



THE CRITICAL ROLE OF SCHOOL PLANT IN ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY: A REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

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Abstract

The school system carries the fundamental responsibility of helping learners acquire knowledge that leads to desirable behavioural change within a conducive environment that supports and promotes effective teaching and learning. Beyond attracting and engaging teachers with high levels of proficiency to deliver on this important mandate, this educational process also requires that the school system's learning environment is fully and appropriately equipped with functional, accessible school plants that support a wholesome learning process. This article addresses the impact of school plants on the educational system, examining the concept of the physical facilities required for teaching and learning, their operation and management, which must be overseen by the school administrator. The paper argues that effective school plant management is indispensable for achieving quality education. It was recommended, among others, that School administrators intensify efforts to preserve the available plants at the school and prevent their misuse, especially by external persons who are not members of the school.



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Keyword: School Plant, Educational Facilities, School Administrator, Maintenance Culture, Technology Integration, Educational Objectives

1.1 Introduction

Education remains a major factor for individual and societal development. The essence of teaching and learning, as important educational processes, is primarily to bring about in the learner desirable change in behaviour through critical thinking and transfer of formidable psycho skills. These processes cannot take place effectively with obsolete, deteriorating and empty school plants, but rather in an environment structured to stimulate and facilitate learning. Globally, the right to education as a fundamental human right seems to apply to all citizens and is often guaranteed in grand norms and statutes. Because this fundamental human right particularly holds sway in Nigeria, the increase in demand evident in the democratization of education has generally led to the establishment of primary and secondary schools in almost every Nigerian community, town, or city.

Historically, efforts at establishing public schools in Nigeria followed the 15th-century introduction of Christianity to Southern Nigeria by the Portuguese. Not long after Christianity took root in Nigeria, early missionaries began pioneering the establishment and operation of missionary schools. Through several deliberate and intentional efforts, the Nigerian government began to moderate the running of the missionary schools and later fully embraced the concept with the opening of public schools. Various surveys have highlighted that the implementation of educational programmes requires adequate provision of equipment, furniture, and recreational facilities for success. Government, school proprietors, parents and other stakeholders are expected to provide the needed facilities for the schools under their jurisdiction (Chika, 2019).

Globally, countries continually seek to improve the quality of their education. As it stands today, especially in developing nations such as Nigeria, governments at both national and sub-national levels seek to radically shift towards achieving quality education for their citizens. There appears to be an embrace of education as a key performance indicator for rapid individual and societal development. Following those early moves and continuing to the present, the establishment and running of public schools have become of immense interest to the Nigerian government (Ibrahim and Joda, 2023). Notwithstanding the supposed attention and present-day advocacy for the total takeover of some schools established and hitherto run by missions, the sector in the fairly recent past has experienced overwhelming participation by other critical stakeholders, such as non-governmental and private actors, in the establishment and running of schools across Nigeria.

Apart from the foregoing, the dismal annual budgetary allocation by the government to the education sector has prompted other stakeholders to provide educational services. This fiscal imbalance has, unfortunately, led to a protracted decline in educational standards, necessitating the proliferation of private schools. Whether private or public, these established schools serve as places of education for children and youths. They are commonly characterised by school buildings

and other features on the land on which the buildings are erected. These characteristic features or physical components of schools are described as the school plant (Chidubem, 2014).

1.2 School Plant: Definition and Perspectives

Scholars have advanced various perspectives on the concept of school plant depending on their varied convictions. Some scholarly considerations suggest that school plants constitute important resources for the implementation of educational programmes in Nigeria. It is considered to comprise mainly the site, the building equipment, which includes permanent structures such as machines and laboratory equipment, and the operational input resources in the school system.

