

## CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper discussed the conclusive physical environment that is necessary for effective Teaching and Learning. It tries to show the relevance of conducive atmosphere that could enhance positive transformation of the child as he passes through schooling. In addition, the psychological traits of the child that enhance positive learning are discussed which include their development of self esteem and self concepts. Teachers' behaviour and expectation are discussed at length in relation to certain theories of classroom interaction that affects learning.*

### Introduction

In trying to make teaching and learning effective, the classroom environment is crucial and needs to be given attention. The classroom is the centre of action where the transformation of the child/pupil (character and outlook wise) is enhanced through teaching and learning.

The first aspect of such enhancement could be achieved through giving serious consideration to the physical classroom environment, in which the psychological nature and needs of the child are enhanced. This paved way for the enhancement of effective and conducive learning environment for positive transformation of the child as he passes through schooling. On the other hand, there is the need to

consider his interactions with his peers and teachers from sociological perspective for teaching and learning to be effectively executed in the classroom environment. These perspectives (Psychological and Sociological) have the teacher as the most important pioneer, who is suppose to ensure that effective environment for teaching and learning is achieved because the teacher is entrusted with the task of making the classroom conducive, effective and memorable environment for both the teacher and his students.

This paper dwelled on the psychological traits of the pupil and child, which need to be moulded and directed towards effective learning by the teacher. In the same vein the classroom environment where interaction

takes place has been considered from an interactionist perspective, because learning is about the individual learner and his interaction with other learners which may facilitates or hinders learning outcomes. Handling the psychological and sociological needs of the pupils positively has gone a long way in enhancing a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning, to take place, which will ultimately results in positive learning outcomes.

### **Physical Classroom Environment**

Teaching is more than mere verbal communication of knowledge by the teacher. The influence of the teacher on his students is significant and therefore, teachers need relevant skills as well as development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-control in order to perform their duty effectively. According to Ada (2004) the teacher's primary responsibilities include not only the organization of learning experience, but also the organization of the physical environment, which is friction-free and satisfying to the children, he is more likely to be effective. This will bring about order and discipline, which are essential to effective teaching and learning.

Akubue (1991) maintained that pupils usually bring into the

classroom various characteristic traits emanating from various factors such as personal likes and dislikes that are idiosyncratic to the individual students. If these are not properly checked, the classroom will not provide the needed environment for the conduct and achievement of educational activities such as organization of the teachers work, execution of educational plans and implementation of instructional efforts.

The teacher should make sure that the classroom arrangement is conducive to learning with a manageable number of students. An overcrowd classroom is inconvenient to both the teacher and the students. It should be well ventilated with chairs and tables to make learning and teaching more effective. There should be adequate lighting with posters on the walls that are educational to create a conducive learning environment for all.

### **Psychological Traits of the Students**

Apart from the enhancement of conducive classroom physical environment afore-mentioned, the psychological traits of the students which manifest in the learning environment need to be cross checked and handled with care to pave way for effective learning and teaching. The learning and

teaching processes involve the student, his peers and the teachers as stakeholders for making every thing effective. This could be achieved through giving consideration to the following.

**Enhancement of Self-Esteem and Self-Concepts of the Pupils:** High self-esteem aids the learning process, low self-esteem hinders it. Without adequate degree of self-esteem, students will feel an underlying anxiety, which will interfere with effective learning. According to Samuels (1977) teachers can convey their expectations of a child's level of performance to the child and should such expectations be high, the child's self concept and self esteem will be positively affected, which will result in the child showing improvement in academic performance. This goes a long way in supporting the notion that the really effective teacher should aim to make all his/her pupils feel capable of significant improvement in their academic performance. Many psychologists stressed the effectiveness of praise in learning environment (Skinner, 1966, Rutter, et al, 1979), which also serve as a booster to high self esteem in the classroom environment.

**Teachers Behaviour and Expectation on Students:** Rosenshine (1971) stressed that a teacher has to provide security in

the form of firm standards of behaviour. Warmth impliedly does not mean permissiveness. Pupils should be made very aware of what sort of behaviour is expected of them, at specific times to know when their behaviour is acceptable. This according to Good and Brophy (1977) would enable the pupils to internalize feelings of worthiness as they conform to the specified kinds of behaviour in the environment. This is because, teacher behaviours have been shown to indicate different messages to different children; positive expectations like performing well in a test by a student identified as brilliant by the teacher favour students while a negative expectations like failure to pass a test by a dull student who was already labeled and condemned as such by the teacher fails to raise student's performance in classroom learning.

