

LEARNER-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study was carried out among public primary schools Ikeduru Local Government Area of Imo State to investigate ways of enhancing pupil's quality of education through learner-friendly school environment. The design for the study was a descriptive survey design. The population for the study consists of all the public primary school teachers in Ikeduru L.G.A. The sample comprised 100 teachers randomly selected from the primary schools in Ikeduru. Four research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in measurement and evaluation of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. Test, re-test method of two weeks interval was used for the reliability test. Reliability coefficient 'r' of 0.78 was obtained using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Statistics. The data collected was analyzed using mean statistics. The study revealed the various components of learner-friendly school environment. It also identified many hindering factors to quality education in Ikeduru primary school environment, various ways of enhancing learner-friendly school environment were revealed and various ways of enhancing quality education through learner-friendly school environment were also revealed. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were drawn among others that the government and other stakeholders in educations should help provide necessary facilities to promote learner-friendly school environment. There is need to improve teachers quality by engaging them in in-service training, conferences, seminars and workshops. This can help them come up with the modern trend of teaching.

Introduction

Education has become an important instrument for the attainment of rapid and sustainable growth and development in modern societies. As such, the rate of development in any society is intrinsically tied to a well organized, managed and supervised education system. To achieve this, the school becomes an instrument that

provides the intellectual and social experiences through which the learner develops the skills, knowledge, attitude and interests that shape their abilities to function effectively in the society. However, the school will only be able to play its role effectively, if the environment welcomes the learners and gives them joy, freedom, security and general well being for effective teaching and learning to take place.

It is important at this juncture to note that the quality of education is not only reflected in the subjects taught and achievement levels, but also in the learning environment. This is because learners according to Akinbote (2010), is the product of their environment. Thus learning environment can also influence the behavior of the learners. Plato the Greek philosopher realizing the importance of stimulating environment in the life of the learner suggested that the child must be provided with the right kind of environment by placing the child in the midst of these things which are like what we want them to become (Akinbote, Oduolowu & Lawal 2001).

From Plato's assertion, one can deduce that the major forces associated with the educational attainment of the learner are to be found within the home, community and the school environment. Since man is the product of his environment, there is need to educate him with adequate consideration given to all aspects of his environment. UNESCO (2001), asserted that if the learner is not treated in that manner, all effort to educate him may be a waste of time, because he may not be able to learn or acquire skills to secure his society and economic well being.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian child is made to learn in what Ijila (2001), and Akinbote (2010) have described as the environmental crises. The Nigeria child often learns in a confused, disorganized and uncondusive environment. In most cases, the school environment is so unfriendly that students are unable to learn the skills necessary for their social and economic well being. It is against this background that the researchers have tried to investigate into the extent to which quality of education in Ikeduru primary schools can be enhanced through learner-friendly school environment. Thus this study investigated the components of learner-friendly environment; deficiencies in the primary schools in Ikeduru Local Government with regard to learner-friendly environment; the extent to which quality of education can be improved among public primary pupils in Ikeduru Local Government Area through learner-friendly school environment.

Environment according to Nwaeze, Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015), can be described as the sum total of all surrounding of a living organism including natural forces and other living things which provide conductors for development and growth as well as danger and damage. Chukwukere, Eruka, Oguike and Okafor (2015), refers to environment as all the circumstance, things and events around people that influence their lives. Onyehalu (2009), realizing the importance of environment noted that the first task as a teacher of education is to study their environment and plan to make best use of it. Onyenalu (2005) is of the view that one can learn in his environment just as he can learn from his teacher. Chukwukere, Eruka Oguike and Okafor (2015), argued that teaching and learning environment should extend beyond the four wall of the classroom if the teacher wants to be effective.

The school environment according to Nwaeze Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015), include the classroom, laboratories, libraries, school hostels, technical workshops, teachers qualities, school management, teaching methods, peers or friends, just to mention but few. The school environment therefore remains an important area that should be well organized and managed to enhance friendly environment for good academic performance (Akinbote, Oduoluwa & Lawal, 2001).

A child-friendly school ensures every child on environment that is physically safe, emotionally secured and psychologically enabled. The school is a significant personal and social environment in the lives of its pupils. A child-friendly school ensures every child an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabled. Teachers are the most simple, most important factor in creating an effective and inclusive classroom. Children are natural learners, but the capacity to learn can be undermined and sometimes destroyed. A child-friendly school environment according to Ahmed (2015), is that which recognizes, encourages and supporting children's growing capacity as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behaviours and curriculum contents that are focused on learning and learner. Ahmed (2015) argued that the ability of the school to be and to call itself child-friendly is directly linked to the support, participation and collaboration it receives from families. Child-friendly school according to Pigozzi (1997), aims to develop a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. Staff members are friendly and welcoming to children and attend to all their health and safety needs.

