

IMPACT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ON STUDENTS' DROPOUT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of school environment on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The design adopted for the study was descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 3,918 senior secondary school 2 students in Rivers State, from which 786 students were sampled through simple random sampling technique. The instrument for the study was a questionnaire, titled, "Influence of School Environment on Students Dropout Questionnaire (ISESDQ)". The research questions were analyzed using mean ratings and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was analyzed using independent t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study revealed that school physical environment, school social environment and school academic environment, had impact on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State (with weighted means of: 2.98, 2.70 and 2.73 respectively). It was also found that students' perception on the impact of school physical, social and academic environments on students' dropout were not significantly dependent on students' gender (t.values .025, .019, .795, and .347; and p-values .980, .985, .427, and .729 respectively). Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that the school physical environment in Rivers State should be improved by renovating and repainting old and dilapidated classroom buildings and adequate facilities provided to make the schools more attractive and conducive for learning. In addition, the social environment of the school should be free from abuse and violence. Finally, it was recommended that the school academic environment should be improved by monitoring teachers' classroom management and Instructional delivery.

Keywords: *Dropout, Environment, School physical environment, School social environment, School academic environment, Rivers State*

Introduction

Education in Nigeria is based on the assumption that it is an essential tool for achieving national development. The general philosophy of the Nigerian education system is hinged on two main themes: Integration of individuals into a solid and effective citizen and providing equal educational opportunities to all citizens in primary, secondary and tertiary education, both inside and outside the formal school system. Thus, secondary education occupies an important place in the Nigerian education system. For this reason, secondary education has been taken seriously from the beginning, not only as an acceptable qualification for good jobs, but also as a door to higher education. It is in the light of these that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced in the country.

The Federal Government of Nigeria passed the UBE law in 2004 to ensure that children complete full primary school and also achieve the critical objectives of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) for wealth creation, job creation, poverty reduction and realignment of values (International Monetary Fund-IMF, 2005). The objectives of the UBE programme is to improve access and reduce students' dropout. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2015), it is believed that a student who, for one reason or another, withdraws from learning before completing the programme, is regarded as having dropped out of school. Dropout in a broad sense, denote a student who failed to complete the level of education the student enrolled in, for various reasons (Dekkers and Claassen, 2011). Dropout is wastage of government planned activities (e.g training teachers, building schools and classrooms, providing seats, teaching aids, books, free feeding, sandals, and many more) as it leads to underutilization of government efforts. This problem has established its grip on our educational system, as failure to complete secondary school not only limits future opportunities for higher education but also significantly represents a drain on the scarce resources which government has for delivery of quality education.

Despite the benefit of sustainable educational participation, as noticed in some areas in Rivers State, some young ones still chose to dropout for personal reasons and as such lack basic knowledge and life skills which practically has led to an increase in crime rate. Thus, some boys dropped out of school with the intention of making fast money by joining oil bunkering, while some girls dropout because of marriage or early pregnancy. It has been observed that many young ones who are becoming restive in Rivers State are those who dropout from school (Chukwuemeka and Agbara, 2010). However, they noted that the general indices for high dropouts in schools in Nigeria have been identified as stemming from family-related factor, school environment-related factors, societal demand and pressure, delayed social and economic reward on education. This study however focused on school environmental factors on student dropout. Environment therefore, is the aggregate of all the internal and external conditions and influence affecting the life and development of an organism (Maxwell, 2017). For the purpose of this study, school environment is the physical, social and academic climate of the school that may positively or negatively affect students learning.

The physical environment of the school refers to the school physical facilities, which includes; school buildings, equipment, Lawns, playground, lighting, ambient noise, indoor air quality and/or thermal comfort of the physical building of the school and its location within a community. The physical environment of the school spells' out how safe, clean and comfortable surrounding offers positive school climate in which students can learn. In Rivers State, the government has made concerted efforts to improve the school physical environment by way of providing structures through building new schools, rebuilding and reconstructing dilapidated schools, training teachers, providing seats, teaching aids, books, and a lot more in a bid to provide quality education for her citizens.

