

# School Learning Environment and Students' Academic Performance in Social studies in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined influence of school learning environment on students' academic performance in social studies in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study utilized a survey research design, and the simple random sampling technique was used to sample two hundred (200) respondents from the population of seven hundred and forty-two (742) students. Data were collected using an instrument constructed by the researchers titled: "School learning environment and students' academic performance (SLESAP)." Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient was used in analyzing the data. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between school library and students' academic performances in social studies and that there is a significant relationship between class size and students' academic performances in social studies. It was thus recommended that every school should own a library; those with a library should ensure that it is well equipped with books especially in social studies and made very conducive for learning.

**Keywords:** School, learning environment, students' academic performance, social studies, library, class size

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## Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Educational resources are indispensable tools to the educational development of any nation, whether developed and developing. The success of any education system depends effectively on the availability and judicious utilization of learning resources. With the rapid expansion in Nigeria educational system and the projected increase in size, the need for instructional resources in secondary schools become necessary. Equally, there is need for such facilities to be effectively controlled and managed (Inyang-Abia, 2004). By its corporate mission, the school system seeks to assure a productive, enlightened and competent citizenry. It also seeks to promote knowledge and the acquisition of the right attitudes among its members. The secondary school system as a subset of the national educational structure plays a vital role in bringing out those policy objectives by ensuring that the product of the secondary schools are well harnessed and prepared for tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Learning facilities are necessary as they provide the physical setting in which instructional programmes are conducted. In this study learning facilities will be used interchangeably with school facilities. This includes the classrooms, laboratories, school premises, libraries, furniture, workshops equipment and chalkboard etc. apart from the above mention facilities, there are other facilities within the school settings which aid teaching and learning as well as the well-being of members of the community. These include transport facilities, sanitary facilities and disposal facilities. Ogunsaja (1982) in Akpan (2012) maintains that for effective teaching and learning situation, educational achievement and learning facilities should be viewed to be closely interwoven and interdependent.

This results in the fact that stresses the quality of education given in the basic school setting bears direct relevance to the availability of learning whether deficient or defective, teaching and learning stand to suffer, thereby having a negative impact on educational goals and objectives. Meziobi, Fubara and Meziobi (2013) acknowledged the role of social studies and maintained that it is a core subject in the primary and junior schools. He stressed that it is even taught as elective under the garb of citizenship education in the senior secondary schools. In the opinion of Linda & Michael (2004), social studies has the purpose of enabling students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world. The content is designed to allow young learners to explain relationships with other people, to institutions, and to the environment, and equip them with knowledge and understanding of the past. Social studies provides learners with skills for productive problem-solving and decision-making as well as for assessing issues and making thoughtful value judgments.

Above all, it integrates these skills and understandings into a framework for responsible citizen participation locally, nationally, and globally. The teaching and learning processes within social studies are uniquely organized to develop these capacities. Social studies education includes civic engagement, as well as knowledge from the core content areas of civics, economics, geography, and history. Skills that enhance critical thinking, socio-emotional development, interpersonal interactions, and information literacy are more meaningful and useful when developed within the context of social studies. The infusion of technology into social studies also prepares students as active and responsible citizens in the 21st century.

From the foregoing exposition, the need for excellent teaching and learning environment for social studies is imperative for the achievement of social studies objectives especially at the basic school level. There is this general belief that the rate of which school learning facilities are maintained will affect the tone of the school and influence the quality of students' academic performance. This calls for proper planning and management of learning facilities (Meziobi, Fubara and Meziobi, 2013). Personal experience has also shown that most school leavers lack requisite technical skills to be able to function effectively in the society. It appears that the schools seem not to consider the importance of sports to the development of individuals and to nation-building interhouse sport competition (which is very good index of psychomotor domain) is not just a routine or annual fund arising activity for schools but a very good avenue for talent hunt.

