



ASSESSMENT ON THE CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL FACILITIES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The condition of school facilities has an important impact on students' performance and teachers' effectiveness. In particular, comfortable classrooms with adequate facilities are very important effective students' educational outcome. This study therefore explored the state of school facilities in northern Nigerian secondary schools. This is a region with persistent low academic achievement rate in standardised examination over the years. The observations and interviews with 20 students indicated to a large extent that the school facilities did not adequately support the fundamental needs, engagement and high achievements levels of students in the schools. It is recommended that the government needs to invest in the educational infrastructure, especially in the north of the country, to ensure that the next generation Nigerian people have the educational resources to contribute to future of the country.

Key Words: school facilities, educational, students

Introduction

Students' academic outcome and success is not only influenced by the type of school they attend, but the availability of effective and efficient facilities in the school. The school facilities and activities play prominent role in the development of students' potentials (Lawrence and Vimala, 2012). Since education is one of the cardinal rights of every child (MDG), it is important to make available adequate school facilities in order for the children to perform well in school. More so as schools are faced with more public accountability for better academic attainment, school characteristics are studied to discover methods of improving academic achievement of students.

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In Nigeria, wealthier parents prefer to enrol their children to private schools than public schools (Olaniyan, 2011). They consider privately owned schools to have more human, physical and instructional facilities, fewer class ratio and consequently the students always performance higher and stand better chances of securing admissions to higher education.

The relatively poor academic performance of students in northern Nigeria has been a concern to education stakeholders such as:parents, school administrators, teachers and government policy makers. For instance in 2012 WAEC results, which showed improvement in students' performance with 39% pass for all the candidates in the country, compared to other years such as 2009 with 25%, 2010 had 23% and more recently is 31% in 2014. Closer examination of the 2012 result showed that only 22% of the students from the northern region passed compared to 50% of these from the southern. These differences reflect longstanding inequalities between the two parts of the country: the south has more economic prosperity and development while the north has high poverty and illiteracy level.

To this regard, a study (Ahman, 2016) was conducted to investigate some of the leading factors contributing to low academic achievement among the northern students. Although this earlier study, explored psychological aspects of academic achievement of students such as the impact of self-concept, locus of control and students motivation on learning, but found obvious deterioration of facilities in all the schools visited during the data collection process which cannot be ignored. This there by forms the trust for this present study, to report some of the major observations of school facilities and the students' perceptions of the facilities as it affected their academic achievement. Nevertheless, extensive research studies have shown that effective school environment and facilities promote students engagement, mastery goals, abilities, confidence and strive for high goals (Wang and Holcombe, 2010). The main focus of school facilities in this report was to examine the conditions of the physical structure of the schools such as the buildings, instructional, learning facilities and classroom composition. Others include inadequate library and laboratory facilities, and health and well-being. This is to come up with empirical evidence linking student's performance with available school facilities.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous research study have explored school facilities as one of the most important requirements and investment that must be maintained in term of academic achievement, quality of the institution and overall safety all the people in the school including the students and the staff members. The study by Ibrahim et al.(2015) among public secondary schools in Malaysia reports that the available facilities were not favourable to the disabled children. This therefore led to their exclusion in school and classroom participation. In Nigeria, Owoeye and Yara (2011) study on school facilities in relation to the performance of Agric students in Ekiti state in the southern region, found no differences in the inadequate facilities between schools located in urban and rural areas. Similarly, a study in the Northern part of Nigeria (Sa'ad and Usman, 2014) indicated inadequate school facilities as the causes of the students' poor performance in English language. As these studies show that most of the public schools lack adequate facilities and

infrastructure, there is however a variation in their focus on the exploration of the school facilities in their different domains. Ibrahim (2015) was in relation to the disabled while Owoeye and Yara (2011), was based on students' achievement in Agric science, and Sa'ad & Usman (2014) explored students' performance in English language subject area only. This present study focused on the school facilities generally and not restricting it to any subject areas or particular student group in the secondary schools.

Literature Review

School facilities are a collection of buildings and instructional materials used to provide educational programs for students. These facilities provide students with adequate environment and tools to facilitate learning under the direction of teachers. Previous studies have indicated that adequate school facilities create a learning environment that is conducive to learning which arouses students' interest to work hard in school (Korir and Kipkemboi, 2014). However inadequate school facilities indicate that students are not receiving their rights of having sufficiently available and well-maintained school facilities. Indications of having these poor facilities are non-working or poorly maintained comfort rooms, lack of classrooms, overcrowding in classrooms, poor ventilation, unsanitary and crowded canteens and more. Consequently, studies have shown that the condition of school facilities has an important impact on student academic achievement and teacher effectiveness.

