

SCHOOL CLIMATE, TEACHER QUALITY AND STUDENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN BUSINESS STUDIES IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT HARCOURT CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined School Climate, Teacher Quality, School Environment and academic performance of business studies students in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State. The literature review incorporated theoretical frameworks including the Classroom Learning Environment Theory by Betz (1985) and Social Constructivism Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1962). Four (4) 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 "Teachers Quality 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 quality of teachers and academic performance of business studies students' in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, there is a strong, moderate, positive and significant relationship between positive school environment, classroom size and academic performance of students' respectively in the aforementioned secondary schools in 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.

Keywords: Teacher Quality, Academic Performance, Business Education

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance refers to the accomplishment of a given task that is measured against predetermined standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed. It also refers to the act of academics in which students are engaged in their studies and how well they meet the standards set out by the authorities responsible. Pruettt (2010) reveals that academic performance is how students deal with their studies and responsibilities given to them by their teachers. Louis (2012) states that academic performance is the ability of students to obtain high grades and standard test scores in school courses, especially courses that are part of the core academic curriculum. It is affected by the degree of original learning, the methods of learning and learners' memory capacity among others. Academic performance of students in Business Studies is defined as the learning outcomes of students that have undergone teaching and learning in business studies which includes knowledge, skills and ideas acquired and retained through their course of studies within and outside the classroom situation (Adepoju, 2011). It is quantified by a measure of student's

academic standing in relation to those of other students of the same age (Adelola, 2014). The academic performance of students in Business Studies is a function of several factors which are inter-related. These factors are either internal or external. That is, it is either within the control of the individual or outside his/her control. However, there are quite a number of factors that determine the level and quality of students' academic performance in business studies. One of such factors is the learning environment characterized by the class size, school climate, and learning resources in the school, this is the concern of this study.

An effective learning environment significantly improves and enhances the learning outcomes of students in business studies (Lee & Cho, 2013) and creates more conducive circumstances for students to learn (Lippman, 2010). The learning environment is of immense importance in shaping and reshaping students' intellectual ability. However, supportive and favourable school environment enriched with enough learning facilities and favourable climate make students more comfortable, and concentrated on their academic activities that result in high academic performance. The influence of school environment on academic achievement of students has been an issue of concern to all stakeholders in education. The learning environment is becoming uninteresting for learning of business studies and business related subjects, lack of students' interest in business studies and business related subjects, poor performance of students' in business studies and its related subjects, examination malpractices, inadequate provision of learning resources, technology such as internet and computers are not provided for and where they are provided for, they are misused and not maintained, distractions due to noisy environment, qualified teachers with modern pedagogical strategies that promote effective teaching and learning are in short fall, lack of experiential and practical knowledge and skills, classroom sizes are usually small and overcrowded compared to the number of students. The cumulative effect is that most of these students perform poorly in class activities and assessment processes. Some are not sound academically after their schooling years and some engage in examination malpractices since the materials which would have been used for their learning process are elusive, they lack the necessary skills and competence which is one of the aims of business studies. It is against this background that this study examined the relationship between learning environment and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.

Null Hypotheses

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

- Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between school climate and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools.
- Ho₂ There is no relationship between teachers' quality and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools.

School Environment and Students' Academic Performance

Studies have shown that there are positive relationships between the school climate and students' behaviour which improves the students' academic performance (Lippman, 2010). Research has indicated that those using the learning environment are influenced not only with the space in which they study, but by the way they interact with their surroundings. The school climate of the learning environment also affects the students' experiences of the space and are worth mentioning, it also ranked as one of the main sources of comfort in the learning environment (Frontczak & Wargocki, 2011). According to Higgins, et. al. (2015) the school visual climate stimulation has a psychological effect on students in mental receptivity; lighting, colour and personal element all contribute. Lawson (2012) agreed with Higgins' view and added that the visual elements in the school climate not only affect students during the lesson, but also have a clear impact on students' behaviour and performance, because they enhance their ability to understand and gain knowledge effectively.

Teacher Quality and Students' Academic Performance

The students are at the focus of the teachers' profession, the current literature on teaching and the learning environment pays particular attention to the term of 'effective learning environment' (Earthman, 2012). The teacher quality is a critical part of the effectiveness and performance of their practice in education; Frith and Whitehouse (2019) stated that: "The child at the center of work and the environment is made evident in the proportions of the spaces and furniture, and the detailing of work settings including the drama space, lounge, games area, studio/laboratory, classroom workshop, quiet study areas, multi-media hub, areas for group discussion and targeted teaching as well as carpeted floor areas for construction, play and socializing. Within these diverse yet integrated settings, teachers operate as fluid teams guiding student's journeys of inquiry and discovery. The aesthetic language of materials, colour, texture, form, space and light are stylishly contemporary."

