

Exploring the Influence of School Climate on Teaching and Learning of Agriculture at Senior Secondary Schools in Eswatini



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ABSTRACT

School climate is the quality and character of school life reflected in its norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures. No study has been conducted to assess the school climate that exists in Eswatini schools. Thus, this study sought to assess the school climate that exists in senior secondary schools influencing the teaching and learning of agriculture in Eswatini. The study utilized a qualitative research approach employing a phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was used to sample 25 agriculture teachers in Eswatini. An interview guide was used to collect data in February 2024. Trustworthiness was ensured by addressing issues related to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The study concluded that the climate in Eswatini schools does not fully support the teaching and learning of agriculture. The study therefore, recommended a review of the school policies set by the Ministry of Education and Training; in order to create a conducive school climate that supports the teaching and learning of agriculture in senior secondary schools in Eswatini. The study revealed strategies that can be used to improve the school climate in senior secondary schools needed for the teaching and learning of agriculture in Eswatini.

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INTRODUCTION

School climate is the quality and character of school life. A school must provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning where the learner, teacher, and administrator work harmoniously together and happily. Thus, school climate is "the heart and soul" of the school.¹ It encompasses the norms, beliefs, relationships, and teaching and learning practices of students, parents, and school staff; as well as the organizational and structural aspects of the school.² School climate is an integral and essential component of the teaching and learning process.³ School climate is comprised of the physical, social, and academic

¹ H. Jerome Freiberg, *School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments* (Routledge, 2005), 11.

² Jonathan Cohen et al., "School Climate: Research, Policy, Practice, and Teacher Education," *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* 111, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 180–213, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810911100108>.

³ Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory," in *Human Motivation and Interpersonal Relationships* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 53–73, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8542-6_3.

environment influencing students' academic achievement.⁴ It is multi-dimensional and affects individual students, parents, school personnel and the community.

School climate may be positive or negative.⁵ A positive school climate is associated with good academic performance, improved mental health, and the absence of bullying.⁶ A negative school climate is dominated by highly disruptive behaviour, poor attendance, and poor academic achievement, as well as reduced student and parent satisfaction.⁷ The positive climate in school includes characteristics such as involvement, self-worth, social satisfaction, competence (academic achievement), intimacy, independence, enthusiasm, homework, teaching methods, acceptance, problem structuring, cohesiveness, task orientation, teacher support, study habits, cognition, school environment, disengagement, friction, and difficulty. On the other hand, a negative school climate includes psycho-physical hindrance, alienation, apathy, formality, direction, diversity, reproofing, and discouragement. A positive school climate makes people feel more emotionally, socially, and physically safe in the schools.⁸

Although school climate influences students' motivation to learn, academic outcomes, personal development, the well-being of pupils, and teaching-learning processes; a majority of schools have poor conditions.⁹ Unfortunately, there is no study that has been conducted in Eswatini on school climate. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the influence of school climate on the teaching and learning of agriculture at senior secondary schools in Eswatini.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe the climate that exists in secondary schools in Eswatini.
2. Describe the variables that contribute to school climate in Eswatini.
3. Describe the influence of school climate on students' behaviour toward agriculture.
4. Identify the psychosocial status of agriculture students in Eswatini.
5. Describe strategies that can be employed to improve the school climate in secondary schools in Eswatini.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aldridge and McChesney concluded that there is a relationship between school climate and mental health issues such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, body image, and general mental health difficulties.¹⁰ There is a positive relationship between school climate, students' perception of the quality of student-student and student-teacher relationships at school, and adolescent internalizing symptoms.¹¹ Students' perceived quality of student-teacher relationships and student-student relationships related to indices of stress and depressive symptoms which also influence school climate.¹² However, school climate was reported to be inversely related to parent-reported adolescent general oppositional problems.¹³ Behavioural markers of externalizing, such as bullying perpetration, dating violence perpetration, and rates of delinquency or conduct problems were reported in some schools.¹⁴ Impulsivity and hostility have also been found to

⁴ Evans Ogoti Okendo, C Nganzi, and J K Munyua, "Relationships between School Climate and Students' Academic Achievement in KSCE Examinations: A Case of Kisii County-Kenya," *International Journal of Education Learning and Development* 2,no.5(2014):7–17.

