



Environmental Influence On Students' Academic Performance In Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

The school environment, which includes the classroom, school location, school facility, school climate and technology, etc, is a variable that affects students' academic performance. Hence the school environment remains an important area that should be studied and well managed to enhance students' academic performance. The extent to which students' learning could be enhanced depends on their location within the school compound, the structure of their classroom, availability of instructional facilities and accessories. It is believed that a well planned school will gear up expected outcome of education that will facilitate good social, political and economic emancipation, effective teaching learning process and academic performance of the students.

Keywords: Environment, Academic Performance, School Location

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INTRODUCTION

Environment, according to Webster's comprehensive dictionary, can be defined as the sum total of all surrounding of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage. Environmental influence before now has not been considered as one of the factors that affect academic performance in secondary schools hence it has little or no attention in educational discourse and consideration. But, over the last decade, remarkable studies have indicated a correlation between the environment and academic performance of students.

According to (Chukwuemeka, 2013) environments play major roles in the life of every individual whether a student, teacher, employer or employee. The challenge of education today is to offer experiences that provide students with opportunities to develop the understanding, skills, and attitudes necessary to become lifelong learners, capable of identifying and solving problems and dealing with change.

This is particularly important in secondary education which, as specified in the National Policy on Education, is to prepare the students for useful living in the society and for higher education (FGN, 2004).

There are three levels of education in Nigeria: the primary, secondary, and tertiary. Secondary education is the education children receive after primary education, but before tertiary education.

In order to achieve the goals of secondary education, the environment has to be conducive for learning. In fact, education thrives well only if there is good learning environment to assist learners to get the necessary information at each stage of learning. The environment constitutes an important aspect of the learning process. They create the needed conditions for effectiveness of teaching and learning. Hence, it is pertinent to critically look at the environmental factors that influence academic performance of students, measures that can help, improve them and make some recommendations.

CLASSROOM AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The classrooms form a very crucial part of the school environment, as no meaningful learning can take place where no classrooms exist. It is the hub of every learning interaction between the teacher and his students. According to (Oriere, 2007), the teaching learning process takes place mostly in the classrooms. By extension, (OYESOLA, 2007) opined that the number of classrooms required in the school should be a reflection of the population of the students and staff, among other factors. Aigboje (2005), the school is one of the basic learning facilities that promote learning. Because of the complexity of working out a uniform ratio for secondary schools, the National Policy on Education does not include a single prescription, but the National Council on Education (NCE) subsequently laid down that secondary school class size should not exceed 35 pupils (UNESCO, 2000).

But as observed by (R. Aluede, Okhiku, I., Esamah, I. & Ojiemhenkele, A., 2010), classrooms have now become human poultry, where more than 50 students are canned in one classroom which is at variance with the expected. Subsequently, Afolabi (2010), observed that in a majority of Nigerian secondary schools, the classroom accommodation is grossly inadequate. As a result of the large enrolment in these schools, the classrooms designed for only thirty or forty students in most cases as well as the chairs and desks are not enough as students were found sharing chairs, standing up, or sitting on windows or broken desks. When students are overcrowded like this, there is a stalling of the teaching-learning process and a disruption of the children's mental activity, a situation that generally militate against effective teaching and intellectual development of the children. In many of these schools, classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards and achievement R. Aluede, Okhiku, I. & Udele, J. (2009). Classroom lighting plays a particularly critical role in student performance (Philips, 1997). Obviously, students cannot study unless lighting is adequate, and there have been many studies reporting optimal lighting levels. Tanner (2009) cites results of seventeen studies from the mid-1930s to 1997. The consensus of these studies is that appropriate lighting improves test scores, reduces off-task behaviour, and plays a significant role in students' achievement. Recently there has been renewed interest in increasing natural daylight in school buildings. Until the 1950s, natural light was the predominant means of illuminating most school spaces, but as electric power costs declined, so too did the amount of day lighting used in schools.

SCHOOLS LOCATION AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

School location refers to a place where schools are located. This includes urban and rural areas. Most urban schools are sited inside the town close to residential houses and they are more than schools in the rural areas. Schools in the urban areas are more populated in terms of staff and students as well as learning facilities availability. He postulated further

that rural schools occupy large areas of land greater part of which is underdeveloped. He added that rural school location could be far from the community centre and few students and staff manage to get to school regularly. On his part, Ibadin opined that quality of education in the rural localities is not comparable to that available in urban areas. However, in terms of teaching staff, rural areas seem to suffer a lot of setback as many teachers and facilities are often times concentrated in urban areas (State Ministry of Education, Office of Statistics and Planning, 2005). From observation, it is a known fact that there is a wide difference between learning facilities availability in urban secondary schools, compared to those of the rural schools. It is a visible evidence to see schools in the urban areas fully built, well positioned, with modern learning facilities while the rural areas showcase mainly uncompleted buildings used as schools, with no windows, no laboratories. In spite of these differences, students in urban and rural schools are still involved in the writing of the same examination. Ogbode identified the following factors that are responsible for the disparity in the provision of learning facilities in urban and rural schools:

- (i) The urban schools have greater population and often more articulated than rural schools.
- (ii) Educational and policy makers are more interested in urban school.
- (iii) Officers for school administration are located in urban areas. Therefore, nearness of these education agencies influences the disparity in the availability of learning facilities.
- (iv) The children of senior government and education offices attend urban schools. This makes them to be more informed about the physical state of the urban schools than those of the rural schools.
- (v) Nearness of urban schools to construction office or workshop equally makes it easier for a school administrator to seek help for repair work, unlike those in the rural areas which do not have such opportunity.