The quality of education not only depends on the teachers as reflected in the performance of their duties, but also in the effective coordination of the learning facilities (**Ajao, 2001**). The extent to which student learning could be enhanced depends on their location within the school compound, the structure of their classroom, availability of instructional facilities and accessories. It is believed that a well planned school will gear up expected outcomes of education that will facilities good social, political and economic emancipation for effective teaching and learning process and academic performance of the students. Odeh. Oguiche and Ivagher (2015) asserted that a comfortable and caring environment among other treatments help to contribute to student academic performance. According to them, the importance of school environment in the teaching of students in secondary schools today in particular cannot be overemphasized. This is because, school environment has tremendous influence in the quality of teaching students receives and the extent of attention they pay to lesson in school. This implies that schools that fail to provide the necessary learning facilities and create a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning may hardly put in the best in their students especially in the area of academic achievement.

Beyond the direct effects that poor facilities have on students' ability to learn, the combination of poor facilities which create uncomfortable and uninviting workplace for teachers combined with frustrating behaviour by students including poor concentration creates a stressful set of working conditions for teacher. Because stress and job dissatisfaction are common pre-cursors to lowered teacher enthusiasm, it is possible that the aforementioned characteristics of school facilities have an effect upon the academic performance of pupils in social studies.

To this effect, this study is aimed at investigating the relationship between school learning environment and pupils' academic performance in social studies.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

There are numerous theories related to educational resources and learning outcome. For the purpose of this work, the theories of behaviourism are adopted in this study. Behaviourists theories operate on the principle of "stimulus response" they can also be known as S-R Theories (stimulus response theories). The central thesis of S-R theories is that all behaviour (i.e. learning) is caused by external stimuli. Iheanacho (2002) maintained that these stimuli are instructional, naturally composed of human and material resources. Two behaviourist theories will suffice to explain the study:

### 1.1 Classical Conditioning Theory

The classical conditioning theory was propounded by a Russian scientist interested in studying how digestion works in mammals, Ivan Petrovich Pavlov from 1849 -1936. The theory propounded learning procedure in which an association is formed between a condition stimulus and response through the repeatedly presentation of the conditional stimulus. The procedure by Ivan Pavlov observed and recorded information about digestive process while carrying out experiments on the process of digestion in animals. The training procedure is sometime termed respondent conditioning. This way of conditioning could be illustrated with one of the experiments Pavlov carried out. In the experiment, Pavlov used meat powder which dog would naturally respond to by salivation. After a sense of trails, Pavlov's dog started salivating on just hearing the sound. The meat powder which the dog would spontaneously respond to with salivation is termed the unconditioned stimulus (US). The US (meat powder) naturally produces the unconditioned response (UR) which is salivation; the sound itself is able to produce salivation from the dog.

The sound from the metronome is called conditioned stimulus (CS) and the salivation that results from the presentation is conditioned response (CR). The idea of the formal setting is informed by the fact that through this, learning can take place anywhere and at anytime, this is called school, a simplified model of the community where children first learn to like adults that live within the school community. This theory is significant to the study in the sense that learning in the school does not take place in isolated place. It involves a process where an individual can adapt his or herself in other to acquire new behaviour. The facilities around the school can influence a child to learn new value and habits and ways of life so that upon leaving the school, he or she will be able to become a functional, meaningful and useful adult in the society where he or she is found.

#### 1.1.2 Operant Conditioning Theory

Operant conditioning was propounded by B.F. Skinner (1938). Operant conditioning is the conditioning procedure involving bringing operant responses under the stimulus control. Operant conditioning is a behaviourist theory which states that learning is change in behaviour i.e. the individual's response to events (stimuli). Behaviour can be conditioned by rewarding the right stimulus-response patterns (Iheanacho, 2002). In this classical demonstration of operant conditioning, Skinner (1938) designed his special apparatus called "skinner box". It is fitted with a lot of devices, including a lever that could be depressed and the operant response to deliver food pellet to the subject, a rat. When the subject is a pigeon, "Pigeon box" is used which is fitted with one or more lighted circular plastic disks known as the response key on which the pigeon pecks to obtain food.

