

**PROMOTING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: SCHOOL  
SETTING INVESTIGATION**

BY

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION WITH SPECIALISATION IN

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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SEPTEMBER 2017

## **Abstract**

A positive learning environment is more important if students are considered to perform better in their schoolwork. The school environment the students attend mostly influences their performance. The school that each student attends sets its own pillars that promote students' positive learning. This research study looks thoroughly at the schools climate, and socio-economic background of students. Most public schools have insufficient funds to run their day-to-day activities. One of the disturbing factor to promote learning environment is the class sizes are too big. The more funds a school receives, the better it performs because the school invests more in its resources. The teachers' experience also contributes to students' performance. Usually, the students who attend a school where more teachers have pastoral care tend to perform better.

The research intended to investigate the causes and consequences of a school's setting in promoting a positive learning environment and further discussed the benefit of positive learning environment in schools. The students' success in their learning progress is determined by a positive learning and teaching environment.

Generally, if there is a caring environment in the school set up, then that leads to the students obtaining good envisaged outcomes. The schools help the students achieve the good results, or alternatively, they could make the students fail. The students perform better in a positive learning environment that also is tantamount to personal student/teacher relationships. The findings of this study encourage the researcher to come up with new strategies that can be used to uplift the performance of students.

**Keywords:** learning, positive learning environment, physical environment, school climate, classroom climate, and learning spaces

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beautiful wife who encouraged and gave me support from the beginning until the end of my dissertation report writing. I would like also to dedicate this work to my supervisor and my fellow colleagues who gave me the support, guidance and assisting me in compilation of the entire dissertation.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who assisted me in coming up with this work. Firstly, I would like to thank Professor T.A. Mapotse who gave me the support and advice that I needed at the time I was writing this dissertation.

I sincerely thank teachers, head of departments, principals, administrators and students of Limehill High and Mashinga High schools for the support that they gave to me in completing the research questionnaires and responded positively for any request I was putting forth towards my research.

I would like to thank my entire family, my wife and children for all the support, contributions and patience respectively in making it easier for me to complete this research in the time I stipulated.

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## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

A positive learning environment is only vital if it results in better academic performances by students. The school that the student attends greatly influences his/her performance. The factors of the school consist of school composition or structure and climate. In addition, the school that each student attends set their own pillars that promote students' learning. These schools are being visited and monitored in order to come up with methods or strategies to improve the students' school performances. This research has been conducted in order to look thoroughly at how the schools climate and socio-economic background of students promotes a positive learning environment (Clifford, Menon, Condon & Humung, 2012). The school has the choice to find ways to improve students' performance, depending on the condition of the school (Rawson, 2012).

Andrew (2014: 89) suggests that's the class size is an important component of the school. Most public schools have insufficient funds and the sizes of classes are too big. Essentially, the more funds a school receives, the more better the school performs due to the school investing more in its resources (Press, 2012). The teachers' experience contributes to students' performance. Those students who attend a school where more teachers have pastoral care tend to perform better (Jennings & Greenberg, 2013).

According to Henson (2012:75), school climate needs to be taken seriously in the promotion of a good atmosphere in the school. Also the relationship between

teachers and students increases which promotes the team work. Research highlighted that the students who perform better are the ones that have strong confidence in their teachers (Gregory, 2012:33). The school programmes and policies must allow or promote a good school climate where learning is not self-disturbed. Furthermore, if the school is safe, students can successfully achieve their goals regardless of their background (Cohen, Thapa & Ice, 2013).

Generally, if there is a caring environment in the school, then that leads to the students obtaining good outcomes. The schools assist the students to attain the good results, or do not assist them enough and they fail. The students perform better in an environment conducive to learning and personal student and teacher relationships. The findings of the study encourage the researcher to think of new strategies that can be used to uplift the performance of students (McCuin, 2012:19).

According to Cohen (2012:88), teachers must ensure that they create a positive learning environment that serves as the second home for students and teachers have the authority to ask students if they are not performing well or meeting the requirements. Hence, the teachers get the chance to provide the intervention in assisting the students. Therefore, it is imperative to look at the relationship that is caused by a school setting in promoting the positive learning environment.

