

# The School Learning Environment and Students' Attitude and Achievement in English Language.

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## Abstract

This paper examined the school learning environment and students' attitude and achievement in English language. Components of the school learning environment include the infrastructure in the school such as the classroom learning environment, libraries, laboratories, fields and play grounds for games etc. Furniture such as chairs and desks for students, tables and chairs for teachers and instructional materials such as computers, overhead projectors, audio and audio visual aids. The issue of school learning environment was explored and it was observed that many schools in Nigeria have dilapidated building, cracked walls and leaking roofs, infrastructural facilities are far from being conducive. Attitude and achievement of students to English language were reviewed and it was observed that if the learning environment is not conducive for learning, students are likely to develop negative attitude towards the subject with the resultant poor achievement. It is obvious that the poor state of the buildings and unattractive physical structure would likely generate a negative attitude for students' to perform academically. Based on this, one of the recommendations was that dilapidated and old school buildings across the country should be renovated and repainted to foster a positive attitude among students for better performance in English language

## Introduction

English language occupies a very important position in Nigerian education system. It is the language of instruction at all levels of the school system. However, Anoma (2005) observes that most students in the secondary school find it difficult to obtain a credit pass in the subject at external examinations. This is reflected in the large number of candidates who fail the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSC) English language examination every year. The issue of poor performance in English language has been a cause for concern to all stakeholders in the education sector and the problem has been blamed on so many factors. Akwanya (2009) blames it on poor school learning environment, negative attitude among learners and teachers lack of commitment, overcrowded classrooms with consequent pressure and collapse of facilities and of course mother tongue interference. Kolawole (2011) blames the problem of mass failure in English language on lack of basic infrastructures such as conducive classrooms, unequipped libraries and laboratories and negative attitude on the part of students. Osunde and Ogiegbaen (2005) observe that lack of infrastructural facilities is associated with students' poor achievement in Senior Secondary Certificate examination in English language. Similarly, Teachernet (2008) points out that the surroundings in which students learn can greatly influence their academic performance and well-being. Hence a conducive learning environment is a pre-requisite for positive teaching and learning to take place.

Fakeye (2010) states that attitude are positive or negative feelings that an individual holds about objects or ideas and the achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning materials. According to him, a positive attitude more often than not leads to a successful learning. Thus, students' attitude is one of the variables that affect the learning of the language. This means that a favourable attitude could enhance achievement in English language.

## The School Learning Environment

According to Egim (2003) the school physical environment includes the buildings, classrooms, furniture and equipment, instructional materials, laboratories, libraries, play grounds and so on. Others are walls, machinery, decorative objects and audio-visual equipment. Similarly, Mitchell (2008) states that the design and structure of the school environment forms the physical appearance of the school, which may attract parents and friends of educational institutions in their initial judgments about the quality of what goes on in the school. They have effect on the perception and choice for learning experience observed by parents and students. However, In Nigerian schools, one observes that nobody cares about the learning environment and the negative effect this may have on the attitude of the students towards the learning experiences and the concomitant adverse effect this may have on students' achievement. It is common to see school environment poorly maintained with litters of papers strewn round the compound, dusty and unkempt classrooms with leaking roofs and broken doors and windows. According to Uzoegwu (2000), the school environment involves the infrastructure in the school such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, fields and ground for games etc, furniture- chairs and desks for students, tables and chairs for teachers and instructional materials. He, however, observes that adequate facilities are not provided that will help implement government language policies. In most Nigerian secondary schools, one finds

out that the conditions under which learning take place is far from being conducive.

