School Climate and Its Impact on School Development in Nigeria

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.661
Published online: 30 July 2020

Summary

Climate is a multifaceted concept in an organization, with few distinctions in the context of school settings. Although research on school climate stems from the study of organizational climate, and became a central variable in the educational research with a comprehensive review of the literature, there are significant differences in the approaches to the study of school climate. Scholars have studied climate at various levels of education, for example, elementary schools, secondary schools, and higher level schools as well as among teachers and school leaders. There is some divergence and variations in school climate across those contexts; there are also substantial similarities as shown in many past studies. School climate as a key player in school development can be driven by internal factors like interactive behavior and external factors such as school location, school size, student population, educational policies and socio-economic changes.

Studies of climate in the educational context is multidimensional and can be viewed in a variety of ways due to diverse social effects. Climate has been investigated in relation to the general working environment of school, quality of school experience, school values and norms, interpersonal relationships of individual school members, teaching and learning practices, structure of the school, and feelings toward school life. In this regard, school climate is explored in relation to school development in Nigeria and focuses on those factors that have a greater potential to support teaching and learning practices, including school plants, school leadership, school culture, collegiality, school safety, and academic achievement. Relating these constructs to school development in Nigeria will give more precise and sizeable understanding on the importance of school climate towards attainment of sustainable school success.

Keywords: school climate, school plants, leadership, culture, safety, collegiality, school development, Nigeria

Subjects: Education, Change, and Development

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Introduction

In recent times, issues of development have dominated the debate and discussions of many nations, specifically Third World countries. In most nations, sustainable development is often linked with significant positive change in the condition of individual, group, or community through education. Most developing countries present impediments to development in all spheres of life, particularly in the education sector. Pertinently, the challenges faced by some of these countries are the products of the conditions under which they now function. The process of education in Nigeria today is often hampered by a variety of issues, some of which are associated with the delay in pace of its development. All these problems are input variables which are actively involved in impeding the evolution of a culture necessary for solid school development (Adegbesan, 2011; Idakwoji, 2016; Rafindadi, 2014).

In Nigerian schools today, the unavailability of teachers is a consequence of instability resulting from poor teaching conditions, prominent problems of management and control, teacher/student attitude and behavior, tardiness and disrespect for teachers, and poor supply of basic infrastructure, among other challenges (Ghani, Siraj, Radzi, & Elham, 2011). Perhaps one of the greatest challenges hindering quality delivery capable of enhancing sustainable development is the general learning climate within schools. In this regard, climate is one of the critical elements contributing to the overall success of any school. Therefore, seeking a positive working environment is essential, as a sustainable positive climate fosters school development which is necessary to live a productive and satisfying life in a democratic society.

Generally, climate is an elusive concept used to precisely express the enduring situation of an organization from several perspectives that can be observed in a variety of ways (Marshall, 2004). In the school context, educational practitioners unceasingly study climate; for every setting there exists a number of characteristics that influence the behavior of members and distinguish one school from another. The study of school climate differs considerably in its variables or outcome based on external factors, which is an important yardstick in measuring school climate. Although researchers have agreed that outcomes of school climate stem from the characteristics of interacting variables, it is equally difficult to choose variables that work together to best explain climate (Tornatzky, Brookover, Hathaway, Miller, & Passalacqua, 1980).

Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) mention that characteristics related to school climate include social, physical, and academic factors. The physical dimension of school climate includes school buildings and its classrooms, school size and ratio of students to teachers in the classroom, order and organization of classrooms, availability of resources, and safety and comfort. The social dimension includes quality of interpersonal relationships between and among students, teachers, and staff; equitable and fair treatment of students by teachers and staff; degree of competition and social comparison between students; and the degree to which students, teachers, and staff contribute to decision-making. The academic dimension includes quality of instruction and teachers' expectations for student performance (assessed by monitoring progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents).

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Conceptualizing School Climate

Although the term “climate” is a central variable in educational research, earlier studies on school climate stemmed from organizational climate research which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and continued for several decades. Empirical study of school climate grew out of industrial/organizational research coupled with the observation that school-specific processes accounted for a great deal of variation in student achievement (Kreft, 1993). Across the globe, there is a fast-growing interest in the study of school climate as a viable reform strategy and an essential component of school development required for promoting supportive and safer schools. While significant research was carried out in this area, researchers have recognized the significance of school climate for several decades. However, there have been significant differences in the approaches to the study of school climate. The construct has suffered from conflicting definitions and inconsistencies in operationalization (Anderson, 1982; Patterson et al., 2005; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013).

