

# EXISTENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TO LEARNING IN AKAMKPA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Existence of Secondary School environmental issues and students' attitude to learning are variables identified to have a strong mutual link with each other and do surface in the overall aims and objectives of secondary education system in Nigeria. It is assumed that the notable decline in standards and quality in education may have something to do with a hitch on the linkage of these two variables. This paper attempts an investigation into the school environmental issues as they influence students' attitude to learning. Two hypotheses were raised and tested over 300 sampled students in the Upper Basic Education programme using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. Results were that there exists a strong influence of physical/information school environment on desired attitude to learning in students. To achieve positive attitude towards learning in students, the papers recommends that the various tiers of government and other agencies should upgrade facilities and establish ICT units in all schools as well as establish functional guidance counseling units to serve students.*

The National Policy on Education (2004) is very clear on the importance of secondary education in Nigeria. According to it, Secondary Education prepares the individual to fit into the society as well as the Higher Education. Based on this, the existence of secondary school environmental issues and students' attitude to learning cannot be ignored. Many contemporary problems that emerge daily in our secondary schools such as students' unrest, indiscipline, mass failure in examinations, truancy and drop-outs may be attributed to an unfriendly school environment. Egim (2003) identified environment as a critical factor for both the learning processes and the administrative machinery that could enhance the

realization of educational set objectives. The school exists for the purpose of teaching and learning so much so that everything in the school environment should be geared towards this purpose.

The school environmental issues in this study are therefore defined as the sum total of factors within the school setting such as the physical and information environment. As posited by Obong, Okey, Aniah and Okaba (2010), the physical outlook of the school environment is very important and contributes towards students' positive attitude to healthy academic exercise. This is because environment forms the fulcrum on which other activities revolve and creates a favourable atmosphere for study. Egim (2003), maintained that the school physical environment include the buildings, classrooms, furniture, equipment, instructional materials, laboratories, libraries and play grounds tending to contribute either negatively or positively to students' attitude to learning.

Stockard and Mayberry (1992), in the area of school facilities and their relationship to students and teachers' attitude reveals that the quality of the physical plants or environment is related to non-cognitive outcomes, such as better attitude towards school. These outcomes may eventually relate to higher academic achievement. Further collaborative research by Al-Enezi (2002) in Virginia High Schools concluded that when cosmetic and structural building conditions were at the highest rating, students' achievement increased from 3.6 to 5.5 points. He also observed increased academic achievement amongst students in High School buildings with recent interior painting and decorations.

~~*Existence of Secondary School Environmental Issues*~~ On the same vein, O'Sullivan (2006) presupposes that in order to facilitate delivering a good education to learners, schools need to be new and conducive to learning because a high quality education might not be as accessible in an unfavourable environment such as poorly maintained buildings. His study identified various phases in a school life thus: when a school is twenty to thirty years old, frequent replacement of equipment is needed. Between thirty and forty years, the original equipment should be replaced including the roof and electrical equipment. After forty years, a school building begins a rapid deterioration and the building is rendered functionally obsolete. After sixty years, most school buildings exceed their useful life and must be completely renovated or abandoned. Again, Cramer (1976), studied selected Junior High School in the Bibb County school district of Georgia and found that pupils housed in new renovated school facilities showed more positive attitude towards learning. Interestingly, Chan (1982) compared students' attitude towards the physical environment of the school opened in 1980 and that of two (2) older ones: one built in 1925 and the other built in 1936. Findings from the study revealed that students housed in modern school building have significantly more positive attitude towards school than those in much older buildings. The implication of these findings is that students who have better attitude towards school environmental issues usually learn more and work harder.

Furthermore. Hallak (1990), Fabunmi (1997) and Awoyele (1997) are of the strong view that resource input quantity make a significant and positive contribution to the academic performance of students. However, Kesinoro (1997) stressed the importance of instructional materials in learning in schools. Cross, Baker and Stiles (1990) opined that many interactions characterize school learning and unless adequate spaces are provided for such interactions, learning will be hampered. Poor facilities and inadequate space as well as the arrangement of items including seats in the classroom, library and laboratory would hinder students' attitude to learning.

Another environmental issue is the information environment as it affects students' attitude to learning. Education and information technology share a common phenomenon because the information environment serves as a resource material to education. Resource materials are provided largely in hard copies as seen in libraries and also through the provision of information technology units in the school. It was in this light that the National Information Technology Development Agency was initiated in Nigeria and implemented in April 2001. This body was saddled with the responsibility of formulating the ICT

policy and plan to promote ICT activities as well as implement ICT projects. The mission statement was to transform Nigeria into an IT driven economy for global competition. Its initiative was as follows:

1. Computerization of schools in Nigeria, and
2. School Net Initiative which involved the establishment of computer connectivity (internet) to expose students to practical computer education.

