Influence of Collaborative and Autonomous Organizational Climates on Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Mbeere North, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The quality of organizational climate within educational institutions significantly influences teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. In Kenya, persistent challenges such as teacher demotivation, high attrition, and declining instructional quality raise concerns about the workplace environment, particularly in rural and semi-arid sub-counties like Mbeere North in Embu County. This study investigated the influence of collaborative and autonomous organizational climates on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Mbeere North Sub-County. The study was anchored on the Organizational Climate Theory and employed a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 650 teachers and 47 headteachers across 47 public secondary schools. A proportionate sample of 229 teachers and 25 headteachers was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using structured questionnaires for teachers and a semi-structured interview guide for headteachers. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings revealed that a collaborative organizational climate had a significant positive effect on teacher job performance ($\beta = 0.257$, $t = 3.507$, $p < 0.05$), highlighting the importance of teamwork and peer support. Furthermore, an autonomous organizational climate significantly influenced job performance ($\beta = 0.399$, $t = 3.117$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that professional freedom and innovation improve teacher accountability and instructional delivery. The study concludes that fostering collaborative practices and granting professional autonomy are critical to enhancing teacher effectiveness. It is recommended that school administrators actively promote cross-departmental teamwork and empower teachers with instructional independence to boost overall academic performance.

Keywords: Autonomous climate, Collaborative climate, Organizational climate, Public secondary schools, Teachers' job performance.

INTRODUCTION

Job performance is the degree to which employees fulfill their duties and achieve objectives within an organization. In the education sector, job performance encompasses key aspects such as lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, student assessment, and participation in co-curricular activities. Teachers' job performance is critical as it has a direct impact on student-learning outcomes, overall school success, and the realization of national education goals such as Kenya's Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

However, the education sector in Kenya is grappling with a persistent teacher retention crisis. Many teachers leave the profession prematurely due to dissatisfaction with their work environments, lack of professional support, low morale, and burnout. One of the underlying yet underexplored contributors to this crisis is the organizational climate within schools. Organizational climate denotes the shared perceptions, attitudes, and norms that shape the working environment. While existing research in Kenya often focuses on extrinsic factors such as salary, workload, and infrastructure, less attention has been given to internal, school-based conditions that influence teachers' day-to-day experiences.

In Embu County, Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results show that Mbeere North Sub-County has consistently posted below-average performance compared to other sub-counties. Schools in this area face significant educational challenges arising from their location in an arid and semi-arid land (ASAL), which often leads to low school attendance and high dropout rates. These environmental conditions affect teachers' ability to sustain instructional delivery and learner engagement. Consequently, restricted autonomy, low morale, and minimal collaboration among staff have become common.

Understanding how specific organizational climate factors—specifically collaborative and autonomous climates—influence teacher performance in this context is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of collaborative and autonomous organizational climates on the job performance of secondary school teachers in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Organizational Climate and Teachers' Job Performance

A school's organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of the institution, driving achievement, and setting behavioral standards. Wang'ombe (2023) notes that a positive school culture is fostered when the administration, teachers, and staff engage in healthy behaviors, involve stakeholders in collaborative decision-making, and uphold high professional standards. Torres (2022) emphasizes that leadership, teamwork, and a focus on goals are essential in integrating these elements into a cohesive organizational culture.

Collaborative organizational climate refers to the extent to which teachers work together, share responsibilities, and support each other in accomplishing school goals. According to Hafeez and Akhtar (2022), community participation and collaboration among stakeholders in decision-making processes lead to sustainable educational improvements. Collaborative leadership encourages shared responsibilities, where everyone in the organization plays an active role in achieving educational goals. Siddiqui, Samad, and Wasif (2023) explored collaborative cultures and highlighted that collaboration must be a fundamental way of operating built on shared language and clear expectations.

Research by Çoban and Atasoy (2020) revealed that teacher collaboration positively influences organizational innovation. When school principals practice distributed leadership, they create a supportive and collaborative environment that motivates teachers to develop new teaching ideas, embrace change, improve problem-solving skills, and share practices. Furthermore, Kibata and Nyakundi (2023) highlighted that when principals initiated staff development through mentorship and used tools like school meetings for communication, it fostered a collaborative culture and positively impacted student outcomes, even in resource-constrained environments. Jhonshon, Mendoza, and Sobirin (2024) argued that collaborative practices among school leaders positively influence academic performance and recommended that principals should actively promote such networks.