Nonetheless, not all teachers convey such differential expectations because it is generally not good to allow such negative expectations to be experienced by the students in the classroom environment. But it is a feature in teacher-student interaction in the classroom which needs to be done away with, if meaning and conducive environment is to be created that will facilitate teaching and learning. It should be stressed that teachers should develop only

positive expectations towards the students to be effective.

**Incentive and Motivation:** It is generally believed that teachers do actually treat children differently if they hold strong expectations about them. Good and Brophy (1977) asserts that teachers allow less time for low achievers and spend more time on those whom they perceive as high achievers when these categories of students are answering questions. When the presumed low achievers fail to answer a question, the teachers, passes on to the next child without encouraging the presumed low student to make another attempt, which is contrary to their responses to the presumed high achievers, who are asked to make another attempt when they fail. This is mainly because less attention is given to the presumed "low" than the presumed "high" achievers who seem to be closer to them in classroom environment.

Effective classroom environment can only be achieved if teachers treat their students with equality and also serve as a source of motivation to all irrespective of their different abilities. So long as they are in the same environment, equality should prevail, because incentive in the form of praise go along in making the students put in their best and strive to excel in learning.

Goodlad (1984) maintained that learning is enhanced when students understand what is expected of them, get recognition for their work expressed through incentives, learning about their errors and receiving guidance in improving their performance in the learning environment.

**Socio-Emotional Attitude of the Teacher:** The teacher is serving the role of an agent of socialization, model and guardian in the school environment. He/she is supposed to deal with students with good intentions and understanding when they are emotionally disturbed. This will serve as a motivation to pupils to feel free to interact in the classroom environment. Children can only learn through actively interacting with their environment. According to Clarke and Clarke (1976), cited in Yakasai (2006) children will never learn to speak unless they are spoken to. Therefore without adequate stimulation and interaction, speech cannot develop. Students should be accommodated by the teachers with warmth attitude and understanding when in need and encouraged to ask questions when curious without any form of harassment by the teachers.

Vernon (1992) highlighted that in western countries, children are encouraged to ask questions and explore the environment, which is

contrary to many traditional societies in Nigeria where children are discouraged from asking adults too many questions. Teachers should be accommodating and tolerant. Rosenthal and Jacobs (1968) stated that a warm social-emotional mode is associated with effective learning. Naturally, teachers cannot be expected to love their pupils in the same way as family members; nevertheless a warm accepting teacher, provides a background that is conducive to learning environment, for example, being kind and understanding to students when they are in need.

#### **Teaching Strategies for Discovery and Exploration:**

Teaching strategies should be channeled to produce a general climate of optimism in the classroom environment, so that all pupils are encouraged to feel effective and worthy. The teacher should provide new experiences through exploration. It is through exploration and manipulation of objects that the pupil learns to feel effective in his environment. Good and Brophy (1977) stressed that teachers should cater for the pupils need to be active in their learning environment and not merely to remain passive partners in the learning process.

Therefore, teachers should design and implement successful teaching strategies like student centered teaching strategy, which will

acknowledge and accept each individuals personal experiences and perspectives and facilitates students learning. Classroom environment should emphasize collaboration and provide space for exploring diversity of opinion.

#### **The Interactionist Theory and Classroom Environment**

The interactionist approach provides a day to day life of school environment and by extension, classroom environment which stressed that children careers are not necessarily determined by such factors as I.Q and home background. Woods (1983) claimed that the interactionist perspective has practical application because it provides information which could lead to better teaching, reduction in conflict and deviance within the classroom environment. Many interactionists refer to class differences in education but fail to explain how those class differences originated. The most important thing is, interactionism provides a sociological perspective/alternative to the psychological ones discussed at the beginning of this paper.

The main idea behind interactionism is to eliminate class inequalities within the school environment by looking at the day to day life of the children with classroom environment as a pointer to differential in achievement. To the interactionists, self-concept is

produced in interaction with others, that is, the self concept of the pupil is influenced by the other pupils and the teachers with whom he/she interacts. The self concept according to Haralambus and Holborn (2000), may be modified if others constantly contradict it.

