Students’ Engagement and Staying in School:
A Case Study of a Secondary School in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Most of the research on students’ school engagement is based on Western society (Maslak, Kim, & McLaughlin, 2010) and most was conducted on students in tertiary institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). This study pertains to the students’ school engagement factors in a non-Western one.

Students’ school engagement continues to be an issue that attracts special attention. In this study, I review the existing literature relating to students’ school engagement while examining whether the success of a school as a learning environment is based on students’ interest in schooling or the fact that the school environment is crucial to students’ success (Bempechat, Beth, Piergross, & Wenk, 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 1992; Harris, 2008; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Newell, 2003; Satchwell, 2004; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). In this study, I carry out a qualitative investigation through observations and interviews, of the factors present in school that influence students’ school engagement.

The themes emerging from the data from the school observations and the interviews of the participants were colored by the unique school context, which inordinately did affect students' interest and school participation. Their analysis reveals the interplay of factors like the approach adopted in leadership, the teachers’ approach to pedagogy, and peer socialization towards students’ engagement. In my discussion, I provide suggestions derived from this study on how school administrators, educators and policy makers alike may indeed create, enhance, influence and sustain students’ school engagement in the context such as the one in my study.
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To my family, whose sacrifices have nurtured me; I thank you for your generosity, patience and love.

My deepest gratitude goes to the study participants. Thanks a lot for letting me into your world and for sharing so generously your cherished experiences. You were all awesome.
Dedication

This study is dedicated to all my former students and the study participants. Their willingness to share their experiences with me made this work possible. Many thanks for being generous.
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ iii
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1. Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 5
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 5
  Definition of Terms ....................................................................................................... 6
  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 7
  Thesis Overview ............................................................................................................ 8

Chapter 2. Literature Review ............................................................................................ 10
  Students’ Engagement .................................................................................................. 10
  Behavioral Engagement .............................................................................................. 12
    School environment .................................................................................................. 12
    School leadership ...................................................................................................... 14
  Emotional Engagement ............................................................................................... 17
    Assessment ............................................................................................................... 18
  Cognitive Engagement ............................................................................................... 21
    Instructional method ................................................................................................. 24
  Additional Considerations ........................................................................................... 28
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 30

Chapter 3. Methodology ................................................................................................... 31
  Research Design ............................................................................................................ 31
  Research Method ........................................................................................................... 33
    Setting ....................................................................................................................... 33
    Observation ............................................................................................................... 34
    Participant selection ................................................................................................. 36
    Participant recruitment ............................................................................................. 37
    Questionnaire ............................................................................................................ 38
    Participants' backgrounds .......................................................................................... 39
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Remarks</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A. Ethical Clearance</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B. Recruitment Flyer</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C. Letter of Information</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D. Consent Form</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E. Sample Questions from Interview Guide</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F. Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G. Sample of Modified Blank Observation Sheet</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H. Sample of Filled Observation Sheet</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I. Sample of Coded Transcript</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Research Target Population ................................................................. 36
Table 2. Organization of Data Collection Instruments to the Research Questions .... 45
Table 3. Frequency of Codes among the Participants ........................................ 54
Table 4. Result of Counted Behavioral Occurrences for Teachers and Principal .... 55
Table 5. Result of Counted Behavioral Occurrences for Students ....................... 56
Table 6. Distribution of the Themes ................................................................. 103
Chapter 1. Introduction

The contemporary school system serves the purpose of educating citizens. One can say that the school system is a crafted entity for the development of students’ skills so that they can participate in mainstream education (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). However, it has been noted that several factors and conditions affect students’ engagement, despite various government policies aimed at improving students’ academic performance and engagement. Examples of such Policies are, No Child Left Behind Act (2001) by the United States of America; Learning to 18 Strategies (2008) by the Ontario Government of Canada; and the Universal Basic Education Act by the government of Nigeria (UBE, 1999).

When the Nigerian Government established the Universal Primary Education Act in 1976 (UPE), the desire was to afford all citizens an access to a basic education. As contained in the official Reference of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Gazette (2004), the act provides for compulsory universal basic education and stipulates penalties for parents who fail to comply with the provision (Ayeni, 2000; Federal Republic of Nigeria Gazette, 2004; Obayan, 2000; UPE, 1976). However, the initial idea lasted about three years before the program was abandoned midway (Ayeni, 2000; Oni, 2008). In 1999, another program, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act was established by the government, again with the purpose of creating the necessary environment and policy helping to educate people, which include the desire to inculcate in children the knowledge of literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate (Ayeni, 2000; UBE Policy, 1999; Federal Republic of Nigeria Gazette, 2004). Statistics showed the need for the program. In 2000, the Nigerian literacy rate was 52 percent (Babalola, 2000). In 1998, only 40% of
all heads of households in Nigeria had any education at all, only 21% had a primary education, 14% had up to secondary education, while only 5% had a post-secondary education (UNDP, 1998). Education Statistics (1996) from the Federal Ministry of Education reveal that only 14.1 million out of 21 million school-age children are enrolled in primary school. Universal basic education (UBE) originated from these statistics, to encourage and enhance education among all citizens.

Like all policies established in most third world countries, implementation and inefficient personnel proved to be the dearth of such a great governmental program. Most researchers agree that many of the educational policies in Nigeria have been described as the product of confusion. Research reveals that only a small group (17.8%) of respondents agreed that government was taking care of all their school needs whereas the majority (82.2%) claim that their parents were largely involved in funding school expenses (Adepoju & Fabiyi, 2007; Ayeni, 2000). It is also true that when policy and implementation are inconsistent; failure creeps in, affecting all those working in and for the system. In Nigeria, for students to pursue the dreams of engaging in academic work, they have to go through the 6-3-3-4 system of education which implies, six years of primary school; three years of junior secondary school; three years of senior secondary school and four years of university studies (UBE Policy, 1999; The National Policy on Education in Nigeria, 2004).

I began my teaching career in the fall of 1998 at a privately owned Junior Secondary School. However, in the fall of 2002, I was appointed the principal of a new privately owned secondary school that was comprised of both junior and senior sections (same as grade 7 to 12 here in Canada). These experiences both as a teacher and as
principal guided my research work. The daily encounters with the students and the school environments, not only provided excitement but have decisively challenged my conception of schooling. It has been both fulfilling and heart-rending at the same time. 

On the one side, I saw students who were not only engaged in school matters but completely enamored with culture and the school climate. 

On the other hand, I observed the opposite of the above mentioned categories of students. I also noticed students who were completely bored and disillusioned and subsequently got disconnected from schooling, and eventually became at-risk students or dropped-out of school. This situation not only saddened me but became a big challenge to the school board. The high and low points of these encounters made me look for answers and led me to re-evaluate my feelings as both a teacher and a school principal. I probed for answers in the scenarios playing out daily in my school and wondered why such should be the case that some students are greatly interested in schooling and willing to participate in school related activities while others on the opposite side were not as interested as their peers. This probe led me to literature reviews and to neighboring schools to discover how things fared within their study environments. As a result of this probe, I narrated my experiences to my colleagues and they too voiced concerns about the presence of such at-risk students and wondered what could be done to facilitate their engagement. 

Consequently, I volunteered and undertook a diploma course at the state run university trying to discover what helps, what research could provide in order to reduce or even obliterate the looming danger as many students were already victims of school disengagement. My search took me to a lot of schools. This led me to a school where I
did my teaching practicum. It is a private school run by a group of nuns, a female congregation based in the country. The percentage of students’ engagement was impressive. They were succeeding where other schools like mine were not doing so well.

Thus, the conversations started and the interest grew. The very many discussions and recollections made me question the role of the school environment in students’ school engagement. Could it be that, there are factors and characteristics of the school that aid students’ engagement? Or could it be that students’ interests influence their engagement? And by engagement, I do not mean being busy, but the all encompassing characteristics that aid school participation and subsequently prevent students from dropping out of school.

I felt compelled to attend graduate school to research students’ school engagement as a lot of research has been carried out to date in the Nigerian context on the reasons why students drop out of school. However, as I progressed in the graduate school, I came to understand that the fact that students are engaged and stay in school is a complex phenomenon and a result of the interplay between many factors. It highlighted the point that students stay engaged in school not just because of one factor or characteristic but due to a long process and a number of factors, ranging from the school environment to the family and the individual student’s interest. Students do not just stay engaged in school on a sudden impulse, but appear instead to be influenced by many aspects over a considerable period of time in the presence of favorable conditions and characteristics.

Within the school system presently in place I carried out this study with participants who were products of the same system of education or were presently
students of the same system of education. As a high school teacher and due to my previous experiences in school administration, I was drawn to settings where there were favorable conditions for students’ engagement in order to identify what works. I have come to believe that this engagement originates from the right learning environment with adequate conditions. In this study, I decided to research the many facets of the school that actually encourage students’ engagement, by conducting a case study of a secondary school.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was threefold. First, I investigated the characteristics of the school that enhance students’ school engagement in a country where school attendance is optional from kindergarten to grade 12 in order to uncover interventions and strategies for educators and researchers to help foster students’ school engagement. Second, I uncovered the intricate aspect connected to the school as a learning environment that aids such constructs as students’ engagement. Third, I suggested grass-root interventions for educators, researchers and schools, so as to better support students’ school participation and engagement.

**Research Questions**

My literature search on students’ engagement directed me to mostly publications based on research in Western society (Maslak et al., 2010) and research conducted on students in tertiary institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). As a high school teacher for eight years in Nigeria, I witnessed first-hand students’ disengagement from school related activities and subsequent dropout. I was also aware of substantial research that had stated the impact of socio-economic status on students (Ferguson, Tileczek, Boydell, & Rummens,
2005; Sirin, 2005) as well, I also had experienced how engaged many students were during my time as a high school teacher. These experiences had influenced my present study with my focus especially on high school. I was curious to understand whether the school as a learning environment influenced the engagement of these students to remain and not drop out of school. I was drawn to finding out what factors of students’ engagement are characteristic of a culture other than a Western one. Against this backdrop, my study was guided by the following research questions:

- What school characteristics enhance high school students’ school engagement?
- To what extent do the instructional practices of teachers enhance students’ school engagement?
- How do students’ interests influence their school engagement?

**Definition of Terms**

In this study, I employed the following terms: school, students’ engagement and staying in school. School will designate the learning environment hereby referred to as a high school. Engagement describes energy in action, the connection between person and activity. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, & Leske (1989) define engagement as "the psychological investment required to comprehend and master knowledge and skills explicitly taught in schools" (p. 17). Thus, the term students’ engagement does not literally mean students keeping busy, but students’ desire in getting involved in routine school activities, such as interest in going to school, attending classes, interest in school’s social life, and following teachers' directions in class (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wehlage et al., 1989), while its
opposite, disengaged or disaffected students means those losing interest and withdrawing from school in any significant way. Researchers such as Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) however found that lack of interest in a teacher’s method of teaching and what is taught is a better reason for explaining that students are not interested in learning.

Staying in school according to researchers is understood as the act of not leaving; the state of staying and belonging as a member of a learning environment (Finn, 1989); as opposed to at-risk and early school leaving. Belonging to this group encourages interest in school attendance and extracurricular activities which are of vital importance in creating community programmes that meet students’ physical and psychological needs in terms of staying in school (Ashiabi, 2005; Okunsanya & Isabu, 2010). For this study, I define both engagement and staying in school as serving the same purpose. My initial understanding of related issues comes from a review of the literature on engagement and specifically on how the school influences it. Another dimension to consider is the role of the school leader.

Leadership according to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate dictionary (1998, 10th Ed.) is defined as the position or the office of a leader; the capacity to lead; the act or instance of leading. By way of clarification, leadership then denotes a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Assessment on the other hand, is used to denote the classification of someone or something with respect to its worth; the act of judging or assessing a person or situation or event.

Significance of the Study

The rationale for this research was borne out of my classroom experiences as a
teacher, having experienced the daily decline of students’ interest in school and the
influence that regional differences could impact on teaching certain parts of the
curriculum because of cultural context (Ayeni, 2000; Okunsanya & Isabu, 2010; Wodi &
Dokubo, 2009). These declines in students’ interest became a concern and worry not just
for the continued survival of the schools but over the impact these negative effects will
have on the Nigerian society at large in the future.

The significance of this research lies in its applicability to the understanding of
factors present in school that aid students’ engagement. This study is meant to be a
resource for schools that belong to private school boards. As such, this study adds to the
existing literature on the chosen topic from the Nigerian educational perspective where
school attendance is optional. Although Scheel, Madubhushi, & Backhaus (2009)
emphasized the use of interventions like counseling to reduce the rate of school dropout,
the focus of this study was to discover the factors or characteristics of the school as a
learning environment that enhance and contribute to students’ school engagement, and
thus, develop simple interventions or strategies that can be helpful in increasing positive
characteristics in the school under scrutiny with a possible extension to other similar
contexts.

Thesis Overview

In this chapter, I explained my interest in students’ engagement. I have outlined
the background of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, given the definition
of terms and significance of the study. The remaining portion of this thesis is divided into
six chapters. I present the review of relevant literature in Chapter 2. The review of
literature explores the many dimensions of students’ engagement and their relevancy with
a much deeper understanding and exploration through three major categorizations of engagement as reviewed by Fredricks, Blunifield, & Paris (2004) as, behavioral, emotional and cognitive. These three categorizations constitute the base line for my literature review in terms of students’ school engagement. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological approach used in my study which includes the various methods that I used in data collection and analysis. In Chapter 4, I report the findings of the field work; starting from the stories derived from the unobtrusive observations of the school environment culminating in the re-told experiences of the seven participants, and organized into two major sections. In Chapter 5, I explain how the major themes that emanated from the data connect to the literature and the theoretical framework which I highlighted in Chapter 2. I give examples of observational data from my journal entries and excerpts from the interviews of the seven participants in relation to students’ school engagement followed by practical recommendations. In Chapter 6, I discuss some implications for future research, limitations to the study and make concluding remarks for the study.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this section, I explore the meaning of students’ engagement in terms of the different models of descriptions ascribed to it. The literature explores the many dimensions of student engagement and their relevancy with a much deeper understanding and exploration through three major categorizations of engagement as reviewed by Fredricks et al. (2004) as, behavioral, emotional and cognitive. First, I explore and contextualize the meaning of students’ engagement as behavioral, with an eye to understanding how the school as a learning environment affects and influences student activities in terms of how effective leadership generates and sustains favorable conditions that will engage students’ school participation. Even though Fredricks et al.'s second and third categories, emotional and cognitive, are similar as they both include the instructional practices of the school teacher; I will for the purpose of this study categorize and examine my constructs separately as they apply to my research objective. As such, I will discuss assessment of students’ growth and performance under emotional engagement due to the emotional components ascribed to feelings of students when grades are awarded and for other various reasons. Cognitive engagement is discussed in terms of instructional practices of teachers in impacting knowledge at a pedagogical level. These three categorizations constitute the base line for my literature review in terms of students’ school engagement.

Students’ Engagement

There are many studies on student engagement in Higher Education (Kuh et al., 2005), however, this study is aimed at understanding how the school as a learning environment influences and enhances students’ engagement in a country and culture.
where choice of schooling is not supported by any government legislation. Researchers have shown that there are many models of engagement, each describing an aspect of students’ engagement, (Anderson et al., 2004; Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Sharkey et al., 2008; Zyngier, 2008). Many studies have categorized engagement as behavioral, which includes participation and conduct in school related activities, student attendance, active participation in classes, not excluding involvement in extracurricular activities and the effects of teachers on students’ interest (Battistich et al., 1997; Finn, 1993; Harris, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Zyngier, 2008).

There has been some disagreements on the use of the expression ‘psychological engagement’ (Anderson et al., 2004; Appleton et al., 2008; Harris, 2008) versus ‘emotional engagement’ with researchers like Blumenfeld et al. (2005) and Fredrick et al. (2004) preferring the latter, all in the attempt to describe affective constructs like interest, feelings and attitudes showing belonging, engaging with teachers etc. Few researchers classify engagement as being cognitive, as this involves mastery learning and psychological investment in learning (Ainley, 1993; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989). I preferred cognitive engagement due to its close connection to teachers’ activities on a pedagogical level through the process of knowledge transfer to students.

My definition of engagement was based on Fredricks et al.’s (2004) model of engagement as a multi-faceted construct, consisting of behavioral, emotional and cognitive aspects. Its holistic classification and definition in essence are encompassing of the complex aspects involved and go on articulating the correlation existing in engagement as a construct of composite characteristics. As such, due to its inclusion of
school related matters, I sought to see the connection between behavioral engagement and how the school leadership affects it and wondered to what extent it could enhance school participation and engagement.

**Behavioral Engagement**

Behavioral engagement has been defined as participation in academic, social and extracurricular activities (Battistich et al., 1997; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Fredricks et al., (2004, p. 4) in their review identified three ways of understanding behavioral engagement; (a) positive conduct such as keeping and following rules and avoiding unpleasant behaviors (Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997); (b) involvement in learning and academic tasks (Birch & Ladd, 1997); (c) participation in school related activities and extracurricular activities (Finn, 1993).

Behavioral engagement is strictly tied to school related actions and activities as uncovered in the reported studies. The school is seen as the environment greatly influencing students’ engagement and creating positive attitudes towards a positive conduct, involvement in learning and participation in activities. Below I explore school environment and school leadership characteristics.

**School environment.**

The school happens to be the centre of activity with regards to students’ engagement and interest. The organization of the learning environment and the structure of leadership tell much about the influence the school will have on the students (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Finn, 1989; Leithwood et al., 2004). The need for schools to create adequate environments is emphasized; Bong and Mimi (2005) argued that students’ perceptions of the learning environment clarified and explained
changes in motivation, a finding that justifies continued efforts to create a motivationally adaptive environment. However, according to Bempechat et al. (2008) and Bong & Mimi (2005) the issue is not how people can encourage others but how people can create the favorable conditions that will help others to succeed. Arum, (2003) declared that students also want to feel supported, but not at the expense of their sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency; students who feel supported and respected at school may be more accepting of structure. Whereas, Gottfredson et al. (1993) concluded and affirmed through their study that in the absence of support to students, no degree of structure may be adequate to enhance their interest and engagement. This creates the required route connecting the environment to students’ engagement.

In addition to this connection, when the environment is conducive to learning by creating the necessary opportunities for positive conduct, such as rule keeping, involvement in academic and learning tasks, and participation in school related and extracurricular activities, then the first conditions necessary for engagement might be satisfied. The school then becomes the crafted entity for developing student skills so that they can participate in mainstream education (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). The school size and class size, attitudes of teachers, teaching and learning styles of the students and the availability of good procedures for effective school management are evidence of a safe haven for academic engagement.

Researchers like, Molloy, Gest and Rulison (2011), and Prinstein, Brechwald and Cohen (2011) believed that students’ participation could be enhanced by peer socialization as this could influence students’ growth, relationship and involvement. The influence of the environment in sustaining such participation is noted in the research
literature through peer influence and socialization. According to research, friendship experience as it exists among children and adolescents is closely connected to different individual adjustments especially with regards to schooling (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Studsrod & Edvin, 2011; Veronneau & Vitaro, 2007; Wentzel, Barry & Caldwell, 2004). Extracurricular activities in high schools also influence students’ academic performance (Rombokas, 1995), even though for Johnson and Moulden (2011), there was no positive correlation between students’ extracurricular activities and homework performance in mathematics. Behaviors for success are enforced by school leaders and we examine this topic next.

School leadership.

Northouse (2007) in accordance with the Webster dictionary, makes the same point about leadership when he identified it as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. School leadership refers to the position or the office of the leader of a learning environment for academic purposes. In a broad sense, school leadership means the whole administrative set-up of the school and is associated with the process of collaboration between the principal, teachers, parents and students towards the achievement of educational goals and purposes. Opinions have emerged pointing at the necessity and importance of school leadership as it impacts on the overall performance of students, with a strong indication on making schools what they ought to be (Harris & Townsend, 2007). According to researchers, organizational success is attributed to the presence of effective leaders, which highlights the fact that successful school leaders could always influence student achievement through two important channels; first, through the support and development of effective teachers and
second, through the implementation of effective organizational processes that will make practice worth its effort (Leithwood & Day, 2008; Blase & Blase, 1999).

Many research findings show that successful school leaders can influence student achievement in several important ways, both through their influence on other people or on features of their organizations, and through their influence on school processes, systems and practices (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leithwood et al. (2004, pp. 8-9, 12) hinged this on four positives: (a) developing people by way of enabling teachers to do better jobs, (b) monitoring organizational performance, (c) promoting effective communication and (d) creating a productive school culture and climate that encourages collaborative processes between the teachers and the school leader.

The term, student engagement for leaders does not just mean students keeping busy. It involves the discussion of students’ attitudes towards school which are facilitated by veritable leadership processes such as team building, collaboration and rewarding the employees for a job well done. Student engagement then is rightly seen as the consequence of the collaboration which evolved as a unique attribute of leadership description and definition. Rightly so, Spillane et al. (2001, p. 26) in their research, investigating school leadership practice as a distributed perspective, argued that:

Leadership practice is not simply a function of an individual leader’s ability, skill, charisma, and cognition. While individual leaders and their attributes do matter in constituting leadership practice, they are not all that matters. Other school leaders and followers also matter in that they help define leading practice. This position of collaboration encapsulates other constructs like, discipline and culture of respect; support and flexibility through which students’ school engagement are
influenced.

The importance of leadership is noted and its relevance to students’ school engagement is recurring through the literature and by close association. As such, understanding school leadership at its optimal level will not only act as the required criteria for but will always lay serious claim to facilitating students’ school engagement. The importance of collaboration in this case cannot be overlooked as it acts as the base and foundation of meaningful partnership in students’ success. Collaboration in essence creates a community of stakeholders whose goal is strictly centered on the success and realization of educational dreams and purposes. Success invariably creates the atmosphere conducive to students’ school engagement.

The school is a community and like all communities thrives through codes of conduct. The lack of norms could bring about confusion within. The importance of discipline as a necessary tool has always been emphasized by educators. School norms refer to codes of conduct that give enforcement to peaceful co-existence in an organization. An organized school with adequate codes of conduct regarding truancy, home work and greater students’ involvement creates the right environment for growth and interest in school engagement (Bowen, 2002; Doyle, 2006). Doyle (2006, pp. 97–125) argued in his study that schools should be guided by this discipline theory, whereby, a high school administrator might ask the following questions about school structure:

a) Do all staff understand the need to be strict, fair, and consistent in their enforcement of school rules?

b) Are rules and expectations communicated clearly throughout the school?

c) Do all students actually know the expectations for behavior and the
consequences for violations?

d) Do the consequences for violations seem fair and fit the seriousness of the offense?

Discipline enhances school stability and creates a culture of respect which could be described as communication with students, modeling students’ intellectual processing for engagement and achievement through mature regulations (Doyle, 2006). As such, the issue is how students are learning, for when they learn they acquire the skills for proper engagement. The role played by discipline in enshrining such a culture of involvement in terms of skill development and maturity in working with others in a given situation is encouraging. The purpose is to bring about the best possible learning experience for all students and discover how the school through leadership affects the students’ performance in terms of engagement (Bowen, 2002; Doyle, 2006).

The second major factor affecting engagement is tied to the emotional aspect with emotional engagement closely tied to assessment.

**Emotional Engagement**

Emotional engagement is identified with students’ personal attitudes and reactions towards school, teachers, learning and peers. Fredricks et al. (2004) also in their review pointed out that student’s affective reactions are more prevalent in the classroom, and this includes interest, boredom, happiness, anxiety and sadness (Bowen, 2002; Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Other researchers classify emotional engagement as having a close connection and identification with school (Bowen, 2002; Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). Finn (1989) defines identification as belonging and value. The identification so defined includes and signifies the feeling of importance in school related
matters and appreciation of school success. As among the many factors that could trigger either happiness, boredom or sadness is the teachers’ practice in terms of assessment outcomes; I chose to tie assessment with emotional engagement because of the close connection between belonging as a feeling, connection and identification. When students are engaged emotionally, they develop the skills to work with others and know how to transfer knowledge to solve problems creatively. Assessment could always be a polarizing phenomenon as identified in the literature (Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Voelkl, 1997) obviously through students’ classroom affective reactions as aptly described above.

Assessment.

The importance of emotion as closely tied to students’ success and school participation is primordial. This is orchestrated not only through curriculum and instruction but particularly through assessment. A school’s success is dependent on the development and performance of its students and performance is gauged through the kind of instruction and assessment used for the measurement of students’ success. The pre-eminence given to assessment as a measure of accountability for students’ success has always been controversial. Rushton and Juola-Rushton (2008), recognized the complexities involved in both the process of teaching, and more importantly, the assessment of how and what we teach. However, how we assess students contributes to the ensuing attitudes of happiness and sadness and boredom.

Theories and assessment practices abound in schools, but formative assessment deserves a prominent place with regards to holding the school system accountable for students’ emotional engagement and learning experience (Carrillo-de-la-Pen˜a et al.,
This argument stems from the very definition and practice of formative assessment as not only described by Cowie and Bell (1999), as a bidirectional process through feedback; but also by Black and William (1998) as involving the use of feedback from learning activities to enhance the learning needs of the student.

