

Assessing the Adequacy of Aesthetic Nature and Maintenance of School Grounds of the Lagos State Public Schools: A Step Toward Sustainable Development

Olaide Alabi

Department of Science and Technology Education, Faculty of Education,
Lagos State University

Email: laidealbionline@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the quality of aesthetic nature of school grounds of Lagos state public schools: a step toward sustainable development. Two research questions were raised for the study. Multi-stage sample was used, where forty-six schools were purposively selected from two districts to participate in the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and checklist and questionnaire were used to collect data. The reliability coefficients of the instruments were found to be 0.85 and 0.84. The findings show that Lagos State Junior Secondary Schools did not regard the major relevance of the aesthetic nature of school grounds, such as good quality hedges; walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks and assembly grounds, therefore they do not have quality aesthetic designs for school grounds. On how schools were maintained with regards to floods during the rainy season, results show that the following categories of these agents participated in controlling flood: 22 (48%) schools enjoyed government intervention; 13 (28%) schools made use of students to control flood and 11 (24%) enjoyed no assistance from any quarters. None of the schools received parents' intervention. It was therefore recommended that government should ensure that school grounds should be given special attention and should be designed to add befitting attraction to the school environment.

Keywords: school ground, aesthetic nature of school ground, school ground maintenance, school ground fundamentals, UNESCO nature of school ground

School grounds are potentially as important to the education as to the overall well-being of students. They are used for the educational, recreational, and social needs of students. They give encouraging practical activities, excitement, and new learning for students. School grounds serve as a mode of instruction, and they are avenues for students' display of hidden curricula. They give room for students to play and do exercises which make students to have healthy lifestyle. It has been argued that if school grounds are to realize their potential to promote physical activity, they should include a greater diversity of design features and 'green' elements that engage children of varying interests and abilities in active play (Dyment et al., 2009).

Dilbil and Basara (2017) found that playgrounds positively affect development and school attachment levels of children. School grounds, if well demarcated should provide opportunity for students to engage in all sorts of play

and games to develop their social life. Grounds could serve as an avenue for children and young people to develop a wide range of skills, and they provide opportunities for children to learn about key issues and re-connect with the natural environment (Burns, 2016, Odeh et al., 2015). In view of this, it could be emphasized that school grounds breed positive behaviour in students and are at the same time available for community use and development. Nowadays they have become an avenue where the role of schools to community activities is constantly displayed by making the grounds available for community use.

It is expected that a school's plant should have a conducive school ground, and a good school ground contributes positively to students' life. The responsibility of a good school is to create school grounds that befit learning environment, which grounds should be beautiful and deemed fit to acquire values and virtues.

It should be the sort of ground that students will find pleasure to learn, and which will make them engage in pleasurable academic activities, especially if the goal of such a school is to produce an egalitarian graduate who would eventually build egalitarian society. The novel standard is that school grounds designed by landscape architects tend to include natural elements such as trees, butterfly gardens, ponds, and vegetable patches related to an understanding of childhood needs (Mishra et al., 2021).

Ground in schools refers to open land where a variety of outdoor activities or learning take place and provide defined adequate parking spaces. In school premises, it is the open land, the area of land without any building, within the premises. Some parts of it could have trees planted in them while the hedges could be decorated with flowers and cut shrubs. It is a part of the school environment that gives room for outdoor activities. It gives room for spot elevations, intersections and curbs, crown of roads, sidewalks, edge of paving including far side of paving, drainage flow line, manhole rims/covers, top and bottom of retaining walls and so on. It also includes the location of above and below ground structures, man-made and natural features, all floor elevations, and finish floor elevations at each entrance of buildings on the property, if applicable. It also includes location, size and depth of water, gas, and thermal utilities. It comprises the location of fire hydrants available to the property and the size of the main structures within the school (Alabi, 2017)

It has been claimed that learning and appreciation of aesthetic nature of things are correspondent. The concept of beauty cannot be appreciated until one is able to realise that learners should have an insight into the concept, which could be achieved if schools put into practice what they advocate for. In that case, learners would respond positively and complement it with certain aesthetic values, use their critical ideas by harmonizing them with their ambition and achievements in life. Ivanova (2017) is of opinion that harmonization of aesthetic value with learning and human development is very essential to education. The child's environment can limit or help in his/her overall development because the

influence of the environment lasts a lifetime, where outdoor play of children takes place is significant (Marouf et al., 2015).

