

 Research Article

What's the Fuss about Extra Lessons? Empirical Evidence on Pupils' Perception

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Abstract

Divergent perspectives on extra lessons for pupils have dominated current discourse on instructional support. Debates regarding the benefits of extra lessons have been on the increase. A number of experts are of the view that primary school curriculum is overloaded. Often, there is no empirical data for evidence-based policies regarding this. We designed this pilot study to explore students' extra lessons experiences in order to inform policies. We used a cross-sectional survey design to sample 261 students (male = 54%; female = 46%; mean age = 10.51±1.41) from six intact classes in two primary schools owned and operated by two tertiary institutions in Anambra State. We developed a questionnaire consisting of 9 items to gather students' views on their extra lessons activities. Part A of the questionnaire comprises the participants' demographic information while the part B consists of 9 items eliciting the experiences of the participants in extra lessons activities. Major findings demonstrated that the majority of students engaged in extra lessons were satisfied with the lessons, experienced little stress during extra lessons, and learned a lot from them. Furthermore, a higher proportion of male students were more dissatisfied with extra lessons than their female counterparts; and more students reported being dissatisfied with the extra lessons when they lasted longer than two hours per day. The implications of the findings were highlighted, and it was concluded that, while extra lessons may benefit primary school pupils, if not properly implemented, they may be detrimental to students' mental health and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Extra Lessons, Learning, Pupils, Stress


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1. INTRODUCTION

Several nations of the world appear to be making giant strides in advocating and upholding the fundamental human right to education in line with global standards. These standards are spelt out in the policies of international organisations like the United Nations (UN) and its specialised agencies. Some of these policies include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN and the Education for All Campaign of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). To guarantee this fundamental right to education for their citizens, several nations, including developing nations in Africa, have launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy that makes basic education free and compulsory (Ansong et al., 2023). Also, these nations' free basic education policies stem from their recognition of the significance of education in realising social and economic development (Rambeli et al., 2021) and the 17 SDGs (Abreh, 2023).

The UBE policy was launched by the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 30th September 1999 (Amuchie-Austin et al., 2013). According to these researchers, the UBE policy seeks to provide free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age and to reduce the dropout rate from formal

school systems. However, the over 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria (The IREDE Foundation (TIF), 2021) raises some questions about the success of the UBE programme implementation. Yet, even if the programme succeeds in handling the problem of school dropout in Nigeria, and gets all children of school age to school, the next big task would be addressing the issue of children's learning outcomes.

Recent studies in Nigeria (e.g. Udokang & Odeyemi, 2020) show that the learning outcomes of students, as indicated by their performance in external examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) have consistently dwindled with each successive year. Among other factors, recent studies such as Yeşil Dağlı (2019) have attributed the poor learning outcomes of students to the inadequacy of classroom instructional time for effective curriculum content coverage by teachers. This factor affects students' learning outcomes since it determines whether or not a teacher will cover the stipulated curriculum content. Thus, no matter how effective a teacher is, students may not gain much from the teacher if they lack adequate instructional time to demonstrate their teaching effectiveness. The ultimate effect of this inadequacy is demonstrated in students' poor learning outcomes. Bukaliya (2022) asserted that regular school teachers lacked adequate instructional time for curriculum content coverage, stemming from the frequency of public holidays and other events encroaching on the time. To remedy this situation, educational stakeholders like school authorities, in collaboration with teachers and parents, resorted to using extra lessons (EL) among other measures, to make up for lost instructional time in regular schools.

EL are additional academic lessons provided for students outside their regular school hours (Bray, 2011). It is a learning experience that seeks to improve students' areas of weaknesses or learning deficiencies. EL can be provided to individual students or a whole class in many forms such as after-school lessons, home lessons, lesson centres, and holiday lessons (Udokang & Odeyemi, 2021; Zhou & Wang, 2015). Also, extra lessons can be provided freely by schools or private tutors/businesses, or funded by parents (Bukaliya, 2022). Schools can provide free EL for their final-year students preparing for national or qualifying examinations. More often than not, this free service is provided as a marketing strategy to attract students to the school. As the schools offer EL to their students and they excel, parents/guardians become favourably disposed to the school and may send their children to be educated there. However, for other class categories, schools may charge parents a fee for the service. Similarly, private tutors can provide EL services in their clients' homes, or lesson centres, during active school terms or holidays.