Bakula (2010) in her research on the benefits of formative assessments for teaching and learning sets out to find out, as a Grade 7 teacher of a culturally diverse group of students, how much the students are grasping the units being taught in order to assess their readiness for the district summative assessment. They were re-taught certain concepts as a result of the formative assessments. She used formative assessments to determine if students understood the material as it was being taught and re-taught and if deficiencies were discovered through various methods. The findings of the research did show that formative assessment did actually improve the students’ learning and the teaching styles. The implementation of the formative assessment strategy helped her to discover the missing links and comprehension abilities of the students. As such, lesson plans were structured to accommodate and improve upon areas of deficiency. The result of her research was quite obvious and affirmed that formative assessments helped students’ learning and content understanding but above all was very instrumental in their success. This is orchestrated through better class participation and ownership of class work. The emphasis is focused on students’ personal attitudes and reactions towards school, teachers, learning and peers for example, interest, boredom, happiness, anxiety and sadness (Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Opposition abounds on the usefulness of formative assessment as a measure of creating and enforcing students’ school engagement. In his study on the impact of
assessments on foreign language proficiency development, Ross (2005) cast academic
doubt on the effectiveness and efficiency of formative assessment in all academic skill
domains. This he predicated on the premise that formative assessment could bring in
some extraneous sources of variance into its application, which could sometimes give a
wrong appraisal to learning enhancement activities. He argued that while formative
assessment is not to be omnipotent in all academic skill domains, the results of his
longitudinal study of comparative assessment approaches suggest that judicious use of
formative assessment may well lead to tangible value-added outcomes. As such, he
doubted its effectiveness and efficiency in all academic skill domains. He was not
overtly impressed with the widespread tendency for formative assessment to be used as a
tool for measurement.

In the same vein, Bennett (2011, p.24, 25), in his article on formative assessment
emphasized that the term, formative assessment, does not yet represent a well-defined set
of artifacts or practices. He critically discusses six interrelated key points in formative
assessment namely; the definition of formative assessment, the claims commonly made
for its effectiveness, the limited attention given to domain considerations in its
conceptualization, the under-representation of measurement principles in that
conceptualization, the teacher-support and the impact of the larger educational system.
He acknowledges its presence in education but is of the opinion that it is still a work in
progress and suggests rethinking assessment from the ground up as a coherent system, in
which formative assessment is a critical part, but not the only critical part.

The context of this section is vital as it exposes the other side of the coin.
Shavelson’s (2008, p.293) experience creating, implementing, and studying the effects of
formative assessment adds more information. He realized that much of the research found in reviews was carried out in the laboratory with internal-validity controls and having the research findings generalized and extended to the messiness of classrooms with teachers implementing so-called external-validity concerns. He believes that formative assessment like so many other education reforms has a long way to go before it can be mastered effectively by a majority of teachers.

However, the usefulness of formative assessment is considered vital when one speaks about holding the school accountable for students’ learning (Bakula, 2010; Black & William, 1998; Carrillo-de-la-Pen˜a et al., 2009; Cowie & Bell, 1999). Taking into account the complex aspects involved in schooling, learning and being educated, formative assessment has a part to play in educating students for society (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). However this implies creating a greater involvement of students in the learning process and being more successful in creating opportunities for motivations. The onus and responsibility lie on the school to, not only engage the student’s intellectual learning each day but also to stimulate and challenge the emotional, social, cultural, and physical environments in order to ensure a greater depth of thinking and understanding. Much is to be desired as the connection between emotional engagement and assessment re-emphasizes and connects students’ emotions as a means of enhancing or limiting the learning activities and learning needs of the students. Understanding the context of assessment as an emotional engagement determinant offers a way by which we might understand students’ school engagement.

**Cognitive Engagement**

Much about cognitive engagement could be inferred from the discussions on
emotional engagement; however, I needed to make a subtle distinction between the two constructs in terms of the degree of influence exerted on the students’ school outcomes. While emotional engagement focused on students’ personal attitudes and reactions towards school, teachers, learning and peers like for example, interest, boredom, happiness, anxiety and sadness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), cognitive engagement by my classification lines up the same way on students’ attitudes but goes on to emphasize students’ psychological investment in learning, thus, describing the impact of teachers’ instructional strategies on students’ performance (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989).

Cognitive engagement was seen by Fredricks et al. (2004) as pupils’ personal investment in learning that was focused, strategic, and self-regulating. According to their review, one set of definitions focuses on psychological investment in learning, a desire to go beyond the requirements, and a preference for challenge (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989). Wehlage et al. (1989) define engagement as "the psychological investment required to comprehend and master knowledge and skills explicitly taught in schools" (p. 17). How great and influencing this psychological investment is, is of vital importance to this study. Learning and the academic work of students were very prevalent in their review and analysis of cognitive engagement. As such, it will be reasonable to discuss how much teachers’ instructional strategies affect students’ engagement as part of the psychological challenge.

Instructional strategies of teachers play a huge role in creating the right psychological challenge required to comprehend and deepen students’ interest and engagement. Teaching as instruction is used to describe the act, practice, occupation, or
profession of a teacher. It implies that something is taught. It could also be used to
designate a precept or doctrine. Ogili (2005) defined instruction (teaching) as the process
whereby the learner’s environment is deliberately manipulated to enable the learner to
respond positively, under specified conditions to specific situations. By way of
clarification, teaching (instruction) strategies denotes the types of principles and methods
used for instruction, usually in an academic learning environment. Many researchers have
emphasized many types of teaching methods, depending on what information or skill the
teacher is trying to convey. Methods like class participation, question and answer,
demonstration and recitation are some of the ways teachers use to instruct. When teachers
are deciding on the methods to be used for teaching, they usually are flexible and willing
to adjust their styles according to their students’ needs and styles (Olowa, 2009). As well
as is noted in the research literature, student success in the classroom and consequent
school engagement are largely based on effective teaching methods applied by teachers
(Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Olowa, 2009).

There has been an increasingly positive link drawn between the quality of
instructional methods and students’ learning styles as a ‘conditio sine qua non’ of
students’ engagement (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). This reference to teaching
strategies has been largely documented in the literature alongside teacher instructions,
effective students’ learning, underpinned by a strong evidence base (Deci, Koestner, &
Ryan, 2001; Doyle, 2006; Ezeliora, 2004; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Joel, 2007;
Johnson, 2008; Nwagbo, 2001; Ogili, 2005; Olowa, 2009; Oludipe, 2004). However, the
whole scenario of instruction emphasizes that the work of the teacher is not a solo
enterprise, but takes place in collaboration with the school leaders and is linked to school
planning processes. This ensures that the work of the teacher on enforcing teaching strategies is sustainable and appreciated, by creating a lasting effect on students’ engagement, the actual reason for which schools are in place.

**Instructional method.**

Instructional methods of teachers are hugely derailed by many barriers. By barriers, I mean factors that prohibit and inhibit teachers’ ability to teach well and thereby reduce or inhibit students’ engagement in schools. As pointed out by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen (2006), teaching methods in Nigeria are affected by a lot of barriers, which impede proper student learning and engagement. These are barriers that teachers and students tend to face in their daily experiences as participants in academic interaction; these are referred to by Ezeliora (2004) as the factors that inhibit the effectiveness of instructional strategies employed in teaching. Such factors as poor teacher remunerations, inclement weather conditions, family cultural influences, lack of teaching aids, students’ absenteeism, teachers’ emotional attitudes, larger class size and school under-funding (Ezeliora, 2004; Nwagbo, 2001; Oludipe, 2004).

Aduwa-Ogiegbaen (2006) enumerated some deficiencies that act as barriers to teaching:

(a) Many schools, especially those in urban centers, are located in areas surrounded by busy traffic and many active people.

(b) Many schools have dilapidated buildings with leaking roofs and cracked walls. Many of these dilapidated buildings are still being used for classroom activities.

(c) Most of the schools, especially those in urban areas, are overcrowded with
some classrooms containing 70 to 100 pupils, to the point that the teacher had little or no room to move around to give individual attention to students.

(d) There is no electricity in the majority of the schools.

(e) Most of the schools have no adequate staff rooms and offices.

(f) The lack of libraries is problematic, and where they are available there is a scarcity of books (pp. 495-504).

These factors act as barriers to instructional effectiveness. Understanding teachers' perceptions about the barriers to active learning in their classrooms is the first step in devising strategies to help change the way they teach. It is known that schools and teachers that emphasize relational learning are better able to serve the motivational needs of the student. This is a pointer to the need for more innovative classroom instruction which will meet the developmental requirements of adolescents, establishing supportive relationships and upholding behavioral expectations in the classroom (Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Joel, 2007; Johnson, 2008).

Doyle (2006) was convinced that teachers who provide engaging instruction and motivating assignments are more likely to be successful in managing their classrooms. He recommended the following check list for effective control of the teaching environment:

a) Do all staff communicate to students that they care about them and want them to succeed?

b) Can all students identify at least one adult in the school that they could turn to with a personal problem or concern?
c) Are all students willing to seek help from an adult if there is a threat of violence?

d) Do students have an opportunity to express their opinions and feel heard (pp. 97–125)?

The outcome then will include being able to interact constructively with teachers and peers, meet academic challenges and learn actively and collaboratively. The emphasis on the schools’ part should always be on reducing the negative influence that instructional barriers could have on students’ school engagement (Doyle, 2006; Zepke & Leach, 2010).

According to the guidelines from Instructional Development Services (2002), instructional tools usually support one or more of the following in an instructional requirement: gain attention, recall prerequisites, present objectives, present new content, support learning through examples and visual elaboration, elicit student response, provide feedback, enhance retention and transfer, and assess performance. There are many ways to achieve teaching goals; this is also true for the best use of instructional methods and catering to the learning styles of students. Teachers are in the best position to provide feedback, through either encouraging or impeding students’ motivational processes, which will, in turn, affect their learning and possible engagement (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Instructional Development Services, 2002).

Teachers have and use varied instructional methods. Previous researchers have stated students’ ability to self-regulate as a key factor in their school engagement (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Greene & Azevedo, 2007). But for Greenwood et al. (2002) the best instructional tasks for promoting academic engagement are by using
worksheets, paper and pencil writing and other technology like computers, workbooks, and readers. In their categorization, little importance was ascribed to students’ involvement. All their criteria for pedagogy were teacher centered. This is not only one sided, but does not aim at enhancing students’ involvement in classroom activities.

However, studies have shown that the approach used by teachers is very important to the success of the teaching process (Guardino and Fullerton, 2010; Olowa, 2009). Teachers should learn how to use several teaching methods. No one method of instruction will work all of the time and under every circumstance and for all the students. As such, it is very pertinent to make a choice of teaching strategy that will not only benefit students but keep them adequately engaged for further participation. The emphasis of the above research was on how the classroom environment can increase academic engagement and decrease disruptive behaviors. It also discussed the nature of classroom management strategies that take a proactive approach to preventing disruptions and are easy to implement. This taken in the right perspective includes creating the right environment, adequate student involvement and corresponding activities that enhance teaching, interest, engagement and students’ compatibility (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Olowa, 2009).

The importance of strategizing for students’ engagement need not be underplayed. It is very strategic for their operationalization. To emphasize this importance, Gregory and Chapman (2002), identified that the differences in students’ apprehension are unique because their brains differ as much as their fingerprints (Gardner, 1993a; 1993b; Johnson, 2007). As such, there is a greater need for teachers to get acquainted with requisite knowledge on how to engage the students, taking into account the many
and varied differences exhibited by students. The onus lies on the teacher to engage
students in such a way as to capture their interest and make meaning and interest out of
the daily task of coming to school; failure to activate this vital connection will result in
students’ disengagement from teaching. However, by way of disagreement, Asikhia
(2010) concluded that while teachers' lack of qualification and an environment not
conducive to learning influence students' poor performance, teachers' methods of
teaching and learning materials do not. Yet by contrast, Johnson (2007) had discussed the
theory of multiple intelligences as a follow up to Gardner’s work (1993a; 1993b), and
studied several classrooms that implemented the different intelligences into instructional
applications and activities. Many recent studies emphasized the importance of training
teachers to the observation approach through multiple intelligences. These studies
provided observed facts as to the quality and influence of teacher effect on the
engagement of students’ interest and instructional improvement (Gardner, 1993a; 1993b;
Harris, 2011; Heller et al., 2010; Johnson, 2007; Nicolini, 2010). Good instructional
strategy creates an environment for student input and participation. For, as Heller et al.
(2010) concluded, students show their engagement by participating in class discussions,
doing research projects, and interacting with their professors and peers. However, the
whole scenario of instruction emphasizes that the work of the teacher is not a solo
enterprise, but takes place in collaboration with the school leadership and is linked to the
whole school planning processes (Gardner, 1993a; 1993b; Johnson, 2007; Harris, 2011;
Heller et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2010).

Additional Considerations

Many factors are connected with students’ school engagement, such as leadership
roles which connotes creating interest in schooling through dedicated leadership
collaboration in conjunction with teachers as exemplified through teacher related
practices (Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001). These point
to the effect the school has on the engagement of students in terms of influencing their
interest to remain in school. Spillane et al. (2001) in their research on investigating
school leadership practice as a distributed perspective argued that leadership practice is
not simply a function of an individual leader’s ability, skill, charisma, and cognition, but
an action that includes others for successful input. Their emphasis on collaboration in
terms of leadership was confirmed by Leithwood et al. (2004) when they came to the
conclusion that successful school leaders can influence student achievement in several
important ways, both through their influence on other people or on features of their
organizations, and through their influence on school processes, systems and practices.
This hinged on four positive aspects: (a) developing people by way of enabling teachers
to do better jobs, (b) monitoring organizational performance, (c) promoting effective
communication, and (d) creating a productive school culture and climate that encourages
collaborative processes between the teachers and the school leader. Harris (2011), in his
recent study on the secondary teachers’ conceptions of student engagement: engagement
in learning or in schooling, has confirmed the importance and influencing effect of the
school through its related leadership in enhancing students’ engagement when he
concluded that teacher’s actions can influence how students engage their time at school,
making it relevant to understand their conceptions of student engagement and how to
facilitate it. Earlier on, Harris (2010) raised the concern that it is important that school
leaders and those creating educational policies understand and acknowledge this
complexity which pertains to teachers’ conceptions and influences when making decisions which impact teachers’ work. In light of these divergent strategies found in research examining ways of engaging students as most educationally fruitful in relation to student learning, examining the use of such strategies should be the primary goal of increasing student engagement. The next section details my research methodology and the methods adopted in collecting and analyzing data.

Summary

Researching student engagement in the literature brings about intricate complex issues and perspectives. When concentrating on behavioral aspects we found them tied to school discipline, and it seemed logical to connect them to aspects of leadership. Areas having to do with emotional engagement highlighted the importance of how students felt regarding how they were doing at school, so there is a strong connection between emotions and assessment including peripheral aspects influencing results of assessment. Cognitive engagement showed to be mostly centered round teachers and instructional methods. Other factors were given some considerations as there appeared to be a lot of interplay between some of the dominant aspects coming into play.
Chapter 3. Methodology

This section will provide in detail the methodological approach used in my study and the various methods that I used in data collection and analysis. It commences with the research design, consisting of the following steps: (a) choice of setting, (b) method for observation, (c) participant selection, (d) participant recruitment, (e) participants’ background, (f) data collection, (g) organization of data, (h) developing a coding scheme, and (i) content analysis. I also described the procedure for obtaining the ethical clearance for the study, with a detailed approach towards enhancing trustworthiness, credibility and inter-rater reliability.

Research Design

The field component of the research took six weeks. Due to the nature of my research, which was to understand the complexities of the school as a learning environment that aids such constructs as students’ school engagement, a qualitative study was the best choice. I employed a case study approach which is an in-depth analysis of a single entity (Stake, 2008); in my case a specific school context. Case study designs are exploratory and descriptive in nature. This approach does not involve the manipulation of variables and it neither adds nor subtracts from the existing facts. It only investigates, explores and describes information as it naturally occurred at the time of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

As an in-depth single case investigation and analysis of students’ school engagement, within a bounded system, a case study approach was most appropriate as the design for this study. Cresswell (2007) gave a definition of case study as “an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection
involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). To further clarify its meaning, Merriam (1998) claims that it is an “examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or social group” (p.9).

The constructs investigated in this study, engagement and staying in school, are bounded within the school system. Merriam (1998) explains that “case study focuses on a single unit within which there may be several examples, events, or situations...” (p.46), and the decision to use a case study approach was obvious as I had to carry out an in-depth analysis (Stake, 2008) of the research constructs. The in-depth analysis provided the base for a case study approach which completely identified with my constructs; and the setting was seamless and fitted. The reasons for this choice were as follows: it was a bounded system (Cresswell, 2007); I was interested in the process (Merriam, 1998); time and place were defined; the study was situated in a natural context; and the study was of a single setting (Stake, 1995).

To justify the relevance of my in-depth analysis of the research, a case study approach was also appropriate. I can say that the investigation of students’ school engagement can be defined in the context of a bounded system, naturally situated in a school environment, and that contextually could be inferred from the behavioral, emotional and cognitive variables as expressed in the school environment, students, teachers and school leadership.

Consequently, as in all case study designs, the research employed multiple methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010 p.346). Interviews and observation methods were used for data collection. I employed multiple methods due to their effectiveness and relevancy in case related studies and specifically because it was the kind of research
referred to as an instrumental case. Stake (1995) made the argument in his distinction between intrinsic case and instrumental case, that “an intrinsic case is one in which the focus is on the case itself. It investigates unusual or unique individuals, groups, or events”, while an “instrumental case provides an insight into a specific theme or issue. As such, the case study is used to elucidate that entity, issue, or theme”. In this regard then, it was ideal to employ an instrumental collective case study, exploring the process, characteristics and the factors that enhance and influence students’ school engagement. This has allowed me by way of narration to depict and describe a compelling and rich representation of the various characteristics of the school towards describing students’ school engagement.

**Research Method**

**Setting.**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p.351), “choosing a site is a negotiation process to obtain freedom of access to a site that is suitable for the research problems and feasible for the researcher’s resources of time, mobility and skills”. Clarifying further the need for a good site, they concluded that, “the researcher needs to obtain useful information... that includes the identities, power alignments, and interests of the principal actors; the general history, routines and social system of the site; and the activities of the site” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.351). I knew a school that could provide the context to conduct my research, a private secondary school; in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Africa. I had a good knowledge of the secondary school as I have had previous working experience in the school.

The school is located in the heart of a state capital. It lies in a quiet but
advantaged section, east of the metropolitan city. The school is comprised of triple two storied blocks of classrooms and offices built and arranged together, shaped not completely like the letter ‘E’; but created a compactly arranged environment and which aided the leadership in school monitoring. The buildings housed such places like the classroom, the science laboratories, English language laboratory, staff-room for the teachers, principal’s office and the school reception. The buildings were enclosed within a fenced environment, attached to the entrance gate which was the only entrance into the school compound. Quite close to the entrance gate was a notice board with lists of offences and corresponding fines; for example, the offence of ‘sagging pants’ had a fine of 200 Nigerian Naira, an equivalent of 2 Canadian Dollars etc. There were choice plants, flowers and shrubs adorning the well structured and organized environment, with a mini park in between the buildings. Attached to the school fence but facing inwards the school compound, were a convenience store and a bookstore, which were operational during the recess and at the end of the school day. The school’s sporting complex is a little removed from the school compound and not directly situated within the space accommodating the school buildings. The school environment was serene and well marshaled due to its compact structure.

Observation.

The first two weeks were used to touch base and get myself attuned to the happenings in and around school for my study. Two things happened during this time: observation of the school environment and recruitment of participants. I engaged in unobtrusive observation of the school environment. This was done in order to touch base, and gain entry into the field. Unobtrusive observation was most suitable for me because
of the tropical architectural designs of schools in the region of study. Nigeria, situated at 10 degrees away from the equator has a tropical climate. As such, it is a hot climate and the school’s architectural design is such that ventilation is a priority, coupled with the fact that electricity is not guaranteed. Classes are built with corridors and windows making it easy for a researcher to observe a class without being observed. This allowed me to observe as in an ethnographic approach for getting me into the field. The results of the observations were properly documented with regards to shadowing the principal, teachers and the students as they interacted in the school. Observation is mostly used in academic environments and helps to show the extent of interest in schooling exhibited both by the students and their teachers through their vocal and body language (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.208). I took field notes and kept a journal as I observed the environment, with particular reference to the teaching practices as they affected students’ school engagement. I observed the school environment in the first week of my field work. I developed a log for the observation using also check marks on a grid in order to describe the settings, general characteristics of the school and classrooms (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

I used the Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) (Laevers, 1994) to clarify and objectify my observations. The importance of this scale was to assess the different levels of student engagement for a period of time in order to determine some patterns for a specific activity. It comprises two components: (a) a list with signals of behavior and (b) three scale rates (low, medium, and high). I modified this scale to accommodate my research constructs and interest to include: (a) a list with signals of behavior and five scale rates (poor, fair, good, very good, and excellent). I counted
behavioral occurrences and summed up the number in each category. The scale for the principal and teachers had such items as; collaboration, instructional methodologies and assessment. The scale for the students’ observation was also modified to include items such as; sense of welcoming and belonging, discipline, collaboration, instructional methods, assessment and interest. These were added as a modification due to their prevalence as revealed in the literature review. In all, I documented my impressions and feelings of the setting and the activities (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) through daily reflections and logs. This has added to the trustworthiness of my study.

**Participant selection.**

The selection exercise for the study participants was done through purposive sampling, and it was carried out in two stages.

In Table 1 below, I identified and organized the research target population through purposeful sampling:

**Table 1**

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<tr>
<th>Research Target Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
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<td>Observation</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>Students</td>
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First of all, the principal, by virtue of being the leader of the school was selected as one of the participants. The principal’s selection is important and useful as already exposed through the literature that school leadership has a big influence in students’ school engagement. The teachers as part of the school leadership were also informed of the studies through a notice board announcement in the staff room, with specific reference to
teachers teaching core subjects in S.S. 2 and S.S.3 (grades 11 and 12 here in Canada). I made sure that they understood that participation was strictly by consent only and that one was free to withdraw at any time during the studies, knowing well enough that there was no monetary compensation for the participation.

Second, the selection of the students’ participants was preceded by an announcement by the school principal. I distributed the study flyers to the students and placed some on the students' notice boards inviting them to an initial recruiting process through a demographic questionnaire based on the following characteristics: students (a) are in S.S.2 or S.S.3 (grades 11 or 12), (b) have varied socio economic status, (c) will have parental permission and/or give their own consent to participate in the study if they are above 18 years of age. Out of twenty volunteers, I finally selected four students in S.S.3 (the same as grade 12 in Canada). The essence of setting out these criteria for selection was to help me recruit different participants.

**Participant recruitment.**

I recruited all the participants within the first and second weeks of my arrival at the school. I was able to get the consent of all the participants, including parental permission for the student participants. Arrangements were then made to proceed to the next stage of my research, having schedules to conduct one-on-one interviews with each and every one of them. I conducted the interviews for the seven participants, not more than one hour in the physics laboratory after having secured the use of it with permission from the school principal and physics teacher, at a time and date agreed upon by both parties. To sum up, I recruited seven participants and interviewed all seven.

I did not plan to involve other participants in this study, but as the work
progressed, being in a school setting, I became conscious of other students and teachers, who were not part of the selected participants. Sometimes, I observed them and made entries into my reflexive journal. At other times, conversations ensued between me and others within the school setting, and information was passed along; however, I made sure to ask for the person’s permission to use such information gleaned if it became relevant to my studies and I entered notes in my field journal. At other times, this information formed the base of my entry into the field of studies. I did not re-contact the participants for a follow up interview as there was no need for further clarification. However, at the end of the study, I made sure that I provided feedback to all the participants on the result of the study.

**Questionnaire.**

I administered an information questionnaire (Appendix F) to the students who showed up during the call for participants. Before then, an announcement had been made by the school principal during the morning assembly informing the students of my presence and the purpose of my visit. Flyers were also distributed to the students during one of their recess times with much detailed information and some copies were also placed at the students' notice boards, inviting them to be part of the study by filling out a questionnaire to select participants for the research.

The questionnaire allowed me to obtain demographic data of the participants with age and grade. It also availed me the opportunity of knowing and selecting different participants, with varied socio economic status, to find out if I could have parental permission and obtain their own consent to participate in the study. Confidentiality was also maintained as efforts were made to protect their identity. The principal and the
selected teachers were not administered any questionnaire. The criteria for selecting them were explained differently; the principal was selected as a participant by virtue of being the leader of the school. On the other hand, the teachers as part of the school leadership were also informed of the studies through a notice board announcement in the staff room, with specific reference to teachers teaching core subjects in S.S. 2 and S.S.3 (grades 11 and 12 here in Canada).

Participants' backgrounds.

I had planned to recruit seven participants. I got seven. These participants offered me an outlet through which I could understand the experiences, situations and beliefs about students’ school engagement in this particular context. Here, a brief glance at each of the participants will be quite suitable to lend credence to my discussion.

Olive.