SCHOOL LOCATION AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

One of the factors that influence academic performance is school location/site of the school. This is so because in a situation whereby the school is sited in a noisy area like airport or in the heart of a city like Port Harcourt city, where activities disrupt the teaching/learning of the students, one will not expect such students in this area to be doing well academically. Onukwo (2004/2005) agrees that a conducive environment enhances a child's growth and development. Children feel happy in a peaceful and friendly environment where as schools sited in noisy urban streets are associated with deficits in mental concentration leading to student's poor performance. Noise is anything that interferes with teaching/learning process. Noise produces influence on children's information processing strategies, feelings of personal control as well as their level of arousal. Economic, motivational and emotion are also other factors that influence academic performance of students (Fraser, 1985). These

hamper the child's intellectual development considerably as such treatments invariably result in negative self-concept.

Also culture influences student's academic performance. The cultural environment influences aspiration because culturally based explanations of behaviour tend to focus on the moral codes that operate within particular families, communities or groups.

As culture has to do with beliefs values, norms and socializations, research have shown that the environment whether urban or rural industrial also contributes to what a child learns and how it is being learned. Some communities have a history/tradition of formal education and modern education influences. Then while some are not so well equipped, the gadgets, resources, facilities in both types of community will influence the learning processes of the child. Student's cannot single handedly achieve all their goals. So they must be equipped with adequate technological facilities such as textbooks, clients, computer, visual and audio-visual aids, photographs and posters.

Vikoo (2003) views instructional material as "any device with instructional content or function that is used for teaching purpose, including books, supplementary reading materials, audio-visual and other sensory materials, scripts for radio and television instrumentation programs for computer management packaged sets of materials for construction or manipulation. Also Vikoo (2003) sees instructional material as anything that can be profitably employed to facilitate teaching learning process. Therefore, class without learning material can lead to student's poor academic performance.

INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL FACILITY ON STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT

This is a considerable support that a variety of sustainable designs a significant influence on student's behaviour and academic achievement. One of the most critical physical characteristics of classroom is lighting (Philips, 1997). The importance of an appropriate visual environment for learning task deserves careful consideration. The visual environment affects a learner's ability to perceive visual stimuli and affects his/her mental attitude and thus, performance.

Dunn, Krinsky, Murray, and Quinn (1985) insisted that the lighting of a school should be considered on active element of the total educational environment. He found that good lighting contributes significantly to the aesthetics and psychological character of the teaching space; students perform well than in a dark classroom. Horton (1972) suggest that the ability of individuals in school to concentrate on instructions was strongly influenced by factors such as lighting.

Classroom lighting plays a particularly critical role because of the direct relationship between good lighting and students' performance. Students cannot study unless lighting is adequate. The effectiveness of information collection is reduce in bad light seeing in bad light can lead to the development of ineffective programming of the information collection process which may become habitual. Bad light leads to discomfort and poor academic performance.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AS IT AFFECTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Physical structure of a school building and the interactions between students and teachers, are two main diverse factors that both affect and help to define the broad concept of school climate. School climate has been researched for many years and continued to be examined and redefined as a result of its significant influences on educational outcomes. Clearly, school climates is multidimensional and influences many individuals, including students, parents school personnel, and the community. Additionally, school climates can be of positive influence on the health of the learning environments as Freiberg (1998) notes "school climate can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning. School environment can affect many areas and people within schools. For example, a positive school climate has been associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems for students. Additionally, specific research on school climate in high risk urban environment indicates that a positive, supportive and culturally conscious school climate can significantly shape the degree of academic success experienced by urban students (Haynes & Comer, 1993). School climates research suggests that positive interpersonal relationships and optional learning opportunities for students in all demographic environments can increase achievement behaviour. Regarding the roles of teachers and administrators, Taylor and (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995) found that a positive school climate is associated with increased job satisfaction for school personnel.

Attending a new school can be frightening for students and this apprehension can adversely affect student's perceptions of their schools climate and learning outcomes. Therefore, providing a positive and supportive school climate for students is important for a smooth and easy transition to a new school. Furthermore, school climate can play a significant role in improving a healthy and positive and supportive school climate for students is important for a smooth and easy transition to a new school. Furthermore, school climate can play a significant role in improving a healthy and positive school atmosphere, Freiberg (1998) notes "the interaction of various school and classroom climate factors can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels". A positive school climate can yield positive educational and psychological outcome for students and school personnel. Similarly, a negative climate can prevent optimal learning and development. (Freiberg, 1998). School climate including "trust respect, mutual obligation and concern for others welfare can have powerful- effect on educational relationships as well as learners" academic achievement and overall school progress.