It is a truism that students need information to enable them participate in all the activities within the school environment which could influence their learning attitude for better academic performance. Ozigi (1982) emphasized that good information is one of the pre-requisite of effective administration within an organization. He further stated that the breakdown of information in the organization could lead to misunderstandings, confusion and frustration thereby causing negative attitude to all concern within the organization.

There is no gain saying the fact that teaching and learning process has gone beyond the teacher standing before a group of students and disseminating information to them without the students' adequate participation. Hence Ajayi and Ekundayo (2010) opined that with the aid of ICT, teachers can take students beyond traditional limits, ensure adequate participation in the teaching and learning process and create vital the component of environment for students to experiment and explore. Sivin-Kachala (1998) reviewed two hundred and nineteen (219) research studies from 1990-1997 to evaluate the effects of technology on learning and achievement across all learning domains and all ages of learners. His findings revealed that students in technologically rich environment experienced positive effects on achievement in all major subject areas. This pre-supposes that availability of functional ICT units in schools would enhance students' positive attitude to learning.

Apart from ICT unit, the school guidance counsellor plays a significant role in the dissemination of information especially in the area of career choice, psycho-social, etc and help build up students' attitude for enhanced learning. Nwachuku (2009) is of the view that the school guidance counsellor performs the following information services:

- Disseminates career information to students, and
- Coordinates the accumulative information concerning students through interviews, test and inventories. This is also aimed at stimulating students for greater academic attainments.

Recently across the country with particular reference to Cross River State, government has embarked on renovation of schools to enhance teaching and learning. This study was therefore designed to investigate the existence of secondary school environmental issues and students' attitude to learning in the areas of physical and information school environment.

### **Statement of Problem**

Attitude to learning has generally derailed in students in our school system, thereby impairing the very essence of education which is the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and attitude that are acceptable to society. The primary concern of education remains the elevation of human social, economic and spiritual conditions and is also a key to overall development, (Alade, 2004; Oderinde, 2005). It is therefore necessary to gear research work in apparent school environmental issues that are capable of creating poor attitude formation towards learning in the school system. Amongst others, these school environmental issues as identified in this paper include the physical school environment and the information school environment. It is expected that if these issues are adequately harnessed to meet the expectations of the learners, the required attitude that will earn all the objectives of secondary education in Nigeria will be realized.

### **Hypotheses**

To guide this study, two (2) research hypotheses were formulated. These were:

1. There exists no significant influence of physical school environment on students' attitude to learning, and
2. Information school environment does not significantly influence students' attitude to learning.

## Methods

The study adopted the survey research design of ex-post facto type where the composite and relative effects of school environmental issues and students' attitude to learning were considered. The reason for this choice of design was to determine the nature of the situation as it exists at the time of investigation, (Kerlinger, 1995).

The study population consisted of all the students in all the eighteen (18) public schools in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Of this, 3523 students are in the Junior Secondary while 1896 are in the Senior Secondary level, bringing it to a total of 5419 students in the study area, (Cross River State Education Strategic Plan 2011 – 2020; 2010).

Five (5) long standing public schools in the study area were randomized and used for the purpose of realizing a useful sample size of three hundred (300) subjects out of 325 who were served with questionnaires. Numerical information was sought from this sample made up of only Senior Secondary School students. The choice of this level of students was borne out of their maturity and ability to form reasonable opinions that could express their attitude to learning. Responses that border on attitude are entirely subjective.

A self designed School Environmental Issues Questionnaire (SEIQ) was the major instrument used for data collection. It was made up of three sections and a total of 25 items. Section A with 10 items was on Physical school environment, Section B (10 items), Information school environment and Section C (5 items) was on students' attitude to learning. Face validation of the test instrument was done by the researchers themselves. The reliability of the questionnaire was guaranteed by its adaptability to test re-test technique to determine its internal consistency. After computing the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of data collected for the first and second administration of the questionnaire to 100 Senior Secondary School students in Biase Local Government Area, a coefficient (r) of 0.81 was realized. This high and positive correlation coefficient was considered good enough to strengthen the reliability of the instrument.