## **1.2. Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study was to:

- Improve a healthy, supportive schools climate as an atmosphere for progressive teaching and learning.
- Add literature on positive learning environments.
- Provide useful suggestions for establishing a positive classroom climate that is aimed at identifying and explaining how the crucial elements for effective teaching and learning are composed of and how to create the desired learning environment conducive to learning.

## **1.3 The Aim and Purposes of the Study**

### **1.3.1 Aims of the Study**

The classroom organisation and behaviour of students are of crucial importance within the school (Brown & Elias, 2012). Teachers used the methods that promoted constructive interactions that lead to students achieving better results. However, the aim of the research was to provide strategies that can be used to support and prevent the challenges within the classroom context. Teachers should always strive to work on creating a positive learning environment and create classroom policies that will assist in creating the desired students behaviours in the classroom (Hinze & Wiley, 2013). The teachers created the positive learning classrooms and eradicated anything that can disturb the good atmosphere. In addition, a positive learning environment helped to bring support to students and allowed students to fully develop their potential.

A positive learning environment in a classroom was crucially important because of the following reasons:

- it maximised students learning
- it helped students of today to become full participating citizens of society

The above reasons were why it was important that the classrooms minimise, as much as possible, all the constraints that could disturb or create an environment that is not conducive to learning, as such an environment makes teaching and learning ineffective and inefficient.

### **1.3.2 The Purpose of the Study**

The research intended to investigate the causes and consequences of a school's setting in promoting a positive learning environment and discussed the benefit of a positive learning environment in schools. A positive learning and teaching environment was taken into consideration as essential for the students to succeed in schools. McFarland (2012:11) recommended that, "creation of environment that provides fully support to students must be looked at, as it creates conducive climate for the students to learn to their potential". If the learning environment was not conducive to learning for students, then it breed drop outs or affected their success.

There were many factors that contributed to a positive classroom environment. The instructional and emotional support helps the social competence of students in the classroom (Cohen et.al, 2013). That means the factors that increased the social competence of students to perform better were taken into consideration. More students were engaged with activities during learning, and had good interaction with other students; factors that disturb learning such as noise and disruptive behaviours of students were limited. However, Gary, Villered and Sharon (2010:34) emphasized that "many schools needs to provide with learning conditions that will stimulate students eagerness to learn, and teachers, and principals must constantly improve the school climate and school culture". This raised the point that the schools together with communities must both provide equal support to students by creating an environment where the students are valued.

#### **1.4. Problem Statement**

Poverty is one of many factors that contributed towards the students' performance. According to Blair (2011:53), poverty has spatial, racial, and gender dimensions. Poverty is most found in places that have many rural areas and are predominantly black. The cause of unemployment and illiteracy contributes to the high level of poverty. These factors contribute to the poor performance of students. The unavailability of resources in schools also contributes to the poor performance of a student. However, most of the time when the schools are under performing in rural areas, the issue of unavailability of resource is brought up. The rural schools have the students that have parents who do not pay attention to the essence of education (Olson, 2013).

Many children suffer from being exposed to unstable home environments such as quarrelling parents with substance abuse, which generally leads to violence in the home. These types of environments tears families apart and leaves students with no sense of belonging and this directly impacts on the students' support structure, as well as their school performance. Cohen (2012:56) stressed the point that involvement of parents in school can boost and uplift the performance of students and reduce low self-esteem and unpleasant behaviour. In many schools people view environments as isolated from learning and teaching, they do not think that environments play a crucial role in the performance of the students, as they usually

consider the curriculum alone. This leads to inefficiency and undesired results from students. Elements that support positive teaching and learning environments in many classrooms were not seen. Ross (2013: 98) found that most teachers did not regard effectual classroom management strategies and scrutinized challenging student behaviour as having a negative impact on the overall classroom environment and subsequent interactions between students and teachers.

