

Learning Environment and Academic Performance of Students with Disabilities in Special Schools in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated learning environment and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. Correlational research design was used for the study. Two research

questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population of the study comprised 116 special teachers in special schools in Rivers State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 60 respondents for the study. A self-designed questionnaire titled: 'Learning Environment and Academic Performance Questionnaire' (LEAPQ) was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient for (LEAPQ) was $r=0.88$. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Pearson Product Moment Correlational (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study concluded that; that school climate and school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. That there is significant relationship between school climate, school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. It was recommended among others that; appropriate school authorities should endeavour to provide a conducive learning environment that has good school climate to enhance effective teaching and learning. Such environment should be safe with students been treated fairly by teachers.

Keywords: Climate, disabilities, environment, learning, students.

Introduction

The issue of poor academic performance of students in Nigeria has been of much concern to the government, parents, teachers and even student themselves. The quality of education not only depend on the teachers as reflected in the performance of their duties, but also in the effective coordination of the learning environment (Aliyu, 2018, Ubani et al, 2020). Education is an essential factor for effective development of any country like Nigeria. The western education adopted by Nigeria is highly based on individualism, socio-economic and internationalization which are all geared towards national development.

In the view of Onachukwu (2019), one of the major obstacles to the development of secondary education for regular and students with disabilities in Rivers State is the persistent poor academic achievement of the students. Based on this fact, people believe that the standard of education is the state and Nigeria is falling. Poor academic performance as recorded in recent years was so great that many

special and regular students fell short of the requirements necessary for admission into tertiary institutions.

Similarly, Okebukola (2017), stated that a number of factors are said to have contributed to the poor academic performance of regular and special needs students in schools. Okebukola (2017), stressed that a host of these factors may surround poor study habits and lack of available resource materials, poor school climate, indiscipline in school, inadequate facilities, teachers' ineffectiveness, the teaching method and the type of learning environment available for both the students and the teachers. Poor performance of students with disabilities in special schools may be a reflection of the type of learning environment available.

Learning environment may have negative influence on academic performance especially if such environment lacks good school climate, inadequate instructional materials, incessant case of indiscipline, poor physical facilities, poor teacher quality, and the location of school is questionable. School facilities are a potent factor to quality education. The importance of quality teaching staff and the provision of adequate instructional facilities for effective teaching and learning in the school system cannot be over-emphasized. In furtherance, learning can occur through one's interaction with one's environment (Ubani, 2022). Environment here refers to facilities that are available to facilitate students learning outcome. It includes books, audio-visual, software and hardware of educational technology; so also, size of classroom, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves on which instruments for practical's are arranged (Ubani, et al, 2019).

Learning environment plays a vital role in determining how students perform or respond to circumstances and situations around them. This implies that no society is void of environmental influences. The learning environment determines to a large extent how a student behaves and interacts, that is to say that the environment in which we find ourselves tend to mould our behaviour so as to meet the demands of life whether negatively or positively. The desire for both qualitative and quantitative education has multiplied the problem of providing an effective and conducive learning environment for teaching and learning.

In Nigeria, there is an increase in the number of students' enrolment in regular and special educational institutions with little or no regards to improving the learning environment so as to better their performance. Most at times parents of students are not satisfied with the facilities provided in the school. Also, the extent at which some teachers, exhibit high level of indiscipline does not seem to portray them as role models. They rather encourage indiscipline among students by their attitudes. This may have negative influence on academic performance of regular students including those with disabilities since students also learning through observation and imitation.

It was for this reason that Adzema (2016) defined learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour due to practice and experience. This definition is in confirmation of the view that learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of insight, practice, experience or stimuli in the environment. To buttress further, learning environment is the immediate surroundings of the school which also include classrooms, dining halls, examination halls, football fields among others. Learning environment should have good infrastructural development, adequate trained teachers, good leadership and adequate instructional materials among others. All these characteristics may have positive impact on academic performance of students with disabilities in schools. In the same vein, it is opined that an improved environmental condition leads to higher intelligence scores while poor environmental conditions reduce these scores (Ubani, et al, 2020). It became imperative to examine the learning environment and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The influence of learning environment on academic performance of students with disabilities has been an issue of concern to all stakeholders in education. This is evident in the rate of mass failure of students in both internal and external examinations, as revealed by research studies. Despite government's effort towards the provision and renovation of infrastructures in schools, performance of special needs students in both internal and external examinations such as National Examination Council (NECO) and West African Examination Council

(WAEC) and other internal examinations in the schools are still very low and below expectation.

