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REVIEW ARTICLE

ENHANCING THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS THROUGH THE IMPROVEMENT OF
HEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The importance of healthful school environment in the enhancement of effective teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. It is a fact that adequate physical structures in a school not only enhance greatly the efficiency and proficiency of teachers but also facilitate good understanding and comprehension on the part of the learners. Thus, a good and healthful school environment enhances effective learning, imperative for the realization of educational objectives and, therefore, economic growth and development and social transformation of the society. Based on this, this paper considers: the concepts of teaching and learning, healthful school environment, and the relationship between healthful school environment and effective teaching and learning. It then recommends that professional educational planners should be involved in school planning; that educational policies should not be mated up with political interests; and that non-government organisations should assist the government to provide adequate structures for effective teaching and learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The essence of teaching, schooling and learning is to make learners better-informed citizens and equip them to transform the society. This objective is often achievable in a conducive and healthful school environment. The health of learners at all levels of education is very important, as bad health would not allow learners to reap the benefit of education in the school environment. The effectiveness of teaching and learning and the efficiency of school personnel are greatly affected by the learning environment. The learning environment, in the words of Lindgren (2006), refers to any factor or condition that affects the learner or learning process. In this view, the classroom setting, the effectiveness of the ventilation system, the lighting, the noise of the school band practicing within the school premises, and so on constitute the school environment. Cecilia and Okoi (2007) posited that effective teaching and learning depend on good planning and management. The functional planning and management of the school environment have long been considered as fundamental to school design in relation to effective learning. It is also generally accepted among educators that human comfort is necessary for effective teaching and learning.

This suggests that a school environment, including the classrooms, staff offices, school halls as well as other structures, even with regard to recreation and general aesthetics, should be well-planned and managed to provide this comfort.

Learners are constantly aroused and directed in order to sustain a particular behaviour by the learning environments in which they find themselves. Cecilia and Okoi (2007) stated that what people see, hear and feel cannot be divorced from their surroundings, and that the environment serves as the background against which all configurations can be identified. The environment determines how and what learners learn. So the emphasis in teaching and learning is on the surroundings and buildings. Effective learning and teaching is possible only in a conducive and healthful school environment.

The Concept of Teaching

Teaching is the art and science of using various strategies or methods in any situation to facilitate learning. Okorie (2009), as quoted by Moronkola *et al.* (2004), sees teaching as ‘the guidance of pupils through planned activities so that they may acquire the richest learning possible from their experiences’. Moronkola *et al.* (2004) further stated that teaching is ‘an attempt to help someone’s skills, attitude, knowledge, idea or

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appreciation'. Teaching could also be viewed both as an art and a science, which involves the acquisition of knowledge through the active participation of the learner when he/she is guiding or helping other persons to learn.

Smithrin (2000) showed concern about the quality of teaching, with regard to the following: how to teach; what to teach; and why we teach. Several experts documented the following indispensable or essential qualities of a teacher: patience, courage and impartiality; caring, humility and imagination. Teaching is an attempt to bring desirable changes in human learning, abilities and behaviour so as to influence the learner to make those desirable changes in the behaviour that contribute to living (Olaitan and Agusiobo, 2002).

The Concept of Learning

Learning is one of the key concepts in psychology. It is undertaken by every human being, from the cradle to the grave. It is a continuous process of interaction between the individual and certain elements, events, or conditions within the environment of his birth, training or activity. These events or conditions in the environment, elicit some responses from the individual, which in turn, shape, modify or change him in a special way, to enable him function positively in whatever situation he finds himself (Cecilia and Okoi, 2007).

Okoro (2002) endorsed the definition of learning as 'a relatively penanent change in behaviour, the potentiality that occurs as a result of reinforced practice'. Learning is not limited to a mere change in behaviour, it also includes the process of acquiring skills or knowledge and the functional application of what has been acquired. Corroborating this assertion, Oduaran (2000) referred to learning as a process by which a particular person acquires knowledge, skills and attitudes through study, experience or lessons taught and application of those things to his daily functioning. Observed changes in behaviour must be evidenced in individual's performance, training and experience, which must be influenced, enhanced or affected by prevailing events, episodes, objects or conditions, within the learner's environment (Akintola *et al.*, 2002).

The Concept of Healthful School Environment

A healthful school environment means the provision of a safe and healthy school day and the establishment of relationships favourable to emotional, social and physical health (Ogundele, 2009). Udoh (2001) stated that a healthful school environment includes everything that is being done to provide school physical, emotional and social conditions which are beneficial to the health and safety of school children.

Ajisafe (2000) affirmed that the scope of a healthful school environment includes wholesome school environment, organisation of a healthful school day, an ideal teacher-pupil relationship, teacher's health and school food services. A healthful school environment equally encompasses maintaining safe, clean and sanitary school facilities and careful planning of the school-day activities for study, play and rest. It also denotes a social situation in which students develop their potentialities

in effective and enjoyable living (Ogundele, 2009) and the provision of good physical plants with their sites to enhance efficient learning situation for students.

A healthful school environment cannot be isolated from the education of the child, with regards to performance in school (Ekeh, 2007). Moronkola (2003) opined that healthful school environment is an important subdivision of the school health programme, with emphasis on provision of healthful living environment in the school community that favours an effective teaching-learning process. This division of school health programme concerns itself with the protection and improvement of conditions of the school environment, that influences students in one way or the other especially the conditions of the building (light, air, sanitation and eating arrangement, teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, pupil-pupil relationship and school lunch or meal programmes).

