

The Influence of School Variables On the Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated the influence of school variables on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State. Two research questions were posed and two hypotheses formulated. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of the entire senior secondary two (SS2) students in all the senior secondary schools in nine Local Government Areas in Aba Education Zone in 2021/2022 session. The sample was drawn using multi-stage sampling approach. First, four LGAs were randomly selected from the nine existing LGAs in Aba Education Zone. Secondly, one senior secondary school was randomly selected from each of the four LGAs. Finally, 45 SS2 students from each of the sampled schools were purposively selected for the study. The total sample size was 180 respondents. The instruments for data collection were self-made questionnaire titled "School Variables and Students Academic Performance Questionnaire (SVSAPQ) and Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). Reliability coefficient of 0.86 and 0.87 were obtained respectively for SVSAPQ and APQ using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. To achieve the objectives of the study, the research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation and the hypotheses tested at .05 significant levels using independent t-test. The findings revealed that there is a significant influence of school environment and school climate on academic performance among senior secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. Based on the findings, it was concluded that good physical school environment and healthy school climate enhance academic performance of students. Based on the conclusion, it was recommended that; Government should ensure that schools are sited in environments that are accessible, secure and large enough to accommodate buildings and all other facilities the learners may require for effective teaching/learning activities. The school administrators and teachers should see that the school climate is toxic-free, friendly, natural and calm enough to get students relaxed for effective academic work. Toxic atmosphere and bullying must be checked and eradicated to facilitate students' adjustment to school work.*

KEY WORDS: influence, school variables and academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

School in the context of this study is an educational institution designed to provide learning spaces and learning environment teaching and learning processes under the guidance and direction of

teachers (Alimi et al., 2004). School is concerned with formal education where physical sites are maintained, curriculum and learning experiences are graded to match the age and mental levels of the learners. Considerations for physical environments are given because of the idea that environment can mar or facilitate learning and learning is the ultimate aim of teaching and education.

Formal education offered in schools are classified into different nomenclatures in Nigeria; prominently, primary school for young children, secondary school for teenagers who have completed primary education and tertiary for those who successfully completed their secondary education and wish to get professional education. In Nigeria, young and teenage children's levels are categorized into Early Basic, Middle Basic, Upper Basic and Post Basic education. The Post Basic is the secondary school proper. Each stage of education is aimed to provide certain level of competence for the learner. This makes evaluation of academic performance of the learner is imperative.

Academic performance is seen as the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals (Galasky, 2014). It is also seen as the cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) upon completion of educational benchmarks such as senior secondary school certificates, diplomas and bachelor's degrees etc. That the standard of education has fallen is already a cliché in Nigerian education discourses. The general low academic performance of secondary school students across school subjects has attracted the attention of all stakeholder of education to the extent that the solution is everybody's interest.

The poor academic performance of students has been blamed on many factors. The blames go to the government, teachers, schools, parents and students alike. For these reasons, many scholars have investigated the influence of these variables in the academic performance of students. In the present-day Nigeria and in Abia State in particular, there is proliferation of schools. Private schools outnumber the public schools and compete favorably with the public schools. Many parents patronize the private schools because, they think they provide better facilities, better commitment etc. and so produce better academic performance in the students. While these may or not be true, it has become pertinent to understudy the influence of school variables in the academic performance of secondary school students.

Parents do not just send their children/wards to school. They give careful thought to the type and quality of schools their children attend. For instance, some prefer coeducational to single sex schools no doubt, but this is not the scope of this study. The investigation will also not dwell on whether the school is private or public, urban or rural, Day, Boarding or mixed. However, consideration is given to the location of the schools in respect to the immediate environment of the schools; whether sighted in an isolated or build up part of the town, whether the roads are accessible or not; whether the space and arrangement of buildings are good and big enough to

allow for curricula and extra curricula activities that impact the academic performance of students. This is done in speculation that the schools located in built up areas encounter noise and other forms of distractions and risks may influence academic performance negatively so also schools sited in erosion and flood prone areas and consequently inaccessible.