Several studies have revealed that theories of the teaching environment have been discussed from two perspectives. Barber and Mourshed (2017) refer to 'the teacher and educational system as crucial to learning', emphasizing the educational factors like their teaching skills, communication skills, teaching strategies, experience, organization, technologies and students' capacity. They focus more on the teacher's quality as the core elements in providing the optimal educational system which is based on three important issues:

- 1- Choosing the right and qualified people to be teachers,
- 2- Developing and improving their skills to be effective instructors,
- 3- Providing strong system to deliver the best possible support for all students.

Salama (2019) accepted the above factors and although did not ignore the importance of the teaching and educational systems quality, pays more attention to the quality of the learning environment as an important aspect. Over the past years, the development of educational systems, including the learning environment, has drawn attention from educational authorities and educators, who have become more aware of new approaches to learning and teaching in business studies. They advise business studies teachers to apply variety of methods and techniques that could improve the overall experience of teaching/learning and build a successful learning environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Hutchinson (2013) opined that two factors affect the learning environment; first is the course and curriculum that are the educational factors: styles, aims, objective, and assessments. Second are teachers, supervisors and facilitators which reflect the learning process, enthusiasm and teaching style and strategies. Moreover, student's previous experience, motivation and learning style also enhance their effective learning performance.

Cotterill (2013) claims that the problem is not engaging quality teachers in the teaching/learning of business studies but that they use their old knowledge and pedagogical styles such as the teacher-centered teaching style and it is no longer suitable, since many current pedagogical researches have emphasized that traditional lectures and workshops do not enliven the development of an effective learning environment. Teacher quality will be discussed under the following aspects in this study;

Social Constructivism Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1962)

The Russian psychologist and teacher Lev Vygotsky (1962), first stated that we learn through our interactions and communication with others and our environment. The author examined how our social environment influence the learning process and learning outcomes. The author suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their environment, peers, teachers and other experts. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration and

feedback. He wrote about social processes as a core factor affecting how cognitive understanding arises. Vygotsky developed the theory called 'outside out' with emphasis on the internalization of contact between parent or teachers on one side, and children on the other side by using activities, tools and language to create education and learning. Therefore, in this theory, human activity is classified by the extensive range of tools that might be used. And that language is what children initially use to communicate and interact with each other. It enhances their ability to carry on discussion of a developing concept and build their knowledge. As a result, instructional strategies that promote literacy across the curriculum play a vital role in knowledge construction as well as the combination of whole class leadership, individual and group coaching and independent learning. Moreover, teachers need to provide the opportunity for student to manage discussion about their learning. Schools are thus seen as cultural tools that exist not just to teach the community, but also to let people naturally develop, and provide them with interaction that forces their mental functions to learn and receive new knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky developed the idea that the role of teachers and educators is to guide learners and enhance learning procedures, besides presenting the best possible support to advance students' thinking, achievements, knowledge, experience, and function. While Vygotsky argued that children learn through the means of language. Consequently, social constructivism theory is influenced by Vygotsky's ideas about 'guided learning approach' and a 'scaffolding approach'. Guided learning is a constructed approach by which teachers manage discussions to share and join knowledge, whereas the scaffolding approach aims to enrich students' minds to generate new knowledge, and it consists of providing learning resources and challenging activities accompanied by a mentoring system from teachers to allow students to construct their understanding and performance independently. Classroom strategies must be suited to a scaffolding approach if it is adopted, such as offering students plenty of time to develop relationships with each other, and then giving them the opportunity to respond freely in lessons and shape the teaching method to ensure

students are building an understanding of concept and knowledge. This motivates students to engage themselves with the subject and with the teacher by asking open questions and requesting preparation to find solutions.

In essence, Vygotsky recognizes that learning always occurs and cannot be separated from a social context. Consequently, instructional strategies that promote the distribution of expert knowledge where students collaboratively work together to conduct research, share their results and perform or produce a final project, help to create a collaborative community of learners. Knowledge construction occurs within Vygotsky's (1962) social context that involves student-student and expert-student collaboration on real world problems or task that build on each person's language, skills and experience shaped by each individual's culture" (Vygotsky, 1978).

