

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND PEER RELATIONSHIP AS CORRELATE OF ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between school climate and peer relationship on academic adjustment of secondary school students with disabilities in universities in Southeast Nigeria. To guide the study, three research questions were answered and three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The design of the study was correlational survey design. The study was carried out in ten public universities in Southeast Nigeria. The sample for the study comprised 206 students with disabilities drawn using purposive sampling technique. Three instruments were used for data collection and they are questionnaire titled "School Climate Questionnaire" (SCQ), "Students Peer Relations Questionnaire" (SPRQ) and "Students Academic Adjustment Questionnaire" (SAAQ). The instrument yielded the following reliability 0.98, 0.76 and 0.65. Result of the study showed there was significant relationship between school climate and academic adjustment, there was significant relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment and lastly the result of the study showed that there was statistically significant relationship among school climate, Peer relationship and academic adjustment of students in Lagos State. In line with the findings of the study, the educational implications of the findings were highlighted and the recommendations were proffered among others that school administrators should ensure that basic materials needed for teaching students with disabilities in mainstream school are provided to ensure proper academic adjustment among them.

Keywords: School climate, Peer relationship, Correlate of academic, Adjustment, Persons disabilities, Tertiary institutions

Introduction

Individuals with disabilities are sometimes been marginalized and hidden away in the society because of their disabilities. They are routinely institutionalized, denied education and subjected to discrimination in employment, housing, transportation and many other aspects of daily life (Ametepee and Anastasiou, 2015). The term disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. According to the United Nations Convention on the Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), disability is the state of having physical, sensory or chronic health impairment which hinders one from full and active participation in the society on equal basis with others. Hence, disability is an impediment, limitation restriction or lack of abilities experienced by an individual in performing an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. In this study, disability is the condition that disposes an individual to having special needs. Disabilities could be



difficulties in six core functional domains which are seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, and communication (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2018). This informs that there are varying forms of disabilities.

A lot of individuals have different levels or forms of disabilities in different countries of the world. World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) reported that “about one billion people, or 15% of the world’s population, experience some form of disability, and disability prevalence is higher for developing countries of which Nigeria and Ghana are part. In Nigeria for instance, over 25 million Nigerians suffer from one physical deformity or the other, with over 3.5million of them having difficult challenges of moving around (Langhera, Riccia, Reversib, & Citarellia, 2010). These people who live with a disability face a multitude of barriers to participating equally in society. In particular, their right to education is often not realized, which in turn hinders their access to other rights and this creates enormous obstacles to reaching their potential and effectively participating in their community development.

However, a major milestone for the individuals with disabilities was the introduction of inclusion education which supported the right of people with special needs to live in community settings and learn in the same school environment with normal students. The idea of inclusive education was given impetus by two conferences set up under the support of United Nations. The first of these, held in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990, promoted the world declaration of ‘Education for All’. This was followed in 1994 by a UNESCO conference in Salamanca, Spain on the “Convention of the Right of Persons with Disabilities”. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1994) and United Nations (UN) convention on the right of persons with disabilities (2006) stipulates that the right to education is a fundamental human right for everyone irrespective of the individual’s abilities. Persons with disabilities need to be accorded equal opportunities in education as the other irrespective of the nature of their disabilities. Many countries committed to adapt the inclusive education agenda give way to inclusion within their education system in the form of special needs education.

From the forgoing, persons with disabilities can be regarded as individuals with special needs. Persons with special needs refers to individuals that have visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, emotional disorders, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, albinos, gifted and talented persons. They require a special type of education because of their needs. However, with the emergence of inclusive education, there is the provision equal opportunity for persons with special needs to study in the same mainstream schools with the others who do not have special needs. Research shows that persons with special needs who are included in the regular schools are likely to develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics, have higher rates of attendance, are less likely to have behavioral problems, and are more likely to complete secondary school than students who have not been included. As adults, students with disabilities s who have been included are more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education, and to be employed or living independently (Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, Burke, Hehir, 2016).

Nigeria is one of the developing country in sub-Saharan Africa that adopted the inclusive education agenda at all levels of their educational system. The idea for adoption of the innovation is on the ground of having a level playing ground for their citizenry. Nigeria became the 94th rectifier of CRPD and the 58th country that ratified the optional protocol. The adoption of inclusive education agenda at all educational level will provide learners with equal access to educational opportunities and as could ensure proper academic adjustment. Therefore, there is need for proper academic adjustment for students



with disabilities s learning in the same academic environment with others without special needs.