THE INFLUENCE OF HOME BACKGROUND ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

Motivating students to achieve set goals in school is of great concern to teachers, parents and researchers. A child's first educational experiences are centered in the homes; his

ideas, attitude and general pattern of behaviour are as a result of his childhood rearing. The variation in the academic attainments of students could be related directly to differences in the home and its influence. For the purpose of this research, the home is categorized into monogamous and polygamous type and both have effects in difference ways on the academic progress or achievement of the child. Durojaiye (1975) in his investigation among four thousand (4000) primary and secondary children from Ibadan in Nigeria found that 88% of children from extended family situation were influenced by grandparents, aunts and uncles in discipline at home, 92% complained of lack of clear standard to follow, 91% complained of being unable to study at home because of their being sent on errands by relatives. The study also found out that 78% justified the need to lie as a means of escaping blames and punishments from all sides and 75% admitted regular stealing. The extended family system, the said appeared to be the less favorable than unclear family for the emotional and academic well being of the child. Some polygamous homes burden children with domestic duties that they had little time left for rest or study.

In some cases the children from polygamous home were left to care for their younger ones, which prompted their inability to attend school. Evans as cited in Egwuche noted that family size to a large extent determines the relative amount of physical attention and time which each child gets from his parents.

Too many children in the home entail less amount of attention in terms of time available for each child. It is also possible that family size affects the level of intellectual quantity that the child brings into the classroom. Evidence from several studies suggests that a measure of intellectual quantity varies directly with the size of the family and that correlation cuts across social class line. Musgrave in Egwuche found out that the greater the number of children in the family, the lower the measure of intellectual quantity of the subsequent children.

The significant relationship between socioeconomic class and success in school has been shown by Fraser she looks at socio-economic class as one of the major causes of unnatural inequalities in education. In most western countries, all types of public and private schools serve different social class. She further explains that inequality of educational opportunities results when there is keen competition to enter an institution and their need to play high fees. Students from higher socio-economic to classes are expected to perform better in schools. Dubey (1972) states that the most important predictor of achievement in school associated with the family is socio-economic status.

He concluded by saying that his relationship of socio-economic achievement is always consistent, no matter whether our measure of status is occupation of the parents, education or both of them. On the whole, the child's background affect the school success. Also family stability has been found to exert serious effect on the child's education. Divorce, separation and single parenthood affect the children academic performance.

TECHNOLOGY INFLUENCE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

Technology is of significant importance to the academic achievement of students. But instead of achieving academically, students turned to be cheating instrument. There is the acceptance that the incidence of academic misconduct in our middle schools and high school has increased significantly in recent years (Underwood and Szaba, 2003).

Although educators and academics disagree on the root causes of this alarming behaviour, there is little disagreement that the accessibility of computers, the internet, and other electronic resources such as CD-ROM encyclopedias has made cheating quicker and easier for our current generation of Technology-Savvy teen. "Cyber cheating" (meaning the use of technology tools in inappropriate ways for academic work). Because of this cheatings on students, Fulton (1997) persuasively argue that schools must change traditional approaches to learning in order to help today's students acquire the skill set required for succeeding in the work place of the future. These advanced skill will be achieved "through the learner's interactions with the content" "in the digital ages" and not through "the transmission of facts" (Fulton, 1997). Therefore assessment tools should be designed in a way that knowledge and information are used in the adult world. Cromwell (2000) claims "many trends watchers think cheating is epidemic, usually beginning in middle school and extending through college. Cheating is starting younger in elementary school in fact. And by the time students hit middle and higher school, cheating is for many, like gym class and lunch period, just part of the fabric of low things are what is changed is technology. It has made cheating so easy. Also Thomas, quoting McCabe (2001), asserted that "higher scholars are much more liable than college students to use the net to cheat, and computers have redefined younger kids concept of which constitutes cheating" McCabe also claims, based on his findings, that 15 to 20 percent of higher scholars bought or downloaded papers from one of many paper websites to submit as their work. Research by the Jesephson Institute of Ethics is another example of a frequently quoted survey involving 20,829 middle and students, where 70 percent reported that they had cheated in school. It should be noted that while in academic and elsewhere have found fault with some of the survey techniques, or have questioned the interpretation of some data, he overwhelming proportion of literature suggest that students plagiarism at secondary level is a pervasive practice, with significant percentages of students copying directly from the internet and other electronic sources without proper attribution. For example, in their analysis on cheating, Athanasou and Olasehinde (2002) found that "substantial properties of males and females ends up in cheating "substantial proportions continue cheating in college or universities".

CONCLUSION

Location/setting of school is one of the environmental factors that influence the academic performance of secondary school students. Onukwo (2004/2005) in his note recorded

that conducive environment enhances a child's growth and development. But schools sited near airports or at the heart of city like Port Harcourt city are always and leads to deficits in mental concentration of students in such schools. School buildings is one of the school facilities that influence academic performance of students. The designs of classroom and its lighting also determine if students will perform well or not. Dunn et al. (1985) said that students perform well than in a dark. Without light it is obvious that students may develop bad sight. School climate can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learner (Swanson, Brown, & Barton, 2003).

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