

# The Classroom Environment: A Major Motivating Factor towards High Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in South West Nigeria

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the impact of the classroom environment as a motivating factor in enhancing the academic performance of secondary school students in South West Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey type. The population of this study comprises all students of senior secondary schools in South West Nigeria which consist of Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo and Ekiti State. The sample for this study comprised one thousand and fifty senior secondary school three students from three states out of the six states in the South West Geo-political zone. The sampled states are Osun, Ondo and Ekiti. The researcher made use of a questionnaire and inventory to collect data. A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Motivation and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students" (MAPSSS) was used to elicit information from the respondents. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between classroom environment and the academic performance of senior secondary school students. Based on the findings of the study, Government who is the proprietor of public secondary schools should build sufficient, modern and conducive classrooms and embark on renovation of those in dilapidated condition, teachers should make the classroom environment comfortable and functional for learning to take place, so that students can learn and perform better academically and behave better.

**Keywords:** Classroom environment, motivating factor, academic performance, senior secondary school.

## Introduction

The classroom environment seems to be an important motivating factor that makes or mar the teaching and learning process. It is pertinent to note that the curriculum or the content of the school syllabus is being implemented mainly within the four walls of the classroom, (usually under the formal school system) through professional teachers who happen to be the curriculum implementers. It appears that the quality of teaching would likely affect the learning of many secondary school subjects and learning programmes, this perhaps may be as a result of the state of the classroom environment.

Globally, formal classroom systems can be found in every citadel of learning in all countries across the globe, be it developed or developing countries, depending on the types, shapes, class and academic environment in which they are situated. The classroom according to Adesua (2014) environment is an important, most powerful and effective instrument of socialization where learners from different socio-economic backgrounds come together to learn.

Classrooms are found in educational institutions of all kinds including public and private schools home schools, corporations, religious and humanitarian organizations. For lessons that require specific resources or vocational approach, different types of classrooms both indoors and outdoors are used. Classrooms can range from small groups of five or six to big class rooms with hundreds of students. A large classroom is also called a lecture hall. A few examples of classrooms are computer labs which are used for IT lessons in schools, gymnasiums for sports and science laboratories for biology, chemistry and physics. There are also small groups where students learn in groups of about 7 (seven) (wikipedia the free encyclopedia.)

It has been observed within the Nigeria school system that the yardstick to measure a student's academic performances are through the scores obtained by the learner during or after the process of learning. So much importance seems to be attached to scores to the extent that scores often depicts or reflects performance.

Academic excellence is the desire of every school owner (proprietor). The quality of teaching and learning that takes place in any establishment determines the level of academic excellence. In other for effective teaching and learning process to occur within the school environment, there must be provision for required learning aids such as conducive school physical environment, well painted classroom, adequate chairs, moderate distance from an industrial area to prevent unwanted noise and a well experienced teacher (progress Educate).

Research from various teachers' personal experiences across the globe indicated that different criteria needed to be seriously put into consideration when it comes to achieving the desired educational goals and objectives in a classroom environment. These criteria range from the furniture and space arrangement, environmental preferences such as the physical climate of the classroom, the decoration and design, lighting and

acoustics of the classroom environment. A well-run classroom begins with the physical layout – the arrangement of space and working space, attractiveness and appeal of bulletin boards, the storage of materials and supplies. The physical layout of the classroom reflects the teaching style, for example students could be organized around clusters of desks. For frequent discussion, a circle or U-shape configuration could be devised. (Classroom organization: the physical environment/scholastic.com.)

Gorola Frank a fifth grade teacher contended that basic bulletin boards are not enough in a classroom environment, he emphasized on the need to have a very colourful classroom with posters, functional bulletin boards and other interesting items to enhance the environment. This view about space arrangement corroborates that of Reggio Emilia educators (in Northern Italian), who stressed the need for a classroom environment that informs and engages the child, they consider the physical environment of the classroom to be another teacher in the sense that it can motivate children, enhance learning and reduce behaviour problems, the environment really is described as an “extra teacher” (classroom organization: The physical environment/scholastic.com)

Mike Hopkins an author and educator held a contrary opinion, he is of the view that teacher should forget about the way things are done and go beyond the four walls of the classroom, visit museums, libraries, other schools and colleagues’ classrooms to identify different ways of organizing space. (classroom organization: The physical environment/scholastic.com.)