It is a known fact that an average Nigerian child learns in an unconducive and unfriendly environment. An unconducive school environment is a situation where there are unlikely, unfavourable, uneasy condition affecting the behaviour and academic performance of the students in an area (UNICEF, 1996). It constitutes the infrastructural decay and where other learning facilities like libraries, classrooms, chairs, laboratories are inadequately equipped with current materials such as literatures for students to borrow and make use of them (Ahmed, 2015). Ochia (2007), report on the state of infrastructural facilities in Nigerian schools noted that library facilities and books are grossly inadequate so also the provision of classrooms, furniture, laboratories, workshops and other facilities.

The above scenario paved way for saddling teachers with more responsibilities than what is required, handling large classes with limited resource to facilitate effective teaching and learning. According to Nwaeze, Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015), overcrowded classrooms are considered to be unconducive for both teachers and students, when it comes to the issue of continuous assessment, marking and the ability to give individualized attention to students who need extra help.

Iwu (2016), noted that environment plays an important role in children's lives because they learn by observation and limitation. A child-friendly school environment however, is that which is favourable to the child and makes the child free, happy, healthy and ensures harmony and sustainable well being; growth and development (Akinbote, 2010). Such school environment according to Akinbote (2010), is also conducive to the staff and the teachers are friendly to the students, the

health and safety needs of the students are adequately met. A learner-friendly environment helps to develop the learners' personality. It also determines the extent to which the learner will realize his maximum potentials.

Akinbote (2003), identified some components of child-friendly school environment as the school resources which include; safe water and sanitation facilities, first aid supplies, age appropriate furniture, educational materials and other learning materials that are gender sensitive, well ventilated and spacious classrooms, school library, play ground with appropriate equipment for the age of the children. The School Curriculum, include; knowledge of language, mathematics, science and social studies, skills in literacy, numeracy and life skills, values of human right as well as moral and spiritual values.

Ahmed (2015), noted that in child-friendly environment, teachers are to:

- possess appropriate training in learners' centered education and children participating actively, and individual difference respected.
- possess professional skills that will enable children achieve desired learning.
- understand and monitor children's rights.
- communicate quality learning to parents and others in the community.
- provide educational materials, such as: textbooks, writing materials and other learning resources that are gender sensitive to encourage effective learning.
- provide flexible schedules to accommodate out of school responsibilities.
- offer adequate instruction and time for learning, in key curriculum areas.
- offer a range of learning options.
- establishing schools where children live and learn,
- building education system which supports children's learning as a first priority.
- focusing supervision on teachers improvement rather than covering the curriculum.

A right-based, child-friendly school has two basic characteristic according to Ahmed (2015, p. 19):

1. It is a child-seeking school, actively identify excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning, treating children as subjects with right and state as duty-bearers with obligations to fulfill these rights and demonstrating, promotion and helping to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.
2. It is a child-centered school, acting in the best interest of the child, leading to the realization of the child's full potentials and concerned both about the whole child (including her health, nutritional status and well-being) and about what happens to the children in their families and community. Above all, a right-based, child-friendly school must reflect an environment of good quality characterized by several essentials aspects. Moreover, it is inclusive for children.

Learner-friendly school environment is a veritable tool for enhancing quality education in Nigeria. The social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1986), asserted that the learner and the learning environment have a reciprocal relationship. When learning environment is conducive and realistic, the learner tends to learn effectively. Ononuju (2008), argued that educational performance of the children is to a large extent influenced by his environment. Chukwukere, Eruka, Oguike and Okafor (2015), posited that enabling and child-friendly environment promotes mental development and intellectual growth. It will also bring about high academic performance. Nwaeze, Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015) posited that an unconducive learning environment affect students' academic performance causing them to have low grade. Nwaeze, Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015) argued that the environment in which the child stays and learn has direct effect on their health status. Ipem (2013), noted that a stressed and unhealthy students cannot perform their best academically.

Learner-friendly school environment can be improved by adequately funding educational programmes and providing necessary facilities needed by the learners and teachers. This according to Anusiem (2006) will enable the learner to be active and serious in the class activities. Professionally qualified teachers if recruited in our public primary schools can help improve learner-friendly environment. Akinbote (2010) have it that many primary school teachers are ill-equipped and half-baked and so cannot give their best in teaching profession.

