

PRINCIPALS' PERFORMANCE IN PROMOTING LEARNING CLIMATE IN EBONYI STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine principals' performance in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools. A sample of 630 teachers completed a 12-item questionnaire designed for the study. Out of 630 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 606 copies representing about 96.2% return rate were properly completed and returned. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviations and t-test statistic. The results of the study showed that principals' performance in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools was effective. It was also found that there was a significant difference in the mean rating of teachers in most of the functions of principals in promoting learning climate in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State. However, there was no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female teachers in most of the functions of principals in promoting learning climate in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State. On the basis of the findings of this study, it was recommended that there should be constant appraisals of principals' performance in promoting learning climate in secondary schools. This might motivate them to initiate programmes that could improve teaching and learning in school.

Key words: performance, promoting, learning, climate

Introduction

The term school climate describes the environment that affects the behaviour of teachers and students. School climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place (Gonder & Hymes, 1994). School climate is a significant element in discussions about improving academic performance and is also mentioned in discussions of potential solutions to problems such as bullying, inter-student conflicts, suicide, character education, and moral education (Gonder & Hymes, 1994).

Although there is no consistent agreement in the literature on the components of school climate or their importance, most writers emphasize caring as a core element. However, some place safety foremost (Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth and the Alliance Organizing Project, 2001), defining school climate as 'an orderly environment in which the school family feels valued and able to pursue the school's mission free from concerns about disruptions and safety.' One organization identified the components of school climate to include appearance and physical plant, faculty relations, student interactions, leadership/decision making, disciplined environment, learning environment, attitude and culture and school-community relations (Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate, 2009).

A positive school climate is an environment where learning and achievement can take root and grow. The foundation for a positive school climate rests on the integration of academic and behaviour approaches that address the student as a whole person. Instructional practices teach to the standards and are culturally relevant (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Curriculum and instruction engages students by providing personal meaning for them. Behaviour is approached positively, with an emphasis on prevention. There are clear, positive expectations and behaviour supports to increase academic achievement. There are systems in place to assure that continuums of strategies are used to match the need of the students. Adults have high expectations and team effectively with colleagues to help students achieve at their maximum level (Schweitzer, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, 1978; New Detroit: The Coalition, 2003; The Michigan State University, 2004).

Leadership is the key in developing a positive school climate. While leadership is clearly not the job of just one person, the principal must be a key player in guiding, leading, inspiring, and supporting staff and students in establishing relationships where they can work and learn. Effective principals recognize the importance of staff leadership in all successful reform efforts. They rely on staff leaders to develop and move efforts ahead, to inspire peers and build ownership (Cohen, 2006; Mahoney & Hextall, 2000).

Analyses of research suggest significant relationships between climate at school and matters such as student engagement, behaviour, self-efficacy, achievement, and social and emotional development, principal leadership style, teacher burnout, and overall quality of school life. For example, studies (Cohen, 2006; Mahoney & Hextall, 2000) report strong associations between achievement levels and classrooms that are perceived as having greater cohesion and goal-direction and less disorganization and conflict.

Given the correlation nature of school and classroom climate research, cause and effect interpretations remain speculative. The broader body of organizational research does indicate the profound role accountability pressures play in shaping organizational climate (Cohen, 2006; Mahoney & Hextall, 2000). Thus, it is likely that the

increasing demands for higher achievement test scores and control of student behaviour contribute to a climate that is reactive, over-controlling, and over-reliant on external reinforcement to motivate positive functioning.

The attention given to the promotion of learning climate by secondary school principals may vary among individual or even may be influenced by gender and the location of school. In other words male principals and female principals and those teaching in urban or rural secondary schools may have different ideologies in promoting learning climate in school. The implication of the differences in the ideologies of the principals might also make promoting learning climate as perceived by the secondary school teachers to differ.

Researchers (Glickman, 1995; Bowman, 2002; Anderson and Nicholson, 2007; Ploghoft and Perkins, 2008; Egwu, 2009) over the years have reported varying qualities of performance among secondary school principals with regard to their role in instructional supervisory functions. Unfortunately, these reports have concentrated on general instructional supervision and no study has specifically reported the performance of secondary school principals in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools. Secondly, the differences that might exist in the performance of principals in promoting learning climate with regard to gender and location of school, both in Ebonyi State and elsewhere, have also been neglected.

The study was therefore designed to determine the principals' performance in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study as follows:

1. there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of rural and urban secondary school teachers on principals' performance in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools, and
2. there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female secondary school teachers on principals' performance in promoting learning climate in Ebonyi State secondary schools.