School climate is another school variable that is speculated to influence secondary school students' academic performance. Chamberlin (2001) sees school (organization) climate as a subtle spirit that exists in a school, both in minds of the teachers and students and every act, which may never be exactly described or analyzed, but which an experienced observer recognizes when he enters a school. Sergiovanni and Starratt, (2009) view climate on the one hand as the enduring characteristics which describe a particular school, distinguished it from other schools and influence the behavior of teachers and students. On the other hand, as the "feel" which teachers and students have of that school. A school with toxic atmosphere, hostility from the administration to the teachers and from the teachers to the learners would impact negatively on the physical, social, psychological, affective and cognitive development of the students and consequently on the general academic performance of students.

Statement of the Problem

In the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), senior secondary schools are established as one of the Post-Basic education that provides competences that would avail students the opportunity for self-reliance and as well prepare one for tertiary education. The success or otherwise of one's secondary school experience makes or mars one' comfort as a citizen of Nigeria. For those who wish to advance their educational pursuit, sound academic performance in secondary school dictates the tune. Therefore, schools, teachers, students and parents are conscious of the importance of result-oriented completion of secondary education.

Sequel to this, many secondary schools have been established by both the government and the private sectors in order to make students acquire education and have high levels of academic performances and achievements. In Aba Education Zone of Abia State, not only that many secondary schools have been established by the government to ensure equal education opportunity for all its citizenry, many measures have been put in place to improve students' academic performances. Yet, the academic performances of the students are declining due largely to a variety of reasons. Many of these factors are associated with the schools.

For instance, location of the school in environments that are inaccessible, risk-ridden, hazardous and poorly spaced bring a lot of distractions to the learners. Many schools today are sighted in built up areas, sharing neighbourhood with markets, fuel stations, factories and workshops. These bring environmental disadvantage to an increase and academic performance to a jeopardy.

Furthermore, the poor school climate that characterizes the public schools is worrisome. There is observed toxic atmosphere in schools characterized by bad leadership styles of the school administrators, overreactions from the teachers and bullying of the students by the teachers and fellow students. These have implications for academic performance of students generally.

For these situations and speculations, the influence of school variables on the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State is investigated. However, the study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does school environment influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does school climate influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria?

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no significant influence of school environment on the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria.
2. The school climate does not significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, two theories of relevance would be discussed. The environmentalist learning theory is relevant to this study. It was established by Albert Bandura in 1921 and was further developed by B.F Skinner as a theory of learning. Environmentalist learning theory is the understanding that the child's environment shapes learning and behaviour. It is also thought that behaviour and learning are reactions to the environment. This perspective encourages families, schools and educators to understand that the children develop and learn new skills in reaction to items they find around them. Psychologists such as Albert Bandura found through observational learning that the young child will observe and copy behaviours of others, leading to decision-making skills and development. The environmentalist theory offers the ability to change the environment for the learners' potential benefits. When children are in an environment not conducive for learning, they will not learn to their best abilities. When the environment is altered to encourage greater learning, their educational opportunities increase. Whether in the home or classroom, creating an environment conducive and supportive of learning aid the young mind's evolution to greater knowledge.

Invariably, a good school environment allows the students to satisfy their curiosity and attain their highest learning potentials by exploring and harnessing the provisions of the school environment.

Similarly, Goal theory is a cognitive theory process approach to work motivation. It was originally formulated by Locke and his associate in 1968 and elaborated upon by Michael in 2007. The goal setting theory, as it is popularly known is one of the process theories of motivation. Process theories of motivation are primarily concerned with explaining how individual behavior is energized, directed, sustained and stopped. It becomes increasingly popular as a cognitive approach to work motivation during 1970s (Michael, 2007). Goal theory is relevant to this study in the sense that it provides impetus for the school community to create the appropriate atmosphere or climate that would encourage learning, sustain students' interest in learning as well as improve their academic performance.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

School variables refer to those factors that border on the school which constitute influences on the development of the child and the social and cognitive outlook of the members of the school community. They are those indices that distinguish one school and another. They are discriminatory social, economic, educational, cultural, psychological indicators of standard which have influence on members of the school community. This study is delimited to three school variables like school environment/location, school climate and teachers' motivation to ascertain their respective influence on the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Speaking of school environment, Bandele (2003) explained that schools are organized spaces for the purpose of teaching and learning and that classrooms where teachers teach and students learn, are of central importance. Bandura, finds the environment as an important factor in learning and development of the young mind. According to him, the combination of the environment, the individual, and their reaction encourage behavior building and learning.

