GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE ON SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS IN ZIMBABWEAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF MAKONI DISTRICT.

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on a quantitative inquiry on the role played by school climate in promoting school effectiveness in Zimbabwean secondary schools using a sample of 400 teachers from a population of 1200 teachers in Makoni District in Manicaland in Eastern Zimbabwe. The sample had 220 females and 150 males. The research instrument used was the questionnaire. The study revealed that there was a very high correlation between a positive school climate and a school's high pass rate standards. The findings also revealed that poor results were closely linked to a negative school climate. The study recommends that school heads should create a conducive school climate to enhance the effectiveness of their schools. Furthermore, adequate resources should be provided in rural schools in order to create an enabling climate for high student achievement.

Key Words: Climate, School, Secondary Schools, Teachers and Effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Each school has its own climate or setting and this setting makes one school different from the other in the way it realises its goals. Jack (2010) stresses that schools develop a culture, ethos and environment which might be favourable or unfavourable for their effectiveness. Halpin and Croft (1963) in Chakanyuka (2009) found that school climates ranged on a continuum from open to closed climates. As Szilagyi (1981) in Bowora and Mpofu (2008) state, a school with an open climate is characterised by low disengagement, low hindrance, very high esprit, high intimacy, low aloofness, low production emphasis, very high thrust and high consideration. The closed school has opposite characteristics which are very high disengagement, high hindrance, very low esprit, low intimacy, high aloofness, high production emphasis, low thrust and low consideration (Bowora and Mpofu, 2008). Thus, for a school to be effective there is need for the leader to establish an open climate which leads to high production. Climate is important in that it determines the extent to which the personnel in the organisation perform their various tasks to achieve organisational goals. This study therefore, sets out to investigate the role that climate plays on school effectiveness in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

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Statement of the Problem

School climate determines what staff members do, how they relate to each other and the quality of pupil achievement and other gains an organisation can achieve. It also affects such outputs as satisfaction, creativity and group decision-making. This study sought to explore the role played by climate on school effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to establish the role played by the school climate in determining the effectiveness of schools in Zimbabwe in order to conscientise school authorities about the need to build healthy climates in schools.

Research Questions

In order to determine answers to the main research problem, the research had a three-fold research question.

1.   What are the factors that influence school climate?
2.   Is there any correlation between school climate and the effectiveness of the school?
3.   How can heads improve the climate in their schools?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is premised on the fact that it will benefit school administrators and their teachers through the creation of a conducive school climate for effective development of the schools. The study also hopes to develop new insights about the effects of school climate in order for schools and stakeholders to reduce those aspects of their operations that promote unhealthy climates.

Limitations of the Study

The study employed a relatively small sample to make generalisations about the whole of Zimbabwe. The other limitation relates to the descriptive method that was used in this study. As Ary and Razaviah (2010) argue, the descriptive method lacks predictive power, the research may discover and describe "what is" but is unable to predict "what would be." The respondents may also give false responses thereby affecting the validity of the findings. This would be mitigated by triangulation of methods.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to the role played by climate in the creation of effectiveness of schools using a sample of 400 teachers from Makoni District in Manicaland Province in Eastern Zimbabwe. The study confined itself to the impact of school climate on school effectiveness and other variables that may also play a critical role on effectiveness of schools were outside the purview of this study.

2.   REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The way a person performs in a school is determined in part by individual characteristics and in part by the school atmosphere. This is the internal quality of the school especially as expressed by its numbers. Different schools have different settings. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983:352) in McCaffrey (2008) define school climate as the set of internal characteristics of a school that distinguishes it from other schools and influences the behaviour of the people in it. The climate is the end product of the school groups (students, teachers, parents) as they work to balance the school and individual aspects of a social system. As Mlilo (2007) posits, this end product includes shared values, social beliefs and

social standards. Shared values are agreements as to what is desirable, for example, kindness, social beliefs are perceptions of the nature and essence of people and objects as well as the relationships among them. Social standards are agreements specifying appropriate behaviour in a school for example, norms against stealing and rules regarding dress, (Mlilo, 2007).