Methods

The cross-sectional survey research design was used to carried out an investigation among 630 (317 urban, 313 rural; 316 male and 314 female) teachers randomly drawn from forty-five secondary schools in three education zones in Ebonyi State (Egwu, 2009). The researcher used a self-developed questionnaire titled, Principals' performance in promoting learning climate (PPPLCQ), which consisted of 12 items arranged in two sections; A and B. Section A, contained two questions about the gender and location of respondents' schools. Section B, consisted of 10 items on principals' performance in promoting learning climate.

Three experts in Measurement Evaluation and Educational Administration from Ebonyi State University were used for validating the PPPLCQ. Thirty secondary school teachers (15 each from a rural school and an urban school) of both genders in Enugu State were used for test of reliability. The data yielded a Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of 0.947. The reliability coefficient was higher than Ogbazi and Okpala's (1994) criteria of 0.60 acceptable for good instruments.

The researcher administered the 630 copies of the questionnaire on the respondents in their staff room during break period and some other time during staff meeting. The respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire and return same to the researcher immediately. This method ensured a 100% return rate of the questionnaire.

The completed copies of the PPPLCQ were examined for completeness of responses and copies that had incomplete responses were discarded. Out of 630 copies of questionnaire distributed 606 (305 urban, 301 rural; 304 male, 302 female) copies, representing about 96.2% return rate, were used for data analysis. Data were analyzed using mean (\bar{x}) score, standard deviation, and t-test. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data. A criterion mean (\bar{x}) of 2.50 was set for the study. In this case a mean (\bar{x}) score of 2.50 and above was adjudged effective performance in promoting learning climate and a mean (\bar{x}) score below 2.50 was adjudged ineffective performance in promoting learning climate. Standard deviation was used to determine how the teachers' responses varied. Statistical differences between means were tested using the t-test statistic. An alpha level of 0.05 was set for the t-tests. All data analyses were done with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 for Windows.

Results

Table 1 shows that each of items 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 10 on principals' performance in promoting learning climate obtained a mean score above 2.50. On the other hand, items 1 and 9 obtained mean score below 2.50. This implies that the respondents rated principals' performance in items 2-8 and 10 effective while in items 1 and 9 the respondents rated principals' performance as ineffective. The grand mean score is 3.07, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50 set for the study. This result implies that principals' performance in promoting learning climate in secondary schools in Ebonyi State could be adjudged effective performance.

Table 1: *Mean Ratings of Principals' Performance in Promoting Learning Climate (n= 606)*

| Item | Statement | \bar{x} | SD | Decision |
|-------------------|--|-------------|-------------|----------|
| 1. | Principal promotes professional relationship characterizing collaboration | 1.95 | 1.41 | IE |
| 2. | Principal promotes safe and orderly environment conducive for teaching and learning | 3.49 | 0.59 | E |
| 3. | Principal ensures that classroom are conducive for teaching and learning | 3.46 | 0.49 | E |
| 4. | Principal promotes high expectation for student and staff | 3.21 | 0.54 | E |
| 5. | Principal frequently gives public recognition to teachers and student for achievement | 3.44 | 0.49 | E |
| 6. | Principal cooperates with teachers to develop strategies to promote the desired climate | 3.45 | 0.53 | E |
| 7. | Principal work cooperatively with staff to over come factors inhibiting the development of a positive climate | 3.71 | 0.49 | E |
| 8. | Principal maintain appropriate professional boundaries with student | 3.73 | 0.46 | E |
| 9. | Principal implements instructional opportunities where student are interacting with ideas, materials, teachers and one another | 1.34 | 0.56 | IE |
| 10. | Principal understands principles and patterns of child growth and development and uses this knowledge in working with students | 2.60 | 0.62 | E |
| Grand mean | | 3.07 | 0.54 | E |