Autonomous Organizational Climate and Teachers' Job Performance

An autonomous organizational climate in schools is characterized by a supportive environment where teachers have significant freedom to manage their responsibilities. Adinew (2024) highlights that in such a setting, the principal plays a key role in inspiring enthusiasm and dedication, which fosters a strong sense of commitment among teachers. Che, Zhu, and Huang (2022) indicated that work autonomy is a key component linked to employees' well-being and engagement. Furthermore, Ijaz and Tarar (2020) highlight that how employees perceive their work environment plays a crucial role in fulfilling their psychological needs and driving their engagement, specifically noting the positive impact of decision-making involvement and work autonomy.

Wangi (2022) adds that the defining aspect of an autonomous school climate is the freedom principals provide to teachers, allowing them to establish their own interaction structures and explore ways to fulfill both their and their students' social needs. This stands in contrast to a controlled school climate, which heavily prioritizes hard work at the expense of social interactions.

Akpoguma and Nwogbo (2024) highlighted that an autonomous climate significantly enhances educators' job commitment, while a controlled climate yields lesser commitment. Furthermore, Oduro, Parker, and Mensah

(2024) found that teacher autonomy can account for substantial variations in job satisfaction, emphasizing the critical need to promote teacher autonomy and ensure teachers are engaged in policy-making processes. Conversely, Alharbi and Saaty (2022) noted that teachers often feel demotivated when strict and rigid teaching guidelines undermine their professional autonomy, limiting their ability to select the teaching methods they find most effective.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded in the Organizational Climate Theory, originally developed by Litwin and Stringer (1968). This theory posits that organizational climate entails the collective perceptions and attitudes of individuals within an organization regarding its practices, procedures, and interactions. According to Litwin and Stringer, the organizational climate is a psychological environment shaped by leadership styles, communication patterns, reward systems, decision-making structures, and the level of interpersonal support. The theory emphasizes that these elements significantly influence employee behavior, motivation, and performance.

At the core of the theory is the principle that climate is perception-based. This means that what matters most is not just the formal structure or policies of an organization, but how these elements are experienced and interpreted by individuals within it. It also emphasizes the multidimensional nature of climate, suggesting that factors such as collaboration among staff and professional autonomy interact to create a particular work environment. Crucially, the theory asserts a direct link between organizational climate and performance: a positive climate promotes motivation, engagement, and productivity, while a negative one leads to dissatisfaction and poor outcomes.

The theory's relevance in education was operationalized by Hoy et al. (1991) through the development of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), which highlighted the influence of open and engaged climates on teacher morale. In the African context, scholars have also demonstrated the applicability of this theory. Oduor and Simiyu (2023), in a study conducted in Kenyan public secondary schools, found that positive organizational climates significantly enhanced teacher commitment and performance. Similarly, Komba and Nkumbi (2021) linked a healthy school climate with improved teacher retention and morale in Tanzania, suggesting that the internal environment of schools is a key determinant of teacher engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is effective for gathering information that reflects the real experiences and viewpoints of respondents without manipulating the study environment. The study was conducted in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya. The target population comprised all 47 public secondary schools in the sub-county, consisting of 650 teachers and 47 headteachers. A sample size of 254 respondents (229 teachers and 25 headteachers) was determined using Slovin's formula and selected via stratified and simple random sampling techniques.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires for the teachers, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), and a semi-structured interview guide for the headteachers. Content, construct, and face validity were established through expert review and a pilot study conducted in the neighboring Mbeere South Sub-County. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) yielded an acceptable threshold above 0.7. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (logistic regression) using SPSS. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed thematically.

RESULTS

The study achieved an overall response rate of 88.6%, with 205 teachers and 20 headteachers successfully completing and returning valid research instruments. This high response rate provides a highly reliable foundation for analyzing the variables under investigation.