The implication of social constructivism theory reveals that the teaching experience and learning environment of business studies play a significant role in enhancing students learning and academic performance and outcomes. Knowing how students gain knowledge and process information in business studies is an important factor when designing an appropriate and successful learning experience in business studies. Teachers control the education process from a cognitive point of view, and learners are likely to discover more when offered encouragement. Therefore, educators need to take this into account by providing relevant and current teaching/learning materials, using business studies teaching/learning methods that engages and stimulate students' cognitive processes along with creating links in their minds that enhance their learning and sensory experience.

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

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant relationship between school climate 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 School Climate and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students at 0.05 Level of Significance

Variables	N	Df	r-cal	r-critical	LS	Decision
School Climate	95					
		93	0.82	0.196	0.05	Significant /Rejected
Academic Performance	95					

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2023)

Table above reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.82 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 school climate 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 quality of teachers 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 Quality of Teachers and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students at 0.05 Level of Significance

Variables	N	Df	r-cal	r-critical	LS	Decision
Quality of Teachers	95					
					0.05	Significant

		93	0.80	0.196	/Rejected
Academic Performance	95				

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2023)

Table above shows that the calculated r-value of 0.80 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 quality of teachers 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.

School Climate and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students

The result analysis in Table 4.3 indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between school climate 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 above shows that there is a significant relationship between school climate and academic performance of business studies students.

The findings of the fourth objective that examined the relationship between the school climate and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary schools showed that a weak positive correlation (0.151) was identified between a positive school climate and academic performance. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between school climate and academic performance was supported. The correlation was weak and not statistically significant.

This finding partially aligns with some research that has demonstrated a weak or non-existent relationship between school climate and academic performance. For instance, a study by Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins. (2013) found that school climate had a minimal effect on student achievement compared to other factors such as family background and prior academic performance. Similarly, a study by Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk. (2000) concluded that changes in school climate did not necessarily translate to significant improvements in student outcomes.

However, a vast body of research highlights the positive and significant relationship between a positive school climate and student academic achievement. For example, a study by Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy. (2011) found that a positive school climate characterized by safety, trust, and respect was associated with higher levels of student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, improved academic performance. Similarly, a study by Roorda, Koth, and Bearman. (2011) concluded that students in schools with a positive and supportive climate showed greater academic gains compared to students in schools with a negative climate.

The weak positive, but statistically insignificant, correlation between school climate 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 specific dimensions of school climate that are most conducive to learning, such as student-teacher relationships, peer interactions, and classroom environment. Additionally, factors such as school leadership, teacher quality, and student individual differences might have played a more significant role in influencing academic performance than the overall school climate alone.

Quality of Teachers and Academic Performance of Business Studies Students

Finally, the result analysis in Table 4.4 indicates that there is a very strong and positive relationship quality of teachers and academic performance of business studies students in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. Furthermore, the associated hypothesis is shown in Table 4.8 reveals that there is a significant relationship between quality of teachers and academic performance of business studies students.

The findings of the fifth objective that examined the relationship between teachers' quality and students' academic performance in business studies in junior secondary school revealed that a very weak positive correlation (0.032) was observed between teachers' quality and academic performance. The null hypothesis that there is no relationship between teachers' quality and academic performance was supported. The correlation was very weak and not statistically significant.

This finding is surprising, as numerous studies have established a positive and significant relationship between teacher quality and student academic achievement. For example, a study by Hattie (2009) identified teacher quality as the single most important factor influencing student learning, accounting for a large portion of the variance in student outcomes. Similarly, a study by Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain. (2005) found that students assigned to more effective teachers exhibited significant gains in standardized test scores compared to their peers with less effective teachers.

However, it is important to note that defining and measuring teacher quality is complex and multifaceted. This study's specific definition and measurement methods for teacher quality could have contributed to the weak and insignificant findings. Additionally, factors such as student motivation, home environment, and classroom resources might have played a more significant role in influencing academic performance than teacher quality alone.

CONCLUSION

The study on School Climate, Teachers Quality and Students' Academic Performance in Business Studies in Junior Secondary Schools yielded several insights but also highlighted the complexity of factors influencing academic success. The findings suggest that while certain elements like positive school climate, and teachers' quality showed weak correlations with academic performance, none of these relationships were statistically significant. 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. 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.
2. Parents and guardians should encourage active involvement in students' education. Regular communication with teachers and participation in school activities can positively impact both the learning environment and academic outcomes.
3. Students should advocate for the availability of diverse learning resources in the school environment. Participate in discussions about the learning climate to contribute to improvements.

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