The school buildings must be well laid out, painted, ventilated and having adequate artificial and/or natural lighting, making it easy for both staff and pupils to see each other and school materials without eye strain. The buildings should be well-maintained to make them attractive to learners. When both staff and pupils admire and are proud of their school, they will, under the right leadership, voluntarily contribute to its maintenance. The social environment rests largely on good interpersonal relationship between staff and pupils, staff and staff, and between pupils and pupils (Moronkola, 2003).

According to Boroffice (2005), a healthful school environment connotes the various physical, emotional and social aspects of the school and the numerous activities provided at the school to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff. Udoh *et al.* (2007) asserted that a healthful school environment is such has all efforts to provide, at school, physical, emotional and social conditions which are beneficial to the health and safety of pupils and school personnel. These include the provision of the following: safe and healthful building and facilities, the organization of a healthful school day, the establishment of interpersonal relationship favourable to mental health and the maintenance of standards of sanitation in the total school environment (Nemir and Schaller, 2005).

Akhere and Akinyosoye (2007) comprehensively examined the components of a healthful school environment and stated that this includes school buildings, toilet facilities, refuse disposal, sewage disposal, seating facilities, water supply and school meals. Others include the establishment of interpersonal relationship between staff and students, staff and staff, and pupils and pupils; the organization of healthful school day and maintenance of high standard of sanitation in the school environment.

Enhancing Healthful School Environment for Effective Teaching and Learning Process

The school environment (preprimary to tertiary levels) can be stimulating, interesting, pleasant, and conducive to the teaching/learning process or otherwise, depending on several factors, such as school rules against unhygienic conditions, school location, life philosophies of teachers, government

policies and the cooperation or otherwise of parents, teachers and the learners (Moronkola, 2003). Thus, environment affects learning. The particular environment in which an individual finds himself and responds to it at a given time, by and large, makes or mars his abilities, capabilities and potentials (Denga, 2006). A defective environment, resulting from poor planning or inept managerial capability, can hinder good citizenship, individual excellence and full development of potentials (Ukeje, 2005). On the contrary, a rich and enriching environment helps the nurture, to maturation, innate potentials (Idowu, 2002).

When the social environment is good, there will be less violent demonstration, absenteeism, cult activities, examination malpractices, sexual exploitation, various forms of abuse, suspension and expulsion (Moronkola, 2003). Since the school is to explore and expand the frontiers of knowledge, the social environment in a school must give room for the development of wholesome personal, positive self concept, healthy attitude and practices as well as the social skills of the learners. Moronkola (2003) has stressed that primary and secondary schools, especially in Nigeria, are often concerned primarily with teaching and learning, while at the tertiary level, research forms the substantial part of the work of academic staff and students. But staff and students must be motivated through the provision of appropriate inputs (teaching/learning materials, appropriate facilities, conducive learning environment, remuneration, etc) so that effective teaching/learning process is not hindered. This is important for effective learning to take place, as it helps the teacher and learner to be psychologically ready to perform their tasks.

The physical environment — such as beautiful scenery, parks, orderly and quiet environment (Bullus, 2002 and Ejide, 2002), and social environment; the society at large, friends, peers, social patterns and values (Idowu, 2002); the psychological environment — feelings, attitude and expectations of parents, teachers, friends, iblirig, etc; the school environment — teachers, administrative staff; and the technological environment — mass media, advance in science, sensational literature and films, all have profound effects on the thinking process, direct experience, emotional health and well-being of the child and can as well motivate love and interest, radiate peace and peaceful coexistence for effective teaching and learning, towards social development and transformation. The dimension of students' behavioural problems in school may be connected with unfavourable school environment. Moronkola (2003) found that one of the reasons students smoke tobacco is that they desire to relax. Moronkola listed drug misuse and abuse, smoking and sexual malpractices as precursors of student behavioural problems in Nigeria.

Moreover, the problem of cultism is a major threat to peace in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, from the late 2000s upward, and this has been traced to the fact that students live in overcrowded halls or hostels, learn in overcrowded classrooms, and use inadequate or poorly maintained recreational facilities; poorly stock libraries, and so on. Poor basic social amenities and infrastructure, such as electricity supply, water supply, etc make the learning environment unconducive and uncomfortable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been established that a healthful school environment brings about effective teaching and learning. High quality of learning is achieved when students, especially young ones, perceive learning stimuli through all five senses (of tongue, eye, ear, skin, nose). Thus school plant designs can serve as stimuli, that would motivate and stimulate learning. Classroom design, instructional drawings on walls, laboratories and library buildings, sculptural designs around the school compounds not only serve aesthetic purposes, but also as stimuli for learning purposes. A learning environment rich in instructional designs serves a multidimensional purpose, as students learn during classroom activities and outside the classroom.

Thus, education has been described as the bedrock of any nation's development. In view of this, stakeholders in education industry should harmonize their expertise, to uplift educational standards for better national economic growth and development and social transformation.

Professional educational planners should be involved in planning schools, while only professionally trained educational administrators should be employed to manage educational establishments and schools so as to achieve better results. Educational policies should not be mixed up with political interests, this is pertinent to put in place realistic and functional policies that would improve all the facets of education for the purpose of rapid growth and development.

Non-government agencies should complement the efforts of government in providing physical structures that would promote good emotional, social and psychological atmosphere conducive for effective teaching and learning. Also, the government should make education a priority and release enough funds to the sector. These funds should be monitored so that the purpose it is meant for can be achieved. Finally, it is imperative, in line with U directives of UNESCO, to have about thirty students per classroom,

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