A Review of Issues on the Importance of Creating and Sustaining a Positive School Climate to Enhance Academic Excellence in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract— **A positive school climate is a means to reducing school violence and inappropriate behaviour; and is created by students, teachers, the principals and the parents. Although the behaviour of teachers and students contribute to the kind of climate in a school, the principal's behaviour and practices are the main determinants of the climate that exists in schools. Their behaviours and practices can hinder or foster positive school climate. This is because both the learners and teachers, among other stakeholders, look up to the principalsfor leadership, motivation and development. This paper is based on a review of existing literature on the importance of creating and sustaining a positive school climate that enhances academic excellence in secondary schools. The methodology adopted, is theoretical, as the paper engages in interpreting the relationship between the behaviours and practices of the principals, teachers and leaners, among other stakeholders in order to create and sustain a positive school climate. The greatest challengefacing the principals is to maintain high standards of academics and character of students so that they can get the best in examinations. From the information discussed in this paper, the ministry of education, among other stakeholders, should organize workshops and expose the principals to all the details of a positive school climate in order to realize academic excellence in secondary schools.**

Index Terms— **Academic excellence,Creating, School climate, Secondary schools, Sustaining.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizational school climate can be defined as a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by teachers, affects their behavior, and is based on their behavior and their collective perceptions of behavior in schools. Its properties are likely to be experienced and observed by the organizational members while being reported by them in an applicable questionnaire (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Hoy *et al*. (1991) simplify the definition by stating that the organizational climate of a school is the set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another and influences the behavior of its members. Organizational climate is a fairly persistent quality of the organization's internal environment, that is:

(a) faced by the organization's members,
(b) has an influence on their behavior, and
(c) can be described on the basis of the values of a specific set of attributes or characteristics in that particular

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organization (Hoy *et al*., 1991). The term 'climate' is used as a metaphor for organizations; it refers to the psychological environment for relations within the organization (Acun-Kapikiran & Kapikiran, 2011; Bayrak *et al.*, 2014). It should be noted that in the 21st century, organizational climate has received considerable attention from many sectors. This is so because organizational climate is often related to organizational effectiveness (Lazaridou & Tsolakidis, 2011).

Krug (1992) notes that the instructional climate of a school is not much concerned with the contentment or positive attitude of the students, teachers and principals, but is related to their perceptions of norms. These norms consist of instructional performance, expectations for learning, the school's sense of purpose, and overall commitment to this common purpose. Vos, Van der Westhuizen, Mentz and Ellis (2012) define organizational climate as a concept that encompasses the general motion of expressing the enduring organizational life quality. Based on this understanding, the organizational climate framework has increasingly been shaped while establishing an understanding that organizational climate can be measured and conceptualised (Vos *et al.*, 2012).

Mine (2009) suggests that organizational school climate is the individuals' perception of the environment in which they work. Schools characterized by the virtues of unity, trust and familiarity among the staff members will have a highly efficient and effective team that is results-oriented (Ali & Hale, 2009). In the same sense, the organizational climate is a form of energy. The effects of that energy are dependent on the way this energy is directed and channeled. Some institutions will employ this energy to improve the workplace while others will misuse it to the point of causing more problems and difficulties within the same institutions (Dimitri & Mieke, 2012). The two aforementioned generalizations have to be made if the climate is to be perceived as a representation of the capacity of the school to act efficiently and effectively as it should and expected.

A positive organizational school climate automatically contributes to staff performance in schools. Moreover, this climate promotes increased morale while improving the students achievement level (Dorathi, 2011). In her research, Dorathi used climate and school effectiveness scales in a survey of 240 teachers from both private and public schools. Her findings link school climate to student achievement and attributes organizational school climate as one of the most significant ingredients contributing to a successful

instructional programme. A statistically significant positive correlation between organizational climate and service orientation has also been found. Without a climate that creates a well-functioning and harmonious school, it becomes difficult to hit a high academic achievement (Dorathi, 2011).

From an academic point of view, organizational school climate is constituted of an interpersonal interaction between the behavior of the teachers and that of the principal (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). The interaction in groups by teachers can be referred to as synonymous to the topographical contours in a place while the leadership of the principal can be referred to as the atmospheric conditions. The two combined result in a peculiar social texture unique to each organization and is referred to as its climate (Ali & Hale, 2009). Teale and Scott (2010) describe three standard categories in which the organizational climate can be conceptualized and measured, namely:

(a) Perceptual measurement; individual attribute approach
(b) Perceptual measurement; organizational attribute approach
(c) Multiple measurement; organizational attribute approach.

