CORRELATES OF SCHOOL CLIMATE: A STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING, LECTURER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP, SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN AMONG STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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Abstract

This study investigated the correlation indices of school climate with mental health wellbeing; lecturer-student interpersonal relationship; school connectedness; and motivation to learn among undergraduates in the University of Benin, Nigeria. Four hypotheses were formulated. A descriptive correlation research design was used for the study which allows the researchers to establish the relationships that exist between school climate and mental health wellbeing, lecturer-student interpersonal relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn. The population of the study is 12,140 which comprised of all full time undergraduate students of University of Benin who are in the penultimate and final year of their studies under the 2024/2025 academic session. A sample of 408 full time undergraduate students was selected for the study with emphasis on those in their penultimate and final year, using multi-stage sampling technique of stratified, simple, proportionate and purposive sampling techniques. Two sets of self-reported questionnaires were used for data collection. Psychometric properties of the instrument were ascertained for validity and reliability. The instrument was content validated by three experts in the field of Health Education, sociology of education and educational management from the University of Benin. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the split-half reliability approach in which 20 copies of the validated instrument was administered and responses were segregated into odd and even items. The scores was analyzed using the cronbach alpha analysis with the latest SPSS version to obtain the correlation coefficient. The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of four trained research assistants. Collected data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that mental wellbeing, lecturer-students relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn were positively correlated to school climate. From the values of percentage of variability, school climate account significantly for students' mental wellbeing, lecturer-students relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn among students in university of Benin. In conclusion, school climate is the framework for promoting mental wellbeing of students, lecturer-student relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn. Therefore, the need for school management and governing council to promote school climate becomes paramount particularly in enhancing students' the mental and emotional well-being of students, fostering a positive learning environment for suitable interpersonal relationship between lecturer and students, raising the sense of belongingness of students and enhancing the motivation to learn.

Keywords: Mental wellbeing, lecturer-student relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn.

Introduction

The school climate is the organization of the school environment that enhances learning, raises interest of learners and promotes their quality of life, therefore paying detailed attention to the school climate is imperative. According to Wang and Degol (2016), school climate can be described as a multidimensional construct that can be conceptualized into four areas: safety, community, academic environment, and institutional environment. Each of these areas plays a crucial role in supporting the functioning and flourishing of students (Lewno-Dumdie et al., 2020). A sustained positive school climate promotes student cognitive, social, mental and emotional development, and behavioural and learning outcomes. Given that the different dimensions of school climate play a crucial role in meeting students' psychosocial needs, it can be argued that when these needs are met, students are more likely to engage in learning and develop essential academic skills (Akorede et al., 2023; Conesa et al., 2022). Contextual arguments suggest that the characteristics of the school itself create a clustering effect – for example, the shared physical environment, school policies and priorities, ethos and culture (Rudasill et al., 2018).

Mental wellbeing concerns optimal experience and functioning, emphasizing the subjective experiences of happiness and life satisfaction (Buecker et al., 2023). Developing positive mental wellbeing has long-term

benefits, as adolescents with high wellbeing tend to perform better academically, have greater career success, and report higher life satisfaction in adulthood (Loft & Waldfogel, 2021; Thomson et al., 2022). Social relationships and physical health are key factors in fostering mental wellbeing (Merino et al., 2024), and school climate plays a particularly important role, as adolescents spend a significant portion of their daily lives in school (Hawkins et al., 2023). School climate influences students' mental wellbeing by shaping their social interactions, sense of belonging, and academic motivation. When students feel supported by teachers and peers, experience meaningful learning, and develop self-efficacy, they are more likely to engage in school positively. Supportive peer networks, inclusive extracurricular activities, and school-based mental health initiatives create an environment that fosters a sense of belonging and emotional security (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Research has shown that students' perceptions of their school climate are closely linked to both health and psychosocial wellbeing (Akorede et al., 2021: Bosacki et al., 2023; Tusha et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2020). For example, in a meta-analysis, with class climate composed of instructional, socioemotional and organisational class processes, the authors found evidence that higher class climate was associated with lower externalising behaviour and socioemotional distress (Wang et al., 2020).Students construct their identities through their experiences with their classroom climate and school climate by developing competencies and skills, understanding their social standing among peers, and enhancing their ability to self-regulate learning behaviors (Li et al., 2024; Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2024). The role of school climate is, therefore, pivotal in shaping students' holistic development and mental wellbeing through extended socialization, fostering friendships, providing emotional support, and cultivating a sense of belonging (Huang & Chui, 2024; Tusha et al., 2024).

