Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.-March 2020, 9(1), 34-50
DOI: https://doi.org/10.20372/star.v9i1.03
ISSN: 2226-7522 (Print) and 2305-3372 (Online)
Science, Technology and Arts Research Journal
Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan. - March 2020, 9(1), 34-50
Journal Homepage: https://journals.wgu.edu.et

Original Research

Students' Perceptions of School Climate: Differences between Private and Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract

School climates in private and public institutions may differ given the unique characteristics of competitive pressure, family involvement, and key autonomy. Examining how private and public secondary school students perceive the school climate is the goal of this research. This study was conducted using a descriptive research design. The sample consisted of 650 randomly selected high school students (318 from private schools and 332 from public schools). The data were gathered using a questionnaire. Means and t-tests were used for data analysis. The results indicate that private secondary school students viewed the school climate more positively than their public secondary school counterparts. Analysis of the variable gender indicated that male and female students showed no significant variations in their overall impressions of the school atmosphere. However, concerning the specific dimensions of the school climate, male students were more positive towards their experience of peer support, whereas female students were more optimistic about the clarity of school rules than male students. Therefore, to increase students' involvement in the school, it is necessary to create a pleasant and engaging school atmosphere. Thus, there is a need to create a conducive environment for school students to participate and keep them engaged.

Article Information

Article History:
Received : 05-01-2020
Revised : 24-03-2020
Accepted : 26-03-2020

Keywords:
perception, private school, public school, differences

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INTRODUCTION

School climate encompasses the overall atmosphere and character of the educational environment. It includes interactions among students, teachers, and parents as well as physical and emotional surroundings (Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Goldenberg & Klavir, 2017; Cohen et al., 2009; United States Department of Education [US DE], 2018). The school climate is a wide-ranging and complex concept that touches on many facets of a student's educational experience (Cohen et al., 2009). School culture, or the values and principles that underpin the institution and its mission statement, is distinct from the school environment. The school climate is determined by interactions among its members, whereas its culture is based on the environment as a whole. The primary distinction between the school environment and school culture is that the former is more inclusive than the latter (Glover & Coleman, 2005; Ramelow et al., 2015). Furthermore, although some schools are restrictive, unpopular, and dangerous, others are pleasant, inclusive, and helpful (US DE, 2014).

Schools that value leadership, teamwork, and high academic standards create an environment that supports student success. For a school to have a positive environment and culture, administrators, instructors, and students must interact, be consistent, and be dedicated to it (Glover & Coleman, 2005; MacNeil, 2009). Private schools prioritise a caring atmosphere, whereas public schools offer a more varied student body. Schools have different climates; private schools provide a more personal learning environment by encouraging parental participation and lower class numbers (Krommendyk, 2007; National Centre for Educational Statistics, NCES, 1997). Additionally, they may hire instructors more freely, which may impact credentials. Although private schools may charge tuition, public institutions are typically less expensive. These variations may differ across schools and are not always relevant. To improve student results and provide comparable learning environments, it is essential to assess these discrepancies (Begna, 2017; Buening, 2014; Seboka, 2003).

Measuring the school climates of private and public schools offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers. It helps identify areas for improvement, set goals, and guide efforts to create a safe and inclusive learning environment. Regular monitoring of the climate allows for data-driven decisions and adjustments and assesses student engagement, which is crucial for academic success. Understanding these differences can inform education policymakers and practitioners by shaping policies that promote positive school climates, enhance student outcomes, and create equitable learning environments (Krommendyk, 2007; MacNeil, 2009).

A trustworthy and effective technique for assessing the learning environment is to acquire and interpret students' impressions of their school climate (Fauth et al., 2014; Marraccini et al., 2019; Ramelow, 2015). This is essential because student perceptions provide a more accurate image of what is happening in classrooms and offer a great opportunity for educational advancement. To support schools in this country, it may be beneficial to examine students' perceptions of the educational environment.

Statement of the problem

Recently, private education has expanded in Ethiopia, particularly in urban settings. Consequently, many families that demand quality education and are capable of paying have enrolled their children in private schools. Due to public schools' inability to satisfy their demands and expectations, parents choose private schools (Begna, 2017; Seboka 2003; Woldetsadik, 2017). The underlying justification is that the general public believes that academic performance is better in private schools than in public schools. People believe that private schools provide greater access to well-run classrooms, inviting workspaces, sufficient infrastructure, more qualified teachers, richer curricula, and an administration system that focuses on student learning results (Woldetsadik, 2017). Private schools often benefit from additional resources, perform better on national examinations, and have a better reputation over time (NCES, 1997). Private schools also consult parents on matters about their children's learning (Begna, 2017).

