

Critical Environmental Variables: Predictors of Students' Academic Achievement in Literature in Ebonyi State

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Abstract

This paper focused on Critical environmental variables; Predictors of students' academic achievement in literature in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The study was a descriptive survey research. Stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select 240 teachers of literature and languages in 32 schools, 16 schools each from rural and urban schools. A 4 likert structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The title of the questionnaire was Predictors of Literature Achievement Questionnaire. (PLAQ) The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in the field using Cronbach method in a test retest and an index of 0.89 was realized as reliability of the instrument. A total of 240 questionnaires were shared using on the spot distribution and collection. The analysis was based on the decision rule of 2.5 mean and above as being high and anything below it as being low. Findings showed that inadequate number and unqualified teachers in literature predict poor students' achievement, uncondusive classroom in most schools as well as poor condition or lack of facilities predict student's achievement. The two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance and result showed that calculated value of 1.14 realized was less than the t-critical value of 1.97. This showed that sex does not predict student achievement while location of school urban or rural, had all the items in t-cal higher than the t-critical value of 1.97. It was recommended that more qualified literature teachers should be employed in the senior secondary schools. Good classrooms should be provided and teachers should make the classroom print-rich. Government should construct more buildings, libraries with good texts and schools in the rural areas also should be funded and well facilitated.

Keywords: *Literature in English, Environmental, Genre, Teacher, Uncondusive Classroom, Facilities.*

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I. Introduction

Literature is an important subject that is taught in Nigerian secondary schools and it is a pre-requisite in various arts and humanities courses taught in the universities and various tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Literature is important in critical development of student's imagination and values of the society. Literature is the study of written works of imagination which constitutes poetry, drama and narrative fiction and the most familiar types of genres. It is used to examine the richness and diversity of experience through visual uses of language that is recognized as different from everyday language and aspires to produce a reflection of the world that may not be available to us. literature are also primary documents for investigating national histories, world events, the individual psyche, race, class, gender, science, economics, religion, the national world leisure and the other arts. (mcl.as.uky.edu Retrieved 3/12:12Pm 2022.)

Literature in English is important because of the following reasons as provided by (Corwyn) 2019 as:

- To instruct the students in the use of language and rhetoric by providing sterling examples.
- To lead the students to the processes known as critical thinking and analysis by practicing close reading of texts that employ sophisticated literary strategies.
- To teach the students that there are often layers of meaning to a story or situation.
- To broaden the student's experiences of life and the world vicariously and to enhance his understanding of society and his fellow man.
- To teach the student to develop his ideas and express them with cogency and coherence in written form.
- To add a pleasing layer of apparent erudition and eloquence to unfurnished minds.

The importance of Literature in secondary schools cannot be overemphasized. This is because, Literature teaches one how to think critically about complex topics from different perspective: such as one learns how to consider literary texts from a number of different theoretical perspectives. It broadens ones horizons. Texts of Literature may include different types of literature dwelling on working-class writing

narrative, protest Literature and genres that focus on madness, masculinity, adolescence, place and belonging, terrorism, race and crises in contemporary capitalism. Also literature enables one to develop transferable skills as writing essays, report writing and summarizing complex text, carrying out research, developing persuasive arguments and writing in coherent articulate way and discussions and carrying out an activity. Literature also provides exciting placement and travel opportunities (Moore, 2021). Literature is the mirror of life. The society is represented through literary texts. Literature presents good values and defects of the society in a creative and imaginary way. Writers create stories and compose poems for the sake of reflecting man's real life situations and it is reflected through settings, imageries or characters in the story... (Rosdinato, 2012).

Literature has three major genre, drama, prose and poetry. Drama is a mode of fictional representation through dialogue and performance. It is one of the literary genre which is an imitation of some action. Prose is a long narrative essay that tells story about the historical culture and social economic life of the people. Poetry is an art form in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to its emotional and semantic content. It uses condensed or compressed form to convey emotions and ideas to the readers or listener's mind (Laga, 2013).