According to Arshad, Tahira and Ahmad (2009), school environment is a very important school resource input and all the indicators of school environment collectively produce an academic environment that is helpful for the development of students' attitude and achievement in English language. Similarly, Akpofure and N'dipu (2000) report the need for schools to maintain a manageable capacity in the utilization of classrooms, libraries and laboratories for effective teaching and learning. To them, this will pave the way for a quality school-learning environment. Ogiegbaen (2004) reports that students' learning environment, their cognitive abilities, self-esteem, self-concept, study habits and motivation affect their academic success. There is no doubt that the school-learning environment plays a vital role in the teaching and learning of English, which invariably determines student's achievement and attitude towards the target language. The school environment comprises human and materials resources, which facilitate learning. Teaching and Learning International Survey (2009) notes that

numerous other factors determines the classroom learning environment include the curriculum, then physical conditions (good / poor quality facilities) and material resources available at schools, the role of testing and examination in education systems, working time and condition for teachers (including pay, social security and other benefits), students motivation, marking and grading systems and overall school culture.(p.2)

Hence, Ijaiya (1999) observes that the state of the physical facilities and buildings is poor and made worse by over- crowding. Even with the implementation of the current 6-3-3-4, facilities are far from being adequate. Osunde & Ogiegbaen (2005) notes that lack of infrastructure facilities are associated with student's poor achievement in senior secondary certificate examination in English language. They observe that many of the students come from technologically advanced homes where all sorts of modern gadgets such as radio, television sets, film videos, satellites and internet services exist but find themselves in boring and rowdy traditional classrooms which hardly have any facilities. The school environment is not conducive for learning and the classrooms are usually poorly equipped. It is not surprising, therefore, that the students perform poorly. Consequently, Ogiegbaen (2010), observes the following environmental deficiencies in Nigerian schools:

- a. Many schools, especially those in urban centers are located in areas where there is a busy movement and activities of many people.
- b. Many schools have dilapidated buildings with leaking roofs and cracked walls.
- c. He also observed that most of the schools, especially those in urban areas are overcrowded with some classrooms housing as many as 70 to 100 students.
- d. There is no electricity in majority of the schools.
- e. It was also observed that most of the schools do not have adequate staff rooms and offices.
- f. Most of the schools have no libraries and where they are available, there were scarcity of books in the shelves.

This is the critical state of most secondary schools in Nigeria. Hence, Obong, Okey, Aniah and Okabia (2010) state that the physical outlook of a school environment is very important in contributing to a healthy academic exercise because it forms the fulcrum on which other activities revolve. They further observe that where a school is located can determine to a large extent the stability of the students' mind for academic readiness. A school located along air-traffic route, roadside (especially without a fence) in a neighbourhood of industrial activities, markets and so on will constitute a nuisance and interference with the students' learning process. It will generate noise loud enough to badly affect the study adventure.

Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALLIS) (2009) reveals that the school environment in which teachers are operating is not always conducive to achieving an equal and quality teaching and learning environment. They observe that factors such as poor school infrastructure as well as social factors are often a barrier against effective teaching and learning. Therefore, for effective and efficient teaching and learning the English language in Nigerian secondary schools, a conducive school-learning environment is an imperative. Unfortunately, the situation of educational facilities and the learning environment in Nigerian secondary schools' can be best described as most pathetic. This is because the school-learning environment is a potent factor in determining student's academic achievement and attitude to English language. Hence, Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) rightly observe that most schools in the country are still languishing in the old architectural designs with crumbling walls and limited resources. A cursory look at the learning environment in the secondary schools shows that many of the classrooms, laboratories, examination halls, libraries and office furniture are in a terrible state and in need of repairs. Most windows have no louver blades thereby causing hazards to life. Moreover, the psychosocial environment, which has to do with interpersonal relationships among students and between students and their teachers appear to be non-conducive. All these tend to put teaching and learning in jeopardy.

According to Obong, Okey, Aniah and Okabia (2010) it is common to find schools located close to