Influence of Collaborative Organizational Climate on Job Performance

The first objective of this paper was to examine how a collaborative organizational climate influences the job performance of secondary school teachers. A collaborative climate focuses on teamwork, joint problem-solving, and professional support among staff. The descriptive findings generated from the teachers' responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Collaborative Organizational Climate

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Dev
Teachers often work together to improve instruction.	25.9	40.0	2.4	29.8	2.0	2.42	1.217
There is a culture of shared decision-making in the school.	13.7	63.4	3.4	12.7	6.8	2.36	1.082
Team teaching or peer consultation is encouraged.	9.8	55.6	3.4	22.9	8.3	2.64	1.178
Collaboration across departments is actively promoted.	12.7	57.1	4.9	18.5	6.8	2.50	1.136
Teachers are supported by peers in addressing academic or behavioural issues.	10.2	45.9	2.9	32.2	8.8	2.83	1.233
Total Mean						2.55	1.169

A detailed breakdown of the data in Table 1 reveals a concerning trend of professional isolation within the schools. When asked if teachers frequently collaborate to enhance instruction, a combined majority of 65.9% (25.9% strongly disagreeing and 40.0% disagreeing) reported that they do not. This suggests that teachers largely work in silos when it comes to lesson planning and curriculum delivery. Without mutual support, the exchange of innovative pedagogical strategies is stifled.

Furthermore, the data points to a highly rigid, top-down administrative structure. An overwhelming 77.1% of respondents disagreed that there was a culture of shared decision-making in their schools. When teachers feel excluded from shaping school policies and academic strategies, their sense of ownership diminishes, which naturally lowers their motivation and daily job performance. Interestingly, while formal structures of collaboration (like team teaching and interdepartmental projects) scored poorly, informal peer support showed slightly better results. Approximately 41.0% of teachers agreed that they receive support from peers when addressing specific academic or behavioral challenges with students. This implies that while institutionalized collaboration is weak, teachers still rely on informal networks to cope with classroom difficulties.

Insights from the headteacher interviews deeply corroborated these quantitative findings. Most school leaders openly admitted that advanced collaborative practices, such as co-teaching, were rarely utilized. One headteacher explained, *"Teachers occasionally plan jointly during departmental meetings, but on the other hand, the practice of co-teaching is not common in our school."* Despite this, headteachers unanimously recognized the value of collaboration. Another administrator noted, *"Schools where teachers collaborate perform better, since issues of academic and behavioural challenges are tackled in unison."* This reveals a gap between what school leaders know is effective and what is actually practiced on the ground.

To determine the statistical weight of these observations, a logistic regression analysis was performed (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression Coefficients for Collaborative Organizational Climate

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	3.447	1.147	-	3.005	0.000
Collaborative Climate	0.803	0.229	0.257	3.507	0.019

The regression results confirmed that a collaborative organizational climate has a positive and statistically significant influence on teachers' job performance ($\beta = 0.257$, $t = 3.507$, $p = 0.019$). Because the p-value is well

below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected. This statistical evidence translates to a clear reality: for every unit increase in a collaborative climate, teacher job performance improves by 0.803 units. When schools break down isolation and encourage collective responsibility, teachers are better equipped to deliver high-quality instruction.

Influence of Autonomous Organizational Climate on Job Performance

The second objective explored how an autonomous organizational climate—defined by the degree of professional freedom, trust, and independence granted to teachers—affects their daily performance. The descriptive data is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Autonomous Organizational Climate

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Dev
I have the freedom to design and implement my lesson plans.	15.6	30.2	2.4	49.3	2.4	2.93	1.233
I am trusted to make professional judgments in my teaching.	0	32.2	0.5	52.7	14.6	3.50	1.092
I have flexibility in using different instructional approaches.	6.3	54.1	4.9	26.8	7.8	2.76	1.150
I am involved in school-level decision-making processes.	11.7	63.9	5.9	15.1	3.4	2.35	0.986
I am encouraged to innovate in classroom management and pedagogy.	12.7	46.3	5.4	26.3	9.3	2.73	1.241
Total Mean						2.85	1.140

The data in Table 3 paints a picture of "constrained autonomy" within these secondary schools. A striking paradox emerged: a significant majority of teachers (67.3%) felt they were trusted by their administrators to make professional judgments in their teaching. However, when asked about the practical application of this trust, the numbers dropped sharply. For instance, 60.4% reported lacking the flexibility to use different instructional approaches, and 59.0% felt they were not encouraged to innovate in their pedagogy.

Furthermore, 75.6% of the respondents disagreed that they were involved in school-level decision-making processes. This suggests that while teachers are respected as subject matter experts inside their specific classrooms, they are largely excluded from broader academic planning and policy formulation. This type of restricted autonomy limits a teacher's ability to adapt to the unique, changing needs of their students, forcing them to rely on routine, standardized methods that may not always yield the best academic results.

