

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the influence of learning environment (social and psychological) on students' learning outcomes in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions and null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Using stratified random sampling, 563 students were sampled from a total of 1,876 SS2 students in the area. The researcher constructed an instrument entitled: Learning Environment and Students' Learning Outcomes Questionnaire (LESLOQ) which was used to gather information from the students, after being subjected to face validation by one educational psychologist and two measurement experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Uyo. Also, the SS2 promotion examination results of the sampled students provided data on learning outcomes, using descriptive statistical analysis and independent t-test respectively. The findings reveal that students' learning environment has influence on their learning outcomes. However, the implication of this study depends on sustainable personal development. Based on the findings, it was concluded that social and psychological learning environments also influence learning outcomes. It is recommended that all the components of the school environment (physical, social, psychological and emotional) should be considered in curriculum planning, designing and implementation of educational policies.*

**Key Words:** Learning Environment, Learning Outcomes, Sustainable Personal Development.

### **Introduction**

The quality of learning which is significant for enlightenment and development has depreciated over the years. This is because the effective tools for successful learning have not been employed. Hence, the government, the curriculum planners, the school administrators, the teachers, the parents and the general public wonder why the standard of education has deteriorated. Then who takes the blame for underdevelopment if the learners are deficient in any area of learning and at any stage of learning? Researchers have realised that learning environment goes beyond the physical structures with teachers and students but also embodies the psychological, social and emotional climate and how they affect the welfare of the staff and students. This implies that the quality of learning and the learning activities result in eventual balanced development of the child (Isangedihi, 2007).

In a bid to establish a relationship between environment and multiple constructs including learning, Miller and Cunningham (2011) adopted the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory. This advocates the foundation of human development through families, teachers and schools at the layer of environmental micro system. This system is more or less bi-directional in the sense that we are the beneficiaries of the environment we create.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The depreciation in current standard of learning coupled with poor academic achievement of students has prompted the researcher to embark on this study based on selected variables. This will give an empirical outcome for students' sustainable personal development. The problem of this study therefore is whether learning environment influences students' outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the level of influence of learning environment on students learning outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools. Specifically, the study seeks to determine:

1. The influence of social learning environment on students' learning outcomes.
2. What influence the psychological learning environment has on students' learning outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. Does the social learning environment influence students' learning outcomes?
2. Is the influence of psychological learning environment on students' learning outcomes significant?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho 1. Social environment has no significant influence on students' learning outcomes.
- Ho 2. Influence of psychological environment on students' learning outcomes is not significant.

### **Literature Review**

In as much as human beings generally do not live in a vacuum but occupy a space along with some external influences, learning activities cannot be carried out effectively without a cordial relationship with the environment. Since learning leads to child's personal development (Isangedihi, 1996), students' willingness to participate and adjust in school programmes might be influenced by school environment (Okpara and Onyekuru, 2013).

The issue of poor physical learning environment in Nigeria has received less attention and generated less debate than poor quality of teachers and learners at various levels (Meziobi, Nokand Nwosu, 2009). For example, laboratories, examination halls, libraries and furniture are in terrible state in need of repairs (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi, 2010). According to them, learning environment affects both attitude and achievement of students. The state of the poor facilities in public secondary schools in Nigeria could be the reason for students' restive and delinquent behaviours most times. As a matter of fact, security threat in Nigerian secondary schools was one of the topical issues discussed on FRCN Network News of 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2016.

In the aspect of social and emotional learning environment, Okoro (2002) advocated a non-threatening and cordial relationship between the teachers and the students. It means that the teacher should create a friendly atmosphere for the learners. This will encourage intellectual development, exploration and self knowledge (Joanna, 2009). Since the classroom environment refers to the tone, ambience or atmosphere created by a teacher through the relationship developed within the classroom and the way in which instruction is delivered (Alderidge, Fraser and Ntuli, 2009), learners should not merely be passive recipients of knowledge. If learning is created to address the need of the learners, healthy interactions will be evoked between the teachers and the learners.

The students can also create a particular environment that influences their level of development. They always feel happy in a friendly environment. However, since most of them have different family and cultural orientation, they encounter conflicts sometimes. Bullying (physical and emotional), discrimination and negative peer influences in educational institutions have become topical issues discussed by researchers and school administrators recently. This situation becomes so hazardous to the students and makes them feel insecure. Ideally, education is expected to tame the impulsive attitude of children and convert them into cultured beings who are morally dependable, socially adjusted, intellectually equipped and spiritually adequate (Isangedihi, 1996). Therefore, resources (human and material) should be utilized in the context of maintaining them in good state not only for use by the present generation but as well as the generation unborn (Obinaju, 2012).

