Research Paper

Examining the Effects of the School Environment on Teacher Attitudes and Learner Performance

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ABSTRACT
Schools exist to impart knowledge to learners. This is done under varied teaching and learning environments which lead teachers to develop either positive or negative attitudes towards their work. This study examined the influence of school environments on teacher attitudes and learner performance in the classroom. A descriptive survey research method was employed in this study. The simple random sampling method was used to come up with ten primary school heads and fifty primary school teachers. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Questionnaires were hand delivered to participants. Graphs and tables were used to analyse data. It was found out that most schools operated under closed types of climates. Such environments made teachers develop negative attitudes towards their schools and work thus affecting learners as well. The researchers recommends the choice of leadership styles that create conducive working environments and positive teacher attitudes.
Key Words: Teacher attitudes, class performance, organisation, organisational climate, environment.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Teachers spend a greater part of their working lives at their schools imparting knowledge to learners. With parents expecting their children to come out with high passes it means teachers have a big task of ensuring that they work hard towards producing the good results. As essential elements in schools, it is on their shoulders that good pass rates are expected by school heads and parents. This important characteristic contributes to the improvement of schools. For improved work standards and enhanced teacher performance, a positive work environment should exist where teachers feel that they are part of the teaching community. Positive environments in schools are characteristic of teachers working freely without being compelled or constant supervision. Increased supervisory activities on teachers may signal the lack of freedom of exploration by teachers thus affecting their zeal to work ending up in them developing negative attitudes towards their work. In Zimbabwe, a new curriculum was introduced in 2017. To prepare teachers for the new curriculum, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education conducted workshops in 2015 and 2016 for teachers on how to implement the new curriculum. More training activities were conducted at cluster and at school level to prepare teachers for the new curriculum. The overall aim was increased pass rates. Despite these efforts by the Ministry, the pass rates in schools remained low. The Ministry concentrated on introducing the new curriculum to teachers but did not focus on the work environments where the teachers would be working. No workshops were conducted for school heads to conscientise them on the importance of availing positive school environments so that the implementation of the new curriculum would be a success. No consideration was made to improve the working environments in schools. On the other hand, school heads concentrated on administrative issues and the implementation of the new curriculum without improving the work environments under which teachers operate.

The effects of organisational environments on teacher attitudes and their performance at work cannot be underrated as organisations help shape individuals. Attitudes, as constant perceptions, play a significant role in shaping people's reactions to situations (Al-Zaidiyee et al., 2010) [1]. Hofman & Kilimo (2014)[2] advocate that teachers' attitudes towards their work, caused by working conditions are not grounded on ideological opinions, but rather on practical concerns of their work environments, their participation in essential school activities such as decision making, and the respect accorded to them by their superiors. Al-Zaidiyee *et al.*, (2010, p. 213) [1] define attitudes as "… positive or negative emotional reaction toward a specific situation." Teachers work in specific situations in their schools and react to them in varied ways depending on their perceptions of such environments and the organisations. Omolara and Adebukola (2015) [3] view attitudes as mindsets that affect how people think and act. They believe that attitudes can positively or negatively influence a person's performance. It, therefore, shows how crucial attitudes are in work situations.

The establishment of many universities in Zimbabwe has led to an increased number of teachers accessing university education. This has made teachers improve their educational status from being certificate or diploma holders to degree holders. Such teachers have varied experiences, knowledge, and skills which when tapped can benefit schools. To achieve success, these elements must be properly managed and harmonised. The researchers believe that these elements are not properly harmonised in Mbare-Hatfield district primary schools leading to this research examining the effects of the work environment on teacher attitudes and learner academic performance. No known study has been conducted on teacher attitudes towards learner performance in Mbare-Hatfield district. Maxwell, et al., (2017) [4] argue that a school climate has an essential role towards the academic outcomes of learners. It thus explains the focus of this research on the impact of school climate on teacher attitudes and learner performance. Collins and Parson, (2010) [5] point out that school climate is significant in its influence on learner academic outcomes. It therefore surprised the researchers as to whether school heads understood the effects school environments have on teacher attitudes and ultimately on learners. This is irrespective of the fact that the school heads expect high pass rates. The Mbare-Hatfield district primary schools are found in both high- and low-density suburbs. There are both public and private schools in this district and pass rates of 100% are experienced in the few private schools in the district and non from public schools. Teachers in schools largely have varied working experiences because of the different working environments. Workers perceive their climates as they interact with each other and with objects in their organisations. The climates of organisations are enhanced during management. Organisational climates determine aspects as participation by subordinates, support from leaders, relations among workers and standards to be achieved.

