

# The Concept of Positive School Climate and its Application to Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in Kenya



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## Abstract

*This paper investigates the concept of school climate and its critical value in learning and teaching in secondary schools. Besides examining the characteristic and dimensions of the concept, the paper also explores the challenges that make it paramount if effective teaching and learning is to take place. Significantly, the paper discusses the application of the concept in the context of secondary schools in Kenya. The overriding argument in the paper is that if education process is to achieve its objectives of socialization and imparting of requisite competences, then it is vital for school principals who are key stakeholders in the education process to put in mechanisms geared towards implementing a positive school climate. Key issues that need to be addressed thereof are establishment of suitable physical facilities in the schools, teaching processes and creation of a cordial relationship between teachers and students*

**Key words:** School climate, School principals, school physical facilities; teacher-student relationships

**Paper type:** Literature review

## Introduction

Globally schools are recognised as critical in the socialization process. It is in the school that the children learn about societal expectations, a view affirmed by Henslin (1997) who observed that schools are responsible for socializing groups of children and young people on specific skills and values in a society. On the same, Saldana (2013), contends that this socializing role contributes most to social stability. He further argues that, the main purpose of schooling is the transmission of culture, the process by which individuals learn their culture; acquire knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms. One of the major activities that contribute to this process is teaching and learning which is at the core of all educational institutions and involves intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual interaction between teachers and students.

Accordingly, the society has a huge responsibility of ensuring that schools are protected so that their socialization role can be effective. It has been observed



that in Kenya, there are a number of issues that hinder the effectiveness of this process especially with the implementation of free day secondary schools and 100% transition policy from primary to secondary school which have resulted in increased enrolment without commensurate increase in either infrastructure or personnel (National Education Sector Plan, 2015). This has led to overstretched facilities, overcrowding in schools, inefficient teacher utilization and high teacher to pupil ratios in some schools leading to poor teacher-student interaction.

For instance, in many boarding schools, dormitories are overflowing with students making them stressed and increased cases of fears of strikes, inadequate facilities including sanitation and teacher de-motivation (KESSHA, 2019). There is also inequitable distribution of teachers, teaching and learning resources in many secondary schools. In this context, it is important to point out that principals are among the major stakeholders in the school eco-system because they play a critical role in creating, sustaining and supervising the school climate for effective teaching and learning. It is obligatory for them to provide a conducive teaching and learning environment so that students can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills essential for the development of the society.

The objective of this paper is to investigate how the principals can promote a positive school climate in secondary school amid all these challenges through school processes and upholding school characteristics that contribute to effective teaching and learning and consequently students' academic achievement.

### **Understanding the meaning of School Climate: An overview**

School climate has been viewed as an essential element in teaching and learning and is an important factor in effective schools. According to Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) effective schools have strong effective leadership, focus on instruction and learning, safe and orderly school climate, high expectations for achievement from all students, uses student achievement test data for evaluating programs and school success, emphasizes on effective teaching, involvement of parents in productive and appropriate way of developing staff skills at the school. New York's National School Climate Council (2007) describes school climate as norms, beliefs, and aspirations that help people feel socially, emotionally, and physically secure. It is based on patterns of people's school life experiences and represents norms, goals, beliefs, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning activities and organizational structures.

It can therefore be argued that if people experience love, care, concern, security, feel accepted, supported and appreciated then they can confidently say there is a positive school climate. School climate is further explained by National School Climate Council (2009) as a relatively enduring character of a school that is experienced by its participants and motivates the different persons in the organization to work toward achievement of their goals. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, (2013) argue that school climate is the consistency and essence of school life involving social, emotional, and academic experiences of students, family members, and school personnel, which can be summarized as the collective beliefs, values and attitudes that prevail in a school.

On the other hand Adejumobi and Ojikutu (2013) have observed that school climate has two components namely school characteristics and school processes. School characteristics entail features such as available facilities, school size,



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policies of the school, value system, norms, integrity, and recognition, while school processes refers to the social organization of a school which include the principal leadership style, communication pattern, motivation, teachers morale and teachers participation in decision making.

According to Thapa et al. (2013), effective schools have five dimensions namely safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment and school improvement process. These aspects were stressed by Loukas (2007) who summarized different views of researchers and concluded that school climate is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social and academic dimensions. He underlined that school principals must ensure that all these work in harmony to enhance academic performance of students. Nwobodo and Agusiobo (2017) are of the same view when they stress that there is high relationship between school climate and academic adjustment. Other factors in school climate that could enhance students' academic adjustment include the environmental factors such as the physical building, classroom, materials used for instruction, academic performance, feeling of safety, school size, feeling of trust and respect for teachers and students.

