



Trends in School Physical Plant, Provision, Maintenance and Utilization

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Abstract

This work dealt with trends in physical plant provision, maintenance and utilization in secondary schools in Rivers State. Each of the subheadings was discussed. The types and importance of school physical plants were also discussed others were types and some of the issues of school plant maintenance. Conclusion and recommendation were made based on the literature.

Keywords: Trends, Physical, Provision, Maintenance, and Utilization

INTRODUCTION

Physical plant refers to all physical properties of a school, consisting of the grounds, buildings and the various facilities with the school grounds and inside the school buildings, (physical plant and facilities in educational management 2014). In other words, these are physical things present in school that can be seen, felt and touched and not the ones felt in the mind.

In line with the above, Adeboye (2000) defined school facilities as physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning which will increase the production of results. These school facilities serve as pillars of support for effective teaching and learning in the school.

According to Oyesola (2000), school physical plants or facilities include permanent and semi-permanent structures such as machinery, laboratory equipments, black board, teacher's tools and other equipment, as well as consumables. Good quality and standard of school depend largely on the provision, adequacy, utilization and management of education facilities. School physical plants or facilities, as already mentioned above, involve every single thing within the school premises meant to give maximum services (Allen, 2015).

According to Stoner, Freeman and Gillbet (1996), the environment of an organization remains all elements relevant to the operation and they include direct and indirect action elements. For them school physical facilities constitute the major components of both direct and indirect action elements in the environment of learning. Direct action elements are those actions which the teachers emphasize on while teaching while indirect action elements refer to those actions which manifest themselves unconsciously by the learners. It is an example when the learners put into practice what they have learnt without being reminded.

Research studies have shown that close relationship exists between the physical environment and the academic performance of students. Nwagwu (1978) and Ogusanju (1980) maintained that the quality of education children receive bears direct relevance to the availability or lack, thereof of physical facilities and overall atmosphere in which learning takes place. If the physical facilities are in short supply teachers would not be equipped to carry out their duties effectively, hence quality learning would not be expected. One can see that the quality learning cannot be over emphasized.

The school facilities, in other words school physical plants consist of all types of buildings for academic and nonacademic activities, equipment for academic and non-academic functions, area for sports and games, landscape, and paths. Others include furniture and toilet facilities, lighting, acoustics, storage facilities and parking lot, security, transportation, information and communication technology (ICT), clearing materials, food services and special facilities for the physically challenged. These facilities play vital role in the actualization of educational goals and objectives by satisfying the physical and emotional needs of the staff and students of the school.

Importance of school physical plants

The following factors are some of the observed importance of school physical plants.

(a) School physical plants remain as the strong hold of the school. In other words, they are the pillars of support for effective teaching and learning in school.

(b) School physical plants bring about good results of students in school. When the school is properly equipped, the students will learn better and bad result will be a thing of the past but the opposite will be the case where students scramble for seats before they are able to sit down for learning to take place as a result of lack of short supply, the comfort ability to learn well and better to pass their exams will not be there. Amachukwu (2010) observed this as part of the dilemmas in the classroom. She added that more facilities and equipment are necessary as population increases to avoid unnecessary disruptions during teaching and learning in school.

(c) School Physical plants arouse the interest of teachers to carry out their duties most effectively to generate quality learning. If they are in short supply, teachers would not be equipped to carry out their duties most effectively; hence quality learning would not be expected.

(d) School Physical plants remain the pride of the school, strength and reference point. It is clear that a school that is well equipped dominates the others that are ill-equipped in terms of population and even good results. This is because every parent would like to identify with such school in training his or her children; hence, Koroye (2010) observed that a school that is ill-equipped is like an empty sepulcher or a grave that nothing good can be found inside. This explains how important school facilities are in the life of a school as a social system.