Schools have different work environments because of the leadership styles found at each school. As organisations, schools are a precise type of organisation with its goals focused on education. They have a way of achieving those goals and there are certain relationships between the school elements. How the schools operate is determined by the vision of the country and the school structures. The various elements of each school need to work properly for the whole school as an organisation to also work properly. The malfunctioning of one aspect will in turn affect the whole school. Thus, school heads need to ensure that all aspects of the organisation function well to have high learner academic outcomes.

11. Statement of the Problem

The continued low pass rates in Zimbabwean primary schools demands that increased attention be given to working conditions that teachers work in. Primary education is the foundation for further education endeavors by all people and if learners pass through the primary education system without a proper grasp of the basics of education, this can affect people's future educational endeavors. The new curriculum could have been well crafted but whether the work environment supported effective implementation of the curriculum by the teachers is questionable. This has led to the question; what is the effect of the work environment on teacher attitudes and learner academic performance in Zimbabwean primary schools.

111. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of school environments on teacher attitudes and learner performance in Zimbabwean primary schools.

1V. Research Questions

The following research questions were guided by the above research objectives.
- What are the perceptions of teachers towards their school environment?
- What is the effect of teacher attitudes on children's performance in class?
- How do school climates affect learners' performance outcomes?

V. Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study:

- To examine the perceptions of teachers towards their school environments.
- To find out how teacher attitudes affect children's performance in class.
- To examine how school environments affect learner performance.

V1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools are organisations that are made up of the school community, comprising teachers, learners, non-teaching staff and the school leadership. They exist to impart knowledge to learners. School heads are the managers who drive all the activities that take place in schools.

Everard and Morris (1996) cited in Naidu et al., (2008) [6] advocates that organisations are made up of four interdependent elements which are structure, people, technology, and culture. Dalin (1998) cited in Davidoff and Lazarus (2003, p. 20) [7] listed four primary perspectives on organisations as the structural, human, political and the symbolic perspectives. This study discussed the structural and human perspectives because of their relatedness to this study.

The structural perspective

Under this perspective, organisations are viewed as coherent wholes concerned with the achievement of their goals through effective structures and procedures. Structures and procedures that are set in organisations would be effective if given enough backing by managers in organisations (Davidoff and Lazarus, 2003) [7]. These point at the interrelationships that exists in organisations and between organisations and their environments. The major functions of organisations determine the structure of the organisation. This happens within the confines of a specific vision and value outline (Davidoff and Lazarus, 2003) [7]. Managers thus influence on organisations. Without adequate support, organisational activities do not function well since managers make things move. Castro and Martins (2010) [8] talk of environmental factors in organisations as influencers of worker productivity and morale. Such environmental factors in schools have a bearing on teacher performance and ultimately on learner performance. Kraft and Papay (2014)[9] cite a supportive professional environment as an agent that improves teacher effectiveness more over time than teachers working in less supportive settings. They further believe that teachers working in more supportive environments are effective at raising the performance of learners in standardised tests over time when compared to teachers who work in less supportive environments. Boyd *et al*., (2011)[10] and Grissom (2011)[11] believe that effective leadership by school heads and their support for teachers' practice is a critical determinant on teachers' decisions to stay long at their schools. Thus, school environments where teachers receive meaningful feedback about their instructional performance, where they collaborate frequently and where they are recognised for their efforts promote improved teacher performance at faster rates than schools where such practices do not exist.

Kutsyuruba *et al*., (2015) [12] advocate that the top priority of schools is high achievement by learners. Thus, effective structures and procedures should be existent in schools if this goal is to be realised. Whereas some school environments are friendly, inviting, and supportive, others are exclusionary, unwelcoming and often unsafe. Such unwelcoming environments negatively influence teacher attitudes and, in the end, become a significant barrier to optimal student learning and development. The differences in teacher experiences, perspectives, and roles in the school structure entails that individuals within the same school there might have different perceptions of their school environment thereby having different attitudes about their work. Individual subjective insights of the environment by teachers influence individual outcomes and behaviours.

