

## PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATES

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### Abstract

This study examined the Perceived Influence of School Environmental factors on the academic adjustment of senior secondary school students in Nsukka local government of Enugu state. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study was 3,357 SS.2 students from public secondary school in Nsukka local government area of Enugu state. Simple random sampling technique was employed and the sample size was 345 which was 10% of the population. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, school environmental factor questionnaire (SEFQ), and academic adjustment questionnaire (AAQ) was used to collect data. The instruments were face validated by three experts, two from department of Counselling and Human Development studies and one from Science Education (measurement and evaluation) all from the faculty of Education University of Nigeria Nsukka. Cronbach alpha value for the instruments showed reliability coefficient of the 0.81, 0.78, and 0.74 respectively. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Findings revealed that positive teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, and a safe school climate significantly influence students' academic adjustment. Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms were found to negatively impact students' ability to adapt academically, while the availability of adequate learning resources had a positive correlation with academic adjustment. The study recommended amongst others that educational stakeholders should invest in better infrastructure, foster supportive teacher-student relationships, and ensure equitable access to instructional materials.

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**Keywords:** School environment, academic adjustment, secondary school, classroom conditions, overcrowding, learning resources

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### Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental tool for the personal and societal development of individuals. Within the school setting, several factors contribute to the academic success and overall development of students. At the secondary school level, students face increasing academic demands, developmental transitions, and social expectations, making this period crucial for their overall adjustment and long-term academic success. One of the most critical but often overlooked aspects is the school environment. Among the various influences on a student's academic experience, the school environment stands out as a powerful and multifaceted factor. This environment includes the physical infrastructure, teacher-student interactions, peer relationships, administrative support, learning resources, and general school climate (Ogunyemi, 2019).

Secondary education is a crucial tier in the hierarchy of education in Nigeria. It is the midway between primary and tertiary schools. It is the form of education that students receive after their primary education and or before their tertiary education. It is intended for pupils between the ages of 11-17. Secondary Education is the budding ground for future professionals as well as the foundation for the discovering and classification of the specific fields of professions. Prior to the independence of Nigeria through to 1982,

Secondary Education lasted only five years. After the duration of five years, those who obtained the required qualifications were allowed for the two years of Higher School Certificate which qualifies them for university education. Thus, the system allowed for three years junior and two years senior. However, discovering the need to enhance this tier of education with science and technical subjects, the curriculum was broadened to have its duration extended to six years. The importance of this stage of education cannot be over-emphasized. (Sulaimano, 2019). In 2012, UNESCO defined secondary education as "the education provided in institutions designated by national authorities as secondary or high schools" (UNESCO, 2012). The World Bank, in its World Development Report 2018, described secondary education as "the educational stage that follows primary education and precedes tertiary education" (World Bank, 2018). The United Nations, in its Sustainable Development Goals framework (2015), characterized secondary education as "the stage of education that follows primary education and prepares adolescents for tertiary education or entry into the workforce" (United Nations, 2015)

In Nigerian situation, secondary education is the basic or raw material provider for the desired future manpower resources. Taiwo (2016) observed that secondary education is of great importance to the nation because it is a mid-level manpower production that is necessary to sustain and improve the economy. Nwangwu et al, (2012) articulated the objectives of secondary education as follows; secondary education should provide the learner with the opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and the rightful attitudes for the development of self and the nation, equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology, develop and project Nigeria culture, art and language as well as the world cultural heritage, raise the generation of people who think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, and respect the dignity of labour, develop ability for enquiry, critical thinking and rational judgement. Operationally, Secondary school, is the second formal stage in education and generally begins at ages 11-13 and ends at ages 15-18. It is the formal schooling given after primary (elementary) school and before college. In support of the above objectives of secondary education posited by Nwangwu, et al (2012), the federal government of Nigeria recognized the importance of secondary education as an institution that provided the bulk of its workers and introduced the basic technological skills within the academic session (Obanya, 2010). According to Gidado (2012), noted the importance of secondary education in Nigeria as foundation for higher manpower skills being offered in the tertiary institutions, it provides the sources of fueling and re-fueling the tertiary institutions and other stakeholders in secondary education. Consequently, the country depends on the viability of the secondary education. In the context of this study, secondary school education can be defined as that education for children that follows primary education and leads to either employment or higher education, and it is also an institution that reforms and package the beneficiaries with basic information that will make one a successful being to one's self and as well to the society.

