

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN BUSINESS STUDIES IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT HARCOURT CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Ile, Chinedu Victor (PhD) & Okehs, Pabaraebiere
Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This study examined learning environment and academic performance of business studies students in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State, focusing on factors such as classroom size, availability of learning resources, positive school climate, and teacher quality. The literature review incorporated theoretical frameworks including the Classroom Learning Environment Theory by Betz (1985) and Social Constructivism Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1962). Four (2) aim and objectives, research questions were stated answered, and null hypotheses formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide this study. This study adopted correlational survey design and the population consisted of ninety-five (95) business studies teachers in the study area. Census sampling technique was adopted in this study because the entire population was used as the sample size. Two (2) self-developed instruments titled "Learning Environment of Business Studies Questionnaire (LEBuSSQu)" and "Academic Performance of Business Studies Students' Questionnaire (ACaBuSSQu)" were used to obtain the necessary data meant for this study. The instruments were validated by experts and a reliability index coefficient of 0.81 and 0.74 were obtained respectively through Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). The same statistical tool was used to analyze and answer the research questions and also used to test the null hypotheses. However, findings of this study revealed that there is a very strong, positive and significant relationship between learning resources, quality of teachers and academic performance of business studies students' in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State,. It was therefore recommended amongst others that Port Harcourt City Local Government Area educational policy makers should develop policies that takes a holistic approach to improving academic performance considering factors beyond classroom size, and learning resources. School administrators should invest in teacher professional development and assess and improve school environment regularly. Teachers are encouraged to employ diverse and more of student-centered teaching methods, and students, parents, and guardians should actively contribute to creating a conducive learning environment.

Keyword: Learning Environment, Classroom Size, Learning Resources, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have argued that there is a relationship between the learning environment and students' academic performance in business studies, including performance in examinations. As such the learning environment remains an important area that should be studied and well managed to enhance student's academic performance in business studies in secondary schools. According to Ajao (2011) the recent poor academic performance of students in business studies subject is of concern to all. But the quality of education not only depends on the teachers performing their duties, but it also depends on the effective coordination and utilization of the school's learning environment (Bossaert, Doumen & Buyse, 2011).

Learning environment encompasses all resources; human and material, programmes and opportunities, teaching/learning process and styles, relationships and cultures, for students and teachers to use creatively and imaginatively to learn and develop their potentials. According to

Oduwaye (2011) learning environment refers to the context in which learning takes place. It is the surrounding circumstances which affects learning. An environment in which learning occurs can be as wide as a particular society and it may be viewed as an educational institution. A leaning environment is the condition and influence which a learner comes in contact with, resulting in a series of complex interactions and ensuring a permanent change in the behaviour of the learner. This implies that a learner's acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies would occur under certain conditions and influence (Nwadiani, 2010). In the view of Obanya (2017) education does not occur in vacuum. It grows in a socio-political-economic environment and there can be no education without a society. Thus, a society provides a macro environment in which a school is located and from which it draws its resources. Within the school, there is also a macro environment which influences the operation and the extent to which learning can take place and the achievement of educational objectives. Therefore, the learning environment includes all the external conditions and influences in the school that affect the academic performance of students' such as class size, teacher quality, learning resources, positive school environment, among others. Business education has occupied a strategic place in the history of education in Nigeria. It is important to national development as it seeks to develop vocational knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for employment and advancement in a business career. Business studies is a practical-based subject that is usually taught at the junior secondary level of education in Nigeria. Ohiwerei (2013) remarks that business studies is designed to equip students with the practical skills that would enable them participate meaningfully in business activities in future. From the above definition, one major thing that stands out clear about business studies is that, it is a programme that provides practical skills for its recipients to gain employment in the business community while at the same time such recipients are useful to themselves. Business education holds a lot of promise for the recent spate of privatization of government parastatals and establishments which seek to inject the principles and strategies of business management to these establishments for greater efficiency on profitable results. The pathway to this is not through a rote-learning process, but a practical oriented discipline. Hence, to give a meaningful training in business studies, the learning environment must be conducive for learners and must be equipped with the needed and current learning resources, qualified teachers with current pedagogical styles, conducive school climate and a quiet and serene learning environment which serves to reinforce learning. The National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that business education is to be offered from the Junior Secondary School (JSS) up to the tertiary institutions. At whatever level the recipient terminates the learning process, it is expected that some vocational competencies would have been inculcated into the individual to make him/her a useful member in the society. The acquisition of such competencies should lead to the much-desired vocational development right from the junior and senior secondary schools. It would also qualify its recipients for further studies in those areas of competencies that they have chosen. Above it all, the student would be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to engage in a life of work in the office as well as for self-employment. For example, an NCE business graduate, apart from being a business education teacher at the JSS level, could earn a living by being a secretary/typist, stenographer, receptionist, an executive office services are offered at a profit.