Moreover, the psychological classroom environment refers to the level of the speed of teaching, cohesiveness, distractions, interests, motivations, anxieties, confusion and difficulty of the classroom learning activities (Haertel, and Walberg, 2001). By implication an optimal learning environment is not without challenges but there must be a corresponding motivational support intellectually, emotionally and psychologically. In a study by Maoto (2014), it was found that young learners (aged 11 years to 12 years) could direct their own learning if offered opportunities to construct, refine and use their own representations in solving mathematics problems. Also, Chukwuemeka (2013) discovered that performance is generally affected by environment while Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) discovered a relationship between learning environment and effectiveness of schools.

Finally, this empirical study is prompted by some deficiencies in secondary school learning environment. It is meant to help students adjust properly and feel happy while undertaking their learning activities. This will lead to better outcomes especially for their sustainable personal development.

## **Research Methods**

### **Design of the Study**

The researcher used an ex-post-facto research design in order to investigate the influence of learning environment on students' learning outcomes. This is in line with Bassey (2002) who stated that ex-post-facto design is used when investigation involves establishment of a cause-and-effect relationship which does not warrant experimental manipulations but selection of subjects through randomization process.

### **Area of the Study**

Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area is located on latitude 5°11' N - 5°183'N and longitude 7°43' E – 7°717'E. It has a boundary with Ikono and Obot Akara at the North; Essien Udim at the South, Ikono at the East and Obot Akara at the West.

Their major dialect is Annang since it is mostly populated by the indigenes – Annang with few traders from Igbo and Suya vendors from Hausa. Their major occupation is spread across the different professions as well as trading and farming. They practice Christianity and traditional religion. Some of their minor conflicts are resolved by the family and village heads while the major conflicts are treated in the court of law.

There are varieties of educational institutions in the zone, ranging from nursery, primary and secondary: public and private, vocational and tertiary institutions: Central School of Nursing, State Polytechnic, Federal Polytechnic and St. Joseph Major Seminary. Education is free and compulsory at the primary and secondary levels.

### **Population/Sample and Sampling Technique**

A total of 563 students formed the sample of the study. This sample was drawn from the population of 1876 SS2 students drawn from the seven public schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of AKwa Ibom State. Stratified random sampling technique was used.

### **Instrumentation**

There were two sources of data for this study. The first data source was the *Learning Environment and Students Learning Outcomes Questionnaire* (LESLOQ) developed by the researcher. The second data source was the SS 2 promotion examination results of the sampled students which provided data on learning outcomes of the sampled students. The questionnaire was used to collect personal and demographic data of the respondents along with information on their social and psychological learning environments on a four point rating scale. The questionnaire was validated by one educational psychologist and two measurement experts.

### Method of Data Analysis

Data obtained with the questionnaire was scored using the 4-point rating scale of strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point). The scores were then pooled for each of social and psychological learning environments for each respondent and recorded for analysis. The learning outcomes gathered, in the form of examination grades were also treated to obtain weighted mean scores. In treating the data, the grades were scored thus: A = 5 points, B = 4 points, C = 3 points, D = 2 points, E = 1 point and F = 0 point.

In answering the research questions and testing the null hypotheses formulated for the study, descriptive statistical analysis and independent t-test analysis were used respectively. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

The result of data analyses done in this study which represent the empirical findings of this study are presented in the following tables according the specific research question answered and the hypothesis tested.

#### Research Question 1

Does the social learning environment influence students' learning outcomes? The descriptive analysis of research data given in Table 1 provides the answer to this question.

**Table 1:** Social learning environment and students' learning outcomes

Dependent Variable	Social Learning Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning Outcomes	Conductive	135	4.11	.847
	Un-conductive	428	2.86	.349

The analysis in Table 1 shows that students whose social learning environments were conducive had a higher mean achievement score than students whose social learning environments were un-conductive. From this analysis, it is evident that social learning environment when conducive has the potential of enhancing the learning outcomes of students.

#### Research Question 2

Is the influence of psychological learning environment on students' learning outcomes significant? The descriptive statistics of research data presented in Table 2 furnishes an answer to this research question.

**Table 2:** Psychological learning environment and students' learning outcomes

Dependent Variable	Psychological Learning Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning Outcomes	Conductive	104	4.51	.929
	Un-conductive	459	3.70	.503

From the analysis in Table 2, those who studied in conducive psychological environment had a higher mean score than those who studied in an un-conductive psychological environment. This indicates that psychological learning environment influences students' learning outcomes.

