

# THE STATE OF NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT: JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXTENSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES

***Nchekwube M. Okafor***

*Department of Integrated Science,  
Federal College of Education,  
Eha-Amufu.*

## **Abstract**

*Perhaps the most constant feature of Nigerian education has been the demand for change. However, the most of it all is that much is being said and proposed for change than done. This paper examines the structural fault of the Nigerian school learning environment and how it can be re-engineered to suit modern schooling. It noted that the extension of environmental education learning environment where students participate fully in community environmental programmes to gain experience is necessary for self development. Implications of such development have educational and socio-economic gains for environmental quality and life sustainability.*

There are indications of failure in our educational system. It is common place to blame these failures on lack of students motivation to learn or lack of motivation and competence of teachers. Educational outcome standards seem to be dropping while students need to know more than before because we are in an age in which the predictable and pedestrian is done by machine. According to Luis and Lessgold (1996), the scholarly tradition has left the world of education with maladaptive view of learning. They saw learning as “storage” of verbal materials in mind. This definition indicated disjunction between school learning and competence in the world as one of the severally generated problems. Verbal knowledge is encoded in words and those words gain meaning from experience. When verbal statement abstract goes with no experience, competence problem worsens. However, the problem is less if the students and the teacher comes from a common experiential background. The teacher is in a position to point the situation to which a given piece of knowledge might be relevant, making reference to experiences and situations in real life. Obviously, the scenario where a teacher stands in front of a class, distributes knowledge to rows of learners is a bad model for the real life situations the students will encounter.

Considering learning as an active, self conscious process that results in meaningful, changes in behaviours, beliefs and attitudes cannot be attributed primarily to maturation, then students will learn more work under certain situations such as when they are actively engaged with work, invest time and make a committed

effort, focus on what is most important. Thus, they will experience a balance of intellectual change and academic support, work regularly and productive with instructors or with other students etc. involve lots of experiences. The fifth of June every year is marked as world environmental day with only a handful of world population being aware. Environmental education being a means of creating quality environmental awareness for sustainability cannot propel educational process only in classroom. The reason being that the school cannot operate in isolation of communities where it exists. There is need to connect school learning environment (an outdoor learning environment) to communities where real life situations on environmental education will be experienced. This can only be achieved by involving students with community environmental programmes where they observe and participate in life activities.

### **Environment and Education**

Encyclopedia of science and Technology (2000ed) defined environment as assemblage of factors and conditions surrounding the living organisms. Thus environment includes the sum total of biotic and abiotic factors. Whiston (2001) defined environment as not residual but an entity which incorporates attitudes, values, institutions, economics, Science and Technology. This implies that environment is life itself hence man and environment are inseparable. So man's ability to strive and survive depends on how well he handles the environment in which he exists. The achievement these could be possible through knowledge attitudes and skills man acquired from education.

English Dictionary (Website) defined education as a process of a acquiring and impacting knowledge and skills especially in a school, college or university. Salwanod & David (1998). Education is a process of passing on necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills which society cherishes, from one generation to another. This shows that education plays a vital catalyst role in developing talented, skillful and adequate future manpower to a nation i.e. development of skills for self-reliance. According to Sir, Charle in Schumacher (1973), "the essence of education is to transmit desirable values, that by the end of the process, one is expected to live successful as a learned person". Anih (1987) viewed education as a process whereby emphasis should be on the change the materials of knowledge brought about in an educated person and not the amount of knowledge the person accumulated. By implication education should be a means through which change is acquired by the recipient rather than an end in itself (Ogugua, 2004). Connecting education and environment, Spork (1992) stressed on education that develops good knowledge, attitudes and skills and creates awareness to the environment. According to Onyike and Onyido (2011), education that has the potentials of contributing best to the general wellbeing of the environment is what man needs. Therefore, the future of man and education depend solely on education as a powerful instrument in which the problems and solutions of environment abuses could be solved and communicated to the entire society.