Comfortable school environment, engaging qualified teachers, adequate use of learning resources, appropriate class size and good site devoid of noise will not only boost the morale of teachers and students but may also ensure the realization of the set educational objectives of business studies in secondary schools. The quality of education as seen in the products of the system not only depends on the teachers as reflected in the performance of their duties, but also in the effective coordination of the learning environment. Based on this backdrop, it is very expedient to note that there are paucity of works on the relationship between the learning environment as characterized by class size, noise, learning resources, school climate and quality teachers and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt city Local Government Area. The research helps to fill the gap by exploring the relationship between class

size, learning resources, positive school environment and quality teachers and its impact on students learning outcomes in business studies.

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between classroom size and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools.
- Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between learning resources and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools.

Classroom Size/Density and Students' Academic Performance in Business Studies

Classroom size is the number of students in a classroom environment under the control of a teacher at a time (Elliot, 2019). Mankinde (2012) sees classroom size as the population of learners in a classroom environment, whether small or overcrowded. A Classroom with less crowded population is easily managed and controlled by teachers, hence making learning easy and impactful. Crowded classrooms make learning ineffective and unattractive, noisy and causes fighting among students (Marcus, 2010). Crowded classrooms may also generate heat that could make the learners less attentive which affect students' academic performance in their studies negatively. Opare (2013), stated that crowded classrooms make learning ineffective and unattractive, noisy and often cause distractions among the students. Mba (2019) points out that students in overcrowded classrooms can be found playing during learning hours, discussing with each other and making noise thereby distracting other students, the teacher and the learning process. Umoren (2011) stated that a less crowded classroom environment is one whose population ranges from 20 to 30 or 35 at most. Such a class looks attractive and participation in the learning activities is active. According to him, class management and control is always highly achieved. This kind of classroom does not foster noise making and even distraction amongst the students. The students always pay rapt attention during teaching.

The classroom size and density of students' have an effect on how students experience and assimilate the subject matter in business studies. For example, in long halls where the teacher is expected to stand in front of the class, it is more difficult to establish eye contact, see what the students are doing and to ascertain if they are following up with the lesson or not, so students feel that their relationship with the teacher is not close which can lead to distractions. When no attention is being paid to the quality of the classroom size/density, students are more dissatisfied with the quality of learning.

Learning Resources and Students' Academic Performance

Learning may be defined as a change in behaviour which is more or less permanent in nature that results from activity, training or observation. Maxwell (2010) defines learning as a relatively enduring change in behaviour which is the function of prior behaviour (usually called practice). The idea of prior behaviour connotes some formal experiences. In other words, learning may be defined as a process whereby, as a result of experience, some change in patterns of adjustment occur.

Learning resources are those materials that can easily enhance effective learning in the school. With the provision, utilization and maintenance of learning resources in business studies, students in the class will have better understanding of business concepts in the learning process. Learning resources are defined as resources that organize and support instruction, such as textbooks, tasks, and supplementary resources. They refer to the human and non-human materials and facilities that can be used to ease, encourage, improve and promote teaching and learning activities. They are any collection of materials including animate and inanimate objects and human and non-human resources that a teacher may use in teaching and learning situations to help achieve

desired learning objectives. They are whatever materials used in the process of instruction. The Great encyclopedia defines learning resources as educational resources use to improve students' knowledge, abilities and skills to monitor their assimilation of information and to contribute to their overall performance. They are items that assist and describe the information aspect of teaching. Learning resources are basically any material or information containing resources that the teacher uses while instructing. These learning resources can include; computer, library, internet/ICT, microscope, projectors, video CD player, textbook, stationeries and exercise book. Learning resources play significant roles in the teaching and learning process. Agwu (2013) stated that: Learning resources are a crucial component of the entire classroom control and management; this is because the excitement usually generated by the provision and utilization of learning resources can make the student participate in the learning process.