Confirming the propositions of earlier authors, Ekpoh (2018) listed buildings, grounds, facilities, and equipment that are essential to the implementation of educational programmes and the attainment of school goals as components of the school plant. Meanwhile, Ololube *et al.* (2013) had earlier described the school plant as the site, the buildings, the equipment and all the essential structures, permanent and semi-permanent, including machines and laboratory equipment, as well as blackboards needed for effective teaching and learning. In another opinion, Yusuf *et al.* (2013) expanded their consideration of the school plant to include the interpretation of the school curriculum in terms of space. Their research postulation argues that the curriculum cannot be implemented if the physical facilities required for teaching and learning are unavailable. The absence of a school plant would certainly make teaching ineffective and also hamper desired learning. The number and types of equipment and materials available, and the size of the learning space within the school building environment, all influence the methods and qualities of teaching.

Quite interestingly, rather than concern only with facilities such as classroom space, furniture, and all structures and features, Nwosu *et al.* (2018) maintained in their work that components of the school plant include books, desks, tables, ventilation of the classrooms and other objects used for the enforcement of educational activities, including security and fire prevention systems. For instance, a classroom serves as a common ground for sharing learning experiences and conducting research. Playgrounds are places for recreation and sports, while instructional materials such as teaching aids generally are facilitators of the teaching learning process (Grace and Odey, 2021). No doubt, investment in school plants often involves a large amount of money, which is why their proper maintenance is important.

From the foregoing, the school plant can be considered as the entire scope of physical infrastructural facilities provided in the school for the purpose of educating the child. It is a vital instrument comprising buildings, grounds, facilities, and equipment, which are essential for the implementation of educational programmes and the attainment of school goals. Its place in the teaching process cannot be overemphasised.

1.3 School Plant Management

The term management has been defined in various ways by different authors. Earlier, management was simply considered to be a set of functions directed at the effective utilization of resources in the pursuit of organizational goals. However, more extensive definitions have been proposed in contemporary scholarly works. In some sense, management is now understood to be the specific process consisting of the activities of planning, organising, actuating, and controlling, performed to determine and accomplish stated objectives using human beings and other resources. School plant management is key to achieving educational objectives. A common idea of this is that management is goal-directed.

Musa and Vincent (2022) explain that school plant management entails the making and carrying out of a series of decisions by individuals and groups in building a school plant according to need, operating and using it effectively and efficiently, and ensuring that it remains in a functional state as the educational programme is being implemented. The goal of school plant management and maintenance, as highlighted by Chika (2019), is to keep school facilities in good enough condition to meet the needs of educational programmes. However, where school plant items are inadequate, poorly maintained and not safeguarded, the teaching and learning process becomes ineffective.

1.3.1 Consequences of Poor School Plant Management

Olayinka and Obasi (2017) described school plant management as the practice of coordinating the physical workplace with the people and work of the organization. Alabi (2018) describes the school maintenance programme as an organizational activity carried out by the school community in order to prolong the life expectancy of the school building, its furniture and equipment. School maintenance is a daily activity and an important factor in the delivery of education.

Several reasons are being advanced for school plant maintenance. Asiyai (2012) noted that the lack of maintenance of school plant can result in the following consequences. Poorly maintained facilities constitute health hazards to students and teachers who use them. Lack of maintenance results in wastage of resources. It leads to poor teaching and learning activities. It also makes the school environment untidy and unsafe for staff and students. School plant maintenance entails maintaining a clean and safe environment for teaching and learning, as well as providing adequate facilities for this purpose.

1.3.2 Challenges of School Plant Management

1. **Poor Attitude of Staff and Students:** A nonchalant attitude and lack of duty of care from both staff and students towards preserving school facilities (Chika, 2019).
2. **Inadequate Funding:** Insufficient allocation of funds by governments for maintenance, with needs far exceeding the resources provided (Omolala and Ogunode, 2021).

