

**CONSUMER PROTECTION COUNCIL ACT AND AWARENESS LEVEL OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN OBIO-AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
RIVERS STATE**

Isaac, Ijeoma Chinazaekpere Ada and Prof. Akpomi, Margaret E.

Department of Business Education Faculty of Education
Rivers State University P. M. B. 5080 Nkpolu-Oroworukwo
Port Harcourt Rivers state

ABSTRACT

This research work investigates the level of consumer protection awareness among secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study the population of the study was 43 principals in the 43 government owned secondary schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area as obtained from the Education unit of the Local Government and the zonal office of the Universal Basic Education Board. Consumer Protection Awareness of Secondary School Principals (C-PASSP) Questionnaire which contained eighteen (18) items was administered to the entire 43 secondary school principals as the sample size was manageable and there was no sampling. Face and content validity of the instrument were determined by three experts of Business Education while the reliability which yielded a co-efficient of 0.82 was ascertained by test-retest method. Fifteen (15) principals who were not part of the population were used for the reliability test. Findings from the study showed that school curriculum and inadequate visit to CPC website contributed to the low level of awareness. Thus, the researchers recommend amongst others that the Ministry of Education should carry out more sensitization programs to enforce the inclusion of Consumer Education in the school curriculum.

KEYWORDS: Consumer Protection Council Act, Awareness, Consumer Education, Manufacturers, Principals, School Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as one of the developing nations of the world had borrowed a leaf from the developed nations of the world in terms of consumer protection. As compared to the developed nations of the world, Nigeria can be said to be in her infantile age adjudging from the fact that her Consumer Protection Act was promulgated in 1999 via the Consumer Protection Council (CPC) (Oyewole, 2014), The CPC is an agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria, supervised by the Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment. Though it was established by Act No. 66 of 1992, it commenced operations only in 1999, when its institutional framework was put in place. Consumer protection is a provision worth emulating and this provision can only be worth the while if the consumers, who are the citizenry even in the rural areas, are made aware of the provisions to protect them. According to Ishak and Zabil (2012) unawareness and lack of knowledge on consumers' rights and claim procedures distort consumers' capacity and ability to defend themselves against cunning traders. In

other instances, the consumer might be aware of his rights but prevailing circumstances might make it better for the consumer to remain silent given the situation where the trader or manufacturer is so highly placed as to silence the protesting consumer or a scenario where the trader is not bothered about one's complaints because sales will continue to be made in spite of such complaints. The consumer in this study, is seen as one who has and is been influenced by his or her wards who are students in secondary schools and who are expected to be taught consumer protection in the school. The secondary school administration is headed by or rests on the shoulders of a school principal.

A school principal is the administrative head of the school and can be seen as the manager of the school (Abdikadir, 2013). According to Ayers and Sommers (2009), the principal is also saddled with the responsibility of stimulating awareness about current theories and practices. This stimulation is usually among staff, students and community members. Other responsibilities of the school principal include shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction and managing people, information and processes to foster school improvement. Good principals are balanced within all their roles and work hard to ensure that they are doing what they feel is best for all constituents involved (Meador, 2018). All references on the school principal boil down to one fact, which is, that the school principal is seen as one full of wisdom and leadership traits as to communicate both in the school environs and by extension the society at large,

Statement of the problem

In Nigeria, the average man on the street believes that once a person is in the education sector, the person becomes an island of knowledge and the school principal is seen as a person who should not be ignorant of anything. This assumption is based on the fact that the principals are exposed to large amounts and various types of information. Principals are likened to boundary spanners that filter information and decide who needs to receive what information (Benoliel & Schechter, 2017). Hence, they serve as filters, facilitators and disseminators of information. In the contest of this research work, the school principal is seen as a consumer. Every individual is a consumer, regardless of occupation, age, gender, community or religious affiliation; Consumer rights and welfare are now an integral part of the life of an individual. A problem for consumer protection, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, according to Usman, Yaacob and Rahman (2015) is the lack of information or awareness on the existence of legal and institutional arrangements available to the consumer. The problem in the present contest is that there seems to be little or no consumer protection awareness by the secondary school principals who are credited with the attribute of being facilitators and disseminators of information first to their students and staff, and then the society at large. The school principal in the average Nigerian context is seen as one who should have all the knowledge such that the teachers are to tap information from the principal and in turn disseminate to the student who become heralds of such information to their parents and the society at large. Not much has been done in terms of consumer protection awareness of secondary school principals in