The term adjustment is often used as a synonym for accommodation and adaptation. Adjustment, in psychology, refers to the behavioral process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments (Mudhovozi, 2012). Azizah, Shah, Roziana, Siti and Faizah (2014) sees adjustment as a psychological concept which has to do with the process of achieving harmony among the individual and the environment. Usually this harmony is achieved through changes in the individual's knowledge, attitudes, and emotions about his or her environment. This culminates with satisfaction, feeling more at home in one's new environment, improved performance, and increased interaction with persons in this new environment. Adjustment is the degree or capacity by which individual students with different forms of disabilities tries to cope with inner tensions, needs, conflicts, frustration and is simultaneously able to bring coordination between his inner demands and those imposed by the school environment (Lee, Park& Kim,2009). A well-adjusted student is one who does not get affected negatively and adversely by the interactions such as conflicts, emotions in the academic environment and whose personality development goes through a healthy course of socialization (Sangeeta, 2012). To this effect, adjustment to school life as an important process which students with disabilities have to pass through in order to suit or fit in a new academic environment.

Adjustment to school life reflects on how much an individual achieves through it and its effect on his personal growth. Hiester, Nordstrom& Swenson (2009) stated that an individual's adjustment is a maturity process and man's behavior in facing his needs with the environment. Therefore, adjustment means immersing oneself in a new environment and adapting to that environment to suit one's needs. This shows that every individual has a unique way of adapting to different situations compared to others. Thus, self-adjustment is something that we do by ourselves to adjust to the environment and is different from others. The individual needs to undergo an adaptation self-process with the surroundings making the situation suit the needs of the individual so that the association is favorable not only to the individual but also the environment (Sukrekha, 2008). Tinto (1993) proposes three stages that students move through from school to college i.e. separation, transition and incorporation (integration or adjustment). Baker and Siryk's (1999) assert that there are four adjustment sub-scales which are academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional attachment.

Academic adjustment is seen as how students adapt to school life and academic demands. Paramanik, Saha and Mondal (2014) refers to academic adjustment as the ability of students to adapt to school life and there by reaching a state of satisfaction in his or her performance, interaction with colleagues, teachers and the environment as a whole. This suggests that students with disabilities can adequately adapt to school life when there is satisfaction not just their performance in school but also in healthy interaction with individuals in the school and the school environment entirely. In this study, academic adjustment refers the degree or capacity by which students with disabilities cope with the demands of the academic environment in other to achieve academic success and as well complete his or her academic program. Adjustment difficulties may arise from the differences between the expectations of the students and realities of school life that is higher education life. These difficulties could be as a result of the kind of school climate that is obtainable in the academic environment.

School like any other organization has its own climate. School climate is generally the atmosphere for learning. The National School Climate Center (NSCC, 2012) define school climate as “the quality and character of school life”. Furthermore, they posit that school climate is based on “patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures”. That is to say, that school climate cuts across the experiences of school life by different individuals including students with disabilities as it relates to values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes, structures and culture.

School climate is a crucial factor that should not be overlooked as it translates to students' performance as well as their academic adjustment. Evidence has shown that school climate is a leading factor in explaining students' learning and achievement as well as their academic adjustment (Maxwell, Reynolds, Lee, Subasic & Bromhead, 2017; Jia, Way, Ling, Yoshikawa, Chen, Hughes, Ke, & Lu, 2009). Students' experiences of their school environment, particularly those experiences like interpersonal supports and relationships affect not just their social and emotional well-being but also their academic adjustment. To this effect, there is need to ensure a positive school climate where diverse learners can thrive,

A positive school climate is an environment that ensures proper learning for all irrespective of their special needs. The NSCC (2013) asserts that sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development. Literature on school climate from different authors shows that positive school climate have a powerful influence on the motivation to learn, mitigating the negative impact of the socioeconomic context on academic success and contributing to less aggression, violence and sexual harassment (Astor, Benbenisty & Estrada, 2009; Attar---Schwartz, 2009; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, Shih, & Huang, 2010 and Karcher, 2002). In the contrast, negative school climate is tied to multiple negative outcomes for students and has been shown to exacerbate harmful behavior and diminish achievement. Negative school climate is linked to decreased graduation rates; poor student achievement, facilitates opportunities for bullying, violence, and even suicide; is associated with a decline in psychosocial and behavioral adjustment, as reflected in measures of self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and problem behavior; and for students with disabilities, it is tied to reports of anxiety, alienation from and disinterest in school, and feelings of being disrespected and not cared about by school staff (Maxwell, Reynolds, Lee, Subasic & Bromhead, 2017). Positive relationships are central to a safe and supportive school climate. Therefore, the type of relationship that exists among peers in school could be attributed to the nature of school climate that exist in their leaning environment.

