

The Influence of Aesthetic School Environment on Children's Motivation for Learning and School Attendance in Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

Young children respond differently based on the nature of the environment in which they live. An effectively designed classroom has the potential for positively influencing all areas of children's development: physical, social/emotional, and cognitive. The study examined the influence of aesthetic school environment on children's motivation for learning and school attendance in Ilorin Metropolis. This study adopted descriptive survey research design. Three Local Government Areas in Ilorin were used for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select five aesthetically rich schools, and five aesthetically poor schools also in the LGAs. All the primary one classes in each of the ten schools were used for the study. Rating scale of Children Motivation for Learning and a proforma for school attendance were used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analyzed using t-test statistics, with two hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed a significant difference in motivation for learning and school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools. Based on these findings, recommendations were made on the need for every stakeholder to provide an aesthetically rich learning environment for children to enhance effective teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Keywords: Aesthetic school environment, Children's motivation for learning, School attendance

Introduction

Environment of high quality signals to children that the schools or the educational institution is an important place to be. Aesthetic environment is about how the environment appeals to senses of the body and our emotional life. An aesthetically rich school can affect the children's behaviour, including their attitude to learning, their academic achievement as well as all areas of their development. Aesthetic is one of the opportunities that can be given to children to explore and experiment in the different areas of learning to bring their potentials to the maximum. Providing opportunities to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings freely through art, music and drama not only enable the children to express things creatively, it also fosters the development of other domains; such as physical, cognitive, language and social. Children should see school as a place to be and a place to stimulate their intellect.

Aesthetic comes from the Greek word; aesthesis, which means recognition via senses. The Aesthetic environment include; architecture, outdoor environment, interior design and aesthetic activities. Aesthetic environment is about whether the surroundings and environment are stimulating for the senses, and about giving pupils a multitude of impressions and possibilities of expressing themselves. The aesthetics of the educational environment are not just about making things aesthetically pleasing for the eye, but also about the surroundings and activities that affect all senses in the everyday life of the school.

The concept of aesthetic in children's environment encompasses much more than just the teaching and acquisition of purely technical skills in the visual art room. According to Isbell and Raines (2003), aesthetic is an area of art, concerned with feelings and responses to colour, form, and design. The entire picture of the aesthetic educational environment at the school includes, lessons in visual arts, woodwork, physical education, exhibitions, theatre, the surroundings, the buildings, the interior design and all these. An aesthetic environment provides architectural experiences for the senses in its proportions, scale, rhythm, light, materials, odours and colours that could influence all senses. Apparently, aesthetic is about seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting. Aesthetic is connected with beauty and the study of the beauty. It can stimulate children's senses in the form of art, music, dance and drama. A stimulating environment created

for such activities will enhance children's learning and thinking. As defined by Schirmacher, (1998), aesthetic involves the love and pursuit of beauty as found in art, movement, music and life. Feeney and Moravcik (1987) also described aesthetic as the awareness and appreciation of pleasant sensory experiences.

Much had been revealed by researchers about aesthetic environment and the importance of it for early childhood education and the benefits it can bring to the lives of the children. Friedman (2005); Firth (2008) and Bullard (2010) noted that, the better the aesthetics of the school, the better will be the response of the children and the educational surroundings of the school. Through aesthetic learning environment, researchers confirmed that, children acquire knowledge, understanding and skills that help them in the development of physical, intellectual, emotional and social domains. For example, Alvino (2000) submitted that, aesthetic allows children to enjoy success as it develops children's skills in eye-hand coordination, persistent, patience as well as good working habits. Also, Edwards (2002) observed that, when children are engaged in activities, they are comfortable with, it will motivate them to explore and learn more and thus build up their confidence. Eyestone-Finnegan (2001), saw the importance of an aesthetic environment and suggests that, images and objects that relate to the interest of young children should be displayed in the learning environment. The sense impressions which pupils get from the surroundings, influence their emotional life and ability to learn. Consequently, school environment provides experiences which influence the activities, communication, social gathering and well-being of the pupils. At the same time, the concept development they acquire during the process, enables them to have the ability to solve problems that involve thinking and imagining.

Aesthetic is also viewed as a necessary component to be included in developing a child holistically. Children who are exposed to beauty experiences will develop the skill to appreciate things that are taught to them in their early childhood setting. This development will ultimately lead to the appreciation and valuing of good design in their adulthood. As mentioned by Bullard (2010), aesthetic education in early childhood is to create opportunities to experience and promote interest so as to learn to appreciate and develop the skill to evaluate art forms. Aesthetic helps

children to understand other cultures and examples have evidently shown that, some of the information and knowledge we acquire about people from the past centuries were not recorded in the form of written words, but rather in the form of drawing. The National Art Education Association (NAEA) also supported that, aesthetic is the richest source for understanding culture as it reveals the human activities most of the time.