The human resources aspect

This is an important aspect of organisations. It includes the workforce found in an organisation. The determination of the type of workers needed in an organisation is of great importance if the achievement of organisational goals is to be realised. Workers with the requisite knowledge and skills need to be employed. With the manpower in place, human resource aspects related to organisational contexts can be highlighted. These include the utilisation of the personnel, their interpersonal relationships, professional development, and their conditions of work. The human resource aspects are crucial as they determine worker attitudes towards their work leading to them being productive or not. At the centre of organisations is the leadership and management which ensures that all elements of an organisation are coordinated and developed and thereby working well. Armstrong (2012, p. 19) [13] defines leadership as "… the process of influencing the behaviour of others to achieve results." For leaders to be successful in their leadership they depend on those who follow them. The followers in turn need to know the direction they will be going. Armstrong (2012, p. 24)[13] goes on further and defined management as "…the process of making things happen." This is only possible when managers ensure that their organisations are effectively operating.

Managers and leaders create varied organisational contexts depending on their personalities. This results in different organisational climates. Castro and Martins (2010, p. 4) [8] define an organisational climate as. "--- the shared perceptions, feelings and attitudes that organisational members have about the fundamental elements of the organisation, which reflect the established norms, values and attitudes of the organisation's culture and influences individuals' behaviour positively or negatively." The climate of an organisation affects the behaviour of individuals in either a positive or a negative way depending on how they perceive the organisation. Attkinson and Frechette (as cited in Selamat et al., 2013. p. 73) [14] defined organisational climate as "… a set of attributes specific to a particular organization that may be induced from the organization, deals with its members and its environment." The definitions show that an influence on the behaviour of workers exist from the climate of an organisation. Aspects such as materials in use, work relations or management processes have an influence on workers. School climates thus describe the behavioural processes that are found in school systems at a point in time. It can also be regarded as the sense that teachers and learners have for their school. It is based on the leadership by the school heads who are at the helm of the schools. Such school climates distinguishes them from others. The difference results from the type of leadership employed in each organisation, the practices, and the maturity levels of workers. This influences the attitudes of the workers either positively or negatively.

Organisational climates can be open or closed. Open organisational climates are conducive to high productivity since they permit worker participation in crucial work decisions. Such organisations move smoothly towards the achievement of their goals (Raza, 2010) [15]. Workers identify with organisations that have open climates as they experience job satisfaction. A high esprit and low worker disengagement exist in those organisations whose climates are open. The leaders and managers in such organisations are usually considerate, energetic, and not indifferent. They work well with other members of staff to increase the productivity of their organisations. On the other hand, we have closed climates which are related to autocratic type of leadership. This type of climate neither has social satisfaction nor task orientation amid workers. It is characterised by much paperwork, low morale, and disengagement of workers (Raza, 2010) [15]. The leaders in such organisations are characterised by aloofness, inconsideration, and the existence of a feeling of apathy in workers. Such type of environment does not produce good results since workers have negative attitudes towards their work and do not perform to their best.

School climates determine the type of environments found at the schools and what a school becomes. It determines the school tone, the attitudes of teachers and the interrelationships in the school. Kutsyuruba et al (2015) [12] believe that school climates are by-products of the quality of the interpersonal relationships that exist among learners, parents, teachers, and school leaders. Thus, by having a shared vision of respect and caring for all people by all people in the school results in a positive and healthy school climate. Mestry (2017)[16] adds on saying a supportive environment affords teachers an opportunity to upgrade themselves professionally, it is therefore important for school heads to create positive climates in their schools. These statements suggest that the type of working environments contribute to the achievement of school goals. It is believed that too much bureaucracy at a school would result in a closed climate whereas less bureaucracy would lead to an open climate. Rafferty (2003, p. 53) [17] says there is, "--- a positive correlation between principal personality and leadership style and the overall openness or closedness of school climate." This depicts the importance of type of leadership in schools. School heads therefore need to know the effects of working environments on teachers because teachers who are "… dissatisfied with their teaching conditions and environment are likely to express negative attitude towards teaching and learning of their students" (Omolara & Adebukola, 2015. p. 132) [3]. This affects the academic outcomes of learners.