In Nigeria, secondary education typically spans six years and is divided into junior and senior secondary levels, each designed to equip students with essential skills for future academic and career pursuits (Okeke, 2020). Beyond academics, secondary schools play a crucial role in shaping students' values, decision-making abilities, and interpersonal skills, helping them navigate the challenges of adolescence (Adeyemo & Adeleke, 2021). However, despite its importance, many students face difficulties in adjusting academically, socially, and emotionally, which can impact their overall educational experience (Ugwuoke, Ikedimma, & Okechukwu, 2023). In recent years, secondary schools in Nsukka local government have also appeared not be free from the increasing cases of academic maladjustment among students. This issue manifested through several

behavioural indicators, including poor academic performance, frequent absenteeism, low classroom engagement, reluctant of complete assignments, and a tendency toward examination malpractice (Anselem & Akanaeme, 2021; Ugwuoke, Ikedimma, & Okechkwu, 2023). Many students also struggle with emotional distress, lack of interest in learning, and difficulty adhering to school rules, which further hinder their academic success.

Globally, numerous studies have emphasized the role of school environmental factors in shaping academic outcomes. In developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and Finland, educational reforms have consistently focused on improving school infrastructure, promoting inclusive classroom environments, and strengthening student-teacher relationships. For instance, schools in Finland have integrated flexible classroom designs, strong teacher autonomy, and student-centered learning approaches, contributing significantly to students' academic success and well-being (Sahlberg, 2015). These countries have shown that an enriched and supportive school environment not only promotes academic performance but also enhances students' emotional and social development. In contrast, many developing countries, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa, face systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, poor school facilities, and undertrained teachers. In Nigeria, despite efforts to reform the education sector, the quality of the school environment remains a major concern. Research and reports by organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO have highlighted that Nigerian students often learn in suboptimal conditions characterized by broken furniture, lack of ventilation, teacher shortages, and large class sizes (UNICEF, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). These environmental constraints often lead to poor academic adjustment, increased dropout rates, and reduced academic motivation (Ajayi & Oladejo, 2022).

Several studies have indicated that environmental factors within the school significantly impact students' ability to adjust academically. A safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment has been found to enhance students' engagement and willingness to participate in learning activities. Conversely, poor classroom conditions, lack of instructional materials, unsupportive teacher attitudes, and negative peer interactions can lead to academic disengagement and stress. Operationally, school environmental factors refer to the physical, social, and psychological aspects of a school's environment that can influence secondary school students' learning, behaviour, and well-being. In the context of Nigerian secondary schools, issues such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, teacher absenteeism, and poor student-teacher relationships are common challenges that may hinder academic adjustment. Despite efforts by the government and stakeholders to improve the quality of education, many students still face difficulties in adapting to school demands, which raises questions about the adequacy of school environments in promoting positive academic outcomes.

Academic adjustment, on the other hand, refers to how well a student adapts to academic demands such as completing assignments, understanding lessons, managing time effectively, preparing for examinations, and coping with academic stress. Successful academic adjustment has been associated with higher academic achievement, better mental health, and improved motivation among students. However, many secondary school students struggle to adjust to the academic expectations placed upon them, leading to poor academic performance, school avoidance, and, in some cases, dropout. Academic adjustment is a crucial factor in students' overall success, influencing their academic performance, emotional well-being, and future aspirations. However, researches indicate that academic maladjustment among secondary school students in Nigeria is a prevalent

issue, manifesting through various behavioural indicators. For instance, a study by Uyanga (2016) highlighted that maladjusted students often become withdrawn, introverted, disruptive, or exhibit other disturbed behaviours, leading to poor academic attainment. Similarly, Edinyang, Effiom, and Unimtiang (2020) observed rising levels of student dissatisfaction, violence, cultism, poor student relationships, and poor academic achievement, all of which point to students' school maladjustment. These findings underscore the need for a conducive learning environment to address academic maladjustment in Nigerian secondary schools. Many students struggle to adjust to academic demands due to inadequate study habits, lack of motivation, and an inability to balance school responsibilities with personal life.