Classroom Learning Environment Theory by Betz (1985)

The theory of learning environment was propounded by Betz in (1985). According to him, learning environment was originally started by mental health movement. This movement saw the school as an important influence upon personality adjustment and emotional development. Betz (1985) sees classroom environment and the school as a social environment where students come together from various home backgrounds to study and learn, and that the classroom as a matter of fact is a social system in its right. The author further stated that the school environment is a very unique social system and learning environment that people can be interacted with as well as predict students' academic performance. Bassegy (2012) stressed that the school environment as a social climate is based largely on the quality of relationships that exist there. These relationships significantly affect the students' academic performance. The development of school and classroom social interactions which is a result of participating in school/classroom activities and this may enhance students' academic performance.

This theory is related to this study in the sense that, there must be an interaction between the learning environment and all the players in the learning environment. That is to say that, if the learning environment is not conducive enough, lacks learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, and has low quality teachers, students will not be motivated to learn and may dislike the school in general, thus affecting their academic performance. However, if the learning environment is conducive, with all the needed learning resources, quality teachers, good classroom size with appropriate density of students, they will develop a positive attitude toward their study, hence increasing their academic performance in business studies.

Research Design

Research design describes the methods and plans for gathering and organizing data for the study. Design in non-experimental research is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance. Therefore, this study leveraged correlational survey design because correlational survey designs are studies that basically seeks to establish if linear relationship exists between two or more variables.

Population of the Study

Population is any group of people, events or subjects that are of interest to the researcher and that they wish to investigate. Therefore, the population of this study comprised of 95 business studies teachers saddled with academic and administrative responsibilities in all the junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. See Appendix for the population distribution.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study consisted of the entire business studies teachers that made up the population of the study in public junior secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Local Government Area

of Rivers State, which is 95 since it is of a manageable size. Hence, this study adopted the census sampling technique which is ideal to be used when the entire population of a study is considered useful.

Instrument for Data Collection

Two self-developed instrument titled "Learning Environment of Business Studies Questionnaire (LEBuSQu)" and "Academic Performance Questionnaire (ACaPEQu)" with the modified likert type a four (4) point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA-4), Agree (A-3), Disagree (D-2) and Strongly Disagree (SD-1) will be adopted for this study.

Therefore, the first set of twenty-four (24) items measure Learning Environment of Business Studies Questionnaire (LEBuSQu) while the second set of six (6) items also measured "Academic Performance Questionnaire (ACaPEQu)" in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The instruments were divided into two sections namely: Section A and B. Section A covered respondents' demographic information while Section B covered the instructions guiding the filing of the items in the instruments.

Validation of the Instrument

Validation of the instrument represents measure of the objectives the researcher is prepared to achieve. Hence, to ensure the validity of the instrument, each item in the instrument was cross-checked with the questions that were answered.

The researcher employed face and content validity methods. In this regard, the instrument was scrutinized by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in the fields of study. After a careful study of the questions, observation and corrections were made by the validators and the instrument was modified. Based on this, the instrument was able to measure what it ought to measure.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability of the instrument states the precision, accuracy and consistency of measure of instrument. Thus, a test-retest method of reliability was adopted in this study. The research instrument was administered to 20 business studies teachers of private secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Areas of Rivers State who were not part of this study. The same instrument was re-administered to the same group after two weeks interval and specifically, Learning Environment of Business Studies Questionnaire (LEBuSQu) which represented the independent variable computed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.81 while the dependent variables representing Academic Performance Questionnaire (ACaPEQu) was equally computed and 0.74 reliability co-efficient was obtained. Thus, both instruments were deemed reliable for this study.

Administration of the Instrument

With the aid of a research assistant, the researcher administered copies of the questionnaire to the teachers and their responses were collected at an agreed date and time. In all, ninety-five (95) copies of the questionnaire was administered.

Method of Data Analysis

The chosen method of data analysis for this study is the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. This statistical tool is employed to investigate and answer the research questions related to the relationship between the learning environment and students' academic performance in business studies. Additionally, it is used to test the formulated hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05.

The rationale for selecting the Pearson correlation coefficient lies in its ability to quantify the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables. In this study, the variables of

interest include factors within the learning environment and students' academic performance in business studies. The Pearson correlation coefficient is particularly suitable when examining associations between continuous variables, making it well-suited for assessing the relationship between these educational variables.