V11. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used the descriptive survey research design to collect data. It is a popular design that is used in education. Survey research designs have been described by Creswell (2012, p. 376) [18] as "… procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population." Using this procedure, the researchers collected quantitative data through questionnaires and interviews. Through a survey study the trends in data are described and the researchers' focus is more on knowledge about a population than relating variables (Creswell, 2012) [18]. Of importance is that surveys assist researchers in identifying significant views and attitudes of persons. This was crucial in this study which focused on examining the effects of teacher attitudes on learner performance. Gray (2009, p.131) [19] says, "A research design is the over aching plan for the collection, measurement and analysis of data." Simply put a research design shows how data would be collected and analysed to answer research questions. A research design is useful since it points to the appropriate research methods for use in the study. It is a plan for research which the researcher(s) follow when conducting a study to come up with valid and reliable results.

The Population and sample
   A sample, which represented the population of thirty-one primary schools in the district was employed. A probability sampling strategy was used in this research. In a probability sampling strategy, the likelihood of members of the whole population being chosen for the sample are known (Cohen, et al., 2007) [20]. The simple random sampling method which is an example of a probability sampling strategy was used to come up with ten schools. The school heads of the sampled schools were the respondents to the interviews conducted. Five teachers from each of the schools to make a total of fifty teachers were selected for the research. The sample had elements with similar characteristics to those of the whole population. All the primary schools, irrespective of being privately owned, church run or government owned derived their curriculum from the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Thus, the schools shared a common curriculum. The percentage composition of the sample of 50 teachers was 56% females and 44% males. This is characteristic of most urban schools in Zimbabwe, female teachers outnumber males. This study investigated the effects school environments had on teacher attitudes and learner performance.

Research Instruments
   A determining factor of the quality of data is how the reason and relevance of the study are explained to participants. In using the varied data collection methods respondents should clearly understand the reasons for undertaking the study. This is particularly important when using the questionnaire, where the researcher(s) do not have the opportunity to answer respondents' questions unlike in the case of an interview where the interviewer can answer respondents' questions (Kumar, 2011)[21]. In this study two research instruments were used, the questionnaire and interviews. Questionnaires were for teachers and interviews were conducted with school heads.

Questionnaires
   Johnson and Christensen (2014, p. 274) [22] say, "A questionnaire is a self-report data-collection instrument that each research participant fills out as part of a research study." Most questionnaires used in quantitative research contain closed ended questions. Such questionnaires focus on getting the responses of participants to standardised items for confirmatory purposes (Johnson and Christensen, 2014) [22]. Closed ended questionnaires were used in this research study to collect data from teachers on the effect of their attitudes towards learner performance. All the questionnaires were hand delivered by the researchers to teachers when they were knocking off after a day's work. The researchers collected the completed questionnaires the following day thereby giving the respondents enough time to complete the questionnaires. This was done after the school heads had given permission to the researchers to conduct the study at their schools and after the school heads had announced to teachers that the researchers were conducting a study and needed their participation in completing the questionnaires. A 100% response rate was achieved since all questionnaires were completed and returned.

Interviews
   Interviews are social relationships that involve exchanging information between the interviewer and the respondent (Johnson and Christensen, 2014) [22]. How creative and astute an interviewer is results in the amount and value of information a researcher gets. In interviews, the interviewer has a challenging role which include asking questions, recording responses, and maintaining the tempo of the interview. In educational research there are three commonly used types of interviews which are the standardised open-ended, semi structured, and structured interviews. The semi-structured interview was used to collect data from school heads on teacher attitudes towards learner class performance in this study. In this semi-structured interview, the interviewer had a schedule with predetermined questions that guided the interview (Kumar, 2011) [21]. Through interviews the researchers obtained the perceptions of school heads on the effects of school environments on teacher attitudes and learner performance.

Data Analysis Procedures
The gathered data were presented and analysed quantitatively. Tables and pie charts were used in the presentation of the data.