The social environment of the school deals with the way in which the school environment influences or supports the interactions between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers, teachers and school management, students and school management, and even interactions between parents and school staff. As a matter of fact, when students view their teacher(s) and the entire school system as being supportive they report higher levels of interest,

valuing, effort, and enjoyment in their schoolwork (Fraser and Fisher, 2012). The academic environment otherwise known as the teaching and learning environment, is the classroom situation where the entire teaching and learning processes in school is basically an interactive session between the teacher and the learners on one hand and between instructional materials usage and instructional delivery on the other hand. Nevertheless, in between these two extremes lies students' readiness to learn and teachers' willingness to teach effectively. Furthermore, in every school academic environment, teacher quality matters so much, in terms of mastering of their subject area and professional training. This is because, if teachers are not qualified, teaching and learning may be faulty and so, students' academic performance may be affected and they may likely dropout. Both boys and girls may have their different reasons for dropping out of school. For this reason, some researchers see school dropout as gender-specific social problem (Khan, Tahir and Shah, 2011; Taddese and Tadele, 2019). This is because the perception of male and female students in the schools are not the same. For instance, some male students feel being insulted in school or wasting their time going to school when their mates are making money by having their own businesses and so dropout of school to earn money with their mates. While, the female may perceive all physical task given in the school as being so difficult and so decide to dropout.

To be able to understand the reason why students dropout, particularly in relation to the school environment, this study is therefore anchored on Student Integration and Institutional Departure Models by Vincent Tinto (1975). The theory posits that students enter college with family and individual attributes as well as precollege schooling. They enter with certain commitments, both to finishing college and to staying at their college. They enter an academic system that is characterized by grade performance and intellectual development, which together lead to academic integration, and they enter a social system where peer group interactions and school interactions lead to social integration. Employing his Student Integration Model and Institutional Departure Model, Tinto explained student retention. He found that a student's sense of academic and social belonging impacts on retention and graduation. Hence, dropout from school can be seen as a process, which takes place over a long

period of time, resulting from a combination of student characteristics and the extent of their academic, environmental and social integration in school. This theory is apt for this study as regards the fact that, it tries to narrate how the school physical, social and academic environment impact on the decision usually made by students to remain in school without dropping out over a period of time.

Statement of the Problem

In Rivers State, it is common to see many young boys and girls who lack basic knowledge and life skills to make a living, a phenomenon which in practice has led to increase in crime rate, intra-ethnic hostility and harassment of potential investors. Interestingly, the situation in Rivers State is very peculiar as despite all government efforts to retain students in schools, one still sees many children/youths of school age hawking or roaming around the streets. Some are involved in cultism, militancy and oil bunkering instead of being in school. Although the problem of students' dropout have been attributed to other factors such as family-related factor, societal demand and pressure, delayed social and economic reward on education, etc. It is therefore necessary to find out if the dropout by the students is related to school factors. Thus the main objective of this study is to find out the impact of school physical, social and academic environment on students' dropout in Rivers State. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided this study.

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of school physical environment on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does the school social environment influence students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the impact of the school academic environment on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

1. Gender has no significant influence on students' perception of the impact of school environment on students' dropout.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study was made up of 3,918 students in fourteen (14) Public Senior Secondary Schools, from Rivers East, Senatorial District in Rivers State. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for sampling SS2 students in this study. Hence, employing simple random sampling technique, 20% of the schools in each local government area were sampled. This gives a total of 14 schools sampled for the study. Also, the simple random sampling technique was used for sampling seven hundred and eighty six (786) SS2 students for the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled, "Influence of School Environment on Students Dropout Questionnaire (ISESDQ)". It was designed on a modified 4-points likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) is 4 points, Agree (A) is 3 points, Disagree (D) is 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) is 1 point.

The instrument was validated by experts from Educational Measurement and Evaluation. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was conducted and subjected to statistical analysis using Cronbach Alpha, reliability coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.93 was gotten. Data collected were analyzed using Mean Rating Scales and Standard Deviation for the research questions. A weighted mean score of 2.50 and above was taken as an index for 'Agreement' while scores below 2.50 were considered as an index for 'Disagreement' in relation to the responses. The t-test statistical analysis was applied in testing the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings and Discussion

The results are presented on tables 1-4.