According to Belin (2009), school climate may be viewed on the one hand as the enduring characteristics that describe a particular school, distinguish it from other schools and influence the behaviour of the teachers and students and on the other, as the 'feel' that teachers and students have for that school. The climate of the school, therefore, may be thought of roughly as the "personality" of the school. The character of the school can be deduced from the behaviour of its members, more particularly, its leader, as summarised by the old saying that "The school is like its head" (Richard, 2012). A modern school should qualify the old saying and be seen to be not only like its head but also like its teachers and students. As noted by Liston (2012), schools differ markedly in their "feel." School climate, therefore, reflects people's descriptions of what the school is like. The "feel" that exists in a given school as suggested by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) in Bowora and Mpofu (2008) varies as one moves from one school to another. At one school, one feels warm yet in another, one feels cold. Thus, as one moves from one school to another, one gets different personalities.

As Squires (1983) in Richard (2012) states there are six types of climate that obtain in organisations. These are the open climate, autonomous, controlled, familiar, paternal and the closed climates. According to Mlilo (2007), the open climate depicts a situation in which the members enjoy extremely high esprit. The teachers work well together without bickering and griping. Teachers are not burdened by a lot of work or by routine reports. The head's policies facilitate the teachers' accomplishment of their tasks. There is very low hindrance. On the whole, teachers as a group, enjoy friendly relations with each other, but they apparently feel no need for an extremely high degree of intimacy (Chivore, 1996). The teachers obtain job satisfaction and are motivated to overcome difficulties and frustrations. They have the incentive to work things out and to keep the school going. Teachers are proud to be associated with their school. The behavour of the head represents an appropriate integration between his or her own personality and the role he or she is required to play as head.

The autonomous climate's distinguishing feature is the almost complete freedom that the head gives to teachers to provide their own structures for interaction so that they can find ways within the group for satisfying their social demands. In the controlled climate, McCaffrey (2008) states that everything else is marked by pressure for achievement at the expense of social needs satisfaction. Everyone works hard and there is little time for friendly relations with others or for deviation from established controls and directives. This climate leans towards task-achievement and away from social needs satisfaction. People are too busy to waste time on other people. They are highly motivated to do their work.

The main feature of the familiar climate is the conspicuously friendly manner of both the head and the teachers (Robson, 2012). Social needs satisfaction is extremely high, while little is done to control or direct the group's activities towards goal achievement. Teachers do very little and accomplish little in a task-oriented situation. The head exerts little control in directing activities. There are too many people trying to tell others how things should be done. Few rules and regulations are established as guides to suggest to the teachers how things should be done (Robson, 2012). The head neither emphasises production nor does much personally, to insure that the teachers are performing their tasks correctly.

The paternal climate is characterised by the ineffective attempts of the head to control the teachers as well as to satisfy their social needs (Barry, 2009). The head's behaviour is not free or genuine and is perceived by the teachers as non-motivating. This climate is partly closed. Teachers do not work well together. They are split into factions because of the quality of leadership. Teachers allow the head to do as he or she pleases. Low esprit results when the teachers obtain inadequate satisfaction in respect to both task accomplishment and social needs. The head, on the other hand, is far from being aloof. He or she is very busy trying to be everywhere at once, checking, monitoring and telling people how to do things. There is emphasis on production but somehow, nothing does get done.

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The closed climate refers to a situation in which the group members obtain little satisfaction from either task-achievement or social needs. The head is ineffective in directing the activities of the teachers and is not interested in looking after the teachers' personal welfare (McCaffree, 2008). Teachers do not work together. Group achievement is minimal. People work on their own as individuals. Teachers are not happy at work. The head is highly aloof and impersonal in controlling and directing the activities of the teachers. The head does not give teachers freedom to perform whatever leadership acts are necessary. The head does not provide adequate leadership for the teachers.

The above information shows that the head plays a pivotal role in the construction of a school climate. In his or her role as climate builder, the head's responsibilities` encompass supervision and coordination of the entire instructional process including curriculum development in the school. A healthy school climate is a prerequisite for school effectiveness. The climate prevailing in a school differentiates one school from another and influences the behaviour of the people in a school (Barry, 2009).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Leedy (2009), the descriptive survey method looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data because as Anderson (2011) argues, it increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and one open-ended question. All respondents were given the questionnaires by the researchers at their schools. The researchers also collected the questionnaires personally in order to increase on rate of return of the instrument. As a result, all the questionnaires were returned and there were no non-returns. According to Phillips and Pugh (2011), non-returns introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to be different from respondents in many ways thereby adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings. Data collected from the questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications then deduced and recorded.

Findings and Discussion

This part is presented in two sections, namely, actual findings and discussions.