A peer is simply people who are approximately of the same age and come from a similar social group. Peer relationship is the quality of friendship one has with his or her peers. Peer relationships have been studied from numerous perspectives, including friendship (Berndt, 1999), peer rejection or acceptance (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996), and bullying (Furlong, Chung, Bates, & Morrison, 1995). A considerable body of research has stressed the role that peer friendships and peer rejection play in determining students' social, emotional, and academic health as well as adjustment to school. Peer relationship, especially friendship plays several important roles in the personal and social development of students. It provides an arena for learning and practicing a variety of social skills including negotiation, persuasion, cooperation, compromise, emotional control and conflict resolution. This kind of relationship can be positive or negative.



Positive peer relationship happens when there is healthy, cordial and respectful interaction among peers. Evidence has shown that students who have a good relationship with their peers at the school are more likely to achieve more or at a high level (Kindermann, 2007). Experiencing positive peer relationships and friendships contribute to positive self-image, social competence and academic achievement, among other outcomes, and may act as a buffer against the negative impact of family troubles. Young people who find it difficult to develop such relationships are more likely to be aggressive, lonely and depressed (Teunissen, Spikerman, Scholle, 2012).

In relation to students with disabilities, negative peer relationships are generally recognized as being a major barrier to full social inclusion at the school for children and youth with disabilities. This is in recognition that an individual's relationship with peers is essential to their overall development. Hence, peer relationship is essential to the psychosocial as well as academic adjustment of every child and children with disabilities being inclusive (Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012). A socio-metric research carried out by Yu, Tepper & Russell (2009) brought attention to the peer relationships of students with learning disabilities showing that these children are often generally less liked or accepted by their classmate than other children. Also, Boer, Pijl & Minnaert (2012) assert that on a scale of positive, neutral and negative attitude, students hold neutral attitude towards peers with disabilities. Hence, the quality of relationship among peers relate to the social and over all participation of students with disabilities. By implication, if students with disabilities perceive being loved by their peers and feel welcomed as well this would help them achieve more in the academic environment and even outside the school. This will in turn make them achieve more in their academics, thus, ensuring that they adjust properly to the academic demands. Therefore, thus study investigated the relationship between school climate and pear relationship on academic adjustment of persons with disabilities in public universities in southeast Nigeria.

To guide the study, the following research questions where posed:

1. What is the relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities?
2. What is the relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment students with disabilities?
3. What is the relationship among school climate, peer relations and academic adjustment students with disabilities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested significance level of 0.05

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities.

HO₃: There is no significant relationship among school climate, peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY



This study adopted a correlational survey design. The study was carried out in the ten public universities in Southeast Nigerian. The sample for the study comprised all the 206 undergraduate university students with disabilities in the study area. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw only blind student's for the study out of all the disabilities that exist among the university students. Three instruments were used for the study, namely; School Climate Questionnaire (SCQ), Students Peer Relationship Questionnaire (SPRQ) and Students Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (SAAQ).The instruments SSCQ, SAAQ and SPRQ yielded internal consistency reliability index of 0.98, 0.76 and 0.65 respectively. The data for this study were collected by first meeting with the academic advisers of students with disabilities to first intimate them on the essence of the study and to also seek for permission to invite the students to answer the questionnaires. The researcher with the aid of research assistants helped to administer the instrument on the respondents and collected them on the spot. This study employed Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients and Regression analysis to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: what is the relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities universities?

Table 1: Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient (r) rating of relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities in universities

Variables	n	\bar{X}	SD	r
School Climate	206	2.70	.48	.96
Academic Adjustment	206	2.68	.49	

Data in Table 1 on the relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities showed the correlation coefficient between academic adjustment and school climate. From the table the correlation coefficient of .96 was obtained showing a direct positive relationship between the two variables.

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students with disabilities in universities

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) on relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of students in Lagos state (N=206).

ITEMS	School Climate	Academic Adjustment
School climate* n206	Pearson correlation 1 Sig. (2-tailed)	.962** .000 206
Academic adjustment Sig. (2-tailed) N 206	Pearson correlation .962**	1 .000 206



The result in Table 2 showed that Pearson correlation for school climate and school adjustment indicated significant relationship between school climate and academic adjustment, $r(1, n=206) = .962, p < .000$. Thus the null hypothesis of no significant relationship of between school climate and adjustment was rejected as the relationship is significant.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities?

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) rating of relationship between peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities

Variables	n	\bar{X}	SD	r
Peer relationship	206	2.61	.51	.84
Academic Adjustment	2062.68		.49	

Data in Table 3 on the relationship between peer relationship and academic adjustment of students showed that correlation coefficient of .84 was obtained showing a direct positive relationship between the two variables (peer relationship and academic adjustment).

H_{O2} : There is no significant relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment of students.

