

HEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: A PANACEA FOR SCHOOL GOALS ACHIEVEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to highlight on the need for healthful school environment as a remedy for the attainment of school goals in developing countries. To a reasonable extent, the characteristics of healthful school environment, factors that influences healthful school environment, school goals as well as problems associated with unhealthy school environment were considered. Hence, conclusion was drawn and recommendations made such as: provision of basic necessities of life such as shelter, food and warm and protection from biological threats; safe water or sufficient water; vector borne free disease environment.

KEYWORDS: Healthful School Environment, School Goals, Physical, Emotional and Social Conditions

INTRODUCTION

Healthful school environment cannot be isolated from the education of the child with regards to performance in the school. Healthful school environment is an important sub-division of the school health programme with emphasis on provision of healthful living environment in the school community that favours effective teaching-learning process. This division of school health programme concerns itself with the protection and improvement of conditions of the school environment. This influences students in one way or the other especially the conditions of the building (light, air, sanitation and seating arrangement); teacher-pupils; teacher-teacher; pupil-pupil relationship and school lunch or meal programmes, (Moronkola, 2012).

Olesen (2008) noted that the school responsibility in the area of healthful environment is the provision of a safe and a healthful school environment, the organization of a health school day, the establishment of interpersonal relationship, favourable to emotional, social and physical health. In line with Olesen (2008), healthful school environment embraces all efforts to provide at school, physical, emotional and social conditions which are beneficial to the health and safety of students. Therefore, for the school to achieve its goals there must be a healthful school environment, since teaching and learning process rely largely on this factor.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

According to Moronkola (2012), the characteristics of healthful school environment required for healthful school goals achievement includes:

- Location of school away from potential environmental hazards.
- Protection of the school community from excessive noise, heat, cold and dampness.

- Provision of adequate buildings, constructed in line with approved standards, with particular emphasis on facilities for learners with disabilities.
- Provision of an appropriate and adequate amount of furniture for learners and staff.
- Provision of an adequate number of gender-sensitive toilet facilities.
- Provision of adequate safe water supply and sanitation facilities for the school environment.
- Provision of proper drainage and waste facilities.
- Permanent fencing of the school.
- Observation of annual school health days.
- Promotion of healthy human relationships in the school community.
- Promotion of the health related school policies.
- Promotion of maintenance culture.
- Provision of safe recreation and sports facilities.

SCHOOL GOALS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

According to Esu, Erukola and Umoren (2009), the school has three main purposes or goals to perform and these are as:

- Preserver of the cultural heritage,
- Transmitter of the cultural accumulated knowledge; and
- Transformer of the society

The above goals make schools a strategic instrument in the transformation of a nation. For this transformation to take place there must be a healthful school environment that will motivate the students to do their work, have a healthful school day that enhances learning and interaction with school personnel.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCES HEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

According to Cornacchia (2004), the factors that influences healthful school environment include the following:

School Site and Construction

In citing a school, the following factors should be considered as they can hinder teaching-learning process or achievement of school goals:

- Accessibility for local traffic
- Distance from busy or noisy streets, external odour and noise factors (airports, railway stations, dumps, industrial areas etc.)
- Adequate space (playgrounds, athletic fields)

- Freedom from unnecessary hazards (open holes, landscaping, internal organization).
- Adequate drainage for aesthetics, landscaping, internal organization is very necessary

It is important that the architects give consideration to the needs of the learners and the teachers. The classrooms should be spacious enough to provide for areas that can be used for quiet study. There should be provision for chalkboards/whiteboards and storage spaces for bags and other items like pipe borne water, toilets, sinks and light switches. The wellbeing of the faculty and staff must also be provided for with a teachers' lounge and separate restroom facilities that are both functional and appealing in appearance.

Moronkola (2007) stated that during construction of schools the needs of the special people (disabled) should be given special attention. If the school water supply is from a well, it should be free from contamination. It is important to ensure that at least each primary or secondary school has one hectare of land in a well drained area. The school buildings must be well laid out, painted, ventilated and have adequate artificial and natural lightening, making it easy for both staff and pupils to see each other in school; while teaching materials are very well seen without the eye strained. The buildings should be well maintained to make them attractive to learners. When both staff and pupils admire and are proud of their schools, they will under the right leadership of the school staff voluntarily contributed to its maintenance.