## **Environmental Education**

Environmental education as environmental sciences is a systematic study of our environment and our place in it. It is inter-disciplinary and integrates information from many fields to study to understand how the world works and how we should behave as environmental citizens. According to Okafor (2007) environmental education is a process of developing a world literacy population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems. Environmental education is mission oriented and implies that we are all responsibly involved to do something about the problems we created in our place and elsewhere. It focuses on what each of us can do to fulfill that responsibility. An outdoor interaction with our environment involving activities that would solve environmental problems is part of the mission the national environmental act sets two broad goals:

- To improve understanding among the general public of natural and built environments and relationships between human and their environment, including global aspects of environmental problems.
- To encourage postsecondary students to pursue careers related to the environment. Specific objectives proposed to meet these goals include developing an awareness of and appreciation for our natural and socio/cultural environment, knowledge of basic ecological concepts, an acquaintance with the broad range of current environmental issues and experience in using investigation, critical thinking and problem solving skills in solving environmental problems. The Tbilisi declaration of October, 14<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> (1977) by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) resulted in a list of directive principles for environmental education as below.
- Environmental education is life long educational process that takes place in all levels of education.
- The understanding of how human interaction and political processes, in consonance with nature of socio-economic issues and the impact of these on environmental degradation or enhancement.
- Environmental education is for developing attitudes and value systems which lead to socio-economic improvement through positive social interaction and maintenance of natural environmental improvement.
- Environmental education aims to develop individual understanding skills and feelings of empowerment, that are vital for both positive biophysical and social environment in everyday living to find solutions for environmental problems.
- Environmental education requires a wholistic and preferably inter-disciplinary approach to teaching with diverse learning experience but with particular emphasis on direct experiential learning in nature and social environment.

Former Environmental protection Agency (EPA) administrator, K. Reilly called for broad environmental literacy in which every citizen is fluent in the principles of ecology and has a working knowledge on the basic grammar and underlying syntax of

environmental mission. According to Reilly, environmental education is all about environmental literacy that creates stewardship ethics - a sense of duty to care for and manage wisely our natural endowment and our productive resource for the long haul – long life sustainability. Environmental education provides technical knowledge to participate and contribute to solving real scientific problems in our community and environment as a whole.

### **The Structural Fault of Environmental Education Learning Environment in Nigeria Schools**

Learning is an active, interactive, self-aware process that results in meaningful, long-lasting changes in knowledge, skills behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that cannot be attributed primarily to maturation. Generally, students learn more when they;

- Are actively engaged with the work.
- receive regular timely specific feedback
- Focus on what's most important
- Are aware of their learning
- Experience a balance of intellectual challenges & academic support.
- Connect new and prior knowledge
- Organize their learning to real world situations
- Work regularly and productively with instructors or with other students.
- Invest time & make a committed effort.

Learning means relatively permanent change in behaviour that results from practice. Learning occurs both in and outside the classroom. According to Akubue (1991) classroom is a place where learning experiences are co-ordinated and where various types of instructional materials are housed. A classroom is the most important area of a school because it is where students and teachers spend most of their time and where learning process takes place. It is a building that has no other functions than to house and support learning. Most classrooms in Nigerian schools today are virtually empty, consisting basically of sets of desks, a chalkboard, a table and many be some maps or charts on the walls. What do you expect the teacher and students to do in these empty classrooms if not to talk, listen and write (three action verbs). Traditionally, the teacher does most of the talking, writes out official knowledge which the students copy down. In most cases, students have similar social background and life experiences while teachers are a homogenous bunch compared to the diversity of our society as a whole. In the course of a day, the students change teachers, and in every few months in the course of a year. What is really wrong with this kind of classroom learning environment is yet to be pictured. Our society today is a complex type in which a myriad of different kind knowledge of forms of human activities take place in different institutions, works of life and jobs. Why do we imagine that in a society as complex and diverse as ours, that one can learn what is of value in our society for self development by sitting inside an empty classroom