Climate has been described in diverse ways by many authors. It was perceived in terms of supportive school environment, safety, and engagement (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014); as a link between the school and teacher attitudinal behavior (Gunbayi, 2007); the overall quality and character of school life (Thapa & Cohen, 2017); the affective and cognitive perceptions regarding social interactions, values, and beliefs held by individual school members (Rudasill, Snyder, Levinson, & Adelson, 2017); and as an academic, community, safety, and institutional environment (Wang & Degol, 2016). Climate is grounded by different forms of school experiences which reflects norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structure as perceived by people within that environment (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012). School climate reflects the feelings and attitudes elicited by a school environment (Loukas & Murphy, 2007), and it is the heart and soul that brings about learning, motivates teachers and students to be part of the school, and fosters positivity toward being there each day.

Furthermore, the concept of school climate was recognized to demonstrate the sustainability that could result from quality interactions and communication patterns among school members (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). On this note, therefore, it could be said that school climate is a function of the specific characteristics of a school and its environment and is often influenced by the values, norms, members’ behavior, and leadership style of the school head. Undoubtedly, school environments vary greatly; where some schools feel friendly, inviting, and supportive for learning, others feel exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe.

Earlier studies on school climate primarily focused on defining and measuring the dimensions of school climate (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Kottkamp, Mulhern, & Hoy, 1987). School climate was assumed to be an expression of the shared perception of teachers’ experience, the meaning attached to that experience, and behavior resulting from being rewarded at work. That is, school climate is related to the perceived behavior of both teachers and principals. Through a review of research on climate, Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) found four encompassing constructs that make up the concept of school climate. The domains were classified as principal leadership, teacher professional behavior, teacher approach to pushing student academic performance, and

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vulnerability to the school. A similar review by Anderson (1982) considers the empirical evolution and current status of school climate research, including major instruments, research approaches, and findings about the sources and consequences of school climate. The study provided some insight into the earlier focus of school climate research on individual personality and belief systems, which can be categorized under social systems and culture. Table 1 summarizes related variables in a review of research studies on school climate.

Table 1. Classification of School Climate in Relation to School Development

S/N	Author/Year	Dimensions
1.	Hoy et al. (2002)	Principal leadership, Teacher Achievement Press, Vulnerability to Community
2.	Wheelock (2005)	Supportive Behaviour, Directive Behaviour, Restrictive Behaviour, Principal Openness.
3.	Uline, Wolsey, Tschannen-Moran, and Lin (2010)	Academic Press, Community Engagement, Teacher Professionalism and Collegial Leadership.
4.	Thapa et al. (2012, 2013)	Safety, Relationships, Teaching and learning, Institutional Environment, School Improvement Process.

Insel and Moos (1974) developed a consensus on the basic properties of school climate: human interactions with the physical and social dimensions of the environment and psychosocial characteristics; the geographical, meteorological, architectural, and ecological factors that are important to the environment; the material and behavioral components of the members arising from the organizational structure; the individual characteristics of members within the environment; and functional dimensions of specific situations.

In an attempt to appraise the various dimensions assigned by school climate researchers, this article emphasizes taxonomy of school climate (Tagiuri, 1968) based on four components: ecology, milieu, social system, and culture. There are several other categorizations to conceptualize school climate; however, Tagiuri’s is preferable as it gives a more precise and broad description of constructs that deal with all attributes of the school system (Figure 1). The comprehensive taxonomy of climate-related terms provided an effective system for organizing the school climate literature.