As already explained earlier, principals are among the major stakeholders who play a critical role in creating, sustaining and supervising the school climate. So, their style of leadership and management and personality matter a lot. Additionally, the manner in which they employ their leadership style determines how the students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders view their school and whether they feel accepted and at home. It is this feeling that will make them own the school goals, vision and mission and engage in the accomplishment of all these and consequently improve on the students' academic achievements. The principal therefore, has an obligation of providing conducive teaching and learning environment.

It is worth stating that proper leadership is necessary as it is the one that gives direction to the institution without which the school goals may not be realized. To do this, leaders need to use the technical, human and conceptual skills and work hand in hand with other stakeholders. According to Gary (2013) technical skills include knowledge about methods, processes, and equipment for conducting the specialized activities of the manager's organizational unit. Technical skills also include factual knowledge about the organization (rules, structure, management systems, employee characteristics), and knowledge about the organization's products and services (technical specifications, strengths, and limitations). This type of knowledge is acquired by a combination of formal education, training, and job experience. Acquisition of technical knowledge is facilitated by a good memory for details and the ability to learn technical material quickly.

In a school setting the saying that the principal has technical skills means that the principal has the mastery of his area of specialization and specifically leadership skills. Such leadership skills include active listening, creativity, innovativeness, patience, empathy among others that will enable the principal to perform their duties. In addition the principal must have knowledge about the organization's rules, structure, employee characteristics, and about the schools programs. The knowledge of organizational structure helps the principal give different responsibilities to specific persons with the required competencies and allows for proper supervisions and flow of activities. If these persons are technically proficient it necessarily follows that they have the capacity to make decisions that aim at achieving the school goals, plan the school activities and ensure that they are implemented properly. It is imperative



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that the principal possesses monitoring and evaluation skills and is able to put in structures and strategies that promote the achievement of the school goals and aims.

On the other hand, Gary (2013) sees conceptual (or cognitive) skills as involving good judgment, foresight, intuition and creativity. Conceptual skills are essential for effective planning, organizing, and problem solving. Strategic planning requires considerable ability to analyze events and perceive trends, anticipate changes, and recognize opportunities and potential problems. On his part, Northouse (2017) sees conceptual skills as the ability to work with ideas and concepts. This skill requires the principal to have the capacity to understand, make sound decisions, make the right judgements based on correct and reliable information, and be creative and innovative. The principal requires the ability to find meaning and order in ambiguous, uncertain events since the entire school expects guidance from him. It demands that the principal acquires critical thinking skills as he/she is confronted with very many issues that require analysis, interpretation, inference and explanation.

According to Northouse (2017), human skills allow a leader to assist group members in working cooperatively as a group to achieve common goals. In the same vein, Gary (2013), has stressed that human relational skills (or social) skills include knowledge about human behaviour and group processes, ability to understand the feelings, attitudes, and motives of others, and ability to communicate clearly and persuasively. Specific types of interpersonal skills such as empathy, social insight, charm, tact and diplomacy, persuasiveness, and oral communication ability are essential to develop and maintain cooperative relationships with subordinates, superiors, peers, and outsiders. Understanding what people want and how they perceive things makes it easier to select an appropriate influence strategy, and persuasiveness and oral communication to influence more successfully.

In a school setting there are different stakeholders with different needs, culture, social background, characters, temperaments, skills and knowledge and to deal with them the principal must possess interpersonal skills to make it easier for him to serve such a diverse community. The leader must learn when to speak, how to speak and what to speak. If the principal possess such skills, quality leadership will be evident that is able to articulate clear vision and mission, focus on high expectations, and attract dedicated teachers and enhance positive teacher student relationships. By embracing these skills, school leadership will essentially provide a safe environment conducive for teaching and learning; develop proper assessment procedures and policies that are free from any bias which in turn will yield reliable and valid results.

If they have to succeed, it is imperative that principals involve the teachers, students and parents in the school plans and allow them to share their ideas which may be considered when making decisions. Great principals must develop teachers and engage them in decisions that affect teaching and learning since they are at the core of this process and at the same time support their efforts. Students who are central in any educational institution must be engaged so that they can own the processes that are happening in the school. The school has an obligation to provide a conducive teaching and learning environment so that students can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills essential in the development of the society hence school climate.



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## Dimensions of School Climate

Loukas (2007) identified three major elements of school climate i.e. social, academic and physical that must be present for the success of any educational institution. This section explores these dimensions with view to deepen our understanding of school climate.

### *Social Dimension*

According to Loukas (2007), social dimension involves interpersonal relationships of all members of staff (teacher-leader; teacher-teacher; teacher-student; student-student; teacher-parents), and the extent of the contribution of students, teachers and school staff in decision-making process. This interaction brings together all the stakeholders to ensure that there is ownership of all the activities in the institution. This interaction creates an environment of belonging, safety, security and appreciation of diversity. In such an environment, the giftedness of each individual is valued and considered for the development and growth of the institution. In support of the importance of social interaction, Werang, and Lena (2014) argue that the quality of children's relationships with their teachers play a critical and central role in motivating and engaging students to learn. For him Effective teachers are typically described as those who develop relationships with students that are emotionally close, safe, and trusting, who provide access to instrumental help, and who foster a more general ethos of community and caring in classrooms.