commercial areas and other activities that generate noise such as automobiles, neighbourhood human discussions, discotheques, etc. to the extent that they distract the concentration of learners. In most schools one finds heaps of refuse uncontrollably dumped haphazardly with the environment reeking in filth and squalor. The school buildings on the other hand are another source of worry. Most school environments are not regularly painted. They are dilapidated and often in shambles, which make schools dull and unattractive. This tantamount to very hostile study environment that is not congenial to students'. The aesthetics of most schools are almost zero. No attention is given to the beautification of schools in creating lawns, landscaping and planting of flowers with regular trimming, planting of shrubs for shades and clearing of grasses. There is no proper drainage system in most schools. During the rainy season, it is common to see classrooms leaking or roofs blown off making the students most uncomfortable. Regrettably, this is the sorry state of the learning environment in Nigerian schools. Onotere (2008) attributes the problem of poor school learning environment to the nonchalant attitude of the Nigerian government to the state of education in the country and this contributes to the problem of ineffective teaching and learning of English language in schools. It is stated in the National Policy on Education, FGN (2004) that government should provide school library and basic infrastructure for the smooth running of schools, however, the contrary is the case. Government does not provide the necessary physical plants, human resources, funds, instructional and infrastructure facilities for the smooth running of schools. The school library which is an essential facility that assists students in their knowledge acquisition is lacking in most schools. Few schools that claim to have libraries have outdated books. It must be noted that schools without libraries render students handicapped because they cannot get good reading materials to support what the teacher teaches in the class. Supporting this view, Onyeachu (2008) observes that what is found in most secondary schools in Nigeria are dilapidated buildings, leaking roofs, inadequate chairs and tables for students and teachers use and these affect students' attitude and achievement. Similarly, Nwachukwu (2005) observes that most schools are a caricature of what schools should be in a modern state -collapsing buildings, leaking roofs, unkempt surroundings, houses with few or no public toilets, and a total disdain for aesthetics. These schools are designed and run merely to maintain the status quo that is poor quality services for majority of the populace.

The Education Sector Analysis (2002) note that almost all state-run schools and colleges are in a deplorable state. Most of the physical structures are in a state of total neglect and despair. The schools lack basic textbooks, library and laboratory equipment and other tools for imparting knowledge. They further report that the quality of life and work in Nigerian public schools and colleges and the very environment in which teaching and learning take place, have become a thing of shame and a source of embarrassment to many who have an idea of what educational institutions should look like. They observe that years of neglect have left Nigeria with poor quality public education. Many schools fail to provide even basic opportunities for learning. School buildings and facilities are inadequate. Teaching standards are low. They further observe that teachers receive inadequate training and have little motivation to improve. Management of education is weak and ineffective, inefficient and top heavy. There is a desire for reform, but policies and plans are not implemented effectively. Financial management is opaque and capital and operational funds do not reach schools as intended.

According to Agwu (2005), our education system is facing a very serious crisis. The schools, especially the ones owned and run by the government are poorly staffed, with dilapidated buildings and very untidy environments. He observes that the classrooms are often vandalized and there is also the absence of essential teaching and learning materials. According to him, the level of neglect of this vital arm of the education system is so much that one begins to wonder if the country has an education system at all. Similarly, Ogiegbaen (2005) also blames the problem on the poor state of the physical facilities in the schools. He observes that most of the school buildings are poor and made worse by over-crowding. Adequate facilities are not provided in schools and in most of the nation's secondary schools teaching and learning take place under a non-conducive environment. Similarly, Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) also observe that a number of schools around the country are still languishing in the old architectural designs with crumbling walls and limited resources. and many of the classrooms, laboratories, examination halls, libraries and office furniture are in a terrible state and in need of repairs. Most schools have no toilet facilities and the dormitories are rat infested and reeking of filth and squalor. During the rainy season, it is common to see classrooms and dormitories with leaking roofs, cracked walls and roofs blown off, making the students very uncomfortable.

The situation of school learning environment in Nigeria is nothing but a disaster. It is obvious that the entire unattractive physical structure of the school buildings and compounds would likely generate a negative attitude among learners to achieve academically. Hence, Ijeoma (2007), states that a conducive learning environment can have effect on both the attitude and achievement of students. She also observes that over-crowded classrooms are now a permanent feature of academic settings at all levels of the education system. Hence, Lynch (2010) observes that the number of learners in a class can range from multitudes of 35 or forty or even fifty or more learners packed into a learning situation. This is the sad truth in many Nigerian classrooms especially in major towns and cities. Thus, the phenomenon of overcrowded classrooms as well as poor quality and inadequate furniture in the classrooms due to unlimited expansion has taken its toll on the educational

system. Kolawole (1998) observes that inadequate period of teaching, method of teaching and lack of adequate and useful materials plague the teaching and learning of English language. Hence, Ijaiya (1999) observes that increase in examination malpractices cannot be divorced from poor seating arrangement in classrooms. There is no doubt that with this kind of poor school learning environment, the quantity and quality of interaction in the class are likely to be adversely affected.