A study in Ethiopia found that private schools have higher academic achievement rates and better access to classrooms, instructors, facilities, skilled teachers, a comprehensive curriculum, and results-driven administration than public schools (Begna, 2017). Similarly, Sebaka (2003) revealed that parents of students in private schools in Addis Ababa expressed a decent level of satisfaction with student achievement, safety, discipline, and the school environment compared to public schools. Furthermore, Ehetu’s (2015) study comparing private and public schools in Dasse Administrative Town indicated that private school students were more satisfied with their services, with higher levels of parental involvement and increased use of tutorial sessions and student-

centred teaching, than government-led school students.

However, there are plenty of private and public schools in Wallaga Zones, to the knowledge level of the researchers, it is difficult to access research outputs related to students' perceptions of school climate. It is therefore essential to study the variation in students' perceptions of the school climate between private and public schools in the local area to inform parents and educators about where to send their children for education and to shed light on the spread of rumours about the quality of education in the two types of schools.

The purpose of the study

The study employed a descriptive research method to investigate whether students attending public and private secondary schools perceived the school climate in significantly different ways. A questionnaire that consists of six school subscales—teacher support, peer support, school connectedness, accommodation of differences, rule clarity, reporting, and getting help—were the subjects of data analysis.

3. private secondary schools perceive the school climate differently?
4. Do male and female students in private and public schools view school climates differently?

Significance of the research

The findings of this investigation will contribute to the understanding and awareness of the disparities in the educational environment as regarded by student groups from private and public schools. A detailed study of the variations in perceptions of school

The researcher studied the perceived views of the pupils in the school climate. According to one study, student perceptions provide a more accurate image of what is happening in classrooms and offer great potential for improving the quality of education (Fauth et al., 2014). This research attempted to explore the perspective that private and public secondary school students had about their school environment, as well as assess if there was a substantial variation in the view of school climate between private and public secondary schools. Additionally, an analysis of the data was undertaken to evaluate whether there was a significant variation in the impression of the school environment between male and female students of the relevant school type.

Research questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the school climate of students in private and public secondary schools?
2. Do students attending public and

environments among students attending private and public schools will contribute to the body of evidence about the school-type choice of parents for their children. The majority of research has focused on how success and accomplishment are impacted by the school atmosphere. However, this research highlights students' assessments of the extent to which they perceive their schools as favourable to learning and how this is associated with their school participation. Very little research has addressed the relationship between students' impressions of

the school environment and school involvement. Thus, this study provides an opportunity to evaluate the full school climate to boost the performance of students by enhancing their school engagement from all aspects, such as teacher support, peer support, and the school environment. The findings of this study may motivate education offices at different levels to look closely at the environment of private and public schools to enrich them and play a decisive role in the growth of students' interest in learning. The results could aid schools in identifying areas of strength and weakness in efforts to improve students' school engagement.

Definition of terms

School climate is often referred to as the social atmosphere of a setting or learning environment in which students have different experiences, depending upon the protocols set up by the teachers and administrators (Block, 2011).

School engagement "refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education" (Great Schools Partnership, 2016).

Private schools refer to an educational institution that operates independently of the government. Private schools are regulated by the government but are not funded by the government. The management is controlled by a private company. Tuition fees cover the expenses. Private schools are owned by private investors; nonprofit organisations (NGOs) and religious institutions are among them.

Public schools refer refers a state-owned schools. These schools are financed and administered by the state. All students in the community are usually invited to attend public schools, which are often free.

Literature review

Perception of school climate

Understanding how students view their school climate is vital for understanding the larger educational environment and how it influences their social, academic, and general well-being. Numerous studies have examined how children evaluate their school environment, offering significant insights into a variety of variables that impact their attitudes and experiences in the classroom.

Wang and Degol (2016) explored the association between students' academic involvement and their opinions on the school atmosphere. This research indicated that higher levels of academic participation were associated with favourable evaluations of the school climate, such as encouraging relationships with students and teachers, a sense of belonging, and a safe and respectful culture. Conversely, lower levels of academic participation were associated with unfavourable opinions of school culture, including instances of bullying or discrimination.