Recent studies have suggested the preferred seating arrangement in a classroom. In many classrooms the largest amount of space is devoted to the arrangement of individual student’s desks. Bickerstaffe (1980), explained that many classrooms are too small for the number of children they have to accommodate, usually there is not much the teacher can do about this. The conventional classroom arrangement starts from the seat of the teacher (i.e. table, chair), in the front, which is a few steps away the blackboard, this is followed by the pupils furniture e.g. table and chair. A cupboard is usually situated at the back of the class; this contains the books (textbooks, exercise books) of pupils, the lunch box e.t.c.

Ikudayisi, Arotiba and Adesua (2003), seems to share the same view with Bickerstaffe (1980), they explained that the arrangement of pupil row by row is what obtains in the primary and secondary schools. Desks and tables are arranged in straight rows. This seating arrangement is done in a way that pupils who are short have their seats in the front while the taller ones seat at the back. At times, the slow learners are made to seat with the very bright ones, so that they can be of added advantage, those with visual defects (eye problem) would also have their seats in front. In the olden days, the populations of pupils were usually small, but today, it is not possible to have such small groups because of the great demand for education teachers have to face large classes of 40 to 50 or even 100 depending on the type of school.

Recent studies, revealed that teachers vary greatly on their preferred classroom arrangement but most (teachers) agree that the days of 30 desks lined in neat rows and facing the teachers desk up front are long gone (classroom organization: The physical Environment/scholastic.com). Bickerstaffe (1980), contended that the teacher can look at the amount of space being occupied by the teacher’s desk, the blackboard and store cupboards, if the teacher’s desk is moved to a corner of the room instead of being in the front center. Will it make more room available for the children? Will it enable the black board to be moved further back, and create a little more circulation available, can the number of cupboards be reduced from two to one?

In support of the above, Jane Baird a sixth grade teacher suggests that no matter how the desk is arranged, the teacher should not be afraid to make changes. She recommended that the teacher should “arrange the room so that he can make eye contact with every student and reach every student with ease”. This view corroborates that of Laurie Borger, a fifth grade teacher who advises that the teacher should “set the classroom up and at the end of each unit or each month evaluate and make changes” he advises that “the students’ desk be moved on a regular basis so that all children learn to co-operate with all”. Pamela Shannon a second grade teacher seems to support Baird and Borger, she agrees that teachers should not be afraid to make seat and desk changes if the arrangement doesn’t work, since the teacher is in charge. (Classroom organization: the physical environment/scholastic.com.)

Ikudayisi Arotiba and Adesua (2003), held a contrary opinion and explained that in the rural areas where the classroom may be overcrowded the school playing ground or school garden can be used for oral work, whenever the weather is good for such. It is recommended that teachers should do away with the traditional arrangement of desks in rows whenever he can conveniently do so. This kind of change, together with having occasional lessons outside and a classroom enlivened by colourful displays of pictures and children’s work will help to make school a more exciting and enjoyable place for pupils.

In a similar dimension, Ikudayisi, Arotiba and Adesua (2003), explained that if a school is situated in an area where flowers of leaves can be obtained, this can be used to brighten up the classroom while expensive flower vases are not necessary, also old glass containers can be made quite decorative in a craft lesson by painting them with black enamel and sticking on brightly colours shapes made from paper marsh. These would alleviate drabness which one finds in many classrooms. Based on the above, one of the factors this research work is set to investigate is the relationship between classroom environment and the academic performance of

students.

Research has also indicated the impact of classroom environment on the academic of a student, a study conducted by Rosssenfield, Lambert, Nadine and Black (1985), revealed that when desk are arranged in a circular pattern, students are likely to listen attentively, participate in discussions, they tend to rely more on their own knowledge and that confidence causes test scores to rise, but when compared with scores when desks are arranged in clusters or rows, instances of cheating went up.