### **Importance of the School Learning Environment**

Fakeye (2012) states that the environment in which learning takes place is very important as it is capable of either enhancing or impeding the learning capacities of students and that there appears to be a declining concern for the nature of the environment in which learning takes place in Nigeria. According to him, this apparent neglect could be as a result of the syndrome of the end justifies the means, which now makes many to be interested in the nature of result produced by each school in public examinations at the expense of the quality of the process that generates such results.

Teachernet (2008) also observes that the surroundings in which students learn can greatly influence their academic performance and well-being. According to them, the architectural layout and facilities of the school play a vital role in shaping the learning environment. Subsequently, Adewuyi (2002) and Ijeoma (2007) note that a conducive learning environment can have effect on both the attitude and achievement of students. As indicated by the National Teachers' Institute (2008), school supervision and sanitation are capable of affecting the quality of learning environment. This refers to all the strategies adopted by school systems in managing the wastes (noise water and other effluents), drainage pattern and the facilities provided in the school. Equally crucial is the greening of the learning environment. Sanitation connection (2001/2002) maintains that a school management that provide sanitation, planting of flowers, trees, maintaining the lawns and well cleared grasses, etc, improves quality of life and study environment. There is no doubt, therefore, that the physical outlook of the school learning environment has a lot to do with the attitude of students towards the teaching and learning of the English language and invariably on their academic achievement in English language. Most students may lack the zeal to learn and skip classes if the environment is unattractive and boring. When they do show up it is likely due to fear of failure more than anything else.

In addition, Fakeye and Ogunsuji (2009) submit that where the school is located determines to a very large extent the patronage such a school will enjoy. The entire unattractive physical structure of the school building and compound could generate a negative attitude among learners to achieve academically. Hence, Hussin, Maarof and D,Cruz (2001) observe that a conducive environment has to be created for successful language learning. Also, the positive attitude of both the teacher and learners are relevant in terms of students overall academic achievement.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs arranged human psychological needs with the idea that people are incapable of paying attention to higher level needs when lower level needs remain unmet. The lower level needs include food, shelter and safety. The upper level growth needs include the need to understand what motivates students to learn. So, for a school to achieve its educational goals and objectives, it is pertinent for it to make students feel safe and secure in the learning environment. A conducive school learning environment also means ensuring the safety and well-being of teachers and school administrators so that they can effectively carry out their jobs of impacting knowledge.

This has shown that an environment conducive to learning makes teaching successful. The negative impact of dilapidated, leaking and ill-ventilated schoolhouse with broken windowpanes or defective walls or muddy and sandy floor on students' achievement and attitude would be stating the obvious. Most school environments are not clean enough to attract even the most willing students. The overcrowded classrooms are not only repulsive but energy-sapping as students struggle and wrestle over sitting positions. In other cases, students lean on the walls and hang on the broken windows to listen to the teacher. When students are accommodated in an overcrowded classroom, their degree of concentration is impeded.

### **Attitude And Achievement Of Students In English Language**

English language plays the vital role of being the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools from primary to tertiary level. According to Anoma (2005), presently, Nigerian secondary school students have problems in the learning of English language as revealed in their performance in the subject at public examinations. Ogunsiji and Fakeye (2009) state that the poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria.

One major reason why students fail English language woefully in the yearly school certificate examination is the negative attitude of some students to the subject, (Fakeye, 2010). Students' attitude to the language is likely to be one of the personal variables that affect their performance in English language. Therefore, developing favourable attitude as a means of enhancing performance in English language in the students is of



utmost importance. The attitude of the learner towards the language learning matters a lot, if the learner is going to gain the mastery of the subject for a better performance.