Thapa et al. (2013) carried out a study that focused on the impact of the school environment on children's social-emotional health. This research indicated that higher levels of social-emotional well-being among children were linked to a healthy school culture defined by strong connections between students and teachers, clearly established behavioural rules, and opportunities for student engagement and participation. By contrast, children's psychological health and overall well-being were lower in an unhealthy school culture typified by high levels of bullying, violence, or discriminatory conduct.

Moreover, Bradshaw et al. (2015) studied the association between behavioural outcomes and students' evaluations of the school atmosphere. Positive evaluations of the school environment were linked with lower rates of aggressive behaviour, disruptive behaviour, and drug use among students. Conversely, a higher incidence of problem behaviours was linked to negative perceptions of school culture.

Apart from these studies, several additional research publications have explored different elements of how young people perceive their school environments. For instance, research has examined how students' views of the school environment are affected by cultural characteristics such as ethnic diversity (e.g., Barnes et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). Another study investigated how teacher-student interactions and school leadership influence students' perceptions of school culture (Gase et al., 2017).

Overall, research on students' views on their school climate underscores the importance of creating a supportive and caring learning environment. Higher levels of academic involvement, psychological and social wellness, and improved behavioural results are associated with a healthy school atmosphere. Conversely, unhealthy school environments, defined by discrimination, bullying, or exclusionary activities, may severely affect children's experiences and academic progress.

Measurement of school climate

There are several approaches for estimating the climate of schools. The Education Department School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) and Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) are survey instruments used by the U.S. Department of Education to measure school climate from the views of students, staff, and parents. The CSCI measures 14 essential dimensions of a healthy school climate (Marraccini et al., 2019). The What's Happening in This School Questionnaire (WHITS) is a six-scale measure developed to estimate the school environment for students in grades 8 through 12 (Aldridge & Ala'I, 2013). Due to its clarity of wording and coverage of crucial factors linked to school climate that reflect local circumstances, WHITS was chosen for this research to examine students' perceptions of the climate of a school. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions, eight for each of the six school climate aspects. WHITS has been found to have high reliability and validity, fulfilling all constructs validity requirements (Aldridge & Ala'I, 2013).

Differences in perceptions of school climate

Perceptions of school climate can vary greatly between private and public school students. According to recent literature, private school students report greater satisfaction and an overall more positive school climate than their public school counterparts (Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2018). They perceive their schools to be more academically motivated, better organised, and overall friendlier than public schools (Krommendyk, 2007). Private school students also report feeling that their school provides and promotes more personal relationships with faculty as well as more meaningful and varied extracurricular activities than those offered in public schools (Allen & Burgess, 2014).

By contrast, public school students are less likely to report feeling connected to the school, and they perceive their schools to have a less supportive and less motivating environment than private schools (Krommendyk, 2007). They are less likely to view school as a safe and friendly learning environment (Allen & Burgess, 2014). Public school students also comment on the presence of negative behavioural influences from peers, such as a lack of respect for authority and poor attendance, which they often attribute to the underfunding of their schools and a lack of involvement from the community (Krommendyk, 2007).

Yang et al. (2013) investigated how students in China and the United States perceived their distinct educational settings. The sample included 10,000 American and 3,435 Chinese students from 85 American and 22 Chinese schools, ranging from elementary to high school. The survey found that Chinese students outperformed American students across all three grade levels on the subscales of teacher-student relations, student-student connections, school-like environment, and fairness of school rules and regulations.

According to research, the learning environments of private religious schools and

public schools differ (Krommendyk, 2007). Private religious institutions had a friendlier and more cheerful culture than public schools. The survey also revealed considerable variation between public and charter schools in terms of the school environment, with the latter having a more inviting and cheerful atmosphere. Private schools provide a tailored learning environment that focuses on academic excellence and high expectations, although they are more expensive and have higher admission criteria. Public schools offer diversity in teaching and learning approaches, exposing students to a wide range of information and skills. Both schools create a safe and supportive learning environment, but public schools may have more resources and extracurricular activities (NCES, 1997).

Public schools in Ethiopia are typically underfunded and overcrowded (Begna, 2017), lacking the necessary materials and technology to enable students to engage with more challenging materials, and teaching staff often lack the qualifications required to provide an effective learning environment (Seboka, 2003; Begna, 2017). Furthermore, attitudes of unpreparedness and animosity towards teachers are commonly observed in public schools in Ethiopia (Shishigu, 2017).