In the university, there is a great diversity in terms of sociocultural, political, religious and racial backgrounds among students and lecturers. This diversity necessitates an appropriate lecturer-student relationship in order to create a campus environment that prepares students and lecturers to live and work amicably in a socio-culturally diverse society. Newton (2012) has opined that lecturers' contact with students in and out of the classroom is very important in student motivation and may help to prepare students to respond to an increasing complex global environment. A healthy relationship between the lecturers and students might therefore influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education. The impact the university is expected to bestow on students may be achieved due to appropriate lecturer-student relationship which can facilitate both formal and informal interactions. In such an environment, the student is assisted to develop those qualities that go with good learning skills and leadership. This is perhaps due to the students' identification with lecturers as role models, which has been acknowledged as vital to the acquisitions of good learning skills and functional behavior. Regarding lecturer-student relationships, students might form close relationships when they begin to acquire event-based information of their lecturers' tendencies to be available and sensitive to their needs. In this way, lecturers might function as a secure base from which children can engage in exploration and their intellectual activities in the classroom can be scaffolded.

Socio-cultural researchers do not appreciate simply the structural characteristics but the overall interpersonal culture of the classroom that contributes to lecturer–student interactions (Turner & Meyer, 2020). While creating a shared intellectual space, teachers might build the relationships with their students upon empathetic stimulation. In contrast, impersonal teaching styles can leave students feeling vulnerable and limited in terms of their achievements. For example, strategies emphasizing the power differential between students and lecturers can have a negative impact on relationships, particularly when students do not understand the process of evaluation of their performance. Clearly, poor quality relationships with teachers and non-supportive classroom climates can be seen as sources of chronic stress, poor motivation to learn and disjointed school connectedness. It is therefore assume that the lecturer-student relationship may thus serve an important support function, especially for first year students in their attempts to adjust to the challenges at school.

The affective or emotional dimension of engagement refers to the young people's attraction to school with the absence of negative emotions and the presence of positive emotions (i.e., interest, joy) during task involvement (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). The behavioral aspect of engagement refers to factors (i.e., attention, effort, and persistence) that are in accordance with school expectations, learning-related tasks, and involvement in different school activities, even though not related to learning. School enjoyment is influenced by different factors involving values, reading, and writing skills, expectations of social context (i.e., peers, teachers, and families) and is affected by both school and out-of-school contexts (Jennings, 2003; Ainley & Ainley, 2011). In fact, there is

evidence that students are more engaged in school and attain higher academic achievement in schools with a positive school climate (Wang & Degol, 2016; Konold et al., 2018).

School connectedness is a multifactorial construct that includes students' thoughts (e.g., perceptions of the quality of relationships with teachers and peers and levels of support, feelings and behaviours. School connectedness is associated with greater academic achievement and psychological wellbeing. Cross-sectional studies link school connectedness with less anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours, especially for young adults. Previous systematic reviews examining similar constructs such as school belonging or school climate (Tusha, Bulut & Al-Hendawi, 2024) (of which school connectedness is one component) on psychological wellbeing and mental health in young people. Greater connection to school might also bring greater learning of cognitive, social, and emotional skills that promote good mental health, or avoidance of hazards to mental health which arise from dropping out of education (i.e., protective relationship). Conversely, connection to school might be associated with academic pressures and in turn, lead to anxiety and poorer mental health (i.e, risk relationship).

