AN INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Creating and sustaining positive school climate has become a vital factor in modern school management. This is because positive school climate has been found to be an essential ingredient of school effectiveness. This study was driven by the assumption that private schools in Delta state are better managed than the public secondary schools. This assumption could be attributed to many factors, one being the management proficiency in creating positive school climate in these schools. The study was therefore set to examine the difference in school climate of the private and public secondary schools in Delta state, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study with the population comprising all the teachers in private and public secondary schools in Delta state. The multi-stage sampling procedure involving the cluster, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were adopted and 1,200 teachers were sampled from 679 secondary schools (328 private and 351 public). Data were collected through an instrument titled School Climate Description Questionnaire adapted from John and Taylor (2005). Analysis of the data collected involved the use of the "Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Test of hypotheses involved the use of t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that teachers' social interactions significantly differ in private and public schools. It also showed a significant difference in principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers in private and public secondary schools. Consequently, it was recommended that School principals should develop an open climate characterised by a high degree of trust as well as low disengagement, and that Principals should enhance their personal commitment and interaction expressed through regular effective meetings with staff to discuss progress and problems of students.
Key words: School, Private, Public, Climate.

Introduction

The creation, development and sustenance of positive school climate and conducive learning environment are areas of importance in school management. Educational managers must understand that a positive learning environment

provides a healthy soil for students to flourish. It enhances the right attitudes, feelings and values as well as builds positive interpersonal relationships. Olaniyonu (1999), states that the learning experiences of students are better expressed within the facilities available. Positive school climate enhances the recognition of the needs and successes of individuals within the organisation. According to Templar (2005), creating a good atmosphere is not only easy but also essential because, if members of staff are sullen, despondent, depressed and surly, their productivity becomes negatively affected.

School climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects that are more susceptible to change and provide the preconditions necessary for effective teaching and learning. School climate as described by Hoy & Miskel (2007), refers to teachers' perceptions of the general work environment of the school; the formal organisation; informal organisation; personalities of participants, and organisational leadership influence. It is the sum of values, culture, safety practices and organisational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways. It encompasses the school's physical attributes as well as levels of order, satisfaction and productivity. Halpin and Croft as cited in Hoy and Miskel, (2007) identified four types of school climates namely:

(i) **The Open Climate**: This is described as having a high degree of trust, esprit de corp and low disengagement. It is a situation where the principal and the teachers are all committed to their jobs. The principal leads by example and the teachers carry out their duties without so much supervision or rules and regulations.

(ii) **The Closed Climate**: Here the trust and espritde corp are low and disengagement is high. The principal stresses routine, has no respect for the teachers, the teachers' response is minimal with little commitment to their job.

(iii) **The Engaged Climate**: This is described as a situation where the principal is ineffective in his or her control of the staff who are highly competent. The principal is rigid, but the teachers ignore his or her behaviour and conduct themselves as professionals. They enjoy their work and respect the competence of their colleagues.

(iv) **The Disengaged Climate**: Here the principal's behaviour is open, concerned and supportive. He or she listens to teachers and gives them freedom to operate on their professional knowledge, while teachers do not like the principal, and even each other and are uncommitted.

A school with positive climate is one that has effective strategies in place to support students' learning at all levels. The students' needs drive the range and intensity of interventions and strategies. Brooks (2005) notes that cordial relationship between teachers and students as well teachers and principals is one of the factors

involved in creating a positive school climate. Deci and Chandler cited in Brooks, (2005) describe a positive school climate as one that uses as little control as possible. It encourages students to think through their own problems rather than feeding them solutions. It permits them to try out their own plans and ideas and allows them to work at their own speed. The new paradigm of management emphasizes an environment in which growth and empowerment of the individuals in an organisation are the keys to success. It is therefore imperative that educational leaders learn to build the appropriate school climate that maximizes human potentials.