Overall, the literature has demonstrated that private school students generally perceive their schools to have a higher-quality climate than public school students. However, both private and public school students report feeling similarly unprepared for the demands of college or the real world post-graduation (Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2018). This finding highlights the need for all schools, regardless of their type, to provide students with meaningful learning experiences to better equip them for post-graduation.

Gender inequalities in the school atmosphere have been discussed for a long time. Studies have been conducted to determine how boys and girls view the educational environment at school differently. In general, girls view schools as being less supportive than boys, particularly in middle school (Maccoby, 2002; Wood et al. 2011). Real variations in the educational environment, gender roles, and distinct socialisation processes are potential causes of this disparity.

Kirsch and Mallinckrodt (2006) used a sample of 755 students from public and private schools in the United States to examine gender disparities in seventh and eighth-grade students' views on the school atmosphere. The main component analysis revealed that males were considerably more likely than females to perceive their schools as having a favourable atmosphere. Boys also gave higher ratings for order, structure, and physical safety than girls.

In qualitative research conducted, Young (2010) examined gender disparities in views of the school atmosphere. Compared to males, girls reported feeling less safe and comfortable in their surroundings, as well as having worse school morale and group dynamics. Additionally, males reported more peer ties than girls, who reported less. Moreover, males reported higher levels of peer competitiveness and stronger power to influence school choices, while girls reported lower levels of fairness regarding school regulations. Young (2010) observed gender disparities in students' views of the school atmosphere related to trust, inclusion, and challenges among students. Boys reported greater degrees of difficulty, whereas girls reported lower levels of inclusion and trust. The outcomes of this research demonstrate that boys and girls evaluate school atmospheres differently. Additional research is necessary to understand the causes of these inequalities and to help educators develop a fairer educational setting for both male and female pupils.

Research design

A cross-sectional survey approach was employed to evaluate the variations in views of the school atmosphere between private and government secondary school pupils. Differences in evaluations of school atmosphere were also identified between the sexes.

Study Population and Sample

In this study, primary information was acquired from secondary school students in Gimbi, Nekente, and Shambu Towns. During the research period, 22,737 pupils were polled, with 19,052 being public and the remainder private. Of the 22 secondary schools in the region, only eight were chosen for the research, with an equal

representation of four private and four public schools.

The sample size was calculated using Yemane's (1967) simple size determination formula. As a result, 392 students from each group of private and public secondary schools were chosen. An online random number generator was used to select the 784 students.

Research instruments

The data were obtained using a questionnaire: the What Is Happening in This School (WHITS) questionnaire (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013) was applied to examine the students' impressions of the school climate. This questionnaire consisted of 48 questions divided into six categories: affirming diversity, peer support, school connection, teacher support, rule clarity, and reporting and receiving help. It was developed to obtain the thoughts of students in the eighth through twelfth grades regarding the atmosphere of their school. Participants scored each item on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 meaning "mostly disagree," 2 meaning "disagree," 3 meaning "not sure," 4 meaning "agree a little," and 5 indicating "mostly agree". The dependability of the six scales varied from 0.89 to 0.91.

A pilot test of the instrument was conducted to ensure accuracy. The questionnaire was revised for contextual meaning by the researchers and then given to three instructors in the psychology and education departments. Suggestions forwarded by experts were incorporated into the instrument. Two hundred copies were subsequently administered to 200 students in one of the Nekemte Town secondary schools, but these students were eliminated from the final data collection. Of the 200 admissible questionnaires, 165 were qualified and subjected to analysis.

Three items of the questionnaire were eliminated from the analysis because their correlation with the survey's overall score was less than 0.30. Cronbach's alpha reliability was then computed for the subscales and the total scale, yielding 0.80, 0.70, 0.78, 0.75, 0.81, 0.82, and 0.91 for the scales (teacher support, peer support, school connection, diversity accommodation, rule clarity, and reporting and seeking assistance), respectively. As a result, the final study data were collected on 45 items measuring the students' perceptions of the school climate in private and public secondary schools.