One of the negative impacts of terrorism in the global village presently is the destruction of structures and facilities in the affected area, school grounds inclusive. The perpetrator of these wicked acts are mostly youths and young adults. This is an indication that the form of education received by these sets of individuals failed to inculcate in them the joy of living in peaceful society as well as beautiful environment. The overall effect of these kinds of destruction is that it would hinder access to education, especially to particular classes of students which the backfiring effect is to create more conflict. It has been stated that when there is diminished or inequitable access to education, it drives conflict (Burde et al., 2016). In addition, Agnihotri (2017) stated that education can be that mode through which the goal of peace can be achieved and sustained for a long period of time through adoption of correct strategies and techniques.

At this juncture, one needs to state that one of the fundamental aspects of education is to make students appreciate the beauty of natural environment which should be presented through school grounds. Education involves instruction and the grounds where this takes place should be beautiful and appeal to their instinct. Schooling is expected to expose students to aesthetic values of nature which would lead them to contribute more of it to the system by making the environment they find themselves in more conducive for human habitation. School grounds should not be planned only for knowledge acquisition but also to make students have desire to build an egalitarian society, which will lead to the improvement of the entire system.

Furthermore, the importance of aesthetic nature of school ground lies in the realisation that if the nature of school ground is carefully planned, it would not only support the educational objectives but would build in them the desire to live in a serene society. Students' knowledge of appreciation, especially appreciating beautiful co-existence in a beautiful world should not be made ephemeral but rather concrete especially through a stimulating school ground. Schooling requires propelling children towards extraordinary changes and transformations that will guide them to develop a culture that is acceptable for human interaction. This accounts for why the quality of learning ground is vital to the quality of education given.

School grounds need effective maintenance; therefore, school authorities need to monitor the activities that take place on the grounds, which should be done regularly - before the opening of school for the day, during break and lunchtimes and after school. It has been observed that the main issue confronting schools' system in this era is that facilities are not maintained as expected (Uko, 2015). There are responsibilities in this regard by school authorities, or any committee put in place for school management. They ought to give required standards and conditions on how different groups should use school grounds to influence school operations positively; they ought to give specific requirements as to which calibre of people should use the grounds especially during out-of-

school hours, and how the grounds should be sustained. In rainy seasons, specification should be stated on how well school grounds should be sustained not to hamper school operations.

Specifications should be highlighted on how schools should pay attention to certain required standards like having within school systems some school ground fundamentals like walkways, ornamental trees, flowerbeds, hedges, grass fields, carparks, assembly grounds to mention but few. It is against this background that this study embarks on assessing the adequacy of aesthetic nature and maintenance of school grounds of the Lagos State public schools: a step toward sustainable development.

Research Questions

The study was guided by these research questions:

1. How adequate is the aesthetic nature of school grounds in Lagos State Public Junior secondary schools?
2. How adequate do schools get support for maintenance of school grounds in the rainy season?

Methodology

The study was a survey, and approach used was a qualitative one. The population of the study comprised of 174 Junior Secondary Schools in Lagos State Educational Districts. Lagos State was chosen for this study because the findings of this study could be used to envisage the situation for the rest of the country since Lagos was the former capital and commercial nerve of the country, and it is highly populated more than any other state in the country.

The environment of Lagos consists of coast, which is low, marshy and contains swamps. Along the shore the great Atlantic billows cause a serious surf. Behind the coastline stretches a series of lagoons, in which are small islands.

The population of Junior secondary school students in Lagos State was 180,240 males and 185,935 females totalling to 366,175.

Lagos State has six Educational Districts, each district comprises of different zones. Multi-stage sampling was used, where two Educational Districts (District 1 and District 5) were purposively selected out of the six Educational Districts for this study. Forty-six schools were randomly selected as samples in the two Districts.

The instruments for data collection were of two types; rating scales of the aesthetic nature of school ground and questionnaire for school principals on how the school grounds were maintained in the rainy season. Rating scale was used to determine the averages of the items listed for the quality of the aesthetic nature of school grounds. School ground data were obtained pertaining playground, covered hedges, walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks and assembly grounds.

The researcher developed the instruments by using as models, the standards stipulated by the 1985 UNESCO training manual and the 2015 Virginia Commonwealth Department of Education specifications on the nature of school

grounds. The Description of the quality for each of the listed items was based on a four-point scale of 1-4 where 1 represents very poor, 2 poor, 3 good, and 4 very good.

Data were collected through the inspection of nature of school ground with each item listed by the instrument for the school ground examined and the scales of the qualities recorded as required by the instruments. Reliability coefficients of the instruments were found to be 0.85 and 0.84.

On the questionnaire, the options for agents that are expected to contribute to the level of maintenance of school grounds included: government officials, cooperate organizations, students, parents, and no assistance – because it is possible for schools not to receive any assistance on school maintenance.