Children strive to make sense out of the world in which they live. They try to organize the visual images and concrete objects in their environment into meaningful systems. They want to determine how the space works and what activities can happen in this place. Specific design techniques, when combined with aesthetic, can help the environment become a wonderful place for nurturing their development. Children in aesthetically rich classroom, will have many opportunities for expanding their knowledge, by actively participating in a world that is appropriate for their level of development. It will include spaces for active play as well as spaces for privacy. Opportunities are provided for a child to work quietly, and areas are available where small groups can collaborate on a project.

An aesthetic learning environment is essential for young children's growth. Brain research suggests that, there are potentially lasting negative effects on the brain as a result of extremely poor environmental conditions (Bergen & Coscia, 2001). We shortchange our children when we provide them with an uninspiring learning environment. This can negatively impact learning. If children are not motivated and inspired, then they will not learn. Gandini (2005) reinforce this point by noting that, the way a space is aesthetically organized can assist in concentration and can also increase one's motivation to work in creative ways.

Motivation is an important and one of the major determinants of how well a child will learn. Ryan and Edward (2000) described that, to be motivated means to be moved to do something. Feeling impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as being motivated, that is being energized or activated toward an end. Motivation for learning has to do with pupils' desire to participate in a learning process. It determines children's involvement or noninvolvement in academic activities. Children are born with an inherent drive to learn. According to Marshall (1987), the term motivation to learn is the meaningful, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner, Ames (1990) noted that, motivation to learn

is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning. The challenge of educational environment is to help children to be self-motivated to learn, enjoying the process of learning, and seeing the value of what he or she learns.

Several researches have confirmed that, school attendance is an important factor in school success among children. Studies show that, better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; McCluskey, Bynum & Patchin, 2004; Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011). The attendance rate is important because pupils are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently. It's difficult for the teacher and the learning environment to build their skills and progress if a large number of pupils are frequently absent. According to these researchers, among many factors that contribute to student absenteeism, poor school climate is often associated with a child's frequent absence from school. There is also an inclination that, discouraging physical conditions may be responsible for poor attitude of pupils to learning and absenteeism in schools. Children's education is very important, and regular attendance at school is essential for them to achieve and do well in school. Children need to attend school daily to succeed. Aesthetic environment can help the environment become a wonderful place for nurturing the development of young children. When the environment is welcoming, the children who live in the classroom will have many opportunities for expanding their knowledge by actively participating in a world that is appropriate for their level of development and always attend school with the curiosity of coming to an engaging environment.

Children's development flourishes if they are surrounded by beautiful environment and experiences. Aesthetics of the environment provide opportunity for children to perceive learning as enjoyable as well as challenging and looking forward to more opportunities for discoveries about the things around them. The exposure of beauty in nature for aesthetic experiences encouraged children to express their thoughts freely as well as observing the surrounding without obstruction or hindrance. Studies have been conducted looking at the relationship between aesthetic environment and children's achievement, and the condition of the school building as well as children's motivation for learning. Accessible literature

revealed that, the whole aesthetic environment including both architectural design and aesthetic activities and pupils' motivation for learning plus school attendance have not been investigated. This study, therefore, investigated the influence of an aesthetic school environment on children's motivation for learning and school attendance in Ilorin metropolis.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in children's motivation for learning in aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools.
2. There is no significant difference in school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of aesthetic school environment on children's motivation for learning and school attendance in Ilorin metropolis. The population for this study comprised of all primary one classes in Ilorin Metropolis. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample ten schools: five of which were schools with aesthetically rich learning environment while the other five were with aesthetically poor learning environment. Primary one pupils of the sampled schools were selected for the study. A rating scale titled; "Children's Motivation for Learning Rating Scale" designed by the researcher was used as an observational tool to collect data on children's motivation for learning. The instrument was administered to children in two schools which were not part of the study. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through Cronbach alpha and reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. Also, a proforma was used to record pupils' attendance for two terms. The data collected were analyzed through the use of percentage and frequency count to describe demographic data of the respondents, while t-test statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result and Discussion

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in children's motivation for learning in aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools.

