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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS IT RELATES TO CREATIVITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH EAST

BY

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Abstract

The study aims to determine the relationship of school environment on attendance achievement in the English language and creativity. This study employed a correlational design. The population of the study were 147,488 students. A sample of 384 were selected. A purposive sampling technique was used to select schools and simple random sampling to select students. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires, titled: Student's Perception of School Environment Questionnaire (SPSEQ) and Thinking Skills and Creativity Questionnaire (TSCQ). The instrument was validated for face and content validity. The reliability coefficient was 0.67 and 062. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviation for research questions and Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 to test a hypothesis. The findings of the results show that school environment has no relationship with student's attendance and achievement but has a relationship with creativity. Government and educational stakeholders should intensify efforts in providing a school environment with good facilities.

Keywords: Student perception, School environment, Creativity, Government, Relationship

Introduction

Ensuring a safe and hygienic learning environment at the Secondary School level is crucial for effective teaching and learning, as emphasized by Obi, Johnson, & Lawani (2014). The school environment encompasses all the resources, both human and material, that enable students to engage their senses securely. According to the Safe School Manual (2014), a clean and

secure school environment significantly impacts the academic performance of Senior Secondary School students in Nigeria. The concept of environment, as articulated by Mangal (2012), originates from the French term "Environia," meaning surroundings. It encompasses both living (biotic) and non-living (abiotic) components. The environment constitutes the entirety of the surroundings in which organisms, including humans, reside, regulating their existence. Humans interact with their environment more profoundly than other organisms. Essentially, the environment encompasses everything Harshita (2024) pointed out that the term "school environment" is often ambiguous and can encompass one or more of the following aspects:

a. School culture: This refers to the rituals, traditions, and distinctive modes of interaction that distinguish one school from another.

b. School climate: It pertains to the attitudes and perceptions held by individuals within the school, contributing to a friendly and supportive atmosphere.

c. Physical environment: This includes the structures, classrooms, aesthetics, indoor air quality, and other physical attributes of the school buildings.

Despite the critical importance of a healthy and safer school environment in promoting learning in senior secondary schools, research findings indicate that student's performance has been consistently poor or low over the years (Chike, 2016). Poor attendance of lessons by students has been correlated with decreased performance and creativity. Okanlawon, Yusuf, Metu, and Yunusa (2016) are of the view that fostering safe and secure school environments will help facilitate an increase in learners' enrolment, retention, and attainment of quality education.

Influence of School Environment on Creativity

The study conducted by Batey and Furnham (2006) addresses the creative environment and seeks to understand the physical and social circumstances in which creativity is more likely to develop. Promoting creativity is associated with interactions a person has with their family, school, and society. Therefore, a conducive environment for creativity development is linked to the quality of these interactions and the life experiences individuals have within those contexts. Consequently, schools play a crucial role in fostering creative skills. Many people assume that creativity is an innate ability that only applies to certain individuals. In other words, some people are perceived to be born creative, while others are not. At first glance, this assumption may seem valid, but upon closer examination of research, we find that creativity can be nurtured in the right learning environment. This study suggests that we can teach students to be creative thinkers if we provide them with the necessary tools and create the appropriate conditions for practice. Therefore, emphasizing the importance of cultivating new ways of thinking and innovation is

essential. While standardizing public schools can ensure equal opportunity, it's important to recognize the need to foster creativity within this framework.

The study conducted by Hayes (2015) observed that the physical environment of the school can either facilitate or hinder students' creativity development. Factors within the physical classroom environment, such as lighting, temperature, ventilation system, size of the classroom, flooring, walls, desks, chairs, chalkboard, and the surrounding environment, including threats, noise, and fear, can all impact creativity. Creative classrooms have the potential to significantly alter the way students acquire education and apply it in real life. In fact, creative expression plays a pivotal role in a student's emotional development.