The data-collection process

Secondary schools were contacted through a letter written by the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. For consent and data collection, the schools were informed of the study. One instructor from each school was selected and trained for the data collection. The students were briefed about the study's goals and provided with directions on how to complete the questionnaire. Students filled out the questionnaire in classrooms with researchers to help answer any questions. The students were not forced to participate, and their responses were kept secure. The survey took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Data analysis

Of the 784 administered questionnaires, 740 were completed and returned. This left us with responses from the 650 students in our study. SPSS version 25 supported the data analysis. Percentages, means, and t-tests were computed from the data obtained. Statistical significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

Ethical issues

After completing the study proposal, it was submitted to the College of Education personnel for comments. The proposal was revised and presented to the university's research review board for approval and budget. The plan satisfied all the university standards, including ethical issues. The review board approved the study and allocated a budget for it. The university's ethical concerns were followed throughout the investigation, with no breach of human rights.

Data Analysis

Study participant

The information gathered for the research was acquired from students of eight schools (four public and four private schools). The schools were located in three zonal towns: Gimbi, Nekemte, and Shambu. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic details.

Table 1

Background of the Respondents

Background information	Options	F	%
Gender	Male	330	50.8
	Female	320	49.2
Age in years	< 16	20	3.1
	16 to 18	475	73.1
	19 to 21	143	22
	> 21	12	1.8
School	Private	318	48.9
	Public	332	51.1
Family Background	Government worker	185	28.5
	NGO Worker	76	11.7
	Private	389	59.8

Male (50.8%) and female (49.2%) students were included in this study. The majority of students (73.1%) were between the ages of 16 and 18, with 3.1% less than 16 years old and 1.8% greater than 21 years old. The remaining 22.0% of the respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 21 years, which was consistent with national guidelines for secondary schools. Furthermore, 48.5% of the participants went to private secondary institutions, and 51.5% went to public institutions. In terms of family employment status, the majority (59.8%) worked in the private sector (as farmers, merchants, or daily labourers), 28.5% were civil servants, and the remaining 11.7% worked in non-governmental rganizations. Moreover, 58.8% of the participant's parents had a secondary school education or higher, while the remaining 41.2% had either a primary school education or no formal education.

Students' perceptions of the school climate

Teacher support (seven questions), peer support (six questions), school connectedness (eight questions), affirming diversity (eight questions), rule clarity (eight questions), and reporting and seeking assistance (eight questions) were used to assess students' perceptions of the school climate. The final survey consisted of 45 questions aimed at measuring the general perception of the school climate.

To further assess the data, descriptive statistics of the percentage, means, and standard deviations were calculated. In terms of mean size, a higher mean score indicates a more favourable opinion of the school environment. Table 2 displays the mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD) for every subscale, together with the overall evaluation of the school atmosphere.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics on perceptions of school climate beetween school types

Sub-scales	Type of School	
	Private	Public
Teacher support	23.62(6.30)	21.48(6.77)
Peer support	23.12(4.55)	22.81(4.90)
School connectedness	33.13(5.14)	30.28(6.91)
Diversity accommodation	30.73(6.77)	28.48(6.77)
Clarity of rules	34.05(6.06)	31.72(6.95)
Seeking help	29.45(6.83)	25.39(7.90)
Total	174.09(24.25)	160.15(28.96)

Students at private and public secondary schools had different opinions on the overall school climate as well as on each of its dimensions, according to the data in Table 2. In private secondary schools, for example, the mean score for student assistance was higher (M = 23.62, SD = 6.30) than in public schools (M = 21.48, SD = 6.77). Students attending private schools also had better mean rating scores than those attending secondary schools for their assessment of the other components. Regarding their impressions of the school atmosphere (total scale), students in private secondary schools scored better on average (M = 174.09, SD = 24.25) than students in public secondary schools (M = 160.15, SD = 28.96).

The findings imply that, to varying degrees across the scale's dimensions, students in both public and private secondary schools had favourable opinions of the school atmosphere. Table 3 displays the test differences in the opinions of the school environment among the various school students.