Uncomfortable feeling in school is also caused by how the school responds to their problems in a repressive way, such as time out or exclusionary discipline, school suspension, office discipline referral or giving them removal experience from class activity (Lewis et al., 2017). On the other hand, the quality of life of students with emotional and behaviour disorders enhancement is significantly influenced by positive support from the school team, good social relationships, mentoring provided and the provision of psychological interventions (Chung-Do et al., 2015). Supportive and protective schools will reduce the influence of school disorder on student achievement and improve school connectedness and motivation to learn among learners (Hurd et al., 2015). Students' externalising or internalising problem behaviour that is related to reduce connectedness to school can be predicted from students' perception of school disorder (Hurd et al., 2015). School connectedness is everything related to students' feeling about how adults and their friends in the school environment care about them as individuals, their academic success and their well-being in general (Marsh et al., 2019). Various literature studies have mentioned that school connectedness has strong psychological attributes. These include high motivation in school activities, feelings of autonomy and competence, sense of belongingness with peers and teachers and feelings involved with activities at school (Hodges et al., 2018). Aspects of school connectedness include school bonding and attachment, school engagement and school climate.

Furthermore, a positive school climate is crucial for fostering students willingness to learn, as it create a safe, supportive and engaging environment that encourage intellectual curiosity and academic success. Accordingly, the environment that satisfies or fulfils students' basic needs is predicted to support their self-motivation, engagement, and well-being. Academic motivation is recognized as one of the most effective driving forces of student learning (Tucker, Zayco & Herman, 2002) as well as the only factor that guarantees students' academic achievement (Griffin, MacKewn, Moser & VanVuren, 2012), which the school climate play a significant role to maintain.

Statement of the problem

Over the past two decades, considerable researches have been carried out about the importance of school climate as it relate to academic performance and shaping the experiences of the learners. It is observed that not paying attention to the nature and values of the school climate affect the general coordination of the school system, emotional stability of learners, self-efficacy development of the learners and general academic performance of the learners. Although some studies have identified a positive association between a supportive school climate and mental wellbeing, teacher-students relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn, most have primarily focused on primary and secondary students, who are not basically leaving their familiar domestic environment or supervision of their parents. It is against this background, the researcher want to investigate correlation of school climate against the mental wellbeing of learners, lecturer-students relationship, school connectedness among learners and motivation to learn among learners.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

1. There is no significant correlation between school climate and mental wellbeing among students of University of Benin

2. There is no significant correlation between school climate and lecturer-student relationship among students of University of Benin.
3. There is no significant correlation between school climate and school connectedness among students of University of Benin.
4. There is no significant correlation between school climate and motivation to learn among students of University of Benin

Method and Materials

The study was based on descriptive correlational research design. This design allows the researchers to establish relationships that exist between variables and study phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2017). The population of the study comprised of all full time undergraduate students of University of Benin under the 2024/2025 academic session. The multi stage sampling technique was used, which comprised of stratified, simple, proportionate and purposive sampling techniques to select 408 University of Benin students (respondents) and this was carried out by using the criteria of representation based on gender balance, in school and off-campus students and religion differential. Two questionnaires including adapted Ottawa Carleton district school climate survey (OCDSCS) and general health psychological components of mental wellbeing, lecturer-student relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn which the independents variables were developed by the researchers. The participants completed self-report questionnaires on school climate survey and other variables of mental wellbeing, lecturer-student relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn. It should be noted that participants completed the questionnaires of their own volition, remained anonymous and were not asked by the researchers to reveal confidential details in the questionnaires. The validity of the instrument was done by psychometric test analysis carried out by health psychologist, sociologist and health educators in the University of Benin. The reliability testing of 30 students from faculties of Art, Education and Engineering and after two weeks of the first administration, same questionnaire were re-administered to same set of students. The two set of scores obtained were subjected to analysis of correlation to get 0.74 reliability coefficient, hence ascertained reliable for the study. The instruments were administered by the researchers and three research assistants trained for the purpose of the study. The training was done in one day that entailed target respondents, language to motivate respondents and to check for correctness of questionnaires distributed. Completed instrument were collected, sorted, coded. To analyze the data, correlation between variables were examined, using Pearson product-moment correlations. In this regard, correlation coefficient(r) ±0-0.49 indicate a weak relationship, ±0.5-0.69 is a strong relationship and ±0.7-1 is a very strong relationship with regard to the arithmetic sign (±) to indicate the direction of strength of relationship.