When I interviewed her, Olive was the principal of the secondary school. She had been in this position for nearly twelve (12) years. She is a nun by profession and vocation and studied mathematics at one of Nigeria’s Premier Universities to obtain a Master’s degree. Under her leadership, the school has experienced tremendous growth in terms of students’ success in their academic achievement, empowerment and maturity. Her father was a lawyer and her mother was a primary school teacher. She was greatly influenced by her family and has always believed that creating a better schooling environment will always benefit students longing for a fulfilling academic life.

Nelly.

Nelly is a female teacher. She is married and has been a teacher for five years. This school is her first school as a teacher. Her previous experience in teaching before now was during her teaching practice placements. She was an English language teacher at
the time of this interview. Unlike Zach, the other teacher, she comes from a middle class family. Her parent had little education only up to high school and as such knows the importance of education. She was greatly supported by her family who knows too well that education will give her the opportunity to have a fulfilled life.

\textit{Zach.}

At the time of the interview, Zach was one of the male teachers at school. He had been a teacher for 18 years and had been at this school for ten years. He was part of the team that has led the school to its glorious stage and enjoys his work as a teacher. He is a science teacher. He does not come from an educated family. His parents were petty item traders but he struggled to go to school due to his friends’ influence when he was much younger. His desire to become a teacher is closely entwined in his belief that “you can if you think that you can”. He is married with three children.

\textit{Cosmas.}

At the time of the interview, Cosmas was seventeen (17) years of age. He is in S.S.3, which is the same as grade 12 here in Canada. His parents were both educated; one a medical doctor and the other a lawyer. They both value education and would love their first child to emulate them; sometimes urging him to be a medical doctor after his father in order to continue in the family’s private practice. He has attended private schools all his life. He said he loves schooling for varied reasons but has to respect the wishes of his parents. He gives a lot of reasons why schooling is engaging for him.

\textit{Lynda.}

At the time of the interview, Lynda was seventeen (17) years of age. She is in S.S.3, which is the same as grade 12 here in Canada. Her parents were both high school teachers. She was the last child of a family of seven. All of her siblings are in school and
her family takes care of her education. Her family could be categorized as a little below middle class because teachers in Nigeria are not well paid. The family values education and the parents have sworn to train her through university as long as she is ready, even if it means mortgaging their family property, usually a bequest from the ancestry. She says she loves her school.

Prince.

Prince was sixteen (16) years of age at the time of the interview. He is in S.S.3, which is the same as grade 12 here in Canada. He is the second child from a family of five. His family is from a low income class and he attends school on a scholarship from a generous donor. His family though poor and not educated has the burning desire to have one of their children go to school. Prince secured the scholarship amidst one hundred (100) contestants. He remembers that it was a tough competition and is always grateful for such an opportunity. He would not exchange his school for any other school.

Gerald.

Gerald happens to be sixteen (16) years of age at the time of the interview. He is in S.S.3, which is the same as grade 12 here in Canada. He comes from a big family. His siblings are nine (9) in number and he is number seven in ranking. His parents are wealthy. Both parents did not have much education, he says but love education. They have a big interest in training their children so that they can take over the family business empire. They believed that the current tide is changing and one without education will be lost in the near future. However, Gerald is content to be attending this school, not just because his parents wanted him to attend a good school but because he loves it. He remembers that he had never wanted to come to this school, but thanks his parents for
making the choice for him as he loves it there. He was looking forward to continuing his education.

**Informants.**

I gleaned information from many within the school set up. I had earlier on mentioned that I observed and at other times spoke to individuals who were not part of the selected participants for my field study. Two other teachers who taught core subjects and who I identified as Jude and Sally and some students make up the group that I named informants as I was able to glean some information and observed some instructional behaviors from them. Pseudonyms were given to them for the purpose of confidentiality. Information gathered from these individuals were recorded in my journal entries and used specifically to triangulate my participants’ observations and interviews. Permission was obtained from each of them verbally before I approached them. The two whose names I mentioned earlier (Jude and Sally) will be described due to their contributions to the interpretation of my field work.

Jude was a science teacher in S.S.1 (grade 10) class. His attention to details to class work was outstanding. He had a good control of his class and maintained good eye contact with the students. He said he loves teaching and his passion is a great motivator for the students who look up to him for guidance and direction.

Sally was also a science teacher in S.S.1 (grade 10). As a result of her younger age, she has a close relationship with students that she thinks plays a vital role in creating interest and makes the environment quite pleasant for academic work. She believes in student centered instruction and thinks that one on one attention to instruction creates a better effect in engaging the students academically. She thinks that there should be no
dichotomy to defining students’ engagement. It is holistic and involves the totality of the students’ life and work.

**Interviews.**

I conducted one on one interviews with the seven participants that included the principal, two teachers in core subjects and four students selected through my demographic questionnaires for selecting different participants. The interviews were all conducted between the 20\textsuperscript{th} of September, 2011 and the 12\textsuperscript{th} of October, 2011. All the interviews were held in the physics laboratory situated on second floor in the school premises.

Prior to these interviews, all the participants were provided with the letter of Information (Appendix C) and the Consent form (Appendix D), however, the students prior to the above mentioned were provided with the demographic data questionnaire. In compliance with the directive by the General Research Ethics Board protocol, the participants and/or their parents read both the Letter of Information and the Consent Form. He/she and or the parents signed two copies of the Consent Form. The participant retained the letter of Information and one signed Consent Form. I retained the second copy of the signed Consent Form. Before proceeding with the interview, the purpose of the study and the interview were reviewed and the participant was notified of his/her right to decline to answer question found objectionable and to withdraw from the study at any time.

The reasons for the interviews were to understand, give clarifications on observed school experiences and also to obtain rich data from each participant generally on the factors present in school that enhance students’ school engagement. I made sure before
ending each interview to provide a brief oral summary of the discussion, and gave more opportunity for clarifications and re-defining an already defined concept. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were all audio-taped using a Sony digital recording device, to fully record participant’s narrations and for transcription purposes. There was no need for any follow up interviews as I obtained rich data and no further clarification was required.

**Journal entries.**

I kept a reflective journal with the aim of keeping track of my progress and noting my concerns in terms of my subjectivity. It was used in triangulation, from the literature to the observations and the interviews as a way of keeping me on track. Triangulation is defined as the mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic (Olsen, 2004). It is described as the application and combination of more than one research perspective in the study of a phenomenon. The purpose of triangulation in specific contexts is to obtain confirmation of findings through the convergence of different perspectives. The point at which the perspectives converge is seen to approximate what is actually happening (Jakob, 2001). As such, it minimizes the inadequacies of a single-source research as two sources complement and verify each other. It similarly reduces the impact of bias (Bailey-Beckett & Turner, 2010). Journal entries are entered into the discussion in Chapter 5.

I referred to findings in the literature throughout the entire time of the research; from the recruitment process, through the observation and to the one on one interviews. I documented my research bias on a continuous basis in the midst of my unobtrusive observations of the school environment and through the interviews.
Organization of data.

For sound organization, Table 2 shows how I distributed the data collection instruments to the research questions to enhance the data analysis.

Table 2

Organization of Data Collection Instruments to the Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What school characteristics enhance high school students’ school engagement?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent do the instructional practices of teachers enhance students’ school engagement?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do students’ interests influence their school engagement?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I transcribed all seven audio-taped interviews and as a result, I remained connected to the data. Researchers hinted to possible challenges that one could face in the transcription of data. Poland (2002) enumerated two possible challenges: (a) misinterpretation and, (b) the impulse to “tidy up” the transcript. In order to ensure the credibility of the transcription and remain constantly connected to the data, I had to listen to each of the audio taped interview three times before I started the transcription process. I did this in order to be able to understand the participants’ experiences in relation with the construct under investigation. After the third listening, I transcribed the audio-taped interviews verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Typing the interviews was beneficial as it afforded me the opportunity to easily organize, retrieve and code the transcribed interviews. Each transcribed interview bore the title of the participant; continuous page numbering and line numbers were inserted.

After the transcription of the audio-taped interviews, I did listen to the audio-
taped interviews once again, during which I corrected errors and mistakes within the transcript. This was done in order to enhance the transcript trustworthiness, limiting misinterpretations and as such, capturing the participant statements and keeping their thought process in line with the research. Efforts were made to avoid tidying up and editing the participants’ account of the study. This is following up on Poland’s (2002) advice that one should avoid editing and tidying of data. An instance of applying his advice is referencing pauses in speech with ellipsis. I completely omitted such language gaps in speaking like “uum”, “eem” and “uuh” in order to present a better readable version of the transcribed interviews, reflected in participants’ quotes in this thesis.

**Developing a coding scheme.**

I made use of qualitative analysis in my data coding and subsequent analysis. Qualitative analysis is primarily an inductive process. Inductive process according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 367) is a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest. This is approached through four overlapping phases; data gathering, coding of data/categorization and pattern (themes/concepts) development.

Since my research was an instrumental collective case study, involving the use of observations and interviews in exploring the process, characteristics and the factors that enhance and influence students’ school engagement in a high school, the units of analysis were the observed experiences and the responses by the participants. As such, I analyzed my school observations journal and the participants’ response to my interview questions. In the first step before coding the transcribed interviews, I tried to comprehend the responses by the participants. Each and every response by a participant was understood
according to the different themes that emanated in the unit of analysis. For example, should a response by a participant include peer influence and peer socialization, the response was separated twice for each of the corresponding theme. Comprehending the data was vital in separating the varied themes encapsulated in the unit of analysis, after which I read the transcribed text of the participant once again. This approach helped me to develop a coding scheme.

The emanating data were coded based on the observed experiences of the school and participants responses to the interview questions which were expressions of their lived and on-going experiences. Codes were derived from the existing literature on the meaning of students’ school engagement; participant interviews and from interpreting the experiences derived from the observation of the school environment. The codes include: (a) Engagement, (b) Leadership, (c) Environment, (d) Extracurricular activities, (e) Collaboration, (f) Discipline, (g) Assessment, (h) Instructional method, (i) Curriculum (j) Family influence, (k) Peer influence, (l) Teachers effects, (m) Self motivation, (n) Dialogue, (o) School benefits, (p) Societal pressure, (q) Remuneration, and (r) Cultural influence.

**Content analysis.**

With the coding scheme in place, I went back to read each of the participants’ transcribed interviews. I underlined any data portion that was synonymous to a particular code, at the same time writing the code in the margin of the text using a chosen color. The same process was also repeated for all the emerging codes using another chosen color in order to differentiate various and varied themes as they emanated from the interviews.
After deciding on the initial codes, I made a comparison across all the interviews, and I triangulated them with the themes that were uncovered during the school observation. This code comparison was quite important as it helped to discover patterns within the data in order to “understand the complex link among various aspects of people’s situations, mental processes, beliefs, and actions” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 373). The need to compare the codes unlocked the most prevalent views among the participants in consonance with the notes from my school observation. This became the base for the pattern analysis of the data as presented in the subsequent chapter. The various patterns were all then organized by bringing together each participant’s description corresponding to each initial code and named accordingly in a Microsoft Word document with titles describing its content. The emerged patterns were then used to identify the themes which were congruent with the lived experiences of the participants, my theoretical framework, and research questions. These themes are discussed later.

**Ethics clearance.**

This research on students’ school engagement was granted ethics clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen’s policies. Participants received a letter of Information which explained the purpose of the study, and two copies of a Consent form, a signed copy which I got back which indicated their willingness to participate. In keeping with Queen’s University’s research ethics policies, all participants’ information continues to be kept confidential. Each participant chose a pseudonym before the interviews and this was used in transcripts and data reporting. The participants were informed of their freedom and right to decline to answer
questions they found objectionable and the right also to withdraw from the study at any
time, and request to remove all or part of his/her responses at any time by contacting the
thesis committee whose contact information was provided in the Letter of Information.
Only the researcher, the thesis supervisor and committee member and the independent
coder had access to the data. These were kept in a secure and locked safe at all times
during the course of the study and will be destroyed in due time as mandated.

**Trustworthiness and credibility.**

The need to enforce credibility and trustworthiness in research is quite obvious
and can be achieved through a number of means. McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p.
330) identified some strategies that could enhance the validity of one’s work; by using
multi-method strategies, triangulation was enforced in data collection and analysis,
verbatim accounts, mechanically recording all data by audio recorders. I used multi-
method strategies exemplified through observations and interviews. I audio-recorded the
interviews and I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim and did not edit the
document in order to enhance transcript quality. I maintained a shared sense of the
concepts and experiences with the participants, which included both responses and non
verbal behaviors in observations.

I also monitored and evaluated the impact of my subjectivity and reflexivity.
Reflexivity is the rigorous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire process. It
is an important procedure for establishing credibility. This is because qualitative
researchers do not deny human subjectivity, but rather take it into account through
various stages (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 332). I kept a journal throughout my
observation time and right through the interviews and repeatedly went back and forth to
my reviewed literature in order to keep aware of my subjectivity and the role it plays in
data interpretation. There was constant triangulation across all stages of the research
process ranging from the multi-methods applications to monitoring and evaluating my
subjectivity and reflectivity. This was done in order not only to bring validity but to
enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research process and subsequent
analysis. I also noted the informal discussions with the study informants throughout the
study as journal entries when they were relevant.

**Inter-rater reliability.**

The need for inter-rater reliability was paramount as with all qualitative research.
In order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study, I engaged a fellow Master’s of
Education colleague for an independent analysis of the data that emanated from the
interview and the observations of the school, so as to ensure that the developed codes are
reflective of the literature on students’ school engagement. The Master’s of Education
student was availed the opportunity to get familiarized with the objectives of the study
before the coding, was adequately briefed on the meaning of all the codes in relation to
the observations and the literature on students’ school engagement and trained how to
code the data. After the colleague’s coding, we both met and compared and discussed our
respective coding. We reached a consensus as to the coding of the data.

**Summary**

I have provided in this chapter an account of the methodology used in my study
including the methods used to collect and analyze data. The need was to give a detailed
account through a multi dimensional approach using observation and interview methods.
This collective case study method made available rich, in-depth, and varied perspectives
with regards to students’ school engagement. The method employed included: (a) observation, (b) participant selection, (c) participant recruitment, (d) participants’ background, (e) data collection, (f) organization of data, (g) developing a coding scheme, and (h) content analysis. I also described the procedure for obtaining the ethical clearance for the study, with a detailed approach towards enhancing the trustworthiness, credibility and the inter-rater reliability. In the following chapter, the findings emanating from the analysis of the study are presented.
Chapter 4. Results

The purpose of my study was to investigate the characteristics of the school that enhances students’ school engagement in a country where school attendance is optional from kindergarten to S.S 3 (grade 12); as opposed to scenarios in developed countries like Canada, in order to uncover interventions and strategies for educators and researchers to help foster students’ engagement. Specifically, I intended to understand the complexities of the school as a learning environment that aids such constructs as students’ engagement.

This chapter narrates the result of the field work; starting from the details derived from the unobtrusive observation of the school environment culminating in the reported experiences of the seven participants. This is organized into two major sections. In the first major section I recapitulate the results of observations at the school. Whereas, the second major section is subdivided into seven sections with four or five themes developed depending on the participant from the following as points of reference:

1. Personal Characteristics - (engagement, self motivation, school benefits and collaboration)
2. Environmental Influence – (environment, family, extracurricular activities/peer influence, social pressure and culture)
3. Administrative Influence – (leadership, discipline and collaboration)
4. Teachers’ Effect – (instructional method, assessment, remuneration, culture and collaboration)
5. Activities Influence – (curriculum, extracurricular activities/peer influence and collaboration)
I provided thick descriptions which refer to accounts that describe or representations in words of a perceived reality in order to express both the school’s observation and the participants’ expressions of school engagement. The observations and the participants’ stories formed the major part of the findings. When there was no depth in either source, I resorted to the literature in order to provide a deeper interpretation. The participant’s citation when referred to bears a pseudonym, page number of the transcribed interview, and the corresponding line numbers. By way of example, the citation “Olive, p. 2, 20-24” means an interview for a participant pseudo-named Olive whose quotation will be found on page 2, lines 20-24 of her transcribed interview. When a description of an observation or feeling was noted from my journal, the reference bears the following designation: Journal, the item observed, page and lines. For example; the reference “Journal, DCP, 1, 2-5” means that the reference is from the Journal, DCP refers to discipline, page 1, and lines 2-5 of my journal.

I present the findings resulting from the data analysis specifically from the unit of analysis. By unit of analysis, I mean the responses by the participants and from the observations of the school environment specifically corresponding to a theme or topic. In coding the findings, a constant recourse is made to the observations, recorded in my journal and to the check marks from the grid of the behavioral items investigated. Through the process of parsing and triangulation between the observation and the participants’ responses, a coding scheme was established and each transcript was coded. With the coding scheme in place, I went back to read each of the participants’ transcribed interviews. I underlined any data portion that was synonymous to a particular code, at the same time writing the code in the margin of the text using a chosen color. The same
process was also repeated for all the emerging codes using another chosen color in order to differentiate various and varied themes as they emanated from the interviews.

Table 3 below represents the number of occurrences of codes among the participants.

Table 3

*Frequency of Codes among the Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Olive</th>
<th>Nelly</th>
<th>Cosmas</th>
<th>Lynda</th>
<th>Prince</th>
<th>Gerald</th>
<th>Zach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>EGM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>LDR</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>EVR</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>CLB</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>DCP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>ASS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional method</td>
<td>ISM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Further Themes from the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Olive</th>
<th>Nelly</th>
<th>Cosmas</th>
<th>Lynda</th>
<th>Prince</th>
<th>Gerald</th>
<th>Zach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>FIF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>PIF</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>SM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>DLG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School benefits</td>
<td>SB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal pressure</td>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>RMN</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture influence</td>
<td>CIF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above (Table 3) does not describe the weight of these topics but it does enunciate the fact that these topics arose during the course of the participants’ interview.

Having created these classifications with their frequencies of occurrences, I then
reorganized or confirmed the codes which aided me to categorize my findings chapter under the following headings: (1) Personal Characteristics, (2) Environmental Influence, (3) Administrative Influence, (4) Teachers’ Effect, and (5) Activities Influence. These topics were either partially or deeply discussed at length by the participants and all of the themes may not have been relevant in each participant's account.

**Observation Notes**

I used a modified version of the Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) (Laevens, 1994) to clarify and objectify my observations. The importance of this scale was to assess the different levels of student engagement for a period of time in order to determine some patterns for a specific activity. The importance of this modified scale was to accommodate my research constructs and interest to include: (a) a list with signals of behavior and (b) five scale rates (poor, fair, good, very good, and excellent). I counted behavioral occurrences as I observed the participants and summed up the number in each category.

The tables below show the result of the counted behavioral occurrences:

**Table 4**

*Result of Counted Behavioral Occurrences for Teachers and Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ and Principal’s Observations</th>
<th>Olive</th>
<th>Nelly</th>
<th>Zach</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional method</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal utterance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Result of Counted Behavioral Occurrences for Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Observations</th>
<th>Cosmas</th>
<th>Lynda</th>
<th>Prince</th>
<th>Gerald</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional method</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and belonging</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School Observation

I carried out observations in the school for five days, four hours of observations each day and alternated to different hours of the day in order to obtain varied impressions of the school environment. I was able to observe teachers and the students unobtrusively due to the way classes are built in the tropics.

Instructional Methodology

The teachers observed exhibited a welcoming attitude. Teaching here was student centered. The focus seems to be strictly based on making sure that the individual student is well taken care of. Their class control and their methods of instructions were quite appealing and interesting too. I could glean from my hidden locations that the teachers were good at multi-tasking throughout their one hour class time. They taught using different teaching methods, like questions and answers, explanations and activity methods. In all, the students responded well, asking questions for better clarifications and understanding. They overtly maintained sharp eye contact with their students and seemed
to know each of them by name, calling them to attention whenever they needed them to focus their attention.

The teachers exhibited a variety of teaching skills. Their instructions were student directed instructions and teaching aids such as diagrams and artifacts were used to pass on knowledge. The effect of using good aids to teaching could be observed through the control the teachers were able to have in their classes.

**Collaboration**

The students warmed up to the teachers when they walked into their classrooms. The chorused greeting to teachers which is traditional in Nigerian culture was heart-felt. The response to teachers’ questions during the class was both prompt and good. The classes cooperated with the teachers. They were all too eager to answer questions and perform the in-class tasks given to them.

**Assessment**

I observed an in-class formative assessment. The in-class-exercise that the students were asked to perform was attended to with haste and carefulness; with the teachers walking desk to desk assessing and complimenting the students’ efforts. The class feedback was positive. The students showed a mature attitude towards this class task assessment. They nodded their heads to acknowledge their mistakes and their limitations.

**Creativity**

The English teacher was good at improvisation, in a way to impart and clearly put across knowledge. Some students submitted personal essays to the teacher for her comment and editing. The general class atmosphere was engaging. Students showed great
interest in the lesson. The teacher repeatedly challenged the class through questions in the form of a quiz. This teacher had a pleasant smile and responded with interest to the questions directed to her by the students.

**Discipline/Welcoming**

Discipline is a big issue and ways of enforcing it are made openly known. Punitive warnings were written in bold letters and clearly displayed at the very entrance to the school for all students to see. Ordinarily, during recess, when students are supposedly free to have fun and a break from classes, I observed that they did not go beyond the school perimeter, even when no one was at hand to prevent them because the gates were left open. They seemed contented with the provisions made available through the school canteen. There was no visible sign of class tension.

On the 3rd day, I made a surprising discovery. After having witnessed for the past days the cooperation between the students and the teachers, this altercation seemed to come from nowhere. One student who seemingly misbehaved was asked to leave the classroom and sent directly to meet with the school principal. The personnel in charge of discipline accompanied the student whose parents were later invited for a long chat with the school authorities. The parents expressed great joy that the school was not tolerating their child’s misdemeanor and reiterated their commitment in joining the school to bring about good behavior from their ward.

**The Principal**

I shadowed the school principal throughout the fourth day of my observation. She paid a visit to the senior classes and spent time with them educating them on civic responsibilities and what the local society expected of them. The students were quite at
ease with their principal. They found it easy to talk to her and she seemed accessible to the students’ body. Her availability to the students as evidenced in this situation was noted. There seemed to be a constant collaboration between the principal, the teachers and the students. The presence of a good communication network was observed. It was easy for the teachers and students alike to search for the principal and have a word with her or report/deliberate on matters affecting the school life or climate. It was gleaned that the principal was interested in the modalities and procedures of instruction and weekly class assessments; and she got feedback on the teachers’ activities weekly. The principal was the chief security officer in charge of enforcing school discipline. She was kept busy in the office dealing with issues emanating from the students’ and the teachers.

She was quite welcoming, and her positive attitude made her school a home away from home as some of the students will call it. This was closely seen in their new dress code. The pupils wear their official school uniform, a combination of navy blue and white. However, on Fridays, all the students were dressed in cultural attire, designed specifically by the school with the school logo and emblem all very prominent on it. This dress code is specifically for Fridays.

**Participant Voices**

**Olive.**

**Personal characteristics.**

When I interviewed her, Olive was the principal of the secondary school. She had been in this position for nearly twelve (12) years. Olive spoke at length of her vision for the school and discussed the abiding strategies that have enabled her school to exhibit the characteristics as envisioned by the founders of the school and which has impressed both
the student body and their respective families. This is so, as she believed that there was this overriding sense that school administration should always work hard in making the environment pleasant for academic purposes:

First and foremost, you make them feel accepted. You encourage them, you give room for dialogue, and you give room for discussions, questions and answers and providing materials they need so that they will be able to learn very well (Olive, p. 5, 199-201).

In describing the personal characteristics that create an enabling environment, she emphasized the need to have “not only positive, but a decent and challenging environment that makes the child interested in going to school and learning” (Olive, p.7, 318-320). When I probed Olive’s insistence on creating a favorable environment, she re-emphasized that “the school’s desire is to deliver holistic education so that they will be mature and responsible students for the society” (Olive, p.1, 16-17). Asked for more clarification on the holistic criteria she argued that:

It depends on the motto of the school. Ours is knowledge per-excellence in its entire ramification—which includes moral, social and academic… As far as we are concerned, we are interested in the child. How do we follow the child from where he/she is and help to bring him/her up to where we want him/her to be? So we follow the child gradually, making the child feel accepted, loved, belonged, and interested to go to school (Olive, p. 1, 21-22; 28-31).

Olive’s responses to her perceived impressions are closely tied to her belief that attending school will surely be of benefit to these students which she refers to as long term benefits:

When a child is not trained, is not formed, is not educated, he/she becomes a
nuisance in the community. So being trained makes a child a good citizen, to face the challenges in life and being able to contribute positively to growth of the society (Olive, p. 7, 304-306).

In order to fulfill this long term vision of schooling, Olive re-creates the students’ daily scenario with regards to their benefiting from an environment geared towards productivity and reflects also as it defines also the students’ self motivation in an environment that is both conducive and favorable to learning, all achieved in collaboration to school principles:

Their (students) eagerness to come to school is worthy of note; because if they are not interested, they will not like to come to school. We resume school by 7:30 am, you will be surprised that by 7:00 am you will see 2/3 of students coming to school happily and they are happy. When you look at them, they radiate joy because they are interested… They are eager to learn and they are involved and… You will see students going out to remind teachers of the class times, shows that the child is interested in what is happening. Even doing assignments and carrying out anything you ask the child to do happily show that the child is interested... Is engaged in what is happening... Is involved in what is happening… The child is happy coming to school to learn (Olive, p. 3, 95-103).