A study conducted by Gallagher (2017) addressed the Impact of the Classroom Environment on the Creative Thinking of Elementary Learners at Western Oregon University. The researcher examined factors such as physical space, classroom flexibility, desk arrangement, available resources, curriculum design, hierarchical systems, and the variety of activities and subjects offered. The study also explored changes in room arrangement, seating arrangements for students, and broader shifts in the public education system. In the current Nigerian education system, children are often taught in a manner that discourages originality. Consequently, creative thinking is frequently lacking. The researcher's interest in this topic stemmed from concerns about the limited emphasis placed on creativity and its importance in Nigerian classrooms. Failure to appreciate creativity risks losing the potential for new ideas and discoveries, as well as inhibiting critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, all of which are essential skills for our society. Addressing these issues is crucial for the development of future generations.

Statement of the Problem

The safety of the school environment is a fundamental requirement for learning. When school environments are safe, both students and teachers can enjoy teaching and learning, leading to enhanced psychological well-being and success in academic and daily activities. However, many of our schools fall short of providing such safety. This is also true for secondary school students in the North East region. Numerous students are often found roaming during class hours or engaged in hawking activities. Additionally, many schools struggle to display students' work, possibly due to threats posed by insurgents, gender-based violence, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, fire outbreaks, kidnapping, and drug abuse. Some students may also feel threatened by their peers, making it challenging for them to communicate effectively in English, which is the primary language of instruction in schools. These factors significantly impact students' creativity development in secondary schools and may lead parents to withdraw their children from school. Those who remain, often live in fear and anxiety about potential risks. It is against this backdrop that the researcher became interested in investigating the perception of the school environment concerning students' creativity among senior secondary school students in

the Northeastern part of Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives

1. To determine the perception of school environment among senior secondary school students in North Eastern part of Nigeria.

2. To determine how students' perception of the school environment influences creativity among North Eastern senior secondary schools in Nigeria

3. To determine the association between school environment and creativity

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the school environment among senior secondary school students in the Northeast?

2. To what extent can student's perception of the school environment influence creativity?

Research Hypothesis

Ho_1- There is no significant association between the perception of the school environment and creativity of public senior secondary school students in the North East.

Methodology

The study employed a correlational survey research design. The population comprised all SS II students from public senior secondary schools in the northeastern part of Nigeria. According to data from the Ministry of Education in the selected states, the population of SS 2 students was as follows: Adamawa State: 84,734; Bauchi State: 39,576; and Gombe State: 23,178. Thus, the total population of SS2 students from the selected states was 147,488. A sample of 384 students was selected using the Research Advisor 2006 software. Purposive sampling was utilized to select students from both boarding and day schools, while simple random sampling techniques were used to select individual students. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires titled "Student's Perception of School Environment Questionnaire (SPSEQ)" and "Thinking Skills and Creativity Questionnaire (TSCQ)." These instruments underwent validation by three experts in test and measurement for face and content validity. Pilot testing was conducted on students who were not part of the sample schools to determine the reliability of the questionnaires: SPSEQ with a reliability coefficient of 0.62 and TSCQ with a reliability coefficient of 0.67.

The researchers, along with trained Research Assistants, distributed the questionnaires themselves and explained the procedures for filling them out to the respondents. A total of 346 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents, while 38 questionnaires were missing. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviation, for

research questions, and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. A Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agreed" (4 points) to "Strongly Disagreed" (1 point) was used for responses, with a total score of 10 points, 10/4 =2.5. therefore, the decision benchmark for accepting is 2.5 mean and above while any mean that is below 2.4 is rejected.

Data Analysis and Result Presentation

Research Question One: what are the perceptions of the school environment among secondary school students in the North- Eastern part of Nigeria?

Table 1: Perception of School Environment among Secondary School Students in North East.