Trends in physical plant provision

It is not a thing of impulse action to provide physical plant in our secondary schools but that of carefulness and well calculation. Some of the trends in the provision of physical plant are as follows:

Proper Planning

There has to be good and proper planning about it, hence it is aimed at the up-date of the school system for effective teaching and learning to take place and the achievement of high productivity. Possibly, there should be high feasibility study that will take care of the financial resources, school size in terms of land, population, subjects studied etc., before executing such plans. This will guide the planners to make just minimal mistakes, if ever, and ensure that adequate provision of facilities is made which will bring about effective teaching and learning. In line with this, Oyesola (2000) suggested the need for adequate provision utilization and maintenance of approved school buildings and facilities such that ensures effective teaching and learning situation. If the planning is poor, it will be difficult to achieve this objective.

Available school physical plant

Another trend for the planners to provide school physical plant is to ensure that they are available and adequate in function. It is possible to provide quality of such physical plants which may not serve their purposes. Although social justice demands that all schools be given the same treatment but it is possible to observe disparity between the treatment given to schools in the rural areas and that of the urban in terms of their educational facilities with regard to virtually every conceivable social amenity, the urban fare better than the rural areas, especially in the area of educational facilities. This explains why there is need for the planners to provide school physical plants adequately and trample this existing disparity underfoot.

Ololube, (2009) observed that this situation holds true in all countries, but this is more exaggerated in developing countries where a wide gap exists between the educational levels of urban and rural dwellers. It is not surprising therefore, to find the schools in urban areas better constructed, maintained and furnished.

Population explosion

Planners should consider population explosion in providing physical plants to schools. Before now there had been just a hand full of people looking for admission into our secondary schools. This is not the same now. The enrollment rate has increased drastically which needs to be faced with sufficient supply of facilities at all levels. It is an eye saw that students sit on the floor to take lesson. Some even stand. Many teachers no longer have the strength to manage their allotted classes because of the increase in numbers of students they are meant to teach. This is not helping effective teaching and learning.

Expressing his experience while in teaching practice supervision, ogbodo (1995) observed that in a number of public schools visited in the federal capital territory while supervising teaching practice students, there were classes that contained as much as 120 – 130 pupils. In these classes, chairs and desks were inadequate; teachers could not effectively manage the classes which translate to very poor teaching and learning environment or experiences.

Trends in physical plant maintenance

Maintenance of school plant is the keeping of school site, building and equipment in as near their original state of utility as possible. (Olotola 1981) in line with Olotola's view, Ajayi (2007) opined that school plant maintenance are all activities embarked upon with a view to sustaining initial use value of the school plant; such as sweeping of the floors, surroundings, dusting, moping, scrubbing etc.

Studies have shown that in some Nigeria public secondary schools, Rivers state as point of reference, there are laxities with regards to the maintenance of school plant. Some teachers do not care how the situation is, whether this plant are in good condition or not. They come to school, perform their duties and leave at the end of the day. Some of them complain that they have written a report to the ministry authorities who are yet to respond. We need to be proactive in things like this, not waiting endlessly for the government which may be detrimental to our joy and happiness.

Types of maintenance

a) **Regular:**

This is done in a periodic basis servicing of machines, typewriters, vehicles, generators, computers etc.

b) **Emergency maintenance**

This is the one that is very common in the system. Service men are called in when the equipment are out of use or broken down eg crack wall of hostel which requires urgency.

c) **Prevention and periodic maintenance**

It is a program for servicing of machine, system and structures, so that they keep maintaining their original being and before they malfunction. Olugboye (1978) and Ajayi (2007) having investigated on this, enumerated five maintenance systems similar to the ones mentioned above, as corrective, preventive and predictive, shutdown, running and breakdown maintenance.

Issues of school plant maintenance

Some of the issues that can affect school plant maintenance in various ways are;

- a) When the learners begin to rush for a few available seats for their lessons, break may occur and sometimes injuries are incurred. This is part of the dilemmas in the classroom (Amauchukwu et al 2013). It is therefore necessary to add more facilities and equipment's as population increases to avoid disruption during teaching and learning.
- b) Regular supervision is avoided by the ministry of education officials and this has led to the deplorable condition of school plant. This will normalize if the opposite becomes the case.
- c) Irregular attendance of the school heads makes possible delay in taking decisions that affect the running of schools and this is not helping matters etc.

