

CREATING A FRIENDLY SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR NIGERIAN CHILDREN

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Abstract

This study evaluates the school learning environment in Nigerian's primary schools. Areas of study include, classroom environment, provision of infrastructural facilities, Teacher/Pupils interaction in the classroom setting. The descriptive research design of the survey type was used, questionnaire tagged (CFV) "Child friendly environment was the instrument used to elicit information from the respondents. The population of the study consisted of all the teachers in the public primary schools in Osun State Nigeria. Sample comprised 250 teachers from selected Secondary Schools in the state. Data were collected using frequency counts means and percentages. Results showed that 25% of the selected schools were not child friendly. This was because they lacked infrastructural facilities such as toilet facilities, chairs, desks and tables. Most classrooms were not friendly to pupils with disabilities. Based on the findings, it was recommended that all education stakeholders in the primary education sector should made classroom environment attractive and pleasant for pupils. This would enhance teaching and learning and improve teacher productivity.

Keywords: Environment, Friendly, Teaching and learning, Infrastructure, Pupils

Introduction

The development of a nation depends much on the young ones, therefore the education of the children is of utmost importance. The school is often regarded as an institution created by the society to perform important cultural functions associated with the education of the young ones. In order for the school to achieve this goals, there should be a conducive child friendly environment where teaching and learning will take place. A child friendly school is a school where the staff are friendly to children and the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met. The school is also community based, recognizes and

promotes the rights of all children irrespective of gender, religious and ethnic differences, family status, physical and mental abilities disabilities (UNESCO 2001).

A UNESCO (2001) report on child-friendly school stated here that a child friendly school ensures quality education and positive learning for the child. A situation where this outcome is absent then the school is not child friendly. Nigerian child belongs to several environments such as the home, the school, the community and the large society. All these contribute significantly to the child's right to live, develop and learn. As far as the acquisition of academic knowledge is concerned, it is the school environment which imposes a significant influence on the child. The term school learning environment has been used by some researchers to refer to physical characteristics of the school environment. Others have used the term to refer to staff relations, leadership styles, morale, cooperation among the members. Brook over (1982) however said that the concept emphasizes the total learning environment where the child finds himself. This includes the norms, expectations of the total system and the pattern of grouping of pupils for teaching and learning. In any given situation the environment has a major role to play if effective development will take place.

Piece (1994) said that the classroom is a critical focus for pupils inter-personal and educational development. Evidence from research findings shows that the nature of classroom environment has a powerful influence on how well pupils achieve a wide range of educational outcomes. Goodlard (1984) also noted that classroom environment such as the physical, emotional and aesthetic characteristics of the classroom tend to enhance student attitude towards learning. It has however been observed that many of the schools in Nigeria are still functioning below standard. Most of them are characterized among other things:-

- a. Inadequate classroom space, furniture, equipment for teaching and learning.
- b. Lack of easy access to safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation, and health facilities.
- c. Poorly motivated teachers.
- d. Use of sub-standard teaching methodologies.

Schools that are characterized by the above are not likely to provide quality educational for the children (Olaleye 2009).

Researchers such as Okpala (2006), Ndukwe (2002) and Okebukola (2000) among others different occasions highlighted the gloomy state of the Nigeria school environment According to Okpala (2006), many school children in Nigeria learn under the shade of trees while many sit on the floor to learn in their classrooms. Ndukwe (2002) on the other hand found that many schools have no adequate games and recreational facilities. Akinbote (2001) once asserted that many of the primary school teachers are not sufficiently equipped in both

the pedagogical and content knowledge of what they are to teach in the schools. Okebukola (2000) while quoting the SAPA report has provided a statistical analysis of the deficiencies in the Nigeria school as follows:

- 12% of pupils sit on the floor
- 87% have overcrowded classrooms
- 3% of the schools have no chalkboards
- 38% of the classrooms have no ceiling
- 77% of the pupils lack textbooks
- 36% of the pupils have no writing materials.

Okebukola (2000) went further to say that the unfriendliness of school environment is induced among other things by:

- Inadequacies in classroom space, furniture, equipment and teaching/learning materials;
- Poorly motivated teachers;
- Use of poor teaching methodologies;
- Inadequacy of water, and sanitation facilities in schools;
- Limited community participation in education.