Despite the importance and crucial nature of literature in English in the senior secondary schools in Nigeria, student performance in the subject remains poor. The West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) Chief examiner's report 2015 to 2018 confirmed this. The report stated that questions maintained the same standard and were within the grasp of the candidates, students' performances were poor and disappointing, The result from the Federal Ministry of Education (FRN) 2015-2018 indicated 52.8% 48.7% and 59.9% fluctuation passes respectively and were the candidates that were qualified for admission into the Nigerian universities. Environmental variables as lack or inadequate number of qualified teachers reflecting male and female, unconducive classroom, poor facilities and location of schools seem to predicate students' abysmal performance in literature. Lawrence (2012) asserted that educational process of development occurs in the physical, social, cultural as well as psychological environment. Byoune (2012) was of the view that students needed to study in safe, healthy and stimulating environment. The National Policy on Education (FRN 2004) noted the importance of good environment and promised provision of schools with adequate sizeable class and facilities that would meet the needs of pupils and students. It also promised training, retraining and recruiting of specialized teachers that would meet the needs of students in various subjects. The objective of this study is to investigate school environmental variable that predict academic achievement in Literature in English in secondary schools. Specifically this paper sought:

- 1 To find out how lack/inadequate unqualified Literature teachers predict students' poor academic achievement.
- 2 To find out how unconducive classrooms predict students' academic achievement in learning English Literature.
- 3 To find out how poor state or lack of facilities predict students' achievement in Literature.
- 4 To find out how location urban or rural school predict student's achievement in Literature.
- 5 To find out if sex of a teacher is a predictor in students' achievement in literature.

School Environmental Variables and Students Achievement

Since literature plays significant role in developing the literary creativity of individuals especially the students, teaching and learning demands to be given both quantitative and qualitative attention by ensuring that environmental variables in the schools are given top priority. The school environmental variables include qualified teachers, conducive classroom and learning facilities as well as the school location .This is because as Byoung (2012) put it that children need safe, healthy and stimulating environment to grow and learn.

Teacher quality is a variable that is critically needed for students' achievement especially in teaching of literature. Lawrence (2012)and Sunday (2012) emphasized that the teacher is responsible for reshaping every child in the classroom and that the destiny of every child is being shaped in the school. Also condition of services of teaches predicts students academic. Jegede (2002) is of the view that enhanced condition of services for teachers is of utmost importance to academic. Teachers are poorly remunerated and they seem not to give their best in their teaching job.

The most significant gains in student's achievement will likely be realized when students receive instruction from good teachers over consecutive years. Human resources no doubt would boost the educational system especially when there is adequate number of specialized ones. Agwu (2005) and Okonkwo (2014) opined that schools are bound to fail when approximately 20% of the faculty is comprised of unqualified teachers who do not meet minimum stated requirements and the best way to close achievement gap is to make sure that every school has a fair share of qualified teachers both urban or rural. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education stated that the success of the secondary education in Nigeria would depend on the availability of qualified teachers, their quantity and quality; This is to say that qualified and adequate number of teachers are predictors of students good performance especially in literature.

Classroom and teaching facilities seem to contribute immensely to children learning fast in a teaching situation. Agwu and Okonkwo (2013) emphasized the indispensable nature of suitable environment such as adequate facilities comprising suitable buildings which include classroom blocks, offices, libraries, language laboratories for effective teaching, and that when the environment is characterized by confusion and unconducive learning environment, it affects the output of teachers negatively. Good classroom adorned with literacy materials, textbooks and literary works help to boost teaching especially the teaching of Literature (Crow 2001). The importance of literary materials such as books- literary text and critical texts, chats, flannel board, radio, digital facilities cannot be over emphasized in teaching especially literature in senior secondary schools (Azikiwe 1998) Crow (2001), Agwu (2005) and Okonkwo (2013).

Rice (2003) asserted that school buildings should be a stimulating agency and that classroom that has adequate space and equipment would help teachers teaching especially in Literature to be concretized and it would promote the growth of learning. This is why the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006) saw the effect adequate conducive classroom would have on teaching and learning and the need to realize the school objectives, stipulated twenty five pupils per class, the equivalent number of desks. This indicated indirectly that conducive classroom with adequate teaching facilities is a predictor in students good performance in teaching especially literature.

Urban or rural no doubt predict students' achievement in literature. Location is geographical setting in which schools are situated. Haris and Sass (2012) stated that the education aspirations of students who studied in the rural areas lag behind those of their urban counterpart. Balogun (2002) stated that a school located in the heart of the government reserved areas or housing estates cannot be compared with a school located in an unsuitable place like motor garage, main street or noisy environment and nearness to a big market. Noisy environment is likely capable of hampering teaching and learning conditions. Also, a long journey to school can be drudgery. Okonkwo (2014) discovered that schools in the rural areas are poorly financed and do not have teachers as well as lack facilities that facilitate studies than their urban counterparts.

