

MANAGING SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

School facilities management is an integral part of the overall management of the school. The physical environment of a school is a major determining factor in the attainment of its objectives. This paper described the concept, types of school facilities and facilities management. The paper also identified some challenges and prospects of school facilities management. It concluded that school facilities give meaning to the teaching and learning process, and recommended that school managers should carry out comprehensive assessment of the facilities to determine areas of need. This type of assessment will assist in policy formulation and proper planning.

The primary purpose of teaching and learning is to bring about in the learner desirable change in behaviour through critical thinking. This process does not take place in a vacuum but rather in an environment structured to facilitate learning. In support of this, Nnabuo, Okorie and Agabi (2008) submitted that the actualization of the goals and objectives of education require the provision, maximum utilization and appropriate management of school facilities. Educational management is the totality of efforts that are brought to bear in the provision and delivery of education to ensure that both human and material resources allocated to education are used to the best advantage in the pursuit of educational goals and objectives. Facilities management is an integral part of the overall management of the school.

The school administrator, principal or school head as a resources manager has numerous areas to effectively and adequately manage if he is to be successful. He has to manage the school environment in such a way that it will be conducive for teaching and learning to take place, this is why Adaralegbe in Akpan (2003) posited that "the right type of atmosphere required for effective learning is that consisting of better school buildings, better teaching facilities".

School facilities according to Mbipom (2000) is the physical expression of the school curriculum in the construction, internal and external arrangement of the buildings, facilities, equipments and grounds around the buildings. It is line environment, facilities, equipment and buildings in which teaching and learning take place. Akpan (2003) stated emphatically that many parents have the belief that, if the buildings in the school are well-maintained and the grounds well kept, the academic programmes of such schools will be effective. Thus, many parents choose schools for their children based mainly on the external appearance of the school compound.

School facilities management according to Adeogun (2002) is the practice of careful utilization and control of available material resources in the school system. It involves the process of directing, co-ordinating and modifying materials towards the achievement of organizational goals.

Meaning and Types of School Facilities

School facilities are the material resources provided for staff and students to optimize their productivity in the teaching and learning process. The realization that the transfer of knowledge does not only take place in the four walls of the classroom from the teacher to the students but rather that learning takes place through discovery, exploration, interaction with the internal and external environment has necessitated the creative and innovative development of teaching and learning facilities that reflect these changes. Ogunsaju (1980) described school facilities to consist of all types of buildings and equipment for academic and non-academic activities, areas for sports and games, landscape, farms and gardens. including trees, roads and paths. Others include furniture and toilet facilities, lighting, acoustics, storage facilities and parking lot, security, transportation, ICT, cleaning materials, food services and special facilities for the physically challenged persons.

School facilities variously referred to as physical facilities or school plants are very important in the teaching and learning processes. No level of education can survive in the absence of physical facilities (Okunola, 2001). School facilities consist of:

- (a) Buildings - Classrooms, offices, workshops, canteen, recreational facilities, laboratories, libraries, sickbay or clinics, sports complex, hostels,
- (b) Land on which the buildings are erected
- (c) Equipment
- (d) Machines, vehicles and furniture
- (e) Supplies

All the structures and equipment that are put in place to enhance teaching and learning including the land upon which the structures exist make up the school facilities. Equipment and supplies are essential for the attainment of educational goals and objectives. Simpson and

Anderson (1981) defined equipment as "items that last a minimum number of years or cost more than a certain amount" and "supplies as items such as microscope slides, glass tubing, and cotton swabs, that are quickly consumed and that are usually less expensive than equipment items". Some equipment perform specific functions while others such as computers perform multiplicity of functions. School equipment are available in various forms. They may be fixed or movable and they serve various purposes in educational system. They are used in the classrooms, laboratories, offices, workshops, cafeteria, toilets, laundry, library, and for sports etc. Akpabio (2011) asserted that schools need vehicles to convey people to and from the school, it can be a bus, van or saloon and that proper and systematic school vehicle maintenance is important in providing for safe transportation of school children. Furniture are also available in the classrooms, offices, cafeteria laboratories and workshops (Asiabaka, 2008).

Castaldi in Akpan (2003) listed school plant to include the school buildings, equipment and surroundings, paths, fields, playgrounds, classrooms, desks, school farms, school vehicles, assembly halls, libraries, generating set, kitchen and clinic. Denga (2000) reported that for a school to be considered as having minimum school plant to operate, it must have the infrastructural facilities such as standard school buildings, standard classrooms, administrative offices, furniture in the classrooms and offices, toilet facilities, water supply, store room of instructional materials, first aid office and first aid box with essential drugs and materials for emergency use, play ground for recreational activities school vehicles for movement of people and a workshop for instructional materials both hardware and consumables. Akpan (2003) commented that it is not enough to provide infrastructural facilities to school, that they

should be assessed for their quality, appropriateness, quantity and adequacy.

Bassey (2011) adopted the school facility theory in reviewing the meaning and types of school facilities and forwarded that school facilities embrace both temporary and permanent structures at school sites, as well as infrastructural and instructional facilities. School facility management adopts the theory of school facility in an attempt to put in place by school administrators, all resources of the school in required number and at appropriate maintenance against destruction or dilapidation and keeping of record of all the facilities available and how to retrieve them for utilization. School facility theorists identified three major components of school facilities to include:

- 1) Infrastructural facilities
- 2) Instructional facilities
- 3) School Physical environment (Bassey 2011)

The theorists stated that their quality and availability in the required quantity in the school is essential for the achievement of educational objectives and accountability.

Fenker (2004) stated that school facilities management is a process that ensures that buildings and other technical systems support the operation of an organization. The International Facilities Management Association (2002) described facilities management as the practice of co-ordination of the physical workplace with the people and the work of the organization; it integrates the principles of administration, architecture and the behavioural and engineering sciences.

