Perceived Impact of online predators on the academic performance and socialization of basic school students in a Period of Socio-Political and Economic Uncertainty in Awka Education Authority.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined 'Impact of online predators on the academic performance and socialization of basic school students in a Period of Socio-Political and Economic Uncertainty in Awka Education Authority.

The purposes of the study was to examine the role of online predators on basic education school students' academic performance and investigate the role of online predators on basic education students' socialization in Awka south local government education authority. Descriptive survey was used. The population was made up of 6,660 upper basic students in Awka south local government authority with 357 sample size. A multistage sampling technique was used. Twenty-three self-structured-items questionnaire was used. Reliability of the Instrument was ascertained through test re-test method using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC) to correlate the two results and 0.83 was obtained which implies the instrument was reliable. Mean was used for data analysis. The study found that online predation can lead to poor academic performance as it causes truancy and class absenteeism. Also, online predation distracts pupils from participating in extracurricular and religious activities which inhibited social life. The school management should design software to monitor and manage internet use among students so as to enhance positive academic performance. Also, the head teachers should collaborate with parents through ASUBEB to monitor use of internet in order to enhance positive social interaction of students' in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Keywords: Online Predators, Academic Performance, Socialization

Introduction

Online predators referred to the internet users who exploit children and teens for sexual and violent reasons or social vices such as child grooming, engage in sexual activities, unwanted exposure of materials and pictures, online harassment, threats and/or embarrassment. Basically, online predator is a form of harassment that normally takes place online using the internet services. International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE, 2023) described an online predator as someone that seeks contact with children and adolescents on the internet for abusive and exploitative purposes that are typically sexual as they use the internet as a method to facilitate contact with children to potentially harm them online or offline. A predator or online predator is a person on the Internet who seeks out vulnerable parties for exploitation as predators often use platforms such as social working sites, internet forums, chart rooms and instant messaging apps as they provide them with a certain degree of anonymity (Computer Hope, 2022). Lazic (2023) opined that online predators use the Internet to exploit kids and teens for sexual satisfaction. According to Long and Zuckerman (2023), the common stereotype of the online predator is that of a middle-aged man with no job who lives alone and whose day is consumed with 'luring' young children and teenagers through the internet. Furthermore, Clayton (2014) asserts that there is no one single method in which online predators work as there are several methods that can have been identified as how online predators locate their victims and get them to do what they want, whether it is meeting them in person or simply engaging in some kind of online/on the phone sexual activity. Every parent worries about online predators at some point. This is because these activities stand as a distraction from students and impede on their academic performance

Academic performance is the output of students' behaviours and progress reports across various academic subjects. Abrantes and Casinillo (2020) described academic performance as the measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects and considered as important indicator on students learning. Animba, et al., (2022) opined that aacademic performance is the yardstick for measuring educational outcomes for economic, technological and scientific advancement of a nation. Academic performance is therefore very important for the successful physical, social, psychological integration of a learner to the society and contribution to national development (Brew, et al., 2020).

Socialization is the process in which an individual's skills, motives, standards, attitudes, and behaviours change to conform to those regarded as, cherished values, desirable and appropriate for his or her present and future role in a society. Socialization is the process of internalizing the norms and ideologies of society. Maheshwari (2016) defined socialization as the process by which human infants begin to acquire the skills necessary to perform as a functioning member of their society, and is the most influential learning process one can experience. According to Drew (2023), socialization is considered to be a prosocial process because it helps people learn how to behave appropriately within their community and understand their role within social groups and that the process of socialization begins in childhood, when children internalize the beliefs, values, and mindsets of parents, siblings, and culture. Jain (2023) viewed socialization as a lifelong process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors necessary to function as members of a society and that it is a multifaceted process that occurs through various social interactions, experiences, and institutions. Socialization to Sujan (2021) is a process through which an individual is prepared to become an acceptable and useful member of society. Socialization in simple terms is described as an interaction to establish a balanced relationship between a person and the society he lives in (Bhasin, 2020).