Table 2: *t*-test Analysis of Urban and Rural Principals' Performance in Promoting Learning Climate

| S/N | Variables | N | \bar{x} | SD | df | t-cal. | t-tab. | Dec. |
|-----|---|-----|-----------|------|-----|--------|--------|------|
| 1. | Principal promotes professional relationship characterizing collaboration | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 1.92 | 0.62 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 1.37 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Rural | 301 | 1.77 | 1.89 | | | | |
| 2. | Principal promotes safe and orderly environment conducive for teaching and learning | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.56 | 0.52 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 3.57 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.42 | .49 | | | | |
| 3. | Principal ensures that classroom are conducive for teaching and learning | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.51 | 0.51 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 3.63 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.36 | 0.48 | | | | |
| 4. | Principal promotes high expectation for student and staff | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 2.99 | 0.50 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 10.59 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.42 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 5. | Principal frequently gives public recognition to teachers and student for achievement | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.51 | 0.51 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|------|------|-----|------|------|----|
| | | | | | 604 | 3.63 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.36 | 0.48 | | | | |
| 6. | Principal cooperates with teachers to develop strategies to promote the desired climate | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.38 | 0.55 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 3.27 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.52 | 0.50 | | | | |
| 7. | Principal work cooperatively with staff to overcome factors inhibiting the development of a positive climate | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.81 | 0.48 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 4.97 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.61 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 8. | Principal maintain appropriate professional boundaries with student | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 3.81 | 0.43 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 4.46 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 3.64 | 0.48 | | | | |
| 9. | Principal implements instructional opportunities where student are interacting with ideas, materials, teachers and one another | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 1.75 | 0.55 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 3.76 | 1.96 | S |
| | Rural | 301 | 1.92 | 0.56 | | | | |
| 10. | Principal understands principles and patterns of child growth and development and uses this knowledge in working with students | | | | | | | |
| | Urban | 305 | 2.52 | 0.55 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 0.85 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Rural | 301 | 2.48 | 0.69 | | | | |

Dec. = Decision, Significant at $p < 0.05$, N = Not significant

Table 2 shows that the t-calculated for each of items 2-9 is greater than t-critical of 1.96. Since the t-calculated is greater than the t-critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of teachers in principals' performance in promoting learning climate in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State for items 2-9. However, the t-calculated for items 1 and 10 is less than t-critical the t-critical value; therefore the null hypothesis is accepted with regard to items 1 and 10. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of teachers in principals' performance in promoting learning climate in urban and rural schools in Ebonyi State with reference to items 1 and 10.

Table 3 shows that the t-calculated for each of items 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 is less than the t-critical of 1.96. Since the t-calculated is less than the t-critical value, the null hypothesis is accepted for the given functions. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female teachers in principals' performance in promoting learning climate. On the other hand, the t-calculated for each of items 2, 3, 5 and 10 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96. Since the t-calculated is greater than the t-critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected for the given functions. This means that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of male and female teachers in principals' performance in promoting learning climate in secondary school Ebonyi State for the given functions.

Table 3: *t-test Analysis of Male and Female Teachers in Principals' Performance in Promoting Learning Climate*

| S/N | Variables | N | \bar{x} | SD | df | t-cal. | t-tab. | Dec. |
|-----|--|-----|-----------|------|-----|--------|--------|------|
| 1. | Principal promotes professional relationship characterizing collaboration | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 1.91 | 1.87 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 1.13 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 1.78 | 0.67 | | | | |
| 2. | Principal promotes safe and orderly environment conducive for teaching and | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|------|------|-----|------|------|----|
| | learning | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.55 | 0.52 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 2.97 | 1.96 | S |
| | Female | 302 | 3.43 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 3. | Principal ensures that classroom are conducive for teaching and learning | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.48 | 0.51 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 2.05 | 1.96 | S |
| | Female | 302 | 3.39 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 4. | Principal promotes high expectation for student and staff | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.22 | 0.59 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 0.81 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 3.19 | 0.48 | | | | |
| 5. | Principal frequently gives public recognition to teachers and student for achievement | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.48 | 0.51 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 2.05 | 1.96 | S |
| | Female | 302 | 3.39 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 6. | Principal cooperates with teachers to develop strategies to promote the desired climate | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.42 | 0.56 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 1.49 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 3.48 | 0.50 | | | | |
| 7. | Principal work cooperatively with staff to overcome factors inhibiting the development of a positive climate | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.70 | 0.49 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 0.28 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 3.71 | 0.49 | | | | |
| 8. | Principal maintain appropriate professional boundaries with student | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 3.73 | 0.45 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 0.14 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 3.72 | 0.48 | | | | |
| 9. | Principal implements instructional opportunities where student are interacting with ideas, materials, teachers and one another | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 1.85 | 0.61 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 0.60 | 1.96 | NS |
| | Female | 302 | 1.82 | 0.50 | | | | |
| 10. | Principal understands principles and patterns of child growth and development and uses this knowledge in working with students | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 304 | 2.57 | 0.54 | | | | |
| | | | | | 604 | 3.03 | 1.96 | S |
| | Female | 302 | 2.42 | 0.69 | | | | |

Discussion

Results of the study on Table 1 showed that eight out of the ten instructional leadership functions of principals in promoting learning climate had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. These results revealed that the principals' performance in promoting learning climate in secondary schools in Ebonyi State was adjudged effective performance. The effective performance was evident from the grand mean score of 3.07 which is above 2.50 set for the study.

