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Examining the Impact of Environment on Pupils' Academic Performance at PLE in Kitagata Town Council of Sheema District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted from three selected primary schools in Kitagata Town Council of Sheema District, Uganda. Case study research was used for this study, data were collected using open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires. Findings show that most primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District lacked a conducive learning environment. The study calls for head teachers, teachers, parents, government and other stakeholders to give special attention to the condition of sanitary facilities in schools and the provision or improvement of existing utilities such as water, pit latrines and electricity. More so, parents, teachers, head teachers and the government should always ensure that pupils are provided with enough instructional materials so as to facilitate effective learning. Furthermore, Ministry of Education and Sports should invest in rehabilitating and renovating the existing buildings in primary schools where they already exist. Additionally, Parents Teachers Association in various primary schools should encourage parents to support and become more involved or take more responsibility for the maintenance of existing structures in their schools.

Keywords: Academic performance, Environment, Government, Instructional materials, Learning facilities

INTRODUCTION

Environment as the physical or psychological factors to which an organism responds at a given time [1]. Javed et al. [2] define "environment" as "books, audio-visual, software and hardware of educational technology, so also, size of classroom, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves on which instruments for practicals are arranged". According to Owweye and Yara [3], "the school environment consists of the physical structure (class rooms, libraries, laboratories, offices, gardens, farmlands, fields and playground facilities, learning materials and human resources." Ernst [4] stated that "teachers and students are an important part of the environment in an education setting as they both contribute to the environment and benefit more." Thomas [5] state that "a school is an environment where knowledge is acquired at various levels and the buildings or environment where this knowledge is acquired is as important as the knowledge itself." Mwesigwa [6] reported that 36,285 6-12-year-olds attending primary school in Kitagata Town Council, 88.3%. Huylebroeck and Titeca [7]; and Kasirye [8] said that Uganda prioritised teacher recruitment and classroom development during UPE. Despite successes in both areas, Uganda's learning environment is nonetheless crowded." UNEB (2007) states that "learning achievement as assessed by numeracy or literacy has been declining since UPE, and Uganda performs worse than its regional neighbours on international school tests. Despite improvements in school access, many Ugandan students have dismal learning outcomes. Eastern and Northern Ugandan districts even lag behind the rest [9]. One of the major difficulties facing the education sector, these days, is poor academic performance of pupils in primary schools, according to Donkoh et al. [10] Despite improvements in school access, many Ugandan students have poor learning results [11]. Several studies have linked low performance to instructional materials [12], but nothing has been done on the study environment and academic performance in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District, Uganda. Thus, this study seeks to determine whether environment affects PLE students' academic performance of students.

Learners' response to the study environment

Arul Laurence and Vimala [13] stated that "a proper and adequate environment is very much necessary for a fruitful learning of the child and that a favourable school environment provides the necessary stimulus for learning

experiences.”Oniikoyi[14] stated that “the child is the product of his total environment and the child's environment influences what he would be able to learn as he grows up.” Radmard[15] states that “any learning environment that does not seem gratifying to the learner tends to inhibit certain desirable responses from occurring and this can create a barrier to effective learning.” According to Ahmad[16], “a stimulating environment gives a positive effect on the child's rate of development and learning effectiveness and the reverse is true for un conducive environment. Physical and mental well-being of children in schools is assured where classrooms have sufficient ventilation and illumination[17]. Toyinbo[18] added that the space should be enough to allow safe movements and play ground. Children require a safe, healthy, and engaging environment to grow and learn. Child development is influenced by the environment during their six to eight hours at school during the school year. Arul, Lourence, and Vimala[13] state that the school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. Supportive and favourable school environment enriched with enough learning facilities, and favourable climate makes students more comfortable, more concentrated on their academic activities which can result in high academic performance.” Vincent, Kazibwe and Asiimwe[19] states that “some schools have seen improvements in enrolment, attendance and completion especially for the girl child, despite challenges brought on by unfavourable home or school environments.” “The Environmentalist learning theory holds that the child's environment shapes learning and behaviour and that creating a supportive learning environment in the home or classroom helps young brain development”[20]. Okafor et al.[21] found that “good indoor air quality, good visual comfort and sufficient space within and outside learning spaces affect student performance.” This study was needed since no study has examined students' responses to diverse study environments in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema district primary schools.