Nigeria and there apparently is a need to establish the principal's level of awareness as to reach the society at large. In view of these uncertainties, the following questions are posed:

- i. What are the sources of information on consumer protection awareness available to secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area?
- ii. What is the level of consumer protection awareness of secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of a consumer

Different traditions or discourse have invented different representations of the consumer with specificities and coherences (consumer as a chooser, communicator, explorer, identity seeker, victim, rebel, activist or citizen) that are willingly oblivious to those of others (Yiannis & Lang, 2006, Gabriel & Lang 2015). Some see the consumer as a rational decision-maker; some say the consumer is a vulnerable and confused being, while some still look at the consumer as a communicator of means in sustaining the social fabric. Akomolede and Oladele (2006) define a consumer as any person who purchases or is supplied goods, uses or consumes goods and services at the end of a chain of production. A consumer can be seen as anyone who takes in products or enjoys services as are provided by the producer or provider of such goods and services. Although there is no universally accepted definition of whom a consumer is, various definitions are given to better explain the context in which the consumer appear and apply to. Blythe (2008) defines a consumer as someone who enjoys the benefits of a product. The manufacturer of goods or services is also a consumer to the provider of the raw material that is needed for the production process.

Consumer Protection Council Act

Nigeria as a country has so many consumer protection laws but the principal protection act is the one that was promulgate or enacted in 1992 committed to protecting and enhancing consumers' interest through information, education and enforcement of appropriate standards for goods and services and to promote an environment of fair and ethical trade practices (Consumer Protection Council, 2017). Ekanem (2011) posits that the Consumer Protection Council established by the Consumer Protection Council Act is the most direct consumer administrative agency in Nigeria. The objectives of the Consumer Protection Council include informing consumers, eliminating hazardous products from the market and ensuring that products and services comply with the required standards/specifications, providing speedy redress to consumer complaints and promoting consumers' interest (Consumer Protection Council, 2017).

Other consumer protection laws in Nigeria include; National Insurance Commission Act 1997, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control Act 1993, Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, The Nigerian Communications Act 2003, The Standards Organisation of Nigeria Act 1971, Tobacco Smoking (Control) Act 1990, Utilities Charges Commission, The Civil

Aviation Act 2006, National Insurance Commission Act, Federal Road Safety Commission (Establishment) Act 2007, Sale of Goods Laws, The Central Bank of Nigeria Act 2007, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004, Counterfeit and Fake Drugs and Unwholesome Processed Foods (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999, Food, Drugs and Related Products (Registration, Etc.) Act, Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences Act 2006, Sale of Goods Laws, Harmful Waste (Special Criminal Provisions, Etc.) Act, etc. The consumer laws, acts and promulgations are such that they give rise to agencies that are supposed to make sure that the consumer is actually protected. All these agencies or commission have one sole aim and that is to meet the consumers' satisfaction.

The consumer's rights under the Consumer Protection Council Act

The components of the Consumer Protection Council Act which stipulate the rights of the consumer are:

- The right to satisfaction of basic needs: This component provides for access to basic goods and services necessary for survival, such as food, water, energy, clothing, shelter, health-care, education and sanitation. In the provision of these basic needs, it is also important that goods and services must meet the standard of quality promised, such that there is value for money in the purchase. Abegunde (2015) states that the basic needs covered in this provision are basic goods and services which guarantee survival.
- The Right to Safety: Consumers have the right to expect that their health and safety are taken into consideration when industries or businesses develop their goods and services. The consumer has the right to insist that production processes that are injurious or hazardous be stopped for the sake of the safety of the consumer. A production practice that exposes the consumer to danger and thus jeopardizes his/her safety is to be halted on the insistence of the consumer since it will infringe on his/her right to safety. This component of the Consumer Protection Act gives the consumer the right of protection from hazardous products, production processes and services.
- The Right to Information: Manufacturers or providers of goods and services should make full and accurate disclosure of information (facts) on quality and materials used in the production process. Manuals on use, application and installation on all consumer products or services should be made available to the consumer. Sales representatives and customer relation personnel should always be handy at specified times to provide help to consumers requiring such services.
- The consumer is given the right of the provision of information enabling informed consumer choice as well as protection from misleading or inaccurate advertising and labeling (Mwalimu, 2009).
- The Right to Choose: Variety, it is said, is the spice of life. Variety makes it possible and easy for the consumer to make a choice between goods and services that have various options. When there is monopoly, the consumer does not have any choice but with the presence of variety of a particular goods and services, the consumer is in a better position to

make a choice on which type or quality of a product appeals to him/her the most. Freedom of choice is a mirage when there are no varieties to help exercise that freedom. Access to variety of quality products and services at competitive prices is made possible by the Act as to make freedom of choice a reality.

- The Right to Redress: This component makes provision for compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods and unsatisfactory public and private services, including the right to adequate legal representation (Iheme, 2016).
- The Right to Consumer Education: An educated consumer makes the consumption process in particular and exchange of goods and services in general an easier experience. The consumer thus, has the right to the acquisition of the skills required to be an informed consumer throughout life
- • The Right to Consumer Representation: The consumer has the right to expect manufacturers or providers of goods and services to make provision for a rapid and convenient means for registering his/her dissatisfaction. The consumer has the right to demand that complaints made about goods and services are competently managed, evaluated objectively, resolved reasonably, quickly and satisfactorily. The consumer should have this assurance that his/her interest is considered in the scheme of things. This involves the advocacy of consumers' interest and the consumer's ability to take part in the formulation of economic and other policies affecting him/her.
- The Right to a Healthy Environment: Habitat is a place that is safe for present and future generations and which will enhance the quality of their lives. Thus, the consumer has the right to insist that his environment which is shared by the producer and the production processes should be safe enough for habitation. Health threatening practices should be avoided by the producers or providers of goods and services as not to make the environment uninhabitable.

CONSUMER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The consumer does not only enjoy the rights provided by the protection act. The consumer is also saddled with certain responsibilities which help put checks and balances on the production – consumption wheel. The responsibilities of the consumers are as follows:

- The consumer should be aware of goods and services available for consumption. It is the responsibility of any consumer to make consented efforts to know all that needs to be known about goods and services to be consumed. The consumer should make efforts to know about changes in products and services as to be well informed about that particular goods or service (Goldsmith, 2016).
- The consumer should be an independent thinker. Appeals vary and the job of the consumer is to make the best choice out of seemingly similar products. The decision to prioritize and consider thoroughly needs and wants is the responsibility of the consumer. It is the

responsibility of the consumer to refuse to be coaxed into consuming goods or services that are not totally beneficial or meeting the consumer's satisfaction