Gender may predict students' achievement in literature. In a study carried out by Dibia (2013) on extrinsic motivation and its effect on job performance, it used 200 teachers in ten secondary schools. It was discovered that lack of motivation affects a teacher's attitude to work and also affects students' achievement in literature. Non commitment by teachers may be as a result of lack of motivation which leads to lack of job satisfaction (Maduwesi and Ihebereme, 2009). The different that exists in the two works is that the study is on job motivation while the present study is on Critical environmental variables that predict students' academic achievement in literature.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways would inadequate/qualified number of literature teachers predict students' achievement?
2. How would unconducive classroom with poor teaching materials predict students' achievement in literature?
3. How would poor/lack of facilities predict students' achievement in literature?
4. How would location of school predict students' performance in teaching literature?
5. How would gender mean rating predict students' academic achievement?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

1. Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on how location predicts students' academic achievement in literature.
2. Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of gender as a predictor of students' achievement in literature.

II. Methodology

The researcher employs the following method:

Design of the Study

A descriptive survey design was employed.

Area of the study

The three education zones - Abakaliki, Onueke and Afikpo Zones in Ebonyi State constitute the area of study.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all the teachers of Literature, English language, other language teachers and the school administrators with a total population of 1,126 teachers.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select schools which consisted both Urban and rural schools in the three Education Zones, 80 teachers for each, (40 for Urban and 40 for rural) which gave a total number of 240 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was used to generate information from respondents. The title of the questionnaire was Predictors of Literature Achievement Questionnaire (PLAQ).

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument contained fifteen question items that were in three sections: Each section contained a sub-title of questions which were generated based on a 4 point scale of strongly agree 4 points, agree 3 points, disagree 2 and strongly disagree 1 point . The respondents were required only to tick (√) on the appropriate view. Experts in the field of measurement and evaluation and Arts and Social Science Department of Ebonyi State University evaluated the instrument and their corrections and advice were taken care of.

Reliability of the Instrument

A reliability test was carried out using Crombach alpha method and a value of 0.89 was obtained and this warranted use of the instrument.

Method of Data Collection

A total of 240 questionnaires were taken to schools and distributed and on the spot distribution and collection were adopted and the data collected were presented in tables and analysed.

Method of Data Analyses

Statistics of mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions and decision rule based on 2.5 was used as upper limit but anything below it was regarded as low. The hypothesis was tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Data

Data was presented based on each objective and research question formulated.

Research Question 1: In what ways would inadequate number of qualified literature teachers predict students' academic achievement?

Table1: Teachers perceptions on inadequate number and unqualified teachers as predictor of students' literature performance.

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision	R
1	There exist inadequate number of literature teachers with too much work which affect their productivity negatively in literature teaching	125	70	20	25	3.20	0.81	Accepted
2	Schools use unqualified teachers who are not knowledgeable on the literature contents which adversely affect students performance in literature	127	83	13	17	3.3	0.6	Accepted
3	The unqualified teachers find it difficult and poorly interpret the curriculum and syllabus mapped out in literature	131	89	11	09	3.4	7.68	Accepted
4	The unqualified teachers find it difficult to understand and interpret concepts in literature class	122	78	21	19	3.2	65	Accepted
5	The teachers that are unqualified rather absent themselves in literature classes because of lack of confident and it affects students adversely	80	75	51	51	3.1	0.78	Accepted
Grand mean						3.24		

Data on table 1 had grand mean of 3.24 which indicates high acceptance that inadequate number and unqualified teaches predict student's achievement in literature.

Research 2: how would unconducive classroom with poor facilities predict students; achievement in literature?

Table 2: Mean responses on how unconducive classroom with poor teaching materials predict students' achievement in literature.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision	R
1	Inside of the classroom have no seats and tables which discomfot the students	151	119	31	39	2.3	0.81	Rejected
2	The classrooms are poorly ventilated and make students lose concentration in the lesson	70	80	51	39	2.8	0.81	Accepted
3	The classroom is not print rich and there is no effective library with current literature tests and this adversely impact on students' learning of literature	73	68	59	40	2.8	0.81	Accepted
4	Classes are without windows and doors making it difficult for students to stay in the school and read	82	94	34	30	2.9	0.72	Accepted

5	Most students do not have literature textbooks and do not read them but only relies on the teachings of the teacher	61	57	63	59	2.49	100	Rejected
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Grand mean **2.82**

Data on table 2 indicates a grand mean of 2.82 meaning that unconducive classroom with poor teaching materials predict poor achievement.