V111. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The results of this study are presented and discussed from the viewpoints of teachers and the school heads who participated in the study from the schools in Mbare-Hatfield District of Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Acknowledging teacher efforts enhances their performance (N=50)

Responses	Number of respondents	%
Agree	30	60
Strongly Agree	10	20
Disagree	2	4
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Neutral	6	12
Total	**50**	**100**

Acknowledging teacher efforts plays a significant role in enhancing teacher performance at their work. Responding to whether school heads' recognition to their efforts at school had any impact on them, 80% of the teachers agreed that the school head's recognition of their work had an impact on them. Acknowledging that a teacher has done something good leads to positive school attitudes by teachers and in turn to their improved performance. Eight percent of the respondents indicated that the school head's acknowledgement had no impact on them. The majority response rate indicated that they valued the school head's acknowledgement of their efforts.
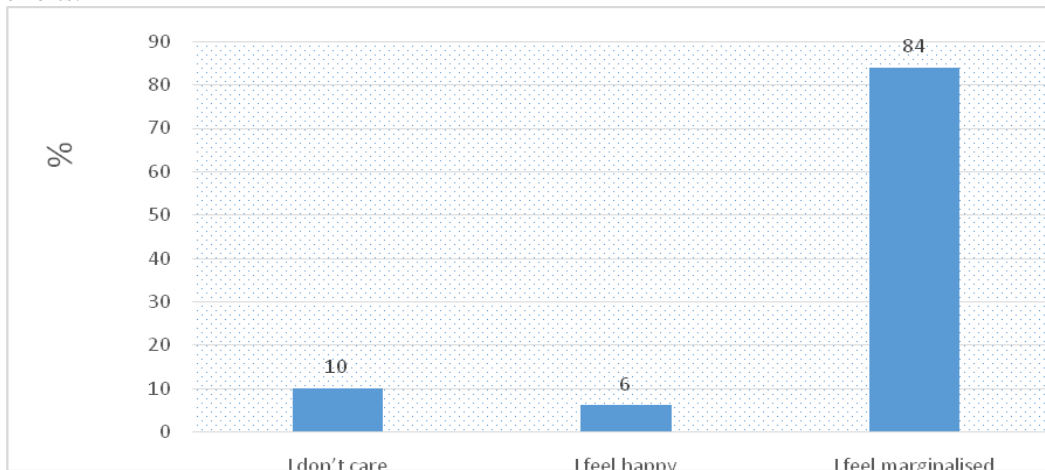

Fig 1: Teacher attitudes on consultation (N=50)

Teachers need to be consulted when it comes to making decisions concerning them. Lack of consultation leads to the teachers developing negative attitudes towards their work. Eighty four percent of the respondents indicated that they felt marginalised if not consulted in areas they feel they have the expertise. When teachers feel marginalised they lack the confidence to effectively do their work. This in turn affects learners'performance in the classroom and ultimately their pass rates.
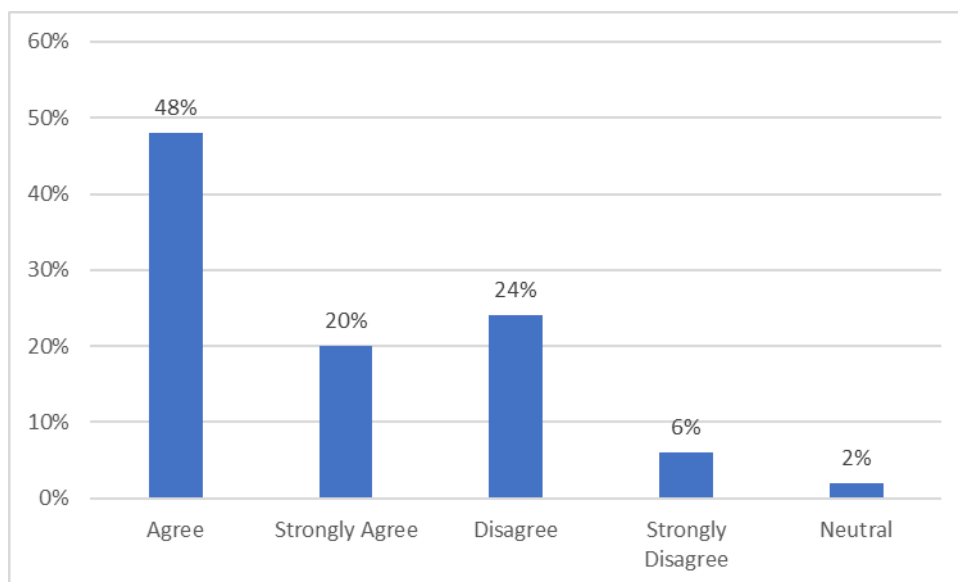

Fig 2: Negative teacher attitudes and their effect on learners (N=50)

