# HEALTHFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL FOR ATTAINING THE AFRICAN UNION'S AGENDA 2063 FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

## OGUNSILE S. E., BOLARINWA, O. M. and KONWEA, P. E.

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

**Abstract**

*The physical and social components of a school environment are strong determinants of the health and safety of the members of the school community and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process within such a school. While a safe and healthy school environment contributes positively to the teaching and learning process, the opposite is true for a school with an unsafe, unhealthy physical and social environment. This paper provides insight into how a healthful school environment, in terms of its physical and social components, could enhance the attainment of the African Union's Agenda 2063 for teaching and learning. The source of information in this article was the review of relevant literature. Based on this review, it is evident that a healthful school environment at all levels of learning is an indispensable tool for attaining the African Union's Agenda 2063 for teaching and learning. Therefore, a conscious effort is required from all the concerned bodies to provide the resources to ensure the healthful environment of schools within the African Setting to achieve the African Union's Agenda 2063 for teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:**    Healthful School Environment, Physical, Social

## Introduction

The health and safety of members of a school community are fundamental to the success of the teaching and learning process within such a school setting. There can never be an effective learning even when all the resources for the teaching and learning are provided, if the health and safety of the learners and the members of staff are compromised or not ensured.

An important factor for ensuring the health and safety of the members of a school is a healthy school environment which supports the healthy growth of learners across all developmental pathways (Healthy Schools Campaign, 2022), and promotes the safety of all the members of the school community. The school is like a second home for both learners and members of staff because more than 8 hours of the day is spent in the school hence every member of the school community deserves a healthy and safe place to learn and work to achieve their academic and professional goals.

The quality of a school environment is directly related to the health and performance of both the learners and the staff members that are found in such a school (Clean India, 2010; Hawkins et al, 2023). A Healthy school environment provides a healthy and safe learning environment for learners and a healthy work environment for personnel thereby fostering good health, better attendance at school, better academic performance, and a high level of productivity on the part of the personnel (Tennessee Department of Health, 2023). Unhealthy school environments on the other hand affect children's health, attendance, concentration, and performance thereby resulting in poor academic performance of learners (Tennessee Department of Health, 2023).

Good quality education, provided in a healthful environment is a fundamental human right and it constitutes one of the prerequisites for sustainable social and economic development in all continents of the world. Africa as a continent, in a bid to be among the best performers in terms of quality of life by the year 2063 has come up with the African's Union 'Agenda 2063'. Agenda 2063 represents the continent's strategic framework for the achievement of a prosperous Africa which is based on inclusive and sustainable growth and development by the year 2063. Agenda 2063 is the actual representation of the Pan-African aspiration for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. Agenda 2063 was founded on the realization by African leaders that there was a need to refocus and reprioritize inclusive social and economic development, con tinental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security amongst other issues aimed at repositioning Africa to becoming a prominent figure in the global arena (African Union, 2024).

Agenda 2063, consists of seven aspirations that are targeted towards building the Africa that is desired by the year 2063. One of the goals highlighted in Agenda 2063 is to ensure that all citizens are well educated and skilled through science, technology, and innovation. To achieve this goal, it is important to harness resources towards maintaining a healthy school environment at all levels of education. This is because a healthful school environment provides a conducive environment for teaching, learning, and innovation. Effective learning outcome is largely based on the premise that learners are healthy, attend school regularly, are motivated to go and stay in school, and concentrate well on their studies and all these can be achieved through the provision of a healthful school environment.

The purpose of this review is to give insight into the meaning, components, importance, and application of a healthful environment to the attainment of the African Union's 2063 Agenda for Teaching and Learning.

**The Concept of Healthful School Environment**

Healthful school environment is one of the components of the school health programme, and it is defined as, all the consciously organized, planned, and executed efforts to ensure safety and healthy living conditions of the members of the school community (Amoran et al, 2017; Bosede et al, 2021).. A healthful school environment protects its members against immediate injury and makes provision for disease prevention activities and attitudes against risk factors for future disease or disability (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2004).

The purpose of the healthful school environment documented by the Ministry of Education (2006) and cited by Moronkola (2019) include the provision of potable water, promotion of healthy practices to prevent water and sanitation related illnesses; encouragement of compliance with standard environmental health and sanitation practices, provision of safe recreational facilities and the establishment of good social relationships within the school community. In short, healthful school environment aimed at providing a safe and conducive learning and working conditions which is characterized by day-to-day activities that influence the physical, social, and emotional health of members of the school community.

The physical and social components of a school environment serve as major determinants of the health and level of intellectual growth and development of learners. The physical

school environment encompasses the school building and all its contents. These include the physical structures, infrastructure, furniture, the site on which the school is located, nearby land uses, roadway, other hazards, and the surrounding environment including water, air, and materials which could be come in contact with within the school (World Health Organisation, 2004).