EL are both supplementary and complementary to lessons provided during regular school hours. However, Bray (2011) argued that EL is an indication of a failed education system. The researcher's argument implies that if the formal/regular education/school system were functioning optimally, there would be no need for EL. Although Bray's argument appears plausible, the roles that EL play in the formal school system cannot be undermined. EL give students a competitive advantage in limited school enrolment and employment opportunities which are majorly reserved for the best among the rest (Zhou & Wang, 2015). Thus, as students get engaged in EL, in addition to lessons from regular classroom lessons, and excel in their academics, they stand a better chance of accessing these opportunities compared to their contemporaries. EL has shifted the view of regular schools as the only formal centre where teaching and learning can occur, to the EL industry that provides essential support to regular schools. This support has necessitated the wide adoption of EL as part of the global education system (Bukaliya, 2022). However, notwithstanding this wide adoption of EL, there is still some fuss about the practice.

The fuss about EL as observed in literature stems from the divergent perceptions of different educational stakeholders on its effects on students and the educational system. Research conducted on this subject by researchers from different climes has shown that the effects are mixed. That is, the effects are both positive and negative. In highlighting the positive effects of EL on students and the educational system, research findings (Bukaliya, 2019; 2022; Udokang & Odeyemi, 2020; 2021) show that teachers use EL to prepare students adequately for examinations. This preparation is facilitated by several factors including the clarification of areas of confusion in students' learning (Mboi & Nyambedha, 2013). EL can provide students with the time and opportunities to interact personally with their teachers and ask questions about confusing ideas. These interactions are aided by the small class size obtainable in EL, which allows students to personally interact with their teachers and have their learning challenges resolved. On the other hand, these opportunities may not be present in regular classrooms because of the large size. Nath (2008) described the teacher-learner interaction that leads to the solving of students' learning challenges as the product of the friendly disposition of EL teachers compared to those in regular schools. However, this

disposition could be a marketing strategy by EL teachers to attract more students to participate in extra lessons.

Irrespective of the underlying motive of the teachers, the friendly disposition of EL teachers enhances the adequate and effective coverage of curriculum content. The effective coverage of the curriculum leads to improved students' learning outcomes for low-achieving students and the maintenance of optimum learning outcomes for high-achieving students. As a remediation process, EL primarily targets low-achieving students, to boost their learning outcomes. On the other hand, EL can serve as a maintenance process for high-achieving students. Thus, as the learning outcomes of low and high-achieving students are improved and maintained respectively, the achievement gap between the two groups can be bridged (Zhou & Wang, 2015), benefiting the entire educational system. On the contrary, the researchers also argued that EL could negatively affect the educational system by widening the achievement gap between low and high-achieving students since it could make high achievers advance further than their peers.

Also, EL introduces some elements of confusion to students' learning (Bukaliya, 2022). This confusion could stem from the different and perhaps contradictory teaching methods teachers employ during regular school hours and extra lessons in teaching students. The students may become confused of the teaching method to work with. However, the different teaching methods used in EL, which are more student-friendly when compared to those in regular schools may be an attempt to make EL attractive to students (Nath, 2008). Furthermore, research evidence shows that EL contributes to disciplinary problems among students in regular classrooms (Yasmeen, 2009). These disciplinary problems can be observed in attention deficiency and truancy of students in regular classrooms, most likely because they may have covered the topic a teacher is teaching, or may be aware that the topic would be covered subsequently in their EL classes. More importantly, as seen in the literature (Bukaliya, 2022), EL negatively affect students' learning outcomes by escalating students' academic stress. This arises when students' mental capacities are stretched beyond their coping abilities in extra classes, often leading to mental overload. Bukaliya asserted that EL contributes to students' academic stress experience by depriving them of the time to rest and socialise with their peers.