Therefore, a positive classroom environment is important because it creates a good atmosphere conducive to learning. It is a natural conclusion that students learn more effectively if the condition of the environments are more favourable. The students are de-motivated and have low self-esteem if they are ignored and not appreciated in terms of the effort they put in work.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

This research study had the intention to answer the central research question:

How does the school setting influence a positive learning environment?

The six sub-questions were used to support the data collection process:

- a) What are the things that the school together with community can do to promote a positive learning environment?
- b) What creates a safe learning environment?
- c) How does a teacher foster the creation, and ensure the sustainability, of the positive learning environment?
- d) What factors promote success or create barriers in promoting a positive learning environment?

## **1.6 The Objectives and Hypothesis of the Study**

The objectives of the research projects were to:

- a) Examine the promising practices that schools in collaboration with their communities can utilise to promote positive learning environments.
- b) Examine the causes and consequences of school settings in promoting a positive learning environment.
- c) Examine the factors/characteristics that create a safe positive school climate.
- d) Identify various methods and techniques that a teacher can use to create a positive learning environment.

- e) Establish the relationship between a student's success and a positive school environment.
- f) Find tips to create and sustain a positive learning environment.

## **16.1 Hypothesis**

A good true learning environment promotes learning and has a good impact on the students' success. Therefore, the research seeks to attain findings that will significantly impact the learning environments in schools.

## **1.7 Conceptualization**

### **1.7.1 School settings**

Students need to be in the classroom that inspires them, spaces that are light, airy, and filled with examples of work that they aspire to do. Each school must have a variety of spacious classroom settings. Some are more traditional in the ways that we envision classrooms now and others may be set up outside. There might be desks, cushions, and/or benches arranged in rows or circle. However, the teachers want them as not every classroom follows the template. Each classroom is set up based on what is necessary to meet learning objectives. Nevertheless, schools prioritize configuring classes to inspire learning first and foremost as well as where they can appreciate and reflect the diversity of environments that students are exposed to outside a school setting. Students have beautiful spaces that make them feel good to be at school. Students and teachers need clean, roomy, well-ventilated, and well lit space for teaching and learning. Every school needs to have air conditioning and there should be sufficient heat in classroom when it's cold, but there should not be overheating. Hallways should be quiet, and classrooms should be as sound proof as possible.

### **1.7.2 Rural Settings**

Rural communities commonly depend more on agricultural or pastoral livelihoods than their urban counterparts and usually have less access to community infrastructure (Olson:2013). When displaced communities settle in rural areas, they reside in host villages or in informal, dispersed self-settlements outside of camps and cities. In host villages, they often live amongst local households or on land or

properties owned by the local people, particularly when the displaced and the local communities share cultural or religious ties. A rural setting is important in that it develops an understanding of the contextual factors that impact the health of people, and the ways services are delivered.

### **1.7.3 Positive Learning Environment**

The strong relationship between students, teachers, and parents promote a safe and peaceful environment where teaching and learning is considered to be an important focus. Hence, this definition actually seeks to demonstrate that a positive teaching environment makes the students feel wanted and valued. Thus, this goes hand in hand with what McFarland (2012:137) emphasise, that positive learning environment “is when the students feels that they are supported and valued in whatever they are doing and learning is mastered easily”. In addition, all students with challenges and extra ordinary personal challenge can do well in their studies if they get full support and motivation. This emphasises the point that creating a positive learning environment can stimulate student learning. The role of teachers as catalysts for positive learning environment: teachers should equip themselves with tools or methods of creating a positive learning environment. All teachers must take it as their responsibility to create a positive learning environment for students.

### **1.7.4 Classroom Climate**

Classroom climate involves the good atmosphere that promotes learning and teaching environments. The impact of classroom climate can create the barrier to learning of students and teachers. The creation of good classroom climate provides the students with an atmosphere conducive to learning. Classroom climate is considered as a factor that contributes to teaching and learning of students. To improve the school, positive classroom climate is the important aspect to be taken into consideration. Hinze & Wiley (2013: 85) highlighted few important matters that need to be considered:

- the engagement of students,
- the students behaviour and self-efficacy,
- the students achievements,
- the leadership style of principal,
- educational reform stages

The classroom environment and the student's achievements are closely linked. The classrooms must display resources that can assist students to fully engage with their studies. If the classroom climate is not considered, it can cause a lot of damage as well as disadvantage students who are coming from a poor background.