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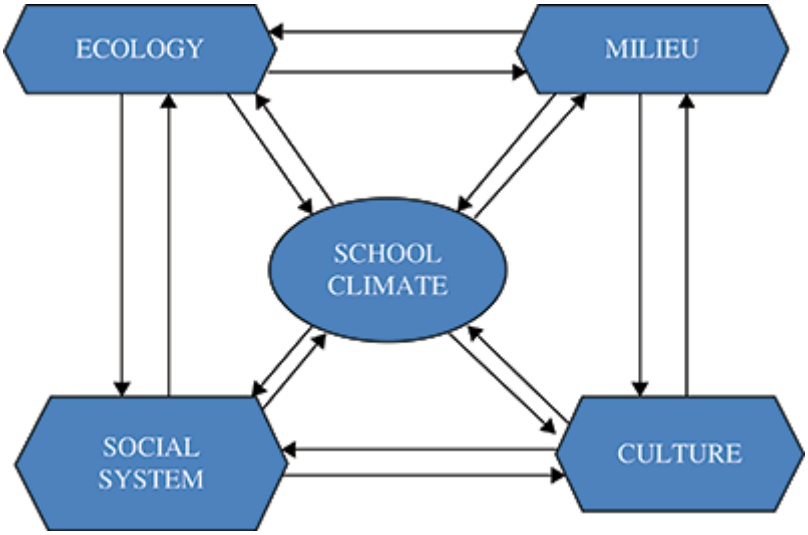


Figure 1. Classification of school climate.

Source: Anderson (1982).

School Development Overview

In a bid to deliver quality instructions and basic cognitive processes, schools play a significant role in both individual and national development. However, several factors have been identified which hinder development in schools and society (Adegbesan, 2011; Idakwoji, 2016; Rafindadi, 2014). Nigeria has been described as Africa's fastest growing economy, but it is less developed than most African countries; hence, there is need to look inward to address these issues (Sanni, 2015). School development research emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in change, with focus on enhanced student learning and school goal attainment through a systematic approach.

The notion of development is an elusive concept with different meanings in both concept and reality, based on the context in which it is defined. Generally, school development implies highly valued and positive change in a specific direction. A careful examination of the magnitude of development reveals that education cuts across all important dimensions of development. Thus, a sustainable and positive climate can be an agent for moving schools along the development continuum toward societal growth and development. The strength of school development research lies in its concentration on how change occurs in schools. An effective planning process aimed at school improvement is a roadmap that guides the development of strategic quality education and sets out the required changes necessary to improve the achievement level of students.

State of Development in Nigerian Schools

The growth and stability of schools are based primarily on the character of school life, patterns and safety of its environment, leadership practices, and school atmosphere. Thus, school development depends considerably on the collective interactions of the internal and external forces that come together to fulfill schools' goals (Adeyemi, 2008; Emu & Nwannunu, 2018). In developing countries, poor safety practices are a common phenomenon in schools. It

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is distressing to note the abysmal state of public schools, putting most government schools at high risk and making room for the establishment and expansion of more private institutions, to the neglect of public schools. Evidently, public schools in Nigeria are not safe for teaching and learning as most lack adequate security, allowing for easier access for visitors to move in and out of the school premises at their own pace. This situation may have a negative effect on learning capacity as learners in an unsafe school may suffer from greater anxiety.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2010) and the National Universities Commission (2011) reported a clear indication of the poor state of basic and post-basic schools in Nigeria. According to the reports, learning environments have a significant influence on effective teaching and learning; several public institutions operate below standards with more than 55% of classrooms in a poor state. The physical state of classrooms, with floors full of holes, inadequate roofs, and broken ceilings, is very poor and ill-equipped for quality delivery of instructions. Most schools are subjected to intrusion, vandalism, and sometimes being used as toilets due to a lack of perimeter fencing. The situation is not any different at the post-basic level.

Reports indicate that available infrastructure is obsolete, grossly inadequate, and non-functional, as only 30% of students in tertiary institutions have access to lecture theaters and other physical facilities. Similarly, the leadership attitude of most school heads has an untold effect on schools, with negative consequences when staff are hostile, thus creating an unfriendly public school environment. Admittedly, all these scenarios pose a serious threat to the actualization of school goals, particularly in a nation that is struggling with quality educational infrastructure. However, correcting these deficiencies and improving infrastructural needs of schools is fundamental and pivotal to the attainment of overall goals that foster school development in Nigeria.

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Figure 2. Positive climate for school development. Depiction of the relationships between school climate and other school related factors that brings about positive development.