Table 3

School type variations in perceptions of school climate

Sub-scales	School type	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher Support	Pr	23.62	6.30	4.16	648	0.000
	Pu	21.48	6.77			
Peer support	Pr	23.12	4.55	0.84	648	0.400
	Pu	22.81	4.90			
School connectedness	Pr	33.13	5.14	5.94	648	0.000
	Pu	30.28	6.91			
Diversity accommodation	Pr	30.73	6.77	4.23	648	0.000
	Pu	28.48	6.77			
Rule clarity	Pr	34.05	6.06	4.55	648	0.000
	Pu	31.72	6.95			
Reporting and seeking help	Pr	29.45	6.83	7.01	641.32	0.0000
	Pu	25.39	7.90			
Total	Pr	174.09	24.25	6.64	639.66	0.000
	Pu	160.15	28.96		648	

Note: Pr = private, Pu= public

Table 3 presents a test of variation in perceptions of school climate between private and public secondary school students on the measurement's six dimensions and total scale. To assess differences in perception on each subscale and the total scale, an independent sample t-test was used. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Accordingly, a significant variation was found in the perception of teacher support rating mean scores (t = 4.16, df = 648, p =.000) between private (M = 23.62, SD = 6.30) and public (M = 21.48, SD = 6.77) secondary school students. The findings, therefore, indicate that there is a substantial difference in the views of teacher support held by students attending private and public secondary schools, with students attending private secondary schools reporting much higher perceptions of teacher support.

Regarding peer support, a non-significant variation was found in the perception of peer support rating mean scores (t = 0.84, df = 648, p = 0.400) between private (M = 22.96, SD = 4.59) and

public (M = 22.81, SD = 4.90) secondary school students. Therefore, it was concluded that there were no significant variations in students' views of peer support between private and public secondary schools.

Concerning school connectedness, a significant variation was found in the perception of students' school connectedness rating mean scores (t = 5.94, df = 480, p =.000) between private (M = 33.13, SD = 5.14) and public (M = 30.28, SD = 6.91) secondary school students. Thus, it was concluded that there is a significant variation in the perception of student-school connectedness between the two types of schools, with private secondary school students having a greater positive attitude towards student-school connectedness.

The test performed to determine a significant difference in perception of diversity accommodation showed a substantial variation (t = 4.23, df = 648, p =.000) between private secondary school students (M = 30.73, SD = 6.77) and their counterparts in public secondary school (M = 28.48, SD = 6.77). Hence, it was concluded that there is a significant variation in the perception of diversity accommodation between private and secondary school students, with private secondary school students having more positive feelings towards rule clarity than public secondary school students.

As well, a significant difference was found in the perception of the clarity of the rules rating mean score (t = 4.55, df = 648, p =.000) between private (M = 34.05, SD = 6.06) and public (M = 31.72, SD = 6.95) secondary school students. The results showed that secondary school students in private schools see regulations more clearly than those in public schools and those participating school students also feel more positive than public school students.

Similarly, a significant variation was found in the perception of reporting and seeking help rating mean scores (t = 7.01, df = 648, p =.000) between private (M = 29.45, SD = 6.83) and public (M = 25.39, SD = 7.90) secondary school students. Essentially, it was determined that secondary school pupils attending private and public schools had quite different perspectives on reporting and asking for assistance. Once again, it was shown that secondary school pupils attending private schools saw their institutions' rules as clearer than those attending public schools.

Finally, a significant variation was observed in the total perception of the measuring scale rating mean scores (t = 6.64, df = 648, p =.000) between private (M = 174.09, SD = 24.25) and public (M = 160.15, SD = 28.96) secondary school students. The results showed that private and public secondary schools differ significantly in their perceptions of their learning environments. The results indicated that secondary school pupils attending private schools viewed their school climate more favourably than those attending public schools did. The rating mean scores and standard deviations are shown in Table 4 to further explore the differences in male and female students' perceptions of the educational environment.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics on perceptions of school climate between male and female students

Sub-scales	Sex	
	Male	Female
Teacher support	22.85 (6.63)	22.19 (6.61)
Peer support	23.39 (4.64)	22.51 (4.79)
School connectedness	31.76 (6.39)	31.58 (6.14)
Diversity accommodation	29.25 (6.93)	29.92 (6.78)
Clarity of rules	32.25 (7.19)	33.50 (5.94)
Seeking help	27.36 (7.82)	27.39 (7.51)
Total	166.85 (28.19)	167.09 (27.09)

Table 4 displays the rating mean scores and standard deviations in the perception of school climate on the sub-scales and the total scale of the measuring instrument between male and female students.