⁵ Okendo, Nganzi, and Munyua, "Relationships between School Climate and Students' Academic Achievement in KSCE Examinations: A Case of Kisii County-Kenya."

⁶ Alex Ed Thomas and Jeff Ed Grimes, *Best Practices in School Psychology IV, Vols. 1-2* (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

⁷ Ming-Te Wang and Jessica L. Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes," *Educational Psychology Review* 28, no. 2 (June 23, 2016): 315–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>.

⁸ N. H. Sunitha, "Academic Learning Environment of Students from Aided and Unaided Co-Educational High Schools" (University of Agricultural Sciences GKVK, Bangalore, 2005).

⁹ Deci and Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory."

¹⁰ Jill M Aldridge and Katrina McChesney, "The Relationships between School Climate and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of Educational Research* 88 (2018): 121–45.

¹¹ Ian M Shochet et al., "School Connectedness Is an Underemphasized Parameter in Adolescent Mental Health: Results of a Community Prediction Study," *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2006): 170–79.

¹² Shannon M Suldo et al., "Relationships between Perceived School Climate and Adolescent Mental Health across Genders," *School Mental Health* 4 (2012): 69–80.

¹³ Marisa Hendron and Christopher A Kearney, "School Climate and Student Absenteeism and Internalizing and Externalizing Behavioral Problems," *Children & Schools* 38, no. 2 (2016): 109–16.

¹⁴ Aldridge and McChesney, "The Relationships between School Climate and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Systematic Literature Review."

have a direct influence on school climate,¹⁵ resulting in some students' greater peer rejection and loneliness,¹⁶ and lower perceived social support. Similarly, adolescent anger is directly linked to in-school bullying perpetration and victimization, as well as off-campus peer violence perpetration and victimization.¹⁷

Student engagement has the potential to assist in constructing a more complex and meaningful model of the association between school climate and academic achievement. It has long been recognized as a critical factor in student learning and achievement.¹⁸ Generally, it is regarded as having behavioural, affective, and cognitive aspects. High student engagement is directly related to academic outcomes such as course grades and achievement test scores. Students who become disengaged from school are more likely to exhibit problematic behaviours such as substance use and delinquency, and eventually drop out of school.¹⁹ School climate is associated with engagement during the teaching and learning process.²⁰ A positive, respectful school climate provides a solid foundation for supporting students' academic performance and the development of positive attitudes and behaviour. Students who are connected to school experience are less distressed and less risk-taking.²¹ A positive school climate also results in positive antisocial behaviour. Conversely, a negative climate can prevent optimal learning.²² For instance, an overcrowded class has a deleterious effect on students learning as it tends to produce chronic noise pollution that hinders cognitive function and impairs reading skills.²³

The review of literature unearthed several strategies for enhancing school climate. These include parental/family involvement, home-school relationships, and proper organizational structure in the school. Family involvement, especially for the adolescent, is crucial as the school alone cannot prepare students for academic success without the support of the families. Parents and family involvement is correlated with school achievement of both children and adolescents.²⁴ Parental involvement enhances home-school relationship. Home-school relationships are also linked to various students' achievement outcomes and beyond grades, including adjustment across transitions and students' educational expectations for themselves.²⁵ The school climate can be enhanced if the student takes full responsibility for the learning outcome.²⁶ Such self-directed learning encourages individuals to develop a sense of agency to sustain their growth and development over time.

Lastly, the organizational structure has an impact on the school; as leaders determine the direction to be taken by the school. The leaders will contribute to the school climate through the vision they create and the goals they set.²⁷ The school leadership monitors curriculum implementation and decides on staff development needs. The principal is the single most important individual in the development of a school's climate.²⁸

¹⁵ Gwentyth Edwards et al., "Parent-Adolescent Conflict in Teenagers with ADHD and ODD," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 29 (2001): 557-72.