Studies have revealed the importance of school climate for school efforts in its preparedness to undertake restructuring and improvement. Dellar (1998) posits that school climate seems worthwhile in determining schools' dispositions and capacity to embark on a drive for substantial school development. However, school climate may be one of the most important ingredients of successful accomplishment in schools. Without a climate that creates a harmonious and well-functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). At the beginning of each academic year, therefore, teachers and school administrators should emphasize school climate in relation to other variables.

Nevertheless, studies have found that positive school climate has a direct link to indicators of positive school outcome, such as student academic achievement (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2017; Dagnew, 2014; DiStefano, Monrad, May, McGuiness, & Dickenson, 2007; Greenberg, 2004; Stewart, 2007), teacher productivity (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011), principal job performance (Okorji, Igbokwe, & Ezeugbor, 2016), and overall success of the school (Cohen & Geier, 2010; Othman & Kasuma, 2016). Thus, school climate critically affects overall school success.

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School Climate and School Development Connection

To better understand the processes through which school climate promotes positive development, there is need for a systematic review of existing literature on the relationships between school climate and other school-related factors that bring about positive development. Research shows that school climate is malleable and can serve as a target for intervention and a prelude to enhancing academic achievement (Figure 2). When schools focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to achieve academically, develop positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities, increase school achievement levels, and reduce maladaptive behaviors. Elements that constitute school climate are complex and extensive; nevertheless, there are factors that should be integrated into school practices in response to issues that influence school development. *What then are the features that constitute a healthy school climate in relation to school development in Nigeria?*

School Plants

Beyond any doubt, educational objectives and goals cannot be realized without satisfying the physical needs of a school's teachers and learners. The desire for a quality education in Nigeria has eclipsed the need to provide an effective and conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning (Odeh, Oguche, Angelina, & Dondo, 2015). An efficient and effective education system requires provision and utilization of physical plants. Inasmuch as teachers and students spend longer hours in school, there is a need to make the place inviting, attractive, and orderly as a precondition for effective teaching and learning (Yusuf & Fasasi, 2015). Considerable research conducted on school environment revealed that the physical environment is a component of productivity which sets a parameter for students' learning experiences (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014; Lawrence & Vimala, 2012). The school atmosphere is viewed as the extent to which school settings promote students' safety and health, which should include physical plant, academic environment, and available physical support services. The site in which the school is located and the surroundings with which people come into contact vary across countries and within communities.

Furthermore, school plants have been recognized as an important factor necessary for creating a conducive and supportive environment, and in turn enhances school experience and interaction between individuals and the environment. This is corroborated in a study of public school teachers in the United States (Moore, 2012), where school environment was found to play a statistically substantial role in the displeasure of teachers on their job when the physical environment is inadequate. School plants can be classified into school physical environment, building and facilities, and material/equipment; truly, it encompasses the building and all its contents. School physical environment should support instructional delivery with access to a broad range of resources available to all and should meet the learning needs of all students.

Physical needs are met through the establishment of a safe structure, the provision of suitable and healthy amenities, a stable visual environment, a suitable thermal environment, and appropriate space for work and play. Emotional needs are met by creating an enjoyable atmosphere, satisfying surroundings, and a stimulating school environment (Asiabaka, 2008;

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Zepatou, Loizidou, Chaloulakou, & Spyrellis, 2016). As recognized by Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011), the types of physical resources required by schools include physical structures, buildings, furniture, infrastructure, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, hostels, auditoriums, technical equipment, administrative staff offices, and other physical plants like machines, computer sets, and duplicating and photocopying machines.

School Leadership

Admittedly, leadership is instrumental in turning around any organization, especially the underperforming ones. Although early researchers like Brookover (1979); Edmonds (1979); Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979); and Drysdale, Goode, and Gurr (2009) established that the existence of strong leadership and an orderly climate can often predict the effectiveness of schools' work toward desired development, it makes some intuitive sense that school leadership has the greatest association with the overall quality of instruction and student achievement through the school learning climate. Studies (Bailey, 1988; Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995; Holley, 1995; Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990; Tajasom & Ariffin, 2011; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004) further confirmed that school heads have a noteworthy influence in setting the tone of the school by demonstrating their role as key actors for school activity and maintaining close interaction with all staff.

