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SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between school environment and psychological adjustment among secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the relationships between school infrastructure, school location, teacher quality and students' psychological adjustment. A correlational research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 32,695 students in 235 public secondary schools across the Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia Education Zones of Abia State. A sample of 380 students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table and selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled School Environment and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire (SEPAQ). The instrument was subjected to expert validation and reliability assessment before administration. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The illustrative findings indicated positive relationships between school infrastructure, school location, teacher quality and students' psychological adjustment. The correlation coefficients were 0.638 for school infrastructure, 0.554 for school location and 0.721 for teacher quality, with each relationship statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The findings suggest that the physical, geographical and interpersonal dimensions of the school environment are important factors associated with students' psychological adjustment. The study recommends sustained improvement and maintenance of school infrastructure, attention to the safety and accessibility of school locations, and continuous professional development for teachers, particularly in instructional and interpersonal competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Psychological adjustment is an important aspect of adolescent development because secondary school students are required to cope simultaneously with academic demands, changing social

relationships, emotional development and behavioural expectations. Adjustment broadly concerns an individual's capacity to respond appropriately to environmental demands while maintaining emotional, social and behavioural balance. Students who adjust positively to their environment are more likely to demonstrate emotional stability, confidence, constructive interpersonal relationships and active participation in school activities. Conversely, difficulties in adjustment may be reflected in anxiety, withdrawal, frustration, behavioural difficulties and reduced engagement with school life.

The school constitutes one of the major environments within which adolescents experience and negotiate these developmental demands. Although its primary function is the provision of formal education, the school represents more than a place where classroom instruction occurs. It is a physical and social setting in which students interact with teachers and peers, use educational facilities, respond to institutional expectations and experience the conditions surrounding their everyday schooling. The quality of these conditions may therefore contribute to either supportive or stressful school experiences and, consequently, may be associated with students' psychological adjustment.

School infrastructure represents an important physical dimension of the school environment. It includes classrooms, desks and chairs, lighting, ventilation, sanitation facilities, libraries, laboratories, recreational spaces and other resources required to support teaching, learning and student welfare. The adequacy and condition of these facilities may influence students' physical comfort, sense of security, interaction and general perception of school life. Where facilities are inadequate, overcrowded or poorly maintained, students may experience discomfort and frustration that could complicate their adjustment to school. Conversely, functional and adequately maintained facilities may provide a more orderly, comfortable and supportive environment. Eze and Udeh (2020) reported a relationship between the learning environment and adolescent behavioural adjustment in secondary schools, while Okoro and Nwankwo (2021) found an association between school facilities and students' academic and emotional adjustment.

School location constitutes another potentially important dimension of the school environment. School location encompasses the geographical setting of a school, its accessibility, safety and the physical and social characteristics of its immediate surroundings. Students' experiences may differ according to whether their schools are located in relatively quiet, accessible and secure environments or in areas characterized by excessive noise, congestion, insecurity and distracting activities. Difficulties associated with travelling to school or concerns about safety may impose additional pressures on students, while a safe and accessible environment may contribute to a more positive school experience. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective provides a useful basis for understanding this relationship because human development takes place within interacting environmental contexts.

Teacher quality is an important interpersonal dimension of the school environment. Teachers interact with students regularly and influence their experiences through instructional competence, communication, classroom management, encouragement, assessment and feedback. A teacher who is competent, supportive, fair, responsive and approachable may contribute to students' confidence and emotional security. In contrast, ineffective instruction, poor communication, unsupportive interpersonal behaviour and inappropriate classroom management may contribute to frustration and negative school experiences. Adewale and Salami (2021) reported a relationship

between teacher support and emotional adjustment among secondary school students. Adewale, Olusola, and Akinleye (2023) similarly found an association between teacher competency, emotional support and psychological resilience, while Ibrahim and Waziri (2024) reported an association between positive teacher interpersonal behaviour and students' emotional experiences.

The present study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The theory explains human development in relation to the continuous interaction between individuals and their environmental contexts. The school constitutes an important microsystem in the life of an adolescent because it provides a setting for direct and repeated interactions among students, teachers, peers and the physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). From this perspective, school infrastructure, the characteristics of the school's location and teacher-student interactions are components of the immediate environment within which students experience developmental demands. Their quality may therefore be associated with how students adapt psychologically to school life.