Forty-eight percent of teachers agreed that negative teacher attitudes affected children's performance in the classroom, while 20% strongly agreed. Most of the teachers agreed that negative teacher attitudes affected both their class performance and that of learners. For success in schools a positive attitude about one's work is needed. In line to this Brown and Militello (2016, p. 706) [23] state that, "The quality of the teacher is the main predictor of how well students will perform academically. ... Teachers are significantly important to student learning, and school principals are significantly important to teacher learning." It therefore suggests that once the working environment is not conducive to teachers, learner academic outcomes are affected. Since the quality of the teacher determines learner performance it suggests that when the environment is not conducive, teachers develop negative attitudes towards their schools which in turn affect learner performance.
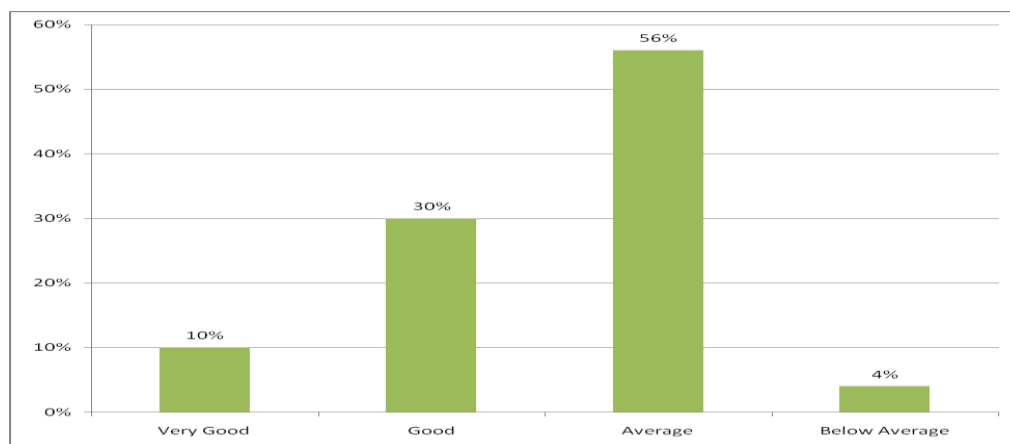

Fig 3: School pass rates (N=50)

Fifty-six percent of the teachers indicated that the pass rates at their schools were average and 10% indicated that they were very good. From the percentage pass rates it shows that the schools' pass rates were low. It appears the working environments in most schools are not conducive leading to negative teacher attitudes. Omolara & Adebukola (2015, p. 131)[3] advocate that, "The attitude of a teacher, consciously or unconsciously, greatly affects students' academic performance." This signifies the importance of teacher attitudes towards their work and to learners. It is crucial that school heads understand the importance of conducive organisational climates to workers and thus improve them.

Table 2: School environment and teacher attitudes (N=50)

Responses	Number of respondents	%
Agree	32	64
Strongly Agree	10	20
Disagree	6	12
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Total	**50**	**100**

Teachers were asked whether the school environment had any influence on their attitudes and most of them (84%) indicated that school environments had high impact on the development of positive or negative attitudes by teachers. Maxwell et al., (2017:3) [4] advocate that "… the way teachers perceive school climate envisages learner accomplishments." It is therefore critical for school heads to ensure that school environments are conducive to teaching and learning to avoid the development of negative teacher attitudes in schools since working environments contribute to the determination of teacher attitudes and learner performance. Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) [24] concurred with the above when they point out that a positive school environment leads teachers to practise desired behaviours that benefit learners.
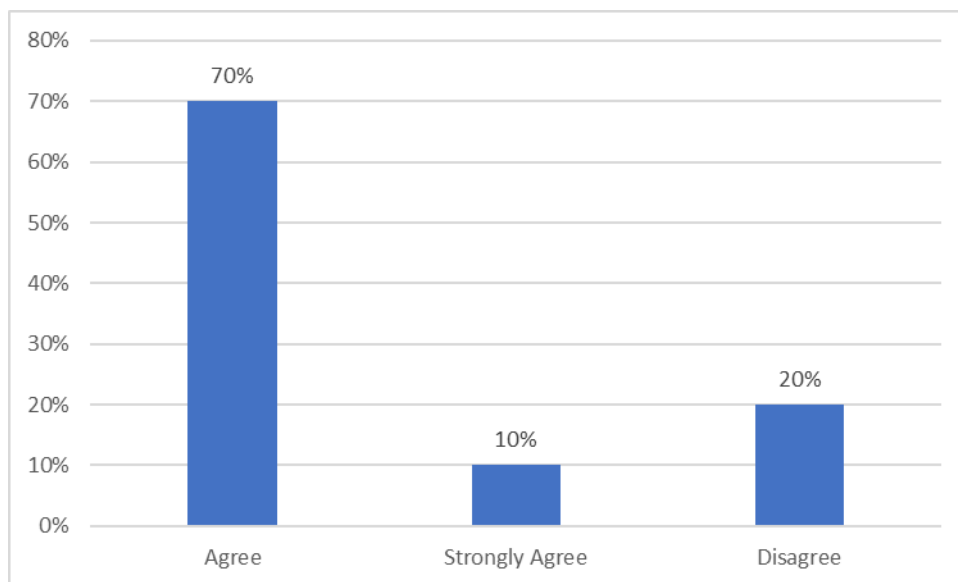
Fig 4: School heads' perceptions on negative teacher attitudes (N=10)