Table 1: Summary of T-test showing Difference in Children's Motivation for Learning in Aesthetically Poor and Aesthetically Rich School

Variable	N	Mean	Std. D	Df	t	Sig (p)	Remark
MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING							
Aesthetically Poor	5	19.40	1.52	8	-20.930	.000	Significant
Aesthetically Rich	5	34.20	0.20				

Table 1 shows children's motivation for learning in both aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools. The table shows that, the overall mean score of the children's motivation for learning in aesthetically poor schools is 19.40, while it is 34.20 for children in aesthetically rich schools. The mean values reveal an appreciable difference which indicates that, the children's motivation for learning in aesthetically poor schools is significantly lower than that of the children in aesthetically rich schools. Thus, there is significant difference in children's motivation for learning in aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools ($t=20.93$, $df=8$; $p<0.05$). Based on this result, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools.

Table 2: Summary of t-test showing Difference in School Attendance of Children from Aesthetically Poor and Aesthetically Rich Schools

Variable	N	Mean	Std. D	Df	T	Sig (p)	Remark
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE							
Aesthetically Poor	5	34.56	9.53	8	-3.637	.007	Significant
Aesthetically Rich	5	36.12	1.10				

Table 2 shows the attendance of children from both aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools. The table shows that, the overall mean score of the attendance of children from aesthetically poor schools is 34.56, while that of children from aesthetically rich schools is 36.12. This result reveals a little difference in the mean values, and this implies that, children in aesthetically poor schools do not attend school as much as the children in aesthetically rich schools. Thus, there is significant difference in school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools ($t=3.64$; $df=8$; $p<0.05$). Based on this result, hypothesis 2 is not accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Result of the study revealed a significant difference in children's motivation for learning in aesthetically rich schools and aesthetically poor schools. The motivation for learning of children from aesthetically poor schools is lower than that of the children in aesthetically rich schools. The finding is supported by Edwards (2002) who observed that, when children

are engaged in activities they are comfortable with, it will motivate them to explore and learn more and thus build up their confidence. The result also correlates with Gandini' (2005) who noted that, the way a space is aesthetically organized can assist children in concentration and can increase their motivation to work in creative ways. The result also confirmed the Brain research suggestion that, there are potentially lasting negative effects on the brain as a result of extremely poor environmental condition (Bergen & Coscia, 2001). The result is also in agreement with Brook (2007) who found that, the condition of the building to be related to motivation for learning and the improvement in the condition of the environment is associated with the improvement in overall achievement scores. The result is also supported by Firth (2008) who studied the aesthetic effects of the environment on people within different types of environments. Firth found that, pupils housed in "beautiful" rooms had better attitudes and greater achievement than pupil housed in "average" or "ugly" rooms. Robert (2011) also found the condition of building to be related to motivation for learning and the improvement in the condition of the environment is associated with the improvement in the overall achievement scores. These researches all indicate a significant enhancement of pupils' motivation to learn in a learning environment of higher aesthetic standards.

The result revealed that there is significant difference in school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools. The children in aesthetically poor schools do not attend school as much as the children in aesthetically rich schools. The finding agrees with Danish Act on the Educational Environment (2001) which stated in her document, advocating working with the aesthetic educational environment that, a large number of pupils--more than one in four--leave school before graduating. Many more are physically present in the classroom but largely mentally absent; they fail to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning. The result also support Friedman's (2005) view that, the exposure of beauty in nature for aesthetic experiences encouraged children to express their thoughts freely, as well as observing the surrounding without obstruction or hindrance and determines their attendance and stability in that environment. Blades (2011) found that, the variability in the school attendance and achievement among school age children deriving

from the variability in the nature of the schools they attend. Robert (2011) found that, the architectural settings of a school can affect the attitude of children towards the environment, facilitate the transmission of cultural values, stimulate or subdue, aid in creativity or slow mental perception, and can cause fear or joy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The result revealed that, there is significant difference in motivation for learning and school attendance of children from aesthetically poor and aesthetically rich schools. Active engagement of children in an aesthetic learning environment can motivate pupils to learn and also encourage their regular attendance in schools. Children's learning environment shapes the pattern of attitudes they develop toward learning. Aesthetic can help give children the message that learning is worthwhile and frequently it is fun and satisfying. Children's natural curiosity about the world should be welcomed by encouraging exploration, and familiarizing them with resources that can enlarge their world through aesthetically rich environment.

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

1. There is the need for development of a more comprehensive tool by school administrators and child educators to accurately implement aesthetically rich practice in their schools and classrooms. Creating an aesthetically learning environment can assist educators in reducing pupils' apathy.
2. Every stakeholder should appreciate the value an aesthetic environment can add to a child. Stakeholders should wake up to their responsibilities to provide an aesthetically rich learning environment for children to enable effective teaching and learning in early childhood education.
3. It would be important for research to identify empirically proven interventions for use by school administrators to facilitate the implementation of an aesthetic environment that would influence children's motivation for learning and school attendance

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