“spending all his/her days in one building? The classroom in Nigerian schools have no innovations of modern times. It has no such poor substitutes as books, pictures, studios, films, television and webs etc. for observing and participating in at least some of the millions of real activities in real places in our society. There are no other buildings as empty as school classrooms except prisons. The implication is that students of school are easily like fish out from water, unable to demonstrate what they do in their jobs/life. School classrooms are impoverished learning environment compared to any office, factory, farm hospital, court house, laboratory and departmental stores. Teachers spend their lives teaching and have little to offer about what goes on in any of the world’s jobs and professions. No wonder some establishments demand technical experience from applicants before offering them employment.

What if the teacher brings in experience from outside the school in teaching? Is it obvious learning the locations of villages in a community than knowing and experiencing what actions to minimize adverse impact of activities for clean neighbourhood environment in the community or what the teacher experiences in active environmental littering control programmes in a community? In what moments would our present system of schooling with its time - filling curriculum requirements and high-stakes testing allow a teacher to show his/her experience with students? Such moments require out-door experience. In this case learning environment should not be in classrooms alone but be extended to communities outside school environment. Schools are established in the community environment and as such have to work together with the community. The curriculum must be followed and covered but environmental community programmes provide adequate and effective technical experiences for functional environmental education.

### **Re-engineering Environmental Education Learning Environment**

Re- engineering means re-designing the existing structure to something new, to meet the needs and purpose of what the change is demanding for quality environment. Thus re- engineering environmental education learning environment involves making a structural change in the learning environment to facilitate teaching environment would be in such form as to equip students with relevant and sufficient professional knowledge, skills and character, guidance based evaluation techniques, ethical values etc. required for effective and productive performance of their duties and responsibilities in our society. Every one acknowledges environmental problems but only very few understand and appreciate the value of quality environment. The achievement of mass understanding and appreciation of quality environment requires the need for new attitude, skills, knowledge, awareness and behaviours towards environment.

The Nigerian school learning environment is a failure to the modern schooling. The structural form being as described above needs to be modernized to suit the present productive activities. Science students need to consult books or source

for information about their subjects always, therefore, the classroom need to be equipped with books, pictures and computers connected to network for instant service when there is need.

Most important is the extension of classroom environment to community environment by which students are active participants in community environmental programmes. They should organize themselves as to interact fully with the community people and their environment.

### **Implications of Outdoor Environmental Learning Environment**

The implications are not far fetched and can be considered as educational, economical and social as follows;

- **A Model of Social Interaction** The scenario where a teacher stands in front of a class, distributes knowledge to rows of learners is not only false but bad model for real life situations the students encounter. By creating their own knowledge and by co-operating to do so, the students will get used to the environments found in productive activities, and will develop, by practicing the cognitive style required in modern society. The fact that schools and communities interact, these students are taking up responsibility as they mature and able to tackle the task assigned or creating product.

- **Economical – Highly Improved Cost Effective Educational System** Cost – effectiveness is determined by comparing the value of the product/services generated by an outdoor learning environment with the confined classroom environment. At least there is no increase in school fees with reduction in the fund for instructional materials.

- **Educational Gains for Low Socio-Economic Groups** from the social and economic stand point low achievers in the socio-economic stats will step up to interact fluently with other students and community people, and vice-visa. In consequence such quality educational interaction to low socio-economic status group in the community will bring a high factor improvement to one of the major problems facing to one of the major problems facing our society.

- **Superior Work-force for Service and Time Saving** In this era of technical experience, the instructional level required for the workforce will be acquired by the end of the educational programme and time will be saved, by participating in community environmental programmes the students are incorporated into the workforce in a much shorter time than to graduate and start searching for where to obtain such technical experience.

## **Conclusion**

No level of knowledge distributed to rows of learners in an empty classroom can be enough for practical experience in real life situations. Confining students in classroom environment throughout their educational programme deprive them competency and can easily be fished out in different productive activities. Let our different makers and those in the corridors of education stand up to this challenge for self development.

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