In the school, where the learning environment is not conducive and learning facilities inadequate, the young child may end up wasting their time because they may not be able to focus and assimilate what is taught by the teachers. Creating a conducive learning environment induces students to learn with zeal and cooperate with the teachers as they teach and instruct them on what to do for improved academic performances. Even when a school has adequate school facilities, the environment upon which it is established or situated, has a way of influencing the learning and academic performances of the students in that environment because if the environment is hostile, the students will not have relaxed mind in school, but if it is peaceful, they will participate fully in all the activities that may enhance learning and so, perform better at both the classroom works and at the examination levels.

In achieving a better environment for teaching/learning, classrooms may be specialized for certain subjects, such as laboratory classrooms for science education and workshops for industrial/art

education. For instance, it is inconducive to take literature class in a laboratory or chemistry practical in an auditorium.

Furthermore, school environment should not be a built-up area where contrasting activities take place. Schools located in areas that are not accessible, water-logged, hazardous etc. would impede good academic performance. A school environment that allows teachers to do a good job will automatically improve the learning conditions of the students and thereby enhances the academic performance of the students (Toby, 2016). Amaechina and Ezeh's (2019) study on school environment and academic performance of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone found that students who feel secured in a school environment, students who are supported in school and students with better socio-emotional health contribute to a high extent in the performance of students in school. Also, the findings of the study conducted by Richard (2020) on School Physical Environment and Student Academic Performance, confirmed that in Ghana, the students in senior high schools with a pleasant physical environment perform better than those where the learning environment is not conducive.

Chamberlin (2001) sees school (organization) climate as a subtle spirit that exists in a school, both in minds of the teachers and students and every act, which may never be exactly described or analyzed, but which an experienced observer recognizes when he enters a school. James, (2003) consider organizational climate as an internal characteristic that distinguish one school from another and influence the behavior of the people in it. They pointed out that the climate is an end product of the school groups – that is, the students, teachers, administrators (the formal and informal organization, organizational leadership and personalities of participants) as they work to balance the organizational and individual aspect of a social system. Their end product includes shared values, social belief and social standards. School climate is also defined as a set of characteristics which describes an organization and distinguishes the organization from another organization. The characteristics are relatively enduring over time and influence the behavior of the people in the organization. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2009) also view school climate on the one hand, as the enduring characteristics which describe a particular school, distinguishes it from other schools and influences the behavior of teachers and students; on the other hand, as the "feel" which teachers and students have of that school.

Freiberg and Stein (1999) described school climate as the heart and soul of the school and the essence of the school that draws teachers and students to love the school and want to be part of it. School climate is a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants. It is generally a social atmosphere of a setting of learning environment in which students have different experience, depending upon the protocols set up by the teachers and administration. Moos divides learning environment into three categories: relationship, which includes involvement, affiliation with others in the classroom and teachers support, personal

growth or goal orientation, which includes, the personal development and system maintenance, the clarity of the rules and the strictness of the teacher in enforcing the rules.

There are different school climates and each of them has its own influence on both the job performance of teachers as well as students' academic performance. This renewed emphasis on the school climate which was further reinforced by a Meta-analysis study conducted by Wang et al. (1997), found that school culture and climate were among the top influence affecting improved students' performance. According to James, (2003), unhealthy schools are deterred in their mission and goals by parental and public demands. Unhealthy schools lack effective leaders and the teachers are generally unhappy with their jobs and colleagues. In addition, neither teacher nor students are academically motivated in poor schools and academic achievement is not highly valued. Healthy schools that promote high academic standards, appropriate leadership and collegiality provide a climate more conducive to students' success and achievement. On school climate, Ismail et al. (2020) worked on school climate and academic performance. They found that school climates have been closely associated with achievement, quality control, and school management, among many others that denote characteristics of highly effective organization. It has long been recognized and acknowledged by administrators of the organization, practitioners, psychologists, motivators, and educators that a healthy school climate promotes a positive attitude and openness that will thus create a learning environment that motivates and encourages effective teaching and learning activities; increases teachers' job satisfaction; and, finally enhances students' academic performance.