- **Speak out:** This responsibility of the consumer is one that is so commonly neglected by the consumer. Most consumers will very lazily adopt the 'suffering and smiling mood' instead of speaking out on wrong or inadequate delivery of goods and services. It is very common in developing nations of which Nigeria is a comfortable member to keep quite when things are not going the right way maybe for fear or favour but the bottom line is that it is the responsibility of the consumer to speak out when goods and services do not meet specifications. The providers of those goods and services will not know if they are meeting up with the expectations of the consumers if the consumers do not speak out on what their expectations are.
- **The consumer has to be an ethical consumer.** Being an ethical consumer entails that the consumer has to be honest and fair in the consumption and reporting on the goods and services consumed (Schwartz, 2010). Rules and regulations guiding the consumption of goods and services as is provided by the goods and service provider should be followed because doing otherwise will give an unintended result which may not go down well with the consumer. So, it is the responsibility of the consumer to play his/her part in ensuring that things move the way they are intended to move.
- **The consumer has the responsibility of complaining about goods and services that do not meet the set standards placed on his/her shoulders but in complaining, the consumer is saddled with the greater responsibility of not being malicious but truthful and corrective in his/her complaints.** Honesty is the watchword in this responsibility placed on the consumer because any falsehood could be misleading and can make other consumers to consume or abstain for the consumption of certain goods and services (Abegunde, 2015).
- **Respect environment:** It is the responsibility of the consumers to respect and protect the environment just as it is the consumers right to a healthy environment. In enjoying a safe environment, the consumer is saddled with the responsibility to respect the environment by making sure that the safe environment remains safe for all. Pollution of the environment through poor waste disposal should not be a practice seen amongst consumers.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts descriptive survey research design. The population comprises 43 principals of the 43 government owned secondary schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. This population includes the 20 principals in the Senior Secondary schools sector and 23 principals in Universal Basic Education sector. There was no sampling since the population was adjudged manageable. A consumer protection awareness questionnaire named Consumer Protection Awareness of Secondary School Principals (C-PASSP) Questionnaire which contained eighteen (18) items was administered to the entire 43 secondary school principals as the sample size was manageable and there was no sampling. Face and content validity of the instrument were determined by three experts of Business Education while the reliability which yielded a co-efficient of 0.82 was

ascertained by test-retest method. Fifteen (15) principals who were not part of the population were used for the reliability test. Four point rating scale – Extremely Aware –EA, Moderately Aware – MA, Somewhat Aware – SWA and Slightly Aware – SA was used to collect data from the respondents. The research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 What are the sources of information on consumer protection awareness available to secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area?

**Table 1: Mean score and Standard Deviation of responses on sources of information on consumer protection available to secondary school principals
N = 43**

S/N	SOURCE	EA	MA	SWA	SLA	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	Television	30 (120)	13 (39)	-	-	3.7	0.46	MA
2	Print Media	17 (68)	18 (54)	10 (30)	-	3.3	0.35	MA
3	Consumer Awareness campaigns, rallies and seminars	5 (20)	10 (30)	15 (30)	3 (3)	1.9	1.29	SLA
4	Visit to CPC website	2 (8)	8 (24)	15 (30)	18 (18)	1.9	0.88	SLA
5	Friends and neighbours	17 (68)	12 (36)	14 (28)	-	3.1	0.85	MA
6	School Curriculum	15 (60)	10 (35)	18 (36)	-	2.9	0.87	SWA
Grand Mean						2.8	0.78	

Source: Field survey data 2020

KEY: Extremely Aware –EA, Moderately Aware – MA, Somewhat Aware – SWA and Slightly Aware – SA (Cut-off value ≥ 2.5)

Table 1 which represents the results of the various sources of information on consumer protection awareness slants towards the negative for sources like consumer awareness campaigns, rallies and seminars with a Mean of 1.9 and visit to CPC website with a Mean of 1.9. These values are far below the bench mark of 2.5 for this study.

Research Question 2: What is the level of consumer protection awareness of secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean score and Standard Deviation of responses on level of consumer protection awareness of secondary school principals