From the foregoing, it is evidently clear that the Nigerian (public) primary schools cannot be regarded as child-friendly. In other words, most of the Nigerian schools' environments are not conducive enough for the development of appropriate skills, knowledge, interests and attitude in individuals to become responsible citizens. It means therefore that we still have a long way to go in the provision of a child-friendly school environment for our children. Although, government and UNICEF have been trying in the last decade to make the school environment child friendly, a visit to most public schools reveals that the situation still requires drastic solution.

It is against this background that this paper discusses the importance of providing child-friendly environment for Nigerian children for quality learning and teaching. The focus of the study is as follows:

1. The classroom environment and teacher/pupils interaction

Statement of the Problem

The welfare of the children should be the concern of every nation as they are the leaders of tomorrow. The schools are institutions established to help these children to be useful to themselves and the nation as a whole. The teachers in the classroom are very important in this aspect because they work directly with the children and as such make a lot of impact in their lives, Okeke (1999) noted teachers are the most effective agents of change because they function as administrators, curriculum developers, instructors and career guidance counselors. They are powerful mediators in all educational matters. Ukeje (1992) also noted that if the child is the centre of educational system, the teacher is the pivot of the educational process. The processing takes place in the classroom settings. If the classroom environment is not child friendly, learning and teaching will not take place. It has however been observed by education stakeholder recently, that academic performance of Nigerian children is below standard. Also many children are dropping out of schools.

The questions raised by this paper:

1. Are the schools environment where most schools are located conducive for learning?
2. Are the classrooms environment friendly for children to learn?
3. Are pupils provided with adequate educational material resources such as textbooks, tables and desks.
4. Are teachers attitude to work friendly, so as to initiate new methods of teaching for effective performance?
5. Are teachers motivated to create friendly environment for pupils.

Methodology

This was a descriptive survey research which aimed at examining the provision of child friendly environment in selected primary schools in Osun State Nigeria.

The study population comprised all the public primary schools in the state. As at 2005, there were 30 Local Government areas and 1,686 primary schools in the state. (Source: Federal Ministry of Education/Universal Basic Education Commission (UBE). Out of this population, 50 primary schools were randomly selected from 10 Local government area of the state. That is 5 schools from each local government were randomly selected.

A total of 250 primary school teachers were randomly selected i.e 5 respondents from each school. The instrument questionnaire titled Child Environment Questionnaire. A twenty

six item/questionnaire divided into two sections was used to elicit information from the teachers on how to provide child friendly environment in schools. Section A elicit information in the area of classroom environment and provision and teaching and learning. Section B elicit information in the area concerning teachers and teaching methods. The questionnaire was validated with reliability coefficient of $r=0.763$. The instrument was constructed on a 2-point rating scale thus Agree (A), Disagree (B).

The research was carried out with some research assistants in administering the instruments. The researchers also carried out on the sport assessment of the school's environment. A total of 250 questionnaire were administered and collected from the respondents. Data were analysed using means and percentages.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: Are the Environments where most schools located, child friendly?

Environment of School location

No	Items					
1		N	agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Environment where my school is located is conducive to teaching and learning	250	199	88	55	22.0
2	The school is not far away from the children	250	230	92	20	8
3	The school is not prone to hazard from the traffic	250	237	94.8	13	5.2
4	The school is accessible to physically challenged children	250	15	6	23.5	94
5	The school environment is peaceful and science for children to learn	250	213	85.2	37	14.8

Results

Results on table 1 revealed that 88% of the respondents agreed that the schools were well located in areas that were conducive for teaching and learning. 94.8% of the respondents agreed that the schools were not prone to hazard from the traffic. 92% agreed that the schools

were not far away from the pupils. 94% of the respondents said the schools were not accessible to physically challenged children.

Research Question 2: Are the classroom environment friendly for children to learn?

Classroom Environment

No	Items					
		N	agree	%	Disagree	%
1	There are enough classrooms for teaching and learning in my school	250	157	62.8	93	37.2
2	The classroom are provided with ventilation	250	243	97.2	17	2.8
3	The classrooms are not overcrowded but spacious for children to learn	250	160	64	90	36
4	Classroom floor was clean for children	250	105	42	14.5	58
5	Classroom environment is accessible to children with disability	250	92	36.8	158	63.2

Table 2: Findings on classroom environment showed that, there were enough classrooms for teaching and learning in most schools. 62.8% of the respondents agreed to it. 97.2% agreed that the classrooms are spacious and well ventilated. However the classrooms were not accessible to physically challenged pupils. 36.8% of the respondents agreed to it while 63.23% disagreed.