### **1.7.5 Physical Environment**

The physical environment in school plays an important role in learning. It gives students clear messages about how teachers should create a positive environment to promote good teaching and bring the interest of learning to students so that they will perform better. Developing independent learning it has a good or bad implication to teachers and students, and it gives the opportunities to the teachers plan to give students to initiate and extend their own learning. Developing independence to students is the other way that can be used to support the creation of a physical environment conducive to learning.

### **1.7.6 Physical Arrangement of the Classroom Environment**

In designing the physical arrangement in the classroom, the accessibility and organization are the factors that need to be considered. The physical classroom arrangement includes availability of resources, and other learning materials can prevent the problematic classroom behaviour of students. The teachers can provide or make the routines for distributing, returning, and storing teaching and learning materials with an effort to prevent confusion to students. Some suggestions that can be used are: the school must have the shelf and the space for supplies; developing and teaching procedures for borrowing materials; and routinely assigning the distribution of materials on a rotation basis so that all students get an opportunity to distribute supplies (Mahony & Ilexall, 2011). If the teachers can provide the proper planning for their teaching (with the required school resources) then that can maximise the chance of students succeeding in their performance.

### **1.7.7 Creation of Positive Classroom Environment**

Creating a positive classroom environment is an important aspect that allows effective teaching and learning to take place and by creating positive learning environments teachers have the chance to develop the classroom policies that help in controlling and managing the students' discipline. A positive classroom environment is very important in that it decreases the students' behaviour problems.

It also provides or allows students to have good manners. Positive classroom environments stimulate, promote, and encourage the learning of students in all educational sectors. Teachers can use many ways to create positive classroom environments in the school. The suggestions for creating a positive classroom environment encourages the students to be involved in learning and get feedback from the teachers and, teachers must always tell the students what is expected from them. Students must also contribute in bringing or developing a positive learning environment.

The researcher raised the point that teachers must involve students and encourage the spirit or culture of sharing ideas among themselves to create a good atmosphere of teaching and learning (Higgins, 2012). The classroom arrangement must encourage the student to be able to share their views without being disturbed during the learning process. The classrooms should have charts and pictures on the walls and a good layout. Henson (2012:81), states that “there is nobody who wants to learn in a dull environment that disadvantage the achievements of learning goals”. Students are more encouraged to perform their abilities if the conditions are more favourable. Undeniably, a productive school with good students value the importance of having a good positive environment.

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

This section presented an overview of the methods that were used in the research study. The topics covered include:

- The research design,
- population,
- sample and sampling techniques, and
- Data collection and analysis.

### **1.8.1 Research Approach**

The study had used the mixed methods approach. According to Smith (2014:12), mixed methods “involved or used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to find new information and to make it easy for the researcher to get more information as possible”. For the researcher, this method has the purpose of giving the better

understanding of a research problem. This approach helps in eradicating the gap on the data collected.

## **1.8.2 Research Design**

Research design is a general plan that the researcher uses to answer the research question. According to Saunder, Lewis & Thornhill (2012), “the research design can be divided into two groups which are exploratory and conclusive”. Exploratory research aims to explore the specific aspects of the research but does not give the final answers of the questions. In exploratory research, the researcher is allowed to change the direction of the study to a certain extent, but however, not biased to the new information received or gained while doing the research. However, Patton (2012:26) also pointed that “the research design refers to the overall strategy components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring the researcher will effectively address the research problem”. The research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data during the research process.

### ***1.8.2.1 Delineation of the study***

The study involved investigating the setting of different schools in promoting positive learning environment. Cohen (2012: 34) emphasised that the research study had the intention to achieve the research objectives. My research was done in two schools under Mnambithi circuit, UThukela District, KZN province, and UKhahlamba region in KwaZulu Natal. The reason these places were chosen to do the research is that in many rural schools there was a perception that students did not perform very well in studies due to location, i.e. school setting. The two schools Mbalenhle High School and Thembalihle High school are not the boarding school. As the result, in the research, I wanted to find or investigate whether there was an impact of school setting on student success.