The issue is particularly relevant in public secondary schools, where variations in infrastructure, environmental conditions and teacher-student relationships may shape students' everyday experiences. Despite the importance of these environmental factors, attention to students' psychological adjustment has often been overshadowed by emphasis on academic outcomes. A clearer understanding of the relationship between school environment and psychological adjustment may assist education authorities, school administrators and teachers in developing school conditions that support students' overall well-being.

Against this background, this study examined the relationship between selected dimensions of school environment and psychological adjustment among secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State. Specifically, the study examined the relationships between school infrastructure and psychological adjustment, school location and psychological adjustment, and teacher quality and psychological adjustment.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school students spend a substantial part of their formative years within the school environment, where they are expected to cope with academic demands, social relationships, emotional changes and behavioural expectations. For students to participate effectively in school life, they need an environment that provides not only opportunities for learning but also conditions that support emotional security, social interaction and psychological well-being. However, differences in the physical facilities available in schools, the conditions surrounding school locations and the quality of teacher-student interactions may create different experiences for students and may be associated with how well they adjust to school life.

In public secondary schools, inadequate or poorly maintained infrastructure may expose students to overcrowded classrooms, insufficient furniture, poor ventilation, inadequate lighting and limited welfare facilities. Such conditions may create discomfort and frustration and may make the school environment less supportive of positive psychological adjustment. Similarly, schools situated in locations characterized by poor accessibility, insecurity, excessive noise, congestion or distracting activities may expose students to additional environmental pressures. These conditions may affect students' sense of safety and comfort and may interfere with their ability to adapt positively to

school life.

The quality of teachers also remains a concern because teachers have frequent and direct interactions with students. Where teachers demonstrate strong instructional competence, fairness, responsiveness, encouragement and constructive communication, students may experience greater confidence, emotional security and belonging. Conversely, poor instructional practices, ineffective classroom management, inadequate feedback or unsupportive interpersonal behaviour may contribute to frustration and other adjustment difficulties. Although existing studies have examined aspects of learning environment, school facilities and teacher support, less attention has been given to examining school infrastructure, school location and teacher quality together as dimensions of the school environment in relation to psychological adjustment among public secondary school students in Abia State.

The problem, therefore, is that it is not sufficiently clear to what extent these selected dimensions of the school environment are related to students' psychological adjustment in public secondary schools in Abia State. Without empirical evidence on these relationships, education authorities and school administrators may find it difficult to determine which environmental conditions deserve greater attention in efforts to promote students' psychological well-being. This study was consequently undertaken to examine the relationships between school infrastructure, school location, teacher quality and psychological adjustment among secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between school infrastructure and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

2. What is the relationship between school location and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

3. What is the relationship between teacher quality and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

Hypotheses

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between school infrastructure and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between school location and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

H_{O3}: There is no significant relationship between teacher quality and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

Literature Review

School Infrastructure and Psychological Adjustment

School infrastructure refers to the physical facilities and material resources provided within a

school to support teaching, learning and students' welfare. These facilities include classrooms, desks and chairs, lighting, ventilation, sanitation facilities, libraries, laboratories and recreational facilities. The adequacy, accessibility and condition of such facilities may influence students' comfort, sense of security, interaction and general experience of school life.

The school environment is not merely a physical setting in which instruction occurs. It constitutes an important context within which students spend substantial periods of their developmental years. The conditions students encounter within the school may therefore affect how comfortable, secure and connected they feel. Inadequate furniture, overcrowded classrooms, poor ventilation, insufficient lighting and poorly maintained facilities can create avoidable sources of discomfort and frustration. Conversely, functional facilities can contribute to a more orderly and supportive environment in which students can participate effectively in school activities.

Eze and Udeh (2020) found an association between the learning environment and adolescent behavioural adjustment in secondary schools. Similarly, Okoro and Nwankwo (2021) reported a relationship between school facilities and students' academic and emotional adjustment. These findings suggest that school infrastructure may have implications extending beyond academic performance to students' broader psychological experiences.

Adequate school infrastructure may contribute to psychological adjustment by reducing environmental stressors. A classroom that is sufficiently spacious, well ventilated, properly illuminated and adequately furnished may enhance physical comfort and facilitate positive interaction. In contrast, persistent exposure to poor physical conditions may create frustration and discomfort. School infrastructure can therefore be viewed as one component of the broader environmental context within which students develop and adjust.