~~Academic Excellence~~ statistics was employed in data treatment. This was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis which helped to determine relationships between variables and a conversion to t-values helped in appropriate judgment about earlier stated null hypotheses.

## Results

To test the hypothesis that there exists no significant influence of physical school environment on secondary school students' attitude to learning, analysis on **Table I** is presented.

**Table I. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Physical School Environment(X) and Students' Attitude to Learning(Y), (n = 300).**

Variable X	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r	t
Physical school environment	2001	151260	194209	0.62	13.59*
Students' attitude to learning	3302	489012			
Variable Y	$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r	t

\*Significant at p = .05; df = 298

The table shows the correlation analysis of Physical School Environment and Students' Attitude to Learning as variables X and Y respectively. Analysis yielded a coefficient (r) of 0.62. The calculated t-

value arising from conversion from r-value was 13.59. With a high positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.62$ ) and comparing the calculated t-value (13.59) with the critical t-value (1.96), the null hypothesis was rejected at .05 level of significance and 298 degrees of freedom. Thus, findings were that there exists a significant influence of physical school environment on students' attitude to learning in secondary education system.

Arising from the presentation of correlation analysis in Table 2, the null hypothesis that information school environment does not significantly influence students' attitude to learning was rejected for its alternate hypothesis.

**Table 2. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Information School Environment (U) and Students' Attitude to Learning (Y), (n = 300).**

Variable U	$\sum U$	$\sum U^2$	$\sum UY$	r	t
Information school environment	2201	15211	193510	0.60	12.95*
Students' attitude to learning	3302	489012			
Variable X	$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum UY$	r	t

\*Significant at  $p = .05$ ;  $df = 298$

**Existence of Secondary School Environmental Issues**

This was because the realized coefficient of correlation ( $r$ ) was 0.60 and converted to t-value was 12.95. It was, again, clearly noticed that the t-value calculated (12.95) was greater than the t-value from tables (1.96) leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance and 298 degrees of freedom. Hence, the study also established that information school environment do significantly influence students' attitude to learning in the secondary education system.

**Discussion**

The result of the statistical analysis of the hypothesis one revealed that there exists a significant influence of physical school environment on secondary school students' attitude to learning. This result is not surprising since physical school environment is a sine qua non to students' adjustment and learning. The implication of this result is that the more favourable students' attitude to the school physical environment, the higher their interest in learning. The finding is in consonance with that of Obong, Okey, Aniah and Okaba (2010) who ascertained in their findings that the physical appearance of the school environment impacts positively or negatively on students' attitude to learning. The result also agrees with earlier studies carried out by Stockard and Mayberry (1992), Cramer (1976), Al-Enez (2002), )'Sullivan (2006) and Chan (1982) who, in their separate work reported positively on the importance of physical environment (new/renovated buildings and provision of other infrastructural facilities) and students' attitude to learning.

Result from hypothesis two showed that information environment exert profound influence on students' attitude to learning. This is in view of the fact that information and computer technology cannot be divorced from our schools especially in this age of information globalization. It is in this vain that Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) placed emphasis on the provision and utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective integration into this modern world of computer age. The urgent need to integrate ICT into the educational system in Nigeria became obvious. The result is in line with the work of Sivin-Kachala (1998) who discovered that students in technologically rich environment demonstrated positive attitude towards learning which goes to enhance their academic achievement in all major school subject areas. Similarly, the findings of this study agrees with Ozigi (1982) who emphasized that breakdown of information in the school system could lead to misunderstanding, confusion and frustration, thus causing negative attitude to schooling and learning by students. The work of Nwachukwu (2009) posited that information from the school guidance counsellor is highly significant in students' positive attitude towards learning.

## Conclusion

Conclusively, it is evident that school environmental issues (physical and information environment) play vital roles in enhancing students 'positive attitude towards learning. This is because good school environment motivates them towards effective learning.

## Academic Excellence

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### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. the various tiers of government and other supporting agencies should assist in the provision of infrastructural facilities and instructional materials to help build positive attitude in students to learn.
2. School principals should re-engineer efforts in effective and regular information dissemination to students and teachers within the school system because when students are kept abreast with valuable information that affect their well-being in school, their attitude to learning is enhanced.
3. Government, again, should create functional guidance counselling units in all schools and provide all necessary facilities that will enable guidance counselors perform their official duties to the overall benefit of the students.
4. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres compliment the work in guidance counseling units. Government should see to the establishment of these vital ICT centres to meet the challenges of the rapid growth in information and technology globally.

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