Male students were found to have relatively higher mean scores on the dimensions of teacher support (M = 22.85, SD = 6.63), peer support (M = 23.39, SD = 4.64), and student school connectedness (M = 31.76, SD = 6.39) than female students (M = 22.19, SD = 6.61; M = 22.51, SD = 4.79; M = 31.58, SD = 6.14). Conversely, female students in public secondary schools showed relatively higher mean scores for diversity accommodation (M = 29.92, SD = 6.78), clarity of rules (M = 33.50, SD = 5.94), reporting and seeking help (M = 27.39, SD = 7.51), and the total scale (M = 167.09, SD = 27.09) than male students (M = 29.25, SD = 6.93; M = 32.25, SD = 7.19; M = 27.36, SD = 7.82; M = 166.85, SD = 28.19), respectively. The significance of these differences is presented in Table 5. Significant variations in the perception of school climate between male and female students are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Variations in perception of school climate between male and female students

Sub-scales	Sex	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher Support	M	22.85	6.63	1.26	648	0.210
	F	22.19	6.61			
Peer support	M	23.39	4.64	2.39	648	0.017
	F	22.51	4.79			
School connectedness	M	31.76	6.39	0.38	648	0.706
	F	31.58	6.14			
Diversity accommodation	M	29.25	6.93	-1.25	648	0.211
	F	29.92	6.78			
Rule clarity	M	32.25	7.19	-2.41	648	0.016
	F	33.50	5.94			
Reporting and seeking help	M	27.36	7.82	-0.06	648	0.952
	F	27.39	7.51			
Total	M	166.85	28.19	-0.39	648	0.912
	F	167.09	27.09			

Note: M = Male, F = Female

A t-test of the variations in male and female secondary school students' views of the school atmosphere in private and public secondary schools for each dimension and the overall measuring scale is shown in Table 5. To assess differences in perception on each subscale and total scale, an independent sample t-test was performed. The test was considered significant if the p-value was less than 0.05. Differences in the perception of teacher support (t = 1.26, df = 648, p = 0.210), diversity accommodation (t = 0.38, df = 648, p = 0.706), student school connectedness (t = -1.25, df = 648, p = 0.211), reporting and seeking help (t = -0.06, df = 648, p = 0.952), and overall scale (t = -0.39, df = 648, p = 0.912) between male and female students were not significantly different. The results revealed that male and female students did not differ significantly in their perceptions of teacher support, student-school connectedness,

diversity accommodation, and overall school climate.

Nevertheless, tests of differences in the perception of peer support and clarity of rules have shown significant variations. That is, significant differences were found in peer support rating mean scores ($t = 2.39$, $df = 648$, $p = 0.017$) and in the clarity of rules rating mean scores ($t = -4.21$, $df = 648$, $p = 0.016$) between male ($M = 23.39$, $SD = 4.64$; $M = 32.25$, $SD = 7.19$) and female ($M = 22.51$, $SD = 4.79$; $M = 33.50$, $SD = 5.94$). Therefore, it was determined that male and female students had significantly different opinions on the clarity of school rules and peer support. The findings, however, indicated that while male students had a favourable opinion of peer support experiences, female students had a more favourable opinion of the clarity of their school's regulations.

Discussions

In this study, regardless of the degree of variation, students viewed their school climate positively. They judged the experiences of teacher support, student school connectedness, diversity accommodation, clarity of school rules, reporting and seeking help, and overall perception of the school climate as healthy. Previous studies have indicated that students appreciate the support provided by their schools. They liked the attractiveness of schools and the provision of lessons (Thapa, 2013; Wang et al., 2016). Studies have further shown that students perceive school climate positively, although perceptions can differ depending on their characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Bottiani et al., 2018). Moreover, according to Maxwell et al. (2017), students who perceive their school climate as safe and supportive are more likely to feel motivated, engage in learning, and be positively connected to their peers and teachers. Conversely, students who experience adverse school climates are likely to feel less connected to their peers and have lower grades and attendance (White et al., 2014). Thus, schools need to create and maintain a positive, supportive climate to ensure that their students have positive experiences and remain engaged.

The current research demonstrated that students in private secondary schools had a more favourable assessment of the school atmosphere than those in public secondary schools. The mean scores for sub-scales, except for student support, and the overall scale revealed considerably greater impressions of the school atmosphere in private schools compared to public schools. This outcome aligns with a previous report (NCES, 1997), which found that public schools faced more challenges in the classroom than private schools. In comparison to public school students, private school students had a stronger favourable opinion of the school atmosphere (Krommendyk, 2007). Private school students typically perceive their school climate as being more supportive, cooperative, and communicative than that of public school students (Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2018). Private school students may also feel more connected to their school and classmates and tend to have better relationships with their teachers (NCES, 1997). Saboka (2003) stated that private schools were more adaptable and had less bureaucratic administration than government-led schools, which may contribute to a better school climate. Moreover, parents of private school students expressed higher satisfaction

with student performance, safety, and discipline than parents of public school students.