The questionnaire on how the school grounds were maintained in the rainy season were given to the sampled school principals. They were to fill if they received fund and support from different agents to assist schools during the rainy season. This was necessary because of the water level of Lagos state, which is 41m elevation and 59 m below sea level. Because of this, the rainy season could at times constitute a very big predicament and this is the season during which the situation of school grounds manifests the need for assistance. It is based on the assistance received by schools, that the school were sustained as well as the running cost given by the government to school principals to run the schools.

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical methods.

Findings

The results from the analysis of scores on the observed aesthetics quality of school grounds are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Aesthetics Quality of School Grounds

S/N	Variables	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Total
1	Hedges	20 (43.5) **	6 (13.0) *	16 (34.8)	4 (8.7)	46 (100.0)
2	Walkways	14(30.4) *	1 (2.2)	21 (45.7)	10 (21.7)	46 (100.0)
3	Flower Beds	22 (47.8) **	7 (15.2) *	11(24.1)	6 (13.0)	46 (100.0)
4	Ornamental Trees	19 (41.3) **	2 (4.4)	15 (32.6)	10 (21.7)	46 (100.0)
5	Grassed Fields	21 (45.7) **	9 (19.6) *	8 (17.4)	8 (17.4)	46 (100.0)
6	Car Parks	15 (32.6) **	9 (19.6) *	13 (28.3)	9 (19.6)	46 (100.0)
7	Assembly Ground	9 (19.6) *	18 (39.1) **	13 (28.3)	6 (13.0)	46 (100.0)

Flash points are highlighted by stars (**), on items on the table and suggest the need for serious attention.

The result in Table 1 shows that Lagos State Junior Secondary Schools did not regard the major relevance of the aesthetic nature of school grounds, such as good quality hedges; walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks and assembly grounds, therefore they do not have quality aesthetic design for school grounds.

Most schools lacked adequate spaces, good walkways and hedges, and ornamental trees were not well provided for, while most of these schools had no

car parks and assembly grounds. Therefore, from the result above, it could be inferred that the quality of school grounds in Lagos State Junior Secondary Schools was in adequate and need serious attention as highlighted in the flashpoints in asterisks.

Table 2
Level of Maintenance of School Ground by Some Agents

Agents that assist schools on school ground maintenance	Number of schools in District 1, that received assistance from agents	Number of schools in District 5, that received assistance from agents	Total
Government	11 (23.9 %)	11 (23.9 %)	22 (47.8%)
Cooperate organisation	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Students	7 (15.2%)	6(13.0%)	13 (28.3%)
Parents	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
No assistance	5 (10.9%)	6(13.0%)	11 (23.9%)
Total	23 (50.0%)	23 (50.0%)	46 (100%)

On how schools were maintained with regards to flood during the rainy season, results show that the following categories of agents participated in controlling flood; 22 (48%) schools enjoyed government intervention; 13 (28%) schools made use of students to control flood and 11 (24%) enjoyed no assistance from any quarters. None of the schools received parents’ intervention. These findings establish the level at which Lagos State Junior Secondary =Schools’ grounds were maintained with the responsibility resting almost squarely on the state government, with little assistance from other organisations.

Discussion

It was found that Lagos State Junior Secondary Schools did not regard the relevance of the aesthetic nature of school grounds, such as good quality hedges; walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks and assembly grounds, therefore they do not have quality aesthetic design for school grounds.

Aesthetics in a school setting is a kind of approach that creates beauty for school environments using both natural and artificial means to boost the quality and standard of the schools. Aesthetics of school environment gives the school a kind of attraction that appeals to both parents and passers-by and robs off on staff and students. One needs to point out here that if the beauty of natural environment of a school is enhanced through good design and arrangement, students have a lot to gain.

A properly designed and arranged natural environment would not only add to the beauty of the school but would be used as real world for students and avenue for teachers to use as media to teach some concepts that are related to nature study. To utilise some natural items within the school for instruction would be very easy. So, school grounds should be designed with students at heart (Kass, 2017). This will ultimately help students’ imagination when learning related concepts.

Mark (2017) is of the opinion that when lower levels of details of what had been taught are forgotten but with constant interaction with the real environment, there will be a form of re-experience and reimagination since they are in constant encounter with materials related to the concepts taught.

According to Ajayi and Yusuf (2009), and Yakubu and Sowunmi (2017), the main objective of school plant planning is to lay a solid foundation for educational goals, satisfy the physical and emotional needs of the learners and provide for future expansion of the schools' system. Also, the realization of educational goals and objectives, no doubt, depends on the extent to which government and administrators of schools can give school plant planning the adequate attention needed.