Research Question 3: How would lack of/poor facilities predict students' achievement in literature.

Table 3: How lack/poor facilities predict students' performance in literature.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision	R
1	Most schools have no boarding system, students trek long distance to school which make them to be tired and it affect their literature studies	121	61	31	38	3.1	0.84	Accepted
2	Most teachers reject teaching in the rural school as there are no teachers' quarters which adversely affect literature teaching and learning	60	64	60	56	2.8	0.098	Accepted
3	There is no good roads and electricity in most rural schools and indirectly adversely affect Literature teaching	60	70	72	38	3.0	0.85	Accepted
4	Most schools in the urban areas are located in noisy areas and it affect teaching and learning especially in literature	108	62	29	41	3.0	0.83	Accepted
5	Schools in the rural areas are generally poorly funded which adversely affect literature teaching	108	57	43	32	3.0	0.085	Accepted
6	There is no adequate libraries with good literature text	107	52	43	32	3.0	0.85	Accepted
Grand mean						3.0		

Table 3 had grand mean of 3.00 which indicates that poor or lack of facilities would predict poor achievement while availability of the facilities would predict better achievement

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of urban and rural schools on location as a predictor of students' achievement.

Table 4: T-test statistics on urban and rural schools on location as a predictor of students' achievement.

S/N	Location	No	Mean x	SD	T-cal	T-Critical 1.97	Remark
1	Urban	120	2.7	0.94	2.60	1.97	
	Rural	120	3.3	0.64	2.43		
2	Urban	120	3.0	0.81	2.43	1.97	
	Rural	120	3.0	0.81	2.43		
3	Urban	120	2.3	0.64	2.47	1.97	
	Rural	120	2.7	0.94	2.74		
4	Urban	120	2.7	6.2	2.74	1.97	
	Rural	120	2.7	0.94	2.60		
5	Urban	120	2.0	0.81	2.65	1.97	
	Rural	120	3.0	0.81	2.65		
6	Urban	120	2.8	0.91	2.47	1.97	
	Rural	120	3.2	0.64	2.47		

Significance at 0.05

The t- test analysis of location difference indicates that the T-critical value of 1.97 was greater than all the t calculate value. This indicates that location is a predictor on students' academic achievement.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant different on mean ratings of respondents on gender as a predictor of academic achievement.

Table 5: The t-test analysis on gender as a predictor of students' academic performance in literature.

Gender	No	Mean x	SD	T-cal	T-value 1.97
Male	95	3.08	0.84	1.41	1.97
Female	135	2.98	0.57		
Significance at 0.05					

Result on table 5 indicated that the calculated t-value of 1.41 was less that the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance, hence the hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there is no significant difference on teachers' perception on gender as a predictor of students' academic achievement.

III. Findings

The findings of the study were based on the three research questions and the two null hypotheses. Major themes of the study were used to discuss the results. Tables presented obviously indicated that school environmental variables predict students' academic achievement. Critical variables such as inadequate and qualified number of teachers, unconducive classroom with poor teaching materials, poor state or lack of facilities, all predict students' academic achievement. Location predicts students' academic achievement,

responses of respondents showed that male and female responses had no significant difference on gender as a predictor of students' academic achievement.

IV. Discussion

Data on table 1 on inadequate and unqualified teachers predict students' academic achievement. Item 1 on inadequate number with too much work had mean of 3.2 and SD of 0.81, item 2 on unqualified teachers teaching literature had mean of 3.3 and SD of 0.65, item 3 on poor interpretations of the curriculum had mean of 3.4 and SD of 0.65, item 4, on poor interpretation of content had mean of 3.2 and SD of 0.65 and item 5 on lack of confidence which adversely affects student had mean of 3.1 and SD of 0.78.

All these indicate that inadequate number and unqualified teachers predict students' achievement. These findings are in line with Lawrence (2012) and Sunday (2012) who stated that teachers are responsible for reshaping every child in the classroom and that the destiny of every child is being shaped in the school. Okonkwo and Agwu (2004) emphasized that schools are bound to fail when approximately 20% of the school faculty is comprised of unqualified teachers who do not meet minimum requirement to close achievement gap. This happens when qualified teachers are neglected. This is because most teachers will divert to other profession because of ill treatment of teachers, non-payment and non promotion and this adversely affect students in literature.