The study by Ibrahim et al. (2015) assessed conditions of the physical school facilities in Malaysia to find out whether it conformed to the stipulated planning standards and guideline provided for schools by the town and country planning department, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. It found that most of the physical structures did not take in to consideration the need of the disabled group of learners, which did not conform to the policy of inclusiveness. The aim was to not to discriminate against the physically challenged and to enable them to integrate them fully in to the society just like other people. Some of the major areas focused on in the study included the parking areas, pedestrian walkway, bus-stop and toilet facilities. These were important aspects to provide for their safety and comfort due to their various forms of disabilities. On a whole the study reported 33 students as the average number of students in the schools visited per class. This was seen to be higher than the expected size for the students in the country, although this recommended number of students was not stated in the study. This according to the study over stretched the school facilities which were grossly inadequate to cater for the student population, which was detrimental to their academic achievement. However, the Malaysia average is far better than the Nigerian situation even based on UNESCO's (2013) report of school with over 100 students in some classes in northern Nigeria. The average size for school used in this present study was 70 students on a whole, while 40 students was the recommended number for students in primary and secondary school for Nigeria (UNESCO, 2013). Nevertheless, over crowdedness makes the school condition harder for students to learn effectively. This causes discomfort and high level of distractibility during lessons and class management becomes difficult for teachers in such situation, since they cannot

see identify those that are not paying attention or those that are not concentrating (Shuaibu, 2013).

Similarly Alimi et al. (2012) identified school facilities as a main contributing factor in the attainment of educational goals and objectives. Despite the fact that their study provided evidence to show that privately owned schools had more facilities than public schools, they indicated that all type of schools deserved to be properly equipped, which is logical. This is because availability and adequate utilisation of facilities aid effective teaching and learning. It will help the teachers to show their level of ingenuity and commitment to lesson delivery while it will provide the students with ultimate learning experience. Buttressing this, was the findings of Sa'sd and Usman (2014) which indicated that the inadequate instructional media facilities and lack of language laboratory for teaching English language was the major cause for the massive failure rate recorded in English language standardised examination among Jigawa State students in the. They argued that the normal class room setting was not adequate considering the classes were overcrowded and that the fact that they needed to practice to reduce first language interference. There were cases were by some words with similar sounds were mistaken for other words. Students would have been grouped into various sessions to use the media and language laboratory and that would have reduced most of the problems linked to oral English aspects of the subject.

Consequently, the failure of the Nigerian education system to meet the demand for schooling has resulted in over-stretched capacity such as inadequate potable water supply and sanitary facilities, (1997, Lawani et al., 2014). The prevalence of sanitary and water related diseases such as diarrhoea, and malaria are related to inadequate water supply prevalent among schools located in rural areas and northern region of the country. Students from such areas are to use open fields for defecation and streams as a source of water. These practices are liable to resurgence of contagious viral diseases such as Ebola which ac affect the overall health and wellbeing of the citizenry. In support of this, a report from the FME (2005) indicated that 20% of primary schools, especially in rural areas, had no toilet facilities, while in some cases similar toilets are used by male and female students. Part of the ministry's report indicated that the schools were also lacking electricity, which made the students to depend on kerosene lanterns for light at night. This is highly hazardous and dangerous for the students considering technological advancement and the wealth of the country.

The overall condition of school buildings also has high impact on students' performance (Earthman, 2002). Some of these conditions featured in the design and components which in most cases affect the weather conditions, temperature, lighting, acoustics and age. The older the buildings the more it is susceptible to bad weather conditions and retention of noise level. All these constitute hazard and well being of the students. Students attending schools with better condition outperform those in substandard buildings and inadequate instructional facilities (Earthman, 2002). Location of the school contributes to the general protection of not just the

facilities but to safe guard the learners and all the other personnel in the schools (Ibrahim et al., 2015).