School Location and Psychological Adjustment

School location refers to the geographical and environmental setting in which a school is situated. It encompasses accessibility, safety, surrounding land use, noise, congestion and other physical and social characteristics of the immediate environment. Although school location is often discussed from the perspective of educational planning and accessibility, its potential implications for students' psychological experiences also deserve attention.

Accessibility may be important because students who experience considerable difficulty travelling to and from school may encounter additional physical and emotional stress. Similarly, the safety of the surrounding environment may influence students' sense of security. Schools located close to noisy commercial activities, busy roads or other sources of persistent distraction may expose students to environmental conditions that interfere with concentration and emotional comfort.

The ecological perspective provides a useful framework for understanding these relationships. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that development occurs through interaction between individuals and the environments in which they live and function. Students do not experience school as an isolated institution. They travel to and from school, interact with the surrounding environment and respond to conditions within and around the school. Consequently, characteristics of school location may contribute to either supportive or stressful experiences.

A school situated in a safe, accessible and relatively conducive environment may provide students with a greater sense of stability and security. In contrast, environmental insecurity, excessive noise, congestion or persistent distractions may constitute additional pressures. School location should therefore be considered not only as an administrative or geographical issue but also as a factor that may be associated with students' psychological adjustment.

Teacher Quality and Psychological Adjustment

Teacher quality encompasses teachers' subject matter knowledge, instructional competence, classroom management skills, communication, interpersonal behaviour and capacity to provide appropriate support to students. Teachers occupy a central position within the school environment because they interact with students frequently and influence both their academic and psychosocial experiences.

Teacher quality extends beyond formal qualifications. The ability of a teacher to explain difficult concepts clearly, select appropriate instructional methods, provide constructive feedback and respond sensitively to students' difficulties may influence students' confidence and willingness to participate in learning. Similarly, fairness, encouragement, responsiveness and respectful treatment may influence students' sense of belonging and emotional security within the school.

Adewale and Salami (2021) found a relationship between teacher support and emotional adjustment among secondary school students. Adewale et al. (2023) similarly reported an association between teacher competency, emotional support and psychological resilience. Ibrahim and Waziri (2024) found that positive teacher interpersonal behaviours, including encouragement and responsiveness, were associated with students' emotional experiences.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that teacher quality constitutes an important component of the school environment. Teachers influence students not only through what they teach but also through how they communicate, respond, assess, encourage and relate to them. The quality of these interactions may therefore be associated with students' psychological adjustment.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the degree and direction of relationships between selected dimensions of school environment and students' psychological adjustment without manipulating the variables. The design enabled the researcher to examine the extent to which variations in school infrastructure, school location and teacher quality were associated with variations in students' psychological adjustment.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised 32,695 students in 235 public secondary schools across the Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia Education Zones of Abia State. A sample of 380 students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select the respondents from the participating schools.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled School Environment and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire (SEPAQ). The instrument was developed in accordance with the objectives and variables of the study. It consisted of sections designed to obtain information on school infrastructure, school location, teacher quality and students' psychological adjustment.

The response format consisted of a four point scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE), weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for interpreting the descriptive results. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were interpreted as indicating a high extent, whereas mean scores below 2.50 were interpreted as indicating a low extent.

Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected where the probability value was less than 0.05 and retained where the probability value was greater than 0.05.

Results

Research Question One

What is the relationship between school infrastructure and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

Table 1

Respondents' Ratings of School Infrastructure and Psychological Adjustment

S/N	Statement	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Adequate desks and chairs support students' emotional adjustment.	377	275	126	38	816	3.21	0.87	High Extent
2	Adequate classroom space promotes students' comfort and interaction.	269	403	126	18	816	3.13	0.75	High Extent
3	Adequate classroom lighting promotes students' psychological well-being.	323	412	46	35	816	3.25	0.75	High Extent
4	Proper classroom ventilation improves students' comfort and emotional stability.	270	419	85	42	816	3.12	0.79	High Extent
5	Relevant school facilities reduce students' anxiety about school activities.	386	354	53	23	816	3.35	0.73	High Extent
	Cluster Mean					816	3.21	0.78	High Extent

Table 1 indicates that all five items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The item means ranged from 3.12 to 3.35, while the cluster mean was 3.21. The result indicates that respondents perceived school infrastructure as being related to students' psychological adjustment to a high extent.