¹⁶ B. Hoza, "Peer Functioning in Children With ADHD," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 32, no. 6 (May 28, 2007): 655-63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsm024>.

¹⁷ Daniel J Dickson et al., "Derisive Parenting Fosters Dysregulated Anger in Adolescent Children and Subsequent Difficulties with Peers," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48 (2019): 1567-79.

¹⁸ Ming-Te Wang, Maureen Brinkworth, and Jacquelynne Eccles, "Moderating Effects of Teacher-Student Relationship in Adolescent Trajectories of Emotional and Behavioral Adjustment," *Developmental Psychology* 49, no. 4 (2013): 690.

¹⁹ Ming-Te Wang and Jennifer A Fredricks, "The Reciprocal Links between School Engagement, Youth Problem Behaviors, and School Dropout during Adolescence," *Child Development* 85, no. 2 (2014): 722-37.

²⁰ Wang, Brinkworth, and Eccles, "Moderating Effects of Teacher-Student Relationship in Adolescent Trajectories of Emotional and Behavioral Adjustment."

²¹ R. Blum, "School Connectedness: Improving the Lives of Students," *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*, 2005.

²² Freiberg, *School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments*.

²³ Corinne Meier and Joyce West, "Overcrowded Classrooms-the Achilles Heel of South African Education?," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1-10.

²⁴ Christopher Spera, "Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Goals, Practices, and Styles in Relation to Their Motivation and Achievement," *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 26, no. 4 (2006): 456-90.

²⁵ Sue Dockett, Bob Perry, and Emma Kearney, "Family Transitions as Children Start School," *Family Matters*, no. 90 (2012): 57-67.

²⁶ Ann Macaskill and Andrew Denovan, "Developing Autonomous Learning in First Year University Students Using Perspectives from Positive Psychology," *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 1 (2013): 124-42.

²⁷ F Yasser and R Amal, "Teachers' Perceptions of Principals' Instructional Leadership in Omani Schools," *American Journal of Educational Research* 3, no. 12 (2015): 1504-10.

²⁸ Ismael Abu-Saad and Vernon L Hendrix, "Organizational Climate and Teachers' Job Satisfaction in a Multi-Cultural Milieu: The Case of the Bedouin Arab Schools in Israel," *International Journal of Educational Development* 15, no. 2 (1995): 141-53.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was framed using the Bronfenbrenner Bio-ecological Theory of 1979.²⁹ The theory postulates that human development occurs in the complex, reciprocal interactions that an individual has with others and the surrounding environment. The theory has four sub-systems of operations; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The core of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory is occupied by the personal aspect of the system or environment. Bronfenbrenner divided personal characteristics into three types, namely: demand, resource and force characteristics. The theory indicates that an individual interacts with the sub-systems in the system. The immediate level from the inner core is the microsystem.

The microsystem relates to the immediate environment of the individual; such as the family, school, learning environment, religious community, and friends. The mesosystem encompasses different interactions between the characters of the microsystem. The exosystem is the indirect environment that may moderate the behaviour or functioning of the individual such as the economic system, educational system, government/political system, industry and media. The macrosystem entails the abstract environment consisting of attitudes/ideologies of the culture in which the individuals live. In the subsystems, societal and cultural practices or norms have an impact on the individual by setting expectations for his or her behaviour

The theory is relevant for this study because the school is more of a microsystem in which the school climate exists. The perceptions of its members, levels of conflict or cooperation among teachers and students, academic expectations for students, and the sense of collaboration among teachers are all examples of the factors contributing to the formation of school climate in the microsystem. The mesosystem is the interaction between two microsystems; such as during a parent-teacher conference when the combined messages from the teacher and family influence a student's engagement and effort in academic tasks. Through the mesosystem, two microsystems may be mutually reinforcing, such as when the family and school staff share similar beliefs and behavioural expectations, or discordant, leaving a child to negotiate between microsystems that conflict. Factors within the exosystem potentially influence school climate through the opportunities and constraints provided by the school. For example, a student is expected to abide by policies developed by the local board of education or may benefit from a parent-teacher association that is effective at providing additional resources for the school.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the interpretivism philosophy; a research approach that focuses on understanding the subjective experiences and meanings of people in social contexts. It is based on the idea that reality is socially constructed through human interactions and interpretations. The phenomenological research design was used in this study. Phenomenological research is an inquiry in which the researcher explores the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by them^{30,31}. The target population was agriculture teachers (N=423) in Eswatini. Purposive sampling was used to sample 25 agriculture teachers. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for data collection. Trustworthiness was addressed by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was ensured by debriefing the participants about the study before data collection. Transferability was established by the thick description of the concept of assessing agriculture development. Dependability was established through audit trails which involved giving details of every step taken in data collection and reporting.