Internal Organization

A classroom that is too hot or too cold will have a negative effect on the teaching-learning process. The recommended temperature for classroom is between 65⁰-70⁰ Fahrenheit, depending on the age of the students and the type of activity that is taking place. Cornacchia, 2004 identified the following conditions:

- The flow of air in a classroom must receive primary attention. If the school is not equipped with air conditioning equipment, the teacher should open windows or doors or secure a fan to ensure adequate air movement.
- **Lighting:** This should be done properly whether natural or artificial. The teacher should be aware that glare is a very annoying problem in the classroom setting. Speaking to the class while standing in front of un-shaded windows so that the sun shines brightly into the eyes of students is certainly not in their best interest. Window shaded can be used to reduce glare and students should not directly face windows or other sources of light.
- **Acoustics:** This matter should receive attention during the construction of schools so that; areas that have potential for a high level of noise such as shops, playgrounds and music rooms can be located far away from the classrooms, and air conditioners can also be provided in our classroom as this will enable the doors and windows of the classrooms to remain closed.
- **Water Supply:** School authorities have a legal and moral responsibility to provide a safe and sanitary water supply for the schools. Periodic testing of the water supply should occur to assure that it is free of contamination.
- **Location of Restrooms or Conveniences:** Cornacchia (2004), opined that the preferred location of the toilet facilities is one with an outside exposure to direct natural lighting. This is because of the effect of sunlight on some pathogenic organisms. Toilets should also be located on the ground floor level for easy access by the supervisors and the special (handicapped) students. There should be wash hand basins in these restrooms or classrooms equipped with hot or cold running water for washing hands and other needs.

Sanitation

Students should not be subjected to an unsanitary environment to avoid outbreak of communicable diseases like cholera and dysentery. Provisions must be made for safe and effective removal of waste from the schools.

Sewage Disposal

When installing septic tanks, expert consultation is important. Septic tanks should be located far away and below the source of water in schools that use wells to avoid the possibility of contaminating the water supply. The tank should be accessible for annual evacuation and cleaning to ensure that there are no pathogenic bacteria contained in the tank.

School Food Services

Survey have shown that the school food services are poor and deficient, and there is a pressing need for better arrangement and expansion of the school food services to ensure the proper nutrition of the school community, (Cornacchia, 2004).

School Transport Services

According to Ajala (2003), there should be careful selection and training of drivers to make the school bus services safer.

Hazardous Chemical and Biological Agents

Hazardous chemical or biological agents within the school environment should be removed as they are detrimental to the health of the school community.

Interpersonal Relationships

Positive social relations and attitudes about the school are as important to the environment as are safe and well-kept buildings and grounds. A safe, clean and well-maintained school with a positive psychosocial climate and culture foster school connectedness, can boast students and staff health as well as well as students educational achievement (Ajala, 2003).

PROBLEM ASSOCIATED WITH UNHEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

According to Moronkola (2012), the social environment restssolely on good interpersonal relationship between staff and students. When the social environment is good, there would be less violence demonstration, absenteeism, cult activities, examination malpractice, sexual exploitation and various other forms of abuse and suspension and expulsion. Since the school is designed to explore and expand the frontier of knowledge, the social environment in the school must give room for the development of wholesome personnel self-concept, healthy activities and practices, as well as special skills of the learner.

Also, the staff and student must be motivated through the provision of appropriate facilities, example a well-equipped library, conducive learning environment and good salary, so that effective teaching-learning process is not hindered. This is important because, for effective learning to take place, both the teachers and the learners must be psychologically ready to perform their tasks.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, a healthy school environment for developing countries should include:

- Provision of basic necessities such as: shelter, warmth, water, food, light, ventilation, sanitary facilities and emergency medical care.
- Protection from biological threats such as; molds, unsafe or insufficient water, vector-borne diseases, venomous animals, rodents and hazardous insect and other animals (e.g. dogs).
- Protection from physical threat such as; traffic and transportation, violence and crime, injuries, extreme heat, cold, and radiation.
- Protection from chemical threats such as; air pollution, water pollution, pesticides, hazardous waste, hazardous materials and finishers; asbestos, paint and cleaning agents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made;

- Schools should be located away from potential environmental hazards.
- Schools should create a school environmental health and safety team which includes Parents Teachers Association (PTA) members, school officials, teachers, custodians business and community leaders and law enforcement officials.
- Establishment of functional counseling services for the students
- Principals should advocate for more funding for school construction and renovation.
- School administrators should provide air conditioners if possible.
- The government through its agencies should provide Zebra crossing in front of school gates.
- The school should write to newspapers, speak at school board meetings and policy makers about the health, academic and cost benefits a healthy school environment would provide.

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