The concept of organizational climate in modern studies is based on these three categories. However, with the focus being based on the individual nature, the psychological climate has been continuously used in the perceptual measurement – individual attribute approach. Indeed, literature points to aspects of the principal's behavior and those of the teachers' behavior that are contributing factors to organizational school climate. The varied impact of the principals and the teachers' behavior on organizational school climate is discussed below.

II. LIMITATIONS

The issues discussed in this paper are based on the analysis of existing literature only. The limitation in this kind of approach is that an actual study could counter the views expressed by earlier scholars as documented in this paper. Nonetheless, this paper generates a number of critical issues of concern on the need to create and sustain a positive school climate in order to enhance academic excellence in Kenyan secondary schools. These issues could be of much interest to future research students on the same areas.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper involves a review of literature touching on issues of importance to creating and sustaining a positive school climate necessary for learners' academic excellence in secondary schools. The review of literature illustrates a good relationship between the principal leadership and the school climate of more robust and effective team of teachers who are committed to deliver on the school goals. The behaviors and practices of principals are the main determinants of the climate that exists in schools. This is because teachers rely on the principal to provide leadership, motivation and developments and students depend on the principal to ensure they get quality education.

IV. MAIN DISCUSSION

A. Creating a Positive School Climate

The school climate can be viewed in every aspect of the school ranging from the teachers and students' attendance records, in the classroom, during breaks, from the students' mobility in the hallways and the like (Freiberg & Stein, 1999). According to Harris and Lowery (2002), the school climate is created and can be maintained unless an alteration occurs in the life of the school. While it is true that the behaviours and practices of the principals, teachers and the students affect a school climate, to a larger extent, the principal is central to creating the school climate. This is because what the principals do establish the climate of the school whether positive or negative (Hall & George, 1999). Therefore, it is necessary and worthwhile to examine how a positive climate can be created and sustained in secondary schools.

The school climate can be manipulated to directly affect the behavior of people within the school (Moorhead & Griffin, 1998). Fundamental to creating a positive school climate is job satisfaction, recognition of human dignity and teamwork, as discussed below.

B. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the common factors that influence teacher absenteeism and turnover rate (Keller, 2003). It has been noted that good physical working conditions in any occupation can have a positive impact upon job satisfaction, attendance, effort, effectiveness and morale (Becker, 1981). According to Keller (1995), it is difficult to separate behavior from work environment when addressing teachers' morale and job satisfaction. Becker (1981) states that physical surroundings impact on job satisfaction and, subsequently, job performance. Decreases in job performance and increases in turnover rate result in real financial costs on the part of schools as a result of inadequate facilities. Further, Becker notes that adequate space with comfortable temperature, furnishings and lighting will increase the satisfaction of occupants and, as a result, increase individual capabilities.

According to Harris and Brannick (1999), job satisfaction refers to the extent to which workers like their jobs. These scholars assert that the quality of education depends on the availability of qualified and motivated teachers. Therefore, if quality education is the goal of the school, then the focus should be on creating and sustaining the school climate that will encourage teachers to be committed to their school responsibilities and duties as is required by the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission of Kenya. O'Malley (2000) asserts that the level of teachers' happiness on the job affects the quality of their lives and level of commitment to work. O'Malley further says that teachers who enjoy their job work harder and stay longer on the job. O'Malley (2000), however, strongly believes that it is possible to enjoy emotionally rewarding experiences at work if there is a good job and a favorable context in which it can be enjoyed.

It is, therefore, the responsibility of principals to lead in a way that teachers and students will be motivated, by not stressing job demands over emotional needs. The principal needs to be aware of teachers' as well as students' personal

problems, and ensure that those problems are not left unattended. Otherwise, all efforts to create a happy environment characterized by teachers' and students' involvement may not yield good fruits. Oyetunji (2006) is of the view that the principal needs to use various motivating techniques like praises, recognition, among others, in directing the affairs of the school so that teachers can enjoy their work and students can become interested in school. In so doing, the students will be engaged more in their academic activities that will eventually lead to enhanced performance in National Examinations. In Kenya, teachers' morale has generally become very low because of the attendant problems brought about by the FDSE programme that has resulted in over-enrolment of students. Most teachers have been rendered unhappy by excessive workloads such as marking several of students' scripts, even past the schooling hours.