Socio- economic status has been used to measure the status of people, families and communities. Libretext (2022) opined that socio-economic status of any society can greatly impact on children's experience. Security crises are a terrible aspect of socio-economic and it is fast

spreading as individuals are striving to survive. Security uncertainty is the overall sense of anxiety about one's value as a person including issues concerning risks or dangers of one's life which have negative impacts on productivity. The impact of insecurity could be physical, mental or emotional. Bhandari (2022) described security crises as a condition of inadequacy (not being good enough) and uncertainty that produces anxiety about one's goals, relationships, and ability to handle certain situations. Security crisis is an issue that is often taken for granted, even though its meaning and dimensions remain largely unknown (Khani, 2020). Donatus and Udebunu (2017), security is the precaution taken to safeguard an environment from an impending danger or injury. Nothing positive can be achieve or realize in the absence of safety and security (Iwogbe, & Awwal, Chigbo-Obasi & Anidi 2023). School curriculum suffers setbacks since teachers and students stay out of school for safety hence the need for blended learning. This is in a bid to salvage the students' academic performance and socialization which seems to be affected by states of socio-economic uncertainties.

A large number of students seem to fall prey to the auspicious activities of the online predators. Child Crime Prevention and Safety Center (2023) reported that there are an estimated 500,000 online predators active each day, children between the ages of 12 and 15 are especially susceptible to be groomed or manipulated by adults they meet online, over 50 percent of the victims of online sexual exploitation are between the ages of 12 and 15, an estimated 89 percent of sexual advances directed at children occur in Internet chatrooms or through instant messaging, in over a quarter of all reported exploitation incidents, the online predator will ask students for sexually explicit photos of themselves and four percent of children receive aggressive solicitations from adults online, including attempts to contact them in person or over the phone. The report from Child Crime Prevention and Safety Center (2023) further indicated that 58 percent of parents report being concerned about the threats that strangers pose online, two out of ten children between the ages of 12 and 15 are aware of the issue and are concerned that strangers may find out information about them and that while using social media, forty percent of children remove privacy settings in order to attract more friends or followers. Long and Zuckerman (2023) found that only three characteristics have been found to be significantly associated with online predators which include close to 100% are male, 91% are white and non-Hispanic and 91% hold a full-time job. A study by Lazic (2023) revealed that there are 500,000 online predators on the lookout daily; targeting children aged 12 to 15. Nikolovska (2023) carried out a study and discovered that the latest online predator statistics reveal that half a million of these perpetrators are a threat to children on any given day as their most likely victims are females aged 12-15, which they find on social media with unwanted sexual talk (16.9%) and unwanted sexual act requests (14.3%) follow, along with forced images (10.3%) and voluntary adult partners (8.6%). According to facts about online predators, online sexual abuse ranks second, with 15.6% of victims having experienced it, followed by image-based sexual abuse, with 11% (Nikolovska, 2023).

The internet is now common and much more anonymous than the real world. The internet and use of social media have so many advantages for our daily activities across the ages but the advantages are sometimes missed especially. Many people hide their identities or even pretend to be someone they're not thereby causing harm on others and the society at large using internet. According to Child Crime Prevention and Safety Center (2023), online predators may try to lure kids and teens into sexual conversations or even face-to-face meetings. Child Crime Prevention and Safety Center (2023) added that predators will sometimes send obscene material or request that kids send pictures of themselves and that there are a variety of dangers lurking online that affect minors in a number of different ways. Minor (2020) opined that between school and socialization, kids are spending more time online, which means it's important to keep a close eye on what they're clicking on and who they may be talking to. Dad (2022) pointed out that when it comes to kids and social media, awareness needs to be magnified, and everyone needs to be on board with watching out for these risks as there is no way for the sites themselves to regulate these risks, and it's important to

monitor children's use of internet for social media closely. Human authenticity is not given when using internet for social media, which is why stalking, pedophilia, grooming, scamming, sexual exploitation, and harassment run rampant on the internet, with victims suffering in equal measure (Shu, 2021).