Statement of the Problem

Children learn best in an active and nurturing environment. People appreciate and support the child-friendly school initiative. The provision of child-friendly environment in Nigerian public schools and Ikeduru in particular, has often constituted great challenges. The Nigerian public schools have been found to be in horrible state. For many school children in Nigeria learn under the tree shades while many sits on the floor to learn in their classrooms. Many schools have inadequate games and recreational facilities. In some schools teachers are ill-equipped in both the pedagogical and content knowledge of what they are to teach in the school. These are serious problems because the researcher in addition discovered that most public primary school pupils in Ikeduru Local Government sits on floor, have overcrowded classroom, no good chalkboard, no textbooks and even writing materials. Some stay on dilapidated classroom without ceilings. The thrust of this paper is to investigate the extent to which quality education can be enhanced through learner-friendly environment in Ikeduru.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine ways to enhance quality education in Ikeduru public primary schools through learner-friendly school environment.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. investigate the features of learner-friendly school environment

2. determine the hindering factors to quality education in public primary schools in Ikeduru local government area.
3. determine ways learner-friendly school environment can enhance quality education in Ikeduru public primary school.
4. determine ways of improving learner-friendly school environment in Ikeduru primary schools to enhance quality education.

Research Questions

1. What are the features of learner-friendly school environment?
2. What are the hindering factors to quality education found in public primary schools environment in Ikeduru Local Government?
3. What ways in learner-friendly environment can enhance quality of education in learner-friendly school environment?
4. What ways can learner friendly environment be improved in Ikeduru primary schools to enhance quality education?

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey design so as to assess the extent of learner-friendly school environment in public primary schools in Ikeduru Local Government Area of Imo State. Population of the study comprised all teachers of public primary schools in Ikeduru Local Government Area. This gives a total of 1,104 teachers. The sample consists of 100 respondents randomly selected from the 10 targeted schools in the Local Government Area.

Instrument used for data collection was a 28 item questionnaire developed by the researchers and titled Learner-Friendly Environment and Quality Education Questionnaire (LFEAQEQ). The items were placed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Using test – retest method of an interval of three weeks, Pearson's product Moment Correlation Statistics was used to test the reliability of the instrument and a reliability coefficient 'r' of 0.78 was obtained. The instrument was made up of five sections. Section 'A' sought for the demographic data of the teachers, names, schools and qualifications. Section 'B' sought for information on components of learner-friendly school environment. Section 'C' focused on deficiencies in primary schools as regard to learner-friendly school environment, Section 'D' sought information on how quality of education can be enhanced through learner-friendly environment. Section 'E' sought for information on how learner-friendly school environment can be improved. Data collected were analyzed using mean statistics. The mean score above 2.5 was used to rate the items accepted while below 2.5 mean was rejected.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the features of learner-friendly school environment?

Table 1: Response of respondents on features of learner-friendly school environment

Tick appropriately as it applies to you

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Ranking	Decision
	Learner-friendly environment is characterized as follows:							
1.	A safe and secure environment from violence and abuse, stress and tension.	82	10	1	1	3.6	8 th	Agree
2.	Place where children take responsibility for their learning.	74	23	2	1	3.7	6 th	Agree
3.	A place where individual differences are respected and children's well being promoted	80	15	3	2	3.73	6 th	Agree
4.	A place where educational materials, textbooks, writing materials are provided.	91	9	-	-	3.91	4 th	Agree
5.	A place where teachers possess appropriate training in learner centered education.	66	33	1	-	3.65	7 th	Agree
6.	A place where children's opinions and needs are included.	90	8	2	-	3.86	5 th	Agree
7.	A place where all the domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are considered.	95	5	-	-	3.95	1 st	Agree
8.	A place where the appropriate furniture and resources are within the reach of the learners.	93	7	-	-	3.93	2 nd	Agree
9.	It includes safe water, sanitation facilities, first aid spacious classrooms, libraries and laboratories are provided.	92	4	-	-	3.92	3 rd	Agree
	Cluster Mean \bar{x}					3.81		

Result on table 1 revealed the characteristics of learner-friendly school environment. Out of nine items, seven items which characterized learner-friendly environment as a place where the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are considered ranked the first position with the mean of 3.95 followed by item eight which characterized the learner-friendly environment as a place where the appropriate furniture and resources are within the reach of the learner ranked 2nd, with mean score of 3.93. Item nine ranked 3rd with mean score of 3.92, item four ranked 4th with mean of 3.91 item, six ranked 5th with mean of 3.86, followed by item three with the score

of 3.73, item two ranked 7th position (3.7) and item five ranked 8th with mean of 3.65 followed by item 1 with mean of 3.6. These were summed up with a cluster mean of 3.81 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents strongly agreed to the items that are presented as the characteristics of learner-friendly environment.