Table 1 : Distribution of Respondents by Sex (N – 400)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	180	45
Female	220	55
Total	**400**	**100**

Table 1 above shows that there were more female respondents than male ones. The datum was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed that most schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male ones.

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Table 2: Composition of Respondents by Age (N = 400)

Age in Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	0	0
20 – 29	130	32
30 – 39	204	51
40 – 49	50	13
50 and above	16	4
Total	**400**	**100**

The information on Table 2 above reveals that the majority of the respondents are below forty years of age (83%). These are relatively young teachers who require more leadership guidance and direction than the older teachers. Those above 40 years constituted 27% of the sample.

Table 3: Composition of Respondents by Professional Qualifications (N = 400)

Professional Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate in Education	50	12
Diploma in Education	240	60
Bachelors Degree	34	9
Masters Degree	6	1
Untrained	70	18
Total	**400**	**100**

Table 3 shows that 65% of the respondents were in possession of relevant professional qualifications. Those without professional qualifications constituted 35% implying that a significant number of teachers are not equipped with skills to properly handle their professional work.

Table 4: Responses to the Question: "Is your school known for producing high pass rates at public examinations?"(N = 400)

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	10
No	360	90
Not Sure	0	0
Total	**400**	**100**

As Table 4 reveals, the majority of the teachers indicated that their schools had no reputation for producing high pass rates in public examinations. A paltry 10% indicated that their schools were known for high pass rates at public examinations.

Table 5 : Responses to the Question: "Your head promotes a healthy atmosphere where everybody works towards promoting high standards of performance."
(N = 400)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	44	11
No	256	89
Total	**400**	**100**

Most of the respondents (89%) in Table 5 indicated that their heads did not build healthy atmospheres that promoted high standards of performance by teachers and pupils. Those who felt that their heads promoted a healthy atmosphere constituted 11% of the respondents. This information almost correlates with the information on table 4 where 10% of the respondents indicated that their schools were well known for producing good results which could be due to heads' efforts in promoting a healthy climate.

Table 6: Responses to the Question: "There are regular conflicts amongst teachers, parents and the head in your school?" (N = 400)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	340	85
No	60	15
Total	**400**	**100**

Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents (85%) indicated that their schools were characterised by endless conflicts amongst teachers, parents and the head. Those who disagreed with the statement constituted 15% of the respondents.

Table 7: Responses to the Question: "How are relations among stakeholders in your school?" (N = 400)

Statement	Always	%ntage	Not at all	%ntage	Frequency	%
High level of interaction between teachers and head.	140	35	260	65	400	100
Teachers relate well with parents.	256	64	144	36	400	100
High interaction level among teachers.	116	29	284	71	400	100
Teachers interact very well with pupils.	122	31	278	69	400	100
Teachers have complete freedom on teaching methods.	60	15	340	85	400	100
The school provides good working conditions for teachers.	40	15	360	90	400	100

Table 7 above shows that the majority of respondents (65%) indicated that there was no high level of interaction between teachers and heads. However, 35% indicated that the interaction between heads and teachers was high. The majority of respondents also indicated that teachers did not relate well with parents (64%) and those who said they were related well

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were (32%). Seventy-one percent (71%) indicated that there was low interaction amongst teachers and 29% said the interaction was high. Most respondents (69%) also indicated that teachers did not interact well with pupils and only 31% thought they interacted well with pupils. Only 15% of the teachers indicated that they had complete freedom on teaching methods and the majority (85%) said there was no freedom on this issue. Finally, only 10% of the respondents indicated that their schools provided good working conditions for teachers and the bulk (90%) said not at all to this statement.

The questionnaire had one open-ended question which wanted to find out from the respondents what they thought were the positive results of a positive climate. The most common responses included the following:

- High pass rate at public examinations.
- Safe and organised working place.
- Effective classroom management.
- High engagement of teachers, pupils and the head on their core business.
- High achievement in co-curricular activities.
- Highly co-operative parents.
- Very minimum conflict situations in the school.
- High success rate of former pupils in the field of work.

4. DISCUSSION

Most respondents are qualified teachers. This, under a healthy school climate, enhances the teaching/learning process. Qualified teachers are an asset in any school because they provide professional guidance to pupils. However, this is dependent upon the atmosphere under which they will be operating. They are also particular about their conditions of service since some of them might be members of professional associations and might not accept a climate that they view as oppressive. They would prefer working under an open climate. As Bowora and Mpofu (2005) argue, qualified and experienced teachers prefer an autonomous climate where the head allows them to provide their own structures for interaction.