One can therefore confidently state that for teaching and learning to take place, social interaction between the teacher and the student requires to be nurtured. It is this interaction that creates confidence in the students and develops in them the capacity to innovate and engage in positive social academic activities. The students feel free to discuss their innovations with the teachers and through this they gain more knowledge and skills. This level of openness can only be achieved if the teachers appreciate and respect each individual student and is ready to listen and learn from them. Teachers who support students in the learning environment can have a positive impact on their social and academic outcome, which is important for the long-term school trajectory and ultimately for employment (Saldana, 2013).

Makewa, Role, Role, and Yegoh (2011), in their research on school climate and academic performance concluded that when students work in partnership with educators and parents to improve their school environment, they promote essential learning skills (e.g. creativity and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, communication and collaborative skills) as well as life and career skills (e.g. flexibility and adaptability, initiative, social and cross-cultural skills). Once teachers develop meaningful relations with students, classrooms are places of encouragement where students can participate in academically and socially active ways (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Students acquire the ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships with their teachers and peers which helps them to mature socially and academically. For this to happen, teachers must be flexible in their teaching and learning methodologies hence the need to adopt dialectical methods where student can bring in their experiences and learn from these. All this can be achieved if there is a positive teacher student relationship. Positive teacher-student relationships are characterized as having the presence of closeness, warmth, and positivity which helps students to be open and share what is learned and the



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challenges faced (Werang, and Lena 2014).

Students who have positive relationships with their teachers use them as a secure base from which to explore both academically and socially the classroom and school setting, to face academic challenges and to work on social-emotional development Werang, and Lena (2014). This relationship is fundamental for classroom management and has impact on the behaviour of the students and impacts their academic progress. The teachers' continued use of positive reinforcement helps the students to create a positive outlook which builds their self-esteem. The reason for the positive reinforcement should be made known to the students immediately when the behavior is observed.

Loukas (2007), argue that use of frequent specific positive praise can bring about the development of a more positive teacher student relationship. The ability of a teacher to relate to students and make constructive, loving connections with them plays a major role in creating a supportive learning environment and promoting student achievement. Studies have confirmed effective teachers show interest in the lives of studies beyond the classroom. Teachers attending sporting events, concerts, and other special programs that involve their students are valued by their students and called effective. Effective teachers conduct themselves consistently in a polite and personal way while preserving the correct teacher-student relationship structure (Gary 2013).

Effective teachers are able to challenge each student positively individually, objectively, and with enthusiasm through social interactions. In schools where social interaction occurs, effective teachers regularly behave in a friendly and personal manner while ensuring an appropriate role structure for teacher-student (Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997). They work with students as opposed to doing things to or for them, give students responsibility and respect, and treat secondary students as adults when appropriate (National School Climate Council , 2009). Teachers who are considered effective allow students to participate in decision making , pay attention to what students have to say spend more time interacting and working directly with them than ineffective teachers. Moreover, effective teachers have a good sense of humour and are willing to share jokes (Werang & Lena, 2014).

### *Physical Dimension*

School Safety is an essential and integral part of the teaching and learning process. The school's physical dimension is very critical because it can attract and retain students, increase morale and improve performance. According to Loukas (2007), the physical dimension includes the appearance of the school building and its classrooms, school size and student-to-teacher ratio in the classroom, school order and organization, resource availability and safety and comfort.

The school buildings are supposed to be done according the acceptable standards as expressed in different architectural documents governing school buildings. In educational institutions, safe and secure school environments promote and foster quality teaching and learning. Nonetheless, in an environment that is dangerous and vulnerable to both learners and staff, no effective teaching and learning can occur. Therefore, it is imperative that educational stakeholders foster safe and secure school environments in order to facilitate increased enrolment, retention and completion of learners and hence achieve quality education (MOE, 2008).



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The Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (MOE, 2008) clearly states that safe and secure school environments in educational institutions promote and encourage quality teaching and learning. Security is even more important, particularly in schools, given the fact that young children are vulnerable to insecurity. Delinquency, truancy and absenteeism are common in insecure school environments, especially among girls. It is unavoidable that when teaching and learning is disrupted by acts of violence among learners, by ethnic or land disputes, cattle rustling, cultural practices such as female circumcision, learner performance will be undermined in national exams. Hence, comprehensive school safety is key to school success and learner achievement.