A school could only be referred to as having a healthful physical environment, if the following characterise the school: location of the school away from potential danger, availability of perimeter fencing to prevent the invasion of strangers, protection of the school surroundings from unfavourable conditions such as excessive noise, heat, cold and dampness, availability of adequate building constructed in line with approved standards and provisions of facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive, adequate safe water supply, provision of sanitation, waste disposal, recreation, and sports facilities, provision of gender-based toilets for staff and students and observation of annual school health week (Moronkola, 2019, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2023).

The social components of a school encompasses the quality of relationships among the students, between the students and staff, among the staff, and between the students or staff and school leadership. Other factors that constitute the school's social environment include well-being, safety, inclusion, diversity, school social media, and virtual settings (School for Health in Europe (SHE), 2023). The social environment of a school is one of the six important key components of the whole school approach to a health-promoting school and it has been reported to have a direct effect on the health and well-being of the members of the school community (SHE, 2023). A healthful social school environment is characterised by: respect for the personalities of teachers, learners, and parents, positive social relationships among members of the school community, availability of activities and teachings that are developmentally appropriate for curbing social vices such as bullying, cultism, violence, and others, and the promotion of pro-social tools such as self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, and effective communication, activities that promote relaxation, concentration, and fun (SHE, 2023).

The importance of a healthful school environment cannot be over-emphasized. Burrett et al (2019) as reported by UNESCO (2023) stated that learning environments that are safe and healthy have a positive influence on learners' academic outcomes. A school with a regular supply of potable water and quality infrastructure such as well-spaced classrooms and staff rooms with proper ventilation, gender-based toilets, and refuse and sewage disposal facilities, will give the members of the school community access to safe drinking water, water for hand washing and sanitation practices thereby reducing the transmission of communicable diseases within the school community.

A school with good aesthetic value also has a significant positive impact on the members of the school community. A school with beautiful landscapes, well-painted buildings that are decorated with well-trimmed flowers, and lawns, and a clean environment, gives an appealing outlook that encourages learners to want to come to school. According to UIS (2012), cited by WHO (2004), a school with an inviting physical environment that ensures the safety and health of learners, enhances the quality of learning. In the same vein, a school with a good social environment reduces the occurrence of bullying, violence, truancy, occultism, examination misconduct, sexual abuse, and various forms of abuse within the school setting (Moronkola, 2019).

**The State of the Physical and Social Environment of Schools in Africa**

Over the years there has been a rapid expansion in access to education at the primary and secondary levels and by implication, a high influx of learners into tertiary institutions. It is however unfortunate to note that the growth trend witnessed in the various levels of education is not commensurate with the facilities on the ground thereby resulting in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate laboratories and technological facilities to cater for the increasing population of students and in turn an environment not conducive for effective teaching and learning. According to UNESCO, a lot of schools in Africa lack the basic services required to ensure a safe and healthy environment for quality learning. Many schools have dilapidated buildings, and many lack facilities like potable water, sanitary facilities, and good-quality furniture. In addition, teachers at all levels of education are not being well remunerated, their promotions are delayed, and, the financial implications of such promotions are often not backdated. Teachers are often not given the necessary support and encouragement hence they do not give the best required for effective teaching. In addition, many students have taken to cultism, violence, sexual pervasions, drug abuse, and all forms of vices thereby making schools unconducive to health, safety, and effective learning.

**Healthful School Environment and the African Union's Agenda 2063 for Teaching and Learning**

The African Union's Agenda 2063, according to the African Union Commission (2023), represents the desire of the people of Africa, irrespective of age, gender, and occupation for the Africa they want. It is a seven-point agenda that reflects the desires of the people of Africa for shared prosperity, well-being, unity, and integration. A desire for a continent where the citizens are free from fear, disease, and want and where the women and youth irrespective of gender, realize their full potential.

The achievement of the aspirations reflected in the African Union's Agenda 2063 requires that deliberate efforts be made to make all the necessary provisions for achieving the aspirations. African Union Commission (2023) stated that, for the desire for a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development to be achieved, there is a need for Africa to make significant investments in education to develop human and social capital through an education and skill revolution which emphasizes innovation science and technology. To achieve Agenda 2063, there is a need for sustained investment in quality education (Cole, 2017).

One of the key objectives proposed by the African Union Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), to reorient the African's education and training system is to expand access to quality education and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy, and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors. One of the things required to achieve this is to make efforts to: provide schools that are constructed in line with approved standards, situated away from potential danger, and protected from biological, chemical, and physical threats. These will ensure the safety and well-being of the members of the school community, especially the learners for which the educational provisions are made. In addition, provisions of necessary physical infrastructure like the perimeter fencing and school gate, will help secure the members of the school community and also the educational facilities that are installed within the school against external invasions.

Another provision that is worthy of note is that of large spaced, well concreted, properly ceiled, well ventilated, and

properly lighted classrooms and office spaces for staff. This will prevent overcrowding, falls, and undue heat in the classrooms and office spaces. It will also reduce unnecessary stress on the part of the learners and the members of staff, it will reduce the spread of communicable diseases within the school, and make the teaching and learning process conducive.