**Environmental influence.**

Olive had always had fond memories of the school where she is the principal. She joyfully reiterated memories with regards to the nature and status of the school as having both positive and supportive learning environment geared towards holistic education: “It is purely a Catholic institution where academics, morals and discipline are very
important. Here children are looked at as persons and they are helped to grow up. Holistic education is given to them” (Olive, p. 1, 14-16). She emphasized the important role the environment plays in students’ interest in school:

I make sure they have a favorable environment. The classroom is spacious and they have the facilities, it is not very hot and not very cold, there is free ventilation. Each child has enough space to himself/herself and the materials they are to work with are there and are challenging. If you do not give them something challenging, they will brush it aside and when you give them a task that is above them, they work with tension. When you have identified the stages of growth and the abilities of the child and provide the facilities and the equipments that the child needs, then the child will learn (Olive, p. 3, 120-127).

On the recurring argument on whether the school is imbued with the requisite paraphernalia for engaging students she quickly affirmed positively and insists, “not only positive, but a decent and challenging environment that makes the child interested in going to school and learning” (Olive, p. 7, 318-320).

However, the role of the family in helping students adapt to the endearing and supportive learning environment of the school is quite crucial and important but not necessarily an expected consequence to students’ adaptability to the learning environment. She feels that:

Despite the economic situation of the family, if the child is not interested, there is nothing you can do. You can even drag the child to the school and pay all the fees and if the child is not interested, he/she is not interested and he/she is not going to learn anything. Interest comes first before the family... (Olive, p. 7, 312-315).
She insisted that the actual role of the family completely hinges on collaboration between them, the school and the children and points out the role of the family (home) in the life of the students. Olive believes that the “home is the first school of the child and the school has to work hand in hand with the parents in order to make the child what the child is supposed to be” (Olive, p. 8, 322-333). And insists that the home is the base of all academic enrichment and should always collaborate and establish a link with the school in career determination, for according to her schooling “is a continuous formation from home and not a formation done in isolation” (Olive, p. 8, 366). Olive hinted that “you cannot train a child outside of his/her culture” (Olive, p. 7, 281-282). She stressed the impact that culture exerts on students during the formative stage of secondary education as it plays an important role in the educational progress of students. She goes on to explain the reason behind such statement, which is; “that it reminds them that they are from this part of the country and this is our way of life” (Olive, p. 7, 282-283). She concluded:

We are Igbo speaking and we teach them the culture of the place, beginning from respect and involvement: for a girl, what are you supposed to do...? As a boy, how do you carry yourself? Gradually you grow into adulthood with required responsibilities (Olive, p. 7, 293-296).

She insists that it all hinges on the collaboration of the students stemming from the favorable promptings of the school environment.

Administrative influence.

Olive discussed the importance of effective leadership in her school. She acknowledged that good leadership entails good rapport and friendship with students and
is completely against the use of coercion or fear in school administration. Olive believed in an inclusive type of leadership which has an influence on students’ achievement. She believed that her interactions with students over the years did influence her choice of leadership: “when somebody is involved in taking decision on what concerns the person, the person feels ‘am loved, am beloved, am cherished’, the person puts in the best’” (Olive, p. 3, 108-109). Olive discussed that this inclusion is a big influence and makes the students eager, interested and engaged in all that is happening around them. When pressed further during the interview to itemize the practical nature of her leadership claims, she reiterated the importance of dialogue and discussion as a good tool:

I invite them and throw ideas to them and allow them to react. They have meetings and they come up with what they feel that if it is done they would happy. When you bring them in to the decision making, they are happy to carry it out and they feel they are recognized, appreciates us, we have an idea and with that they will be happy to carry it out (Olive, p. 5, 185-189).

Olive stated the need to work together and suggested that “collaboration is working together. It’s a team work; it is not a one person’s job as no one is an island” (Olive, p. 4, 172-173). She went on to point out the importance of the teachers in the scheme of things; “you cannot work without the teacher and if the teachers are not involved, you cannot succeed” (Olive, p. 4, 181-182). The need to create a befitting and well nurtured academic environment thrives on the availability of good checks and balances. Olive explained how vital this relationship is in her school: “the teachers are being supervised—what they teach, how do they teach, and the teaching materials they need are all provided. They have standard textbooks, they have materials, and they have enough
time for those things to be carried out” (Olive, p. 5, 206-208). To her, it was important to assess the assessor and this she does with diligence and dedication. She explained further how she monitors the teachers “I look at the lesson notes, their diaries, even the notes they give to children, their assignments, and even their exams are all censored” (Olive, p. 5, 214-215). More often than not, the problem is not in creating a favorable working condition, it hinges on its sustainability and keeping the system up to date with the changes in teaching and school improvements. Olive explained that the teachers are sponsored to participate in teachers’ enrichment programs in order to update their skills.

The success story of these endeavors boil down to discipline. Olive views discipline as part and parcel of the school’s operation. She acknowledged that “if one is not disciplined, one will not be able to learn” (Olive, p. 3, 136). To say the least, discipline is like the oil that lubricates the school’s foundation and wheel of progress. It was of such a nature that in some cases, monetary fines were attached to some misdemeanors like sagging pants and littering of the compound with garbage. These punitive warnings were boldly written and proudly displayed at the very entrance to the school for all students to see. Olive explained it thus:

It is a reminder. They are children and sometimes they can forget the codes of dressing. With that sign they remember and come back to themselves and say I am not supposed to do this. To be a disciplined child and a responsible child, I am not supposed to do this and these are the things am supposed to do. When you call them to order, they take it in good faith and are grateful (Olive, p. 4, 147-151).

Teachers’ effect.

According to Olive, school success is heavily dependent on the work done by the
teachers. She was proud to say that “yes, you cannot work without the teachers and if teachers are involved, you cannot but succeed” (Olive, p. 4, 181-182). In order to aid the teachers to live up to their expectations, the school works hard and makes available the needed materials for adequate preparations, and provides supervision to complement the much needed efforts of the teachers. Olive explained thus:

The teachers are supervised—what they teach, how do they teach, and the teaching materials they need are all provided. They have standard textbooks, they have teaching aids, and they have enough time for those things to be carried out. They are also specialist in the subjects they are teaching. We don’t accept half-baked teachers (Olive, p. 5, 206-209).

Not only this, the teachers are positively helped to improve their teaching skills in order to be attuned to the latest teaching skills available to their counterparts in the public schools. Olive continued:

Yes, from time to time we have seminars. We invite experts from the ministry of education to come and tell us the new trends in teaching and learning and from there we update ourselves. Teachers are also sent for seminars, like those in science they go for STAN (Science Teachers Association of Nigeria) and those in Mathematics they go for MAN (mathematics Association of Nigeria) and those in Arts subjects too. They go there, they interact with people from other schools and the ministry and from there they learn the new trends of teaching and when they come back; they implement that... (Olive, p. 5, 221-226).

However, the whole scenario emphasizes that the work of the teacher is not a solo enterprise, but takes place in collaboration with the school leadership and is linked to
school planning processes.

*Activities influence.*

Olive believes that the school’s concern and interest are on the student. “How do we follow the child from where he/she is and help to bring him/her up to where we want him/her to be. So, we follow the child gradually, making the child feel accepted, loved, belonged, and interested to go to school” (Olive, p. 1, 29-31). The art of making the student interested boils down to a lot of factors like curriculum, extra-curriculum activities which invariably generates peer socialization collaboration.

*Nelly.*

*Personal characteristics.*

Nelly was a very passionate teacher. One of the strongest themes that emerged from her was school interest not just on the part of the administration but overwhelmingly on the part of the students. Over and over again, she recalled her encounters with students and emphasized interest as a point of departure. “They are interesting because I get a positive attitude from a good number of them who display positive attitude towards learning” (Nelly, p. 18, 782-783). However, Nelly believes that the teacher has a lot to do in terms of fanning and sustaining the students’ interest; otherwise, they will switch off and fall behind: “…everything is all about interest. As a teacher I try as much as I can to make the students develop interest... There are so many ways you do that” (Nelly, p. 19, 864-865). The many ways of making this available provides the needed support both for the students and the teachers, part of it which includes: “try being nice to them without being nagging, correct them mildly, you don’t abuse them; they like you and once they like you they will enjoy your class and they are always happy when you are there” (Nelly, p. 19, 867-870).
Nelly believes that one great way of creating identification is by knowing the names of the students. She argues that it is one of the most effective ways of maintaining their feeling of belonging and of being valued:

It has a great impact. As a teacher you should know your students. When you know them by name and you call them by name it endears you to them. They get more attached to you because they know you know them and you are friendly to them. It plays a great role (Nelly, p. 20, 878-881).

Such commitment and its practice thrives only where there is a cordial and working relationship between the school administration, teachers and the students’ body. She argued that the school:

...is a friendly one. One, you try as much as you can as a teacher to do your job. If you do your job... the authority is happy and you work with ease. You don’t get any strains on your shoulders because you do your job...it creates a conducive environment between the authority and the teachers” (Nelly, p. 20, 903-906).

The role of the school she says is not limited to but also includes the fact that “the school has authority on any students who insults the teacher or fails to participate in class, the student who refuses to do assignments” (Nelly, p. 20, 895-896). It creates a harmonious collaboration and this is closely seen according to Nelly in the cooperation between the staff and the school leadership.

**Environmental influence.**

Nelly believes that the school environment plays a big role in both identification and engagement of students’ interest in school. She portrays the school as “…endearing. It is hospitable. We accept people. I am talking about management; I am talking about
students who are taught courtesy and good manners towards visitors and towards their fellow students” (Nelly, p. 22, 1000-1002). However, Nelly believes too that the family’s socio-economic background has a significant influence in suggesting and nudging their children towards making laudable choices that will benefit their school success or derail them. Invariably, “if a child comes from a family that is less rich, probably the parents can’t afford to buy books or any learning material that the child will need, it may affect the child’s learning. The child may not do assignments when he/she should do assignment (Nelly, p. 22, 938-941).

Nelly discussed the fact that peer pressure is also a crucial determinant for school choices and the influence that pressure could play as some will attend a particular school because of their friends. Sometimes, it plays a positive role and at other times, it is negative. Nelly put it this way: “peer group’s influence sometimes also affects them. Those of them, who come to school, do come because of friends who are like them; they affect them for good and they could also lose interest in learning” (Nelly, p. 21, 941-943).

Nelly clarifies her concerns with regards to the pressure mounted by the peer groups as their existence connects and brings stability to the school environment, in terms of school connectivity and identification. She points to the importance of culture in the scheme of things. She added that the school is African and depicts the African culture. She continues: “we are African and we do everything we can to depict that in whatever we do—attitude, dressing and studies” (Nelly, p. 27, 210-211). This is closely exemplified by the kind of school uniform which the students wear on certain days of the school week. She explains: “yes, it makes them at home. It doesn’t get them scared. It makes them believe who they are, Africans; and they are at home with it” (Nelly, p. 27, 217-
Administrative influence.

Nelly explains that the school administration works very hard in order to make the school a home away from home by carrying both students and teachers along in their daily regulations through a harmonious collaboration. The support given to the teachers she says is far reaching:

There is an understanding between the teachers; there is understanding between the teachers and the management. There may be bureaucracy at one time or the other but it does not really affect the learning because that is their motto. Their motto and their aim are for these children to grab the knowledge for which they are here. They do everything possible to foster that (Nelly, p. 21/22, 916-920).

This description she says is in agreement with the mission of the school as they strive to bring about a favorable spot for schooling. She argues that the school:

...is a friendly one. One, you try as much as you can as a teacher to do your job. If you do your job... the authority is happy and you work with ease. You don’t get any strains on your shoulders because you do your job...it creates a conducive environment between the authority and the teachers (Nelly, p. 20, 903-906).

This could only occur Nelly concluded, when there is a favorable academic environment sustained by a good administration. When further probed on the sustainability of a favorable condition, Nelly points to the prevalence of discipline as the tool. Nelly’s impressions of the school success are positive: “the school does so much to instill discipline on the students; that also adds a driving force on their behaviors in school and in classrooms” (Nelly, p. 22, 980-981). These impressions were hinged according to her
on the big influence of discipline as the base of the school’s operation as a learning environment. Nelly believes that teachers’ co-operation in this is self evident, as it also helps them to do a great job. She believes that teachers have the obligation to compel students to adhere to the status quo for their own benefits and most often follow up with sanctions for the students' own good. She refers this to “a kind of giving them a time out” (Nelly, p. 20, 889).

However, she believed that this co-operation to enforce discipline in the student body does not in any way exclude the teachers from being disciplined themselves. Nelly explained too that a huge aspect of discipline is grounded on a ‘do as I do’ kind of philosophy: “they learn a lot from what they see you do than what you say in class. Even if a child is a nuisance, that child can still be remolded, that child can still be refashioned to be good” (Nelly, p. 25, 1133-1135).

**Teachers’ effect.**

Nelly talked about how she interacts with students through the course of carrying out her duties:

I give them class work and I make sure I follow every lesson with a class work...

if there is no time for them to do it in class; I make it a take home assignment, something to keep them busy at home (Nelly, p. 19, 831-834).

She agrees that the teachers’ approach has a lot to do in enhancing the interest and academic engagement of students. In most cases, she argues that it is the task of the teacher to encourage and help students who do not keep up in their school work. Teaching she said has to be a student-centered activity and not teacher centered. With regards to assessment, she explained:
When a child fails once, fails twice, it is natural to get demoralized. I try as much as I can as a teacher to encourage them, to make them understand that it is not the end of the world. They can still do better if they put more effort (Nelly, p. 19, 848-851).

Nelly’s position did confirm the research that pointed out the close connection between teacher instructions and effective students’ learning, (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Doyle, 2006; Ezeliora, 2004). When probed further to ascertain her reason for taking such a position, she said:

As a teacher I try as much as I can to make the students develop interest. There are so many ways you do that. Naturally, a student may not like a subject, but if you make them like you, they may develop interest in your teaching. If you can vary your teaching method, try being nice to them without being nagging, correct them mildly, you don’t abuse them; they will like you and once they like you, they will enjoy your class and they are always happy when you are there (Nelly, p. 19, 864-869).

Nelly was quick to reiterate the importance of knowing the students and forging a mutual relationship with them as a necessary baseline for creating and supporting students’ interest.

According to Nelly, the entire scenario of teachers’ effects on students’ interest and engagement works only when there are well directed discipline measures taken for the students and the teachers. She had this to say:

The discipline we are talking about is both on the side of the students and the teachers. The students are not the only ones disciplined. A teacher also can be
disciplined. A teacher who misses class once or twice without good reasons is not
disciplined. There are some measures to bring him/her to order. So in that way
you see that everyone is ardent with his/her job. You don’t miss classes unless
there is a cogent reason for you to do that, which the management should also
know about (Nelly, p. 22, 985-991).

Nelly spoke of the need for collaboration which evolves through relationship; “it’s
cordial. Our students are taught courtesy and they are meant to understand that they are
always here to learn” (Nelly, p. 23, 1045-1046). When probed to clarify, she said: “I have
always told my students, if I teach in the class and you don’t understand, you are free to
meet me anyway, on the staircase, in the staffroom, at the convenience store and ask
questions” (Nelly, p. 23, 1047-1049). This she said affords the students the much needed
relationship that builds not only trust but energizes the base in terms of co-operation and
subsequent collaboration in school work. The essence of this according to Nelly is to curb
the menace of fear as it is anti educational and does not benefit nor favor the academic
growth and confidence of students. “We try as much as we can to avoid instilling fear in
these children because that is the only thing that can break that communication and that
relationship if a child cannot talk to his teacher” (Nelly, p. 23, 1049-1052).

The need to collaborate does not tilt towards the students only. Nelly heartily
admitted that their school’s administration aptly rewards the teachers’ efforts especially
when they carry out their duties well in terms of class work and overall students’
performance. She explained: “it comes in the form of incentives. Once in a while we
receive incentives, may be gifts, and may be a little boost in our salaries to motivate us to
continue to stay and teach” (Nelly, p. 24, 1093-1094).
Nelly observed that teachers’ feedback to students from class work like projects or assignments provides a credible and level playing field for help:

Feedback helps. I give them a class work and they do it. I go round the class and I watch them do their assignment. At the end of it, I collect their assignments and I mark in class. I call attention of any student who did not do well and I correct him/her (Nelly, p. 19, 840-842).

Knowing quite well that feedback either from class assignments or projects evokes certain disturbing emotional reactions from students, especially when students do not perform well repeatedly, she suggested that one should never give up on any student.

Activities influence.

Nelly discussed the source of their school’s curriculum: “the curriculum is prepared by the State ministry of education which have been passed down to schools and the various subject teachers take on with that and we base our teaching on what we have on the curriculum (Nelly, 25, 1111-1113). However, Nelly based her assessment of curriculum solely on academic content and does not include other related fields such as those connected to extracurricular activities. Nelly’s view of extracurricular activities is noted as an aid to content curriculum and not included in curriculum planning. She however believes that there is a close connection between the two as she thinks that they are complementary.

Zach.

At the time of the interview, Zach was one of the male teachers at the school. However, it was difficult to uncover much relevant content from this participant because he became indisposed and had to leave during the interview but Zach was able to discuss
a few points of interest.

**Personal characteristics.**

Zach loves to teach and admires students who according to him “know their onions”. He identifies with the students who show a good comportment and adapt to their study environment but at the same time deliberately offers a helping hand to those who lag behind in the hope to help them. Consequently, he discussed the importance of the students in the scheme of things in the school: “since I retired to the east, I have not been finding it easy to go elsewhere because, my interactions with students here, have made me more comfortable than any other place” (Zach, p. 9, 368-370). Zach described the relational exchange between him and the students that has really compelled him to remain in his present place of work:

I relate with the student, interact with them and find out their problem, the ones that I can advise, I advice them... the way that it will help them. Furthermore, the way I have been relating with them made most of those who have graduated from the university to still come back to me with some kind of appreciation (Zach, p. 9, 370-373).

This happens all the time and according to Zach, it is “because initially, they will never believe that you have been good to them till they have gone outside the school and seen that... what you were doing were for their own interest” (Zach, p. 9, 373-375). Zach explained that as long as the students realize that your presence is to aid them towards a better future, they realize the essence of staying focused in school and accelerate “their ability to follow the trends of things in the school, academically, socially, morally and otherwise” (Zach, p. 9, 408-409).
Environmental influence.

Zach worked his way up to being a teacher, having come from a poor family background. Zach was able to identify and agree that the interest of the school is geared towards creating an environment that will interest and integrate students. This was against the backdrop of other schools where he worked previously that had a high rate of students drop out from school. He added:

We are more interested in education here and you hardly can find a student dropping out of school except in a case of death or “matter of I can’t help”... we have no social ill that will make any student to drop out of school (Zach, p. 9, 392-395).

The reason is that out of the eighteen years that he has worked as a teacher, Zach has worked for ten years in his present school. His levels of comfort and interest have also been nurtured while working in this school. Zach has great regard for the way the school operates and rates the school engagement of students’ interest to 98 percent. He defined this engagement as including but not limited to “their ability to follow the trends of things in the school, academically, socially, morally and otherwise” (Zach, p. 9, 408-409).

Although Zach had established a good rapport with people at the school, he is still not happy with the way the government treats privately established schools. He laments the non-committal approach of the government to privately owned schools as they are supposed to run mainly through the schools fees obtained from the students, a stand which has been previously discovered by Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2007; Ayeni, 2000. Zach explained his frustration:

The government neglects the private schools; they feel that the private schools are
not part of the government, so when they are issuing things, material things to public schools, they don’t give to private schools and they don’t encourage the teachers there. Every other thing is based on what we recover from the school fees. We depend on the payment of school fees which the school manages judiciously to be able to bring us to this level (Zach, p. 10, 422-427).

According to Zach, this is a frustrating scenario but the school where he works presently was never deterred in making sure that the students and teachers were well taken care of. Zach believes that the opportunities created through the help of the school benefits the students. He thinks that these students will “become better citizens to start with, become useful to themselves in the future, then become responsible citizens” (Zach, p. 10, 431-433).

**Administrative influence.**

Zach believes that the administration of the school is the key to its success. He explained that it is very pertinent that what motivates a school to greater success is the degree and influence of the school leadership, which means the whole administrative set-up of the school. Zach explained that the lifeline to the school success with students lies closely not only with the structured administrative procedures but also with the high level of discipline emphasized. Zach declared “The school has high degree of discipline” (Zach, p. 13, 582). When probed for more clarification, he substantiated his stance:

The school has a code of conduct, the school regulation, the dos and the don’ts, the things that they must do. Taking for instance, when to come to and when they leave the school, when to be in the class and when to go out for break etc. And the school prohibits bad activities like fighting, bullying and so on (Zach, p. 13, 587-
Zach definitely agrees that cooperation or collaboration is a vital ingredient when the issue of discipline becomes a priority for an organization such as the school. Zach was able to share the school’s operational maxim:

The cooperation is good. Here we do not run autocratic type of system. A student has the right to make suggestions or to report any abnormalities to the management and be appreciated. Even if it is a teacher; may be the teacher is not up to his onions, the student has the right to say that they don’t want the teacher because the teacher don’t know his or her own onions and the management looks into it. If it is the pardonable offence, the person will be cautioned, where correction is not taken, the person can be dismissed. There is maximum cooperation between the school and the students (Zach, p. 14, 609-615).

Zach is convinced that the role of leadership extended to all and sundry in the school is unique and empowers the teachers and students to take a role in protecting and enforcing the school’s rules of conduct. Zach’s experiences these past ten years with the school administration and leadership heightened his belief in the administrative effectiveness of the school.

**Teachers’ effect.**

Zach spoke at length on the teachers’ collaboration within the school and the students. He made reference to the efforts the teachers make in carrying out their duties. He believes teachers who work here are committed as they make instructions “student centered”. Zach’s account of the teachers’ role within the school environment paints a picture of the creative abilities of these teachers who go the extra length in providing for
themselves instruments that will aid them in classrooms and the effects of such collaboration. Zach supports his claim:

To the best of my knowledge, it is not everything that the school can provide for the teachers as regards to teaching aids, there are some that the teacher will be able to formulate on his/her own and present it to the class. The school always makes sure that the boards are good and we have writing materials and text books for the teachers (Zach, p. 12, 534-538).

When pressed for clarification, Zach pointed out that the school’s collaboration to making it worthwhile for their teachers is noteworthy and emphasized that the school even had established welfare packages to cater to their needs. Zach believes that the school is: “contributing their own... but they cannot do more than they can afford, they are doing their best. No best is ever enough. They are doing their best in trying to help the teachers...” (Zach, p. 13, 557-559). However in addition, Zach also notes that this desire to aid the teachers also contributes to creating the much needed passion for teachers to give their best to the students in terms of creating the right atmosphere for academic engagement.

**Cosmas.**

**Personal characteristics.**

At the time of the interview, Cosmas was seventeen (17) years of age. Cosmas was torn between following the promptings of his parents and doing what he really wanted to do. But he later on seems to accept the fact that the benefits of going to school completely outweigh whatever choice to the contrary. Cosmas explained:

A friend of mine in the village said; a person that goes to school will not be
hungry in life, going to school will also expose you to other aspects of life that will be so useful in the long run. Schooling is my ticket to a successful life (Cosmas, p. 35, 1567-1569).

The emphasis on being successful in life and useful to the society was at the base of Cosmas’ discussions during the interview. He had already set his mind on following in his father’s footsteps in the medical profession and already thinks on how his profession will benefit the wider society: “going to school will help me by making me educated. If I become a medical doctor, my main goal will be inventing or innovate a new way of disease treatment or discovering a new cure for diseases (Cosmas, p. 35, 1562-1564).

For Cosmas to realize his dreams, he explained his schooling experiences: “It has been rough, enjoyable and good sometimes” (Cosmas, p. 32, 1431). When further probed on what makes school enjoyable, Cosmas admitted that staying with friends contributed quite immensely to his school engagement as this ignited a fierce competitive spirit that motivated him to realize his potential. The presence of his school friends became the element that sparked his self motivation. He admitted:

I remember when I was in J.S.S 1 my marks were low and I never bothered but later when I started comparing my marks with those of my friends, I started becoming depressed and not belonging with my friends. I started working hard to measure up to the performance level of my friends. Competition with my friends helped me a lot and upgraded my effort and my grade greatly improved (Cosmas, p. 33, 1506-1511).

Cosmas highlights how the presence of his peers acted as a tonic to his school engagement as he was able to self motivate through his contact and competition with
them.