Ethical consideration was ensured by using informed consent, confidentiality, autonomy and harm. Before the interviews started, informed consent was obtained from each of the participants to ensure that they understood the purpose of the study, how they would be involved, and their rights. Participants' responses were kept anonymous, and data was securely stored, respecting participants' privacy and confidentiality. To respect participants' autonomy, they were informed of their right to

²⁹ U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

³⁰ Giorgi Amedeo. The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 41, no. 2 (2009):269-276. DOI:10.1163/156916210X526079

³¹ Moustakas Clark Edward. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc., 1994.

withdraw from the study at any moment without penalty. The study did not cause any harm to the participants, and the interview questions were considerate and non-intrusive. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and themes were formed for every question. The interview transcripts were coded, related themes were collapsed, and participant quotes were used to support the findings throughout the research.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings are presented using themes guided by the objectives of the study.

a. The climate that exists in senior secondary schools in Eswatini

The thematic areas of the climate existing in the schools considered in the study included the availability of well-built classrooms, properly constructed school gardens, clean water supply, well-built agriculture laboratories, adequate staffing of agriculture departments, and friendly rules and regulations.

Well-built classrooms

All participants indicated that there were well-built and big enough classrooms for teaching and learning in their schools; which made the teaching and learning environment conducive; and had well-equipped classrooms; with chalkboards and noticeboards. One of the participants indicated that *“In my school, there is a whiteboard and a smart board used for teaching agriculture which enables the teachers to use e-books when teaching and clear drawings are displayed on the smart board for effective teaching and learning”*.

Availability of agriculture laboratories

All the participants stated that there were proper buildings in their schools. Twenty percent of them indicated that there was an agriculture laboratory in their schools; which is a building comprised of a classroom, storeroom, rabbit house and a poultry house. One of the participants stated that *“Agriculture laboratories make the learning of agriculture to be more effective as the agriculture department becomes well organized and independent”*. In those schools without agriculture laboratories, participants stated that they used innovative measures for the practical activities requiring the use of the laboratory such as soil testing.

Availability of school garden

All the participants stated that there was a well-fenced garden in their school; which created a positive school climate; because the successful teaching of agriculture requires a well-fenced garden for carrying out practical activities effectively. This protects the crops from domestic animals and other intruders. One of the participants stated that *“Students recently helped in fencing the garden when they were carrying out a practical on formulating a corner post during fencing”*.

Availability of clean water supply

The participants indicated that they had an adequate supply of clean water in their schools. Some of the participants indicated that schools draw water from boreholes, nearby streams, and rivers, which was a positive climate for effective teaching of agriculture. Water is needed for projects and other practical activities. The participants stressed that without water the agriculture department cannot exist in schools. However, the participants noted that there were times such as winter and drought period when water is scarce. One of the participants indicated that *“The shortage of water in the Winter season in school has a negative impact on the teaching and learning of agriculture as it is a practical subject. Consequently, the teachers will be sending the students to fetch water for practical activities and projects from nearby rivers and streams. This issue negatively affects the school climate and the attitude of the students towards the subject is strained.*

Enforced school rules and regulations

The participants stated that students do understand the school rules and regulations; as when they are admitted, they are given the rules and regulations. However, there are instances whereby the students ignore them. One of the participants mentioned that *“Even though students are given verbal and written*

school rules and regulations; they break them and sometimes engage in strikes, making the school not a safe place to work in.” The rules and regulations must be crafted to accommodate the myriad of challenges faced by the students.