Although studies have not clearly specified the most important roles and anticipated responsibilities required of the school head to improve instructional delivery, it is expected that a wide range of functions be performed to enhance quality teaching and learning, support trust and collaboration among staff, and focus on school mission and goal attainment (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Olujuwon & Perumal, 2014). Specifically, Ubben and Hughes (1992) indicate that a positive climate improves a principal's ability to lead, which in turn helps to reduce negative attitudes in the work environment, lessen employee frustration, foster an understanding of school vision, and facilitate the implementation of school mission.

In a study by Oladapo, Dada, and Serifat (2016) on school improvement and transformation system in Nigeria, senior secondary schools' principals' planning approach, school environment, and curriculum delivery were found to have a significant relationship with school development. Accordingly, principals could create a school climate that improves the productivity of both staff and students and fosters teacher effectiveness. On the other hand, poor leaders create an environment where responsibilities are neglected and mismanaged, crises are escalated, and unacceptable behaviors and relationships throughout the school continue, which often result in poor leadership and failed development (Plummer, 1995).

However, the most crucial factor associated with ineptitude and incompetence in school systems in many African countries, Nigeria included, is that school heads are not appropriately skilled and adequately trained for school management. In Nigeria, for instance, the position of school head is a product of the teaching manpower, as one must have spent a certain number of years in service as a teacher. By implication, the system does not provide leadership training opportunities for schoolteachers to become professionally equipped with necessary skills before they can be appointed as school head. At this juncture, it would be helpful to train school teachers through professional development to prepare them for

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leadership obligation and further assist them to better understand their roles, support them in discharging their responsibilities effectively, and provide them with a model of behavior that fosters cooperation and helps them achieve school development.

School Culture

Since culture is a set of informal expectations and values that shape how people think, feel, and act, it should be considered an important factor in school development. The “school culture” is a broader term encompassing the underground stream of traditions, values, norms, beliefs, and rituals assembled over time as individual members of an organization work together to solve problems and confront challenges. The primary purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture that is hospitable to human learning (Barth, 2001). Thus, it is the role of the principal, teacher, and parent to help identify, maintain, and sustain a student-focused culture within the school.

Culture reflects a comprehensive way of conveying beliefs and patterns of organizational behavior, which sets the pace for the day-to-day operation in any organization (Tharp, 2009). Culture plays a significant role in shaping the character and organizational atmosphere of any setting (Gruenert, 2008). Likewise, Inuwa and Yusof (2013) see culture as an integral factor of school activities and a yardstick for measuring school outcome, whether positive or negative. As proposed by Deal (1985), effective schools have strong cultures with core values and shared beliefs. As reported by Kwantes and Boglarsky (2007), no school can develop a positive culture if there are negative attitudes and approaches to challenging issues. MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) and Waldron and McLeskey (2010) posited that focusing on the existing culture of a learning environment is crucial to the improvement of a school, higher morale of staff, and excellent student achievement. In other words, there is a need for schools to understand clearly those characteristics that involve attitudes, customs, standards, values, beliefs, and traditions, which have been established for people to change their ways of doing things and solve their problems as a team.

Collegiality

In relation to collegiality, school could be viewed as a social organization for learning and an exchange of ideas. It constitutes individuals, units, functions, occupational groups, and an environment in which people interact with and influence one another and also turn to their colleagues for guidance or support in solving difficult problems in their work (Oluremi, 2013). Teachers’ additional administrative tasks, demanding schedules, and workloads may prohibit them from taking time to talk together; however, they need chances to relate with each other to make their work more significant and keep the school lively. Providing opportunities for teachers, and students as well, to get more involved in school activities is a great way to boost collegiality and build confidence. A good way to accomplish this is to get teachers involved in key roles and allow them to contribute to addressing issues that matter to the school. That being said, a collegial school environment will nurture a climate that improves teacher enthusiasm at work and provide continuous support for the realization of academic excellence for advancing development.

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Schools should create settings that foster a vision that reflects teachers' sense of purpose, as school image is seen through the quality of interpersonal relationships and teamwork among members of the system (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). Regular conversation that helps articulate teachers' aspirations and fosters confidence in their contributions should be incorporated. This, of course, will affect the wellness of the school, the state of mind of a person or group working in the school, and the readiness to perform assigned tasks. Further, it would reduce discipline problems, improve achievement, enhance more respect, and help to develop a collective responsibility for the school's prosperity.