Moreover the idea of inadequate school facilities and students school performance can be linked to the self determination theory. The theory posits that if the students perceive the school environment and facilities to meet their needs, they are more likely to be determined and to engage more in the school activities which would result to better performance. Adequate school facilities can make the students to develop a sense of personal competence, autonomy in learning and development of a personal relationship with others in the school (Wang and Holcombe, 2010). Engaged students are more likely to be successful in school since they would attend school more regularly, concentrate more on learning, adhere to school rules and regulation, and avoid disruptive maladjusted behaviours. They are also more able to develop effective learning strategies, effort and persistence in learning and handling difficult tasks. The school facilities create a reciprocal effect on the people who function within the school environment as it affect their behaviours and development, and help to reduce their anxiety and negative effect that may arise in educational settings (Adeyemo, 2012). The achievement for those that are opportuned to attend schools with better facilities will exceed beyond to achieve higher education through to their professional carriers as it would have prepared and equipped them with intellectual tools, self-efficacy belief and intrinsic interest in problem solving strategies, which they would apply in variety of pursuits throughout their life time.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate secondary school facilities in northern Nigeria and their significant impact on the students' academic performance. To this end, observation of the school facilities was considered important in the assessment of the facilities and the perception of the students on the impact of the facilities on their performance. Therefore, the study utilised observation and semi-structured interviews as essential tool for data collection. This type of interview was considered age appropriate and flexible for use among the secondary school students who were mostly in their mid-teens. Semi-structured occupies the middle position between the structured interview, where responses are highly controlled, and an in-depth interview where responses are open-ended to a reasonable extent. The sample was purposively chosen which comprised of 20 students from 15 schools located in rural and urban areas with different academic achievement levels.

The respondents were derived from the survey result which modelled the students' academic achievement. These were students with the highest residual values, whose scores identified them as either underachievers or overachievers in the academic achievement model. Hence, an examination of their profiles indicated the variables that impacted their residual positions to reveal some of the factors that affected their performance. Their views on school facilities were pooled together and used in this study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data was then displayed and similar themes were pulled together. The coding was done, and the themes were identified from the transcripts.

Findings

From the findings, three major themes were derived. These include the physical environment, inadequate library and laboratory facilities, and health and well-being.

Physical Environment of the schools

The schools used in the study include schools located in urban and rural areas that taught both mixed and single sex groups of students. The observation of the environment and buildings showed deterioration and neglect of the facilities in the schools. I saw that many aspects of the schools were not conducive for effective teaching and learning: buildings were often dilapidated and in need of maintenance; the school grounds were overgrown; most of the classrooms needed substantial repairs; windows had been destroyed or were permanently left open irrespective of the weather conditions; some classrooms had no ceilings while others had bare floors. Broken chairs littered the school compound and students often had to squeeze together on those that were not broken which made sitting uncomfortable and writing difficult.

The schools were often overcrowded and this placed a huge burden on existing infrastructure with inadequate space for effective teaching and learning. One student complained that their class was so full that they sometimes do stay outside by the window.

‘For extra lessons we’re combined in one class with other science classes. If you come when the class is full, you’ll stay outside. If you stay outside, how can you hear what the teacher is saying? We will copy the notes from the students that got to sit inside and look for someone to explain it to us.’ (Jummai, OA female student)

Another underachieving (UA) student that the reason he failed chemistry was because his class was so overcrowded that it was difficult to hear the teacher speak and impossible for the teacher to move around the classroom and help everyone.

‘Like when the Antie [teacher] came in, our seat is at the back, so the class is too crowded. She teaches without speaking loudly. Only the people that sit in front of the class can hear what she is saying. If we tell her, she would say that she did not ask us to stay at the back. This is the problem, why I am not doing well in chemistry. The physics teacher will explain and tell us to go with her to the office if we do not understand, but people do understand so not very many people would follow her.’ (Maimuna, UA female student)

These comments show that the lack of space creates discomfort for both the teachers and the students. Also, the distance between them can result in the teacher not being heard, which can prove to be a serious setback for the students, irrespective of their intelligence level.

Inadequate library and laboratory facilities

The issue of inadequate facilities was one of the major factors that were identified by the students in their library and science laboratories. One of the students noted that there were no

recent textbooks in their library and that they had to depend on the textbooks that they brought from their homes and those who did not have books share with the friends that had them.

‘We do not go to the library because there are no books. Most of the books are very old books and are not interesting; we only use our own books or share with our friends that have the ones that we do not have. Sometimes I tell my parent to buy for me if I see any good science textbooks with my friends.’ (Galadima, OA boy)

Also when the students were asked how often they attended the library one of them said that neither she nor the other students went to the library throughout their stay in the school. This may signify inappropriateness of the library as a place to study.

‘I have never been to the school library but we know where it is. No one goes to the library since I came to this school, we read in our classes and our hostels.’ (Sakina, UA female student)

The study finds that the laboratories were ill-equipped and were not properly furnished. The laboratories were highly needed for science practicals which is an integral part of the standardised examinations in subjects like biology, chemistry and physics. The inadequacy of the laboratory facilities can lead student to low performance when all the grades in the different areas of the subjects are added together.