According to Begna (2017), private schools have a substantially better reputation than public schools, owing to their more appealing work atmosphere, adequate facilities, skilled instructors, an enriching curriculum, and result-based school administration. Compared to public schools, private schools tend to be more effective in terms of experienced governance, shared vision and goals, learning environment, emphasis on teaching and learning, intentional instruction, high standards, encouragement, progress tracking, student rights and obligations, home-school alliances, and learning organization. Thus, public schools require more support from the public and government to make them more attractive and suitable for learning.

Studies show that private and public secondary school students can have similar perceptions of student-student support (Jabbar et al., 2019). Zimmer & Toma (2000) found that both private and public school students rated the quality of peer support similarly. Likewise, Goldenberg and (2017) demonstrated that the quality of student-student support was rated equivalently across public and private educational settings. In support of these findings, the present study found that both private and public secondary school students had similar positive perceptions of the support they provided to one another. Schools have a comparable perception of peer support because both types of schools share the same social and family environment. There are no restrictions on interactions between students attending private and public schools in the country in general or in local areas. Therefore, an equally supportive group of peers can help cultivate a desirable academic experience if supported by schools, adults, and family follow-ups.

Overall, the research indicates that students from both public and private schools can have similar perceptions of student-student support. Providing students with a positive environment that encourages social inclusion, kindness, and acceptance from their peers and teachers can enrich students' lives both academically and socially.

Regarding sex differences in perception of school climate, studies show that male and female students have different perspectives on the educational climate (Nichols & Nichols, 2014; White et al., 2014). For instance, Wood et al. (2011) indicated that female students have a more negative perception of the school environment than male students, with females reporting feelings of disrespect from their peers and teachers. Specifically, Young (2010) reported that males had more ties with peers and stronger power to influence school choices than females, while females viewed the unfairness of school regulations more than male students.

Although male and female students in the present study were found to have a positive attitude towards all components and the total scale of school climate, they were observed to have significant differences in attitude only on peer support and clarity of school rules, which supports previous study results. The reason why female students feel more strongly about school regulations than male students may be connected to the local culture, where females are more devoted to social norms and practises. Additionally, this time, female students have an opportunity to get same-sex teachers who may help them in disciplinary confrontations in schools. In general, varying environmental and social factors can influence boys and girls to perceive their school climate differently.

CONCLUSIONS

Private and public secondary school students were found to have positive attitudes towards their school climate, though to varying degrees. Private secondary school students viewed the school climate more positively than their public high school counterparts. The only component on which both school-type students demonstrated comparable perceptions was peer support. Analysis of the gender variable indicated that male and female students did not display significant variations in their opinions on the school atmosphere. However, when addressing the particular features of the school environment, male students were more favourable towards their experience of peer support, while female students were more enthusiastic about the clarity of school regulations than male students. Related to this topic, research suggests that students' views of school climate have a key influence on building a conducive learning environment, which may have an immediate impact on academic attainment. The findings show that education sector officials should aim to build fulfilling school environments in both private and public schools to increase the learning engagement and academic success of children in all types of schools.

Recommendations

1. A healthy school atmosphere fosters learning abilities in children. This encourages teamwork, group cohesiveness, respect, and mutual trust. As a result, school administrators and instructors in both private and public secondary schools should work hard to identify the norms, objectives, and values that form the teaching environment. Additionally, public schools should do more to foster a positive school atmosphere.
2. The results of this study revealed that private school students had a more positive perception of the school climate than public school students. Thus, private school students may concentrate on their education and achieve higher education levels than public school students. However, if this pattern persists, the academic disparity between private and public schools will increase. Parents may continue to complain about the education system, and students may drop out of school. Thus, the education sector should set a standard school climate for all levels of education, at least not to create variation among public and private students in academic achievement.
3. Schools should encourage female students to cooperate with other students and help them understand the contribution of peer support to learning and social life.
4. Teachers should develop good and helpful connections with students to boost their capability, self-sufficiency, and feelings of fitting while encouraging academic engagement.
5. It is suggested that upcoming studies incorporate qualitative information to provide underlying explanations and potential understandings of the difference in link observed between the perception of the school environment and school involvement in private and public schools.

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