When a hungry rat is placed in a skinner box, it usually engaged in a number of spontaneous operant behaviour (i.e. acting or operating on the environment and possibly changing it). After a number of random behaviour, it eventually pressed the lever. Then a pellet of food would fall into a feeding cup which the rat eats. It would continue to wonder not realizing the connection between the lever pressing and the food. In the course of wondering, it would press the lever again accidentally and the pellet of food would fall down again.

It would be after pressing the lever several times that the rat would realise the connection between this lever pressing and falling of the food. This makes the rat to eat the pellet of food that drops. The rat has been conditioned to lever pressing in order to secure food. It did not wonder again to secure food. This change in behaviour is known as learning. The availability of pellet of food reinforced the lever pressing. This reinforcement increased the probability of lever pressing per unit of time. This theory is relevant to this study as learning facilities are represented as stimulus in the learning environment (school). The learner (student) plays an active role in discovering the environment when meaningful instructional facilities are provided in the school and students are encouraged to manipulate such facilities (such as library) then learning is enhanced and greater academic performance is achieved. This theory is also important to this study as it identifies three components necessary for learning doing experience and practices.

This is in agreement with the empiricists' views of learning which sees the mind of a new born baby as a tabula rasa (or blank slate) and assumes especially sensory experience. This shows that availability of adequate and meaningful learning facilities and opportunities in the schools does not only help the students to gain experience by manipulating them but also impact greatly on their senses thereby facilitating learning. Implication of the above mentioned theories to the study in questions are explicit: the implication of classical conditioning is that the presence of such facilities or school structures as library and classroom give a conscious awareness that a child is already out for a learning process. In operant conditioning, the implication of library and classroom gives a child a sense of conditioning learning procedure.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The problem of poor academic performances in school today has been one of the devastating issues in the minds of the school administrators, teachers, educational stakeholders and parents-student academic performance in social studies keeps deteriorating over the year. Parents and members of the public have associated this problem to lack of effective teaching, some says teacher employed in some of our schools are not competent enough so they put the blame on the teachers. However, in a situation where there are no learning facilities, teaching cannot take place effectively. This study attributes the poor academic performance of students to poor learning facilities in the schools. Government through the ministry of education has allowed learning facilities to decay without paying attention on those facilities. Learning facilities are the most important educational facilities in the life of any school. Apart from protecting students from cold rain and heat, the school learning facilities represent a learning environment which has a tremendous impact on pupils' academic performance in social studies. The importance of learning facilities in the achievement of the objective of social studies objectives in the basic level education cannot be over emphasized. Learning facilities are very important in the teaching and learning process. As such, this study sought to give answer to this question.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The main aim of the study was to investigate:

1. The relationship between school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies
2. The relationship between class size and pupils' academic performance in social studies.

### **1.4 Research question**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent does school library with pupils' academic performance in social studies.
2. To what way does class size relate with pupils' academic performance in social studies.

### **1.5 Statement of hypotheses**

The following hypotheses directed the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies.
2. There is no significant relationship between class size and pupils' academic performance in social studies.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was survey research design and was considered most appropriate for this study because it is required for studies that involved careful observation and thorough recording of the observation of a phenomenon. The research investigation was carryout in Calabar Municipal Council Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of this study comprises of all upper basic level pupils (in public schools) in the area of study. It totalled ten thousand and ninety-five pupils (Cross River State Education Board, 2013). The simple random sampling technique was employed in the selection of two hundred (200) pupils, forty (40) pupils each from the five (5) selected schools, equal number of male and female pupils was involved in the study. Names of schools in the area were written in pieces of papers rolled into balls from which five were randomly selected. From the class register, all the names of the boys and girls were extracted, written in pieces of papers, rolled into balls from which names were selected on equal male-female basis.