Research Question 2: What are the hindering factors to quality education in public primary schools in Ikeduru LGA?

Table 2: Mean rating of the responses on the hindering factors to quality education in public primary schools in Ikeduru LGA

Tick appropriately as it applies to you

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	Ranking	Decision
1.	Children learn under shade of trees	96	3	1	-	3.95	3 rd	Agree
2.	Children sits on the floor to learn	99	1	-	-	3.99	2 nd	Agree
3.	Children learn in a dilapidated building	72	27	1	-	3.71	4 th	Agree
4.	Children lack textbooks	99	1	-	-	3.99	2 nd	Agree
5.	Children have no writing materials	62	36	2	-	3.60	5 th	Agree
6.	There is inadequate classroom, furniture, equipment and teaching materials.	97	23	-	-	4.57	1 st	Agree
7.	Teachers are poorly motivated	95	5	-	-	3.95	3 rd	Agree
8.	Teachers are not sufficiently equipped in both pedagogical and content of what to teach.	20	20	15	45	2.15	6 th	Agree
	Cluster mean \bar{x}					3.745		

Results on table 2 revealed that out of eight items raised as hindering factor to quality education in public primary schools, item six which is inadequate classroom, furniture, equipment and teaching materials ranked 1st with mean of 4.57, followed by items two and four that ranked 2nd with mean of 3.99 respectively. Items one and seven ranked 3rd with the mean of 3.95 respectively followed by item three 4th with mean score of 3.71. Item five ranked 5th with mean of 3.60 followed by item eight with mean of 2.15. This result indicates factors that the respondents agreed to all items indentified as hindering factors to quality education with the cluster mean of 3.74 which is above the decision mean of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What ways in leaner-friendly environment can enhance quality education in public primary schools in Ikeduru LGA?

Table 3: Responses of respondents on the ways in which learner-friendly environment can enhance quality education in public primary schools in Ikeduru LGA

Tick appropriately as it applies to you

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	Ranking	Decision
	When there is learner-friendly school environment, the following could be achieved in education system:							
1.	Learners' will perform well academically.	97	21	1	1	4.66	1 st	Agree
2.	Learners' study habit will improve.	88	11	1	-	3.87	4 th	Agree
3.	Learners will have the interest to go to school to learn.	76	22	1	1	3.75	6 th	Agree
4.	It will promote creativity in the learners.	70	25	4	1	3.64	7 th	Agree
5.	It promotes students and teacher relations.	80	18	2	-	3.78	5 th	Agree
6.	Classroom objectives in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains will be achieved.	90	8	2	-	3.88	3 rd	Agree
7.	It helps the learner to reach their potentials in all areas of life.	94	6	-	-	3.94	2 nd	Agree
	Cluster mean \bar{x}					3.89		

Results on table 3 revealed that item one which states that when there is learner-friendly environment, learners will perform well academically ranked 1st with mean score of 4.66. This is followed by item six (3rd) with the mean 3.88. Also item two ranked 4th with a mean of 3.87; followed by item five with mean of 3.78 and item three ranked 6th with mean of 3.75, while item four ranked 7th with the mean of 3.64. This revealed the cluster mean of 3.89 which is above the decision point of 2.50. Thus, the respondents agreed that all items identified for the improvement of quality education are accepted.

Research Question 4: What ways can learner-friendly environment be improved in Ikeduru Primary schools to enhance quality education?

Table 4: Mean ratings of the responses on ways learner-friendly environment can be improved in Ikeduru Primary schools to enhance quality education**Tick appropriately as it applies to you**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Ranking	Decision
	Learner-friendly school environment can be improve in the following ways:							
1.	By adequately funding education and providing all facilities infrastructures and amenities needed in the school.	96	4	-	-	3.96	2 nd	Agree
2.	By recruiting professionally qualified teachers in both rural and urban primary schools.	80	18	2	-	3.75	5 th	Agree
3.	By encouraging capacity building for teacher to help them catch up with the modern for end in teaching and learning.	76	20	4	-	3.68	6 th	Agree
4.	By providing a secured conducive and stress free environment for learning to take place.	98	2	-	-	4.01	1 st	Strongly Agree
5.	By empowering poor parents for them to play their role in education of their children.	90	10	-	-	3.90	3 rd	Agree
6.	Full participation of all stakeholders in education profession, to promote learner-friendly school environment.	88	10	2	-	3.86	4 th	Agree
	Cluster mean					3.87		