Correlation between study environment and learners' academic performance

In their study "Learning Environment and pupils Academic performance: implications for counselling," Dhanapala[22] Investigated the effect of learning environment on primary school students' academic performance and found a substantial effect. Usaini, Abubakar, Ado and Bichi[23] state that “the influence of school environment on academic achievement of students has been an issue of concern to all stakeholders in education.” They later found that students from schools with adequate facilities, good teachers, and a favourable environment perform better than those from schools with fewer facilities, unqualified teachers, and a less favourable environment. "School environment can negatively impact students' academic achievement if it lacks good school climate, instructional materials, discipline, physical facilities, poor teacher quality, questionable location, small class size, and overpopulation"[21]. Noor[24] states that school climate and location significantly impact academic success. For instance, when a school is located in a noisy region like an airport or city centre where activities impede student learning. Such students are unlikely to succeed academically. Anything noisy disrupts learning. In "Impact of School Environments on Academic Performance: Feedback from Senior Secondary School Students," Okafor et al.[21] found that adequate and conducive school environments, particularly classrooms and toilets, improve student performance. Alemngbe[25] noted that school climate, instructional resources, and discipline may affect student progress. This is because schools with the best teachers, instructional resources, and facilities produce high-achieving graduates. Cohen[26] said "the school environment has broad influence on students' learning and growth, includes significant social, emotional, and ethical development. He further added that “when students find their school environment supportive and caring, they are less likely to become involved in substance abuse, violence and other problem behavior.” Alabi[27] that “school climate, discipline and physical facilities had significant influence on academic achievement learners.” The need for this study stems from the lack of research on the relationship between study environment and academic achievement in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema district primary schools.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A case study research design was adopted for this study. This design was considered ideal as it allowed studying a particular phenomenon in detail.

Target population

The target population of the study was 170 people and these comprised of teachers, headteachers, deputy head teachers and pupils.

Sample Size

From a population of 170 people, 118 respondents were used as sample size.

Sampling Techniques

School head teachers and deputy head teachers were selected using purposive sampling whereas teachers and pupils were selected using simple random sampling. Also simple random sampling was used in choosing the schools for the study. The target population and sample size are summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1: Category of respondents, target population and sample size

Category	Target population	Sample size
Pupils/learners	131	82
Head teachers	3	3
Deputy head teachers	3	3
Teachers	33	30
Total	170	118

Source: Field survey, 2022

RESULTS**Table 2: Respondents responses on whether their schools conducive for learning**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	43	36.4
No	17	63.6
Total	118	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

According to responses in table 2, 43(36.4%) indicated “Yes” when there were asked about existence of good environment in their schools whereas 75(63.6%) indicated “No” when they were asked the same question. The researcher also found out that majority of the primary schools lacked enough buildings facilities (class rooms), had no designated libraries, were located near noisy places like roads and some schools were not renovated even when government had constructed for them some class room blocks, further, some classes had broken windows and doors and some classes did not possess either a window or a door. The findings thus implied that majority of the primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District generally did not have a good study environment.

Table 3: Respondents’ responses on the import of conducive learning environment

Response	Frequency	percentage
Shaping and reshaping of intellectual ability	30	25.4
Comfortability of learners’ physical and emotional well-being of children	52	44.1
Promotes concentration academic activities	36	30.5
Total	118	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Based on the responses in table 3, 30(25.4%) of the respondents indicated study environment was vital in shaping and reshaping of intellectual ability of the pupils, 52(44.1%) indicated comfort ability of learner and emotional well-being of children to be dependent on study environment whereas 36(30.5%) indicated that the study environment with less or minimal distractions promoted concentration on academic activities among the pupils. The study findings implied that learners’ response to the study environment ranged from psychological well-being to general academic performance in class activities.