*Environmental influence.*

Cosmas believed that his school is lovely. He affirmed strongly that it is “a home away from home” (Cosmas, p. 35, 1600). When asked to expand on his assertion, he explained further: “they provide a conducive environment for schooling” (Cosmas, p. 35, 1600-1601). However, he addressed one concern about the school environment. He claimed that: “the only regret is the small school space but it plays well into the management’s master plan for school supervision and direction; a typical example of one person’s food being another’s poison” (Cosmas, p. 36, 1601-1603).

Despite his reservations about the limited space the school enjoys as a compound, Cosmas was full of praises for the effectiveness of the school policies and its effect on him as a student. He believes “the environment is a lovely environment and makes me happy... and we behave like brothers and sisters” (Cosmas, p. 32, 1436-1437; 1440).

According to Cosmas, his family had a great influence in his choice of school. He reports that the choice of school was an exclusive right of his family and he had no say as to his choice of school to attend. Cosmas said: “I chose to come here because my parents love it here and think that the school will help me both morally and academically (Cosmas, p. 34, 1548-1549). He was quick to point out the pressure that comes from his family with regards to being successful as a student. He reiterates:

Coming from a family, my father is a medical doctor and my mother is a lawyer, I would like to be higher than them in the future, that has been my motivation. My family is really putting me under a lot of pressure to succeed (Cosmas, p. 34, 1539-1541).
That notwithstanding, Cosmas claims that he loves going to school, has many friends who have made schooling very interesting and is quite keen to see it through to university. He explained:

My opinion about schooling has changed from my J.S.S 1. Then, I went because of the fear of my parents but starting from my J.S.S 2 to S.S 3; it has been quite interesting and has been much engaged. I will not be thinking of dropping out of school now, as my sole desire right now is to be educated and contribute my quota to the society. I am not even thinking of changing school for now as I will miss my friends and it will make no meaning (Cosmas, p. 34, 1550-1555).

Cosmas discussed the influence of his friends in his journey as a student. As above, “I am not even thinking of changing school for now as I will miss my friends and it will make no meaning” (Cosmas, p. 34, 1555), he emphasizes the huge role played by his peers in his school engagement. He loves his friends and they exchange information through engaging competitions. This influence is not just limited to engaging in academic competitions but is inclusive of fun derived through extracurricular activities. Cosmas declared: “social life here is interesting” (Cosmas, p. 34, 1521). According to Cosmas, the school did provide many avenues for students’ participation, for example, Jets club which is science oriented, Debating and Quiz societies, Young Farmers Association and many others. These, according to Cosmas enhance active school participation by students.

**Administrative influence.**

According to Cosmas, love for his school started with the leadership qualities of the school principal; “the principal is very friendly, helpful and always there for us. If
you wanted to chat with the principal, one is free to go up to the office and see the school receptionist and visit. She is always available (Cosmas, p. 32, 1454-1456). The amiable dispositions of the principal do not negate the leadership needed for effective school management. Cosmas observed:

The school codes of conduct are strict rules that are not negotiable, with monetary penalties for some offences like pants sagging and littering the compound with garbage. It makes students conscious and careful. Those monetary penalties are greatly enforced and upon paying so much money, you will think twice in terms of violating those rules. Discipline is really high here and for you to remain here, you will have to abide by the school rules or one is shown the way out of the school (Cosmas, p. 36, 1586-1591).

Explaining much further, he said:

...the school discipline is much. Here a little thing you might do and you get an expulsion. Many dissident students have been expelled. Great emphases are placed on coming to school early, dressing codes and being clean. Fighting in the school and examination mal-practices is direct expulsion (Cosmas, p. 35, 1582-1585).

He believes that good leadership and discipline are effective in collaboration with the students’ body. Cosmas pointed out that the students are involved in the smooth running of the school through collaborative actions. He referred to the back and forth exchanges between old and new students as a huge influence for effective school participation. “We the older students help the new students... We take them as our brothers and sisters.; the school atmosphere is just welcoming and tension free” (Cosmas, p. 35, 1575, 1577,
Teachers’ effect.

Cosmas was very impressed by the quality of teachers in the school. He believed that they actively contribute to the quality of engagement experienced in the school. Cosmas was excited as he explained this scenario:

Teaching is very interesting. The teachers create an avenue for competition among the students through public quiz and debate on already taught topics. So during those times we do stay in groups trying to see who is going to be the best, and maybe if you try answering one or two questions some others will try to oppose you. So you will like to prove yourself among your class mates. That is a lot of fun (Cosmas, p. 34, 1490-1494).

On the quality of instructions and assessments carried out by the teachers, Cosmas declared inadvertently:

I rate my teachers high. They employ different strategies in other to teach us. For example, the English teacher use quiz and debate in order to find out how good our spoken English is. The mathematics teacher will always give us a bulky assignment during the weekend as a form of assessment of the topics handled during the week (Cosmas, p. 34, 1512-1515).

Cosmas was very touchy initially with regards to assessment, but later on overcame the bad feeling by joining forces and competing with his peers. He explained succinctly “the assessment of teachers have a lot of impact on us student. It creates sensitive situations among students which most times are not pleasant…” (Cosmas, p. 33, 1505-1506). When probed further on the effects of the teachers’ work and attitude in the way their duties are
carried out, in line with discipline as a core school value in pedagogy Cosmas said that the:

...teachers give notes and they check our notes monthly and mark them. If you are a student that never copies class notes, and they find out, you will be punished and taken to the principal and that will be more serious, suspension for a few days or expulsion will follow depending on the gravity and the number of occurrence of the offence (Cosmas, p. 33, 1516-1519).

Cosmas explained that these do not imply that he loves it especially when the class work seems difficult. He retorted: “we students grumble when the teachers give an assignment that is tough and difficult” (Cosmas, p. 35, 1571).

**Lynda.**

*Personal characteristics.*

Lynda described her school as loving. Recalling the best description for admiring and loving her school, she said:

It is very true that my family chose here for me as my school; however, I will earnestly say that the school has done a lot to keep me interested and engaged in terms of the quality of interaction from the teachers to the students. I could say that my parent chose the school for me but I fell in love with it on my own (Lynda, p. 44, 2007-2010).

Lynda felt that the connection that she had experienced at the school emanated from the appreciation of the environment:

The school has a lot of interesting aspects to it; the environment is clean, attractive and conducive for learning. The students are happy to see a clean and
attractive school. I like going to school where everything is very appealing, this triggers my interest” (Lynda, p. 44, 2000-2003).

Lynda did not mince her words about her admiration:

I am happy here. I will not trade this school for another because I will always love it here. My life has always been here and there have been no regrets up till now. So why should I change to another school? I love it here. It is very interesting to go to school here (Lynda, p. 44, 1986-1989).

When probed further, she explained: “I like it here because the environment suits my personality and I discovered that they maintain high morals, teach students with patience and always carry students along, not neglecting weaker students... and will help me in the long run” (Lynda, p. 44, 1997-1999). She believes that being a student here at the school did offer her a brighter opportunity for success through academic, social and moral upbringing. Moreover, the school makes available better avenues for learning together and creates a competitive environment for students’ growth. Lynda thinks highly of her school and is so proud of her achievements that she hopes to benefit from the huge success story attributed to it. Lynda’s opinion portrays a school that is geared towards providing opportunities for excellence to the students. Upon further inquiry, she was quick to add that the students complement the work of the school through mutual obedience and collaboration in order to achieve their dreams:

We try to do everything needed of us in order to bring about success; as a way of telling the outside world that, here things are done and in the right way. We are always competing with our neighboring schools for excellence. So we know that for us to succeed, we need to do as we are told to do (Lynda, p. 47, 2104-2107).
As such, Lynda shared her views on personal motivation in the entire scheme of things:

“I have my internal push for success. I am on fire for success. I am determined to succeed in life...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2082-2083). She was of the opinion that she had better keep her aspiration alive in order to succeed in life: “I usually say to myself, you are lucky to be here..., so make the best out it. I cannot even trade here for any other school...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2084-2085). Lynda explained why she was pushing herself so hard to succeed, “From the look of things right now the world is becoming more and more civilized and the future holds nothing for any one without education. I think it will really help me to fit in into the new evolving society. The fear of the future is a big force for my continued interest...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2089-2092). So success and the fear of the unknown were or seem to be propelling her towards her aspirations and dreams.

Environmental influence.

Lynda repeatedly emphasized that she I was happy at the school and even declared that she was unlikely to transfer to another school under any circumstances, expressing the fact that things were working well for her and added that the school did not tolerate bullying and priority for seniority. Lynda however was quick to say that it is not all rosy without a commitment. She spoke about her fears and the dangers that she encounters regularly: “sometimes we are scared of the strict rules that are here, but, we still admire their efforts to make it homely for everyone” (Lynda, p. 47, 2112-2113).

Lynda added that as a student, she has had to make sure to walk the tight rope of maintaining an honest credibility due to family pressure. She spoke of the influence that her family had and is continually exerting on her to succeed in school and the support that they give her. But she does not deny their support for the school project:
My family...always motivate me to stay engaged in school. My family comes in here because your family is always there to support you when you are mentally down, always there to give you encouragement, to carry on with life and the school activities (Lynda, p. 45, 2041-2044).

Lynda sees the role of the family as very complementary to her efforts for success and admits the importance they create and the enthusiasm they instill:

The actual role of my family in all these is not that of forcing me but that of encouraging me to fulfill my desires, having shown me the path of success and victory. The rest is left for me to dream and actualize my dreams…” (Lynda, p. 45, 2052-2054).

Lynda felt that among the many factors that have helped her in school is the influence that she derived from her peers. She describes a situation in which this peer encounter proved very useful to her. She described this effect more closely in their interaction during extracurricular activities, but pointed out that even though the school allots little time for socials and extracurricular activities, they still make use of the small allotted time. Lynda explained what they do during this short time:

We have some social clubs and societies where students express themselves and improve their skills in various socially organized activities. These help students a lot. It involves mostly students helping students in terms of their academic enhancement. Students use these allotted times to teach and explain difficult topics encountered during the course of their classes with the teachers to one another. It is friendly, cordial and interesting too, as some times, we make fun of teachers and mimic their flaws (Lynda, p. 45, 2018-2023).
Lynda went further to say: “Personally, I love the social aspect of the school. It gives me joy to come to school to mingle and have fun with my fellow students and to share their world view...” (Lynda, p. 45, 2034-2035). Moreover, “there is no bullying or seniority here... as it is strictly frowned at...” (Lynda, p. 47, 2111). Lynda’s discussions highlighted quite clearly the importance of peer influence in the enhancement of students’ engagement and the need to sustain its momentum.

*Administrative influence.*

Lynda’s discussion of the administrative qualities of the school focuses more on the effect of leadership in the life of the school. According to Lynda, the organization of the school environment lends credence to good leadership, declaring that the reason for the quality of the decorum is due to the enforcement of the strict discipline policy enshrined in the school’s rules and regulations:

The discipline here is huge. I know that we students like freedom to do what we like. But we also know that anywhere there is excess freedom, people tend to do things the wrong way but when you bring in discipline, they will be able to follow that correct way that you are trying to lead them to and it will lead to a better success in their undertakings (Lynda, p. 46, 2064-2068).

Lynda specified that the essence of this emphasis on discipline is closely attached to the nature of the penalties for those who go against the school ordinances:

The rules of conduct ... mean a lot to us students. When we got admitted, we were provided with a pamphlet containing the school rules and regulations. These rules have penalties attached to them; as such, any offence committed has an equal consequence for the offender. When students see that those rules have such
penalties, they try to avoid the occasions that will make them victims in order to avoid the consequences of such unpleasant outcomes (Lynda, p. 46, 2069-2074). Lynda clarifies and volunteers more information when probed and suggested an economic side to aspects of discipline:

The billboard at the entrance to the school with monetary fees attached to various offences, like pants sagging, littering and fighting is a big deterrent to us students. Money is scarce nowadays for us students, not to think of paying for such offences that one could actually avoid with ease (Lynda, p. 46, 2075-2078).

Lynda had no problem with the school’s stringent disciplinary measures, but nonetheless saw the positive side of it as a way of better things to come “discipline helps us to make good choices and avoid wrong choices for our lives. It is a gateway to avoid being unhappy and a good moderation to school freedom...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2079-2080). Lynda’s discussions further illustrate how much she thinks a disciplined environment is vital to students’ engagement.

**Teachers’ effect.**

Lynda’s opinion about her teachers is positive. She believes that the teachers are competent and they “teach students with patience and always carry students along, not neglecting weaker students” (Lynda, p. 44, 1998-1999). She tried to explain further:

The teachers are very good. They teach us with patience, are humble and tolerate our excesses. They are always ready to go back again and again to previous lessons to make sure that they carry everyone along. They play a big role in our interest in school (Lynda, p. 44, 2094-2096).

Lynda so much believes in her school teachers that she is not worried about the
curriculum, explaining that it is the teachers’ responsibility to make the curriculum manageable for her as she is merely focused on getting good grades and moving on to the next level of schooling. Hear her:

The curriculum is not really what matters for me, it is what and how the teacher delivers on the curriculum that really has meaning for me as a student. My interest is to pass my examinations and proceed to the next level of my studies. I am not bothered with the curriculum as it is the work of the teacher to break them down to my level in order to help me learn. I think that is one of their job descriptions (Lynda, p. 44/45, 2011-2015).

In this case, Lynda worries only in terms of class assessment as the teachers are demanding. She explained: “they make us work for our marks and opportunities are given to us not only to earn our individual marks but also to explain our assignments and projects to the entire class and claim ownership of our studies and growth” (Lynda, p. 46, 2097-2099). Relating to the emotions attached to obtaining low scores in assessment, Lynda reiterated that even though she does not feel happy on such occasions, she however, finds the zeal to fight from within. “When I get a low mark, I am sad. However, I make a promise to myself that it will never happen again. I then work harder to improve my marks...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2100-2101).

Lynda points to co-operation and collaboration with the teachers as a tool for academic engagement among students:

We try to do everything needed of us in order to bring about success; as a way of telling the outside world that, here things are done and in the right way. We are always competing with our neighboring schools for excellence. So we know that
for us to succeed, we need to do as we are told to do (Lynda, p. 47, 2104-2107). Lynda’s explanation is tied to her earlier statement that the school boasts of a great history that invariably puts a lot pressure on the students to succeed.

**Prince.**

*Personal characteristics.*

Prince’s impression of his school is positive. He believes that schooling is the ticket to a better life in the future. He sees the school in terms of what benefits that will accrue from it in order to better his life and that of the society in the future: “Schooling will benefit me a lot because when I finish school, the knowledge gathered will help me to be useful to my life” (Prince, p. 31, 1386-1387). Explaining further he continued: “people in the society will appreciate my contribution to the betterment of the society, through that; I will have left a footprint on the sands of time; going to school will influence my future in a big way” (Prince, p. 31, 1387-1389). Prince discussed his school engagement in terms of deep seated personal characteristics that propel him towards the realization of his dreams.

However, Prince was able to enjoy his time at school and was quick to point out that the presence of friends at school supported his interest: “Life here as a student is enjoyable because you have your friends always by your side, you have your teachers always ready to help you to make good choices for your life” (Prince, p. 31, 1390-1391). This description by Prince was the central theme that ran through his entire interview and it could be seen how his family background did completely moderate his perspective about life after school. Prince declared:

I am the first born and my siblings are looking up to me. My father will always
tell me that to him whom much is given, much is expected, they will always want me to go to school and do something meaningful so that my younger siblings will follow in my footsteps. The family pressure is very high and I have to really live up to their expectations and not disappoint them (Prince, p. 29/30, 1328-1332).

This spurred Prince into a strong determination to succeed. He explained it thus:

I am not forced to come to school because I know that I have a hope for the future and the way I make my bed now will be the way I lay on it. So, now is the foundation for what I will be... (Prince, p. 30, 1341-1343).

Thus, Prince tries to do all in his power to take advantage of his opportunities: “I will always do my best, read my books, do some chores that I was asked to do and then do the right things at the right time” (Prince, p. 30, 1333-1334).

*Environmental influence.*

Prince insisted that his admiration for the school was great and that he was pleased with the choice of the school by his family. He explained: “I like it here and can get what I want here. What I want in education, I have found it here, so I am not going to any other school. I am stuck here...” (Prince, p. 29, 1325-1326). Prince went further to explain that even though he loves and admires his school, it is a very difficult spot to be as a student, especially if you have other ideas about schooling:

Life here is a kind of a seminary life. Your whole activities are restricted. You will be monitored and cautioned at all times. Unlike other schools, your movement is restricted and as you can see the school has only one entrance gate, fenced right round, no way to get outside once you are in, except you get up to the top floor and get a view of the outside environment (Prince, p. 30, 1336-1340).
I probed further to ascertain whether he was forced to attend school here against his own will, but he vehemently rejected that point of view. Prince’s family has a lot of influence in his schooling. He repeatedly laid claim to this assertion throughout the interview.

Prince vouched to make sincere efforts in order not to disappoint his family and then to succeed as a student. He declared:

I want to be someone who can make a difference in the life of the people and the society. That is why my parents chose the school for me. They brought me here for a reason. They know that I will fulfill my dreams here. Even though, I had no choice as they make decisions for me and I do abide by their decisions…” (Prince, p. 29, 1319-1322).

Prince even went ahead to openly appreciate the choice of his school by his parents:

As time went on I found out that my parents made a good choice of school for me.

I like it here and can get what I want here. What I want in education, I have found it here, so I am not going to any other school. I am stuck here (Prince, p. 29, 1334-1326).

Prince openly admitted that as the first born child in the family, a lot of responsibility falls on his shoulders. As such, he had to work hard in order not to disappoint his younger siblings and parents, which invariably put enormous pressure on him.

One thing that Prince regrets is the absence of better opportunities for the socialization of students: “The school is strictly all about teaching and learning. Most emphasis is on academics, and little time had been allotted for socials and other extracurricular activities” (Prince, p. 30, 1358-1359). For Prince, the present provision is not enough as more opportunities should be facilitated to cater for peer socialization. He
explains: “the school can include more sporting activities and create more time for recreational activities to enhance enjoyment in life and make it more joyful for us students” (Prince, p. 30, 1369-1370).

**Administrative influence.**

Prince believes that one of the major reasons that endeared him to the school is the way the school was administered. The strict way the nuns who administer the school do things was impressive and endearing to him; even though, as a young man, he worried and questioned himself time and time again, why things are not relaxed a little bit. When I took him up on the comparison of life in his school to a seminary, he elaborated on the presence of high school discipline through codes of conduct that students must adhere to in order to promote a favorable environment: “discipline plays a big role here. As you know this is a school run by Nuns, as such they force students to abide by the rules and stay disciplined while they remain here” (Prince, p. 31, 1401-1402). Going further, he explained that it is not without reasons, as it creates an atmosphere of respect:

The school codes of conduct stipulate and encourage that discipline and respect go hand in hand. Our school is greatly respected and envied by their neighboring schools due to the high rate of respect and discipline that we enjoy here. As such, students do respect not only their teachers but one another (Prince, p. 31, 1397-1400).

The parents according to Prince play a big role in all this. They tacitly corroborate and collaborate as regards the school’s policy on discipline and codes of conduct as outlined by the school administration. Prince was a little bit disappointed when he was saying this because of the whole-hearted consent of his parents with regards to the school’s hard-line
Parental influence too is a big factor in enforcing the strict disciplinary measures of my school. Parents will always support the codes of conduct the school puts in place in order to supposedly deal with unruly behaviors of students. Which means that, even if I want to change school because of the strict discipline operational here, my parents will not tolerate such wish from me (Prince, p. 31, 1403-1407)? Despite all the difficulties, Prince loves his school and will always remain grateful to his parents for the push to actualize his academic dream through the school.

**Teachers’ effect.**

Prince believed that teachers in his school do a great job. He thinks that the teachers’ work does not just end with mere teaching and assessment but includes role modeling through their way of living: “the teachers influence us positively through their way of life and through the discussions we have with them both collectively as a class and individually too” (Prince, p. 31, 1378-1379).

Prince was very much convinced that the teachers’ commitment stemmed from their innate passion for teaching. He reasoned that it was public knowledge that teachers in the privately owned establishments are less paid than their counter parts in the government owned schools. Prince went on to argue that: “even though we know that the teachers are not as well paid as their counter parts in the public schools, we still see a lot of commitment and dedication on their part in imparting knowledge to us students” (Prince, p. 31, 1380-1382). By way of endorsement, he added: “we feel lucky to have these teachers because we know that they love teaching as a profession otherwise, their commitment would have been worrisome” (Prince, p. 31, 1382-1384). Prince described
the psychological influence of teachers’ work through assessment. He said:

The teachers’ assessment has always had a positive or negative influence on students’ performance. When I get a good assessment with a nice grade from a project or class assignment, I feel good and ready to put in more extra hours in my subsequent assignment. A bad one also demoralizes me and makes me feel that I have wasted my time for nothing (Prince, p. 31/32, 1417-1421).

There is a prevalent influence on students’ school engagement accruing from the teachers’ activities. Prince is of the opinion that what the teachers do in terms of assessment is the most important part of their job. “I like teachers who are honest and not biased in their day to day class assessment. For me, this part of the teacher’s job is the most important aspect of his/her job description” (Prince, p. 32, 1421-1423). He offers some insights on the way forward in teachers’ most important activity: “I just hope that teachers will avoid using assessment for granting favors to students they like. It will just be so unfair to the teaching profession...” (Prince, p. 32, 1423-1424).

Gerald.

**Personal characteristics.**

Gerald was sixteen (16) years of age at the time of the interview. Even though the choice of his school was initiated by his parents, Gerald explains that he made the choice of appreciating the school and what it stands for. He stated: “I have been happy here...” (Gerald, p. 37, 1657). He explained further that it was not just to impress his family:

I won’t say that I want to impress my family. I want to be able to stand on my own when I grow up. That is the reason why I want to be educated. If you look around in the society, those that are not educated don’t normally stand... They
continue to beg from here and there. I want to be an independent person when I
grow up (Gerald, p. 37, 1685-1689).

Gerald’s school engagement is hinged on his utmost ambition to be successful,
apparently a spillover from his parents’ successes in business. Overall, his desire to
success is closely related to being well educated and resourceful. “I look forward to a
brighter future. I look forward to be a medical doctor... this is what I want to be in the
future. That keeps me engaged in the school...” (Gerald, p. 43, 1935-1938).

**Environmental influence.**

The role of the environment and its supporting characteristics were very
influential in Gerald’s situation. He prides himself for attending a school that had set a
high standard for both discipline and morality. Gerald feels supported through the
school’s policies: “we have a very high moral standard... The teachers are nice. They are
quite dedicated to their responsibilities. They have been helping...” (Gerald, p. 36, 1623;
1624-1625).

For Gerald, despite the many challenges that he faced as a new student to the
school, he felt at home and was able to adapt to the academic environment due to the
tolerance and commitment of the teachers at the school. He explained:

The school though a catholic school, does not discriminate. I am an Anglican. I
was surprised when I was made a senior prefect knowing full well that I am not a
Catholic. So I am really very proud of the school. There is no preferential
treatment or discrimination between the rich and poor. The school is really good
(Gerald, p. 39, 1740-1743).

For Gerald, the school created and sustained the much needed environment for his
sustained engagement and interest.

Gerald gave his family much credit for his school engagement. Although Gerald’s parents were not educated, they had a great desire to offer their children every opportunity for acquiring a good education: “they train us to have high moral standard. That is why my Dad brought me here” (Gerald, p. 37, 1661). Gerald believed that acknowledging the help and influence of his family will become meaningful only when he succeeds in the future.

**Administrative influence.**

Gerald views the school administration as being strict. He explained that the school does not compromise in terms of discipline and the enforcement of codes of conduct. He explained that they do not believe in half measures and pointed out that those who do not work hard do not belong to the school. For Gerald, the school has a standard, “if you can’t meet up with school standard here, you change school. But if you can’t meet up and still want to continue, they will send you out. They normally pick up the bad eggs and throw them out...” (Gerald, p. 36, 1639-1641). He explained that the school takes a tough stance when it comes to school administration and this is manifested through the discipline outlined for the school.

Gerald painted a tough picture of the school administration in terms of discipline and the way it works. He believes that the school’s stance on indiscipline is that of no compromise. Gerald gave an insight on why he still remained here at the school in spite of the high presence and strict enforcement of discipline. He said: “I came here to be disciplined. You don’t just enter here because you want to come to a secondary school” (Gerald, p. 37, 1659-1660). The school according to Gerald sets a pace in terms of what
is wanted and tries hard to enforce it. According to Gerald, this does not just only concern the students, but includes teachers as well:

If you are not dedicated to your responsibility, the principal will send you out. Not only the students are sent out but teachers also can be sent out. A lot of them have been asked to leave. In my J.S.S they asked one woman to quit her teaching because she was not coming to class to teach the students (Gerald, p. 40, 1794-1798).

Gerald believes that the success of a school administration depends literally on how much and how effective the school is in sustaining and enforcing the much needed discipline within the academic environment.

**Teachers’ effect.**

Gerald believes that his school’s “teachers are really dedicated. They are trying. The teachers are really dedicated to their responsibility...” (Gerald, p. 39, 1763-1764).

Gerald goes on to explain that:

They will give you what you scored. What you really merit, that is what they will give you. If you didn’t prepare and write your project and pass it to them they will fail you. But if you do what you are supposed to do, they will give you a high mark (Gerald, p. 41, 1856-1858).