Results

Presentation of Null Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between classroom size and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Test of Correlation of Relationship between Classroom Size and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students at 0.05 Level of Significance

Variables	N	Df	r-cal	r-critical	LS	Decision
Classroom Size	95					
		93	0.65	0.196	0.05	Significant /Rejected
Academic Performance	95					

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2023)

Table above shows that the calculated r-value of 0.65 is greater than r-critical value of 0.196. Therefore, since the computed r-value is greater than r-critical value, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between classroom size and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State is hereby rejected. However, this implies that there is a significant relationship between the two (2) variables in the aforementioned secondary schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between learning resources and academic performance of business studies students' junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Test of Correlation of Relationship between Learning Resources and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students at 0.05 Level of Significance

Variables	N	Df	r-cal	r-critical	LS	Decision
Learning Resources	95					
		93	0.65	0.196	0.05	Significant /Rejected
Academic Performance	95					

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2023)

Table above indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.65 is greater than r-critical value of 0.196. Therefore, since the computed r-value is greater than r-critical value, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between learning resources and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State is hereby rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the two (2) variables in the aforementioned secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of the Findings

Classroom Size and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students

The result analysis in Table 4.1 shows that there is a strong and positive relationship between classroom size and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. Furthermore, the associated hypothesis shown in Table 4.5 shows that there is a significant relationship between classroom size and academic performance of business studies students.

The findings of the second objective, which investigated the relationship between classroom size and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools, showed that a weak negative correlation (-0.060) was observed between classroom size and academic performance. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between classroom size and academic performance was supported. The correlation was weak and negative.

On one hand, proponents of smaller classrooms argue that larger spaces become stages for teacher exhaustion and student distraction. Studies paint a picture of personalized attention dwindling as class size grows, making it harder for teachers to tailor lessons and offer crucial feedback, especially in a subject like business studies with its intricacies. This lack of individual support can leave students feeling lost in a sea of faces, hindering their ability to navigate the complexities of financial concepts and market strategies.

Furthermore, larger classrooms can become breeding grounds for distractions, both from rambunctious classmates and the cacophony of the environment. This disrupts focus and engagement, particularly for students who struggle with self-regulation. Some research suggests that larger classes foster disengagement, making it harder for students to truly connect with the material and unlock their potential. Additionally, teachers in these settings often face increased stress and workload, leading to a decline in instructional quality and creating a less conducive learning environment for everyone.

However, the tango of class size reveals counterpoints as well. Some argue that larger classes can become vibrant communities, fostering collaboration and peer learning. Studies like Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, and Russ, (2009) highlight the potential for group projects and discussions to flourish in larger settings, offering students valuable opportunities to learn from and alongside their peers. This dynamic exchange can be particularly beneficial in business studies, where teamwork and communication are crucial skills.

Furthermore, research like Hanushek (2003) suggests that the impact of class size might be a complex tango with other factors, like teacher quality and student motivation, playing equally important roles. This means that simply shrinking the class size isn't a guaranteed waltz to success; the quality of instruction, classroom management, and individual student characteristics all contribute to the final performance.

In conclusion, the study adds a valuable verse to the ongoing ballad of class size and academic performance. While the faint negative correlation suggests a potential disadvantage of larger classes, the lack of statistical significance underscores the need for further exploration with bigger samples and more controlled environments. Ultimately, the goal should be to create a learning environment that fosters optimal performance for all students, regardless of class size, through effective pedagogy, mindful classroom management, and supportive resources. Only then can we ensure that every student, whether in a grand ballroom or a cozy studio, can find their rhythm and excel in the intricate tango of learning.

Learning Resources and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students

The result analysis in Table above reveals that there is a very strong and positive relationship between learning resources and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. In addition, the associated hypothesis shown in Table 4.6 reveals that there is a significant relationship between learning resources and academic performance of business studies students.

The findings on the third objective that ascertained the relationship between learning resources and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools revealed that

a weak positive correlation (0.066) was found between the availability of learning resources and academic performance. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between learning resources and academic performance was supported. The correlation was weak and not statistically significant.