### ***1.8.2.2 Population and sample***

The targets of the study were as follows:

- the principals,
- heads of department,
- teachers,

- administrators and
- students

For this research to be successfully achieved, the details of the samples that had been considered were: 2 Principals, 8 Heads of department, 12 Teachers, 2 Administrators and 120 students. There was a fair heterogeneous representation of the genders in each group.

### **1.8.3 Data Collection Methods**

The focus of data collection was on perceptions and attitudes on different people on how they view a positive learning environment. Hence, supporting data was collected in different schools and the researcher considered reflective journals maintained by participants. In this research, secondary data was collected to augment the studies. There was an initial visit to the selected schools.

#### ***1.8.3.1 Interviews***

The interview is conducted by the researcher to get information and recorded down for analyses at a later stage. Cohen (2012:17) highlighted the point that “structured interviews are performed by using survey forms, whereas open interviews are notes taken while talking with respondents”. The researcher gave the interviewer the chance to say his or her own experiences without interfering. This study had the intention of using the in-depth interviews to get information. The semi-structured interview had certain areas that need to be covered but the words used are left to the discretion of the interviewer. This gives the chance for the researcher to be flexible and able to respond to any questions asked and allows the participants to look at issues that they think are important for them. A face to face interview will also be used, as it has a good advantage for the researcher to ask clarity if there are questions that are not clear or incomplete statements.

#### ***1.8.3.2 Questionnaires***

In contrast with interviews, the questionnaire is the method that participants complete easy without feeling intimidated. Also the structure is good because it accommodates the entire sample. The questionnaire required the participants to complete the form themselves. Patton (2012:54) pointed that “the language used in the questionnaires must suit the groups of participants that are targeted”. The questionnaires were more used in the research to get more information. The

researcher, Ross (2013:28), suggested the good point that for the participants to return the questionnaires on time; the researcher must keep the language as simple as possible and prevent ambiguity.

### ***1.8.3.3 Data analyses and interpretation***

According to Gregory (2012:35), “quantitative data analysis is a systematic approach to investigations during which numerical data is collected and or the researcher transforms what is collected or observed into numerical data”. The research methods that the researcher used were quantitative methods that congruence the problem and objectives of study. The responses were structured as closed-ended questions, were rated in percentage, and were represented using bar graphs. Moreover, this method helped in testing the hypotheses of the study and the researcher is free to collect the data from the participants and analyse it.

### **1.8.3.4 Ethical clearance**

The participant's, which are the students, teachers, HODs, principals and administrators, ethical confidentiality and privacy were taken into consideration. Other information disclosed by the participant was not recorded only the one that assisted in achieving the goals of the research. The participation in the research study was not compulsory, but participants volunteered. The participants that decided not to continue or carry on with research were replaced.

It is the democratic rights of the participants not to participate in the study. The researcher got permission from different authorities. The Department of Education, Thembalihle and Mbalenhle high schools, the principals, Heads of Departments, teachers, administrators, students, and parents gave permission for students who were under eighteen years to participate to the study. The participants information was kept confidential no other person would be allowed to view or see it. The participants were told verbally the intention and the objective of the study and what will happen during the interviews.

## **1.9 Chapter Layout**

In my study the exposition of chapters are as follows:

### **1.9.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and aim of study**

The chapter exposed or outlined the introduction, the context, objective, aim, purpose, research questions, research design, motivation to conduct the study and conceptualization.

### **1.9.2 Chapter 2: Literature review**

This study reviewed literatures on what other scholars are saying about positive learning environment globally and locally and filling the positive learning environment gap in South African schools.

### **1.9.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology**

The focus of this chapter was looking at the research methodology and it was divided into two sections, which were research design and research methods. The study was descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative.