Adequate staffing of agriculture departments

Seventy-six percent of the participants indicated that there were enough agriculture teachers in their schools. In some schools the agriculture teachers were deployed to assist in the Mathematics and Sciences; as this Department is understaffed in most instances. A small sector of the participants (24%) stated that in their schools there was a shortage of agriculture teachers; which delayed the completion of the syllabus and other related work in the department. One of the participants mentioned that *“She is the only agriculture teacher in her school to teach at least 40 agriculture students per class from Form 1 to Form 5.* This underscores the glaring disparities that exist among the schools. For instance, the climate in the school is compromised by inadequate staffing of agriculture departments, because the teachers are unable to assign enough work or class activities and provide timely feedback.

b. Influence of school climate on students’ behaviour towards agriculture

The findings of the study revealed that the influence of school climate on students’ attitudes towards agriculture can be explained in terms of students absconding from classes, participating in class, and contributing materials to be used during practical activities and research projects.

Absconding classes

A majority of the participants (65%) indicated that the climate in the school assists in curbing disruptive behaviours such as absconding from classes by agriculture students. This can be achieved by having a well-organized administration which monitors class attendance by frequently patrolling around the school to ensure that no students loiter outside during lessons. However, participants indicated that in their schools, students do abscond because of their attitudes towards agriculture, as some were forced or channelled by the streaming in the schools. One of the participants indicated that in his school *“The administration is turning a blind eye to students who abscond classes which makes it difficult for those students to do practicals and projects and at the end of the year they fail the agriculture subject.”* It can be observed that the actions of the school administration can make or break the school.

Students’ participation in class

All the participants indicated that students participate in class using information from other subjects and previous classes. Some of the participants stated that students also contribute with information from practices they have at home or community projects. One of the participants mentioned that in his class *“Students actively participate in problem-solving as some of them even volunteer to solve some problems to showcase their strength in the subject”.*

Contribution with materials to be used for practicals and projects

All the participants stated that in their schools students have a good attitude towards agriculture as they contribute farm inputs such as farm yard manure and pegs for marking plots. One of the participants mentioned that *“Students are so much motivated that they even volunteer to feed livestock during school holidays and weekends. This motivation emanates from the eggs they receive as incentives.”* This is an indication of a positive school climate that motivates students to contribute towards their learning.

c. Influence of school climate on the psychosocial status of agriculture students

The findings of the study revealed that the school climate has the following effects on the psychological status of the students: work overload, absenteeism, work stress, and bullying.

Teachers and students have work overload

A majority of the participants (75%) indicated that they were overloaded with schoolwork. They argued that the new examining system requires schools to do and mark for the students many practical activities; which is an overload for the agriculture teachers. One of the participants said *“Students are also*

overloaded with work as they are supposed to do five practical activities and a project. Consequently, the students doing agriculture get stressed towards the exams resulting in poor performance even in other subjects.” However, a smaller sector (25%) indicated that they were not overloaded due to low enrollments in agriculture; thus, making the marking of school work easier.

Absenteeism

All the participants reported a high rate of absenteeism in schools countrywide; which negatively affected the teaching and learning of agriculture. Students and teachers are often absent due to sickness and other engagements. Some school administrators do not monitor the attendance of both students and teachers. Students who are often absent tend to struggle academically. One of the participants indicated that “*School administration tries to control absenteeism in the school as students are punished when they absent themselves for no valid reason.*” Absenteeism creates a negative school climate; which affects the psychosocial status of both the teachers and the students.

Agriculture teachers fatigue

All participants stated that students and teachers become stressed towards the end of the year due to projects and practical activities. The teachers have to mark projects and practical exercises. The students have to make corrections on their research projects while preparing for the final examination; thus they become stressed. This forces some of the students to abscond classes; and ultimately fail the subject. One of the participants mentioned that “*A bright student once failed all subjects in the external examinations due to stress from work overload towards the examinations period*”. It can be noted that stress creates a school climate that negatively impacts the psychosocial status of both the staff and the students.