Gerald believes that apart from the enforcement of the school rules of conduct, teachers’ instruction and assessment play a big role in school engagement and staying in school. This is so true that Gerald explained that a low score in one’s assignment or project is a recipe for being demoralized, but a good score jump-starts students’ school engagement.

For Gerald, the teachers are dedicated, firm and honest in their dealings with the students
and the students relate very nicely to them through mutual collaboration:

If you respect your teachers they will really love you. They will really care for you and they will have that urge to teach and make you understand whatever you are doing. If you come to them in the staff room and ask them things you don’t understand, which they taught in the class, they will also help you to understand it (Gerald, p. 41, 1848-1852).

Summary

This chapter reported in detail the findings from the school observations and the interviews of the seven participants from the same private school in the Eastern part of Nigeria. These observations and the contributions of these seven participants support the findings in the literature about students’ school engagement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001).

Observations conducted in the school shed light on the core characteristics upon which the school was established; which includes a friendly environment, professional diligence and a mature school culture and climate suitable for a school. All the participants interviewed agreed that students’ school engagement is evidently influenced and sustained by personal characteristics, environmental and administrative influences, teachers’ effect and the influence of teachers’ activities. However, Cosmas, Lynda, Prince and Gerald added and insisted that peer socialization deeply affected students’ engagement.

The following chapter discusses the major themes derived from the school observations and the interview data of the seven participants. Their significance will be examined in relation to my theoretical framework and the extant literature.
Chapter 5. Discussion

In the previous chapter I provided details from my school observations and of the seven participants as well as data from my interviews of the participants. In this chapter, I will explain how the major themes that emerged from the data connect to the literature and the theoretical framework which I presented in Chapter 2. I will use the findings from my observation grids and journal entries and the results of participants' interviews to discuss the factors of the school as a learning environment that influence and enhance students’ school engagement and how it connects to staying in school, in other words, what is done in the school to enhance and influence such constructs as students’ school engagement. I will draw conclusions and make recommendations with reference to the findings to help develop simple interventions or strategies that can be helpful in increasing students’ engagement and staying in school in the school under scrutiny, with a possible extension to other similar contexts.

Each of these findings plays a part. The analysis of the observation data and the interview data are interrelated and each set corroborates what is found in the other one. Although, my findings correspond to those in the research literature (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2004; Newell, 2003; Harris, 2008; 2011; Satchwell, 2004; Spillane et al., 2001), nonetheless, my findings do not point to a single factor that determines students’ school engagement. As a matter of fact, it appears to be a combination of a process of integration and collaboration ranging from the school factors, the family and the individual student. What did emerge from these findings was an integrative understanding of the factors present in school that enhance, influence and sustain students’ school engagement. The following table
represents the distribution of the themes that emerged from these findings.

It has to be noted that most themes appeared in each interview except "Activities Influence", only mentioned by two of the participants. It appeared that this last theme is connected to environmental influences, including not only the physical, with at the periphery the influence of family and peer influence and socialization, but also the administrative environment around leadership, discipline, and collaboration. The second important theme connects to personal characteristics, including engagement. Finally I discuss teachers' effect. I also question why certain factors did not gain prominence like the items identified under 'dialogue', 'verbal utterance' and 'curriculum' or were not mentioned at all, like for instance religion, when the study was conducted in a private denominational school.

Table 6 shows the distribution of the themes that emerged across participants.

Table 6

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<th>Distribution of the Themes</th>
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<td>Theme</td>
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<td>Personal characteristics</td>
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<td>Environmental influence</td>
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From the result of the findings, the characteristics that enhance students’ school engagement is a function that not only emanates from the school environment but also includes non school related factors like family and peer socialization which however, can be consolidated through school related activities. The results of the observation and the
stories of the participants all attest to the influences reflected in other studies, like the importance of the environment (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003) including the school administration (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Finn, 1989; Leithwood et al., 2004), personal characteristics (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997) and teachers’ effect (Ezeliora, 2004; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Joel, 2007; Johnson, 2008; Nwagbo, 2001; Ogili, 2005; Olowa, 2009; Oludipe, 2004) indicating that if any of the positive aspects surrounding these factors are lacking, students’ school engagement will be jeopardized.

The participants’ discussions were varied, with each focusing on what heavily influenced the choices they made in terms of engagement. Olive and Zach’s main concern centered on the principle of holistic education for the students, based on a positive school climate and effective leadership and administration in the school. Nelly argued that both the student and the teacher have a lot to say in enhancing students’ school interest. But, Cosmas highlighted the importance of peers’ socialization and discipline in his school engagement. Lynda was in love with the school environment and notes the importance of self motivation in her own engagement. Prince’s main concern was centered on the gain of benefits, which is similar to Gerald's, who declared that schooling will change his life and the fortunes of his family. Each of these participants brought new perspectives and showed a different way of explaining the same reality of engagement as it pertains to interest and participation in school. Below, I discuss the emergent themes as they connect through all the participants and how they fit within the existing literature on students’ school engagement.
Environmental Influence

There are several aspects of the school environment to be taken into account. It encompasses a safe and clean compound, well structured, protected school buildings and surrounding area, not excluding physical conditions such as temperature, lighting and noise and psychological aspects that include peripheral influences like the family, extracurricular activities, peer influence and socialization and culture. The extent of the influence generated by both physical and school climate on students’ school participation is worthy of note.

It is crucial to say that the environment affected the participants’ school engagement. The participants referred both to the physical environment and the school climate. Cosmas stated and argued that the school’s compound was lovely and felt that “it is a home away from home” but regretted the fact that the compound is quite small compared to other schools with more space.

All the participants concurred to acknowledge the favorable nature of the school compound. There were regrets but that fact did not overshadow the needed conduciveness to learning that characterizes a learning environment. What emerged from the data was the impact of the environment on students’ interest and participation, belonging and engagement.

Olive, Nelly, Cosmas, Lynda, Prince, Gerald and Zach made specific reference to the school environment as having a big influence in creating and sustaining their school engagement. There were specific mentions made of the school environment as possessing the needed criteria for mutual trust, support and respect. For these participants, the school climate had been quite supportive and friendly. Olive, the principal, felt the need to create
a favorable environment that will be quite a favorable site for schooling and growth. Zach and Nelly believed that the efforts of the school administration in creating a favorable site were the reason for the good demeanor and interest exhibited by the students. Specifically, Lynda and Gerald described a favorable school environment that was not only supportive but one that they fell in love with. Prince likes the school environment and feels supported in his quest for what he will gain as a student in the near future. However, he did not fail to point out the difficulty he experienced in this type of learning site which he associated with a seminary due to the high level of discipline observed and enforced.

Findings in the literature had identified the environment in students’ school engagement as key. The significance of having a positive environment and having students’ participate in school related activities were all supported in the literature (Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997). Researchers had argued that it is not just the issue of motivating people that matters but creating favorable conditions and environments within which people will feel motivated and thus engage themselves (Bempechat et al., 2008; Battistich et al., 1997; Bong & Mimi, 2005). And the support that emanates from this environment goes a long way in supporting students’ interest (Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 1993). Thus, this study supports other’s stating that the success of the school as a learning environment is based on students’ interest in the school environment (Deci & Ryan, 1992; Newell, 2003; Satchwell, 2004).

**Family influence at the periphery.**

The influence of the family in students’ school engagement was well noted through the responses of six of the participants. They were in agreement that the family
plays a great role in the course of the students’ academic pursuit. However, the impact of this influence was differently captured by each of the participants.

Olive was very much convinced that the family plays such an important role in the academic life of their children but sees this role reflected differently. She thinks that the role of the family in helping students adapt to the endearing and supportive learning environment of the school is quite crucial and important but not necessarily an expected consequence to students’ adaptability to the learning environment that enhances the school engagement of their ward. Arguing her assertion she declared that despite the family support and:

...the economic situation of the family, if the child is not interested, there is nothing you can do. You can even drag the child to the school and pay all the fees and if the child is not interested, he is not interested and he is not going to learn anything. Interest comes first before the family... (Olive, p. 7, 312-315).

This declaration was synonymous with the old saying that one can take the horse to the stream but will not force the horse to drink water. She insisted that the actual role of the family is completely hinged on collaboration between them, the school and the children and points out the role of the family in the life of the students. Olive however, underscored the role and duty of the family in the scheme of things in a student’s life, which includes not just payment of school fees but supporting the school in terms of home work, discipline and insisted that the “home is the first school of the child and the school has to work hand in hand with the parents in order to make the child what the child is supposed to be” (Olive, p. 8, 322-333).

Nelly stressed the role of the socio-economic status of family and parents’ low
academic achievement in students’ school engagement. She argued that both affect the student either positively or negatively. It is crucial to note that Nelly’s opinion concurs with many researchers' findings on why students drop out of school (Devine, 1996; Farmer & Payne, 1992). However, Nelly believes that the family has a significant influence in suggesting strategies to and nudging their children towards making laudable choices that will benefit their school success. Nelly argued on the great need for a family’s inclusion in the schooling process and buttressed her arguments thus: “Yes, coupled with the fact that parents always want the best for their children. Every good parent who values education, who knows the “what” of good education, always recommend here for their children (Nelly, p. 22, 1006-1008). She concluded by saying that every parent should be part of their ward’s educational story and success.

Lynda, Cosmas, Prince and Gerald all believe that their families were all part and parcel of their school choice and sustainability. They all highlighted the different influences as indicators of their divergent reasons for staying engaged in school. While Cosmas spoke of the great influence of his family in school choice, and stressed that they were putting him under undue pressure to follow suit in the family tradition of excelling in his academic career; Gerald acknowledged the help and influence of his family but for him it does not translate into impressing them in an attempt to make them happy. Rather, he just felt that the opportunity will better his lot in the future: “I won’t say that I want to impress my family. I want to be able to stand on my own when I grow up...” (Gerald, p. 37, 1685).

Lynda sees the role of the family as very complementary for her efforts for success and admitted the importance they create and instill:
The actual role of my family in all these is not that of forcing me but that of encouraging me to fulfill my desires, having shown me the path of success and victory. The rest is left for me to dream and actualize my dreams...” (Lynda, p. 45, 2052-2054).

She admitted the pressure that continuously came from her family through the choice of her school but reiterated that she chose to fall in love with the school herself. As for Prince, he openly admitted that as the first born child in the family, a lot of responsibility falls on his shoulders. Because of this, he subscribed wholeheartedly to his family’s influence as a lot depends on his achievement. As such, he had to work hard in order not to disappoint his younger siblings and parents, which invariably puts enormous pressure on him:

I am the first born and my siblings are looking up to me. My father will always tell me that to him whom much is given, much is expected, they will always want me to go to school and do something meaningful so that my younger siblings will follow in my footsteps. The family pressure is very high and I have to really live up to their expectations and not disappoint them (Prince, p. 29/30, 1328-1332).

In Prince’s situation, his parents’ desire for him tacitly synchronizes with his desired ambition to upgrade the family status through hard work, at the backdrop of the secured scholarship.

The family no doubt has a stake in the school engagement of their wards as research has emphasized the resultant value families attach to the education of their wards. Some researchers (Adepoju & Fabiyi, 2007; Ayeni, 2000) agree that many of the educational policies in Nigeria have been described as the product of confusion, which
has led parents and family in search of proper academic structures that will engage their wards academically. Their research reveals that only a small group (17.8%) of respondents agreed that government was taking care of all their school needs whereas the majority (82.2%) claim that the students' parents were largely involved in funding their school expenses (Adepoju & Fabiyi, 2007; Ayeni, 2000). This explicitly notes the relevance of the family in the life of the students as noted through the works of Adepoju and Fabiyi, (2007) as well as Ayeni, (2000) but I add that students’ school sustenance does not just end with funding but includes collaboration with all the stake holders, as this is a vital contributing factor to students’ school engagement.

Peer influence and socialization.

It is crucial to note how peer influence affected the socialization of the students in the school and how this socialization connects to and sustains students’ school engagement and staying in school. Nelly, Cosmas, Lynda and Prince made specific reference to relationships and peers' influence. All the participants are in agreement that peers' influences contribute to school choices and the students’ subsequent school adaptation. However, even though Nelly argued that these could be counterproductive when it is not well managed and controlled, she stated that: “peer group’s influence sometimes also affects them. Those of them, who come to school, do come because of friends who are like them; they affect them for good and they could also lose interest in learning” (Nelly, p. 21, 941-943). Nelly clarifies her concerns with regards to the pressure mounted by the peer groups as their existence connects and brings stability to the school environment, in terms of school connectivity and identification. According to researchers (Molloy, Gest & Rulison, 2011; Prinstein, Brechwald & Cohen, 2011) participation could
be enhanced by peer socialization as this could impact students’ growth, relationship and involvement and this was evidenced in my study.

Prince on the one hand identifies with the influence of his school peers but questions why little time was allotted to social gatherings that could enhance and create better opportunities for peer socialization. He insisted that more time should be allotted to extracurricular activities. Lynda and Cosmas were convinced that their friends in school make schooling interesting. They emphasized the huge role played by their peers in their school engagement. Cosmas as for him identified the influence of his friends in his journey as a student. He explained: “I am not even thinking of changing school for now as I will miss my friends and it will make no meaning” (Cosmas, p. 34, 1555). Cosmas affirmed the role his peers in his academic journey as being positive, agreeing with Nelly on the positive aspect of peer relationship. For Cosmas, this peer relationship afforded him and his friends’ opportunities for healthy competition:

I remember when I was in J.S.S 1 my marks were low and I never bothered but later when I started comparing my marks with those of my friends, I started becoming depressed and not belonging with my friends. I started working hard to measure up to the performance level of my friends. Competition with my friends helped me a lot and upgraded my effort and my grade greatly improved (Cosmas, p. 33, 1506-1511).

The extent of this influence is not just limited to engagement in academic competitions but is inclusive of fun derived through extracurricular activities. Cosmas explained further that: “social life here is interesting” (Cosmas, p. 34, 1521). Orchestrating this point further, Cosmas, stated that the school provided many avenues for students’
participation, for example, Jets clubs which is science oriented, Debating and Quiz societies, Young Farmers Association and many others. These, according to Cosmas enhanced school participation of students. This assertion is corroborated in findings in the literature in terms of the presence of opportunities for participation in school related activities and extracurricular activities (Finn, 1993).

Lynda acknowledged the fact that her school engagement was influenced by her school friends. She believed that her peers were both supportive and useful to her as she was constantly amazed at the talents at their disposal whenever they come together as peers for common exercises. Lynda described this effect more closely in their interaction during extracurricular activities, but unlike Prince, she pointed out that even though the school allots little time for socials and extracurricular activities, they still make use of the short allotted time quite well. Lynda explained what they do during that short time:

We have some social clubs and societies where students express themselves and improve their skills in various socially organized activities. These help students a lot. It involves mostly students helping students in terms of their academic enhancement. Students use these allotted times to teach and explain difficult topics encountered during the course of their classes with the teachers to one another. It is friendly, cordial and interesting too, as some times, we make fun of teachers and mimic their flaws (Lynda, p. 45, 2018-2023).

Lynda went further: “Personally, I love the social aspect of the school. It gives me joy to come to school to mingle and have fun with my fellow students and to share their world view...” (Lynda, p. 45, 2034-2035). Moreover, “there is no bullying or seniority here... as it is strictly frowned at...” (Lynda, p. 47, 2111). Lynda, Nelly, Prince and Cosmas’s
discussions highlighted quite clearly the importance of peer influence coupled with socialization in the enhancement of students’ engagement and the need to sustain its momentum for active school participation.

According to research findings, friendship experience as it exists among children and adolescents is closely connected to different individual adjustments especially with regards to schooling (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Studsrød & Edvin, 2011; Veronneau & Vitaro, 2007; Wentzel, Barry & Caldwell, 2004). Extracurricular activities in high schools also influence students’ academic performance (Rombokas, 1995), even though for Johnson and Moulden, (2011), there was no positive correlation between students’ extracurricular activities and homework performance in mathematics.

**Administrative Influence**

The participants attributed the success of the school to good administration and effective leadership qualities. They emphasized the effort of the administration through established school structures in creating a sustaining environment modeled through effective leadership in administration. On the one hand, Prince and Gerald highlighted the overriding presence of a strictly administered environment which pervaded the whole school but which invariably worked positively in sustaining students’ school engagement. Nelly, Lynda, Olive, Cosmas and Zach were all in agreement that the school administration orchestrated through Olive’s leadership had created and sustained effective students’ school engagement. The information gleaned from these participants support the findings in the literature (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Finn, 1989; Leithwood et al., 2004).

According to researchers, organizational success is attributed to the presence of
effective leaders, which highlights the fact that successful school leaders could always influence student achievement through two important channels; first, through the support and development of effective teachers and second, through the implementation of effective organizational processes that will make practice worth the effort (Leithwood & Day, 2008; Blase & Blase, 1999; Harris & Townsend, 2007).

**Leadership.**

Olive, the principal, discussed the importance of effective leadership in her school. She declared her own feelings about the school which could point to what direction her leadership of the school tilts to; “my own personal experience is that my school is a joyful and encouraging one” (Olive, p. 1, 6). This concurs with Northouse’s (2007) definition of leadership, as it employed these characteristics in creating a favorable organization.

In line with this definition, Cosmas affirmed that love for his school started from the leadership qualities of the school principal; “the principal is very friendly, helpful and always there for us. If you wanted to chat with the principal, one is free to go up to the office and see the school receptionist and visit. She is always available...” (Cosmas, p. 32, 1454-1456). However, the amiable dispositions of the principal do not negate the leadership qualities needed for effective school management. Nelly and Zach highlighted that the school leadership is the key to its success and explained that the school leadership through a friendly administration works very hard in order to make the school a home away from home by carrying both students and teachers along in their daily regulations through a harmonious collaboration with the students and the teachers. Many findings in the literature reviewed itemized the importance of effective leadership for
school administration (Leithwood & Day, 2008; Blase & Blase, 1999; Harris & Townsend, 2007). According to Northouse (2007), leadership denotes a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. These claims suggest that the impact of the leader in an organization cannot be underestimated, but works to create a favorable environment.

Nonetheless, for Lynda, effective leadership is closely felt in the way the school environment looks like and she felt that the school exhibits the favorable characteristics of a kind hearted and effective leader whose leadership skill is exercised and visible. She explained:

The school has a lot of interesting aspects to it; the environment is clean, attractive and conducive for learning. The students are happy to see a clean and attractive school. I like going to school where everything is very appealing, this triggers my interest” (Lynda, p. 44, 2000-2003).

Lynda noticed that her interest was ignited and sustained because of the leadership of the school: “I usually say to myself, you are lucky to be here..., so make the best out it. I cannot even trade here for any other school...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2084-2085). To support such a claim we refer to Olive who believes that the sustenance of the good and effective leadership skills is possible only when leadership duties are mutually shared among interested partners. Olive acknowledged that good leadership entails good rapport and friendship with students and is completely against the use of coercion or fear in school administration. She noted:

When you apply force in order to bring the child to learn, the child is shattered
and when the child is shattered or disinterested or tensed up, there is no way the
child will learn and learning is not taking place. The child is there in fear...”
(Olive, p. 2, 76-78).

Olive believed in an inclusive type of leadership which has been reported in the research
literature as having an influence on students’ achievement both through an influence on
other people or on features of their organizations, and through their influence on school
processes, systems and practices (Leithwood et al., 2004). She believed that her
interactions with students over the years did influence her choice of leadership style:
“when somebody is involved in taking decision on what concerns the person, when the
person feels ‘loved, beloved, cherished’, the person puts in the best” (Olive, p. 3, 108-
109). This type of leadership characteristic is found in the literature as it creates
opportunities through which students can adequately motivate themselves (Bempechat et
al., 2008; Bong & Mimi, 2005; Finn, 1989; Blase & Blase, 1999; Harris & Townsend,
2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Day, 2008). Through my school
observations, I discovered that Olive’s work in the school as a leader is exemplified in the
policies introduced in the school that keep students interested. The inclusion of a cultural
dress code as part of the school’s uniform was deeply appreciated by the other
participants interviewed and it goes on to confirm their claim that their school is 'a home
away from home'. This was a new dress code. The pupils usually wore their official
school uniform-a combination of navy blue and white. However, on Fridays, all the
students were dressed in cultural attire, designed specifically by the school with the
school logo and emblem all very obvious on it. These students look quite distinguished
and more proudly African than their peers in other private or public schools. This dress,
specifically worn on Fridays, could be connected to getting back to the basics of one’s culture in the midst of globalization in the world today (Journal, CIF. p. 6, 118-120). This could influence the students’ interest and pride in their push for excellence through the school. It could impact their self esteem and their ego in a positive way (Journal, CIF. p. 6, 122-123).

**Discipline.**

All the participants agreed that the school thrives on discipline and through it had created opportunities for students’ participation in main stream education through mutual school engagement. While Prince and Gerald highlighted the strict environment of the school through which they pointed out the operational presence of discipline as high on the school’s scale of preference, Olive, Zach, Nelly, Prince, Lynda and Cosmas explained the vital nature of the school’s enforcement of their rules of conduct as part and parcel of creating a favorable environment for students’ school engagement and staying in school. Discipline enhances school stability and creates a culture of respect which could be described as communication with students, modeling students’ intellectual processing for engagement and achievement through mature regulations (Doyle, 2006). Doyle (2006) in his study argued that schools should be guided by discipline theory, whereby, a high school administrator might ask the following questions about school structure:

- Do all staff understand the need to be strict, fair, and consistent in their enforcement of school rules?
- Are rules and expectations communicated clearly throughout the school?
- Do all students actually know the expectations for behavior and the consequences for violations?
Do the consequences for violations seem fair and fit the seriousness of the offense? (pp. 97–125).

In line with Doyle (2006), Olive views discipline as part and parcel of the school’s operation. She acknowledged that “if one is not disciplined, one will not be able to learn” (Olive, p. 3, 136). This is the opinion that influenced Olive’s hard stance on school discipline as enforced at her school. In some cases, monetary fines were attached to some misdemeanors like sagging pants and littering of the compound with garbage. These punitive warnings were boldly written and displayed at the very entrance to the school for all students to see (Journal, DCP. P. 4, 73-74). Olive explained why the administration had to embark on such a pro-active approach:

It is a reminder. They are children and sometimes they can forget the codes of dressing. With that sign they remember and come back to themselves and say I am not supposed to do this. To be a disciplined child and a responsible child, I am not supposed to do this and these are the things am supposed to do. When you call them to order, they take it in good faith and are grateful (Olive, p. 4, 147-151).

Nelly and Zach completely agreed with the views shared by Olive which are in agreement with the research and recommendations in Doyle (2006); however Nelly argued further that discipline as implemented by the school was not just for students’ benefit alone but affected the teachers as the custodians and enforcers of these rules of conduct because according to her the school advocates the ‘do as I do’ kind of principle. She explained:

We do something different here, because the discipline we are talking about is both on the side of the students and the teachers. The students are not the only
ones disciplined. A teacher also can be disciplined. A teacher who misses class once or twice without good reasons is disciplined. There are some measures to bring him/her to order. So in that way you see that everyone is serious with his/her job. You don’t miss classes unless there is a cogent reason for you to do that, which the management should also know about (Nelly, p. 22, 986-992).

For Lynda and Cosmas, the school is an embodiment of strict discipline through the rules of conduct which were given to all students on the day of admission and widely published for effective implementation. They believe that these are not negotiable and enjoy the fact that their enforcement nudges the students to make good choices for their future. Even though, Prince and Gerald saw the school as being too strict with its rules enforcement, they still affirm its positive influence. They believe that it had been the distinguishing character between their school and other neighboring schools and believed that it is a good tool for good administration. The role played by discipline in enshrining such a culture of involvement in terms of skills development and maturity in working with others in a given situation is encouraging, as the purpose is to bring about the best possible learning experience for all students and decipher how the school through leadership affects students’ performance in terms of engagement and school participation (Bowen, 2002; Doyle, 2006).

All the participants were in agreement with the fact that the families of the students play a huge role in discipline enforcement. They all accepted the fact that the parents of the students co-operate tacitly with the school administration in making sure that these rules of conduct as they pertain to the school work. Above all, good and positive students’ engagement stems from positive class involvement both on the part of
the teacher and the students. The class control coupled with a loving, welcoming teacher who loves teaching is a positive point to enhancing school success (Journal, ISM. P. 2, 30-31).

**Collaboration.**

The success story of an organization depends largely on collaborative tendencies exhibited by those within the organization. Collaboration in essence creates a community of stakeholders whose goal is strictly centered on the success and realization of educational dreams and purposes. Success too, creates the atmosphere conducive to students’ school engagement and staying in school. Students’ engagement rightly seen is a consequence of collaboration which evolves as a unique attribute of leadership description and definition.

Observing the school, I think that these students love their teachers for the very way they warmed to them when they walked into their classrooms. It could be due to a lot of factors. The chorused greeting to teachers which is traditional in Nigerian culture was heart-felt. The response to their questions during the class was both prompt and good. The classes were cooperating with the teachers, most likely because they were getting quite close to their final external examination. They were eager to answer questions and perform the in-class tasks given to them (Journal, CLB. P. 1/2, 42-47).

