IMPACT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

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Abstract
It is a statement of fact that school environment plays vital role in a learner’s successful learning of a language. This means that there exists a close interaction between learning environment and students’ attainment in school subjects. This reveals that without adequate and conducive learning environment the impact of learning cannot be felt. In this paper, effort is made to scrutinize issues relating to school environment such as poor learning environment, classroom space, instructional aids, the teacher as well as administrative structure as they influence the teaching and learning of English language as a school subject. At the end, suggestions that could help foster solution to problems bedeviling English language learning with a view to improving learner attainment in this all important school subject are provided.

The major role of education is on the over-all development of the individual. It is on this basis that language is regarded as a vehicle of socialization and of education. The impactation of appropriate basic language skills on the learner is the most effective way of preparing him for any meaningful learning. This is as a result of the fact that all teaching-learning situations revolve around communication and language as described by linguists is a powerful instrument of human communication.

In an attempt to realize the objective of any planned curriculum, curriculum planners must take into consideration the characteristic of the learner as well as his environment. Language therefore, is an environment tool. The community in each environment is usually bound together by a common set of language behavioural patterns. To educate the child for his environment therefore, requires giving him a sound foundation in language. According to Littlewood (1984) language is used:

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(i) to convey orders and information  
(ii) to enable self expression  
(iii) to influence people  
(iv) as instrument of thought  
(v) for record keeping etc

School Environment

School environment refers to everything that the school reflects. However, there are different types of school environment. Some schools have poor learning environment, not good enough to motivate children to learn, others have good environment ranging from spacious school buildings, classrooms, available instructional aids as well as good administrative structure.

The concept of school environment has been looked at by scholars in diverse ways. In the opinion of Odunusi (2000), teachers and students can only optimize their academic achievement in an enabling and conducive environment. Essentially, such environment should provide adequate and appropriate school equipment, infrastructure facilities and laboratories that could promote students development in various language skills.

Hoy and Miskel (1987) considered school environment as “a set of intended characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviour of people in it”. Peterson (1997), that “it is the students school environment which brings about students and teachers interactions that results in students mastery of English Language” in other words, the verbal interaction between students and their teacher, as well as among students themselves, is capable of influencing their improvement in various language skills.

Urevbu (1997) noted that students ability to learn, is heavily influenced by the school learning environment”. He further stated that effective learning environment is closely linked with effective classroom management whereby teachers gain and hold the attention of their students, maintain discipline, start and end lessons on time, let students know what is expected of them, monitor and evaluate students performance. According to him, the situation in our schools is so chaotic that students find it difficult to learn.

Iyagba (2003), in a survey of school environment and students achievement in language studies in selected public and private owned secondary schools in Ikeja local government area of Lagos state, found out that there is a relationship between school environment and students level of achievement in English Language studies.

Badmus (1987), in a study on the effect of curriculum, environment and prior achievement on scholastic aptitude using 400 SS 1 students, indicated a significant effect of curriculum and learning environment on students performance in scholastic
aptitude test. Kayoed (2001), carried out a study on the factors affecting students achievement in language study and after a careful analysis of the data drawn from eight post primary schools in Alimoso Local Government Area of Lagos state, he found out that the type of school environment in which a students found themselves influence their level of achievement in English Language.

It is obvious from the above assertions and findings that school environment is a determinant of students performance in language studies either positively or negatively.

Conceptual Definitions

(i) **Issues:** An issue is defined in the Longman dictionary on contemporary English (1984:633), as the thing considered as most important part of a situation or discussion. Therefore some issues that could promote or impede adequate learning of English Language would be identified and discussed.

(ii) **Insight:** This is the human ability to see into the deep nature of concept around him, a deep understanding of a complete situation or problem.

**Language Learning**

English language is a skill subject, therefore in language, some factors must be considered before proper learning can take place. Some notable problems either psychological or linguistic in nature always re-occur when considering language learning. These problems are discussed below:

(a) **Class Size**

The most traditional and arguably the most widespread vision of the language classroom is that of a controlled learning environment, namely a place where students work on language according to a carefully designed learning programme under the supervision and guidance of a trained teacher. The purpose of a classroom is to enable students to learn the language by the creation of a condition in which language learning can be undertaken in a structured manner. In order to realize the objectives of effective language teaching and learning, the issues of class size must be carefully addressed. However, inadequate class sizes have continued to militate against effective language learning over the years thereby making teaching (education) in Nigeria to resume a subject centered position.