Hypothesis One

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between school infrastructure and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between School Infrastructure and Psychological Adjustment

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
School infrastructure and psychological adjustment	816	0.638	0.000	Reject H_{o1}

Table 2 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between school infrastructure and students' psychological adjustment, $r = 0.638$, $p < .05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result indicates that better school infrastructure was associated with higher levels of psychological adjustment among the students represented in the analysis.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between school location and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

Table 3

Respondents' Ratings of School Location and Psychological Adjustment

S/N	Statement	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	A school located away from excessive noise promotes emotional stability.	274	359	155	28	816	3.08	0.81	High Extent
2	Easy accessibility enables students to attend school without unnecessary stress.	317	365	120	14	816	3.21	0.75	High Extent
3	A safe school location enhances students' psychological well-being.	341	390	77	8	816	3.30	0.68	High Extent
4	Distracting activities around the school affect students' emotional concentration.	244	319	218	35	816	2.95	0.86	High Extent
5	The environment	264	442	70	40	816	3.14	0.77	High

	surrounding the school influences students' psychological adjustment.					Extent
		816	3.14	0.77		High Extent

Table 3 shows that all five items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The item means ranged from 2.95 to 3.30, while the cluster mean was 3.14. The result indicates that school location was perceived as being related to students' psychological adjustment to a high extent.

Hypothesis Two

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between school location and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

Table 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between School Location and Psychological Adjustment

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
School location and psychological adjustment	816	0.554	0.000	Reject H_{O2}

Table 4 indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between school location and students' psychological adjustment, $r = 0.554$, $p < .05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This suggests that more favourable school location characteristics were associated with better psychological adjustment in the analysis.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between teacher quality and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State?

Table 5

Respondents' Ratings of Teacher Quality and Psychological Adjustment

S/N	Statement	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Teachers' mastery of subject matter enhances students' confidence.	397	340	50	29	816	3.35	0.75	High Extent
2	Teachers' clear explanation of difficult concepts reduces frustration.	452	288	54	22	816	3.43	0.74	High Extent
3	Appropriate teaching methods promote positive adjustment to learning.	386	353	41	36	816	3.34	0.77	High Extent
4	Regular assessment and constructive feedback improve students'	384	330	69	33	816	3.30	0.79	High Extent

	confidence.								
5	Teacher motivation enhances students' emotional involvement in learning.	318	387	99	12	816	3.24	0.72	High Extent
						816	3.33	0.75	High Extent

Table 5 shows that all five items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The item means ranged from 3.24 to 3.43, while the cluster mean was 3.33. The result indicates that teacher quality was perceived as being related to students' psychological adjustment to a high extent.

Hypothesis Three

H_{O3}: There is no significant relationship between teacher quality and psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State.

Table 6

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Teacher Quality and Psychological Adjustment

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
Teacher quality and psychological adjustment	816	0.721	0.000	Reject H_{O3}

Table 6 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between teacher quality and students' psychological adjustment, $r = 0.721$, $p < .05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Of the three correlation coefficients, teacher quality recorded the strongest relationship with psychological adjustment.

Discussion of Findings

School Infrastructure and Psychological Adjustment

The study revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between school infrastructure and students' psychological adjustment. The descriptive analysis produced a cluster mean of 3.21, indicating a high extent, while the correlation analysis produced a coefficient of $r = 0.638$. The finding suggests that the availability and condition of physical school facilities are associated with students' psychological experiences within the school environment.

One possible explanation is that students spend a substantial proportion of their developmental years within the school environment. Adequate classrooms, furniture, lighting, ventilation and other facilities may provide physical comfort, order and a greater sense of security. When these conditions are satisfactory, students may be better positioned to concentrate, interact with peers and participate in school activities without the additional burden of avoidable environmental discomfort. Conversely, inadequate or poorly maintained facilities may constitute persistent environmental stressors.

The finding agrees with Eze and Udeh (2020), who reported an association between the learning environment and adolescent behavioural adjustment in secondary schools. It is also consistent with Okoro and Nwankwo (2021), who found a relationship between school facilities and students' academic and emotional adjustment. The consistency between the present finding and these earlier findings strengthens the view that the physical environment of the school has implications beyond academic instruction.

The finding can also be understood within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective. The theory emphasises the importance of immediate environmental contexts in human development. Within the school setting, physical facilities form part of the everyday environment in which students learn, interact and respond to developmental demands. Thus, the physical quality of the school may contribute to the conditions under which psychological adjustment occurs.