However, the participants interviewed all subscribed to the fact that collaboration was a vital angle to students’ school engagement. Olive’s opinion connects well with research on effective leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane et al. 2001). She explained:

> From day to day activities of the child, you tell the child, this is what to do, time
to do this; do the assignment and they do it. The time table and the program help the child to move ahead and that generates their interest. You see them doing it with ease and joy”… “We sit down and dialogue and discuss what is to happen” (Olive, p. 4, 156-158; p. 5, 195-196).

Creating a favorable environment includes but is not restricted to mutual collaboration between the principal and the students; it involves the active and diligent co-operation of the teachers as a necessary component of the leadership ladder. Olive stated that “collaboration is working together. It’s a team work; it is not a one person’s job as no one is an island” (Olive, p. 4, 172-173). She went on to point out the importance of the teachers in the scheme of things; “you cannot work without the teacher and if the teachers are not involved, you cannot succeed” (Olive, p. 4, 181-182). Orchestrating how this was practiced, she clarified:

We have constant meetings and there is openness in relationship. There is division of labor in all this things. There is clarity in the responsibility in any of the teachers and there is feedback, there is reinforcement, there is evaluation. All is happy and there is appreciation (Olive, p. 4, 174-177).

To create a befitting and well nurtured academic environment requires the availability of good checks and balances. Olive explained how vital this relationship is in her school: “the teachers are being supervised—what they teach, how do they teach, and the teaching materials they need are all provided. They have standard textbooks, they have materials, and they have enough time for those things to be carried out” (Olive, p. 5, 206-208). By extension, Nelly gladly explained the unique collaboration and cordiality that exists between the school administration and the teachers. She stated:
It is a friendly one. One, you try as much as you can as a teacher to do your job. If you do your job, the school is happy, the authority is happy and you work with ease. You don’t get any strains on your shoulders because you do your job. In that way it creates a kind of conducive environment between the authority and the teachers (Nelly, p. 20, 903-906).

Nelly subscribed to the effectiveness of team work and pointed out its prevalence in her work environment: “there is an understanding between the teachers; there is understanding between the teachers and the management... They do everything possible to foster that” (Nelly, p. 20, 916-917,920). Nelly explained that through co-operation the vision of the school is realized and stated that this vision cannot be achieved individually but collectively. Zach describes the bureaucracy in the school when he stated that the school does not operate on autocratic principles but creates opportunities to all for mutual co-existence. He explained:

The cooperation is good. Here we do not run autocratic type of system. A student has the right to make suggestions or to report any abnormalities to the management and be appreciated. Even if it is a teacher; may be the teacher is not up to his onions, the student has the right to say that they don’t want the teacher because the teacher don’t know his or her own onions and the management looks into it. If it is the pardonable offence, the person will be cautioned, where correction is not taken, the person can be dismissed. There is maximum cooperation between the school and the students (Zach, p. 14, 609-615).

Zach insisted that the school operates through cooperation and collaboration by allowing both students and teachers to claim ownership of behaviors and actions thereby
encouraging them to remain accountable to their behavioral choices. Prince concluded the discussions by highlighting the fact that collaboration does not end with only the people in the school environment, it was very much extended to parents who tacitly give their consent by supporting the policies outlined by the school. Collaboration gives rise to a good administration which pilots the school affairs, thus, creating and sustaining adequate interest, engagement and participation of students in school related activities. This is parallel to what is noted in the research literature (Harris & Townsend, 2007; Leithwood & Day, 2008; Blase & Blase, 1999). The degree of collaboration between the school administration, teachers, students and the family had immensely influenced school participation here.

**Teachers’ Effect**

Instructional method and assessment play a part. The teachers observed exhibited dispositions that were quite interesting. Teaching here was student centered. The focus seems to be strictly based on making sure that the individual student is well taken care of. Their class control and their methods of instructions were quite appealing and interesting too (Journal, ISM. P. 2, 30-31). The participants all agreed that the teachers had positive effects on students’ school engagement.

These participants, Olive, Nelly, Prince, Lynda, Cosmas, Gerald and Zach shared their unique but related opinions on what aspects of the teachers’ activities mostly enhance school participation, engagement and staying in school. It is crucial to note that Olive made specific reference to school success as heavily dependent on the work done by the teachers. She was proud to say, “Yes, you cannot work without the teachers and if teachers are involved, you cannot but succeed” (Olive, p. 4, 181-182). Olive stated that
the school worked so closely with the school teachers in order to provide the needed help, collaboration and support, coupled with teachers’ supervision as a form of checks and balances. She stated:

The teachers are supervised—what they teach, how do they teach, and the teaching materials they need are all provided. They have standard textbooks, they have teaching aids, and they have enough time for those things to be carried out. They are also specialist in the subjects they are teaching. We don’t accept half-baked teachers (Olive, p. 5, 206-209).

Olive stressed the fact that the school’s success is completely dependent on the commitment and expertise of the school teachers. To this end teachers are exposed to the latest available opportunities for self improvement and updating of their pedagogical skills. Olive explained:

...from time to time we have seminars. We invite experts from the ministry of education to come and tell us the new trends in teaching and learning and from there we update ourselves. Teachers are also sent for seminars, like those in science they go for STAN (Science Teachers Association of Nigeria) and those in Mathematics they go for MAN (mathematics Association of Nigeria) and those in Arts subjects too. They go there, they interact with people from other schools and the ministry and from there they learn the new trends of teaching and when they come back; they implement that... (Olive, p. 5, 221-226).

Nelly reiterated the fact that it is the task of the teacher to encourage and aid students who lag behind and get them back to normalcy. For Nelly, teaching is student centered and teachers have to do all within their power to encourage the ‘not-too-good-students’.
She explained:

When a child fails once, fails twice, it is natural to get demoralized. I try as much as I can as a teacher to encourage them, to make them understand that it is not the end of the world. They can still do better if they put more effort (Nelly, p. 19, 848-851).

Nelly’s position concurs with research findings that pointed out the close connection between teacher instructions and effective students’ learning, (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Doyle, 2006; Ezeliora, 2004). The importance of the teacher for school success was highly commended by Nelly. She believed that the ability of teachers not only to be available for the students but also to get familiarized and know them by name provides a better way for creating the much needed effect through students’ collaboration. Nelly believed that collaboration evolves through reciprocal relationships between teachers and students; “it’s cordial. Our students are taught courtesy and they are meant to understand that they are always here to learn” (Nelly, p. 23, 1045-1046). Nelly further explained: “I have always told my students, if I teach in the class and you don’t understand, you are free to meet me anyway, on the staircase, in the staffroom, at the convenience store and ask questions” (Nelly, p. 23, 1047-1049). This she said affords the students the much needed relationship that builds not only trust but energizes the basic need to feel valued in terms of co-operation and subsequent collaboration in school work. The essence of this, according to Nelly, is to curb the menace of fear as it is anti-educational and does not benefit nor favor academic growth and confidence of students. “We try as much as we can to avoid instilling fear in these children because that is the only thing that can break that communication and that relationship if a child cannot talk to his teacher”
Zach corroborated Nelly’s claim of making teachers’ instructions “student centered” and spoke highly of school’s support to teachers through the provision of teaching aids and other support packages in order to enhance the much needed students’ participation and engagement.

Gerald believed that his teachers were dedicated to their responsibility: “teachers are really dedicated. They are trying. The teachers are really dedicated to their responsibility...” (Gerald, p. 39, 1763-1764). This dedication and honesty in their dealings with the students translate openly in the way students relate very nicely to them through mutual collaboration:

If you respect your teachers they will really love you. They will really care for you and they will have that urge to teach and make you understand whatever you are doing. If you come to them in the staff room and ask them things you don’t understand, which they taught in the class, they will also help you to understand it (Gerald, p. 41, 1848-1852).

This connects to the meaning of emotional engagement as closely knitted to the assessment of students’ works and projects (Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Voelkl, 1997). Cosmas was very impressed by the quality of teachers in the school. He stated that the reason for his impression lies in the fact that the teachers evoke a sense of competition among the students through appealing activities like debates and class quizzes.

The teachers create an avenue for competition among the students through quizzes in public places and debates on already taught topics. So during those times we do stay in groups trying to see who is going to be the best, and the
maybe if you try answering one or two questions some others will try to oppose you. So you will like to prove yourself among your class mates. That is a lot of fun (Cosmas, p. 34, 1490-1494).

Lynda’s opinion about her teachers was positive as she believed that the teachers are competent and “teach students with patience and always carry students along, not neglecting weaker students” (Lynda, p. 44, 1998-1999). She tried to explain further:

The teachers are very good. They teach us with patience, are humble and tolerate our excesses. They are always ready to go back again and again to previous lessons to make sure that they carry everyone along. They play a big role in our interest in school (Lynda, p. 44, 2094-2096).

Lynda’s faith and trust in her school teachers is so strong that she is not worried about curriculum content as she believed her teachers would see to covering it. “I am not bothered with the curriculum as it is the work of the teacher to break them down to my level in order to help me learn. I think that is one of their job descriptions (Lynda, p. 45, 2014-2015).

Prince believed that teachers in his school do a great job. He believed that the teachers’ work does not just end with mere teaching and assessment but included role modeling through their way of life: “the teachers influence us positively through their way of life and through the discussions we have with them both collectively as a class and individually too” (Prince, p. 31, 1378-1379). There are many references to teaching strategies and effective students’ learning in different studies (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Doyle, 2006; Ezeliora, 2004; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Joel, 2007; Johnson, 2008; Nwagbo, 2001; Ogili, 2005; Olowa, 2009; Oludipe, 2004). As well, this school's
teachers’ activities include instructional methodology and assessment. Assessment, according to findings in the literature, could always be a polarizing task as it also plays on the emotional aspect of students’ school engagement and staying in school (Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Voelkl, 1997), which is evidently identified through students’ classroom affective reactions.

Assessment was a vital constituent of teachers’ activities and played an important role in the discussions on students’ engagement. I observed an in-class formative assessment task during my school observation. The in-class exercise that the students were asked to perform was attended to with haste and carefulness, with the teachers walking from desk to desk assessing and complimenting the students’ efforts. The class feedback was extremely positive. The students showed a mature attitude towards this class task assessment. They nodded their heads to acknowledge their mistakes and their limitations, in a cooperative way (Journal, ASS. P. 3, 49-54). The participants through their discussions confirmed previous findings on formative assessment and the positive responses from my unobtrusive observations in the school.

Findings in the literature reviewed highlighted the fact that assessment could always be polarizing and breeds disaffection among students (Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellbom, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Voelkl, 1997). While Nelly, Cosmas, Prince and Lynda spoke of the emotions that emanate from class assessments which were always a consequence of teachers’ activities, they concurred with the above research findings. Nelly stated that in the midst of the many competing characteristics of the school life, the formative assessment carried out by the teachers was the most sensitive and important of all the tasks, as it played into the emotional well-being of the students.
She explained that teachers’ in their school practice giving feedback to students from class works in order to provide a credible and level playing field to all the students in their respective classes:

Feedback helps. I give them a class work and they do it. I go round the class and I watch them do their assignment. At the end of it, I collect their assignments and I mark them in class. I call attention of any student who did not do well and I correct him/her (Nelly, p. 19, 840-842).

Nelly knew quite well that feedback from class assignments creates and evokes either positive emotion for the students who did well in their class tasks and disturbing emotional reactions from students, especially when they do not perform well repeatedly, she stated:

When a child fails once, fails twice, it is natural to get demoralized. I try as much as I can as a teacher to encourage them, to make them understand that it is not the end of the world. They can still do better if they put more effort (Nelly, p. 19, 848-851).

For Cosmas, the issue of assessment was both touchy and emotional. Initially, he was put off by scoring low marks in an assignment and felt not belonging among his peers who scored higher than him. His attitudinal change saw him work hard in competition with his school friends in order to belong to their group:

The assessment of teachers have a lot of impact on us student. It creates sensitive situations among students which most times are not pleasant. I remember when I was in J.S.S 1, my marks were low and I never bothered but later when I started comparing my marks with those of my friends, I started becoming depressed and
not belonging with my friends. I started working hard to measure up to the performance level of my friends. Competition with my friends helped me a lot and upgraded my effort and my grades greatly improved (Cosmas, p. 33, 1505-1511).

Cosmas’ view of the teachers’ formative assessment was not only unpleasant but he grumbled about the too demanding form-of-assessment sometimes practiced:

...teachers give notes and they check our notes monthly and mark them. If you are a student that never copies class notes, and they find out, you will be punished and taken to the principal and that will be more serious, suspension for a few days or expulsion will follow depending on the gravity and the number of occurrence of the offence (Cosmas, p. 33, 1516-1519).

Cosmas explained that these attributes of formative assessment were too tasking, demanding and emotional at the same time. He was quick to add: “we students grumble when the teachers give an assignment that is tough and difficult” (Cosmas, p. 35, 1571).

The demanding nature of class assessment by teachers was what worried Lynda a lot. She explained: “they make us work for our marks and opportunities are given to us not only to earn our individual marks but also to explain our assignments and projects to the entire class and claim ownership of our studies and growth” (Lynda, p. 46, 2097-2099).

Emotionally, Lynda was always a wreck when she scored low in her assignments but hinted that even though she does not feel happy on such occasions, she however, finds the zeal to fight from within. “When I get a low mark, I am sad. However, I make a promise to myself that it will never happen again. I then work harder to improve my marks...” (Lynda, p. 46, 2100-2101).
However for Prince, assessment in all its aspects is the most important task of the teachers and stated that teachers should be not only honest but not biased against any student when this 'sacred' duty was carried out. He did not get into details in discussing assessment but only offered some insights on the way forward in regards to teachers’ most important activity: “I just hope that teachers will avoid using assessment for granting favors to students they like. It will just be so unfair to the teaching profession...” (Prince, p. 32, 1423-1424).

Teachers’ activities contribute quite immensely to students’ school engagement. Guardino and Fullerton (2010) and Olowa (2009) had argued that effective teaching methods applied by the teachers in the classrooms positively enhance students’ success in the classroom and subsequent school engagement. School expectations as inferred from the school observation grid concur with the literature reviewed and the views expressed by the study participants. It was evident that the teachers exhibited characteristics that provide favorable outcomes for the students. Class control through an effective use of teaching aids and the rapport created by the conviviality of the teachers was an efficient way of not only imparting good knowledge but creating an engaging opportunity for the students.

**Personal Characteristics**

All the participants discussed personal characteristics as an important component of engagement. Personal characteristics included such concepts as engagement, self-motivation, school benefits and collaboration. The participants were all in agreement with the fact that participation in school related activities was a choice that one had to make for oneself. They reiterated that even though parents make the choice of which school a
child had to attend, the choice of participation is the prerogative of the student.

Olive stated that the creation of a favorable environment facilitates engagement of students. She believed in creating a decent and challenging space that can ignite interest in school participation through encouragement, creating room for dialogue, for discussions, and for questions and answers. Olive emphasized the need to have “not only a positive, but a decent and challenging environment that makes the child interested in going to school and learning” (Olive, p.7, 318-320). Creating an environment where choices are possible is highlighted in the research literature. This according to Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) helps the school to become a crafted entity for developing student skills so that they can participate in mainstream education.

However, Nelly believes that the teacher has a lot to do in terms of sustaining the students’ interest; otherwise, they will switch off and fall behind: “...everything is all about interest. As a teacher I try as much as I can to make the students develop interest... There are so many ways you do that” (Nelly, p. 19, 864-865). Researchers had classified emotional engagement as having a close connection and identification with school (Bowen, 2002; Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). Cosmas and Prince were torn between following the promptings of their parents and doing what they really wanted to do. But they later on faced the reality that the benefits of going to school completely outweighed whatever choice to the contrary.

Cosmas and Prince had a practical reason for schooling. Their desire was for self fulfillment and being of use to society. For them, education was their ticket to a better life. Lynda had a different but interesting opinion regarding engagement and school participation. She declared that her parents chose her school for her but she fell in love
with the school by herself. She feels no regret as the choice to remain was squarely hers. Lynda’s reason for her school interest and participation is illustrated by findings in the literature (Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 1993) that students who feel supported and respected at school may be more accepting of structure and that in the absence of support to students, no degree of structure may be adequate to enhance their interest and engagement. As for Gerald, he is not in school to impress his family but because he is happy and would like to be successful in the future. Zach’s relation to students boils down to his love for the teaching profession. He believes that having the students place their trust in you as a good teacher creates the necessary forum for interest and participation. These aforementioned statements from the participants present different perspectives on the personal characteristics that create opportunities for the students’ engagement.

Engagement.

Fredricks et al (2004), defined engagement as behavioral, emotional and cognitive, a definition that implies and coordinates all the actions of an individual towards performance of an activity. As such, engagement designates and implies energy in action. Action is explained as a form of participation. And participation as it relates to the school environment connotes participation in school related activities. As Wehlage et al. (1989) defined it, engagement is "the psychological investment required to comprehend and master the knowledge and skills explicitly taught in schools" (p. 17). The notion of investment helps comprehend engagement and includes students’ desire in getting involved in routine school activities, such as interest in going to school, attending classes, interest in school’s social life, and following teachers' directions in class (Connell
Olive’s definition of engagement concurs with the above classified definitions. For her “engagement is involvement, active participation, dialogue, and discussion” Olive, p. 2, 50-51). Olive emphasized that it is not mere appearance within the school that involves serious engagement but the right attitude that encapsulates the above mentioned criteria. She further clarified:

When you talk of student engagement, it is student’s involvement actively in what is happening in the school in all its ramification both in decision making and in carrying out the activities, the child is the center of the whole thing (Olive, p. 2, 51-54).

Olive’s inclusion of dialogue and discussion adds more criteria to the definition of engagement found in the literature and it makes students’ involvement real and active participation. She stated: “the children are actively participating in what is happening in the school and all the challenges that the school provide for them to help them to be mature and responsible citizen” (Olive, p. 2, 324-326). Nelly’s definition included wholesome activity on the part of the student, collaboration and the fact that it “is a commitment on the part of the students always been there, participating in lessons, in the teaching and learning process, doing assignments, home-work, in fact, participating in whatever they are asked to do being homework or class work” (Nelly, p. 18, 786-789). However she stated that the teacher has a lot to do in order to instill this habit in the students because according to Nelly, once the interest is there, participation in school will be there despite the many distractions that might occur. Gerald’s definition included the
willingness to be educated, which inadvertently inculcates involvement. For Zach, it is following the trends of things in the school and getting involved. Whereas, Prince noted the importance of the words attraction and interest within the totality of the school life, Cosmas, on the other hand, identifies interest in school and insists on the activities that keeps student engaged. Lynda openly tapped into the belief that visual admiration lays the foundation for engagement, which involves appreciation of things and a willingness to learn.

**Verbal utterance.**

Verbal utterance was one of the items on my observation grid. Specifically it was used to study the verbal communication between the participants in the school set up, which includes communication between students themselves, between the students and the teachers and between the students and the school leadership. This item on the observation grid had a weighted score of ‘4’ which connotes to ‘very good’ on my grid interpretation and was discussed under the umbrella of leadership, personal characteristics and teachers’ effect (Journal, VU. P. 4, 6).

**Dialogue.**

Dialogue as an item was not discussed much by the participants. Though, Olive, Lynda and Zach who made reference to it used it interchangeably with discussion and examined it in relation to enumerating the procedures for engaging the students in school. Olive and Zach saw it as a tool for discovering the entry point for a child in terms of what the child knows, his/her interests, the capabilities of the child and through which the school could fashion ways of properly guiding the child to achieving his/her dreams. Dialogue or discussion for them became a tool for discovering the hidden potential in
order to make the student a happy learner. This Olive believed is an opportunity to claiming ownership of one’s academic growth and overall development: “when someone is involved in taking decision on what concerns the person, the person feels ‘am loved, am cherished’ and the person puts in his/her best” (Olive, p. 3. 108-109). Along a similar line, Lynda suggested that including dialogue in school administrative policy will provide a better working condition for all stake holders in education.

Curriculum.

As well, little reference was made to this construct by the participants. Nelly, Zach and Olive reported that the State Ministry of Education prepares and makes available curriculum guidelines to all schools; consequently, schools and subject teachers then interpret and adapt the guidelines to their various subjects. They insisted that schools do have to abide by the imposed curriculum topics as they form the basis for the national examination which serves as a summative examination for all schools. Cosmas liked the cultural part of the curriculum more and believed that the opportunity allowed him to know more about the rich cultural values. The curriculum he said, gives him the support to understand the core traditional values that will define him as a human being. However, Lynda on her own part was not bothered by the curriculum but was particularly interested in what and how the teacher delivered the curriculum, concluding that it is the work of the teacher to break down the curriculum to her level in order for her to learn. It suffices to mention that curriculum was seen mainly as referencing academic and teachers’ activity.

Culture.

Culture was discussed specifically in terms of its influence in the engagement
journey of students at the school under scrutiny. Nelly, Olive, Cosmas and Zach raised issues that implicated culture. Zach, who spoke about the influence of negative culture, pointed out the negative impact of social ills like the ‘get-rich-quick’ syndrome through ‘fraud’ and ‘kidnapping’ presently engulfing Nigeria. This, he reasoned, tends to derail the progress of students who are constantly challenged to imbibe the negative ways as the easy way to success.

Nelly, Olive and Cosmas spoke of the rich cultural significance of the school’s Friday uniform, stressing that it depicts the students’ African heritage and culture. They argued that the school does everything it can to depict and promote their positive cultural values in all their undertakings through attitudes, behaviors, language and dressing. They stressed that cultural attires dignify their students which invariably creates a positive climate, inculcating not only cultural identity but also permeating into curriculum interpretations and pedagogy. But for Nelly, this kind of situation “makes students at home. It does not scare them. It makes them believe who they are-Africans; and they are at home with it” (Nelly, p. 28, 1219-1220). The effect of this cultural impact on students’ school participation and growth was summed by Olive when she said:

The child is groomed in the culture the child comes from. You cannot train the child outside his/her culture. It reminds them that they are from this part of the country and this is our way of life... Putting on that attire, it helps them to recall that we belong to a particular culture... (Olive, p. 7, 281-284).

The school’s policy was geared, according to Olive, towards creating and sustaining opportunities for inculcating the cultural values of self dignity and self respect. This they realized through fostering a sound educational foundation that will benefit students in the
long run and through it, counter the negative social ills that had infiltrated the Nigerian core cultural values. According to Olive, it is only:

When a child is not trained, is not formed, is not educated, he/she becomes a nuisance in the community. So being trained makes a child a good citizen, to face the challenges in life and being able to contribute positively to growth of the society (Olive, p. 7, 304-306).

Absence of religion.

Even though, the research was carried out in a privately owned secondary school, the design of the study did not include items to specifically find out if religion ever played a part in students’ engagement and participation. However, the outcome of the research pointed indirectly to the presence and influence of religious faith in students’ school engagement. The pointers are numerous like the family choice of the school, the constant reference to ‘holistic education’ of the school principal and teachers and the decorum enjoyed by the participating students within the school (Journal, Thoughts, p. 6, 124-126). Re-designing the research to include the family could open up the study to investigate the impact religion plays in school choices and how they play out through effective school leadership and guided environment.

Conclusions

The attempt to comprehend students’ school engagement centers on varied reasons like definitions chosen, cause and effect reactions, the characteristics of the participants, understanding of leadership characteristics and teachers’ skills. The findings uncovered strong cause and effect relations. This perspective on students’ school engagement invariably leads one to understand the characteristics of the school as a
learning environment that enhances students’ engagement. As such, we can conclude that factors such as leadership, teachers’ activities, collaboration, discipline, peer influence and socialization, administrative actions and decisions, school benefits and self-motivation of students, all influence students’ school engagement. This observation based on a cause-effect model recognizes the fact that certain causes lead to particular effects. In this case, none of the participants identified a single determining influence that was the reason for their school engagement; rather, it was due to the dynamic interplay between the aforementioned factors. All the participants reflected on their school engagement and felt a positive presence and influence sustaining their effort. Nelly, Olive, Prince, Lynda, Zach, Cosmas and Gerald all acknowledged the effects of personal characteristics, environmental influences, administrative influences, teachers’ effect and activities influence in their comments on students’ school engagement. While some were more forceful regarding one aspect of the causes than others, they stated that not one factor did it all; rather, it was an effect that is sustained by collaborative elements within the system under scrutiny. The observations and interviews reflect the findings in the literature whereby a favorable environment, propelled by effective leadership initiates and sustains programmes that enhance students’ school engagement (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al. 1993; Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001). Thus, understanding the factors and characteristics of this school that enhances and sustains students’ school interest helps to provide grass-root interventions and measures to further enhance and impact students’ school engagement. Below I draw on the results of my discussion to formulate some recommendations.
Recommendations for Better Practice in Schools of Similar Context

Environmental influence and personal characteristics.

Support to students’ interest.

Given that student’s school engagement is a function of the characteristics of the school, it suffices then to orchestrate and sustain those enhancing programmes that encourage and sustain students’ school engagement so that they stay in school. A recommended area of support and sustenance lies around creating, re-inventing and sustaining school programmes that will initiate adequate support for students’ interest.