Human and material resources have a lot to do in effectiveness of school operations, and this can only be possible if all hands are on deck. Schools exist in society, and so it is the responsibility of everyone to take it to optimal level for effective output. Proper coordination and management of school plants is a strong factor in building aesthetic school ground (Briggs, et al 2018).

Conclusion

It could be concluded that most school grounds in Lagos state do not manifest any form aesthetic nature, and that government and other agents within the society were not contributing enough for school maintenance.

Recommendations

It was therefore recommended that government should ensure that the issue of school ground is given special attention.

Government should enforce that in siting a school, school premises should have hedges, walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks, with neat and safe grounds.

The school system within the state should motivate the society to feel responsible in contributing their quotas towards taking junior schools' premises to their optimal level.

School grounds should be designed to add befitting attraction to the school environment, and if it becomes inevitable, canals and water ways should be provided as a form of maintenance measures to make school grounds safe for use in the rainy season.

The stakeholders of the junior secondary school system should enact an established order that for all categories of schools within the state, school grounds should include well-kept hedges; walkways, flower beds, ornamental trees, grassed fields, car parks and assembly ground.

References

Agnihotri, S. (2017). Critical reflection on the role of education as a catalyst of peace-building and peaceful coexistence. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, V5 N6 P911-917 2017

- Alabi, B. O. (2017). Total quality assessment of school facilities in Lagos state junior secondary schools. (*Ph.D. Thesis*). LASU, Lagos State University, Nigeria, Lagos Nigeria.
- Briggs, B. P., & AsakoWalson, O. B. (2018) Contributions of school plant management towards teaching and learning process in public secondary schools in rivers state. *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research* 6(3):52-60. www.seahipaj.org ISSN: 2360-8978.
- Burde, D., Kapit, A., Wahl, R. L. Guven, O., & Skarpeteig. M., I. (2016). Education in emergencies: a review of theory and research. *Review of Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316671594>
- Dilbil, A., & Basara, Z. (2017) Effect of school yard playgrounds on development and school attachment levels of children. *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 5(12A): 144-151, 2017 <http://www.hrpub.org> DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2017.051321.
- Dyment, J. E., Bell, A. C., & Lucas, A. J. (2009). The relationship between school ground design and intensity of physical activity, *Taylor and Francis* <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280903024423>.
- Ivanova, M. (2017). Aesthetic values in science. *Philosophy compass* <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12433>
- Kass, D (2017). Educational reform and environmental concern. *a history of school nature study in Australia*. New York. Taylor & Francis Group
- Mark, J. P. (2017). Beyond immersion absorption, saturation, and overflow in the building of imaginary worlds. In M. Wolf Boni, (ed.), *World Building. Transmedia, Fans, Industries*. Amsterdam University Press, 2017 doi: 10.5117/9789089647566/ch11.
- Marouf, N., Johar, S. Cheani, A. I., & Tawil, N. M. (2015). Examining school grounds as a place for children's physical activity performance in Tehran. *Modern Applied Science*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283474777>.
- Ministry of Education (2018) Lagos State School Census Report. State Education Management Information System (SEMIS) Committee. Author
- Mishra, B., Bell, S., & Mishra, H. S. (2021). An exploration of how playground design affects the play behaviour of kindergarten children in Tartu, Estonia. In Khan, M., Bell, S. and Wood. J. (Eds) *Place, Pedagogy and Play Participation, Design and Research with Children*. London and New York. Routledge
- Odeh., R. C, Oguche, O. A., & Ivagher, E. D. (2015). Influence of school environment on academic achievement of students in secondary schools in zone "a" senatorial district of Benue State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Recent Scientific International Journal of Recent Scientific Research* 6, 7, Pp.4914-4922, Available Online At <http://Www.RecentScientific.Com>

- Uko, E. S. (2015). Principalship and effective management of facilities in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of academic research and reflection*, 3(1), 54-76.
- UNESCO (1986). *Primary school buildings, standards, norms and design*. Department of Education Royal Government of Bhutan. https://www.humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2014/02/101760_e.pdf
- Virginia Department of Education. (2015). School building regulations and guidelines. Commonwealth of Virginia. https://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/facility_construction/building_regs_and_guidelines.shtml
- Yakubu, S. & Sowunmi, G. (2017). School plant planning: a prerequisite for the attainment of educational goals and objectives. *Journal of Education and Practice* www.iiste.org ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online) Vol.8, No.18, 2017 59