Blazer (2012) are of the view that deteriorating schools can have a negative impact on student and teacher morale. Students score much lower on standardized achievement tests if they are in a school that has not been maintained, and teachers are less satisfied with their jobs if the condition of their school is poor. School buildings and all other infrastructure must be maintained and kept in good condition to prevent accidents and calamities that may befall students because of unsafe physical environment

#### *Academic Dimension*

Teaching and learning is at the core of educational institutions. According to Kenya's Sessional Paper (No. 1 of 2019) (MOE 2019), it is in school that learners' knowledge, experiences and imaginative understanding as well as developing an awareness of moral values and capacity for life-long learning is developed. This point to the necessity of a relevant curriculum that provides knowledge, skills, competencies and values that allow self-actualization for transition to the world of work. Blazer (2012) holds the view that Schools are established by the society to ensure that people progress from nothing to something in an organized and purposeful manner. They further, state that it is in school, that students are prepared to make education a priority. For them, everyone goes to school to develop appropriate attitude and behaviour for meaningful living in the society.

If these values and attitudes have to be attained, teaching and learning must be adequately supported through provision of the necessary human and material resource. Teachers being the key players in ensuring that this process is effective need to be well prepared through training so that they acquire the necessary skills and professional knowledge. It is this professionalism that will enable the teacher to create a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere in the class. Skills such as class management, assessment, content delivery will be enhanced thus making learning enjoyable if only there is conducive school climate.

Connell (1985) proposed that knowledge of how to teach is complex and intuitive, therefore difficult to explain or defend. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) used a professional knowledge landscape model in their attempts to explain professional knowledge. This metaphor was expanded by Sarah (2007) when she argued that the field of professional knowledge illustrates the fact that the expertise of teachers is multifaceted, crucially integrating the teacher's position and experience as an educator and as an engaged professional at the cutting edge of teaching knowledge. It points to the fact that the teacher is expected to have adequate knowledge in these spheres. As professionals, teachers must know how to deal with their students, be



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knowledgeable about the content matter, guided by code of ethics in their work and relationships.

Voss, Kunter and Baumert (2011) and König et al. (2011) put these ideals into perspective. For them pedagogical knowledge includes knowledge of classroom management. This includes maximizing the amount of instructional time, handling events in the classroom, teaching at a steady pace, and maintaining clear direction in lessons. On the other hand, knowledge of teaching method implies having a command of different teaching methods, knowing when and how to apply each method. Knowledge of classroom assessment requires knowledge of various forms and functions of formative and summative assessments, knowledge of how different frames of reference (e.g. social, person, criterion-based) influence the motivation of students. By structure here we mean structuring of learning objectives and the lesson process, lesson planning and evaluation while adaptability covers issues dealing with heterogeneous learning groups in the classroom).

If they are to be effective, teachers must be familiar with their subject matter hence proper training in their area of specialization. Quality teaching and learning rests on the teacher and therefore knowing how to develop knowledge systemically guides the process of teaching and learning. The capacity to teach effectively is determined among others by the teacher's knowledge of the subject and conversant with the curriculum.

A teacher needs to know the different approaches and methodologies that can be used in teaching and learning such as learner centred approach, facilitative learning, self-directed learning. Learner centred approach helps the students to create knowledge other than being passive recipients of knowledge. A student-centered approach focuses primarily on what the student needs to do in order to learn, rather than on the course content or the transmission of information by the teacher. The active involvement of students generates satisfaction in their learning by discovering and creating awareness where the instructor supports, guides, and involves them in critical thinking processes to achieve the desired learning objectives (Voss, Kunter, and Baumert, 2011). Learner-centred teaching is a method that engages learners and creates a cooperative atmosphere among peers to act in a socially conscious manner that focuses on group performance rather than individual performance (UNICEF, 2000).

Teachers have the responsibility of assessing student learning accurately and fairly. It is imperative that they prepare accurate and better assessment, based on evidence obtained from a variety of contexts and applications. Gary (2013) contends that assessment as part of classroom activities is a fundamental process required in promoting learning and ultimately achievement. Teachers must plan for it as they plan. He further argues that teachers make professional judgements on learners' performance in every teaching and learning session undertaken, whether consciously or subconsciously. Since assessment of learning is so crucial, it must be planned before the actual teaching and learning and therefore must be included in the lesson plan. Since it is an essential element in teaching and learning teachers need proper training and support to enable them to make valuable assessment decisions and to provide quality feedback to learners (Cheryl, 2005). This is an important skill and teachers must know how to give the feedback so that the students can receive it positively and help them to make progress in their work.



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Through their professional skills and knowledge, teachers ensure learners are comfortable in the school. Teachers need to be concerned about the social, emotional, psychological, spiritual and intellectual welfare of the learners. Teachers are also expected to be role models and offer guidance and counselling support to the learners and be ready to reinforce them positively. They should not be too fast in judging the students but must first understand them then they can respond to the issues that affect them. Mental, social and psychological safety is key for students and therefore good learning environment must be safe haven for them. They need to feel supported, appreciated, welcomed, respected and cared for at all time. Opportunities for social interactions through games, music, drama or any other activity contributes to conducive learning environments.