Most of the respondents indicated that the schools were also not associated with producing high pass rates at public examinations. One significant criterion that most authorities and stakeholders use to gauge the effectiveness of schools is the performance of pupils in public examinations. High performance of pupils is associated with healthy climates. In a healthy climate, the head's policies and actions facilitate the teachers' accomplishments of their tasks. As Mlilo (2007) posits, in a healthy climate, there is very low hindrance and high achievement by both teachers and pupils.

Most schools were characterised by endless conflicts amongst teachers, parents and the head. Conflict in schools is inevitable because naturally, where people work together, they are bound to differ in many respects. Teachers may disagree on resource allocation, parents may diverge on how the school should be. Emotions can run high on a variety of issues. The potential for conflict exists because people have different needs, views and values. The challenge for schools is to find ways of managing conflict constructively so that those involved can learn and grow from the experience. This can only happen in a healthy climate. As McCaffree (2008) posits, where the climate is open, autonomous and positive, teachers obtain job satisfaction and are motivated to overcome difficulties and frustrations. They have the incentive to work things out and to keep the school going.

Data also reveals that relations in most of the schools were not conducive for promoting goal achievement. The majority of respondents indicated that there was minimum interaction between teachers and heads. Teachers did not relate well with parents. There was also low interaction on professional business amongst teachers. Pupils and teachers did not

interact well. Teachers indicated that their schools did not provide good working conditions that motivated them to perform better for the success of the pupils. Relations between key stakeholders in the school constitute a very significant variable for the success of that school in realising its objectives. The school is a place to learn and that is the first thing that should be on the heads', teachers', pupils', parents' and other stakeholders' minds when they interact on school business. The core business of any school as an enterprise is to produce education for the learners. As Barry (2009) advises, it is the duty of every school leader to harness the energies of all stakeholders towards the core business of the school which is providing the best learning opportunities for its pupils. This implies that school leaders should create conducive atmospheres for all in the school to work harmoniously to achieve the school goals.

The study also revealed that most teachers were aware of the positive results of a healthy climate. These results included high pass rates by pupils at public examinations, safe and organised working place, effective classroom management, high engagement of teachers, pupils and the head on their core business, high achievement in co-curriculum activities, a highly co-operative parents body and minimum conflict situations as well as high success rate of former pupils in life-after-school. A healthy climate therefore, according to this article, is a "dream climate" for most teachers. A healthy climate which uses a fair mixture of the various types of climates is a pre-requisite for school effectiveness (Robson, 2012). It therefore, behoves every head of school to build a school climate that promotes co-operation, high productivity and ownership of the school processes. School heads should understand that whilst teachers might be aware of healthy climates, they are also prepared to work under unhealthy climates merely to fulfil an obligation as employees and not as professional colleagues in the school. Behind the scenes, they might show their displeasure about goings-on in the school which may manifest itself through unproductive actions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Given the background of the findings above, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- The majority of schools did not produce high pass rates at public examinations as a result of climates that inhibit high productivity of teachers and pupils.
- In most schools, destructive conflict was endemic amongst all the stakeholders and most of the school's productive time was spent on petty fights at the expense of paying attention to the schools' core business.
- Relations amongst various stakeholders are very poor. As a result, there was very minimal professional interaction amongst teaches, heads, pupils and parents.
- Most schools have poor working conditions for their teachers. As a result, teachers had no motivation to perform at their best.
- Teachers are aware of the role played by a healthy climate in the promotion of the school's achievement of its goals.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations.

- School heads should work closely with their teachers to create conducive climates for high pass rates in their schools.
- Some mechanisms to reduce conflict should be put in place within the context of a healthy climate so that teachers' energies are expended more on teaching rather than fighting each other.

- School leaders should ensure that relations amongst major school stakeholders are cordial and this is possible in a healthy climate within the school.
- Schools should improve working conditions of their teachers in order to motivate them to work harder as working conditions constitute fundamental needs for any worker.
- Heads of schools should know that most of their teachers understand what a healthy climate constitute; and therefore, should work closely with them to construct one for the benefit of the schools.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organise workshops and staff development sessions for heads to provide guidance for the construction of healthy climates.

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