Academic adjustment is not solely about academic tasks but also about navigating social and emotional aspects of the educational environment. Guidance services may contribute to students' social and emotional well-being, impacting their overall adjustment to the academic setting. Academic achievement of secondary school students is a key factor in attaining the goals of secondary education. It is typically measured by grades, GPA, and standardized test scores (Kulm, 2020). Similarly, academic achievement is the demonstration of learning, often measured by standardized test scores or other assessments (Brookhart, 2013). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019) defines academic achievement as the extent to which students have acquired knowledge and skills valued by society, as measured by standardized tests and other assessments. Operationally, academic achievement is the extent to which a secondary school student has mastered the knowledge and skills required in their educational program. Academic achievement is crucial not only for evaluating student learning but also for determining whether students can progress to higher institutions. The results of nationwide examinations significantly affect students' career prospects. Recently, there has been growing concern over the decline in students' academic achievement in Nigeria. Soyinka (2019) confirmed this decline, stating that academic standards have fallen drastically, and the quality of graduates produced by the nation's schools is questionable. This decline may be attributed to several factors, including self-esteem. Academic adjustment encompasses various aspects like managing academic workload, developing effective study habits, coping with academic stress, and integrating into the social and institutional culture of the academic setting. To Kritikou and Giovazolias (2022), academic adjustment as "the process through which students adapt to the academic and social demands of a higher education setting." This adaptation involves balancing academic workload, managing relationships with peers and faculty, and adjusting to new learning environments and expectations. Academic adjustment is influenced by personal motivation and the quality of support systems in place (Kritikou & Giovazolias, 2022). Adnan, Zafar & Khan (2023) also described academic adjustment as "a moderating factor in the relationship between social support, psychological capital, and academic success."

This view emphasizes the role of perceived social support and psychological strengths like resilience and hope in helping students manage academic stress and perform well academically. On the other hand, Liran and Miller (2022) defined academic adjustment in terms of psychological capital, stating that "students who possess strong psychological resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience are better able to adjust to the academic challenges of higher education." Academic adjustment is seen as essential for long term academic success and student well-being (Liran & Miller, 2022). As such Bouffard, Jones & Pappas (2023) highlighted that students who develop coping mechanisms like time management and seeking academic support tend to have a smoother transition into higher education (Bouffard et al., 2023). This is however supported by

Ahmad and Khalid (2023) where they defined academic adjustment as the process through which students manage their emotional and academic responsibilities, often relying on emotional intelligence to maintain positive relationships with peers and teachers. This emotional aspect of adjustment is key to sustaining academic motivation and engagement (Ahmad & Khalid, 2023). Academic adjustment is operationally defined as the dynamic process through which secondary school students modify their behaviours, attitudes, and strategies to effectively meet the demands of the educational environment. It involves not only adapting to the academic challenges presented by coursework but also encompasses the development of effective study habits, social integration, and emotional resilience necessary for successful navigation of the educational journey. Academic adjustment is not solely about academic tasks but also about navigating social and emotional aspects of the educational environment. Guidance services may contribute to students' social and emotional well-being, impacting their overall adjustment to the academic setting.

Given this backdrop, it becomes necessary to explore how school environmental factors influence academic adjustment of secondary school students. Understanding this will provide insights into how schools can create more supportive and effective learning environments that enhance students' academic adjustment. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the influence of school environmental factors on the academic adjustment of secondary school students, with the aim of identifying the specific aspects of the school environment that contribute most significantly to students' academic adaptation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The importance of a conducive school environment in promoting students' academic success cannot be overstated. A positive school environment characterized by adequate infrastructure, supportive teachers, healthy peer relationships, and effective management can significantly enhance students' motivation, concentration, and overall academic performance. However, in many secondary schools, especially within the Nigerian context, students often face various environmental challenges that hinder their academic adjustment. Many schools are overcrowded, lack basic teaching materials, and operate in physically dilapidated buildings. In some cases, students experience poor teacher-student relationships, peer bullying, and inconsistent classroom routines, all of which can negatively impact their ability to cope with academic demands. Despite the presence of educational reforms and government interventions, academic adjustment difficulties among students remain prevalent, as evidenced by poor academic performance, low attendance, lack of motivation, and high dropout rates. Although several studies have explored the factors influencing academic performance, relatively few have focused on the specific environmental conditions within the school and how they directly relate to academic adjustment. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for school administrators and policymakers to develop effective strategies that support students' academic adaptation. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate perceived influence of school environmental factors on the academic adjustment of secondary school students in Nsukka. The goal is to identify which aspects of the school environment most significantly influence students' ability to adapt academically, and to offer practical recommendations for improving educational outcomes through targeted environmental interventions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this study was to identify the perceived influence of school Environmental Factors on Academic Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify;

1. Perceived influence of school environmental factors on academic adjustment of secondary school students.
2. perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. overcrowding) on academic adjustment of secondary school students
3. perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resources) on academic adjustment of secondary school students

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the perceive school environmental factors on academic adjustment of secondary school students of secondary school students?
2. What is the perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. overcrowding) on academic adjustment secondary school students?
3. What is the perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resourses) on academic adjustment of secondary school students?