It is not surprising that factors such as school climate, lack of instructional materials, school discipline, poor physical facilities, and class size could be responsible for poor academic performance of the students. The researcher has observed with dismay that the learning environment in the study area is nothing to write home about. The school climate is not conducive for teaching and learning, instructional materials are inadequately provided, infrastructural facilities are in dilapidated conditions, other conditions that may promote teaching and learning are also in short fall, this situation may tend to negatively influence students' academic performance in the schools. It is on this premise that the researcher was motivated to investigate the learning environment and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to investigate learning environment and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study intended to:

1. determine the influence of school climate on academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State
2. ascertain the influence of school physical facilities on academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. How does school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State?
2. How does school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State

2. There is no significant relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State

Methodology

This study adopted the Correlational research design. The target population involved in this study consisted of a total of 116 special teachers in special schools in Rivers State. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select a target figure of 60 special teachers for the study. The research instrument was a self-designed instrument titled: "Learning Environment and Academic Performance Questionnaire" (LEAPQ). Section A contained the demographic data of the respondents while section B was further divided into 3 subsections and they were structured on a four point modified Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively. Section B had a total of 15 items. The reliability coefficient of (LEAPQ) was $r=0.88$ and was determined using the test-retest method. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while Pearson Product Moment Correlational (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question One: How does school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing how school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. Criterion $\bar{X}= 2.5$

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	STD	Remarks
1	Students who feel safe, cared for and supported have better academic performance.	3.16	0.97	Agree
2	Students who feel secured in a school environment significantly improve in their academics	3.38	0.79	Agree

3	Positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities in a school environment can increase achievement levels of the students.	3.08	0.95	Agree
4	Culturally conscious school climate can significantly shape the academic performance of the students	3.24	0.85	Agree
5	Students in schools with a better school climate have higher performance and better socio- emotional health.	3.08	0.82	Agree
Cluster mean/Standard Deviation		3.19	0.88	

(Survey Data, 2023)

Table 1 shows that items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively were all accepted, as how school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. The table showed that the mean ratings of items 1-5 were 3.16, 3.38, 3.08, 3.24, and 3.08 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.97, 0.79, 0.95, 0.85 and 0.82. That students who feel safe, cared for and supported have better academic performance. Culturally conscious school climate can significantly shape the degree of academic performance students and that students in schools with a better school climate have higher performance and better socio-emotional health. The cluster mean of 3.19 with the standard deviation of 0.88 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: How does school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation showing how school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. Criterion \bar{X} = 2.5

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	STD	Remarks
6	Adequate provision of infrastructures makes students learn with ease thus bringing about good academic performance	3.08	0.94	Agree
7	Poor and inadequate physical facilities, obsolete teaching techniques, overcrowded classrooms leads to poor academic performance of students.	3.05	0.90	Agree
8	School facilities when provided will aid teaching learning programme and consequently improve academic performance of students.	3.09	0.55	Agree
9	Facilities form one of the potent factors that contribute to academic performance of students in the school system.	3.00	0.93	Agree
10	Unattractive school buildings and overcrowded classrooms contributes to poor academic performance of the students	3.04	0.91	Agree
Cluster mean/Standard Deviation		3.05	0.95	

(Survey Data, 2023)

Table 2 shows that items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 respectively were all accepted, as how school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. The table showed that the mean ratings of items 6-10 were 3.08, 3.05, 3.09, 3.00, and 3.04 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.94, 0.90, 0.55, 0.93 and poor and inadequate physical facilities, obsolete teaching techniques, overcrowded classrooms leads to poor academic performance of students. School facilities when provided will aid teaching learning programme and consequently improve academic performance of students. More so, facilities form one of the potent

factors that contribute to academic performance of students in the school system and that unattractive school buildings and overcrowded classrooms contributes to poor academic performance of the students. The cluster mean of 3.05 with the standard deviations of 0.95 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State

Table 3: Relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with disabilities
Correlations

		School Climate	Academic Performance
School Climate	Pearson Correlation	1	0.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	60	60
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.782**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 revealed that the relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State is significant at 0.05 level. This is because the calculated r-value (0.782) is greater than the table r-value (0.195). This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The result shows that there is significant relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State

Table 4: Relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities Correlations

		School Physical Facilities	Academic Performance
School Physical Facilities	Pearson Correlation	1	0.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	60	60
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.635**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 revealed that the relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State is significant at 0.05 level. This is because the calculated r-value (0.635) is greater than the table r-value (0.195). This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The result shows that there is significant relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding of research question one (Table 1) and hypothesis one (Table 3) revealed that school climate influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. And that there is significant relationship between school climate and academic performance of students with

disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. This finding agrees with the view of Megan (2020), whose “research on school climate in high-risk urban environments indicates that a positive, supportive, and culturally conscious school climate can significantly shape the degree of academic success experienced by students in special or regular schools.

The finding of research question two (Table 2) and hypothesis two (Table 4) revealed that school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. And that there is significant relationship between school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. This finding is in consonance with the opinion of Hallak (2019) who revealed that school facilities form one of the potent factors that contribute to academic achievement of students in the school system as they include the school buildings, classroom, accommodation, libraries, laboratories, furniture, recreational equipment, apparatus and other instructional materials. Ubani (2019) also went further to state that their availability, relevance and adequacy contribute to academic achievement of students. He however, quickly added that unattractive school buildings and overcrowded classrooms among others contribute to poor academic achievement of the students in primary and other levels of education.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that school climate and school physical facilities influence the academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State. That there is significant relationship between school climate, school physical facilities and academic performance of students with disabilities in special schools in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Appropriate school authorities should endeavour to provide a conducive learning environment that has good school climate to enhance effective teaching and learning. Such environment should be safe with students been treated fairly by teachers.

2. Rivers State Government should provide adequate school physical facilities in special schools in order to enhance teaching and learning processes which would boost students with disabilities their academic performance.
3. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA), philanthropist and other charitable organizations are also implored to compliment the effort of the government in promoting a healthy learning environment for students with disabilities as this have been found to promote the students' academic performance.

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