Considering the negative effects of EL on students and the educational system, many educational stakeholders, especially the government have questioned its usefulness to the system. In questioning this usefulness, the government of Anambra State recently banned the practice of extramural lessons in schools in the state (Uzor, 2024). In making the ban on behalf of the Governor, the Commissioner for Education in the state cited the mental stress these lessons subject students to and advocated that students be allowed to go home, rest, and interact with their families instead of being held back in school for extramural classes. Before the ban, schools in Anambra State usually began schooling activities by 8:00 am and closed by 4:00 pm. However, with the ban, most schools in Anambra State now close by 2:30 pm. This new development gives students in Anambra State added time to rest from school work and socialise with their peers. Although the argument of the government and other critics of EL may appear plausible, it is important to get students' perspectives on the subject, since they are the direct recipients of EL. Thus, a need for the present study. Specifically, we intend to understand the rate at which students participate in extra lessons and their perception of extra lessons.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The current study employed the cross-sectional survey design to explore students' extra lessons experiences. According to Creswell (2018), survey research involves administering a questionnaire to a sample of people or the entire population to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of that group. Questionnaires are useful tools for survey research because of their reliability, validity, and generalizability (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

2.2. Participants

A sample of 261 students (male = 54%; female = 46%; mean age = 10.51 ± 1.41) from six intact classes in two primary schools owned and operated by two tertiary institutions in Anambra State. A

purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants from two primary schools owned by tertiary institutions based in Awka, Nigeria.

2.3. Instrument for Data Collection

We developed a questionnaire consisting of 9 items to gather students' views on their extra lessons activities. In part A the participants' demographic information, such as gender was obtained, and the second part of the instrument comprised 9 items. It was subjected to content validity to check the appropriateness of the language. The instrument was constructed to elicit the percentage experience of the participants in extra lessons activities.

2.4. Procedures

First the consent of the school authorities were sought, and confidentiality was ensured by not including any marker of identification for the respondents. We thereafter explained the essence of the study, and leveraged on teachers and school authorities to establish rapport with our respondents. The consent of the teachers supplemented that of our respondents' parents (Maduka-Okafor et al., 2022) especially as teacher serve as legal guidance in Nigerian system of education (Nwosu et al., 2023). Direct administration of a questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. Teachers in the classroom served as research assistants. All questionnaire items were framed in English language which is the official language of Nigeria as well as the language of instruction in schools. Approximately fifteen minutes was taken to fill in the questionnaire by the students. All the distributed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot which accounted for the 100% retrieval of the questionnaires.

2.5. Data Analysis

The method of data analysis in this study involves the use of graph to show the percentage response of the respondents to the questions contained in the questionnaire. The main focus of the research is to determine students' extra lesson experiences.

3. RESULTS

Figure 1 shows that 98.85% of the pupils participated in the lessons whereas only 1.15% did not participate in extra lessons.