Similarly, studies conducted by Okura (2002), revealed that elementary school students tends to measure good academic performance where daylight is present when compared to classrooms without daylight. The average school child will record 1 to 1.5 points per month on test scores in math and reading in a classroom with no day lighting while the same child improve twice as fast, gaining 2 to 3 points per month in classroom that includes daylight.

Zentall and Shaw (1980), contended that the acoustics of the classroom are an important part of the success of the child but these are often overlooked. They are of the opinion that materials that can cause sound to reverberate such as floors and hand wall surfaces, greatly increases noise levels and can prove detrimental to learning. This implies that attention should be made to acoustics because it may reduce distractions and aid concentration.

To further corroborated this, Frank Gracia a fifth grade teacher, explained that creating a caring, child centered environment needs lots of planning. Basic bulletin boards are not enough, rather a colourful classroom with posters, functional bulletin board and other interesting items are required to enhance the environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nowadays, the classroom environment in the developing world seems to discourage students from learning. In most public secondary schools, the classroom is usually jam-packed with students. When the classroom environment is not spacious and conducive, teachers may find it difficult to teach adequately and manage the class effectively. As a result, student tend to skip lessons. They may not listen attentively to what is being taught, sometimes they may not copy or update their notes, some may not perform or carry out their academic task adequately. All these may invariably contribute to poor academic performance of students.

The researcher also observed that if the classroom environment is not of expected standard, teachers may find it difficult to interact closely with each student, know the students through their names, background, individual differences and learning difficulties. These are problems and concerns that necessitated investigating the impact of the classroom environment at enhancing the academic performance of secondary school students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the classroom environment on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in South West Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the level of students' motivation derived from classroom environment?
- ii. What is the level of academic performance of students in core subjects?

### **Research Hypothesis**

There is no significant relationship between classroom environment and the academic performance of senior secondary school students.

### **Methodology**

The research design for this study is an *ex post facto* design and descriptive research of survey type. An *ex-post facto* design was considered appropriate because, it examines the cause and effect relationship between one variable and the other, it describes the relationship that exist between classroom environment and academic performance of students. It involves the use of inventory to collect data (i.e. the 2012 WAEC Results of SSS 3 students).

The population of this study comprises all students of Senior Secondary Schools in South West Nigeria which consist of Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo and Ekiti State. The estimated population of public secondary schools as at the time of this study comprises 2,070 secondary schools in the South West geopolitical zone.

The sample for this study comprised one thousand and fifty (1,150) senior secondary school three students (i.e. S.S.3) from three states out of the six states in the South West Geo-political zone. The sampled states are Osun, Ondo and Ekiti.

The researcher made use of a questionnaire and an inventory to collect data. A self designed questionnaire tagged "Motivation and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students" (MAPSS) was used to elicit information from the respondents on motivating factors that could enhance their academic

performance. This consists of two parts. Parts A and B. Parts A is the bio-data of the respondents while Part B consist of 9 sections. Sections A – I, Section C of the questionnaire on classroom environment was used to measure the impact of classroom environment on the academic performance of senior secondary school students.

The instrument was validated with the help of experts in Tests and Measurements, Curriculum Studies and Educational Management. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-re-test method and it yielded a coefficient of 0.85.

### Data Analysis and Results

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis showing the level of students Motivation derived from classroom environment.**

|                       | Low |      | Moderate |      | High |      |
|-----------------------|-----|------|----------|------|------|------|
|                       | N   | %    | N        | %    | N    | %    |
| Classroom Environment | 174 | 15.1 | 470      | 40.0 | 506  | 44.0 |

Table 1 shows that 174 (15.1%) had low perception of their level of motivation derived from classroom environment, 470 (40.9%) had moderate perception on the level of motivation derived from the class environment, while 506 (44.0%) had moderate perception on the level of motivation derived from the classroom environment.