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation on the Impact of School Physical Environment on Students Dropout (n = 786)

SN	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total score	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
	Influence of School Physical Environment on Students Dropout	4	3	2	1				
1	The dilapidated nature of my school buildings may make students to perform poorly and so dropout of school.	285	265	148	88	2319	2.95	0.999	Agree
2	Inadequate classrooms and Lockers/chairs may affect student learning thereby leading to failure and dropout.	205	360	123	98	2244	2.85	0.947	Agree
3	Insufficient games, recreational facilities and spaces in my school encourage students leaving the school.	98	273	299	116	1925	2.45	0.890	Disagree
4	Poor library/laboratory facilities in my school could lead to students withdraw from the school.	310	288	99	89	2391	3.04	0.986	Agree
5	The fence in my school is not good, so students move out freely and get in contact with bad people that may influence to dropout.	373	248	111	54	2512	3.20	0.924	Agree
6	Poor ventilation of my classroom caused teachers and students	324	301	107	54	2467	3.14	0.897	Agree

	uncomfortable and as a result makes some students stay out of classroom for most of the lessons.								
7	Overcrowded classroom may affect teaching and learning, and thus cause low performance which may lead to students leaving the school.	349	313	89	35	2548	3.24	0.823	Agree
8	The unkempt school physical environment is a great threat to students' safety.	203	400	147	36	2342	2.98	0.793	Agree
Weighted Mean (\bar{X})						2.98	Agree		

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation on the impact of school physical environment on students dropout. The table had 8 items. From the table, it was observed that all items had a mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 except item 3 which had mean ratings below 2.50. In addition, the weighted mean of 2.98 for these items is higher than the criterion mean (2.50) for the study. Therefore, the result indicated that school physical environment had impact on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation on the Impact of School Social Environment on Students Dropout (n = 786)

SN	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total score	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
	Influence of School Social Environment on Students Dropout	4	3	2	1				
9	Negative attitude of some teachers in my school could make student to drop out from school.	229	381	140	36	2375	3.02	0.808	Agree

10	Influence of bad friends could cause students to drop out from school.	397	237	99	53	2550	3.24	0.918	Agree
11	Abusive words by our teachers are one of the factors that are making students dropout from school.	141	368	215	62	2160	2.75	0.840	Agree
12	Aggressiveness of our teachers makes students to absent themselves from classroom at times causing poor performance which leads to dropout.	229	371	97	89	2312	2.94	0.930	Agree
13	One of the reasons why student think of leaving the school is the issue of cultism in the school among students.	415	274	70	27	2649	3.37	0.786	Agree
14	Some teachers in my school do not care whether we perform well academically or not.	219	274	140	153	2131	2.71	1.074	Agree
15	Teachers and principals are always quarrelsome in my school over one issue or the other which discourage students and so lead to dropout.	26	89	273	398	1315	1.67	0.804	Disagree
16	Lack of social activities in my school could lead to dropout.	89	302	229	166	1886	2.40	0.943	Disagree
17	Teacher's engagement in	175	290	195	126	2086	2.65	0.997	Agree

	corporate punishment may scare some students and so cause them to drop out of school.								
18	Learning is too strict and boring in my school so can lead to failure and dropout.	98	241	220	227	1782	2.27	1.012	Disagree
Weighted Mean (\bar{X})							2.70		Agree

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation on the impact of school social environment on students dropout. The data on table 2, revealed that out of the 10 items used to measure the influence of school social environment on students' dropout, 7 were above the criterion mean value of 2.50 for this study, while 3 were below the criterion mean value. Thus, items 9,10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 17 had mean ratings above 2.50, while items 15, 16, and 18 had mean ratings below 2.50. However, the weighted mean of 2.70 is higher than the criterion mean. The result therefore showed that school social environment had impact on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Impact of School Academic Environment on Students Dropout (n = 786)