N = 43

S/N	STATEMENT	EA	MA	SWA	SLA	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	Expiry dates are always established before purchases are made	27 (108)	16 (48)	-	-	3.6	0.48	MA
2	Goods bought can be returned when they do not meet advertised standards	5 (20)	28 (84)	7 (14)	3 (3)	2.8	0.73	SWA
3	Manufacturers can be sued if goods are noted to be injurious to health	5 (20)	28 (84)	8 (16)	2 (2)	2.8	0.68	SWA
4	Fake products sold for the price of the original can attract legal actions	17 (68)	20 (60)	6 (12)	-	3.3	0.69	MA
5	Good value should be gotten for money paid	22 (88)	18 (54)	3 (6)	-	3.4	0.62	MA
6	Goods bought should contain adequate information	5 (20)	15 (45)	15 (30)	8 (8)	2.4	0.92	SWA
7	Detailed explanation are necessary for consumption goods	14 (56)	15 (45)	11 (22)	3 (3)	2.9	0.93	SWA
8	Dissatisfaction with goods should be readily addressed by producers	12 (48)	28 (84)	3 (6)	-	3.2	0.52	MA
9	Consented effort is made to know about goods for consumption	7 (28)	15 (45)	18 (36)	3 (3)	2.6	0.84	SWA
10	Malicious reports on goods should be avoided	5 (20)	15 (45)	15 (30)	8 (8)	2.4	0.92	SWA
11	Rules and regulations about goods consumption should be followed	20 (80)	18 (54)	5 (10)	-	3.3	0.68	MA
12	Complaints about goods cannot be silenced by the manufacturer	8 (32)	19 (57)	10 (20)	6 (6)	2.7	0.93	SWA
Grand Mean						2.95	0.75	

Source: Field survey data 2020

KEY: Extremely Aware –EA, Moderately Aware – MA, Somewhat Aware – SWA and Slightly Aware – SA (Cut-off value ≥ 2.5)

Although Table 2 shows a grand mean of 2.95 which is above the cut-off value of 2.5, the individual items on the questionnaire shows that the secondary principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area are somewhat aware of the various listed consumer protection provisions but record a mark below the cut-off value of 2.5 in two of the questionnaire items with a Mean of 2.4 apiece for items 6 and 10.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research on consumer protection awareness level of principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area is one amongst many that has gone out to establish the status quo as it affects awareness of the consumer's rights. The principals were on spotlight because the researcher believes that if the principal is aware, the students will be communicated and the society at large will be informed. The findings on sources of information about consumer protection show that investigated sources like television, print media, campaigns, rallies, seminars and friends/neighbours contribute to the knowledge bank of the principal but the school curriculum which should be the principal's Manuel does not supply much to the principal. The Nigeria Ministry of Education had in 2011 added Consumer Education with support from Consumer Protection Council to primary and secondary school curriculum but the respondents to the research exhibit a low level of awareness via curriculum source. This shows that the inclusion, which was to be felt in relevant subjects like business education, commerce and economics

has not really taken root and more has to be done to make the inclusion workable and awareness of the consumer's right widespread (Adesulu, 2011). It infers thus from the research findings that the inclusion of Consumer Education should be followed up with enforcement and more training on the part of the Ministry of Education as to make it workable.

The level of awareness displayed by principals on consumer protection matters which is a global matter is worrisome. The researchers are of the view that since the principals are disseminators of information, they should be conversant with all the consumer protection provisions. In another study by Akpomi (2016) titled 'Awareness and communication of prevailing weather conditions among university lecturers in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria' where lecturers who are repositories of knowledge and information were investigated, the study showed that an alarming 89% of the population understudied knew nothing or had poor awareness about the issue being researched upon. Thus, the researcher of the above mentioned study reported that current issues such as was investigated was a global issue and one wondered why those who should be imparting knowledge should be ignorant.

CONCLUSIONS

Consumer protection awareness is a course of action worth embarking on and thus, the researchers conclude that more consumers need to know about their rights and obligations as consumers. The findings from this research show that the secondary school principals are to a moderate level, aware of the provisions made in the Consumer Protection Council Act and this awareness should be further imparted to the students, then parents and the community members alike. Until that is achieved, the consumer will continue to suffer injustice in the hands of manufacturers and service providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research work throws more light on Consumer Protection Council Act and awareness level of secondary school principals in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. More consumer protection awareness campaigns, rallies and seminars should be embarked upon by the government and the various consumer protection agencies.
2. The Consumer Protection Commission should create more awareness and make her website accessible so that consumers can log in from time to time to clear issues bothering them.
3. The Ministry of Education should carry out more sensitization/inspection programs to enforce the inclusion of Consumer Education in the school curriculum.
4. The principals on their part should be more versatile in the consumer protection provisions and not just record high level of awareness in only a few areas.

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