### **1.9.4 Chapter 4: Data analysis and results**

The chapter reported on the data that was collected and analysed as the findings of the study that was conducted in two high schools.

### **1.9.5 Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendation and Conclusion**

Chapter 5 entailed overviews of the study and review of the research questions, methodology, and findings. It also provided the answers to the research questions based on findings and recommendations for the further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter represents the framework on a positive learning environment which addresses the concepts of 'learning', 'learning environment', and 'physical environment'. The idea behind these concepts is that resources inputs are used in educational activities so that they produce desired outputs for the individual, and schools and community, such as greater engagement in learning and improved student performances (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development, 2010). This statement indicates that improving the school has a great effect to students learning. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the international trend on how other countries use positive learning environments to enhance students' performance and teachers' achievements. In addition, the researcher will be looking at what other scholars are saying, covered or not covered around positive learning environments, and those gaps the research wishes to close. Lastly, it will end up by summing up the most important points of the chapter.

Kelly (2002:12) explained the definition of learning that it encompassing a range of theoretical approaches. The permanent change of students learning and behaviour occurs after learning has taken place. The educational learning environment involves the interaction of many things, but with the aim of contributing to the students' performance. The outcome of the learning environment is seen by the interaction of students, teachers, and the school infrastructure. This lead to Hansman concept of learning, which emphasizes that learning includes mostly the combination of culture, context, and tools used to facilitate teaching and learning, which shapes the inside of the student heads (Hansman cited by Kelly (2002:102).

### **2.2 Local trend on positive learning environment**

The student's well-being and achievement requires the positive learning environment. Hence, there is a relationship between the learning environment and the student's success. In the school where there is positive school climate the students feel safe and are motivated to do better. The physical learning environment is an influential element in the complex and highly contextualised nature of learning characterised by dynamics and interactions between the student, teacher, content,

equipment, and technologies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). A learning environment composes of a diverse physical location, the context, and the different ways in which students engage in learning. The teacher must organise the classroom in the way that students get the time for interaction so that they will learn to treat one another with respect. Learning environment is determined by many characteristics and qualities and, as the result; physical environment involves the interaction of student, teacher, and a variety of resources such as equipment and technologies. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006:45) highlighted that there is a great impact of school environment in the wellbeing of students and communities.

The schools that are not maintained well and poorly designed, de-motivate the student's and teacher's morale, and impact negatively on the student's outcomes. Filardo (2008: 48) draws attention to the fact that there are many factors that has impact, whether directly or indirectly, on students learning and physical environment. Physical and virtual learning environment include cultural, temporal, and social aspects which contribute to the learning of students in schools (McGregor, 2004). This means the teachers need to use the available resources wisely with the aim of supporting the students to achieve the good results and objectives of education. In order to ensure the quality of education to all students, the issue of sufficiency of resource needs to be considered.

### **2.2.1 School Size and Learning Communities**

The school governance and school organisation are the important aspect in school size. The school restructuring makes new learning spaces. The trend is for new schools to be smaller, particularly in the years, or when schools are merged to increase curriculum provision towards schools and within schools, in order to develop distinctive learning communities. These are often spatially separated in different buildings, organisationally separated into houses with teams of teachers, or across different campuses (Darling Hammond & Aness, 2002). The new governance requirements must attach sharing of resources and promote the multi-campus formations. Darling Hammond and Aness (2002) found small schools benefit aspects of achievement, low income and minority students indicated by better attendance, lower incident rates, better performance on reading and writing

assessments, higher graduation rates, and higher college on-going rates than in the previous large school, despite serving largely socially disadvantaged students.

However, small schools in themselves are not enough to have an effect on achievement. Other essential conditions include proper resources in terms of staffing, capacity for personalized units such as mini schools, buildings, redesigned school districts such as reduced bureaucracy, greater autonomy to schools, and planning time. The individual learning is also considered when there is a change in class size. Graue and Hatch (2007) found that there is a close link between the size of the classroom and the use of team teaching, that decrease the students evidence that link students outcomes and their background. Rudd and Reed et al. (2008) found that, in well-designed buildings, students engage more with learning activities because there is more equipment available and this increases the motivation of students.