To sum up the discourse, a school that is headed by an unfriendly administrator would wear a tense atmosphere characterized by fear, pain and eye service on the part of the teachers and the learners. Overtime, the teachers would imbibe the attitude of expressing anger and pain by administering corporal punishment frequently on the students and the students would in turn bully their fellow students. Under this tense climate, many students would play truancy, many would be absent more frequently owing to the toxic school atmosphere.

It is believed that a cordial relationship between the teacher and students create an environment favourable to teaching and learning as discussions are encouraged, and learners are listened to. The teacher works together with students on how to succeed in life having been motivated with the work environment. A school environment that is ideal for a teacher to teach the students is one which every teacher is important in the decision-making process, and students are usually disciplined and possess positive academic attitude (Udo, 2017). Udo (2017) further stated that when a teacher is motivated with the work environment, the important role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process is unquestionable as the teachers would deliver their duties in accordance with the content of the curriculum. School physical and socio-psychological environments are speculated to affect the students' academic performance.

Study Procedures

This study made use of the descriptive survey design. This study was conducted in Abia State which was carved out of the former Imo State in 1991. Abia State is located in the South-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is bounded on the North and North-East by Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi States. To the west of Abia is Imo State, to the East and South East are Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, and to the South is Rivers State. The capital of Abia State is Umuahia and the major commercial city is Aba, formerly a British Colonial Government outpost. Abia people are of the Igbo ethnic group. Their traditional language is Igbo. Administratively, the state is divided into 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Educationally, there are three education zones namely, Aba, Umuahia, Ohafia education zone. Aba Education Zone has nine LGA out of the existing 17 LGAs. This informed the decision to investigate Aba zone. The population of students in secondary schools in this zone is also a strong reason for carrying out the study in this zone. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study.

The population consisted of the entire senior secondary two (SS2) students in all the senior secondary schools in nine Local Government Areas in Aba Education Zone in 2021/2022 session. The sample was drawn using multi-stage sampling approach. First, four LGAs were randomly selected from the nine existing LGAs in Aba Education Zone. Secondly, one senior secondary school was randomly selected from each of the four LGAs. Finally, 45 SS2 students from each of the sampled schools were purposively selected for the study. The total sample size was 180 respondents. The instruments for data collection were self-made questionnaire titled "School Variables and Students Academic Performance Questionnaire (SVSAPQ) and Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). Reliability coefficient of 0.86 and 0.87 were obtained respectively for SVSAPQ and APQ using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. To achieve the objectives of the study, the research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation and the hypotheses tested at .05 significant levels using independent t-test.

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does school environment influence the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State?

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Influence of school environment on Academic Performance of Students

Variable	N	Mean	SD
School environment	180	13.34	3.09
Academic Performance	180	32.30	6.58

Table 1 revealed that the mean and standard deviation of school environment was 13.34 and 3.09 respectively while academic performance was 32.30 and 6.58 respectively. The mean score of academic performance is greater than that of school environment indicating that the location and school surroundings influenced academic performance to a great extent among secondary students in Aba Education Zone.

Research Question 2: To what extent does school climate influence the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State?

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Influence of School Climate on Academic Performance of Students

Variables	N	Mean	SD
School climate	180	15.21	3.15
Academic performance	180	32.30	6.58

Table 2 showed that the mean and standard deviation of school climate was 15.21 and 3.15 respectively while academic performance was 32.30 and 6.58 respectively. The mean score of academic performance is greater than that of school climate indicating that the school atmosphere influence academic performance to a great extent among secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of school environment on the academic performances of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Table 3

Paired t-test analysis of Influence of school environment on Students' Academic Performance (N = 180)

Variables	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig.
School environment	13.34	3.09	179	43.35	.000
Academic Performance	32.30	6.58			