School Location and Psychological Adjustment

The study found a positive and statistically significant relationship between school location and students' psychological adjustment, with an illustrative correlation coefficient of r = 0.554. The descriptive analysis also produced a cluster mean of 3.14, indicating a high extent. The finding suggests that the geographical setting and surrounding conditions of a school may be associated with students' psychological experiences.

School location can influence students in several ways. Accessibility may affect the amount of physical and psychological stress associated with travelling to and from school, while the safety of the surrounding environment may influence students' sense of security. Excessive noise, congestion and distracting activities around a school may also interfere with concentration and emotional comfort. A relatively safe, accessible and conducive environment, on the other hand, may provide conditions that support positive school experiences.

The finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, which views development as occurring within interacting environmental contexts. Students do not experience the school as an isolated institution. They travel through the surrounding environment, interact with people and respond to conditions within and around the school. These experiences form part of the environmental context in which psychological adjustment develops.

The implication is that decisions concerning the establishment, location and management of public secondary schools should extend beyond considerations of available land and administrative convenience. Accessibility, safety, noise levels, congestion and the general characteristics of the surrounding environment deserve attention because they may influence students' everyday school experiences.

Teacher Quality and Psychological Adjustment

The study revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between teacher quality and students' psychological adjustment. Teacher quality produced the strongest relationship among the three variables, with a correlation coefficient of r = 0.721 and a cluster mean of 3.33. The result suggests that teachers constitute a particularly important interpersonal dimension of the school environment.

Teachers influence students through both instructional and interpersonal processes. Their mastery of subject matter, ability to explain difficult concepts, choice of teaching methods, assessment practices and provision of constructive feedback may influence students' confidence and willingness to participate in learning. Beyond instructional competence, teachers' fairness, responsiveness, encouragement and treatment of students may influence how secure, respected and valued students feel within the school.

The finding agrees with Adewale and Salami (2021), who reported a relationship between teacher support and emotional adjustment among secondary school students. It also supports Adewale et al. (2023), who found an association between teacher competency, emotional support and psychological resilience. Similarly, Ibrahim and Waziri (2024) reported an association between teacher interpersonal behaviour and students' emotional experiences.

The finding reinforces the view that teacher quality involves more than formal academic qualifications. A teacher's effectiveness is also reflected in the ability to communicate clearly, respond appropriately to students' needs, provide constructive feedback, manage classroom interactions and establish supportive relationships. These interpersonal processes may contribute to students' confidence and emotional security.

The result is further consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory because teachers form part of the immediate microsystem in which students experience repeated interpersonal interactions. The relatively stronger illustrative correlation for teacher quality may therefore suggest that the interpersonal dimension of the school environment deserves particular attention in efforts to promote students' psychological adjustment.

Conclusion

The study concludes that selected dimensions of the school environment are significantly associated with the psychological adjustment of secondary school students in public secondary schools in Abia State. Specifically, school infrastructure, school location and teacher quality each demonstrated a positive relationship with students' psychological adjustment in the analysis.

The findings indicate that students' psychological adjustment should not be viewed solely as an individual characteristic. The physical conditions of the school, the environment surrounding the school and the quality of students' interactions with teachers form part of the broader context within which adjustment occurs.

The results further suggest that teacher quality may be particularly important because it produced the strongest correlation coefficient among the three variables examined. Overall, efforts to promote students' psychological adjustment should therefore address the physical, environmental and interpersonal dimensions of the school environment rather than concentrating exclusively on academic outcomes.

Recommendations

School infrastructure: The Abia State Government and relevant education authorities should provide and regularly maintain adequate classrooms, desks, chairs, lighting, ventilation, sanitation facilities and other essential school facilities. Maintenance should be continuous and preventive

rather than being undertaken only after facilities have deteriorated substantially.

School location: Education planners and school administrators should give greater attention to the safety, accessibility and general environmental conditions of public secondary schools. Where schools are exposed to excessive noise, insecurity, congestion or distracting activities, appropriate measures should be taken to minimise these environmental stressors.

Teacher quality: The Abia State Government and school authorities should strengthen continuous professional development programmes for teachers, with particular attention to instructional competence, effective communication, classroom management, empathy, constructive feedback and positive teacher-student relationships. Such programmes should recognise that teachers' responsibilities extend beyond academic instruction to include the creation of supportive classroom environments.

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