C. Human Dignity

The principal interacts with students and teachers over daily school life situations. This is because people are at the heart of the teaching profession. The principal relates and works with people every schooling day. Therefore, as suggested by Azzara (2001), the principal needs to be a people-oriented person, and should remember that teachers and students are human and, as such, have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the principal to create situations where the strengths of people around him will be tapped to facilitate the achievement of school goals. Benton (1995) urges principals to recognize and uphold human dignity in their work. This implies that the principal should perceive teachers as colleagues so as to create a great work harmony. Benton further says that the principal as well as teachers need to balance individual concerns in their private lives with demands of their jobs as the nature of their work requires both personal and professional management. In essence, the principal needs to model and facilitate good relations among the school stakeholders by recognizing the inherent worth of human beings who depend on him/her, irrespective of status or position in the school hierarchy.

A principal who respects and treats every member of the school community fairly and equally encourages and emphasizes behaviours that create a positive school climate (Harris & Lowery, 2002). Further, Heller (2002) affirms that showing compassion to teachers makes them willing to put in extra hours when the need arises. Heller believes in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and motivation which states that people function at high levels when their basic needs are met. Thus when people are treated in a humane way, their best potentials are brought out and utilized to the advantage of the students' academic performance in schools.

It is clear from the literature review that a positive school climate needs to be actively created and sustained by members of the student, teachers and other school personnel, among other stakeholders. When all the members of the school work together to understand and improve their school climate, such collective action powerfully supports youth development and students' motivation to learn in school (Cohen, 2006). According to Ghazi (2003), a positive school climate promotes co-operative learning, group cohesion, respect and mutual trust. As Marzano (2007) states, a positive school climate is characterized by strong collaborative learning communities, and research shows that this improves teacher practice as well as student learning through dialogue and collaboration around engaging classroom instruction. In essence, when students partner with the principals, teachers and other stakeholders work to improve school climate, they promote essential learning skills as well as life and career skills that provide the foundation for 21st century learning (Marzano, 2007).

D. Teamwork

A team is defined as a group of people with complementary skills who work actively together to achieve a common purpose for which they hold themselves collectively accountable (George, 2003). In other words, teamwork occurs when teachers work together for the same purpose and their skills are well utilized to achieve common goals. According to Cohen (2003), when teachers work as a team, they serve their customers better. In effect, when teachers share ideas and experiences with regard to teaching, learning and discipline, they are likely to be more effective and efficient in the classroom.

Teamwork can enhance quality management in schools since teams utilize resources more efficiently and effectively, increase organizational effectiveness, improve the quality of education programmes and create better learning and working environments. Thus, successful teamwork is considered an indispensable ingredient in the process of building successful schools (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002). The findings of DuFour *et al.* (2004) suggest that when teachers work collaboratively, it increases internal motivation, general job satisfaction, work efficacy and professional commitment. In this case, when teachers work together it benefits both the teachers and the students in schools. Indeed, working as a team enables teachers to develop coordinated students' management strategies to address learning and behavior problems. As a result, students with learning problems receive necessary assistance and those who exhibit disciplinary problems receive proper guidance with regard to acceptable behaviour (Oyetunji, 2006). This will definitely increase the teachers' competence on their job and boost the relationships among teachers. Therefore, to a reasonable extent, working as a team enhances positive school climate. It is assumed that teachers are better able to work together as a group if they share common goals and if the school setting encourages it.

School climate is an important ingredient that relates to the productivity and well-being of teachers, students and parents, among others stakeholders. As an instructional leader, the principal is the key figure in promoting an academic learning environment within the school that is conducive to student learning. Promoting an academic learning climate, according to Murphy (1990), has to do with the behaviors of the principals that influence the norms, beliefs and attitudes of the teachers, students and parents. Since good teachers' morale and high student achievement go hand in hand, the school principal has to make the school environment conducive and motivate teachers on their job to indirectly promote students' achievement and bring about school improvement.

