, a post-test was conducted to ascertain the effects of the treatment on the participants. Here, the questionnaire was re-administered to both the experimental and the control groups. This segment of the study revealed that participants exposed to treatment on awareness of the existence of their fundamental human rights and freedoms demonstrated higher performance than those in the control group. Moreover, those exposed to treatment became privy to the fact that rights and responsibilities go together. Furthermore, all forms of violence, notably, bullying reduced drastically among participants exposed to treatment than those in the experimental group.

4. Results Analysis of Research Question

4.1 Research Question: To what extent does bullying infringe upon the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the affected students in Ghanaian senior high schools?

 The data collected are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Violation of Students` Rights in terms of Bullying in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I have been a victim of physical bullying (hitting or punching) in school 22(12.2%)	29(16.1%)	85(47.2%)	28(15.6%)	16(8.9%)	
2. have been a victim of verbal bullying (insults, teasing or name calling) in school.	31(17.2%)	105(58.3%)	25(13.9%)	8(4.4%)	11(6.2%)
3. I have been a victim of cyber bulling (electronic or on line bullying) . 49(27.2%)	4(2.2%)	23(12.8%)	50(27.8%)	54(30.0%)	
4. I have received vulgar messages on my mobile phone. 21(11.7%)	14(7.8%)	69(38.3%)	36(20.0%)	40(22.2%)	
5. I have received sensitive information or lies about another student on my email (on line) 44(24.5%)	18(10.0%)	40(22.2%)	24(13.3%)	54(30.0%)	
6. I have been cyber bullied via other social networking sites such as twitter, facebook etc 64(35.6%)	4(2.2%)	15(8.3%)	30(16.7%)	67(37.2%)	

Source : field study 2012

From Table 2 above, it can be seen that as many as 63.3% of students, have been victims of physical bullying, that is, hitting or punching in school. Majority (75.5%) of them have been victims of verbal bullying such as insults, teasing or name calling in school. Some respondents (15.0%) confirmed being victims of cyber bullying (electronic or on line bullying). Noteworthy is that almost half (46.1%) have received vulgar messages or images on their mobile phones from their school mates. A significant proportion (32.2%) of students, have received sensitive information or lies about another student on their email (on line). Finally, 10.5% of them either agreed or strongly agreed that they have been cyber bullied via social networking sites.

4.2 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools.

Hypothesis 1 was tested using a one – way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Descriptive Data on Bullying as a Form of Violence among Students across Experimental Conditions.

| Group | N | Pre-test | | Post – test | | |
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	MD
Experimental	90	18.27	3.15	13.42	3.29	-4.85
Control	90	17.16	3.02	17.58	2.38	0.42

The descriptive data presented in Table 3 above indicate that the two groups did not differ significantly in terms of their knowledge of different forms of bullying which occur in their schools. Respectively, the mean scores were 18.27 and 17.16 for the experimental and the control group. After the treatment, it would be realized that the experimental group had a mean difference of -4.85 while the control group had a mean difference of 0.42. This means that the experimental group performed better than the control group.

To determine whether significant difference existed between the two groups, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was calculated. The SPSS output is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: A One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on Difference in scores on Respondents` Knowledge of Bullying across Experimental Conditions

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	1859.986	2	929.993	427.539	.000
Pre test	1082.897	1	1082.897	497.833	.000
Group	1108.177	1	1108.177	509.455	.000
Error	385.014	177	2.175		
Total	4436.074	179			

R. Squared = .829 (Adjusted R Squared = .827)

The one-way analysis of covariance was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. The independent variable was the intervention package. The dependent variable was the post-test scores on bullying after the intervention was completed. Respondents` scores on the pre-test were used as covariate in this analysis. After adjusting for pre- test scores, there was significant difference in post- test scores between the two groups $F(1,177) = 509.46$, $p < 0.005$. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that the alternate hypothesis which stated that there is significant difference in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools is upheld.

With significant mean scores realized, the pair-wise comparisons of mean scores were conducted to determine which pairs of scores were significant. The output is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Pair-wise Comparisons Mean Scores of Students
Dependent Variable: Post-test Scores on Bullying.

| (I) group | (J) group | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig.(a) | 95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a) | |
| | | | Upper Bound | Lower Bound | | |
		Lower Bound	Bound	Bound	Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Experimental	Control	-5.043(*)	.223	.000	-5.484	-4.602
Control	Experimental	5.043(*)	.233	.000	4.602	5.484

Based on estimated marginal means
* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

A critical observation of Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental and the control groups with a mean difference of 5.04 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, it is concluded that the intervention package as regards bullying, is effective and would improve human rights education delivery, if adopted.

5. Discussion of Findings

The research question raised for the study sought to find out the extent to which students violate the fundamental human rights and freedoms of their fellow students in terms of bullying. The analysis of data from this research question revealed that there are human rights abuses, notably, bullying among students in the schools under study. This is inconsistent with or in contravention of Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which states that children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, including torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The formulated hypothesis, therefore sought to find out if significant difference existed in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools. The descriptive data and the one-way ANCOVA statistics in Tables 2 and 3 showed that participants exposed to treatment significantly performed better than those in the control group. This implies that bullying diminished among the participants in the experimental group than the control group. We, therefore, fail to accept the null hypothesis and uphold the alternate hypothesis which stated that there is significant difference in post-test scores of the experimental and control groups as regards bulling as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools.

The pair-wise comparisons mean scores results presented in Table 4 to determine which group differs from the other also showed that participants exposed to treatment demonstrated better performance than those in the control group. This was expected because the participants in the experimental group had been given treatment on bullying. This is a clear indication that the intervention was effective. The results of this study fall in line with the results of other studies which focused on programmes to prevent and diminish violence. They indicated that interventions in schools become effective in preventing and diminishing violence (White & Yeomans, 2004; Dawn & Shaughnessy, 2005; Dole, 2006).

6. Conclusion

The study examined bullying as a form of violence among students in Ghanaian senior high schools. The pre-test conducted showed that bullying is prevalent among students in Ghanaian senior high schools in spite of Government's intervention in promoting and defending children`s rights through human rights education, couple with the remarkable efforts being made by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in enlightening the citizenry about the existence of their fundamental human rights and freedoms.

After the treatment, the experimental group had performed significantly higher that the control group. This implies that bullying reduced drastically after the application of the treatment. This is a clear indication that the intervention was very effective.

7. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that:

- Core values such as dignity, rights and responsibility must be incorporated into the school system through human rights education. This would mean not only exposing students to human rights content in the classroom but would also mean that these values must inform us how students learn, how they are treated by their teachers, how they treat one another, how they would take their rightful places in the world, as well as a sense of personal responsibility in promoting social justice.
- Human Rights Education Clubs must be formed in all the senior high schools throughout the country. Inter-school debates on issues bordering on human rights violations in schools could be organised on termly bases. This would go a long way towards the achievement of the 3Rs (*Rights, Respect and Responsibilities*) initiative of human rights education.
- Co-operative and pro-social ways of thinking must be promoted among students. In this way, the school ethos which contains elements that often foster intimidatory behaviours can be changed.
- The treatment package administered to the experimental group produced a positive effect because bullying as a form of violence diminished among the participants who were exposed to treatment than those in the control group. Consequently, the package should be adopted and used in Ghanaian senior high schools. This would go a long way to improve human rights education curriculum for senior high schools in the country.

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