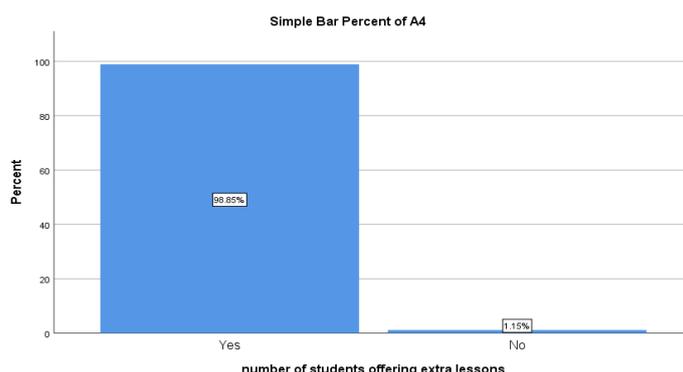


Figure 1. Number of Pupils Offering Extra Lessons

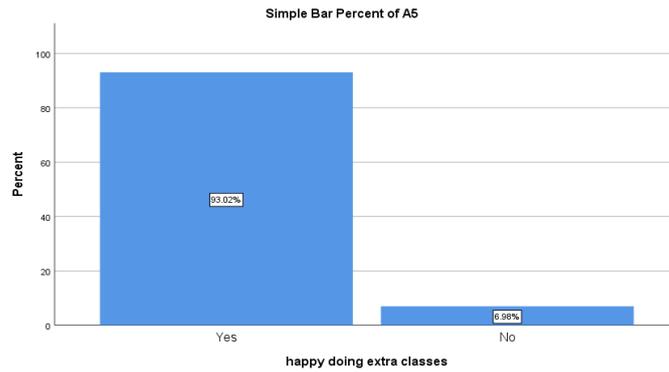


Figure 2. Bar Chart for Number of Students Who are Happy Doing Extra Classes

Figure 2 reveals that 93.02 students were happy doing extra classes whereas only 6.98% were not happy doing extra lessons.

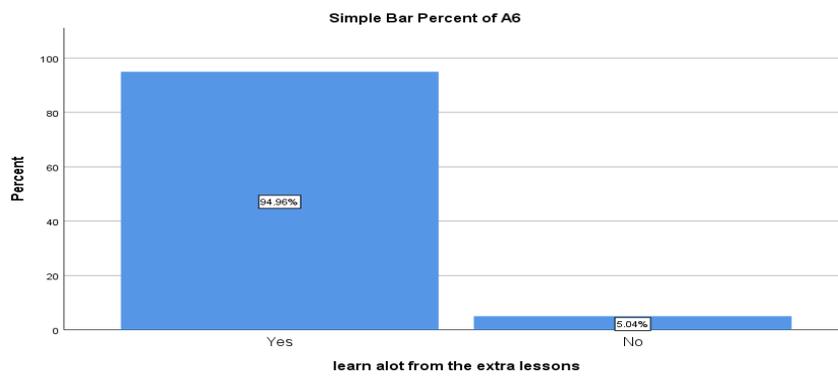


Figure 3. Percentage of Pupils Who Are Learning a Lot from Extra Lessons

Figure 3 revealed that the majority of students (94.94%) reported that they were learning a lot from the extra lessons.

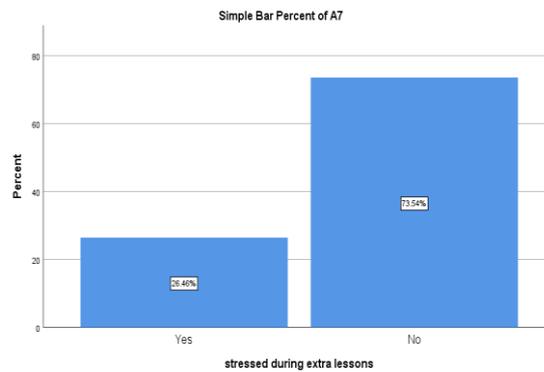


Figure 4. Percentage of Students who are Stressed during Extra Lessons

Figure 4 revealed that whereas 26.46% of the students were stressed during extra lessons about 73.54% were not stressed during the extra lessons.