Result on table 4 revealed ways in which learner-friendly environment can be improved in Ikeduru Primary Schools to enhance quality education in the Local Government. Respondents agreed that item four which is providing a secured conducive and stress free environment for learning to take place with mean of 4.01, followed by item one which is on adequate funding of education and provision of facilities with mean score of 3.96. Item 5 ranked 3rd with the mean of 3.90 while item six ranked 4th with the mean of 3.86. This was followed by two with the mean of 3.75 and item three ranked 6th with mean of 3.68. This implies that the respondents agreed on all items outlined for enhancement of quality education. The cluster mean of 3.87 which is above the decision mean of 2.50 justifies the above finding.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study revealed the features of learner-friendly school environment such as a safe and secure environment, free from violence, abuse, stress and tension, an environment where individual differences are respected and children's well-being promoted, where safe water, sanitation facilities, first aid, spacious classrooms, libraries and laboratories are provided, as features of learner-friendly centered environment and where adequate educational materials are provided. This is in line with the assertion of Usman (2015), that a learner-friendly environment is that which is rich enough to reasonably satisfy the various needs of the learners to enable them function effectively and to develop optimally. The finding is also in corroboration with Akinbote (2003), who described learner-friendly school environment as that where adequate resources, furniture, educational materials are provided within the reach of the learner.

The result of this study also revealed the hindering factors to quality in public primary schools in Ikeduru Local Government. It revealed that pupils learn in an unsafe and uncondusive environment like dilapidated buildings, no fence, no securities, under the shade of the tree, lack writing and reading materials, they suffer bullies, stress and tension. This finding is in line with the finding of Akinbote (2010), who noted that the Nigerian child often learns in a confused, disorganized and uncondusive environment. Also in agreement to this finding is that of Ochia (2007), who argued that infrastructural facilities, library facilities and books are grossly inadequate in Nigeria schools. The finding is in contrary to what Ahmed (2015) outlined as components of learner-friendly school environment.

It was also the task of this study to find out ways in which quality of education can be improved through learner-friendly school environment. It was found that when there is learner-friendly environment, learners study habits are improved. It promotes creativity in the learner. It promotes learners' academic performance and classroom objects are achieved. The finding is in agreement with that of Nwaeze, Nwachukwu and Nwadike (2015), who noted that an enabling and child-friendly environment promotes mental development and individual growth. Supporting this finding is Anyanwu (2008), who argued that unfriendly learning environment bring about poor academic performance. Ipem (2013), stressed that a stressed and unhealthy student cannot perform his or her best academically.

The finding of this study also revealed various ways through which learner-friendly school environment can be improved as follows; adequate funding of education and providing all facilities and infrastructures needed in the school, recruiting professionally qualified teachers in both rural and urban primary schools, encouraging capacity building for teachers to help catch up with the modern trend in teaching and learning. This is in line with Anusiem (2006), who noted that children learn best in an active and enabling and nurturing environment.

Conclusion

One of the major functions of the school environment is to provide effective teaching and learning. Good quality education can only be attained through the

provision of a safe and secure environment. This type of environment can only be realized where the various factors that affect learning are considered and provided as much as possible. The factors affecting learning are numerous, including the factors that affect the learner, the learning environment, the teacher and the learning process. Failure to adequately satisfy any of those requirements will serve as an impediment to effective teaching and learning. The absence of a conducive learning environment amounts to insecurity of the school environment.

Therefore, the school environment should be rich enough to reasonably satisfy the various needs of the learner to enable him/her function effectively and to develop optimally; this is referred to as learner-friendly school environment. However, where any of the needs of the learner are deprived, then, such a school environment is characterized by insecurity and thus unfriendly for learning to take place.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. The government, parents, school administrators and other stakeholders in education should work hand in hand to provide all the necessary materials that bring about conducive learning environment.
2. Government and other stakeholders should establish TETFUND facilities like buildings of classrooms, scholarships should be granted to children whose parents are not able to provide for their children academic programme.
3. School administrators should properly examine teachers before recruitment so as to employ qualified teachers and try as much as possible to improve their status by sending them for in-service training, seminars, conferences and workshops.
4. Teachers should assure conducive, safe, secured and healthy environment for a learner-friendly environment to exist. They should avoid corporal punishment, bullying and labeling of pupils.

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