SN	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
	Influence of School Academic Environment on Students Dropout	4	3	2	1	Score			
19	The teachers' fast method of lessons delivery affect students' learning.	206	263	185	132	2115	2.69	1.037	Agree
20	During lessons, instructional materials are usually used by teachers in the classroom.	125	284	201	176	1930	2.46	1.008	Disagree
21	The use of cane to flog students by some teachers in my school during lessons, have significant impact on	148	335	223	80	2123	2.70	0.889	Agree

	students' learning .								
22	Teachers do not pay attention to classroom work in order to correct students and improve their academic performance.	229	381	140	36	2375	3.02	0.808	Agree
23	Wrong use of instructional materials impelled learning for optimal academic achievement..	98	381	211	96	2053	2.61	0.856	Agree
24	In practical lessons, learning materials are not usually adequate for both teachers and students in the classroom/laboratory.	283	177	193	133	2182	2.78	1.111	Agree
25	Students are not encouraged to ask questions in the classroom by our teachers, this may affect students learning, causing poor performance	161	177	237	211	1860	2.37	1.086	Disagree
26	Teachers in my school are boring during lessons, discouraging students which may lead to poor performance and possible dropout.	349	313	89	35	2548	3.24	0.823	Agree
	Weighted Mean (\bar{X})						2.73		Agree

Table 3 shows the Mean ratings of respondents on the impact of School Academic Environment on Students Dropout. From the table, it is observed that items 19,21,22,23,24 and 26 have mean value higher than the criterion mean value of 2.50 for this study, while items, 20 and 25 had mean value lower than the criterion mean value. Nonetheless, the calculated weighted mean value for the influence of school academic environment on students' dropout was 2.73 which is also higher than the criterion mean value of 2.50. Hence, school academic environment affect students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: Independent t-test Analysis of the Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female Students' Perception of the Impact of School Environment on Students dropout

School Environment Variable	Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	t_{cal}	df	Sig.	Decision
School Physical Environment	Male	357	23.85	3.685	-	784	.980	Not Sig.
	Female	429	23.86	3.754				
School Social Environment	Male	357	27.03	4.029	.019	784	.985	Not Sig.
	Female	429	27.03	4.171				
School Academic Environment	Male	357	19.89	4.083	.795	784	.427	Not Sig.
	Female	429	19.66	4.121				
School Environment	Male	357	70.78	9.263	.347	784	.729	Not Sig.
	Female	429	70.54	9.460				

Not significant, $p > 0.05$ level of significance

Table 4 presents the t-test statistical analysis on the mean scores of male and female students on their perception on the impact of school environment on students dropout. From the table, the calculated $t_{(784)}$ values were found to be .025, .019, .795, and .347 for the influence of gender (male and female students) of school physical, social, academic environments, and total school environment respectively on students dropout, were all statistically not significant. This is so, because, the p-values (.980, .985, .427, and .729) for each of the t-value were all greater than the chosen significant value (0.05) for the study. Hence, the stated null hypothesis is therefore accepted. The result is that, gender has no significant influence on students' perception of the impact of school environment on students dropout.

The Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are shown below:

School physical, social and academic environments have significant impact on students dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State. Gender has no significant influence on students' perception of the impact of school environment on students' dropout.

Discussion of the Findings

Table 1 showed that school physical environment affects students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State. This outcome is however, not completely surprising to the researchers because, literature is replete with information on the importance of good school physical environment as enablers for effective teaching and learning to take place. Some of the school physical environment factors considered included; dilapidated school buildings, inadequate classrooms and lockers/chairs, poor library/laboratory facilities, and overcrowded classrooms to mention but a few. This implies that for effective teaching and learning to take place thereby prevent students in secondary school from leaving the school as a result of poor state of school, the school physical environment as a sine-qua-non to the structure called school and its facilities must be adequate, conducive and by extension encourage students to stay in school. This finding is in agreement with that of Taddese and Tadele (2019) who explored the Prevalence, Causes and Prevention of Primary School Dropout in Gurage Zone, Ethiopia. The study found out that causes of dropout were among others, the bad school surrounding and school authorities.