This finding aligns with some studies that have demonstrated a weak or non-existent relationship between learning resources and academic performance. For instance, a study by Muijs et al. (2009) found that the presence of more resources in schools did not necessarily translate to improved student learning outcomes. Similarly, a study by Marsh et al. (2012) concluded that the impact of resources on student achievement was complex and moderated by other factors, such as school leadership and teaching quality.

However, a vast body of research highlights the positive and significant relationship between access to diverse and high-quality learning resources and student academic achievement. For example, a study by Hattie (2009) identified the availability of learning resources as one of the most significant factors influencing student learning. Similarly, a study by Ayeni, Adebayo, and Balogun. (2020) found that students in schools with more extensive and updated resources performed significantly better on standardized tests compared to students in resource-limited schools.

The weak positive, but statistically insignificant, correlation between learning resources and business studies performance in the current study could be attributed to several factors. One possibility is that the study did not adequately capture the types and quality of learning resources available to students. Additionally, factors such as students' access to and utilization of these resources, as well as the teaching methods employed, might have played a more significant role in influencing academic performance than the mere availability of resources.

CONCLUSION

The study on Learning Environment and Students' Academic Performance in Business Studies in Junior Secondary Schools yielded several insights but also highlighted the complexity of factors influencing academic success. This implies that solely focusing on these factors might not independently determine students' success in business studies.

These results underscore the multifaceted nature of academic achievement. Factors beyond the immediate learning environment likely contribute significantly. Aspects like teaching methods, student engagement, individual motivation, and other unexplored variables may play pivotal roles in students' academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bases on the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Rivers State Educational policymakers should develop policies that take a holistic approach to improving academic performance, considering factors beyond classroom size and resources. Consider broader strategies that address teaching quality, student engagement, and overall positive school environment.
2. School administrators should invest in ongoing teacher professional development programs to enhance teaching quality. This can positively impact students' academic performance in business studies. Also, regularly assess and improve the school climate to create a positive and conducive learning environment. Strategies may include fostering positive teacher-student relationships and promoting a supportive atmosphere.
3. Teachers should explore diverse teaching methods that cater to different learning styles. This can enhance engagement and contribute to improved academic performance. Also, establish channels for students to provide feedback on the learning environment. This can help teachers understand specific challenges and areas for improvement.

REFERENCES

- Ajao, A. (2011). Teachers' effectiveness on students' academic performance. *Journal of Education and Practice, 5*(22).
- Agwu, U.A. (2013). The concept and implications of the new 6-3-3-4 secondary school system in Nigeria. *Nigerian Statesman, 4*(7), 6 - 8.
- Ayeni, A. J., Adebayo, O. A., & Balogun, O. (2020). Impact of availability of learning resources on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology, 16*(1), 1-14.
- Betz, S. G. (1985). *Classroom learning environment*. Longman.
- Bossaert, G., Doumen, S.E. & Buyse, K. V. (2011). Predicting students' academic achievement after the transition to first grade: A two-year longitudinal study. *Journal of applied Developmental Psychology, 32*(3), 47-57.
- Elliot, S.N. (2019). *Educational Psychology: Effective teaching, effective learning*. McGraw-Hill.
- Hanushek, E. A. (1997). Assessing the effects of school resources on student performance: An update. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 19*(2), 197-214.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Mankinde, O. K. (2012). *A survey study of elementary classroom seating designs*. ERIC document, 454-194
- Marsh, C. J., Hau, K. T., & Khoo, S. T. (2012). The effect of resources on student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Educational Research, 51*(1), 46-56.
- Marcus, O.U. (2010). *Environmental variables and students' reading habits in secondary schools*. Unpublished M. Ed. Thesis, university of Calabar.
- Maxwell, I. E. (2010). Chaos outside the home: The school environment. In: Evans, G. W. & Wachs, T. D. (Eds.), *Chaos and its influence on children's development: An ecological perspective: American Psychological Association*.
- Mba, T. N. (2009). *Curriculum development: Concepts and processes*. Horay publication.
- Muijs, D., Harris, A., Chapman, C., Stoll, L., & Russ, J. (2009). Improving schools through better resource management: A review of research. *School Leadership & Management, 29*(4), 373-393.
- Obanya, P. (2017). *"Thinking and talking education"*. Evans Brothers Nigeria Limited.
- Opare, P.C. (2013). Examining space and place in learning environments. A paper presented at the Connected International Conference on Design Education, 9-12 July, University of New South Wales.