S/NO	ITEMS	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	Learners in this school trust their teachers	0.0	3.0	Accepted
2	Fighting among learners often takes place in school	1.1	2.5	Accepted
3	The teachers respect the learners in school	0.7	3.4	Accepted
4-	The facilities are adequate for learning activities	1.1	2.3	Rejected
5	Learners often take things from other learners	1.2	2.7	Accepted
6	Learners feel safe at school	1.0	2.9	Accepted
7	Learners use offensive language at school	1.1	2.9	Accepted
8	Teachers apply discipline consistently	1.2	2.9	Accepted
9	Learners bring weapons to school	1.2	2.4	Rejected
10	The learning environment in this school is conducive	1.1	2.9	Accepted
11	Learners intimidate teachers to get what they want	1.2	2.4	Rejected
12	The school rules are enforced for peace and stability	1.1	3.0	Accepted
13	Learners often vandalize school property	1.2	2.5	Accepted
14	The building of the school is in good condition	1.3	2.6	Accepted
15	Our school have trained security guard	1.2	2.5	Accepted
16	class rooms have doors at opposite sides for fire escape	1.1	2.9	Accepted
17	Learners can count on teachers to be fair	1.1	2.9	Accepted
18	The lack of a fence for securing the school grounds stopped students from attending school	1.2	2.4	Rejected
19	Most of the roof leak	1.2	2.7	Accepted

Source: Field Survey 2023

From Table 1 above, 19 items were responded to by the sample for the study regarding senior secondary school students' perception of the school environment in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The responses from 346 students indicated that items 4, 9, 11, and 18 were rejected due to their mean score being below 2.5, while all the remaining items were accepted, as their mean score was above 2.5.

Research Question Two: To what extent can student's perception of the school environment influence creativity?

Table 2: thinking skills and Creativity

S/NO	ITERMS	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	A variety of resources are available to students	1.1	2.5	Accepted
2	A variety of work areas are available to students	1.1	2.7	Accepted
3	The furniture is comfortable and flexible allowing for multiple arrangements	1.1	2.7	Accepted
4	Disorderliness and noise are tolerated	1.1	2.4	Rejected
5	Students are involved in active discussion among themselves and with the teachers	0.9	3.1	Accepted
6	Students are members of a learning community	0.9	3.1	Accepted
7	The atmosphere is collaborative and friendly	0.9	2.8	Accepted
8	Differences were value	1.1	2.9	Accepted
9	Students are involved in tasks that are open-ended and involve choice	1.0	3.0	Accepted
10	Mistakes and risk-taking are encouraged	1.1	2.7	Accepted
11	Students are intrinsically motivated	1.0	3.0	Accepted
12	Students are given time for the development of ideas and for creative thinking	0.9	3.2	Accepted
13	Multiple ways of knowing and learning are encouraged or used	0.8	3.3	Accepted
14	Students reflect on their learning	1.0	3.1	Accepted
15	Students work at their own pace	1.1	2.8	Accepted
16	Students are involved in real life/ authentic tasks that may include inquiry, project	1.0	2.9	Accepted
17	Examples of student work appear in the space	1.0	2.9	Accepted
18	The teacher is the co- learner,explorer, and resource person supporting students	0.9	3.2	Accepted
19	Students are encouraged to use multiple perspectives/ viewpoints or alternative modes of investigation/problem-solving	1.1	2.9	Accepted

Source: Field Survey 2023

From Table 2 above, details of responses from the sample for the study, which consisted of senior students from public secondary schools in the Northeastern part of Nigeria, were provided. Nineteen items were included. The results obtained from the respondents regarding thinking skills and creativity indicated that only Item 4 was rejected, with a mean score of 2.4. All the remaining items were accepted, as their mean score was above 2.5.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis of the association between perception of the school environment and creativity.

Environment	Creativity			Df	X^2	p.value
	High creativity	Low creativity	Total			
Secured	22(25.3)	156(60.5)	178	1	32.237	0.00
Unsecured	65(74.7)	102(39.5)	168			
Total	87(100)	259(100)	346			