Presentation of Results

Hypothesis One H_{01}: There is no significant correlation between school climate and mental wellbeing among students of University of Benin

Table 1: Summary of PPMC analysis of correlation between school climate and mental wellbeing among students of University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r^2	p-value.	Decision
School climate Mental wellbeing	408	15.09	6.91	.792	0.627	..036	Ho Rejected

N=sample size, SD=standard deviation, r-cal=pearson coefficient, r 2 =coefficient of determination

From the result on table 1, school climate and mental wellbeing were significantly related: Pearson r, 0.792, p-value=0.036. This indicates a significant relationship between school climate and mental wellbeing because the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between school climate and mental wellbeing among students of University of Benin City was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between school climate and mental wellbeing among students of University of Benin City. Again, the r^2 of 0.627 explains that the variability in school climate account for 62 percent of the variability in mental wellbeing. This shows that school climate explains and determines the mental wellbeing of students in University of Benin.

Hypothesis Two H_{02}: There is no significant correlation between school climate and lecturer-student relationship among students of University of Benin

Table 2: Summary of PPMC analysis of correlation between school climate and lecturer-student relationship among students of University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r^2	p-value.	Decision
School climate Lecturer-student relationship	408	17.01	7.23	.791	0.626	.039	Ho Rejected

N=sample size, SD=standard deviation, r-cal=pearson coefficient, r 2 =coefficient of determination

From the result on table 2, school climate and lecturer-student relationship were significantly related: Pearson r, 0.791, p-value=0.039. This indicates a significant relationship between school climate and lecturer-student relationship because the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between school climate and lecturer-student relationship among students of University of Benin City was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between school climate and lecturer-student relationship among students of University of Benin City. Again, the r^2 of 0.63 explains that the variability in school climate account for 63 percent of the variability in lecturer-student relationship. This shows that school climate explains and determines the lecturer-student relationship of students in University of Benin.

Hypothesis Three H_{03}: There is no significant correlation between school climate and school connectedness among students of University of Benin.

Table 3: Summary of PPMC analysis of correlation between school climate and school connectedness among students of University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r^2	p-value.	Decision
School climate School connectedness	408	15.09	7.07	.817	0.667	.031	Ho Rejected

N=sample size, SD=standard deviation, r-cal=pearson coefficient, r 2 =coefficient of determination

From the result on table 3, school climate and school connectedness were significantly related: Pearson r, 0.817, p-value=0.031. This indicates a significant relationship between school climate and school connectedness because the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between school climate and school connectedness among students of University of Benin City was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between school climate and school connectedness among students of University of Benin City. Again, the r^2 of 0.67 explains that the variability in school climate account for 67 percent of the variability in school connectedness. This shows that school climate explains and determines the school connectedness of students in University of Benin.

Hypothesis Four H_{04}: There is no significant correlation between school climate and motivation to learn among students of University of Benin

Table 4: Summary of PPMC analysis of correlation between school climate and social unrest among students of University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r^2	p-value.	Decision
School climate Motivation to learn	408	15.99	7.71	.887	0.787	.039	Ho Rejected

N=sample size, SD=standard deviation, r-cal=pearson coefficient, r 2 =coefficient of determination

From the result on table 4, school climate and motivation to learn were significantly related: Pearson r, 0.887, p-value=0.039. This indicates a significant relationship between school climate and motivation to learn because the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between school climate and motivation to learn among students of University of Benin City was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between school climate and motivation to learn among

students of University of Benin City. Again, the r^2 of 0.79 explains that the variability in school climate account for 79 percent of the variability in motivation to learn. This shows that school climate explains and determines the motivation to learn of students in University of Benin.