In this regard, the conduciveness of the learning environment is also germane. To achieve effective learning in a school, the environment needs to be conducive to learning. This is because it is very difficult for any meaningful learning to take place in an environment that is not conducive. Hutchinson (2003) contends that room temperature, comfort of seating, background noise and visual distractions are all environmental factors that can affect concentration. Conducive learning environment could be allowing students space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process, creating and maintaining stimulating learning environment through effective classroom organisation. Castaldi, cited in Aigboje, (2007) posits that conducive learning environment entails the provision of educational facilities which enable a skillful teacher to achieve a required level of instructional effectiveness. Hellriegel and Slocum cited in Peretomode, (1991) describe organisational climate as a set of attributes that can be perceived about an organisation and its units which may be described by the practices, processes and ways of dealing with members of the unit and its environment. According to Girman (2001), school climate conducive to learning is one which is supportive of the learning process: as a purposeful, orderly and cooperative environment. Girman further asserts that it is difficult to escape the conviction that order, sense of purpose, relative quietness and pleasure in learning play a role in the achievement of school effectiveness. In the same vein, Babalola and Ayeni (2004) posit that creating an environment that will attract future leaders is vital to any organisation saying that leaders must be active and generate activities that are productive and encourage, create and command changes in the organisation, they must create a climate in which potential leaders will thrive. Thus positive school climate is an essential ingredient for school effectiveness.

School climate has been found to be a germane factor of effective school management. With the general assumption that private schools are better managed than public schools, this study was set to compare the school climate of private and public secondary schools in Delta state, Nigeria. Specifically the study focused on ascertaining the difference in teachers' social interaction as wells as principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers in Delta State private and public secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do teachers' social interactions differ in private and public secondary schools in Delta State?
2. What is the difference in personal involvement and interaction with teachers in private and public secondary schools in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Teachers' social interactions do not differ significantly in private and public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. There is no significant difference in principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers in Delta State private and public secondary schools in Delta State.

Method

The descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The School Climate Description Questionnaire developed by John and Taylor (2005) was adapted for collection of data for the study. The population of the study comprised all the teachers from 328 and 351 private and public secondary school in Delta State, Nigeria. The sample was made up of 1,200 teachers while the multi-stage procedure involving (the cluster, stratified and simple random sampling techniques) was adopted for the study.

Test of Hypotheses

$H0_1$: Teachers' social interactions do not differ in private and public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 1: Difference in Teachers' Social Interactions in Private and Public Secondary Schools.

Variables	Teachers' Social Interactions							
School type	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P	Remark
Private	520	31.32	4.28	1110	5.29	1.65	0.05	significant
Public	592	29.81	5.22					

P = Probability Level

Data analysis in Table1 indicate that the private school teachers' responses on their social interactions with a mean score of 31.32 as higher than that of public school teachers' responses with a mean score of 29.81. Further statistical analysis reveal that the calculated t value of 5.29 is greater than the critical t value of 1.65 at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis stated is rejected which implies that teachers' social interactions differ significantly in private and public secondary schools in Delta State.

H0$_2$: There is no significant difference in principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers in Delta State private and public secondary schools.

Table 2: Difference in Principals' Personal Involvement and Interaction with Teachers in Private and Public Secondary Schools

Variable	Principals' Personal Involvement and Interaction with Teachers						
School Type	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P Remark
Private	520	6.26	2.76	1110	6.911	650.05	significant
Public	592	14.9	73.40				

P = Probability Level

Information in Table 2 shows that principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers are higher in private secondary schools with a mean score of 6.26 than that of public secondary schools with a mean score of 4.97. Also the calculated t value of 6.9 is greater than the critical t value of 1.65 at 5% level of significance.. Thus, a significant difference exists in Delta State private and public secondary schools in terms of principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers. The null hypothesis stated is therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the analysis of Hypothesis one shows a difference in teachers' social interactions with the mean scores (31.32 for private and 29.81 for public schools). This result could be a reflection of the closed climate in the public schools where school principals on one hand are not committed to their responsibilities, and do not see the need to create positive climate for the schools to thrive. Teachers on the other hand respond minimally to their job. Obasanmi and Obasanmi (2012) in a study set to determine the most important characteristic/indicator of school effectiveness discovered that out of the eight indicators examined, creation of positive climate ranked the highest. John and Taylor (2005), working on leadership style, school climate and institutional commitment of teachers, discovered that positive school climate makes it possible for teachers to feel socially and