### **Importance of school climate**

#### *Overview*

School climate plays a major role in the achievement of the institutional goals. It is at the heart and soul of an organization and it is important in creating an atmosphere where the different stakeholders feel welcome and appreciated. A positive school environment fosters cooperative learning, unity among groups, respect and mutual trust. Such basic factors were shown to enhance the learning environment specifically (Werang & Lena, 2014). It promotes positive student relationships which supports emotional support, trust, safety and makes each individual feel personal worth, dignity and importance. According to Freiberg (2005) the climate of a school can foster resilience or become a risk factor in the lives of people who work and learn in a place called school. Among the many roles that it plays, climate enhances teaching and learning, improves on the teacher student relationship, enhances academic achievement and enhances teacher job satisfaction and motivation.

#### *Improved Teaching and learning*

One of the key activities that makes a school valuable is quality teaching and learning and therefore it is paramount that teachers create an atmosphere that promotes teaching and learning. Quality teaching is essential for quality learning. Blanton, Sindelar and Correa (2006) argue that quality teaching focusses on teacher performance, teacher knowledge, and teacher creativity while (Gary 2013) see quality teaching as what you are most likely to obtain when there is willingness and effort on the part of the learner, a supportive social surround, ample opportunity to learn, and good practices employed by the teacher. Teacher performance can be improved by proper training, teacher motivation, and continuous professional development, provision of teaching learning resources, appropriate mentorship, continuous supervision and performance appraisal. When teacher performance is enhanced, quality teaching and learning is obvious since improving teacher quality improves student learning. For this to happen the principal must play their role of creating a positive school climate where teachers feel appreciated and accepted.

Quality learning is most likely to occur when students are actively and purposefully engaged with issues and activities they regard as important. The focus of teaching and learning is on processes in which students have appropriate ways of acting and thinking, as well as the use of tools embedded in the profession or related disciplines (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). If quality teaching is to



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occur it should be in line with the Ministry of Education's requirements, it should be related to the school's national education goals and mission and vision. It is expected that teachers will positively persuade students not only to teach them to read, write, and think in words and numbers but also to help them develop their social and moral sensitivity, character, and citizenship (Cohen, 2013). Teaching and learning is also enhanced by provision of the necessary resources which include text books, computers, science labs, well ventilated and lit classrooms, clean and proper sanitation among others. All these though not directly concerned with the actual teaching and learning, boost a health atmosphere for conducive engagement.

School leaders and teachers should strive to clearly define the sets of norms, goals, and values that shape the learning and teaching environment since students can learn best if they are provided with a positive class environment. A positive class environment is where students feel free to interact and share knowledge with each other, support their fellow students and are allowed to learn without any internal, social, emotional, psychological or external interference. Classroom climate will be enhanced by proper class management which entails all the actions and strategies teachers use to solve the problem of order in classrooms (Freiberg, 1999). The climate in the classroom is the emotional atmosphere which determines the learning and progress made by each pupil. The teacher has a role to create a conducive classroom where the students know that teachers care about them. Teachers can demonstrate that they care about their students by following up with students when they have a problem or concern, supporting them in the learning process, motivating them counselling, providing security, molding and encouraging them to perform. They do this by use of rules and best and acceptable procedures which ensure students are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. This is supported by Cohen (2014) who posits that students learn best in positive classroom environments that nurture their social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

Teachers must create enabling structures in the classroom where students feel included, are not discriminated against and are appreciated by peers and teachers. They should make classrooms places where students feel respected and feel their contributions matters Teachers can do this through morning meetings, small moments throughout the day or class, or projects in which students get a chance to share what they learn (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Positive school climate increases student learning ability. Every child has to feel safe and have the opportunity to build a positive relationship with their teacher. Therefore in essence, classrooms should be a place for students to feel respected and that their contributions are important.

#### *Enhanced Teacher-student Relationships*

The relationships between students and teachers and among students are critical ingredients to student success in school and to their social, emotional, and academic development. Thapa et al., (2013) is of the process of teaching and learning as fundamentally relational. Teaching and learning is a relational process and there is continuous interaction between students themselves and between teachers and students (Werang & Lena, 2014). This relationship is possible if there is trust, love and respect among the teachers and students. Schools with strong relationships and trust among students, staff, families, and community members are most likely to improve academically. Teachers have a significant impact on student learning



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since they are among the first people that students encounter outside the family. According to Flanagan et al. (2007), the kind of interactions that teachers have with students convey messages about respect, care, and the importance of different views and need to be careful how they present themselves before the students. They must be role models in the way they treat each other for student look up to them to learn.