During interviews, the researcher also found out that pupils' academic performance at PLE was generally poor especially in English and mathematics when compared to social studies and science. The performance of pupils differed greatly between private and government primary schools in the area under study.

Table 4: Respondents' responses on how school environment shape learners' academic performance

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	12	33.3
Agree	10	27.8
Disagree	6	16.7
Strongly disagree	8	22.2
Total	35	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Based on the responses in table 4, participants (head teachers, deputy head teachers and teachers) were asked whether there was a relationship between school environment and learners' academic performance at PLE and 12(33.3%) strongly agreed whereas 10(27.8%) of the respondents agreed. A total of 6(16.7%) of the respondents disagreed whereas 8(22.2%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that there was a relationship between school environment and learners' academic performance at PLE in primary schools in Kitagata Town Council Sheema District. However, it was also found out that pupils' academic performance was likely to be affected by teachers' use of instructional materials, learners' attendance in class, poor influence, mode of assessment and the level of parents' involvement. The findings implied that there was a relationship between school environment and learners' academic performance at PLE in primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District even when it was also evident that pupils' academic performance at PLE can be affected by other factors.

Discussion of findings

Study findings indicated that majority of the primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District generally did not have a good study environment suitable for learning. Majority of the Primary schools lacked enough buildings facilities (class rooms), had no designated libraries, were located near noisy places like roads and some were not renovated even when government had constructed for them some classroom blocks. Further, some classes had broken windows and doors and some classes did not possess either a window or a door. The findings of this study are in disagreement with Lamaro and Lalam[28] who observed that "government should provide schools with all necessary infrastructure and equipment for effective teaching and learning." The findings are equally in agreement with Mahama, Regine, Apomsah and Ansu[29] who revealed that most of the schools had inadequate physical facilities like the libraries, laboratories, classrooms and dormitories. Study findings indicated that learners' response to the study environment ranged from psychological well-being to general academic performance in class activities. For example, study environment was vital in shaping and reshaping of intellectual ability of the pupils, physical and emotional well-being of children and study environment with less or minimal distractions promoted concentration on academic activities among the pupils. The findings of the study seem to agree with Usaini, Abubakar and Bichi[23] who observed that "a proper and adequate environment is very much necessary for a fruitful learning of the child and that a favorable school environment provides the necessary stimulus for learning experiences." The findings indicated that there was a relationship between school environment and learners' academic performance at PLE in primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District even when it was also evident that pupils' academic performance at PLE can be affected by other factors. The findings of the study can be compared with Okafar et al.[21]. According to Aramude and Omokhomion[30], "the school environment has a significant influence on academic performance and the location of the school affects students' performance." For example, when a school is sited in a noisy area like an airport or in the heart of a city where activities disrupt the teaching-learning of the student. One will not expect such students in this area to be doing well academically. Noise in anything interferes with teaching/learning process. On the other hand Okafar et al.[21] noted that performance of students would improve with the provision of adequate and conducive school environment with emphasis on facilities such as classroom and toilets.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that there was a relationship between school environment and learners' academic performance at PLE in primary schools in Kitagata Town Council, Sheema District. And pupils' academic performance at PLE was also affected by other factors other than the school environment. Despite the above relationship, some primary schools did not have good environment to stimulate pupils' learning. In this light, the study calls for head teachers, teachers, parents, government and other stakeholders to give special attention to the condition of sanitary facilities in schools and the provision or improvement of existing utilities

such as water, pit latrines and electricity. More so, parents, teachers, head teachers and the government should always ensure that pupils are provided with enough instructional materials so as to facilitate effective learning. Furthermore, Ministry of Education and Sports should invest in rehabilitating and renovating the existing buildings in primary schools where they already exist. Additionally, Parents Teachers Association in various primary schools should encourage parents to support and become more involved or take more responsibility for maintenance of existing structures in their schools. Finally, school head teachers, parents and the government should strive to ensure that the school compounds near roads or people's families are fenced off. This may help in reducing distractions while learning.

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