professionally engaged in school life. This combination of principal's support and teachers' engagement, they say, creates an open climate characterized by mutual respect, principal-teacher goal congruence, professional exchange of ideas, participative decision making and teacher input in programme planning. As a result of this enabling climate, teachers may experience fulfillment and develop a high level of commitment to the school.

Positive school climate helps to maximize both teachers' and students' potentials, thus both private and public school principals need to always pay adequate attention to the creation of positive climate. This is because school climate is the heart and soul of a school since the teaching and learning situation in a school seem to be a function of the atmosphere of the school. Unfortunately, Nwagbara (2002), points out that on the average, in Nigeria, the learning environment is far from being conducive or supportive. Where appropriate instructional materials are not available, teachers sacrifice good teaching for speedy coverage of the curriculum. In schools with positive climate, teachers are more likely to cooperate with one another as they work together to have higher morale and enjoy sense of belonging and task achievement. Here, interactions between teachers and students are higher and students are not likely to feel alienated. Ashton and Webb (1996) in a study found that a supportive school climate was one important contribution to teachers' sense of efficacy. It was noted that students of more efficacious teachers were more enthusiastic and more likely to initiate interactions with teachers and also scored higher. In this study, effectiveness was defined as higher scores in national examinations, better behaviour and better attendance. In the more effective schools, teachers worked harder and had better attitudes toward learning, spent more time in actual teaching, relied more heavily on praising students and were better able to involve students as active learners.

The result of the analysis of hypothesis two reveal that principals' personal involvement and interaction with teachers are lower in Delta State public secondary schools than in the private secondary schools. This shows that public schools principals do not demonstrate adequate commitment to the creation of positive school climate unlike their counterparts in the private schools. Many of the public schools principals remain in the attitude of seeing some teachers both as colleagues and friends while some other are seen as just colleagues. They fail to realize that they should treat all the teachers as subordinates and as such take the responsibility of creating supportive and enabling environment for all to thrive. Phillip and Glickman as cited in Sindhvad, (2009) assert that teachers who work in stimulating and supportive environments usually reach higher stages of professional development. Similarly, Blasé and Blasé (98) in a study, suggested that the principal as the leader of a learning community, must be one that facilitates staff and students' learning through interpersonal relationships. They further posited that good interpersonal relationship as a management practice contributes

to the development of a strong sense of belonging and ownership in both teachers and students as well as members of the community. Thus principals' personal commitment and interaction expressed through regular effective meetings with staff to discuss progress and problems of students, supportive communication to assist teachers' effectiveness, effective stakeholders' relationship and external relation management of immediate community as well as regulatory bodies definitely enhances positive school climate. This finding agrees with that of Eshiet (2005), which revealed private school teachers experience cordial relationship with their principals and are involved in decision making and as such, their morale and commitment to organizational goals and objectives are increased and in turn organizational effectiveness is achieved. A school principal therefore, is expected to develop an open climate which is characterized by a high degree of trust and esprit as well as low disengagement. This is a situation where the principal and the teachers are all committed to their job. The principal leads by example and the teachers carry out their duties without so much supervision or rules and regulations.

Recommendation

Consequent upon the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. School principals should develop an open climate which is characterised by a high degree of trust and esprit as well as low disengagement, as this may create congenial atmosphere that could make it possible for teachers to feel socially and professionally engaged in school life.
2. Principals should enhance their personal commitment and interaction expressed through regular effective meetings with staff to discuss progress and problems of students.

Conclusion

Positive school climate is an essential index for school effectiveness since it enables both teachers and students to develop high morale which in turn results in teachers' high task performance and high students' academic performance. School managers therefore, must create positive school climate to ensure school effectiveness.

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