Positive teacher-student relationships promote a sense of belonging to the school and encourage cooperative involvement of the students. Students develop confidence to experiment and succeed in an environment where fear of failure doesn't restrict them. Teachers can help students with encouragement and setting goals and students can turn to them for advice and guidance.. When students develop relationship skills they engage in productive engagement with peers and teachers. Moreover, when all the students develop positive social and emotional skills, they interact with each other more positively. Such constructive relationship helps the students feel more emotionally and physically secure (Werang & Lena, 2014).

Gillespie (2002) recognized that the inherent qualities of a relationship between student and teacher (care, knowledge, trust and mutual respect) and the relationship between a teacher and students resulted in a classroom environment in which students were affirmed and supported in achieving their best. The goals, values, and communications that make school relationships are a vital part of the school climate. How the relationship is and how the school principal, teachers, and parents are connected is important (Ohi, 2007). Positive relationships afford students opportunities to feel connected to school, become more engaged in classroom efforts, and obtain higher grade point average.

While supporting the importance of good relationships, Sergiovanni, (2012) has argued that that schools that do not promote norms, systems and relationships are more likely to experience abuse, peer victimization, and punitive disciplinary actions, frequently followed by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement. .

Woodard (2019) proposes a number of ways of building student relationships:

- i. Learn names quickly and correctly. Too often in our school's students, especially disadvantaged one, feel invisible. Valuing diversity and personality of
- ii. Post student pictures and student work. When students participate in the show, take pictures, print and post on a bulletin board in class that stays up all year long.
- iii. Assign seats, and change them often randomly so that they learn to interact with different persons in the classroom. This will enable them to appreciate and respect each other's giftedness and diversity.
- iv. Find small ways to connect by use if ice breakers, stories, sharing of life experiences and sports. The teacher should also be open and willing to share stories and participate in their activities..

Developing successful teacher-student relationships requires a tremendous amount of time and effort; however, the value to both the teacher and the student is enormous. (How to develop positive teacher-student relationships, 2019). Positive relationships afford students opportunities to feel connected to school, become more engaged in classroom efforts, and obtain higher grade point averages (Cohen, 2013).



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### *Improved Students Performance*

Positive relationships between teachers and students are essential to students' academic and behavioural success. Thapa et al., (2013) argues that the process of teaching and learning are fundamentally relational in that there is continuous interaction between students themselves and between teachers and students. In a study of 12 middle schools, Gary (2013) found that the work environment of teachers, which can be considered as an indicator of the relationships between teachers and school administrators, fully mediated the path from the intervention of a whole school character to the school climate change.

The patterns of norms, goals, values, and interactions that shape relationships in schools provide an essential area of school climate. If there is a positive interaction, then teaching and learning becomes enjoyable and there is likelihood of improved performance. The caring spirit and connectedness among the students is experienced and there are few cases of indiscipline. Thapa et al., (2013) in support of this notes that schools with positive climates tend to have less student discipline problems and aggressive behaviour, less violent behaviour and fewer high school suspensions (Lee et al., 2011).

On the same issue Blanton, Sendelar, Correa, (1997) have observed that in schools with no supporting norms, structures and relationships, students are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization and punitive disciplinary action, often accompanied by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement. Studies have also shown that students feel less safe in large schools and that verbal bullying is more likely to occur in such schools (Cohen, 2014). There is evidence that schools with effective enforcement of rules or schools with better discipline management have lower rates of victimization of students and student delinquency (Cornell, 1985).

Students who have healthy and respectful relationships with their teachers display fewer problem behaviours, fewer bullying behaviours, lower levels of victimization, less frequent fighting with other students, and decreased engagement in violent behaviours (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013; Cohen & Geier, 2010;) Similar idea is held by Cohen (2014) that positive and communal school climate leads to a greater sense of belonging which, in turn, leads to more pro-social behaviors in other words schools with positive climate meet the needs of both teachers and students, who therefore become more attached to other school community members, more committed to the school's mission and goals, and are more likely to internalize school norms and rules. Friendly and supportive interactions enable students to make responsible decisions and work hard to implement them. They for instance on their own decide to support the less fortunate in their class, organize events to raise funds for them or engage the academically poor students in discussion that make them understand the content that is presented by teachers. It is in such atmosphere where responsible citizenship can gain roots. The teacher can also create a conducive environment in which students have meaningful input into the creation of the classroom standards and procedures, as well as academic content, or how the academic material is learned.

According to Collie, Shapka, & Perry, (2012) in an atmosphere where there is care, concern and love, agree that teachers build a classroom where students know that teachers care about them, by asking students questions (academic and non-academic), by following up with students when they have an issue or concern, by



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sharing their own anecdotes or stories, and by acting in ways that students know that taking risks and asking questions are acceptable in. Furthermore, teachers need to build classroom environments where students feel included and valued by peers and teachers alike.