3. **Corruption and Mismanagement:** Diversion of maintenance funds into private pockets by educational administrators (Ogunode and Musa, 2020).
4. **Pressure from Over-Enrolment:** Overstretching of facilities like classrooms and furniture due to large student populations, necessitating frequent repairs (Odhier, 2019; Chika, 2019).
5. **Lack of Administrator Knowledge:** School administrators often lack knowledge of the importance of facility maintenance, leading to its neglect.
6. **Lack of Data:** Little to no existing data or records on school facilities make budget preparation and planned maintenance difficult.
7. **Extreme Environmental Conditions:** Harsh weather, such as extreme heat or heavy rainfall, accelerates the physical deterioration of buildings.
8. **Lack of Custodial Commitment:** Poor attitude and absenteeism of custodial staff, compounded by a lack of supervision and sanctions (Ekpoh, 2014; Manga, Aliyu and Garba, 2013).
9. **Lack of Maintenance Policy:** The absence of a clearly defined policy guideline on maintenance leads to negligence and shirking of responsibility.
10. **Vandalization and Misuse:** Careless use and deliberate defacing of facilities by school members, often with the attitude that it is "government property".
11. **Attitude of Administrators:** A preference for initiating new projects to gain personal recognition rather than maintaining existing facilities.

1.4 School Plant Operation

The lifespan, outlook and functionality of an existing or newly constructed school plant would, to a large extent, depend on the effectiveness of its operation, usage and maintenance. Even though they are often used interchangeably because of overlapping concepts, the maintenance and operation of a school plant are sometimes considered closely related, yet they are indeed different in function. In a big school, for example, the school management may consider separating the functions of school plant operation from that of school plant management and assigning them to respective individuals, usually known as housekeeping personnel or custodial staff (Ekpoh, 2014). To serve effectively in their roles, these personnel must possess sufficient skills and capacity in their respective areas of responsibility. Conversely, in smaller schools, both operational and management functions may be housed in a single individual.

School plant operations are therefore concerned with all services and activities required to keep the school plant serviceable and operational. It ensures that the school plant is open and accessible for use and is regularly kept in a clean, hygienic, comfortable, safe, and secure manner, without any encumbrances for users or occupants. It includes cleaning, effective housekeeping, caring for grounds and regularly putting them in a ready-to-use manner (Ogunode and Musa, 2020). The administrator or head teacher is poised to ensure that there is no shirking of these essential responsibilities by the housekeeping personnel or custodian, and that the school plant

operation is dutifully carried out by these statutory officials. Of course, to keep them regularly updated on recent trends, these custodian personnel would require routine training and retraining to enhance their specialised skills and capacity to handle and operate some of the school's plants that may require storage under special conditions. This would ensure that the school plant is preserved in a manner that guarantees its continued functionality, aesthetic appeal, and cleanliness (Omolala and Ogunode, 2021).

1.5 Maintenance of School Plant

As the school is routinely used in the teaching and learning process, the need for maintenance to sustain its continuous use becomes imperative. It is an established truism that nothing lasts forever. All things, regardless of the size of the capital outlay, are bound to depreciate due to wear and tear from overuse, while repair and maintenance should be anticipated to sustain their health and functionality. Authors such as Asiegbu (2014) have acknowledged that school plants at all levels of education are poorly maintained. The research also documents that school personnel's attitude toward maintenance culture is generally very negative.

One neglected area of school administration is the culture of facility maintenance. It is obvious that no area of the Nigerian school system is more neglected than the provision and maintenance of school physical facilities. Maintenance of the school plant involves addressing malfunctions in the building, equipment, or grounds and restoring them to appropriate condition. Maintenance is concerned with keeping grounds, buildings, and equipment as close as possible to their original condition of completeness and efficiency, or to their original state of utility (Alabi, 2018). School plant maintenance would therefore involve activities such as repairs, replacements, and general upkeep of physical facilities, including school buildings, grounds, and safety systems.

Ekpoh (2018) has highlighted that the need for facility maintenance arises due to a number of factors among which include the daily routine use of the facility, aging of the facility, over utilization, changing curricula to support contemporary instructional practices, extreme climate conditions which result in wear and tear, lack of funding, lack of maintenance culture, carelessness exhibited by users, and deferred maintenance. Kpee (2013) describes school plant maintenance as the continuous efforts to check, improve, repair, renew, repaint, remodel, control use, modify, and ensure the effective and regular use of school facilities in the teaching and learning processes, to keep them continuously relevant and useful. Facility maintenance entails providing a clean and safe environment for teaching and learning.