School principals should be aware of the fact that creating a positive and supportive climate is one of the most important aspects of their responsibilities. Moreover, the school principals believe that the climate among and between teachers is one of the factors with which to measure school success (National Association of Secondary School Principal [NASSP], 2001). Therefore, it can be said that school principals should embrace a transformational style of leadership. This style of leadership is effective in creating a goal-oriented atmosphere in the school. This is because the situation in some public secondary schools requires a principal who will lift the school from a state of complacency and failure to a state of dignity, order and high performance. If the principal is able to communicate his vision for the school, and be able to set high standards through his or her example and behavior, then teachers will rise up to the new challenges. In essence, when the principals are able to establish the kind of relationship that causes the staff to see them as partners, with whom they pursue shared goals, it will enhance a positive climate in the school and result in productivity. This is so because the type of relationships that exist between teachers and students and between the school and parents have a direct impact on the type of school climate created. It is, therefore, clear that the principal is the key individual who can initiate, work towards creating and sustaining a positive school climate in terms of directing and moldingteachers' and students' behavior and attitudes towards the school and work. It is also clear that teachers' involvement and empowerment enhances their commitment to their jobs which indirectly builds students' character and instils in them the virtue of hard work. As a result, a positive school climate will prevail in the school.

A team is a group of people purposely working together for clearly shared goals. Teamwork must be based on a clear sense of purpose and direction. The principal should try to get a balance of gender in leadership and team members should build up leadership skills among all stakeholders. It is also important to encourage younger members of staff, parents and students to become members of the teams where their skills would provide useful input towards the improvement of the school. The principal may not necessarily lead each team but it is his/her responsibility to facilitate and maintain team building spirit and processes amongst and between themselves, the staff, students and other stakeholders. A team building process includes involvement of and consultation with relevant stakeholders before making major decisions that affect them. It also entails making use of their suggestions and advice (MOE&HRD, 1999).

E. Sustaining a Positive School Climate

Freiberg and Stein (1999) lucidly state that sustaining a school climate is like tending a garden that requires continuous effort to retain its beauty. This implies that continuous effort is required to create and maintain a positive school climate. This sustenance can be achieved in a number of ways, including motivation, evaluation and feedback and staff development, as discussed below.

F. Motivation

The need for security, sense of belonging and recognition goes a long way in determining a worker's attitudes and level of performance. A leader should also recognize that individuals' needs are most of the time satisfied better with recognition and support than with money (Benton, 1995). This underscores the importance for the principals as leaders to make use of praise to motivate their teachers in order to realize a positive climate conducive for effective teaching and learning in school.

According to Maddock and Fulton (1998) and Asworth (as cited in Zeng & Gao, 2012), school principals have great opportunities to use the emotion that already exists in the school in a constructive way to energize the teachers and students, and maximize motivation by getting them to be personally engaged in school activities in pursuit of school goals. Henceforth, as a motivator, the principal needs to consistently acknowledge and praise the performance of both the teachers and students in schools. This will go a long way in motivating them and, therefore, enhance participation and performance in schools.

G. Education and Feedback

The purpose of evaluating teachers should be to provide them with feedback on their performance (Steffy, 1989). Therefore, evaluation should be seen as a means to an end. In order to maintain a positive climate, the principal needs to evaluate the performance of teachers from time to time to enhance effective teaching. This is so because evaluation is as important as giving feedback. According to Steffy (1989), no feedback means no recognition, and no recognition means no reward, and this could lead to discouragement and frustration. As Hill (1997) states, feedback emphasizes not only the act of giving, but also how it is given. Feedback builds confidence and competence in teachers when it is given in an appropriate way. This in essence is what workers value, and their strength and contributions are enhanced. Anything contrary to this only serves to disappoint and demoralize them.

In a school situation, the principal needs to provide teachers with feedback in an appropriate manner to either encourage them to keep up the good work they are doing or to advise them to improve in one area or the other, and this greatly helps the principal to effectively manage teachers' performance. As Hill (as cited in Oyetunji, 2006) points out, people like being recognized for outstanding performance and teachers are no different from other professionals; they appreciate being guided or praised as the situation demands. Indeed, regular evaluation of teachers' work as a means to improving teaching fosters positive climate in schools.