(b) **The Teacher**

The teacher is the person most directly responsible for the realization of the planned programme of the school. He is the one who is equipped with a set of pedagogical skills that will allow him or her to realize the plan by means of an expert manipulation of methodological procedures relating
to factor such as his or her mood of presentation of materials and organizing students’ participation. Regrettably, however, in our society coupled with our kind of school environment most teachers lack the basic pedagogical skills such that would enable them propel and motivate learners to learn. Apart from the teacher being relegated to the lowest ebb of the societal stratum he / she is faced with working conditions in the classroom such that would not create room for any meaningful learning. In a nutshell, teachers who according to Urevbu (1997) occupy the highest pinnacle of any learning process are not motivated. Their salaries and allowances are unnecessarily delayed and sometimes not paid at all.

(c) **Learners Interest**
Interest of the learner is very important in any learning process. If the learner has little or no interest in the subject he is learning, he finds it difficult to concentrate and therefore cannot achieve a reasonable level of performance in the subject. Every learner must be interested and show zeal in the language learning.

(d) **Learner’s state of mind**
It is the duty of the teacher to understand his/her students especially language learner before learning can take place. The learner could have what is called “conscious or unconscious distraction” for instance the learner could be ill or very hungry, he could be in serious pain. Such a learner cannot pay good attention to the teacher no matter how good the teacher may be.

(e) **Time of learning**
The issue of time has always been a factor in the teaching of language. In other words, school administrators have always failed to allocate enough time for language teaching. This is one school subject when taught effectively can enhance students general performance in other subjects. It is therefore, ironical that enough and adequate time is not always allocated for its teaching. In addition, the time of the day that English is taught also matters. A conducive atmosphere such as morning hours should be considered.

(f) **Learning aid**
Learning aid is another index of school environment. Learning aids according to Gbenedio (2006) are all the materials that could help a teacher achieve his general teaching objectives. A language classroom is a room equipped with tape recorders, film trips or motion pictures as well as electronic sound production devices enabling learners of English to hear their own voices as they engage in pattern drills.
(g) **School administrator**

A school administrator here refers to the individual in charge of the day to day running of schools. They are part of policy makers in the field of education saddled with the responsibility of mobilizing and encouraging teachers to work. However, leadership behavior of school principals could hinder or promote learning outcome. Unsuitable policies in a school system could go a long way to reducing the effectiveness of the teacher and learners’ interest in English Language classes. If the principals do not create a motivating language learning environment, it will not only affect teacher’s performance but also students’ achievement in language studies would dwindle.

**Recommendation**

Having highlighted and discussed issues and insights into the impact of school environment on the teaching and learning of English language in our schools, the following recommendations are made:

(i) Teaching environment should be made comfortable and conducive for learning.

(ii) Qualified teachers should be recruited to teach skills subject like English language.

(iii) The teachers should be motivated by way of paying their salaries and allowances regularly.

(iv) Considerable number of students should be in a language class at a given teaching period.

(v) Enough time should be allocated for the teaching and learning of English language in schools.

(vi) Selection of trained principals should be given paramount attention by policy makers in education and such school Principals should be trained in the areas of:

   a. Planning, organizing, implementation and evaluation of planned programme.

   b. Human relation with the technique of motivating teachers.

   c. He should be trained in conflict resolution and over-all policies of the school.

   d. He should have a knowledge of educational principles and philosophy.

**Conclusion**

This paper examined the peculiar nature of school environment as it affects the teaching and learning of English Language. Although school environment is complicated, the writer noted in this paper that aspects of school environment are inter-related and took a holistic view of impact of factors such as class-size, the teacher, learners interest, learning aids as well as the school administrator as they affect language
learning and suggestions that could help to provide a good learning atmosphere were provided. Finally, it is hoped that if the suggestions above are scrupulously utilized, our dream of finding lasting solution to the dwindling students’ achievement in English language would be realized.

References


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