School facilities management is the application of scientific methods in the planning, organizing, decision-making, co-ordination and controlling of the physical environment of learning for the actualization of the educational goals objectives. This involves among other things, collective decision making in

relation to selection of site for establishment of new schools, design and construction of new school plants including grounds, renovation and modernization' of old plants, provision of equipment for academic and non-academic activities, maintenance of all facilities and review of management practices and processes (Asiabaka, 2008).

Challenges to Effective Management of School Facilities

1. Planning/Auditing

Planning, as in all management processes, is the first logical step in facilities management. A plan for facilities management must be an integral part of the overall Federal, State and Local Government educational master plan. It is a well articulated conceptualization of the educational philosophy, goals, objectives and specification for short and long term objectives including implementation of the planned curricula and extra-curricula activities. According to Asiabaka (2008), planning cannot meaningfully be carried out without accurate information, which should be collected through facility audit. These processes are poorly executed in school facilities management especially in the primary and secondary schools sector (Fenker, 2004)

2. Policy Guidelines

The most fundamental problem in facilities management is lack of policy guidelines for infrastructural development. In some schools, there are inadequate classrooms, staff, offices, laboratories and workshops, libraries study areas while in some these facilities are adequately provided. This situation arises because the Federal, State and Local Governments have failed to establish policy directives on minimum standards in relation to school facilities.

3. Finance

Money is an absolutely crucial input of any education system. It provides the essential purchasing power with which education acquires its human and material inputs. Inadequate fund is always a problem for managers in all organizations, the school manager therefore is not left out in this problem. With too little money, school facilities management can be helpless.

4. ICT

The school heads and teachers are constantly involved in decision making, planning, organizing, communicating, co-ordinating and evaluating. In carrying out these duties, they work in collaboration with the ministry of education, school board, parents and guardians and other stakeholders in the internal and external environment. School managers lack qualitative and quantitative information on facilities. Since the school is a formal organization, there is need for accurate, timely, sufficient and relevant information, which are kept in form of records. The traditional method of gathering, processing, preservation and dissemination of large volume of information in print media has failed to facilitate work in the school system because of its attendant problems ranging from limited capacity to total loss of important information.

5. Maintenance

Facilities maintenance is an aspect of school management that is generally overlooked Akpan (2003) posited that a good maintenance programme is necessary to protect the initial investment made on school facilities, and that maintenance should be regarded as an on-going activity designed to keep the educational function and environmental conditions of a school plant at peak efficiency.

6. Management Practices

Several individuals occupying managerial positions in schools lack managerial skills and some who possess the knowledge fail to put them to practical use in the management of schools. School plant management requires intermixture of experts in different areas. This demands that the school manager should possess the necessary human relations skills to assemble and utilize the relevant individuals within and outside the school for efficient facilities management.

Prospects of School Facilities Management

It is believed that when all the challenges or impediments to effective management of school facilities are removed, the goals and objectives of educational management will be realized. Ogunsaju (1980) maintained that the quality of education that children receive bears direct relevance to the availability or lack thereof of physical facilities and overall atmosphere in which learning takes place. School facilities play a pivotal role in the actualization of the educational goals and objectives by satisfying the physical and emotional needs of the staff and students. Knezevich in Akpabio (2011) stated that the school receives inputs from the external environment in the form of human and material resources, processes them and empties them into the society as finished products. The quality of the products (learners) bears a direct relationship with the quality of the facilities deployed in the production process. Udoh (2008) described school facilities as the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning. The writer reported a significant relationship between the quality of classroom furniture and students' performance in social studies in Jos Metropolis. Effective management of school facilities improves the quality of teaching and learning, as noted by Asiabaka (2008), they are used:

1. for observation and inquiry
2. to illustrate concepts
3. to provide opportunity for firsthand experience
4. for experimentation and demonstration
5. for scientific investigation and discovery
6. to provide diversity of thoughts.
7. for development of scientific attitudes and skills
8. to protect the individual and also provide comfort.

The indirect teaching support facilities such as offices, cafeteria, acoustics, toilets, laundry, common rooms, cleaning materials, grounds and similar items satisfy individual's physical and emotional needs. They are used to:

- a) Increase instructional effectiveness
- b) Improve the cleanliness, orderliness and safety of facilities.
- c) Reduce the operational and life cycle cost of a building
- d) Extend the useful life of a school building
- e) Increase efficiency and effectiveness of the staff and students
- f) Improve building appearances

Conclusion

School facilities give meaning to the teaching and learning process. Facilities management is therefore an integral part of the overall management of the school, school managers should use the diagnostic approach in carrying out comprehensive assessment of the facilities to determine areas of need. This requires integrated efforts of all stakeholders who possess the expertise needed for accurate and up-to-date assessment of all aspects of school facilities. Furthermore, advances in science and technology necessitate that school managers should adopt modern methods of facilities management; this will improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Bearing in mind, the importance of effective facilities management to quality education delivery and accepting that these objectives have not been achieved. There is need to improve on school facilities management by:

1. School managers should carry out comprehensive inventory of a school's facilities to obtain information on the components, policies and procedures of new or existing facility.
2. There should be proper planning from the Federal, State and Local Government. Such plans should give meaning to educational goals and objectives.
3. The Federal, State and Local Governments should establish policy directives on minimum standards in relation to school facilities. Such policies should direct the actions of the school managers.
4. School managers should be prudent in utilizing government subventions and also look for alternative means of sourcing for funds within and outside the school community.
5. School managers should adopt collaborative efforts to school facilities management.
6. School managers should adopt a good maintenance approach.
7. School managers should be exposed to good management practices through seminars and workshops.

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