H. Staff Development

The main goal of the school is to realize effective student learning. Therefore, it is imperative that schools be in places where both the students and teachers have capacities to create and achieve the set goals. Consequently, just as students continuously increase in knowledge, teachers should also increase and renew their professional knowledge by ongoing learning and developing of more effective and efficient ways to achieve school goals. According to Harris (2002), staff development is critical to student progress and, therefore, school improvement. Harris' research findings show that successful schools encourage and facilitate the learning of

both teachers and students. Thus, the quality of staff development and learning is pivotal to maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Cohen and Scheer (2003) concur that teacher-centered development plans, which cater for the needs, interests and talents of teachers, are central to improving performance in schools. That is why Speck and Knipe (2001) are of the opinion that teachers should have input in their professional development plans. This is because teachers work directly with students and, therefore, are in the best position to understand the needs of students. Besides, teachers are the first recipients of professional development content.

The purpose of staff development is to help teachers as individuals and as a team to become more effective in helping students achieve the intended results of their education (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In the real sense, staff development benefits both the teachers and the school because teachers learn for themselves, which makes them more effective teachers in class. This is because the passion to learn will spill over to their students and this may increase students' enthusiasm to learn. Further, when teachers become learners they are able to see and experience the frustrations and triumphs of their students and this may probably help them to better understand their students and to know how to handle them more effectively. Ubben *et al*. (2001) strongly believe that it is the responsibilities of the principals to set conditions that will enable teachers to reach their full potential. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the principal to initiate and support staff development programmes in schools.

The principal is the secretary to the Board of Management (BOM) and is in charge of the day-to-day activities in the school. Where the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) has not appointed Heads of Department (HODs), the principal appoints competent and experienced teachers among the teaching staff. The principal should ensure the continuous professional development of all staff through training, attendance of seminars and relevant courses for all (Wango, 2009). Schools can sponsor teachers for in-service training offered by, say, Kenya Educational Management Institute { KEMI}on leadership and management, and those offered by, say, Kenya National Examination Council {KNEC}for examiners, among others. This will go a long way in preparing teachers to be effective and efficient school managers, and be better placed to prepare students to excel in their national examinations.

V. WAY FORWARD

The core function of both the principals and teachers is to ensure that their schools are conducive for teaching and learning. They are expected to help students to excel in their academic endeavors. The principal's leadership behaviors and practices, therefore, ultimately affect the teachers' behavior, the accomplishment of teaching goals and the work environment. From the research, it is clear that there is a positive relationship between the principal's leadership and the school climate. The principal, therefore, has to consciously create a positive school climate by employing favorable leadership behaviors and practices in order to make both teachers' and students' stay in school a worthwhile.

While creating a positive school climate is the collective effort of both the principals and the teachers, the principal carries the vision and is, therefore, tasked with ensuring that the whole school fraternity and stakeholders are committed to excellence. The teachers' involvement, commitment and participation, therefore, rest on the leadership of their principals. Therefore, a positive school climate is the cumulative effect of reciprocal relationships between the principals and teachers, among teachers, and between the entire school and parents, among other stakeholders.

The results emanating from literature reviewed in this study in connection with the prevailing school climate in schools indicated that there are two types of climates in schools, namely closed and open school climate. It is important that secondary school principals are aware of the various climates that exist, and other aspects of school climate. In this respect, the Ministry of Education should go ahead and organize workshops where experts in the field will expose principals to all the details of school climate. This may include the meaning, importance, the dimensions, how good climate can be created, how it can be improved and sustained, among others.

Teachers have a great role to play in creating and sustaining a positive school climate as demonstrated by the literature reviewed. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should handle their work concerns with a lot of maturity and use proper channels and exercise patience while waiting for the principals to address issues. There is need for the teachers to share in the school's vision, and their full participation in planning and accomplishing the plans towards realizing school goals is critical. Henceforth teachers should be encouraged to be more committed and faithful to the success of the students they teach.

To ascertain the validity of issues raised by the many studies and other scholarly works reviewed in this paper on creating and sustaining a positive school climate, the author suggests that research should be conducted in the following areas;

a. Influence of school climate on students' academic performance in Kenya sec school.
b. Impact of principal leadership on school climate in secondary schools in Kenya.
c. Strategies for creating and sustaining a positive climate in secondary schools in Kenya.

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