Table 2 on unconducive classroom with poor teaching materials as a predictor of students' achievement in literature, had summary of result as item 1 on lack of good seats and good tables had mean of 2.8 and SD of 0.81, item 2 on poor ventilation of the class had mean of 2.8 and SD of 0.81, item 3 on classroom without print-rich materials had mean of 2.8 and SD of 0.81, item 4 on classrooms without windows and door making it difficult for students to stay and read had mean of 2.9 and SD of 0.72. Item 5 on students do not have literature texts had mean of 2.49 and SD of 1.00. The grand mean is 2.8. These no doubt indicate that unconducive classroom predicts students' academic achievement. This Finding underscores the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2006) that prescribed conducive classroom with twenty-five students per class with equivalent seats and tables in a well ventilated class, with adequate teaching facilities. The findings also is at variable with Azikiwe (1998), Crow (2001), Agwu (2005) and Okonkwo (2013) who asserted that good classroom should be adorned with charts, graphs and literacy materials, textbooks and literacy works to help boost teaching especially in literature.

Table 3 on facilities in school as a predictor of students' academic achievement in literature. Item 1 on most schools have no boarding system and students are made to trek long distance have mean of 3.1 and SD of 0.84, item 2 on most schools do not have teachers quarters and teachers refused accepting teaching jobs have mean of 2.9 and SD of 0.98, item 4 on schools are located in noisy environment which affect literature teaching had mean of 3.0 and SD of 0.83. Item 3 on poor funding of schools especially schools in the rural areas have mean of 3.00 and SD of 0.85, and item 6 on poor libraries with obsolete books or no literature texts had mean of 3.00 and SD of 0.85. All these clearly indicate that facilities in school predict students' performance and that when there is poor or lack of facilities in schools, students are bound to perform poorly in their academic especially in literature. The findings is what Reller (2009) advocated that school buildings should be a stimulating agency and that adequate space and equipment would help teachers and students to boost effective teaching and learning.

Table 4 showed that gender does not play any significant role in teaching and learning as the t-cal of 1.14 were less than the t-critical value at 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance. The finding is in line with Dibia (2013) who discovered that no significant difference existed on teachers' perception of extrinsic motivation of gender on job Performance, and also Maduwesi and Ihebeneme (2009) discovered that poor remuneration of teachers may correlate with the teachers' impute and attitude to work.

Table 5 on location of school as a predictor of students' academic achievement in literature indicated that the t-cal in all the items were greater than the t-critical value at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that teachers have the same opinion on the fact that facilities and equipment determine students' performance. Students are likely to perform better where there are enough and additional facilities with adequate funding of the school and with well qualified teachers who are well motivated. The findings is also line with Lawrence (2012) Harris (2012) who stated that location predicts student achievement and that students who studied in the rural areas lag behind most of their urban counterparts. This is because rural schools lack facilities and fund that were provided in their counterpart urban. This lack of facilities in the rural schools lead to poor achievement in subjects especially in literature

V. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher would conclude that school environment variable such as qualified and adequate number of teachers, conducive classroom with effective teaching materials and educational facilities, predict students' achievement especially in literature. Most schools especially in the rural

areas experience lack of qualified teachers and they make do with teachers who are in other fields that are not qualified to teach the subject.

Most teachers reject accepting jobs in the rural areas because of bad roads, lack of teachers' quarters, lack of electricity and roads and lack of incentives in the rural areas. Generally most teachers run away from teaching because of poor remuneration. Most schools in the rural areas experience poor or lack of educational facilities. Also, gender do not determine students' academic achievement, whereas facilities as qualified teachers, school buildings, library, laboratory and learning equipment as well as conducive class and the likes predict students academic achievement in literature.

VI. Recommendations

1. Qualified teachers especially in literature should be recruited, trained and retrained by the government.
2. Classroom should be made conducive, teacher should endeavour to make the class to be print-rich and provide more captions that can catch attention of the students and develop interest in literature.
3. Educational facilities should be provided by the government to boost learning and the same facilities should be extended to the rural areas. This would facilitate learning especially in literature.
4. Government should handsomely motivate teachers, through prompt payment of their salaries and release of their promotions and even incentive for more dedicated and committed teachers irrespective of sex.
5. Development should be extended to the rural areas and the school facilities, conducive classroom and qualified teachers of literature.
6. Schools in the urban areas should not be cited in a noisy area to avoid distractions.

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