### Methods

Descriptive survey design was used for the study and the population of the study comprised all the 3,357 Senior Secondary School II (SS2) students from 63 public secondary schools in the Nsukka. 1,496 students are male, while 1,861 are female (Post Primary School Management Board, 2024). The decision to focus on SS2 students is intentional, as they have already experienced counselling during their transition from junior secondary school and have begun to adjust to the demands of secondary education. Their experiences make them suitable subjects for understanding the challenges related to academic adjustment. This study utilized a sample size of 345 students, drawn from six intact classes within the study area. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft online sample size calculator (Raosoft, 2004), based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A multistage sampling procedure was employed to enhance the representativeness and accuracy of the sample selection. In the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was used to select six secondary schools from Nsukka Local Government Areas. In the second stage, a cluster sampling technique was applied, whereby all SS2 students from the selected six schools were included in the study. The use of the cluster sampling technique was considered appropriate as obtaining a comprehensive list of all SS2 students across the entire population was difficult. Additionally, selecting intact classes ensured that all eligible students within the chosen schools had an equal chance of participation. The selection of SS2 students was justified based on their intermediate status in secondary school. At this stage, students have encountered academic challenges and adjustments but are not yet preoccupied with final-year external examinations, making them ideal participants for assessing academic adjustment.

Instrument for data collection was researcher develop questionnaire titled “School environmental factor questionnaire (SEFQ) “and “Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ)” The Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ) was designed to assess secondary school students' ability to adapt and thrive within their academic environments. The instrument has a total of 22 items. Students respond using a four-point Likert scale: 4 = Strongly Agree (SA), 3 Agree (A), 2 Disagree (D), and 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). Scores from each cluster range from 5 to 20, with the total questionnaire score ranging from 20 to 80. Higher scores indicate better academic adjustment, while lower scores suggest poor academic adjustment. The School Environmental Factors Questionnaire (SEFQ) and the Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ) were subjected to face

validation by three experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria two from the Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies and one from Measurement and Evaluation unit of Department of Science Education. The reliability of the instruments, School Environmental Factors Questionnaire (SEFQ) and Academic adjustment questionnaire (AAQ) was determined by administering 20 copies of each of the questionnaire to students in Igbo-Eze South Local Governing Area that is outside the study area but share similar characteristics with the study area. Data collected from their response was used to establish the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaires using Cronbach Alpha Method. The SEFQ yielded reliability coefficients of 0.78, 0.71, and 0.74, for clusters A, B, and C respectively with overall reliability coefficient of 0.81. The AAQ yielded overall reliability coefficient of 0.95.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What are the perceived influence of school environmental factors on academic adjustment of senior secondary school students?

**Table 1:** Mean ratings and standard deviation of respondents on the perceived influence of school environmental factors on academic adjustment of secondary school students.

| S/N               | Item Statement                                                     | Mean       | SD          | Decision |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------|
| 1                 | My teachers are approachable and supportive                        | 3.85       | .362        | Accept   |
| 2                 | I have a good relationship with most of my teachers                | 3.39       | .911        | Accept   |
| 3                 | My classmates provide helpful academic support                     | 3.44       | .807        | Accept   |
| 4                 | There is mutual respect between students and teachers in my school | 2.05       | 1.172       | Reject   |
| 5                 | I feel safe and comfortable within my school environment           | 3.33       | 1.065       | Accept   |
| 6                 | There are clear rules and discipline procedures in my school       | 3.49       | .825        | Accept   |
| 7                 | My school encourages academic and personal growth                  | 3.55       | .681        | Accept   |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                    | <b>3.3</b> | <b>0.83</b> |          |

**Key: SD = Standard Deviation**

The Table above revealed that the respondents agreed that items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 are perceived influence of school environmental factors that influence academic adjustment among senior secondary schools. The decision was based on the fact that the items had mean ratings above cut off point of 2.50 set for decision rule. meanwhile, the respondents agreed that item 4 is not school environmental factors that influence academic adjustment among senior secondary schools. This decision was taken since the items have mean rating below the cutoff point of 2.50 set for the decision rule. The grand mean of 3.3 shows that school environmental factors that influence academic adjustment among senior secondary school students. The standard deviations of the 7 items ranged from 0.36-1.17 indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response. It shows that students reported high influence from teacher-student relationships, peer support, and learning materials, indicating these as environmental factors influencing academic adjustment.