According to Adebisi (2006), attitudes are positive or negative feelings an individual holds about objects or ideas. The achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning materials. Kings in Fakeye (2010) states that a positive attitude more often than not leads to successful learning. Similarly, Gardner and Lambert (1972) observe that success in mastering a second language depends not so much on intellectual capacity or language aptitude as on learner's attitude towards the particular language. According to them, attitude could help the language learning process by changing students' orientation towards particular linguistic cultural groups and thereby modify their motivation to learn that language. It is therefore imperative that a positive attitude towards English language accounts for success in learning it. Gardner (1985) proposes three different experiences associated with second language acquisition that can have an influence on students' attitudes and motivation. The first experience is bicultural excursion programme. This he refers to as relatively short term interactions with members of the other language commonly in their own social environment with the express purpose of developing positive attitudes towards that group. Generally, there is little, if any, instruction in the second language. Unfortunately in Nigerian schools, most learners and teachers of English language go through their entire life without coming in contact with native speakers. The other two experiences proposed are regular language courses and intensive language training. According to Gardner (1985), if teachers are skilled in the language and attuned to the feelings of their students, and the methodology is interesting and informative, this can do a lot towards the awakening of positive attitudes, regardless of whether students' initial attitudes are positive or negative. Conversely, if teachers are not knowledgeable or sensitive to students' reactions and encumbered with a dull and unimaginative methodology, it is unlikely that positive attitudes will be developed.

Adelabu (1998) gives three reasons to explain the negative attitude to English language among secondary school students:

- a. Most students hate the English language because of poor results recorded yearly in school certificate examinations.
- b. Teachers do not often engender positive attitude because they use bad methods to teach the subject.
- c. The teachers do not have a thorough grasp of the instructional content and procedure (p.52).

Thus, serious consideration ought to be given to the issue of learners' attitude, as they seem to be the pre-requisite for the successful acquisition of a second language. According to Ellis (1994), the learners' attitude towards the target language informs the determination with which the learner can tackle challenges in the target language. He argues that the learners' attitudes have an impact on the level of second language proficiency achieved by individual learners and are themselves influenced by this success. Thus, learners with positive attitudes who experience success will have these attitudes reinforced while those with negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success.

Similarly Kanyira (2008) states that effective learning can only take place when the pupil is keen on acquiring knowledge, because a negative attitude obviously, relates to poor achievement.

## **Conclusion**

School learning environment is a very important factor in the development of students' attitude to learning and serves as a determinant of their performance in English language. Thus, a conducive learning environment is an imperative if students are to develop positive attitude to learning in order to facilitate better achievement in the subject. Unfortunately in Nigerian secondary schools, one finds out that there is a general negative attitude among the students towards the learning of the English language. No wonder most of the learners have a negative attitude towards the target language. This is made worse by a poor learning environment where provisions are not made for interesting instructional materials (such as newspapers, supplementary texts, audio and visual tapes, computers, language laboratories etc) to aid the lesson.

All these factors contribute to negative attitude among the learners and poor achievement in English language. Thus, a situation where the school learning environment is not motivating and instructional materials are not utilized to make the language learning interesting clearly suggest that students are likely to have negative attitude towards the target language.

## **Recommendations:**

1. The learning environment across the schools in Nigeria should be improved by renovating and repainting old and dilapidated classroom buildings to make them more attractive and conducive .
2. Considering the central role of attitude in second language acquisition, teachers should create a positive classroom learning environment that will motivate learners to develop a more positive attitude to English language.
3. Schools should be located in noiseless areas of the town where students will not be easily distracted

- from their studies by noise from moving vehicles and trespassers.
4. Only professionally qualified English language teachers should be employed to handle the subject in schools.
  5. Government should incorporate the use of computers and other information and communication technology materials into the language classroom as the application of these modern instructional gadgets will enliven the class and transform the traditionally dull and boring class into a computerized one where students perform better academically

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