Bullying of students

A majority of the participants indicated that students were bullied by other students during the practical sessions. Sometimes, the students get dirty as they work in the garden and the other students who are not enrolled in agriculture tease them that they are doing a dirty job. This results in depression and stress, and some of the students end up absenting themselves during practical sessions. Some bullying students also still from the garden. One of the participants mentioned that in his school “*Students are not allowed to grow carrots in the garden as they get stolen by other students. Ultimately, this may result in some students failing as they will be unable to collect data from their carrot project; so stealing for the agriculture students is still prevalent in senior secondary schools.*” It can be noted that stealing in the garden is a form of bullying which ultimately leads to depression as students need their crops to collect the data for the practical assessment and research project.

Strategies to improve school climate in senior secondary schools in Eswatini

The following section presents the strategies essential to improve school climate in senior secondary schools in Eswatini. These include the teachers-students and parents relationship, students engagement towards learning, motivation, extracurricular activities, and educational trips. These are explained below.

Relationship between teachers-students and parents

Forty-two percent of the participants indicated that a good relationship among teachers, students and parents improves school climate in secondary schools. A healthy relationship would ensure productive collaboration among the stakeholders. Parents would be willing to assist their children with school work, pay tutors for extra lessons, and motivate them to focus on education. However, this study revealed that a majority of the participants (68%) reported a strained relationship among parents, students and teachers in their schools; thus, negatively affecting the students’ performance in the subject. One of the participants mentioned that “*Some parents do not care much about the future of their children. Parents during open days send the grandparents of the students who have no understanding of the importance of education. Instead, the elderly people keep on sympathizing with the students that they are orphans.*” The participants argued that if there is a good home-school relationship, parents would monitor students’ work.

Students' engagement in learning

An overwhelming majority of participants (82%) claimed that teachers try to engage students during the teaching and learning process, and this improves their (students) academic performance. This indicates that the students are also engaged in agriculture at home since most of them have an agricultural background. One of the participants stated, *"In my class students even volunteer to solve some problems which makes them deeply engaged in the lessons, and they end up creating a healthy competition among themselves; thus doing well in the subject."* It is worth noting that engaging the students during lessons is one of the best strategies to enhance the school climate.

Motivation

All the participants indicated that motivation is one of the strategies that create a positive climate in school. Some schools invite public speakers to motivate the learners; which enhances the school climate. The school administration also motivates top-performing students with incentives when they have excelled in tests. Top performing students are announced at the morning assembly. One of the participants mentioned that *"Motivation plays an important role in school since it results in great improvement academically."* It is clear that motivation is vital in promoting a positive school climate.

Extracurricular activities

A majority of the participants stated that sports play an important role in improving school climate. They argued that when the students are engaged in sports and go for competition, upon return to school, they exert maximum effort in order to impress their teachers; so that they continuously allow them to participate in the competitions year after year. One of the participants mentioned that *"A school without sports tends not to perform well as students keep on complaining about the sporting activities and end up failing."*

Educational trips

One of the strategies used to enhance school climate is educational trips. The atmosphere in the school is always favourable when there are educational trips. Unfortunately, most schools are reported to have abolished educational trips because of the increase in orphaned and vulnerable children in the schools. One of the participants mentioned that *"Government policies make it hard for schools to organize educational trips as schools have to apply for a trip. Since the money for the trip has to be paid into the school account and the head teacher is supposed to account for that money it becomes difficult for teachers to organize the trips"*. There is a need to devise a strategy for organizing and financing educational trips; as they are important in enhancing school climate.

DISCUSSION

Generally, the findings of the study revealed that the climate that exists in senior secondary schools is positive; as there are well-built classrooms, school gardens, adequate clean water supply, agriculture laboratories, and enough agriculture teachers in the school. However, the students were not happy with the school rules and regulations; as they would frequently break them. The findings of the study are consistent with existing literature; that a favourable school environment should provide the structure within which students, teachers, administrators, and parents function cooperatively and constructively.³²

The findings of the study revealed that the influence of school climate on agriculture students' behaviour can be explained in terms of students absconding from classes, participating in class, and contributing materials to be used during practical activities and projects. The findings are consistent with existing literature on the influence of school climate on students' academic and social development.³³ A positive school climate is associated with higher academic performance, better mental health, and less bullying. Improving school climate can be used as a preventative approach for the reduction of disruptive behaviour and improve attendance, achievement and students' and parents' satisfaction with school.³⁴

³² Sunitha, "Academic Learning Environment of Students from Aided and Unaided Co-Educational High Schools."