**Hypothesis 1**

The first null hypothesis postulated that *the learning outcome of students who have a socially conducive learning environment is not significantly better than the learning outcomes of students who do not have a socially conducive learning environment*. This postulation was tested statistically using independent samples t-test and the result is as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Independent samples t-test of social learning environment and the learning outcomes of students

Dependent Variable	Social Learning Environment	N	Mean	S.D.	t-Cal.	df	t-Crit.
Learning Outcomes	Conductive	135	4.11	.847	*16.64	561	1.96
	Un-conductive	428	2.86	.349			

\*Significant at  $p < .05$  level

With reference to Table 3, the computed t of 16.64 is greater than the critical t of 1.96 at df of 561 and .05 significant level. The null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the learning outcomes of students who have a socially conducive learning environment is significantly better than the learning outcomes of those who do not have a socially conducive learning environment.

**Hypothesis 2**

The second null hypothesis supposed that *the learning outcome of students who have a psychologically conducive learning environment is not significantly better than the learning outcomes of students who do not have a psychologically conducive learning environment*. This supposition was tested using independent samples test and the result is provided in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Independent samples t-test of psychological learning environment and the learning outcomes of students

Dependent Variable	Psychological Learning Environment	N	Mean	S.D.	t-Cal.	df	t-Crit.
Learning Outcomes	Conductive	104	4.51	.929	*7.38	561	1.96
	Un-conductive	459	3.70	.503			

\*Significant at  $p < .05$  level

According to Table 4, the computed  $t$  of 7.38 is greater than the critical  $t$  of 1.96 at  $df$  of 561 and .05 significant level; the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the learning outcomes of students who have a psychologically conducive learning environment is significantly better than the learning outcomes of students who do not have a psychologically conducive learning environment.

### Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of learning environment in learning outcomes of students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. The result of the findings of the study reveals that conducive learning environment enhance students' learning outcomes. The answers to the research questions and the result of the null hypotheses are considered below:

The result of this finding shows that social learning environment project better learning outcomes especially when it is conducive. In table 3, the computed  $t$  of 16.64 was greater than the critical  $t$  of 1.96 at  $df$  of 561 and .05 significant level. The null hypothesis was rejected. The study by its findings indicated that the learning outcomes of students who have a socially conducive learning environment is significantly better than the learning outcomes of those who do not have a socially conducive learning environment.

The findings of this study is in consonance with Okoro (2000) and Joanna (2009) who advocated a non-threatening cordial relationship between the teachers and the students for intellectual development, exploration and self knowledge. The findings also agrees with Maoto (2014) who opined that learners could direct their own learning it offered the opportunity to construct, retrieve and use their own representations in solving mathematics problems. The researcher noticed that in a learning environment that is highly inimical, students will not build up their self confidence. They are always scared of the teachers. This will however, inhibit their intellectual development.

The second hypothesis postulated that the learning outcome of students who have a psychologically conducive learning environments is not significantly better than the learning outcomes of students who do not have a psychologically conducive learning environment.

In Table 4, the computed  $t$  of 7.38 was greater than the critical  $t$  of 1.96 at  $df$  of 561 and .05 significant level. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the learning outcomes of students who have a psychologically conducive learning is

significantly better than the learning outcomes of students who do not have a psychologically conducive learning environment. The findings of this study agrees with Chukwuemeka (2013) that environmental factors affect both the physical and psychological potentials of an individual. If students are encouraged and motivated, they have a sense of belonging and take part actively in the learning process.

### **Conclusion**

From the finding of this study, it is concluded that learning environment has the capacity to influence the learning outcomes of students. It is however, important to consider the interest of the learners at the social and psychological perspectives in the implementation of sustainable personal development.

### **Implications for Sustainable Personal Development**

The following should be given due consideration if Sustainable Personal Development should be applied in the school environment:

- Government agencies for educational affairs should consider all the components of the school environment (physical, social, psychological and emotional) in curriculum planning, designing and implementation of educational policies.
- Since learning environment is deliberately created, teacher quality should be boosted through In-service professional development and on-the job training in order to be sensitive of the learners' characteristics, the goals for teaching and learning, learning activities and assessment strategies. This can be achieved through higher education as well as seminars and workshops in and outside the school.
- The different school administrators should monitor the activities of the students in order to discourage threats and unhealthy practices among students. There should be more of club activities like Anti-Bullying Campaign and Counselling club apart from the existing ones. This will project good moral virtues in the students and make them willing to participate in school programmes for sustainable personal development.

Finally, having been acquainted with the fact that environment can either induce or diffuse behaviour through exposure, experience and learning, there is no doubt that the application of sustainable personal development in learning environment will help to stabilize the mindset of the students to approach learning activities positively for better outcomes. Also, it will help to project creativity and productivity through self discovery for personal as well as national development.

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