According to Dorasamy, et al., (2021), online predators, or groomers, can interact easily with children and adolescents through the Internet, chat platforms, and smartphones as scholars claim that the dark side of the cyber world is increasing owing to ease of access of predators to children and adolescents and that online grooming predators target girls and boys. Herd (2017) found that online predators are guilty of persuading and asking sexual questions to two boys, aged 12 and 14 years, as well as requesting indecent photographs. The proliferation of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) enables adolescents to spend long periods of time in the cyber world, thereby exposing themselves to cyber threats. Balakrishnan (2017) and Yusuf, et al., (2018) confirms children and adolescents are vulnerable to cyber bullying. The internet has expanded the way that young people communicate and interact with their peers. Young people use popular social media sites to stay in touch with their friends and to meet new people. The findings by Baji and Awwal (2020) indicated that Facebook, 2go, WhatsApp, Instagram, you tube, Iskimi and BBM were the social media applications commonly used by the students and that social media affects students' academic performance and social behaviour. It was based on this ground that this study assessed the role of online predators on pupils academic performance and socialization in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Statement of the Problem

Advancement in science and technology has both positive and negative impact especially for students. Technology has positively enhanced education especially at this time when schools adopted blended and e-learning to augment the lapses causes due to sit at home and incessant school closures. Technology seems to make learning easy as the classrooms has been extended to the homes through online learning and therefore there is no barrier to learning.

Unfortunately, the internet spaces are not safe for the students any longer, some online users whose interest is to identify children and seduce them online. The students who are prone to online predation are those who use chat rooms, instant messaging, Internet forums, social networking sites, cell phones, and even video game consoles. The internet space attracts predators because they allow them to have access to make contact with victims without drawing attention. However, the activities of these predators affect students' academic performance and socialization which might cause physical, mental, emotional and psychological disorder among the victims. It was based on this that this study investigated the Impact of online predators on the academic performance and socialization of basic school students in a Period of Socio-Political and Economic Uncertainty in Awka Education Authority of Anambra State.

Purpose of the study

The study determined the impact of online predators on the academic performance and socialization of basic school students in a Period of Socio-Political and Economic Uncertainty in Awka Education Authority. Specifically, the study determined to:

- Assess the impact of online predators on students' academic performance in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.
- Examine the impact of online predators on the socialization of students in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide this study:

- What is the role of online predators on students' academic performance in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?
- What is the role of online predators on primary school pupils' socialization in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?

Method

Descriptive survey was used for the study. Population of the study was 6,660 students as received from Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB, 2020). The population comprised of students in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 375 respondents from the 19 schools which formed the sample size. Research Advisor's (2006) sampling table was used to determine the sample size. Instrument used for data collection was self-structured items questionnaire. The instrument titled 'Impact of online predators on the academic performance and socialization Questionnaire (IOPAPSQ)'. It comprises of 23 structured items. Section 'A' of the questionnaire seeks for respondents' information demographically while section 'B' was item statements to answer the research questions. However, the items were structured on a four point Likert scale ranging from 4, 3, 2 and 1.

Context and face validity of the instrument were ascertained. In order to ascertain reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted on 20 members of the population from 4 primary schools in Njikoka Local Government Authority. The instrument was administered on the students and a test re-test method was used to carry out the pilot study at an interval of ten days and the two results were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. The coefficient r value result of 0.83 was obtained which implies the instrument was reliable. Mean was used to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

In this study, 2.5 was used as decision mean since the instrument was structured on four point likert scale. Therefore, a mean score of 2.5 and above indicate positive response to the research question and accepted while a mean score below 2.5 indicate negative answer to the research question and rejected. However, out of 375 copies of instruments distributed, 373 were correctly filled and returned.

Research Question One: What is the impact of online predators on students' academic performance in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?

Table 1: Opinion of Respondents on Impact of Online Predators on students' Academic Performance in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

S/N	Item Statements	N	Mean	Decision
1	Online predation can lead to poor academic performance among their victims.	3.9		Agreed
2	Online predation causes truancy among students during security crises.	3.1		Agreed
3	Online involvements promote class absenteeism among the victims.	3.2		Agreed
4	Online predators seduce students with attention and affectionate language thereby distracting their victims from academic activities.	3.6		Agreed
5	Online predators use music and hobbies of interest on pupils to get attention of their victims thereby distracting them from school activities.	3.4		Agreed
6	There are cases of exposure to online predations in schools because of security crises.	2.7		Agreed
7	Online predators distract pupils with gifts.	3.3		Agreed
8	Online predation distracts pupils from positive study habit victims through listening and sympathizing with their situation.	3.8		Agreed
9	Students are educated on measures to eradicate online predators in schools so as to enhance positive study habit and academic performance among pupils during security crises.	1.3		Disagreed
10	Parents use control mechanism on student's device while using the internet spaces.	1.2		Disagreed
	Grand mean		**2.95**	

Research question 1 of table 1 sought the opinion of respondents on the impact of online predators on students' academic performance in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. The results indicated that item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were positively responded to (agreed) by the respondents with mean score 3.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.6, 3.4, 2.7, 3.3 and 3.8 while item 9 and 10 were rejected or disagreed with mean score of 1.3 and 1.2.