‘I want the school... like this... in the school premise... let me, let me say for examples for our labs, we don’t have enough equipment. Some of the things that we are supposed to do we do not do them but read about them in the books or during class lessons by the teachers.’ (Amal, OA female student)

‘We want enough equipment in our laboratories, we want enough equipment in our laboratories like this: furniture; we want. And students need..in the school, we need more water...’ (Galadima, OA male student)

The issue of inadequate facilities are presumably one of the reasons for the underachievement of most science students in their final year examinations, which is an eternal factor to the students. For this reason parents would rather send their children to private schools were the facilities are better equipped (Olasehinde&Olatayo, 2014).

Health and well-being

Students’ health and well-being was another theme that was identified from the students. This theme emerged as one of the aspects of the school that did not motivate the students and impact negatively, making them to underachieve. The study found that the areas that created the most discomfort for the students in terms of their well-being, such as physical discomfort and ailment, were the inadequate water supply and health facilities

Inadequate water supply. Inadequate water supply was a prevalent factor in many of the schools and one which affects the students’ school attendance, AA and the environment (Lawani et al.,

2014; Oloruntoba et al., 2008). In most of the schools, boreholes were dug to supplement pipe-borne water, which was always in short supply. The students indicated the provisions made were insufficient for the large population of students in the schools. Furthermore, there were times that the boreholes were damaged and it took time before they were repaired, yet they remained more constant than the pipe-borne water supply.

‘It’s only 3 boreholes that we have in the school, which hasn’t been easy for us. They were provided to support [supplement] the tap water, but since the second term, there had not been water from the tap, so we have been managing with the boreholes. They are not connected to the pipes; we come and fetch water with our buckets. Presently, one of the boreholes has spoilt; we are left with two for all the students in nine hostels. This is how we have been surviving, without water and good toilets.’ (Nnagi, OA female student in an urban school)

‘...like in the hostels sometimes the boreholes will spoil and the students will be suffering to get water. Sometimes we get late to class in the process of looking for water and the teachers are not happy about that’. (Suleiman, underachieving male student, in a rural school)

‘If we did not get water early, [then] either we get to brush our teeth or wash parts of our body, then we just wear the uniform to class. When we come back from class, we’ll go there early to fetch water with our buckets, then we take our bath afterwards.’ (Saadatu, OA in urban school)

As pointed out by some of the respondents, the inadequate water supply affected toilet use, and because this is a critical human necessity, they had to resolve it to find the means to relieve themselves.

‘We are managing with the toilets but if students want to defecate they will go to the ‘bola’ [open space] and defecate, but we are managing. Some have their bath outside, some enter the toilet to have their baths, but everybody is... managing’. (Fatimah, UA female student)

When asked about the cleaning of the toilets, the surprising answer was that, in some schools, there were no custodians; rather, it was the responsibility of the students themselves.

‘Students are trying their best to wash the toilets to keep them clean’.

‘You don’t have cleaners that clean your toilets?’

‘The cleaners that we have in the school clean only the school compound, while we clean and sweep the classrooms and the hostel areas. We cut the grass when we return back from a long vacation or as punishment for resuming late to school’. (Hassana, OA female student in an urban school)

Illness, clinics, and medicine. A number of participants brought up issues related to medical facilities and the poor treatment of students when they were ill. At the time of the survey, one of the participants was sent home for medical treatment and had to complete the questionnaire two weeks later when she returned. As a result, of her illness, she missed classes, which negatively affected her performance, as revealed by the fact that she scored below her predicted scores. The students confirmed during the interviews that the schools provide treatment but that when illnesses persist, they are sent home to their parents due to inadequate medical facilities and drugs. In some cases, the students requested that they be sent home in situations where medicine is unavailable. Here are some of their statements.

‘They will start to give us treatment from the school clinic, but if they see that there is no improvement, they will take you to the hospital, although in my case I requested to be sent home. My mum will go and have the test done by herself since they do not have the facility to conduct the test’. (Umaira, UA female student)

‘The place is well built and beautiful but they don’t have adequate drugs because when you go for a stomach ache they will give you different medicine’. (Faridah, UA female student)

AA: ‘How do you know that the medicines are not appropriate?’

Faridah: ‘It is different from the one that the doctor prescribes for me at home, if you insist, the nurse will tell you that it has finished, and they’ll give you Panadol irrespective of your kind of sickness. That is always the problem.’