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## **Realizing a Positive Climate in Secondary Schools in Kenya**

### *Current status of Secondly Schools in Kenya: An Overview*

Secondary education being part of basic education is the second level which students join after completing primary level through the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (KCPE). According to Kenya's Sessional paper No 1 of 2019, (MOE, 2019) the objectives of secondary education in Kenya are to:- develop necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of self and the nation, promote love for and loyalty to the nation, promote harmonious co-existence among the peoples of Kenya; develop mentally, socially, morally, physically and spiritually; enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in contemporary society, prepare students for global citizenship; enhance understanding and appreciation of inter-relationships among nations; promote positive environmental and health practices; build a firm foundation for further education and training, and finally develop ability for enquiry and critical thinking.

In developing countries and Kenya in particular, secondary education has grown considerably with the success of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Kenya's draft policy framework on education (MOE, 2012) indicates that the expansion of secondary education in Kenya had resulted from government, development partners, and private providers support. Therefore the above objectives can only be achieved if all stakeholders in education and especially the government, religious organizations and private investors collaborate in ensuring that all children have access to secondary education. It is also important to establish a positive school climate in which students can excel in the various aspects of education.

In an analysis of the status of secondary education in Kenya, (MOE, 2014), it is evident that the number of schools in the country grew at 8.2% between 2009 and 2014. Public secondary schools grew at 8.9% annually while private schools grew at 3.9% during the same period. The share of private schools dropped from 15% in 2009 to 12% in 2014 and this is attributed to the faster growth of public secondary schools compared to the private.

The government's effort to improve access and quality in secondary education through Free Day Secondary Education has led to increased enrolment from 2 million pupils in 2013 to 2.8 m in 2017. This is part of Government's effort at implementing one of its election pledges of 100% transition to secondary schools. The secondary school Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) increased from 54.3 percent in 2013 to 69.0 percent in 2017 while the NER increased from 38.5 to 51.1 in the same period (*Sessional Paper No.1 of 2019*, 2019). The total number of secondary schools increased from 8034 in 2013 to 10655 in 2017. Although a blessing, this increment has brought a number of challenges that have affected teaching and learning.

Principally, increased enrolment coupled with the drive to ensure 100 Percent transition has placed a strain on educational infrastructure since the demand is not in tandem with its growth (*Sessional Paper No.1 of 2019*, 2019). As a result classrooms are overcrowded especially in the public secondary schools, there

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are inadequate teaching learning materials, the buildings are in bad condition and unable to match with the number of students. Development of physical facilities has been slow, leading to constrains in ensuring 100 percent transition of pupils to secondary education (*Education -Kenya Yearbook 2015/2016*, 2015).

Teacher shortage has been growing over the years primarily due to increasing number of schools due to increased enrolment. The student teacher ratio is also high affecting the content delivery and teacher student interaction. According to Education-Kenya Yearbook, 2015/2016, (2015) there is inequitable distribution of teachers, between national, extra county and sub-county categories of secondary schools. Teachers are frustrated due to low remuneration, harsh working conditions, terrorist attacks, rejection from parents and delocalization that is affecting their families. If teachers are not motivated it is hard for them to offer quality education. Regional disparities with high potential areas enjoying better access compared to arid and semi-arid areas, urban slums and pockets of poverty.

#### *Role of Principals in Creating Positive School Climate in Kenya*

Since principals are major stakeholders in schools they have a duty to create an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning. The three key areas in improving the School Climate are; - physical, social and academic areas.

##### *(a). Physical facilities*

The principal must ensure that the school infrastructure is friendly and safe to all stakeholders. School Safety is an integral and indispensable component of the teaching and learning process. Indeed, no meaningful teaching and learning can take place in an environment that is unsafe and insecure to both learners and staff. It is, therefore, imperative that educational stakeholders foster safe and secure school environments to facilitate increased learner enrolment, retention and completion and hence attainment and quality education.

In addressing infrastructural issues, the principal has to follow up on the following issues such as:

- i. Classrooms that are well ventilated, well maintained and clean learning rooms, well maintained and clean desks and chairs in classrooms, offices and other relevant places (MOE, 2008 on Safety Standards Manual For Schools in Kenya). Therefore classes should be spacious and well-lit to allow the students ample time to study and relate. The buildings should be built in such a way that it caters for the needs of all students and other stakeholders both challenged and those without physical difficulties.
- ii. A daily schedule for inspecting school facilities should be established, including roofs, ceilings, walls and floors for water leakage, stains, and mould growth or odors (MOE, 2008).
- iii. Good sanitation practices, and proper structural and ground maintenance to seal structural cracks through which pests and rodents can enter. The ablution block should therefore be in good as well as safe condition and if it is a mixed school a clear demarcation is to be put in place for privacy of the girls and boys in the school.
- iv. The environment says a lot about the school and how students feel about it and as such the school compound should be pleasant and good



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looking. Trees and flowers add to the beauty and enable the student to feel safe and secure. The school compound must be fenced to assure safety and security.