Meanwhile, Chidubem (2014) identified that different types of maintenance serve distinct purposes in school plant management. He reiterates that this maintenance regime is necessary to keep the school plant as close to its original state as possible. Regardless of the nature of the maintenance programme and the care taken in executing it, he argues that the need for emergency maintenance may arise at any time due to unforeseen circumstances.

1.5.1 Types of Maintenance Services

1. **Preventive Maintenance:** Service rendered to prevent malfunctioning or early deterioration, maximizing useful life. It is rarely practiced in Nigerian public schools due to a lack of custodial staff and maintenance programmes (Abu, 2016)
2. **Replacement Maintenance:** Involves replacing worn-out parts (e.g., electrical, roofing, vehicle parts) with original equipment manufacturing parts once they become unserviceable.
3. **Periodic Maintenance:** Service done on a regular, scheduled basis (monthly, quarterly, yearly) depending on equipment utilization. Examples include repainting buildings or servicing vehicles. Some authors refer to this as improvement maintenance.
4. **Emergency Maintenance:** Unplanned service required due to unforeseen events like windstorms, natural disasters, or unexpected breakdowns. This is the most common type of maintenance in Nigerian schools.

1.6 Significance of School Plant in Educational Delivery

1. **Creates a Conducive Learning Environment:** Well-maintained facilities with proper ventilation, lighting, and furniture enable students to focus and develop positive attitudes towards education.
2. **Facilitates Curriculum Implementation:** Different subjects require specific facilities such as laboratories for sciences, workshops for technical subjects, and libraries, without which effective teaching and learning cannot occur.
3. **Ensures Safety and Security:** Properly constructed and maintained buildings with secure doors, fire extinguishers, and fences protect students and staff from harm and unauthorized access.
4. **Enhances School Image and Reputation:** Beautiful buildings and well-kept grounds attract and retain students, build community pride, and encourage greater support for school activities.
5. **Supports Health and Well-being:** Adequate toilet facilities, clean drinking water, and proper ventilation promote hygiene, prevent disease, and reduce student absenteeism.
6. **Increases Teacher Effectiveness:** Teachers in well-equipped and maintained schools are more motivated and committed, leading to better teaching and improved student outcomes.
7. **Protects Financial Investment:** Proper maintenance preserves the significant public and private funds invested in school plants, preventing the higher costs associated with total replacement.

1.7 Integration of Technology in School Plant

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are a potent force in driving economic, social, political and educational reforms and have become commonplace entities in all aspects of life. Over the past two decades, the use of ICT has fundamentally changed the practices and procedures of nearly all endeavours within business and governance. Education is a highly social

activity, and quality education has traditionally been associated with strong teachers who maintain close personal contact with learners. No doubt, many important changes have occurred in education systems over the last few years, requiring teachers and school leaders to upgrade and refine their technology skills. Some of these changes are due to shifts in government policies on the use of ICT in schools, while others are driven by advances in state-of-the-art pedagogical practices. Adu and Olatundun (2013) have argued that as technology flows into schools more rapidly, many school leaders are facing a range of difficult management issues.

There are significant disparities between developed and developing countries in the integration of technology into education. Developed countries have more resources, knowledge, skills and experience than developing countries. However, developed nations face many of the same challenges and concerns as developing nations, though to varying degrees. They suffer from the same concerns of teacher apprehension and motivation, lack of appropriate educational software and technical support, and the same challenges of providing adequate teacher training, taking care of infrastructural inadequacies, and implementing learner-centred instruction and proper assessment procedures in schools (Jack, 2021).