Table 2 revealed that school social environment had impact on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State. That is, factors such as influence of bad friends, abusive words from classroom teachers, aggressive traits of teachers, cultism, unfavourable attitude of teachers towards students' academic performance, lack of social activities among students, the use of corporal punishment and unfriendly disposition of fellow students and teachers, strict and boring learning, and the use of poor teaching methodologies by teachers were all considered by the respondents to be factors that could prompt students to dropping out of secondary schools. Thus, a good school social environment establishes an improved sense of belonging and better quality of school life for those engaged. On the contrary,

negative school social environment perpetuates low motivation, more alienation, poor academic performance, and promote poor health and life choices in general. A similar result with this study is found by Taddese and Tadele (2019) who explored the Prevalence, Causes and Prevention of Primary School Dropout in Gurage Zone, Ethiopia. The study found out that causes of dropout were among others, the bad school surrounding and school authorities (principals and teachers) and fellow students attitude, disposition, temperament, as well as relationship to one another which poses challenges to students in schools.

Table 3 found out that school academic environment had significant impact on students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State. Some factors considered here are: teachers' fast method of lessons delivery, the negative actions of some teachers, teachers do not pay attention to classroom work, wrong use of instructional materials, learning materials are not usually adequate, teachers in the school are boring during lessons, discouraging students and many more. In fact, the school academic environment is about the most important aspect of the school environment because it is the section that is concerned with the primary function of the school. This implies that to achieve students' retention in schools, effective teaching and learning of the country's philosophical values through the curriculum, the academic environment of the school must be given priority. Empirical studies with similar finding in terms of the result obtained in this study include that of Daniel, Bomett and Kiprop (2014) which examined the impact of the learning environment on school dropout in arid and semi-arid regions primary schools using a case from the Katilu Division, Turkana South District in Kenya. The study concluded that the main factors in school dropout were frequent absence of teachers from the classroom, inadequate textbooks, poor exam performance, low teacher-student ratio and lack of participation in refresher courses by teachers.

Table 4 shows that, gender has no significant influence on students' perception of the impact of school environment on students dropout. In other words, the influence of school environment on students' dropout was not gender based and therefore was not statistically significant. This result is however surprising to the researchers because usually the aspiration of male students and that of female students in life are usually different and influenced by different

factors, chief among them is the socio-cultural disposition of the individuals concerned. Furthermore, in Nigeria, different regions or socio-cultural entities tend to ascribe different role to the male child and yet some other role to the female child despite modern advancement and discoveries that shows that male and female students can equally succeed in any field of human endeavours. Consequently, one would expect that male and female students will have different views on what are responsible for their dropping out of school, hence reveal significant difference. Nevertheless, the non-significant difference between male and female students perception observed in this study, could be attributed to the fact that, in Rivers State, secondary school students are faced with similar school environment scenario as assessed by the items of the questionnaire used and the subsequent responses given by the respondents. The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Christian (2015) who undertook a study to highlight the extent to which the location of the school, the school department and gender variables can predict the dropout rate of secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. He found out that neither the location of the school, nor the gender, nor the school section has a significant impact on the school dropout rate in Rivers State. That is to say, dropout rate is not gender dependent.

Conclusion

The goals of school are the integrate of individuals into sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizen. Hence, the environments of the school are very important in the training of children. These school environments are: physical, social and academic. The School Physical Environment includes all the physical facilities of the school that promote meaningful teaching and learning. The School Social Environment deals with how the school environment influences or supports the interactions/relationships among members (management, staff and students alike) of the school. And the School Academic Environment is the building blocks for effective teaching and learning processes in the school. From the findings of this study, these factors influences students' dropout in secondary schools in Rivers State. The results of this study also revealed that all secondary school students in Rivers State are faced with similar school environment scenario in their

aspirations to stay in school. Conclusively, education is good and rewarding and so a conducive school environment is important for its proper attainment to meet the needs of the students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made, based on the findings of this study:

1. The school physical environment across Rivers State should be improved by renovating and repainting old and dilapidated classroom buildings and adequate facilities provided to make the schools more attractive and conducive for learning.
2. The social environment of the school should be free from abuse and violence. Therefore, it should be a climate of care, trust and respect, to provide social support and mental health, opportunities for physical education and exercise as well as opportunities for mentoring and role modeling. These situations will encourage greater well-being and happiness among students to remain in school.
3. The school authorities should monitor teachers classroom performance, improve teaching, instructional materials, and access to support, to motivate struggling students by making the school interesting environment for academic rather than being aversive.
4. Schools should expand and diversify their curricula to meet the different interests, needs and abilities of male and female students.

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