- v. Proper and safe playing fields that are free from any harm are necessary as they enable students engage in co-curricular activities where they display their talents and learn a lot from each other.
- vi. Good relationship with the neighbours has to be developed and enhanced because it is from the community that students share their knowledge and learn from them. The community provides opportunity to practice what has been learnt and they also provide security to the school community.

(b). *Social Environment*

Teachers and the learners spend most of their time in the school. It is therefore incumbent on the principal to make sure that the school is socially friendly to its stake holders. This can be done by:-

- i. Ensuring that the school is free from any form of abuse through effective structures and mechanisms. Learners should be protected from any form of bullying, sexual harassment and any other form of abuse either from their fellow students, teachers or from outside the school.
- ii. Teacher student interaction though important must be regulated and be governed by moral and institutional values. Guidance and counselling programmes are important for students and teacher support programmes. Therefore, the principal is to start and enforce these programs and help the students and teachers in order to be able to live a balanced life.
- iii. Since the government is keen on child protection issues, the policy on the same has to be in place which obligates the principal to organize for its dissemination to all the stakeholders. It needs to clearly state the proper reporting structure in case of any form of abuse. The teachers are expected to sign adherence to child protection policies as well as declare if they have been previously accused or convicted of child abuse.
- iv. Disciplinary measures have to be taken seriously and respect the demands of the law. There should be no arbitrary punishment of students without following the due process. Teachers are expected to adhere to disciplinary guidelines and a committee that deals with such matters is to be put in place.
- v. It is important for the school and especially the teachers not only to be knowledgeable, but also to have the ability to identify drug abuse among learners, in order to foster a conducive social environment. They need to be aware of the common signs of the presence of drug abuse which according to MOE (2008) include possession of drug related objects such as rolling paper and pipes, possession of the actual drugs, smell of drugs or odour on clothing and breath. They should be able to detect and spot the drug related magazines and clothing, hostility in discussing drugs. They are to identify instances of memory loss, lapses, short attention span or difficulty in concentration in class, conversation



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mainly focusing on drugs and good knowledge about various types of drugs.



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(c). *Academic Performance*

Good academic performance is the sum total of a conducive school environment and not just what goes on in the teaching. However, teaching skills are very important in achieving good academic performance. The principal therefore should guarantee quality teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers;-

- i. Properly trained to have the necessary skills essential for teaching and learning and that they are up-to-date with the right content for the specific subject. (Objective 1 of teacher education Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019). It is imperative that teachers keep on updating their skills to meet the needs and demands of all students. Properly trained to have the necessary skills for teaching for teaching and learning that they are up-to-date with the right content for specific subject (objective 1 of teacher education (MOE, 2019)
- ii. Embrace inclusive education and have the capacity to observe, analyze and respond to the varied needs of their students.
- iii. Have professional knowledge which does not only focus on the mastery of the content but also be geared towards ensuring that the teacher has the capacity to deliver, has the methodological knowhow and skills necessary in the teaching and learning process, capacity to evaluate and assess the performance of the students.
- iv. Are conversant with the classroom management skills which will help them to maximize the quantity of instructional time, handling classroom activities, supporting the weak students, and be able to achieve the lesson objectives. Improve on their skills through ongoing training programs which must be developed based on their needs. The principals should allow teachers to join the programs, organize seminars and workshops that sharpen their skills in different ways and different levels.
- v. Acquire teaching and learning methodologies appropriate to each course that allow students to be innovative in their thinking and acting.
- vi. Are motivated so that they can feel appreciated and this has to be planned and budgeted for. The motivation may be in form of team building which enables them to be united and appreciate each, certification, promotion and or recognition. This boosts their morale and makes them like what they do and especially molding and tirelessly supporting the students
- vii. Implement the right curriculum using the right teaching and learning materials and that the necessary ICT infrastructure is in place.
- viii. Organize for training workshops for school staffs and specifically teachers on the different ways of disciplining students that are acceptable in Kenya other than corporal punishment.

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### Conclusion

The paper has discussed the concept of school climate and its implications for teaching and learning. It has also articulated the ways in which a positive school climate





can be created in secondary schools in Kenya which is essential for teaching and learning process especially when secondary schools are facing different challenges. If the schools have to achieve its goals, it is paramount that school principals, who are critical stakeholder in the education sector have to ensure that the school climate is conducive so that the stakeholders can have trust in the schools and send their children to study. It is important that school setting be modified so that students feel safe and secure in such an environment and engage in studies without any fear. School principals have the obligation to ensure that the physical, social and academic dimensions are in place. Therefore it can be concluded that the role of school climate cannot be overemphasized because it is the foundation of positive tradition and culture of the schools and contributes to good schools that mold character of the students. Fundamentally, it enables them to fit in the society and whatever they have got will help them to move on in life and become better persons and contribute to the good of the society.



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