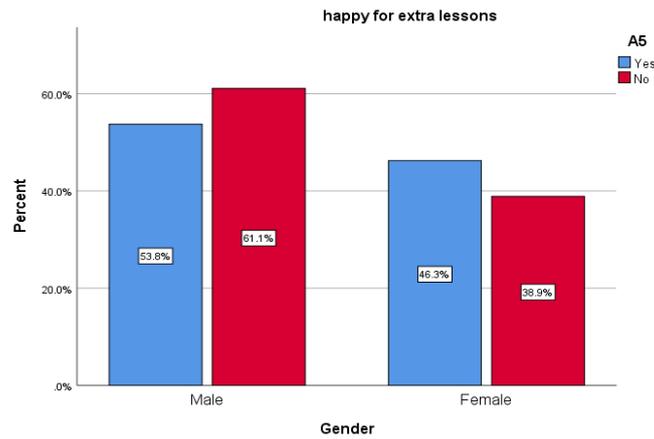


Figure 5. Gender and Being Happy with Extra Lessons

Figure 5 reveals that a greater percentage of male students were unhappy with extra lessons whereas a larger number of female students reported being happy with extra lessons. The number of male pupils who reported being unhappy with the lessons was higher than the number among female girls.

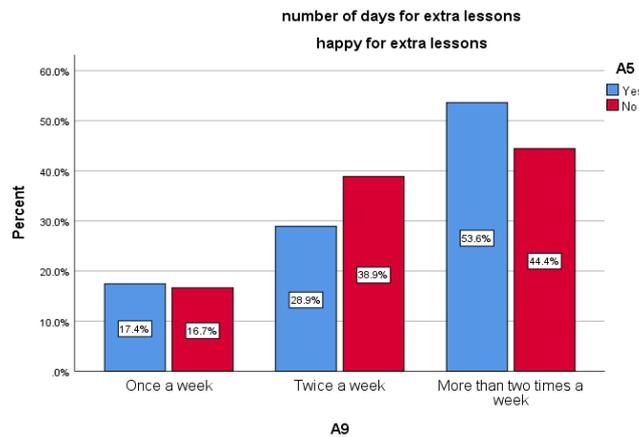


Figure 6. Impact of Number of Days for the Extra Lessons and Reported Happiness for Extra Lessons

Figure 6 shows that 53.6% of pupils who participate in lessons more than twice per week were happy with the extra lessons while 44.4% were not happy participating in the extra lessons. For pupils who participate in extra lessons twice a week, 38.9% reported not being happy with the extra lessons whereas 28.9% reported being happy with the extra lessons. For those who participate once a week, 17.4% reported being happy with extra lessons whereas 16.7% of the pupils in this category reported not being happy.

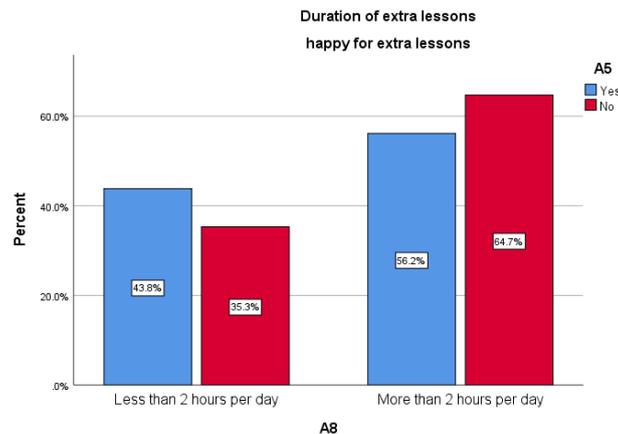


Figure 7. Duration of Lessons and Happy Doing Extra Lessons

Figure 7 shows the duration of the extra lessons and how happy pupils are doing extra lessons. A larger number of pupils whose extra lessons last less than two hours per day were happy with extra lessons whereas a lower number of pupils in this category reported being unhappy with the lessons. Also, more pupils reported being unhappy with the lessons when the lessons last for more than two hours per day.