Percentage within creativity in parenthesis

The results in Table 3 revealed that 65 respondents reported high creativity in an unsecured school environment, representing 74.7% of the expected value, while 102 respondents reported low creativity in an unsecured school environment, representing 39.5%

of the expected value. This suggests that students who perceive the environment as insecure tend to have lower creativity. Furthermore, the results in Table 3 indicated a statistically significant association between school environment and creativity, with a chi-square value of 32.237, degrees of freedom (df) of 1, and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that a significant association was found between school environment and creativity. Consequently, based on the obtained results, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant association between school environment and performance, is rejected.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study revealed the perception of students towards the school environment in the North Eastern part of Nigeria as follows: Students generally trust their teachers, Incidents of fighting among learners are frequently observed within the school, teachers are respected by students, and there is a sense of comfort at school, the use of foul language is common among students, teachers endeavor to discipline erring students in the hope of moulding them into better citizens, there is a conducive environment for learning in the schools, and teachers strive to ensure that school rules are followed, contributing to the peace and stability enjoyed. These findings are not entirely consistent with those of Chika (2016), who stated that a conducive school environment plays a significant role in students' lives. It is unfortunate to note that despite the good structures and well-trained security guards, students still engage in criminal activities, vandalizing school properties. While classroom structures are designed with fire exit doors, some classrooms have leaking roofs. However, teachers make efforts to treat students fairly.

Furthermore, the following results were obtained regarding thinking and creativity skills among students in senior secondary schools in the North Eastern part of Nigeria:
A variety of learning resources and workshops, such as creativity art workshops and food and nutrition labs, are available, furniture is readily available for students to utilize, positive discussions among students and with teachers foster a learning community atmosphere, the school environment is conducive and friendly, allowing for productive thought and innovation, differences among students are valued to prevent ridicule, students participate in multiple tasks that are open-ended, with mistakes encouraged as part of the learning process, students are internally motivated, multiple ways of knowing and learning are encouraged, students engage in real-life tasks such as project writing and inquiry, products of students' thinking and creative skills are displayed, teachers guide students as they explore creative thinking skills and multiple perspectives in problem-solving or investigation are encouraged by the teachers.

This study revealed a significant association between the perception of the school environment and the creativity of students in the North East. This implies that the school environment plays a significant role in fostering creativity among students. This finding aligns

with the research of Gallagher (2017), who also found a significant relationship between school environment and students' creativity. Additionally, it is consistent with the findings of Hennessy (2004), who emphasized the vital role of the school environment in students' creativity. Moreover, this study's results are in line with the findings of Hayes (2015), Ngohemba (2016), and Okafor (2016), all of whom reported a significant association between school environment and students' creativity.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

i.   The study revealed that students often trust their teachers, incidents of fighting among learners are frequently observed within the school, teachers have respect for their students, and students feel comfortable at school. Additionally, the use of foul language is common among students, and teachers exert effort in disciplining erring students with the hope of moulding them into better citizens. Moreover, a conducive environment for learning is present in the schools, and teachers make efforts to ensure that school rules are maintained.

ii. Regarding thinking and creativity skills among students in senior secondary schools in the North Eastern part of Nigeria, the study found that there is a variety of learning resources available, including workshops such as creativity art workshops and food and nutrition labs. Additionally, there is adequate furniture readily available for students to utilize. Positive discussions among students and teachers foster a sense of community and collaboration, reflecting a learning community through their actions. The school environment is conducive and friendly, facilitating productive thought that leads to innovation. Furthermore, differences among students are valued to prevent anyone from being ridiculed.

iii. The findings of the study indicated a significant association between school environment and students' creativity. This suggests that the majority of students who perceive the school environment as unsecured exhibit lower levels of creativity at school.

Conclusion

The study focuses on the roles of school environment plays in the development of students' creativity by providing some number of objectives to guide the study and the study was conducted within the North Eastern state of Nigeria. Related literature was reviewed and some variables were discussed, the method of data analysis was descriptive statistics and chi-square test to test the hypothesis, and findings were discussed. When ample facilities are provided and maintained it will boost students' creativity and it was

also discovered that the school environment can influence students' thinking and creativity skills, ultimately contributing to their significance both to themselves and to the community at large.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. School administrators and the immediate community should exert efforts to ensure that students are shielded from social vices and that structures/facilities designed to enhance their learning environment are protected from destruction.

ii. Teachers and stakeholders in education should collaborate to maintain the facilities provided by the government in order to enhance the school environment and foster students' creativity across various fields.

iii. Given the significant association between the school environment and students' creativity revealed in the study, it is recommended that efforts should be made to sustain the positive relationship between the school environment and students' creativity.

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