Adequate provision of potable water, gender-based toilets for staff and students, refuse disposal facilities and cleaners are also worthy of note. Even if the schools are fitted with all the ICT facilities and other facilities to achieve quality education, inadequate provision of potable water and sanitary facilities can lead to an outbreak of diseases within the school and this may likely keep the students and the staff out of school thereby affecting the teaching and learning process. Cairncross and Curtis (2003) reported that diarrhea diseases, which represent the second most common global illness affecting young children, and a major cause of death in low-income countries, are closely associated with poor sanitation, poor hygiene, and unsafe water and food.

The availability of good quality furniture for staff and students is also key to ensuring a conducive learning environment. Inadequate provision of good quality chairs and tables, and the presence of broken furniture in and around the classrooms constitute a source of stress to staff and students and can be a risk factor for injury. Injury keeps the learners away from school especially when the injury sustained is serious and this, according to Mitchel (2021) has a negative implication on academic outcomes.

Ensuring good indoor and outdoor air quality is also important for a conducive learning environment. Amoran et al 2017 citing World Health Organisation (1997) stated that indoor and outdoor air pollution may be responsible for up to 60% of the global burden of diseases caused by respiratory infections. To ensure a conducive learning environment to make room for effective teaching and learning processes, good quality indoor air must be ensured within the school community.

Other factors that need to be put into consideration in ensuring a healthful school environment for effective teaching and learning in the school community include: providing sports and relaxation facilities, instilling maintenance culture into the learners, and encouraging staff members by giving them their remunerations and promotions as at when due, paying the arrears of their promotions and providing them with research and conference grants to boost their morale and enhance their productivity.

In summary, a healthful school environment makes the learning environment conducive, safe, and free of disease-causing agents. This in turn keeps the staff and students in school, makes teaching and learning enjoyable and effective and in turn contributes to attaining the African Union's Agenda 2063 on teaching and learning.

## Conclusion

Based on the review of literature it can be concluded that for effective teaching and learning at all levels of education, provision and maintenance of learning environments that take into consideration the health and safety of all the members of the school community is essential if the African Union's Agenda 2063 for teaching and learning would be achieved.

## Recommendations

Based on the review of the literature, the following recommendations are made.

1. Build and upgrade education facilities that provide a safe and effective learning environment.

2. Maintaining and renovating existing school infrastructures
3. Provision of conducive physical and social learning environment at all levels of education to enhance the achievement of academic and professional goals
4. Encouraging staff members through remunerations, promotions, research and conference grants, and other incentives to enhance their productivity
5. Inculcating maintenance culture into learners to ensure the maintenance of the facilities within the school environment

## References

African Union (2024). Agenda 2063: The Africa we want. https://au.int/agenda2063/overview 30/9/2024

Amoran, O.E. Kupoluyi, O.T., Salako, A.A. and Kupoluyi, O.T. (2017). Healthful School Environment: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Primary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Archives of Community Medicine and Public Health* 3(2): 062-070. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17352/2455-5479.000027.

Bosede, A. O., Akindulureni, K. C. & Obembe, T. A. (2021). Healthful school environment. Component of the school health progamme. Role of the street-level bureaucrats in its implementation. *International Journal of Innovation, Science and Research Technology*. 6(1); 733-741.

Cairncross, S. & Curtis, V. (2003) Effect of washing hands with soap on diarrhoea risk in the community: a systematic review. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 3: 275-281.

Clean Indian Journal (2010). Healthy school environment. https://www.cleanindiajournal.com/healthy-school-environment/8/7/2023

Cole, L. (2017). Key issues on Agenda 2063 and their relevance to the education sector in Africa https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/key-issues-agenda-2063-and-their-relevance-education-sector-africa 7/7/2023.

Hawkings, G. T., Chung, C. S. & Antolin, G. (2023). The school environment and physical and social-emotional wellbeing: implications for students and school employees. *Journal of School Health*. 93 (9); 799-812.

Healthy School Campaign (2022). What is a healthy school? https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/blog/what-is-a-healthy-school/ 7/7/2023

Mitchell, R. J. (2021). The impact of childhood injury and injury severity on school performance and high school completion in Australia: a matched population-based retrospective cohort study. *BMC Pediatrics*. 21: 426.

Moronkola, O. A. (2019). Healthful school environment. In O. A. Moronkola (Ed). *School health programme*. (pp 21-34). Ibadan: His Lineage Publishing House.

Schools for Health in Europe (2023). School Social Environment. https://www.schoolsforhealth.org/resources/glossary/school-social-environment8/07/2023

Tennessee Department of Health (2023). Healthy school environment https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/environmental/healthy-schools.html 7/7/2023

The African Union Commission (2023). Education, Science and Technology. https://au.int/en/education-science-technology 7/7/2023

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2023). The physical school environment. learningportal.iiep.unesco

World Health Organisation (2004). Information series on school health. The Physical School Environment: An essential component of a Health-Promoting school. (WHO/PHE and WHO/NPH).
Link: https://goo.gl/1sEyQ3