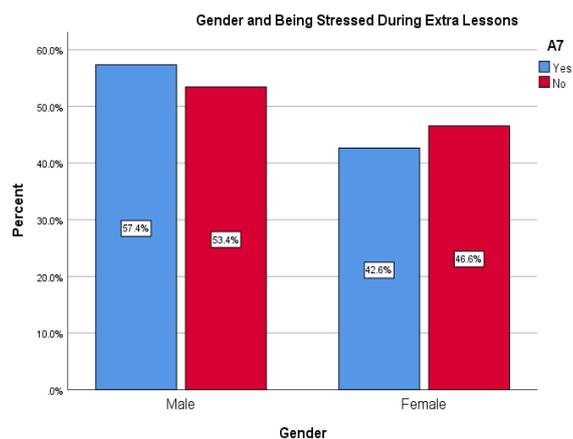


Figure 8. Gender and Stress during Extra Lessons

Figure 8 revealed that 57.4% of male pupils said yes that they are stressed whereas 53.4% reported not being stressed during extra lessons. On the other hand, 46% of the female students reported not being stressed during extra lessons while 42.6% reported that they were stressed during extra lessons.

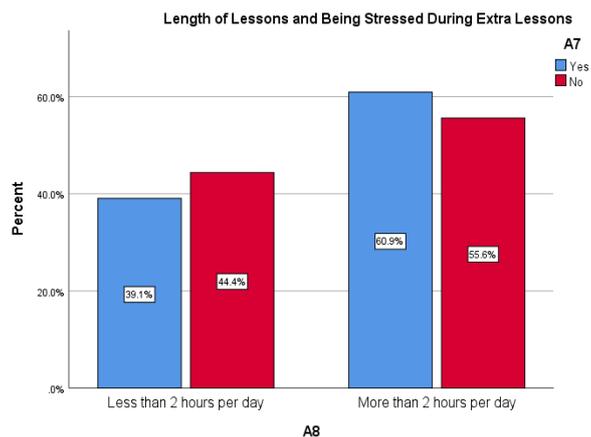


Figure 9. Length of Lesson Period and Being Stressed During Extra Lessons

Pupils reported stress during lessons and the influence of length of lesson period was presented in Figure 9. More pupils reported being stressed when their lessons lasted longer than when it is shorter.

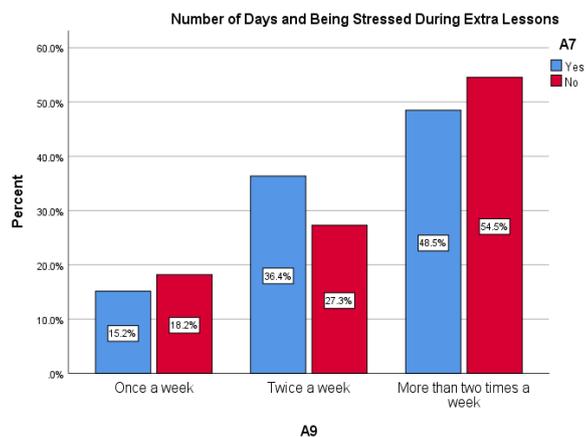


Figure 10. Number of Days of Lessons and Being Stressed During Extra Lessons

Figure 10 shows that more pupils were stressed in the category of students who reported that they have their lessons twice a week. In contrast, more pupils reported not being stressed in the categories of those who stated that they have extra lessons once a week and more than two times a week.

4. DISCUSSION

We attempted to unravel primary school pupils' perceptions about their extra lessons due to the divergent opinions regarding pupils' participation in extra lessons (EL). We found that most pupils sampled participated in EL. This indicates that EL could be popular among the pupils sampled, in addition to the formal education system. This finding corroborates the assertion made by Bukaliya (2022) and Udokang and Odeyemi (2020; 2021) that EL has been widely adopted as part of the global education system used by teachers to prepare students for examinations adequately. This adequate preparation is aided by the effective curriculum coverage which EL makes possible. Also, we found that most pupils sampled learned a lot and were happy doing EL in addition to the learning they acquired in formal or regular schools. When compared against pupils' gender, we found that the reported happiness with extra lessons was more among female pupils than their male counterparts. Again, we compared pupils' happiness doing EL with the number of days and observed that pupils whose EL took place more than twice a week were the happiest, followed by those whose EL took place once a week. The pupils whose EL took place twice a week were much unhappier. Similarly, when compared to duration, pupils whose EL lasted for more than two hours per day were much unhappier compared to those whose EL lasted less than two hours per day. This implies that the longer the duration, the unhappier the sampled pupils become doing EL and the fewer benefits they may derive from their participation. The happiness derived by the pupils from EL can be attributed to the cordial teacher-student interaction, which is facilitated by the friendlier disposition of EL teachers. Also, the happiness could be because pupils learned better in EL as their teachers always took time occasioned by the small classroom size to sufficiently explain ideas for their comprehension. This opportunity may not be available in regular classrooms because of a larger classroom size. This finding corroborates the findings of Mboi and Nyambedha (2013) that EL provided students with better opportunities for grey areas in their learning of any subject matter to be clarified.