Seventy percent of heads agreed that negative teacher attitudes affected their classroom performance and pass rates at school. This indicates that teachers with negative attitudes about their schools have their performance negatively affected also. Heads and teachers (68%) concurred that negative teacher attitudes affect teachers' performance and in turn children's work.

Table 3: School heads' responses on school pass rates (N=10)

Responses	Number of Heads	%
Good	3	30
Very Good	1	10
Average	6	60
Total	**10**	**100**

When asked about their school pass rates at grade seven national examinations level only 10% of the school heads indicated that their school pass rates were very good. This response was from a school head whose school had a slight improvement in the pass rate after several years of obtaining very low pass rates. The greater number of heads indicated that the grade seven pass rates at their schools were on average. The average pass rates could be a signal that school learning environments needed improvement.

Table 4: Teachers as major players in learners' performance (N=10)

Responses	Number of heads	%
Agree	6	60
Disagree	3	30
Strongly Disagree	1	10
Total	**10**	**100**

Sixty percent of the heads agreed that teachers had more influence on learners than them because of their closeness to learners in classrooms. It therefore implies that teachers' negative attitudes of their schools ultimately affect learners' academic performance. When teachers have a negative attitude towards their school and their work it becomes difficult for learners to approach them for assistance in areas of difficulty. Omolara & Adebukola (2015, p. 131)[3] say, "… teachers with negative attitudes may not be as approachable to students as teachers who are positively motivated. This implies that teachers' attitude towards their students and teaching in general is very important for students' success." Failure to get full assistance from teachers results in low pass rates by learners.

Successful teaching and learning take place in such environments where there are collaborative efforts by workers, where working environments are positive and with resources available. The absence of one of the elements in the system may cause negative teacher attitudes and in turn affect learner classroom performance. The results of this research study indicate that teachers need recognition when in schools to avoid a feeling of marginalisation which leads them into developing negative attitudes towards their schools which in the end affect learner performance.

1X. Conclusions

The researchers drew five conclusions from the results of the study:

1. School environments have great influence on the development of either positive or negative attitudes by teachers. It is important that school heads ensure that positive teaching and learning environments exist in their schools.

2. Teachers get motivated when their efforts are recognised by school heads. It leads to the development of positive attitudes towards their work which in turn is beneficial to schools. School heads should understand that motivating teachers has benefits to schools.

3. School heads' leadership styles determine the type of environment that exists in schools. Some of the leadership styles employed by school heads marginalise teachers thereby creating environments that negatively affect teachers' attitudes towards their work.

4. Teachers have more influence on learners than the school head does since they spend more time with the learners in classrooms than school heads.

5. Teachers are major players in schools hence, their performance or lack of it impact on learners either positively or negatively.

X. Recommendations

Basing on the research findings the following recommendations were made:

- School heads should make it a priority to create positive school environments in their schools.
- Leadership styles by school heads need to promote positivity in teacher attitudes since this tends to have effects on learners' performance.
- Teachers' initiative and positive school contributions need to be acknowledged by school heads. This motivates teachers to improved performance at their workplaces.
- School heads need to be cognisant of the knowledge and skills in their members of staff and tap them for the benefit of learners.

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