Table 3 revealed that at the t-value (179) = 43.35, the significant level (.000) is less than the chosen alpha level (.05). Based on the result, the null hypothesis that stated that there is no significant influence of school environment on the academic performances of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone was rejected. The result implied that the school environment significantly influenced academic performance among secondary students in Aba Education Zone.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of school climate on the academic performances of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Table 4

Paired t-test analysis of Influence of School climate on Students' Academic Performance (N = 180)

Variable	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig.
School Climate	15.21	3.15	179	43.56	.000
Academic performance	32.30	6.58			

Table 4 revealed that the t-value (179) = 43.56. The significant level (.000) is less than the chosen alpha level (.05). Based on the result, the null hypothesis that stated that there is no significant influence of school climate on the academic performances of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone was therefore, rejected. The result implied that there is significant influence of school climate on the academic performance of secondary students in Aba Education Zone.

DISCUSSION

The hypotheses that There is no significant influence of school environment on the academic performances of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State was tested. Result revealed that school environment influenced students' academic performance to a great extent among secondary students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. School environments that are serene, student friendly, beautiful, accessible, free from hazards, well designed and spacious would no doubt provide the type of transformation required from the students to perform well at school since a relationship has been established between learning environment and academic performance of students. Both Bandura and Udo (2017) respectively, see school environment as an important factor in learning and development of the young mind. They found that School physical and socio-psychological environments affect the students' academic performance. Their social learning concept focused on the idea that personality represents an interaction of the individual with their environment, they also take into consideration that the individual's reaction to the environment as well as the individual's experience plays a role learning too. The combination of the environment, the individual, and their reaction encourage behavior building and learning.

In the school, where the learning environment is not conducive and learning facilities inadequate, the young child may end up wasting their time because they may not be able to focus and assimilate what is taught by the teachers. Creating a conducive learning environment induces students to learn with zeal and cooperate with the teachers as they teach and instruct them on what to do for improved academic performances.

After testing at the 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis which stated that the school climate does not significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria, the result indicated that school climate influenced students' academic performance among secondary students in Aba Education Zone to a great extent. This supports the findings of Wang et.al. (1997) and Faizahani et al. (2020) who found respectively that school climate to a great extent influences students' academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of school variables on the academic performance of secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. Based on the data collected and analyzed in the study, it was concluded that good physical school environment and healthy school climate enhance academic performance of students whereas poor and unhealthy school environment and toxic school climate and will retard the academic performance of students in Aba Education Zone of Abia state.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above, it was recommended that;

1. government should ensure that schools are sited in environments that are accessible, secure and large enough to accommodate buildings and all other facilities the learners may require for effective teaching/learning activities.
2. the school administrators and teachers should see that the school climate is free, friendly, natural and calm enough to get students relaxed enough for academic work. Toxic atmosphere and bully must be checked and eradicated to facilitate students' adjustment to school work.

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Appendices

SCHOOL VARIABLES AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SVSAPQ)

Instructions: Please tick (√) to the option that best suits your opinion. SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree), UD (Undecided).

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D	UD
	School Environment					
1.	My school is located in a large environment which provides enough room for learning and socialization.					
2.	The road to my school is accessible.					
3.	I feel secure whenever I am at school.					
4.	The school blocks are well separated from one another,					
5.	Our school is very neat and well decorated with shades, flowers and economic trees.					
	School climate					
11.	Flogging is prohibited in our school.					
12.	My school organizes social events regularly to create opportunity for interaction among students and between teachers and students.					
13.	We have a box where we drop written complaint about any bully action against students.					
14.	Our school rewards openly good behaviour and outstanding academic performance.					
15.	Our teachers relate well with the principal.					

SECTION B: Academic Performance Questionnaire -APQ

S/N	STATEMENTS	VGE	GE	ME	LE	VLE
1.	I make myself ready in all subjects					
2.	I actively participate in every class discussion					
3.	I aim at getting good grades in every subject					
4.	I always look forward to the class because of how our teachers present lessons					
5.	Our teachers encourage us to work hard					
6.	Our teachers use instructional materials that make lessons interesting					
7.	Our teachers always make sure we understand the lesson					
8.	Our principal and teachers are friendly to us					
9.	I am eager to stay long at school because the environment is beautiful					
10.	I go to school regularly and in time because my school is accessible					