Discussion of Findings

The school climate describes the personality of the school based on its operation that reflects the physical, emotional, mental, social and organizational frameworks. The study analyzed the school climate on mental wellbeing, lecturer-students relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn among students in University of Benin. The correlation between school climate and mental wellbeing of students was positively high (r=0.792) and further demonstrated that 62% of the mental wellbeing of students in school is explained by the nature of school climate. The mental wellbeing of students which reflect their emotional stability, healthy decision making, ability to manage stressful situation, avoiding suicidal intention, positive interaction among colleagues including positive temperament and avoidance of illicit drugs are greatly determined by the nature of school climate set up and maintained over the years (Olubiyi et al., 2019). This finding corroborate with that of Bosacki et al (2023); which stated that school climate represent an important factor in the maintaining mental wellbeing and emotional stability among students in a stressful learning environment. Again, finding from Huang and Chui (2024) and Tusha et al. (2024) corroborated with the finding of the study that mental wellbeing among learners is a function of quality positive school climate organized for the general learning development of the learners.

Regarding the correlation analysis between school climate and lecturer-student relationship, there exist a positive relationship between these variables (r=0.791). This demonstrated that 63% of the lecturer-student relationship in school is explained by the nature of school climate. It therefore explains that the school climate through cordial relationship, in loco parentis, provide a friendly learning environment devoid of hostility. Creating and maintaining a friendly learning environment and social support to students through positive interpersonal relationship can promote excellent learning satisfaction, motivation to learn and good learning performance. This finding is in congruent with finding of Newton (2012) who established that better results in learning are achieved by positive lecturer-students relationship and guidance. Another study by Turner and Meyer, (2020) found that the school climate through the element of interpersonal relationship between instructors and learners can enhance quality academic performance in school and arouse interest for advanced learning.

Again, the correlation between school connectedness of the students was positively high (r=0.87) and further demonstrated that 67% of the school connectedness among students in school is explained by the nature of school climate. The school connectedness is a reflection of students being part of the school planning and perceived that they are participants to the decision making process for effective schooling and performance. Also, it demonstrates school response to students' challenges and concern to the emotional stability and general wellbeing of students including sense of belongingness reflect positive school connectedness. This finding corroborate with the finding of Chung-Do et al. (2015) that opined that effective learning can be achieved through ensuring a sense of belongingness among learners and is closely related to school climate. Again, finding from Hurd et al. (2015) corroborated with the finding of the study that school connectedness is a function of quality and positive school climate organized for the general learning development of the learners.

Finally, the correlation analysis between school climate and motivation to learn among students demonstrates a positive relationship between these variables (r=0.887) and further demonstrated that 79% of the motivation to learn among students in school is explained by the nature and operation of the school climate. It therefore explains that the school climate which is the character of the general learning environment has its influence on raising interest in learning, reducing school absenteeism, lateness or missing classes and encouraging full participation in the learning activities. Creating and maintaining a friendly learning environment, provision of social support and motivated lecturers enhance interest and motivation to learn among students. This finding is in congruent with finding from Tucker et al. (2002) which asserted that motivated to learn among learners can be promoted with positive school climate organized and improved on. Another study by Griffin et al. (2012) found that self-motivated students, students' engagement are function of the nature of school climate created and implemented.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that school climate is positively related and play a significant role in the mental wellbeing of students, lecturer-student relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn among university students. School climate is a also a central determining factor that explains students mental wellbeing, interpersonal relationship, school connectedness and motivation to learn.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the findings and conclusion of the study;

1. University management and university stakeholders should provide and promote a conducive learning environment that is friendly and receptive for self-discovery which will enhance the mental wellbeing of learners
2. Lecturers and nonacademic staff of the university should be available, show compassion and engage students in a friendly and supportive manner. The use of harsh words and nonchalant attitude should be discouraged in all departments, unit and centres of the university. Course advisers should be proactive and guide students appropriately.
3. University management and officers should bring in the students in critical planning and implementation of the schooling activities. Officers of the university should be concern about the emotional stability of students and the general wellbeing, hence promoting sense of belongingness among learners.
4. School facilities for recreational activities and hands on activities should be provided by university management in a suitable learning environment. Lecturers should be well equipped to make learning interesting to students

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