As such, given the positive results witnessed in the private school under scrutiny in this study, it is acknowledged that there is an urgent need for the government to assist privately owned secondary schools by providing funding to initiate programmes that will sustain the schools’ effort to provide an education to students.

Environmental support through guided peer influence and family collaboration.

Targeted programmes should be implemented within the existing school’s environment to ensure continuity, consolidate and improve existing programmes so that students will benefit and stay through participation in school related activities. The necessity of targeted programmes is to be able to deliberately supervise students and implement measures that will affect and foster students’ interest. Such programmes could include social and sporting activities which could be interwoven with stated school objectives to further enhance and internalize academic context.

Encouraging schools to positively build up programmes ensuring that adequate time is designated for supervised social and extracurricular activities will create an immensely positive influence in the scheme of students’ school engagement and staying
in school. This study highlighted the need for this additional inclusion. School administrators need to over-haul their school programmes and balance times allotted to this under represented aspect of the school curriculum and ensure its practice. The result cannot be underestimated any longer.

**Administrative aspect.**

*Administrative support through effective leadership and discipline.*

School leadership is a very important aspect of school organization and proprietors of privately owned schools should make the appointment of school principals based on merit and not on pure sentiments. They should make adequate provision for on-going training with their counter parts and government agencies to facilitate good and effective leadership. Subsequently, opportunities should be made available allowing students more input in school’s decision making through dialogue and discussions as this will further enhance the participation of students.

It becomes very pertinent to encourage and sustain the discipline as it helps the smooth operation of the school while at the same time encouraging families to liaise with the schools. As such, the family and the school need to collaborate more in order to forge a strong bond to facilitate the desired programmes that will enhance students’ school participation and engagement.

**Additional suggestions.**

First, the school under scrutiny operates completely under the principle of social selection which selects students in the course of the school years. There was tacit agreement among the participants in support of this. Consequently, the natural selection present in schools like the one identified, as explained by the participants makes it such that students who don't measure-up are asked to leave. There is a serious need for more
diversification in school programs so that students who are differently gifted will benefit from programmes specifically crafted for their kind of engagement. The government and educational stakeholders should endeavor to craft and sustain such policies like Learning to 18 Strategies (2008) by the Ontario Government of Canada. A policy for programmes crafted around central themes and interests/fine arts/theater/music/handicrafts/vocational education, not just limited to main stream academic endeavors. Incorporated also are programmes that included apprenticeships or work experience coupled with in-school programmes.

Second, it was observed that the school was subtly doing something with the students’ social time, systematically orchestrating the academic activities into social times in the form of peer teaching and instruction. Thus, in light of the continuous engagement of the students in academic matters, even during their so-called social gatherings, during which activities sustained content covered in class, allowed for added reflectivity, taking distance from teaching, to further add experiential treatment of knowledge gained through verification and reiteration. This, in a sense, was enabling a coming together of minds (Olson, 2003), akin to what happens in ‘communities of practice’ which have also become an important focus within organizational development and have considerable value when thinking about working with groups (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Extracurricular activities in high schools also influence students’ academic performance (Rombokas, 1995), even though for Johnson and Moulden, (2011), there was no positive correlation between students’ extracurricular activities and homework performance in mathematics. However, my research in the school under scrutiny has
revealed that academics and extracurricular activities could be complementary in terms of academic exchange. One could be used to orchestrate the effectiveness of the other under a supervised and well managed environment. According to research, friendship experience as it exists among children and adolescents is closely connected to different individual adjustments especially with regards to schooling (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Studsrod & Edvin, 2011; Veronneau & Vitaro, 2007; Wentzel, Barry & Caldwell, 2004).

Third, the participants all agreed that they were all engaged in the school; they love their school, they cannot change to another school and work towards finishing S.S.3 (grade 12 in Canada) to get their diploma or are working hard to make it possible. This sustained engagement of students in the school under scrutiny, promotes the storage of knowledge, which Anderson et al., (2004) sees as both declarative and procedural knowledge, with the extracurricular activities centered also around academic knowledge which enabled an added experiential way of learning for the concepts presented in class. In addition, the collaboration among students during these extracurricular gatherings supports the need for all students to confront the difficulties they experience and seek their peer's help by discussing the way they try to integrate information by fully understanding it, the only way to deeply integrate knowledge in a transformative way. There are new strategies to be added to formal schooling, a need to reformulate and transpose, in order to fully appropriate and make personal whatever information was gleaned from teaching in a true learning sense.

Fourth, there is the need to assist teachers through innovative measures, tools and seminars on the way forward in terms of assessment. The emotional condition generated by this most important task of the teacher needs all the help to make it function much
better. The need is as urgent as it is important. This is due to the fact that it generates a lot of emotional conditions that could either trigger positive effects or negative side effects in students’ school engagement.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained how the major themes that emanated from the study data relate to my theoretical framework and the reviewed literature in Chapter 2. I connected the findings to the participants' statements. I provided recommendations for school support, improvements and sustenance with reference to the findings. In the following chapter, I discuss some implications for future research, limitations to the study and conclude the study.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

In the preceding chapter, I explained how the major themes that emanated from the data connected to the literature and the theoretical framework which I highlighted in Chapter 2. It also provided the reader with recommendations for school improvements. In this chapter, I provide implications for future research, limitations to the study and concluding remarks.

Implications for Future Research

The results from this research have pointed to the various aspects in the school that work together to enhance students’ school engagement. Although the majority of findings in research on students’ school engagement (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2004; Gottfredson et al. 1993; Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001), have focused on the effect of the environment, leadership and teachers’ activities, further research would benefit from an understanding of how social context through peer socialization and family collaboration with the school would affect and influence students’ school engagement, not excluding the role of students’ personal characteristics. In order to fully understand the factors or aspects in the school that enhance students’ engagement, I would recommend that the research methodology be expanded to include both longer school observations and interviews of peers and families of selected participants, with an attempt to contact and include those who have dropped out, been expelled, or otherwise have failed.

These two methods with the added participants could make available rich data by shedding more light on the social context and on how much influence it has on students’ school participation and engagement. These may also illuminate and expand the research
on students’ school engagement. It would have been beneficial to have extended my research participants to include peers and family in order to understand more clearly the influence of their connections to the constructs of my study in students’ engagement.

This study was restricted to students from the eastern part of Nigeria for reasons given, it might be worth examining what the expectations, influences and characteristics are from the other geo-political sections of Nigeria and make comparisons. Although it was noted that regional differences could impact on teaching certain parts of the curriculum (Ayeni, 2000; Okunsanya & Isabu, 2010; Wodi & Dokubo, 2009), it would be interesting to investigate if there is a discrepancy in that assertion and discover what other aspects may enhance and sustain students’ school participation. Carrying out such a study would further add to the research on students’ school engagement in a country where previous research studies are limited.

The importance of protective factors, which refer to factors that create healthy environments, prevent or reduce vulnerability for the optimal development in modern research, has proved quite useful to educational success. Their usefulness consists in making available programmes that prevent or reduce students’ vulnerability through the provision of opportunities for students’ school engagement and participation, as inferred from such Policy as, Learning to 18 Strategies (2008) by the Ontario Government of Canada. However, through increased protective research, newer interventions could be discovered to augment and respond to the ever-increasing changes in modern pedagogy.

**Limitations**

My desire to undertake this research was to understand the school as a learning environment that enhances students’ school engagement; a study which employed
unobtrusive school’s observation and the interview of seven study participants. Although, many researchers (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 1993; Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001) allow one to conclude that a favorable environment propelled by effective leadership initiates and sustains programmes that enhance students’ school engagement, this study was not able to discuss the effect or the impact of academic curriculum on students' participation. I was not able to ascertain its relevancy.

This study was conducted within a very short time frame; it was carried out within six weeks. The time frame may have affected the results too. A longer time frame could have unearthed much more data that may have altered the findings.

Despite the fact that care was taken to select participants for the study, the influence of the socio economic status of the students’ family may also have affected the findings. For the seven participants, there was the ratio of 4 to 3 in terms of socio economic status of the family, that is four having come from a well to do family and for the other three, one was from a struggling family, the next one was dependent on a generous donor through a study scholarship and the last one struggled through school based friends’ influences. I believe my data on school participation through personal characteristics and family could have been more balanced if I had had equal numbers of social representations.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the research environment in a private school run by religious nuns, coupled with the standard set by the school management and my enthusiasm for the school, I believe that such a setting has affected the outcome of the study. This had an impact on the findings. In concluding then, the result of the school
observations, coupled with the accounts offered by the participants cannot be generalized to all schools; as each school has differing contexts and organizations. Nonetheless, my journal entries of school observations and of the seven participants, however, reflected an environment that enhances students’ school engagement.

**Final Remarks**

Throughout the course of this study, I have been guided by my three research questions:

- What school characteristics enhance high school students’ school engagement?
- To what extent do the instructional practices of teachers enhance students’ school engagement?
- How do students’ interests influence their school engagement?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I analyzed the influence of school observations and the lived experiences of seven participants drawn from the school environment guided by the definition of students’ engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004) as behavioural, emotional and cognitive. The school observation data and the interview data not only support the research findings (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 1993), that the school environment plays an important role to supporting students’ participation in school related activities, but also the data support findings (Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001) attesting to the influence of leadership and teachers’ practices on students’ school engagement and participation, while at the same time highlighting the influence of social constructs such as peer socialization and family collaboration.
As observed in my study, the data from the school observations and the interviews of the participants were coloured by their unique school context, which inordinately did affect the students’ interest and school participation; aspects like the school leadership approach and the teachers’ approach to pedagogy. From the results of this study, it appears that the school environment did indeed create, enhance, influence and sustain students’ school engagement. The fact that the environment of the school where the research was carried out, exhibited such favourable characteristics (Bong & Mimi, 2005; Arum, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 1993), which supported students’ interest and participation, coupled with effective leadership and positive teachers’ practices (Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008; 2011; Spillane et al., 2001) may influence and substantiate subtle clues that enhance students’ engagement. Students may believe that the presence of these positive influences is enough attraction to promote school participation. The emergence of the recurring themes from the data gives due relevance to the reason for the research. However, further themes that emanated ranging from the influence of peer socialization and family collaboration highlighted more emphatically that no one factor is responsible for influencing students’ school participation and engagement but school engagement is orchestrated through the mutual interplay between a lot of factors and conditions.

By way of explanation, I want to re-emphasize the meaning of engagement as defined by Fredricks et al. (2004), which they defined as behavioral, emotional and cognitive. This holistic description encapsulates other constructs like ‘school factor’ (administrative, culture and climate), teaching strategies and learning styles, through which students’ school engagement is influenced and which concurs with the
participants’ descriptions. One could then wonder as to what extent these characteristics systematically create opportunities that will create and sustain this engagement.

As already seen through the literature reviewed and the data that emanated from the study; effective leadership helps in creating a favorable environment that sustains, coupled with the positive effects of teachers’ activities. Referencing, the National Standards for Head teachers (DfES, 2004) as regards specifically the role of the head teacher in identifying core professional leadership and management practices, Day et al. (2008, p.7) enumerated and highlighted six key areas of interest, which are as follows:

1. Shaping the Future: creating a shared vision and strategic plan for the school (in collaboration with governing body).
2. Leading Learning and Teaching: raising the quality of teaching and learning and pupils’ achievement. A successful learning culture will enable pupils to become effective, enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning.
3. Developing Self and Working with Others: building effective relationships and building a professional learning community through performance management and effective professional development for staff.
5. Securing Accountability: head teachers are accountable to pupils, parents and promoting collective responsibility within the whole school community and for contributing to the education service more widely.
6. Strengthening the Community: creating links and collaborating with other
schools, parents, careers and other agencies to share expertise and ensure children’s wellbeing.

In my study the following order of importance was uncovered as regards these key aspects:

2. Shaping the Future: creating a shared vision and strategic plan for the school (in collaboration with governing body).
3. Developing Self and Working with Others: building effective relationships and building a professional learning community through performance management and effective professional development for staff.
4. Leading Learning and Teaching: raising the quality of teaching and learning and pupils’ achievement. A successful learning culture will enable pupils to become effective, enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning.
5. Securing Accountability: head teachers are accountable to pupils, parents and promoting collective responsibility within the whole school community and for contributing to the education service more widely.
6. Strengthening the Community: creating links and collaborating with other schools, parents, careers and other agencies to share expertise and ensure children’s wellbeing.

This classification encapsulates the recurring themes from the findings of my study, and quite evidently, highlights the definitional roles ascribed to engagement by Fredricks et
al., (2004) as behavioral, cognitive and emotional through which success in school practices evolves. Leithwood et al. (2004) had hinged this on four positives: (a) developing people by way of enabling teachers to do better jobs, (b) monitoring organizational performance, (c) promoting effective communication and (d) creating a productive school culture and climate that encourages collaborative processes between the teachers and the school leader (8-9, 12). I fall back on Spillane et al.’s (2001, p. 26) research, whereby they argued that school leadership practice should be seen from a distributed perspective; it

...is not simply a function of an individual leader’s ability, skill, charisma, and cognition. While individual leaders and their attributes do matter in constituting leadership practice, they are not all that matters. Other school leaders and followers also matter in that they help define leading practice.

This position of collaboration encapsulates other constructs like, discipline, culture of respect, support and flexibility through which students’ school engagement is influenced. One might draw the conclusion that the results of the observation in collaboration with the views expressed by the participants highlighted the fact that they were positively influenced by the factors present in the school which created a positive and favorable environment that enhanced and most likely sustained the participants’ school engagement. Each of the prevailing characteristics never will act in isolation, but according to the findings from the data that were supported by a strong base in other research findings, there exists an interplay of positive influences that enhance and sustain students in their stride to remain and stay engaged in school.
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Appendix A

Ethical Clearance

September 1, 2011

Mr. Charles Enyinnia
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-568-11; Romeo # 6006209
Title: “GEDUC-568-11 Students' Engagement and Staying in School: A Case Study of a Secondary School in Nigeria”

Dear Mr. Enyinnia,

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-568-11 Students' Engagement and Staying in School: A Case Study of a Secondary School in Nigeria" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events – GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementations of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

165
Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Marie Myers, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
    Celina Caswell, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

Faculty of Education, 511 Union Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7M 5R7

September 06, 2011
Dear Students,

Recruitment Letter

Students’ Engagement and Staying in School

My name is Charles Enyinnia, a Master of Education candidate in the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. I am writing to request your participation in research about students’ school engagement and staying in school. The goal of my research is to understand the factors present in school as a learning environment that helps students’ engagement and staying in school.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the above study. Participation will take the form of an interview at the school and the interview will last a maximum of one hour. Participation is completely voluntary and there are no known risks associated with participating. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and you may request the removal of all or part of your data without negative consequences.

If you are interested in participating in this study, join us at the school auditorium during the morning recess at 11.00 am to complete a demographic questionnaire to select participants. The questionnaire will take about 5 minutes to complete.

If you have any question about this study, feel free to contact me, Charles Enyinnia at 9ce7@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Marie Myers at 613-533-3032 or myersmj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Yours sincerely,

Charles Enyinnia
Appendix C

Letter of Information

Faculty of Education, 511 Union Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7M 5R7
September 06, 2011
Dear Participant,
Letter of Information for Adult Interview Participants

Students’ Engagement and Staying in School

This research is being conducted by Charles Enyinnia, a Queen’s graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Marie Myers, in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

What is this study about? I am writing to request your participation in research about students’ school engagement and staying in school. The goal of my research is to understand the factors present in school as a learning environment that helps students’ engagement and staying in school. ‘Engaged students’ refers to a certain group of students who remain interested and committed to schooling; ‘staying in school students’ refers to those choosing not to drop out, in order to obtain their high school diploma. The findings from this study may help develop simple interventions or strategies that can be helpful in increasing students’ engagement and staying in the school.

In the first part of the research project, I will engage in strategies to enter the field by taking notes from my unobtrusive observations in a field journal. I will observe all the actions in the school context, including what I can glean from teaching practices, as well as students’ interest and engagement during that process. The school observations will take place over a period of approximately five days. I will take extensive written notes and use checklists, including a checklist to record levels of student engagement and school impact.

I will also conduct interviews. The interview will be conducted at the school and will last a maximum of one hour. The interview will be arranged after you read the Letter of Information and sign the Consent Form. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

Is your participation voluntary? Yes, your participation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your standing in school. You may request to remove all or part of your responses at any time by contacting the thesis committee at the information provided at the end of this
Letter of Information.

**What will happen to your responses?** We will keep your responses confidential to the extent possible. Only the thesis committee will have access to this information as they will have the password to the encrypted devices. The interview will be audio taped using a digital device and the data stored on an encrypted USB key. The data will then be transcribed and stored onto a computer. This computer will be password protected with only the thesis committee having access to the code.

The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. If the data from this study is used in a secondary study, your confidentiality is maintained and secured. As such, the findings from this study may be disseminated. There will be no monetary compensation for participating in this study but the education system at large may benefit from the outcomes. However, should you be interested, you may request a copy of the findings by contacting a member of the thesis committee through the information provided at the end of the Letter of Information. In keeping with Queen’s policy, the data from this study will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Charles Enyinnia at 9ce7@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Marie Myers at 613-533-3032 or myersmj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca
Appendix D

Consent Form

Faculty of Education, 511 Union Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7M 5R7
September 06, 2011

Dear Parents,

Parental Consent Form for Student Participation in Research

Students’ Engagement and Staying in School

1. I understand that my child will participate in the study entitled — ‘Students’ School Engagement and Staying in School’ conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
2. I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.
3. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
4. I understand that the purpose of this research is to understand the factors present in school as a learning environment that helps students’ engagement and staying in school.
5. I understand that my child will be observed during the researcher’s stay at the school.
6. I understand that my child will be interviewed by the researcher for one hour at the school.
7. I understand that the interviews will be audio taped and that the taped interviews will be transcribed and then the tape will be destroyed.
8. I understand that, upon request, I may have a full description of the results of the study after its completion.
9. I understand that the researcher intends to publish the findings of the study and my child could be contacted after the interview if further clarification is needed.
10. I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that my child is free to withdraw from this study at any time and that I may request the removal of all or part of my child’s data without negative consequences; and that my child is not obliged to answer any questions that he/she finds objectionable or which makes him/her feel uncomfortable.
11. I understand that there are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.
12. I have been assured that confidentiality will be maintained through the use of alphanumeric codes and through the protection of raw data via locked cabinets (paper data, audio data) or by password protection (electronic data). Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. I understand that
every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future.

13. I am aware that any questions about study participation may be directed to Charles Enyinnia at 9ce7@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Marie Myers at 613-533-3032 or myersmj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Charles Enyinnia.
Retain the second copy for your records.

My child has given voluntary assent to participate in the research.

Student’s Name (Please Print): _____________________________________________
Student's signature if 18 or older, in place of parent's signature: ____________________
Parent/Guardian Name (Please Print): ________________________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature: ________________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________________________________

If you would like a copy of the results of the study please provide your email or postal address below:
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
Appendix E

Sample Questions from Interview Guide

Sample Interview Questions

Students’ Engagement and Staying in School.

(A) The interview for the principal

(1) What is your definition of student engagement?

(2) Given your definition of school engagement, what are the advantages/disadvantages; short term/long term?

(3) Why do you think these students were engaged?

(4) What role do you play in making sure that your students are engaged?

(5) Why do you think your decisions on school related matters impact students’ interest?

(6) What kind of collaboration exists between you, the teachers and students?

(7) What specific strategies do you use to foster engagement?

(8) Why do you think that schooling will benefit these students?

(B) Teacher interview

(9) Given your definition of school engagement, what are the advantages/disadvantages; short term/long term?

(10) Tell the story of a time when students were engaged in your class.

(11) Why do you think these students were engaged?

(12) What specific strategies do you use to foster engagement?

(13) Are there some students who seem to be more likely to engage? Why?

(14) Are there some students who seem less likely to engage? Why?
(15) Describe your picture of an engaged student.

(16) What does engagement mean in a school context?

(C) These are the questions for students:

(17) What factors affect your school engagement? - School, family, curriculum, extracurricular activities?

(18) How has your opinion changed over the years from J.S.S 1 to S.S 2/3?

(19) What factors made you change/ retain your opinion of engagement?

(20) What do you think can make you stay engaged and not dropout?

(21) Do you think that going to school will be of help to you?
Appendix F
Demographic Questionnaire

Faculty of Education, 511 Union Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7M 5R7
September 06, 2011
Dear participants,

Demographic Questionnaire

Students’ Engagement and Staying in School

Part One: Demographic Information

Please answer the following demographic questions:

________________________________________________________________________

1. What is your age? o 15 – 16 o 17 – 18 o 19 - 20

2. What grade are you currently in? o Grade 11 o Grade 12

3. What is your geographic home location? o East o West o North o South

4. What context did you grow up in? o Urban o Suburban o Rural

5. Please provide the following information: o I am on scholarship o I do not have a scholarship

6. Have you been attending a private school from grade 7 on? o Yes o No

Part Two: Follow Up Interview

7. Would you be willing to participate in a 60-minute interview and be observed at school? The interview will be held at your convenience. It will concern your learning experiences, and how you perceive your personal learning experience.

   o Yes o No

If you responded YES, please provide your first name/last name, to enable me get required permission from your family and/or phone number below:

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix G

Sample of Modified Blank Observation Sheet

MODIFIED VERSION OF LEUVEN SCALE OBSERVATION SHEET

OBSERVATION OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

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<th>Description</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>Date: School:</td>
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<td>Description: Pseudonym:</td>
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<td>Instructional methodology</td>
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<td>(How do they react? Any sign of effect/engaged)</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
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<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td>(Class response; Positive/Negative; Home work?)</td>
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<td>Welcoming &amp; belonging</td>
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<td>(Tensed up? Happy/sad? Afraid? Participation in activities?)</td>
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<td>Discipline</td>
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<td>(Respect to teachers, students? Early to school? Absent? Outcome?)</td>
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<td>Interest</td>
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<td>(School activities-academics/extracurricular? Environment?)</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
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<td>(Initiative?)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix H

**Sample of Filled Observation Sheet**

**MODIFIED VERSION OF LEUVEN SCALE OBSERVATION SHEET**

**OBSERVATION OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: 09-09-11</th>
<th>School: M.M.S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Description:** *E.g.* Class  

**Pseudonym:** P.L.C.Q.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional methodology</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do they react? Any sign of effect/engaged</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive - reacted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Emotional? Positive/Negative; Facial sign?)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed reactions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Class response; Positive/Negative; Home work?)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcoming &amp; belonging</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tense up? Happy/sad? Afraid? Participation in activities?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Act externally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect to teachers, students? Early to school? Absent? Outcome?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Act externally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School activities-academics/extracurricular? Environment?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clean classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creativity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiative?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clean classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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176
Appendix I

Sample of Coded Transcript

Charles - What is your understanding of students' engagement?

Olive - When we talk of engagement, it depends on the philosophy, the value judgement of the person. Engagement is involvement, active participation, dialogue, and discussion. Students are happy doing that at ease. When you talk of student engagement, it is student’s active involvement in what is happening in the school in its entire ramifications both in decision making and in carrying out the activities; the child is the center of the whole thing.

Charles - Thinking about the child being at the center of his/her engagement, do your school give students opportunity of being part of their decision-making in terms of their academic life?

Olive - Yes, we invite the child for a chat. You seat the child down and with all that the child has, you try to dialogue, and I said dialogue and discussion. From there you find out where the child is moving to, the interest of the child and when you have identified these interest and the capabilities of the child; then, you can now guide the child and as you are guiding the child in that route, the child is happy learning at ease.

Charles - Bearing in mind your definition of students' engagement, do you think it has any advantage?

Olive - Yeah plenty of them! When you engage a child in learning, the child is happy, is not tensed up, he is relaxed. When a child is relaxed with a conducive and decent environment, he learns; there is great productivity in learning and there is mastery. The child thinks critically, develops the abilities of thinking, analyzing, and synthesising and that leads to understanding, productivity, and mastery.

Charles - Supposing the child is not engaged, has it any disadvantage?

Olive - If the child is not engaged, there is disinterest in learning and from there you apply force and when you apply force in order to bring the child to learn the child is shattered and when the child is shattered or disinterested or tensed up, there is no way the child will learn and learning is not taking place. The child is there in fear.

Charles - What are the advantages/long-term advantages of students staying engaged in school?

Olive - The long-term is that the child is mastering the concept you want to or you presented to the child and that makes him/her to grow up as a responsible citizen in the society able to contribute to the up keep of the society and able to face the challenges of life.

Charles - Why do you think that these students in your school are engaged?

Olive - It shows in their eagerness to come to school, because if they are not interested, they will not like to come to school. We resume school by 7:30 a.m. you will be surprised that by 7:00 a.m. you see 2/3 of students coming school happily. When you look at them, they radiate joy because they are interested. They are eager to learn and they are involved. Students going out to remind the teachers the time for their classes, shows that the child is interested in what is happening. Even in doing assignments and carrying out tasks, that shows that the child is interested.