School Safety

Given that overall school climate has a vital effect on teacher job satisfaction specifically, it is important to evaluate organizational health in order to maintain a positive work environment and thus, performance. Effective and safe schools have some clearly defined goals, with high academic expectations and specific requirements for students' behavior and engagement with the school process (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Despite reported improvements in schools, safety in schools, from a physical, emotional, and social point of view, is an important concern to students, school personnel, parents, society, government, and education management (Diaz-Vicario & Gairin Sallan, 2017). Many schools have crime and violence problems and most schools are dealing with more behavioral problems, such as disruptive behavior, bullying and harassment, drug and alcohol use, disruption, insecurity, and the deteriorating condition of physical facilities (Kaufman, 2000).

However, there is accumulating evidence which supports that creating and maintaining a safe, positive, and supportive school climate engenders social interactions at all levels, which is a cornerstone to the organizational health of schools (Low & Ryzin, 2014), and that a supportive school climate is a critical factor in addressing victimization, violence, aggression, and particularly bullying (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011) and is a key mechanism for behavior change (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003). As a matter of urgency, safety practices should be adopted at all levels of education in Nigeria.

Academic Achievement

A school environment can influence the performance of teachers and students both positively and negatively. One of the most obvious influences on academic achievement is school climate. In recent years, academic performance has been examined as a crucial function of school climate with a focus on student learning. The significant relationship might have resulted from the important role school environment plays in influencing and stimulating the drive to make students learn. Level of performance in schools in Nigeria was low as a result of disadvantageous learning environments in schools. Busch (2004) stated that there are specific aspects of school climate that significantly influence student achievement.

However, the quality of school climate is an important predictor of student performance, and higher performing schools tend to emphasize commitment to high academic standards characterized by effective principal leadership and collegiality among teachers in service of improving academic outcomes (Wang & Degol, 2016). Tubbs and Garner (2008) posited that schools with higher performance have a stronger sense of belonging and disciplinary climate. Dagnew (2014) used a survey method in his study to explain the impact of school climate on

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student achievement in Ethiopia secondary schools through a systematic random sampling involving 6 principals, 20 teachers, and 662 students. The findings substantiated that school climate factors like student-student relationships, teacher-student relationships, academic concentration, and effective administration are correlated with student achievement. Finally, a sustainable, positive school climate encourages the development and learning necessary for students to become productive contributors to the growth and development of the society (Cohen et al., 2009).

Conclusions

In Nigeria, as in many other developing countries in the world, school climate is a fundamental factor in determining school development. By implication, purposeful development in school can be influenced by physical settings, leadership quality, human relationships, and psychological atmosphere. Although development can only occur when the environment is friendly and free from chaos and worries, it is imperative that Nigerian school systems be improved to be able to function efficiently and effectively. Climate is a comparatively enduring quality of school environment experience, based on the collective perceptions from past research studies. School climate comprises the internal characteristics that differentiate a school from the others; it has thus been described as the personality of the school. Although there numerous studies have been conducted in regard to school climate, this article explores different viewpoints and provides an established and valuable set of conceptualized means by which to understand it.

It has become obvious that development does not just happen; empirical evidence affirms that meaningful development is defined by the quality of its input. It is expedient at this point to state that if ideal school goals are to be accomplished, the need to deal with and find lasting solutions to some of the issues confronting schools in Nigeria becomes imperative. As literature has established, individual school members can only benefit from a well-run school that is sensitive to their needs; thus, school climate cannot be underestimated as a significant factor in the successful functioning and development of academic institutions.

This article therefore contributes to the existing body of literature on the importance of school climate toward school development. Thus, it is expected to guide school administrators to investigate crucial, necessary factors for the improvement of schools and the enhancement of good practices among students, teachers, and school managers. Also, it is important for school leaders to be able to analyze climate due to its significant impact on the beneficial development of individual behavior and school personality. It is also recommended that education stakeholders further their understanding of the importance of school climate in the attainment of sustainable school success.

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