Equipping schools with computers can be very expensive for many developing countries. Although computers vary widely in brand and pricing, they still remain expensive and unaffordable to many. However, in the face of change and the shift towards technology integration in schools, developing countries such as Nigeria must, in light of evolving trends in technology use to advance education, prioritise equipping schools with computers (Hope, 2023). A student-to-computer ratio of one to one could be very desirable, but surely unattainable even for developed countries. Developing countries should, however, provide enough computers in schools to allow at least group activities for students and sufficient hands-on practice for all students. However, one important lesson is that technology, by itself, does not enhance the teaching and learning process or environment (James, 2020).

Research has established that ICT has the potential to innovate, accelerate, enrich and deepen skills, motivate and engage students, relate the school experience to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow's workers, and strengthen teaching and help schools change. Therefore, integration of technology into school plant would obviously deliver the numerous benefits identified in research.

1.8 Importance of Integrating Technology into School Plant and Education Generally

According to Usen (2019), technology integration enhances the quality and accessibility of education. ICT increases the flexibility of educational delivery, so learners can access knowledge anytime, anywhere. It can influence how students are taught and how they learn, as the processes are now learner-driven rather than teacher-driven. This, in turn, would better prepare learners for lifelong learning and improve the quality of learning. In concert with geographical flexibility,

technology-facilitated educational programmes also remove many of the temporal constraints that face learners with special needs. Students are starting to appreciate the capability to undertake education anywhere, anytime and anyplace (Bassey, 2018).

Technology integration enhances the learning environment. ICT presents an entirely new learning environment for students, thus requiring a different skill set to be successful. Critical thinking, research and evaluation skills are growing in importance as students have increasing volumes of information from a variety of sources to sort through. ICT is changing teaching and learning processes by adding vitality to learning environments, including virtual ones (David, 2024). Given the current widespread diffusion and use of ICT in modern societies, especially among the young, the so-called digital generation, it should be clear that ICT will affect the entire learning process today and in the future.

Technology integration enhances learning motivation. Technology can enhance the quality of education in several ways: by increasing learner motivation and engagement, facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, and enhancing teacher training. ICT is also a transformational tool which, when used appropriately, can promote the shift to a learner-centred environment. Computers and internet technologies especially enable new ways of teaching and learning rather than simply allowing teachers and students to do what they have done before in a better way (Umoh, 2019).

Technology integration enhances scholastic performance. Given the extensive use of technology in education, the need arose to unravel the myths surrounding the use of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning and its impact on students' academic performance. ICT is said to help expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, and raise educational quality. Guehi (2025) writes that ICT helps students learn by improving communication between students and instructors.

1.8 Conclusion

Effective teaching and learning take place in a conducive academic environment. This environment involves the availability of essential human and material resources within the school system to make teaching and learning easier, more meaningful, and more comprehensible to learners. The future of education in Nigeria depends significantly on how well the nation addresses the challenges of school plant provision, management and maintenance. As the world becomes increasingly digital and competitive, Nigerian schools must be equipped with modern facilities that prepare learners for the demands of the 21st century. This requires a collective commitment from government, school administrators, teachers, parents, communities, and international partners to adequately invest in school plants and properly maintain them. Only through such collective effort can the nation achieve its educational goals and produce graduates who can contribute meaningfully to national development.

1.9 Recommendations

Taking into account the need to leverage available resources, including technology, to realise the objective of providing teaching and learning at various levels of education, school administrators, such as proprietors, head teachers, principals, rectors, and vice chancellors, should do the following.

1. School administrators should intensify efforts to preserve the available plants on the school premises and prevent unauthorised use of the plants, especially by external persons who are not members of the school.
2. Schools should develop comprehensive maintenance schedules and ensure they are diligently followed.
3. Regular inspection of facilities should be conducted to identify potential problems before they become serious.
4. Adequate security should be provided in order to stem the tide of vandalism of school plants resulting from spates of insecurity.
5. School management should endeavour to imbibe the spirit of timely maintenance of school plants. This will prevent the collapse of school facilities such as buildings, vehicles, sites, and the environment generally.
6. Government and school management should organize regular seminars and workshops for teachers, custodial staff and students on how to dexterously use the available school plants in both teaching and learning.

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