**Table 2: Descriptive Analysis showing the level of Academic Performance of students on core subjects.**

In determining the level of motivation derived from the respondents on the impact of the classroom environment on the academic performance of students, the result of students in 2012 West African Examination Council for the selected schools in the sampled states were obtain in core subject areas as depicted in Table 3.

| Core Subjects | No Registered | A <sub>1</sub> – B <sub>3</sub> |      | C <sub>4</sub> – C <sub>6</sub> |      | D <sub>7</sub> – E <sub>8</sub> |      | F <sub>9</sub> |      | Total |       |
|---------------|---------------|---------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|----------------|------|-------|-------|
|               |               | N                               | %    | N                               | %    | N                               | %    | N              | %    | N     | %     |
| Mathematics   | 2855          | 662                             | 23.2 | 1299                            | 45.5 | 529                             | 18.5 | 365            | 12.8 | 2855  | 100.0 |
| Biology       | 2906          | 521                             | 17.9 | 1377                            | 47.4 | 623                             | 21.4 | 385            | 13.2 | 2906  | 100.0 |
| Yoruba        | 2872          | 856                             | 17.6 | 1301                            | 45.3 | 633                             | 22.0 | 433            | 15.1 | 2872  | 100.0 |
| Economics     | 2848          | 1006                            | 25.7 | 1016                            | 53.3 | 345                             | 12.1 | 253            | 8.9  | 2848  | 100.0 |
| English       | 2868          | 385                             | 13.4 | 1377                            | 48.0 | 725                             | 25.3 | 381            | 13.3 | 2868  | 100.0 |

#### Key

- A1 – B3 High level
- C4 – C6 Moderate level
- D7 – E8 Low level
- F9 Failed

The level of academic performance during the period under review was relatively high, as depicted in Table 3 above.

### Hypothesis

**There was no significant relationship between classroom environment and the academic performance of senior secondary school students.**

Scores on classroom environment were correlated with the weighted scores on the academic performance of senior secondary school students at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in **Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Summary of The classroom environment on the Academic Performance of Students.**

| Variable   | N  | r cal  | r table |
|--|----|--------|---------|
| The classroom environment                                | 23 | 0.743* | 0.381   |
| Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students | 23 |        |         |

\*P<0.05 (significant result)

Table 4 showed that r cal (0.743) was greater than r tab (0.381) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore,, there is significant relationship between classroom environment and the academic performance of senior secondary school students. Hence, classroom environment had positive impact on the academic performance of senior secondary school students.

The findings suggest that the classroom environment could serve as motivating factor to the academic performance of students. If the classroom environment is conducive and spacious, it could contribute to effective teaching and learning, this could enhance effective student teacher interaction. Whereas if the classroom environment is not conducive, it could have negative effect on the academic performance of students.

The probable reason for the significant relationship between classroom environment and academic performance of students might not be unconnected with the fact that the classroom environment may either be

conducive or not conducive for learning to take place. The findings support of Bickerstaffe (1980), Ikudaisi, Arotiba and Adesua (2003), Rossenfield, Lambert, Nadine and Black (1985), and Okura (2002), that classroom environment contributes to the academic performance of students. But the findings contradicted Zentall and Shaw (1980) for the Success of the child, though these are often overlooked they are factors that may contribute or hinder the academic performance of students in the classroom.

### Conclusion

Across the globe and over the ages, even in this age of information and communication technology, the importance of classroom could not be over emphasized at the secondary level of education. This study affirmed that classroom environment has a significant impart on the performance of students in the secondary schools. The study revealed a significant relationship between classroom environment and students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in south west Nigeria. The study further stressed the relative high performance of students academically and that moderate level of motivation was derived from classroom environment.

### Recommendations

Government should build sufficient, modern and conducive classroom in public secondary schools, and embark on renovation of those in dilapidated conditions. Since teachers are in charge of the classroom, teachers should adjust the classroom environment to students' preferences, they should make the classroom environment a "home away from home". By making it more comfortable and functional for learning to take place, so that students can learn and perform better academically and behave better.

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