The major instrument for data collection was a four point Likert scale questionnaire, structured into Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Strongly Disagree (SD = 2) and Disagree (D = 1) for positively-worded items. The scores were reversed for negatively worded items. Before using the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity through the aid of 2 experts in the field of measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test retest method. The result of first administration of the questionnaire on 20 respondents was correlated with the second administration two weeks later. The result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.69 and 0.98. This implies that the instrument was consisted in measuring what it was intended to measure. Data collected was subjected to analysis at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson product moment correlation analysis.

## 3. RESULTS PRESENTATION

**Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies**

(N = 200)				
Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal.
School library	1085	15350	10600	0.63*
Pupils' academic performance	1125	16150		

\*significant at 0.05 level, df = 198, critical r = 0.138

The result of the analysis presented in table 1 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom, the calculated r of 0.63 is greater than the critical r of 0.138. On the basis of decision rule that says that if the calculated value of r is greater than the critical value then the null hypothesis is rejected; the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies was rejected by the analysis.

**Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of class size and pupils' attitude towards economics (N = 200)**

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal.
Class size	1220	12200	13504	0.97*
Pupils' academic performance	1125	16125		

\*significant at 0.05 level, df = 198, critical r = 0.138



The result of the analysis presented in table 2 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom, the calculated  $r$  of 0.97 is greater than the critical  $r$  of 0.138. Basis on the subsisting decision rule, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between class size and pupils' academic performance was rejected by the analysis.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

##### 4.1 School library and pupils' academic performance

The result of the analysis rejected the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies. It is therefore posited that the relationship between the use of school library and pupils' academic performance is significant. This implies that utilisation of the library for study purpose increases the achievement of pupils in school subjects especially in social studies. This finding agrees with a couple of studies, which show a strong relationship between use of library and students' academic performance. Dent's (2006) report show that students in middle schools with libraries had 18% higher achievement test score that their counterparts without library.

According to the Free Encyclopaedia (2010), students with access to well-supported school library media programme with a qualified school library media specialist score higher on reading assessments regardless of their socio-economic statuses. This implies that students who not only have access to the library but also good guide to the use of library have higher propensity to achievement in social studies. Lastly, **Ogunbote & Odunewu (2008)** stated that the performance of students could improve considerably if they use the library regularly, thus recommended that students maximise the use of school library to their advantage since school libraries provide favourable environment where they can discover and develop their abilities and talent as well as improving their reading and study skills.

##### 4.2 Class size and pupils' academic performance

The second hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between Class size and pupils' academic performance in social studies was rejected. The analysis indicated that the relationship between Class size and pupils' academic performance is significant. Class size is an important factor with respect to academic performance of pupils. There is a consensus among researchers and educational scholars that students' achievement decreases as Class size increases. The effect of Class size on cognitive achievement has been debated and researched for many years. In this wise, All Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) recommended a maximum of forty students per class for efficient and effective teaching. Still, **Kedney (1989)** described the Class size as a tool that can be used to measure performance of the education system. By implication, Class size does not only enhance students' academic performance, it also enhances the performance of the educational system. The present research also gives credence to Adunola (2013), who examined the relationship between class size and academic performance of students discovered that large class size negatively affects students' academic performance; an outcome that warranted him to recommend the implementation of a national policy on teacher-student ratio.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings made, it was concluded thus:

1. There is a significant relationship between school library and pupils' academic performance in social studies.
2. There is a significant relationship between class size and pupils' academic performance in social studies.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the conclusion drawn, it was recommended as follows:

1. Every school should own a library; those with a library should ensure that it is well equipped with books especially in social studies and made very conducive for learning.
2. The class size should be minimal to ensure that the teacher reaches out to every pupil in the classroom
3. More classroom blocks should be built to cater for the large population of pupils seeking admission into upper basic schools

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