Furthermore, although a larger percentage of the pupils were not stressed during EL, we found that a considerable percentage felt otherwise. This group of pupils felt EL subjected them to extra academic stress, in addition to the stress they experienced in regular classrooms and the domestic chores they had to deal with. When compared to pupils' gender, we observed that the stress level from EL was more pronounced among male pupils than their female counterparts. Also, we found that pupils whose EL lasted for more than two hours per day were more stressed compared to those whose EL lasted for less than two hours per day. This finding implies also that the longer the duration, the more stress students experience from EL, and the less likely they are to perform well in their studies. Again, we compared the sampled pupils' stress experience to the number of days of EL and found that pupils whose EL took place twice a week felt more stress than those whose EL took place once a week and more than twice a week respectively. These findings support Bukaliya (2022) and the Anambra State government's (Uzor, 2024) positions that EL contributes to the academic stress experience of students by depriving them of time for resting and socialising with their family and peers. Bukaliya further posited that longer hours of EL were inimical to students' progress as it fosters academic stress that is detrimental to students' academic achievement and mental health. However, the study's findings contradict Udokang and Odeyemi (2021) who posited that longer hours of EL were suitable for enhancing students' learning outcomes. It could be that longer hours could aid learning outcomes but there is the possibility that this can endanger pupils' mental health.

Therefore, our findings have significant implications to instructional practices. Extra lessons should be organized and managed with the understanding that they are an additional instructional support and duration should not be so long to result in stress. This will provide pupils with adequate time to rest, thereby promoting their mental health. Extra lessons should be short and focused on areas students lack strengths, and should not necessarily be an avenue for the introduction of new concepts that they may overtax the mental capacities of the students since they attend most of these lessons after their main classes. Also, in scheduling these classes, teachers should be mindful of the fact that these pupils should be given an opportunity to play with their peers and family members. Hence, they should interfere with such arrangements. This will help foster their social interactions and their psychomotor skills. Theoretically,

notwithstanding the fact that extra lessons provides an opportunity for scaffolding important skills from significant persons, it can result in cognitive overload if they are overwhelming.

5. CONCLUSION

Our findings indicated that the majority of our respondents participate in extra lessons and that they felt that the experience is worthwhile except when the lesson time is prolonged. We, therefore conclude based on our findings that extra lessons are perceived by pupils to aid their learning. However, it could impact negatively on their mental health especially when the time is prolonged. Despite our substantial contributions resulting from our study, our findings have a number of limitations in terms of generalizability. First, our sample size was small, consisting of students from primary schools managed by tertiary institutions. These schools are elite schools and opinions from these students may not represent those of students in other public owned schools. There is the possibility that pupils in other schools may not be involved in extra lessons the way our respondents are involved. As a result, future research could focus on students from different types of public and private schools. Second, the data collected involved only the use of questionnaire which may limit the depth of our findings. There is the need that future studies adopt mixed method approach. Importantly, our study could inform policies regarding instructional supports in primary schools, government and school authorities could evolve a policy to regulate the time pupils spend during extra lessons hours to prevent stress among primary school pupils.

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Data Availability Statement. All data can be obtained from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest. No conflict of interest.

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