Ways of maintaining school plant

Principals of schools should be thinking of the best interest of the learners under their care and one way of showing this interest is maintaining of the school plants. The minds of staff and students should be prepared by making them understand that they are one family and that the structures in the school premises belong to them and it is their duty to keep them in good condition after each use.

Principals should not give out any part of the school plant for commercial use since the users are likely to cause some damages which will take a lot to repair.

The school managers should form committee to take care of school plant on a regular basis to prevent a written report to the school principal

The community stake holders, if approached will participate in maintaining the school plant. Robbery of properties on the school compound which is done by the host community boys may be averted through their involvement.

The parents-Teachers Association also is a very powerful organ to use to ensure that school plant is maintained regularly by making funds available, lack of funds causes delay of any project. When funds are provided, the skilled men and women should be employed to swing into action for results to be achieved.

Principals should make it known to school staff that no school plant should be converted to private property. This will surely prolong the life span of the property. If the school vehicle is used to carry out official duty it will last for a long time, coupled with regular servicing. There should be periodic inspection and repairs of school plant so as to make teaching and learning worthwhile.

Trends in physical plants utilization

School physical plant utilization is a systematic process of rationalizing the provision, use and maintenance of these physical plants within an educational institution to ensure their optimal management and achievement of education objectives both in the immediate and in the future, given the available resources.

School facilities cannot manage themselves except there is good leadership that will set the ball rolling. Leadership, whether in the primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, has a vital role to play in the maintenance of school plant. Ministry workers do not stay in educational institutions on a daily basis in order to dictate what is going wrong or right with the school plant. The school authorities should be more concerned about what the students' needs are at the developmental stages and instructional levels. The students should be properly accommodated in their various classrooms and adequate facilities and equipment provided for their effective learning. Facilities and equipment should be for both indoor and outdoor learning so as to cater for overall development of the learner. These facilities and equipment should be properly maintained for them to render their services always, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and others.

Kemezevich (1975) emphasized that the physical needs are met through provision of safe structure, adequate sanitary facilities, a balanced visual environment, appropriate thermal environment and sufficient shelter space for work and play. The learner's emotional needs are met by creating pleasant surroundings, a friendly atmosphere and an inspiring environment. The head of an institution should make it a point of duty to appeal to people whose task it is to check all the facilities and equipment and submit their report to the authorities for adequate attention. In that case, maintenance culture should be part and parcel of institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Effective monitoring of users of school plant

Setting up monitoring team in every educational institution to check the school plant and the people using them and writing an official report about their findings would go a long way to make the school plant last long and remain valuable for effective use. The users should also be educated to make use of equipment they are meant for teaching and learning. Leaving the equipment lying fallow in our various educational institutions or neglecting them is not in the best interest of education in our nation. Students should be meant to understand that the school plant is for the interest of all and all hands must be on deck to keep them in good condition so as to make them serviceable.

School maintenance Culture

Obviously academic staff makes use of the plant most while administering their duties. The nonacademic staff takes care of them. They should organize random check from time to time so as to dictate in good time anything that might hinder effective teaching and learning. If in any institution staff play nonchalant attitude, be it in the primary, secondary and hinder levels, there can be no effective teaching and learning achievement.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION

In view of the above literature, the following conclusion was drawn.

School physical plant includes everything in the school premises. Planners of school physical plant should be highly foresighted to study and know what the school needs at any given period and supply same in their number and model. The leadership of school should be experienced so as to have control over school physical plant. The facilities in the school need to be monitored as well as the users; this will serve as a check on them.

Maintenance culture is very necessary to be adopted in order to ensure the facilities last long. In other words, there should be maintenance culture in schools. It is not necessary that principals of school give out part of school plant for commercial purpose and so, they should not commercialize school plant. School plant is not to be converted to private property. Principals of schools should make this known to all staff.

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