³³ Deci and Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory."

³⁴ Wang and Fredricks, "The Reciprocal Links between School Engagement, Youth Problem Behaviors, and School Dropout during Adolescence."

The findings indicate that student engagement enhances school climate.³⁵ High engagement improves academic outcomes such as course grades and achievement test scores.³⁶

The study revealed that school climate has the following effects on the psychological status of the students: work overload, absenteeism, work stress, and bullying. A positive school climate provides a solid foundation for supporting students' academic performance and the development of positive attitudes and behaviour. Students who are connected to school experience less distress and engage in fewer risk-taking behaviours.³⁷ A positive school climate results in positive antisocial behaviour and also enhances positive outcomes for school personnel.

The findings of the study also revealed that the strategies to improve school climate in senior secondary school include the relationship between teachers, students and parents, and students' engagement towards learning, motivation, extracurricular activities, and educational trips. The findings are consistent with existing literature; which states that establishing a good relationship between the teachers or school administration and the parents can enhance the school climate; as there is communication among the parties; which can control the behaviour of the students; thus, improving the academic performance.³⁸ Parents can also assist in monitoring the students when writing homework. Students taking full responsibility for their school work is supported by the literature.³⁹ Effective organizational structure can result in school satisfaction. Existing literature indicates that school satisfaction is an indicator of the emotional and affective aspects of the quality of life in the school setting.⁴⁰ School satisfaction has been linked to positive health outcomes, school achievement, motivation, and interest, reflects positive attitudes towards school, and is negatively associated with pupil problem behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions for the study, it is recommended that:

1. The Ministry of Education and Training should revise the school policies to create a school climate that enhances the teaching and learning of agriculture in Eswatini.
2. The Ministry of Education and Training must improve infrastructure and facilities in schools to maintain a positive climate in the different agriculture teaching schools in Eswatini.
3. Agriculture teachers should work hard to create a healthy relationship with the students to ensure a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning.
4. Senior secondary schools should increase students' participation in agriculture activities by organising agricultural shows to motivate students to choose agriculture.
5. School leadership should motivate students to perform well in agriculture through various strategies such as recognition, incentives, educational trips, sports, etc.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to assess the school climate that exists in senior secondary schools that influences the teaching and learning of agriculture in Eswatini. The findings of the study revealed that generally there is a positive school climate in schools due to the availability of relevant infrastructure. The factors that trigger a negative school climate as revealed by the study included bullying among students and heavy workloads for both agriculture teachers and students. Also, the school climate does not fully support the teaching and learning of agriculture and also influences the behaviour of the agriculture students. The psychosocial status of senior secondary school agriculture students is strained, and the agriculture syllabus requires students to do a lot of practical work. It has been recommended that the various stakeholders come up with strategies to create an amiable climate for both learners and teachers in

³⁵ Wang, Brinkworth, and Eccles, "Moderating Effects of Teacher-Student Relationship in Adolescent Trajectories of Emotional and Behavioral Adjustment."

³⁶ Wang and Fredricks, "The Reciprocal Links between School Engagement, Youth Problem Behaviors, and School Dropout during Adolescence."

³⁷ Blum, "School Connectedness: Improving the Lives of Students."

³⁸ Spera, "Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Goals, Practices, and Styles in Relation to Their Motivation and Achievement."

³⁹ Min Zhan, "Assets, Parental Expectations and Involvement, and Children's Educational Performance," *Children and Youth Services Review* 28, no. 8 (2006): 961-75.

⁴⁰ Deci and Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory."

agriculture schools. However, the success of the implementation of any strategy in the teaching and learning of the agriculture subject will depend on the schools in question.

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