Research Question Two: What is the impact of online predators on students' socialization in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?

Table 2: Opinion of Respondents on the Role of Online Predators on students' Socialization in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

S/N	Item Statements	N	Mean	Decision
11	Online predation causes social isolation among students who are victims.	257	3.8	Agreed
12	Online predation promotes shy behaviours among students who are victims.	257	1.9	Disagreed

13	Online predation affects interaction of students who are victims negatively.	257	3.4	Agreed
14	I feel rejected because of my online activities.	257	1.3	Disagreed
15	Online predation distracts students from participating in extracurricular activities.	257	3.5	Agreed
16	Online predation distracts students from participating in religious activities.	257	3.2	Agreed
17	Students who are victims of online predators are likely to have good manner of approach.	257	3.1	Agreed
18	Attraction to online predation among students is linked to socio-cultural status of the victims.	257	1.2	Disagreed
19	Students who can afford a gadget fall victims to online predation.	257	3.3	Agreed
20	Attraction to online predation among students is linked to peer group influence.	257	3.8	Agreed
	Grand mean		28.5	

Research question 2 of table 2 sought the opinion of respondents on the impact of online predators on students' socialization in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainties in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. The results indicated that item 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10, were agreed by the respondents with mean of 3.8, 3.4, 3.5, 3.2, 3.1, 3.3 and 3.8. On the other hand, item 2, 4 and 8 were rejected by the respondents with mean scores of 1.9, 1.3 and 1.2.

Discussion of Findings

Online predation can lead to poor academic performance as it causes truancy and class absenteeism among the victims. Also, online predators entice students with attention and affectionate language uses music and hobbies of interest to students and kind words and gifts thereby distracting their victims from academic activities. Online predation causes social isolation and affects interaction of students who are victims. Also, online predation distract students from participating in extracurricular and religious activities as victims are likely to have developed poor socialization syndrome. Child Crime Prevention and Safety Center (2023) observed that predators will sometimes send obscene material or request that students send pictures of themselves and that there are a variety of dangers lurking online that affect minors in a number of different ways. Shu (2021) found that children using internet for social media are prone to stalking, pedophilia, grooming, scamming, sexual exploitation, and harassment run rampant on the internet, with victims suffering in equal measure. The finding of Baji and Awwal (2020) also indicated that Facebook, 2Go, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Iskimi and BBM were the social media applications commonly used by the students and that social media affects students' academic performance and social behaviour. Furthermore, Balakrishnan (2017) and Yusuf, et al., (2018) confirms children and adolescents are vulnerable to cyber bullying. Schoeps, et al., (2020) discovered that the internet has expanded the way that young people communicate and interact with their peers. According to Dorasamy, et al., (2021), proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT) enables adolescents to spend long periods of time in the cyber world, thereby exposing themselves to cyber threats.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that online predation can lead to poor academic performance as it causes truancy and class absenteeism among students. Also, online predation entices students with attention and affectionate language, uses music and hobbies of interest to entice students thereby distracting them from academic activities. Online predation causes social isolation and affects interaction of students who are victims. Also, online predation distracts students from participating in extracurricular and religious activities among students who are victims.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

16. The school management in collaboration with school counselors/psychologist should design software to monitor and manage internet use among students so as to enhance positive academic performance among students in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.
17. Parents should be educated through the parents-teachers association conferences on appropriate child control applications and also enlighten them on available child friendly search engines such as kiddle.co, kidzsearch, kidrex, duckduckgo amongst others.
18. The head teachers should collaborate with parents through school management boards to monitor the use of internet in order to improve positive social interaction of students in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

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