**Research Question Two:** What is the perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g., overcrowding) on academic adjustment?

**Table 2:** Mean rating and standard deviation of respondents on influence of classroom conditions (e.g., overcrowding) on academic adjustment

| S/N               | Item Statement                                                             | Mean        | SD          | Decision |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| 1                 | My classroom is often overcrowded with too many students.                  | 2.90        | .740        | Accept   |
| 2                 | Overcrowding in my classroom makes learning difficult.                     | 3.31        | 1.100       | Accept   |
| 3                 | I find it hard to concentrate in an overcrowded classroom.                 | 2.09        | 1.143       | Accept   |
| 4                 | Teachers are unable to give individual attention due to large class sizes. | 3.36        | .869        | Accept   |
| 5                 | The noise level in my class affects my ability to study.                   | 1.92        | 1.007       | Accept   |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                            | <b>2.64</b> | <b>0.90</b> |          |

**Key: SD = Standard Deviation**

The Table above revealed that the respondents agreed that all items are influence of classroom conditions (e.g. overcrowding) on academic adjustment. The decision was based on the fact that the items had mean ratings above cut off point of 2.50 set for decision rule. The grand mean of 2.64 indicates influence of classroom conditions (e.g. overcrowding) on academic adjustment. The standard deviations of the 7 items ranged from 0.602-1.14 indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response. This implies that overcrowded classrooms hamper students' ability to adjust effectively to academic demands.

**Research Question Three:** What is the perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resources) on academic adjustment?

**Table 3:** Mean rating and standard deviation of respondents on perceived influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resources) on academic adjustment?

| S/N               | Item Statement                                                            | Mean        | SD          | Decision |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| 1                 | My school has enough textbooks for all students.                          | 3.40        | 0.897       | Accept   |
| 2                 | Teaching aids (charts, models, projectors) are available in my classroom. | 3.47        | 0.833       | Accept   |
| 3                 | I can easily access learning materials in school.                         | 3.49        | 0.809       | Accept   |
| 4                 | The classroom is well-ventilated and conducive for learning.              | 3.41        | 0.829       | Accept   |
| 5                 | There are enough chairs and desks for all students in my class.           | 3.49        | 0.834       | Accept   |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                           | <b>3.44</b> | <b>0.84</b> |          |

**Key: SD = Standard Deviation**

The Table above revealed that the respondents agreed that all the items are influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resources) on academic adjustment.

The decision was based on the fact that the items had mean ratings above cut off point of 2.50 set for decision rule. The grand mean of 3.44 indicates the influence of classroom conditions (e.g. availability of resources) on academic adjustment, indicating that well-resourced classrooms enhance students' capacity to adjust academically.

### Discussion of findings

The first findings revealed that teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, and availability of learning materials were among the key environmental factors influencing students' academic adjustment. These findings support the assertions of Eccles and Roeser (2011) and Thapa et al. (2013) that positive school climate and interpersonal relationships significantly impact students' academic behaviors and outcomes. When students feel supported by teachers and peers, their emotional and academic engagement improves.

The second findings showed a significant negative correlation between classroom overcrowding and academic adjustment. This implies that as class sizes increase beyond capacity, students find it more difficult to concentrate, receive individual attention, and feel comfortable in the learning space. These results echo those of Ajayi and Oladejo (2022), who reported that overcrowded classrooms negatively affect students' performance due to distractions and limited resources.

The third findings showed that the availability of classroom resources had a significant positive impact on academic adjustment. Students in classrooms equipped with learning materials, textbooks, and teaching aids were more likely to adapt successfully to academic demands. This finding supports the view that resource-rich environments foster better academic performance and student confidence. The findings also agreed that academic adjustment is influenced by personal motivation and the quality of support systems in place (Kritikou & Giovazolias, 2022).

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore concluded that school environmental factors, particularly interpersonal relationships and classroom conditions, play a significant role in determining the academic adjustment of senior secondary school students. Classrooms that are less crowded and equipped with adequate resources enhance students' ability to adjust and perform academically. Strengthening these areas is vital for academic success.

### Recommendations

1. Government and school management should implement policies to reduce overcrowding by constructing additional classrooms.
2. Adequate funding should be allocated to provide instructional resources that enhance the teaching-learning process.
3. Teachers should receive ongoing training in creating inclusive and supportive classroom environments.

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