In the classroom environment, each individual has a social role like having a class teacher/leader, group leader and etc, which are fixed and unchangeable. Subcultures emerge as strategies to cope with school life and classroom environment. The sub-cultures are produced by members of the group in the same classroom environment.

The interactionists provided a frame work for studies into the effect of the environment on students performance through (1) typing (2) labeling theory and (3) self fulfilling prophecy theory.

**The Typing Theory:** This branch of interactionists concerns itself with the way in which teachers make sense of and also respond to the behaviour of their pupils. Hargreaves, Hester and Mellor (1975) analysed the way teachers classified and typed their students in a study conducted on how teachers *got to know* their new pupils at their first year in the school. This was done using 3 stages: Speculation which is based on hypothesis and prediction, elaboration stage as the hypotheses

are being gradually confirmed and stabilization stage where pupils actions could be evaluated in terms of the type of pupil they are thought to be. The effect of their theory manifest in the classroom environment as follows:

- a) Students social class affects/influences the way he is perceived by the teacher and others (students) as high achiever or low achiever depending on his class.
- b) Students appearance, manner, assessment of their parents on their conduct and adjustments. Hargreaves (1975) concluded that teachers can affect pupils progress in other ways apart from determining what classes they are placed in and what course they take.

**Labeling Theory:** When teachers determine the type of students they have in the classroom environment, it becomes easier to label them as either brilliant, dull, troublesome etc. This is based on their traits as perceived and confirmed by the teacher in classroom interactions. This could be positive or negative to classroom interactions for effective teaching and learning. That is, the teachers interactions with their perception of their students and their being labeled as either low achievers or higher

achievers in classroom environment. (Haralambus and Holburn 2000).

**Self-fulfilling Prophecy:** This argues that predictions made by the teacher about the future failure and success of pupil will tend to come true because predictions were already made. The teacher categorizes the pupils as either "high" or "low" achievers and act accordingly. Their actions will be as already predicted by the teacher and in this way a prophecy is fulfilled. There the pupils attainment in classroom environment defined on the level of or degree of interaction between himself and his teacher, as well as his fellow students (Haralambus and Holburn 2000).

Therefore, all learning effectiveness depends on the teacher's typing, labeling of student and self fulfillment of his/her predictions which place the students as a low or high achievers. The pupils' self-concept will tend to be shaped by the teacher's definition, their actions being a reflection of what the teacher expects. The attainment level is a result of interaction between himself and the teacher. (Haralambus and Holburn 2000).

**Limitations for Effective Classroom Environment:** The interactionist perspective have some limitations which should be

given considerations for effective classroom environment.

- (i) Some studies were found to be rather descriptive and fail to explain the phenomena they describes, like being vague in explaining the exact behaviour of the teacher or student in a typical situation.
- (ii) Relative uniformity of meaning that is behind what account as knowledge and ability having a wider and more fundamental basis.
- (iii) The school favoured a progressive pupils-centred education which treats each individual as unique and discourage the differentiation of pupils according to their ability.
- (iv) Interactionism needs to broaden its concern to take account of such factors as the educational policies which determines the conditions in which teachers and pupils work

These limitations will have to be overcome for effective classroom interactions. In the classroom environment, teachers attitude towards the students should always be positive and a source of motivation and inspiration to the students. Teachers should always have positive predictions where the students are concerned. Teachers

should avoid labeling their students as dull, backwards, but instead find means of assisting them to perform better among their peers in classroom interactions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the points highlighted in this paper, it is recommended that:

Teachers should create a conducive atmosphere for learning by making sure the physical environment is adequately prepared with all that will enable students to learn in terms of structure, ventilation, seating arrangement, lighting etc.

Teachers should ensure equal treatment among their students irrespective of their level of intelligence and performance

Teachers should encourage and motivate their students by being effective in teaching for the students to achieve better students and ensure and form only positive impression.

### **Conclusion**

The paper dwelled on classroom environment for effective teaching and learning. It tends to look at the psychological nature of the pupils which needs to be considered on the one hand, and the sociological concerns from the interactionist perspective despite all its inadequacy. Nonetheless it gives a

divergent view on what is the norm in student's academic performance in classroom.

The interactionist view was considered because it attempted to bring out new strategies that influence classroom interactions and tried to assist the psychological view of such affiliation. The most important thing is each of the view point in this paper tried to explain the classroom environment which is to be reorganized for effectiveness in learning and teaching. The teacher has a lot to offer in making the classroom environment a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning.

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