The results were plausible and expected because principals occupy a strategic position in the school organizational structure for developing and maintaining a school's climate conducive for teaching and learning. It is obvious that school climate is a determining factor of a school's success or failure. In agreement with the above, Stronge and Jones (1993) attested that the full range of the principals' educational leadership behaviour influences the climate of the school. They reported in their study that the climate had the second strongest correlation with student achievement in both reading and mathematics. For this reason, principals as instructional leaders should strive to improve teaching and learning by creating environment suitable for effective teaching and learning.

Results of the study on Table 2 showed that the t-calculated of eight out of the ten instructional leadership functions of principals' performance in promoting learning climate in respect to location were greater than the t-critical value of 1.96. The functions include promoting professional relationship, orderly environment conducive for teaching and learning, high expectation for students and staff, public recognition to teachers and student for academic development, strategies to promote desired climate, working cooperatively with teacher to promote positive climate, maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with student and implement instructional opportunities. Therefore, the null hypothesis with regard to these functions was rejected. These results imply that there is a significant difference in principals' performance in urban and rural schools with respect to promoting learning climate. However, results on Table 2 also showed that two of the functions indicated that the t-calculated was less than the t-critical value. These functions are, promoting professional relationship characterizing collaboration and understanding the principles and patterns of child growth and development and using this knowledge in working with students. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted for these functions. This result implies that there is no significant difference in principals' performance in instructional leadership function in promoting learning climate in urban and rural schools in relation to these two functions.

This significant difference observed between urban and rural schools with respect to the eight functions indicated earlier could prove the disparity between urban and rural secondary schools in terms of educational activities. This might be why Stronge (2006) lamented that the uneven distribution of amenities between rural and urban schools has a far reaching effect on the secondary schools there in. He observed that special attention is not often given by government as regards provision of some basic instructional materials in rural schools. Thus, principals in rural secondary schools might find it difficult to carry out instructional functions effectively. The difference could be because of the necessity for having a healthy environment in teaching learning activities in urban schools. However, to help principals discharge their duties there should be even distribution of educational amenities among schools.

Results of the study on Table 3 showed that the t-calculated values for six out of ten instructional leadership functions in principals' performance in promoting learning climate with respect to gender were less than the t-critical value of 1.96. These functions include promoting professional relationship, promoting high expectation for students, developing strategies to promote desired climate, overcoming inhibiting factors, maintaining professional boundaries and implementing instructional opportunities; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted in respect of the six functions.

These results indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean performance of male and female principals in promoting learning climate. On the other hand, four of the functions showed that the t-calculated values were greater than the t-critical value of 1.96. The functions include promoting safe and orderly environment, making classroom conducive for teaching, giving public recognition for teachers and students and understanding principles and patterns of child growth and development, thus the null hypothesis was rejected. These results indicated that there is a significant difference in the mean performance of male and female principals in promoting learning climate with regard to the four functions.

The results could be an indication that principals in secondary schools in Ebonyi State were performing their instructional functions in promoting learning climate. The differences observed agreed with the assertions that male and female principals may have different temperaments and ingenuity in supervising instruction since school climate has been observed as a determining factor of any school's success or failure. The principals should create conducive environment for effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion and Recommendation

School climate is useful term for the intangibles that can affect learning. As such, they deserve serious attention in the effort to improve performance. Comprehensive models that have been developed for school reform in developed countries have invariably included change in school climate.

The findings of this study demonstrated that principals' performance in promoting school climate in secondary schools in Ebonyi State was effective. It was also found that there was a significant difference in the mean rating of teachers in most of the functions of principals in promoting learning climate in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State. However, there was no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female teachers in most of the functions of principals in promoting learning climate in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State. There should be constant appraisals of principals' performance in promoting learning

climate in secondary schools. This might motivate them to initiate programmes that could improve teaching and learning in school.

One limitation of the study is that lack of complete control over the subjects during the period of supplying the information needed for the study might have exerted some influence on the results. This is because during the period the subjects were filling out the questionnaire, some of the subjects might have influenced the opinion of others. The teachers surveyed represent an important group of the state's population and information generated will be useful in the developing comprehensive models that invariably might positively change secondary school climate in Ebonyi State and neighbouring states.

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