One of the students explained that his school allows two weeks’ medical leave, but that students could stay at home longer if they wish because, in the absence of any follow-ups from them, the school assumes that they might still be taking medications. In such an awful situation, it not surprising that some students were doing less well than others in schools. The student said that:

‘When my mother came to take me home, the school did not provide us any vehicle to take us, so my mother had to hire public transport. She did not know that I was very sick because the school did not inform her officially, and when I went home, they did not even care to check if I was fine or not. I only came back that term to take my exams without attending any lessons.’ (Nasri, UA male student)

These responses indicate the care provided to ill students was insufficient, to the extent that the students had lost faith in the schools’ medical facilities, as indicated by the student who said that her parents preferred to have their own doctor run medical tests. It is expected that the students should be adequately looked after by the schools as a means of necessity. To that end, they should have access to the general hospital as well as to ambulances in the case of emergency. This goes to show the general welfare of the students in the sampled schools was poor, and consequently, irrespective of their level of intelligence and interest in school. This is enough to deter students from achieving highly in school

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study is to identify some of the leading factors contributing to persistent poor performance of students in school and more specifically to explore whether school facilities was a major factor in students' performance. From observations and the interview with the students, the study finds that the state of the school facilities was not adequate enough for teaching and learning situations. This includes run-down buildings and classrooms without windows. Most of the classrooms lack adequate furniture for the large of students. It was also observed that some of the schools had a healthier environment than others. Schools in the urban areas had slightly better facilities than those located in the rural areas. Other impeding factors are hygiene related, for instance unavailability of drinkable water, inadequate toilet facilities and an unkempt environment that was hazardous to students' health, and constitute hindrance to positive performance in school.

These findings are similar to that of Freitas (2011) who considered the use of blackboard and chalks as old fashion and hazardous to human health let alone children in schools. Similarly, Korir and Kipkemboi (2014) who had similar finding among Kenyan schools indicated that need for adequate learning facilities and environment to arouse the interest of the students to work hard in school. This is because good learning environment promote good academic performance that will resolve persistent poor performance of students. The result further corroborated to the findings of Ryzin (2011) that good school facilities and environment serve as protective factors for students and other personnel. Ryzin's study demonstrate that students from schools with good facilities are more engage in school, have higher interest and mastery goal orientations than counterparts from school with poor facilities. Maikudi's (2013).

The findings on health and well being conforms to the report on Vanguard News' (2015) summation of the lack of alternatives available to people that practice open defecation, or who neither wash their hands with soap and water before eating nor after using the toilet. In addition, Olorunfoba et al. (2008) extended the argument of inadequate provision of water and sanitary school facilities to include 'trust to use them properly', particularly among the girls. The lack of sanitary facilities in the schools has been listed as a major factor in why some girls stay out of school (Maikudi, 2013). Most of these studies have indicated that many incidences of students' illnesses were caused by water and sanitary-related diseases, such as parasitic and helminthic infections. Also, they have noted that environmental pollution can lead to the spread of contagious diseases, detrimental to both the environment and the populace. This was seen recently in the outbreak of Ebola. Insufficient water supplies and sanitary facilities adversely effects enrolment rates, school engagement and academic performance while increasing absenteeism and the dropout rate

Conclusion and Recommendation

The implications of these findings show that the school facilities mitigate against students' ability to achieve highly. Some of these resulting from the structural factors of the schools, such

as dilapidated classrooms, chalkboards, desks, the unavailability of water for drinking, washing and toilet use, and the lack of adequate medical facilities. These conditions made it impossible for even highly able students to perform satisfactorily. Some high achieving students that were classified as underachievers should have performed better since most of them pointed to structural facilities as key obstacle to their performance. Some others were linked to crowdedness of the classrooms which prevented the teacher from roving around the class and the proximity of most students that were unable to hear the teacher during the lessons. This is the same thing as not attending the lesson. Most of the structural problems might have been caused by inadequate funding from the government. Since the facilities lacked refurbishment, renovation and replacement as the case may be. As a solution, schools can reduce enrolment rate in order not to overburden existing infrastructure, to create an effective atmosphere for teaching and learning. The government on the other hand, will have to establish more schools and employ additional qualified teachers to provide adequate education for every child in the country. Dilapidated structures would need repaired at the same time. Adequate library and laboratory need urgent attention too since it forms part of the reading and practical places for gaining more knowledge. Some of the students that did not have space in other schools could be sent to schools with low enrolment rates in the interim. Also, provision of medical, water and sanitary facilities cannot be compromise. It is a basic human necessities and a major factor that make students to disengage from school, especially the female students. It is therefore hope that the findings of this study will serve as a potential area of focus for government policy makers and education practitioners to take urgent action in order to solve poor performance of students from northern Nigeria and the country at large.

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