Table 4: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) rating of relationship between Peer relation and academic adjustment

ITEMS	Peer relationship	Academic adjustment
Peer relationship	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1 .840** .000
	n206	206
Academic adjustment	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.840** 1 .000
n206		206

Data in Table 4 showed that Pearson correlation for peer relationship and academic adjustment indicated relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment, $r(1, n=206) = .840, p < .000$. The null hypothesis was rejected. Indicating that there was significant relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship among school climate, peer relations and academic adjustment of students with disabilities?

Table 5: Regression analysis on relationship among School climate, Peer relationship and academic adjustment

Model	R	R ²
Correlation between	.98	.96

The three variables

(School climate, peer relationship

And academic adjustment

The data in Table 5 shows analysis on the combined relationship of school climate and peer relationship on academic adjustment of students. The results of the analysis yielded a coefficient of regression of R .98 and regression square of R² of .96. This implies that school climate and peer relationship jointly predict about 96% of the variation in academic adjustment of students with disabilities.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship among school climate, peer relations and academic adjustment of student.

Table 6: Regression analysis on significant relationship among School climate, Peer elations and academic adjustment

R Square	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	
.955	1	Regression	171.424	2	85.712	7734.244	.000
		Residual	8.090	203	.011		
		Total	179.514	205			

In Table 6, a multiple regression was run to predict academic adjustment from school climate and peer relationship. These variables statistically significantly predicted academic adjustment, $f(2, 203) = 7734.244$, $p < .000$, $R^s = .955$. The two variables added statistically to the prediction, $p < .05$. This showed that there is statistically significant relationship among school climate, Peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities.

Discussion

Result of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between school climate and academic adjustment of the students. There was significant relationship between peer relations and academic adjustment of persons with disabilities. Lastly the findings of the study shows that there was statistically significant relationship among school climate, Peer relationship and academic adjustment of students with disabilities.



The results of the shows that when there is positive school climate, it can culminate to high academic adjustment because school climate is a multi-dimensional construct that influences many individuals including students, parents, school personnel and community. It is also the relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of the school that is experienced by the members who includes students, teachers, administrators, secretaries, consultants and custodians. The finding of this study is in line with Jia, Way, Ling, and Hughes (2009), Ojelabi (2009), Kyalo and Chumba (2011), Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011), Osa-Edo and Iyamu (2012), and Babatunde and Olanrewaju (2014) who in their respective study found out that there was high relationship between school climate and students' academic achievement and adjustment.

This high relationship that exists between peer relations and academic adjustment of students with disabilities is an indication that peer relations play an important role in children's development, by offering unique opportunities for getting acquainted with the social norms and processes involved in interpersonal relationships, and for learning new social skills. They also provide contexts in which capacities for self-control may be tested and refined. Peer relations are also multi-faceted, meaning that children experience peer interactions through their participation in group activities, as well as through their dyadic (i.e. one-on-one) associations with friends. This supports Bandura's social learning theory which state that children learn best in a social context by interacting with their peers thereby learning from each other. This finding is in line with those of Newman (2003), Lubbers, Margaretha, Van Der Werf, Tom and Snijders (2006), Ujor (2014), Koriri and Kipkemboi (2014) and Bankole (2015) who in their respective studies found out that peer relations have high and significant relationship with students adjustment in various aspects of schooling.

Also, since there is high relationship among school climate, peer relationship and academic adjustment of the students with disabilities, it can be deduced that the variables must have culminated to student academic adjustment of students with disabilities. The finding is in line with the work of Koriri and Kipkembi who findings found out that school environment and peer influence made significant impact on students' academic performance.

Educational Implication of the Study

The findings of this study have implication for school administrators in the university and students. The implication of this finding for university administrators is that when the school climate is conducive enough for students' academic endeavor, they tend to adjust very well to school system thereby minimizing the high rate of school dropout and other delinquencies among students at the secondary school level. Therefore the school administrator should endeavor to ensure that proper school climates are prevalent in school. Also for peer relationships, the study shows that when students have good relationships among themselves, they will in turn have positive academic adjustment, therefore, school administrators should endeavor to create enabling environment for students with disabilities so that they will be able to adjust properly in their learning environment. Moreover, the study has shown that there is great relationship among school climate, peer relationship and academic adjustment. Therefore when there is an enabling environment, academic adjustment of students with disabilities will be positive. This can be sustained by creating an educational and counseling center to help students with disabilities to adjust to school life.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School administrators should ensure that basic materials needed for teaching students with disabilities in mainstream school are provided to ensure proper academic adjustment among student with disabilities.
2. There should be proper orientation for all students to ensure that they accommodate students with disabilities in their schools and give them the necessary love and care they need so that they will feel love and adjust properly in their learning environment.
3. Lecturers on their own should always recognize that students with disabilities need special care irrespective of the ideas of inclusive education, therefore they should ensure that they carry them along during instructions.

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