Research question 3: Are pupils provided with adequate educational material resources?

Table 3: Provision of school material resources

No	Items					
		N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	My school is provided with enough material resources for teaching and learning	250	35	14	215	86

2	Teaching aids such as computer, radio, are provided	250	45	18	205	82
3	Chairs, table desks are provided	250	53	21.2	197	78.8
4	Chalk and chalkboards, laboratory provided	250	114	45.6	136	54.4
5	Library and books are provided	250	87	34.8	163	65.2
6	Toile facilities are provided	250	90	36	160	64
7	Playground are provided for children relaxation	250	241	96.4	09	3.6

As indicated in Table 3 on Provision of school material resources, findings showed that material resources such as teaching aids, Tables, desks, and chairs chalk and chalkboards, are provided but not adequate. Toilet facilities are not adequate. 64% of the respondents agreed that library and books are not adequate 34.8% agreed to it playgrounds for recreation provided in most schools 96.4% of the respondent agreed that playgrounds are provided in most schools.

Question 4: Are teachers attitude to work friendly?

Table 4: Managerial Ability of Classroom Teachers.

No	Items					
		N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Teacher/pupils interaction was warm and lively	250	151	60.4	99	39.6
2	Teachers allow pupils to participate actively in the teaching and learning	250	140	56	110	44

3	Pupils are encouraged to work cooperatively in the classroom	250	164	65.6%	86	34.4
4	Teachers voice, mood approaches are friendly	250	188	75.2	52	24.8
5	Cordial relationship is provided by teachers in the classroom	250	191	76.4	59	23.6
6	Teachers teaching styles enhances learning in the classroom	250	143	58.2	107	41.8
7	Kind and Relax atmosphere are provided by teachers	250	134	53.6	116	46.4

Findings on managerial ability of classrooms teachers showed that there was cordial relationship between the teacher and pupils. 76.4% of the respondents agreed. 75.2% of the respondents agreed that teachers and friendly with the pupils and 53.6% agreed that kind and relax atmosphere were provided by teachers.

Question 5: Are teachers motivated to create friendly environment for the pupils

Table 5: Motivation of Teachers

No	Items					
		N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Teachers are motivated through improved condition of service	250	57	22.8	193	77.2
2	They enjoy conducive work environment	250	55	22	19.5	78
3	Professionally qualified teacher are recruited	250	240	96	10	4
4	Teachers are encouraged to develop themselves through attending seminars, conferences and workshops	250	96	38.4	154	61.6

Findings from Table 5 showed that professionally qualified teachers are recruited to teach in the schools. 96% of the respondents agreed to this while 61.6% disagreed on teachers

motivated to develop themselves through attending seminars and workshop. 78% of the respondents disagree on the provision of conducive work environment for teachers.

Discussion

The study revealed that the learning environment in the sampled primary schools was conducive to a large extent. The psychological environment which involves interaction between pupils and teachers was also conducive. This finding is contrary to Ahmed 2003 who submitted that in Nigeria, teaching and learning takes place under a very unconducive environments. The study also revealed that most primary schools in the state were not provided with libraries and books and toilets facilities were not adequate. It was also shown in the study that teachers were not motivated to worker harder because the working condition was not encouraging. The study also revealed that environment of most schools were not friendly to children with disabilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that in Osun state Nigeria the environment in most primary schools selected is partially, conducive to teaching and learning activities. It was concluded that the infrastructural facilities such as toilet facility and library were not adequately provided. Also classroom environment were not friendly to children with disabilities. The classroom is a critical focus in the total school environment and has a powerful influence how well a child develops and learn. The classroom environment should be attractive to the children. Based on the findings it was recommended that school administrators should sustain schools so as to enhance better teaching and learning activities. In view of the fact that school environment is significantly related to children learning, everything possible must be done to make the schools child friendly. This therefore calls for a collaborative effort among all education stakeholders not to relent in providing necessary infrastructure and personnel that will make Nigerian primary schools learner friendly.

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