During the interviews, headteachers provided context for this constrained autonomy, acknowledging that while freedom exists, it is tightly bound by institutional guidelines. One headteacher articulated this boundary clearly: *"Teachers prepare their lesson plans and decide how to teach, but they must follow the guidelines and schemes of work provided by the school."* Nevertheless, administrators recognized the psychological benefits of professional independence. Another headteacher observed, *"When teachers are given room to decide how to teach, they feel respected and motivated, and this reflects in their performance."*

To assess the predictive power of autonomy on performance, a regression analysis was conducted (Table 4).

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for Autonomous Organizational Climate

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	3.447	1.147	-	3.005	0.000
Autonomous Climate	0.664	0.213	0.399	3.117	0.034

The regression output demonstrated that an autonomous organizational climate has a positive and statistically significant influence on teachers' job performance ($\beta = 0.399$, $t = 3.117$, $p = 0.034$). A one-unit increase in

autonomy within the school climate corresponds to an improvement of 0.664 units in teachers' job performance, firmly rejecting the null hypothesis. This indicates that granting teachers the professional freedom to exercise their judgment, without excessive micromanagement, directly boosts their effectiveness and accountability.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer a rich, evidence-based narrative regarding how internal school environments shape educator effectiveness in Mbeere North. The data clearly demonstrates that both collaborative and autonomous organizational climates are powerful predictors of teachers' job performance. In examining the collaborative climate, the study highlights a critical gap between the recognized value of teamwork and its actual implementation. While teachers rely heavily on informal peer networks to manage behavioral and academic challenges, structured collaboration—such as co-teaching and cross-departmental planning—remains weak. This lack of formal collaboration creates professional isolation, which limits the cross-pollination of effective teaching strategies. The significant regression outcomes align directly with the arguments of Çoban and Atasoy (2020) and Siddiqui, Samad, and Wasif (2023), who established that schools prioritizing shared decision-making and peer cooperation foster higher levels of innovation, resilience, and problem-solving capacities among staff.

Equally compelling are the findings regarding the autonomous climate. The results exposed a scenario where teachers experience "supervised independence." They feel trusted as professionals but are structurally hindered from exercising flexibility in their teaching methods or participating in school-wide decisions. Despite these administrative restrictions, the statistical model proved that autonomy is a critical driver of performance. When teachers are empowered with instructional independence, their sense of ownership over student outcomes increases, which naturally elevates their commitment and effort. This corroborates the findings of Akpoguma and Nwogbo (2024) and Oduro et al. (2024), who concluded that autonomous climates fulfill crucial psychological needs for educators, mitigating demotivation and significantly enhancing curriculum delivery. Ultimately, these two dimensions complement one another. A collaborative climate provides the necessary social and professional support network, while an autonomous climate provides the individual empowerment required to act innovatively. Together, they form a highly effective, dynamic working environment that can sustain teacher performance even in historically challenging educational zones.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the internal organizational climate of a school is a profound determinant of educational success. Specifically, a collaborative organizational climate positively affects teacher job performance by breaking down professional isolation. When teachers engage in structured teamwork, peer support, and shared problem-solving, their ability to meet instructional deadlines and achieve desired learning outcomes is significantly enhanced. Similarly, an autonomous organizational climate has a highly meaningful impact on job performance. Affording teachers the professional freedom to make instructional judgments, innovate in their pedagogical approaches, and participate in institutional decision-making directly enhances their motivation, accountability, and overall job effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings and subsequent discussion, the study recommends the following:

1. Institutionalize Collaborative Practices: School heads must move beyond informal peer support by formally structuring collaboration. This can be achieved by mandating cross-departmental meetings, creating co-teaching schedules, and establishing professional learning communities where teachers can actively share pedagogical innovations.
2. Expand Professional Autonomy: School management should transition from rigid, top-down oversight to a model that promotes instructional independence. Teachers should be granted the flexibility to design lesson plans and adopt diverse instructional approaches tailored to the specific needs of their learners, without the burden of excessive micromanagement.
3. Promote Inclusive Decision-Making: Educational policymakers and school administrators must actively integrate teachers into broader school-level decision-making processes. Allowing teachers a voice in policy

formulation not only fulfills their professional psychological needs but also deepens their commitment to the institution's academic goals.

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