### **2.2.2 Classroom climate**

The teachers in school have to carry the responsibility to ensure that they create socio-emotional learning and inter-cultural relations which form part of the school climate. The teachers, in order to promote the harmonious environment, arrange the desks in the classroom to encourage the student's interaction with one another, enabling them to contribute to active learning. Good communication between the students and teacher leads students to treat one another equal and be able to take care of important classroom properties. The essence of school is school climate. A positive school climate fosters students learning and development and contributes to the feeling of social, emotional, and physical safety.

### **2.2.3 School climate**

A positive school climate promotes the respect and trust among students, and encourages students to work together as a group and these particular aspects contribute in improving the environment for learning (Anderson, 2003). A sustained positive school climate is associative with learning of students, increase of teacher retention, and increase the rate of student's graduation. These research findings made the important significance to the department of education's decision to

examine ways to use school climate. The students realize their academic, interpersonal and athletic potential in a school with a positive, respectful climate (Department of Education, 2000). Such schools have clearly respectful and nonviolent treatment of school community members and support an environment that is free of negative and harmful physical, social, and emotional actions. School climate is critically linked to health promotion and prevention of risk.

### **2.3 International trend on positive learning environment**

The literature review pinpoints the new buildings change community perceptions particularly in high poverty areas. Bullock (2007:77) found the positive relationship between new and renovated building and student academic achievement based on an academic test in Virginia that is in the USA. There is a little research, conducted by Blackmore et al. (2011), that made him conclude that while new built environments provide an opportunity and can provide a catalyst for innovative pedagogies, changing teacher mind-sets and practices with regard to pedagogy is the precondition for optimal use of redesigned built environments. In order to understand how school improvement can be enhanced over time by newly built learning environments, it is critical to focus on the practices which become embedded in the post occupancy phase. Fisher (2005:35) argues that existing literature that links learning spaces to student behaviour and learning is overly general and around key measures of building conditions. Promoting a learning environment that influences the students positively is important. The students feel safe, warm and able to motivate others to do well on their studies. The students sees positive learning environment as the chance where they can use it to pursue their goals and develop more self-esteem.

Keep (2002:68) suggested important way that teachers in school can be used to create the learning environment that is supportive to students:

- Building classroom community that is strong: the classroom education allows the students to be stronger and able to network
- Student's motivation: the key factor to student's success is motivation, whatever level of motivation to students can affect them to be positive or negative during the process of learning.

Teachers are tasked to teach students different ways on how to handle diversity issues, conflict among themselves, and use one democratic value which is respect. Whether it is around issues of school life in a democratic classroom or just community, or dialogue in the classroom about political perspectives and morale, or indirect engagement in real political controversy, they are equipping the students with skills that will make them able to fully participate in political processes. Studies have shown that working in culturally diverse classrooms can foster many students to learn to respect each other and inclusiveness by actively responding to inter-cultural tension as well as involving many students in multi-culture and inter-cultural activities. Successful teachers take issues with cultural demeaning statements, graffiti and jokes, and use other inter cultural or racial incidents as a springboard for providing skills and information to avoid such incidents.

### **2.3.1 School environment affects connectedness**

The schools must support the students change in behaviour academically and emotionally by creating the safe environment. Klem and Connell (2004:112) state that:

The school environment include one element which is the school climate which at its most positive, include attention to safety issues, family and community involvement, positive relationships among students and teachers, a strong emphasis on academic achievement, respect for all member of the school community, fair and consistent discipline policies.

The school climate positively or negatively affects student's sense of safety. The students refuse to associate themselves with the school that they feel uncomfortable and have the unpleasant climate. The unpleasant school climate can change if teachers and parents work together with an intention to improve the learning environment for their students.

### **2.3.2 School Culture and Connectedness**

Wilson (2004:74) pointed out that "the culture of school must show the balance between learning and the social needs of individual". The teachers always want to support students, but students come to school with lot of intensions. The student's needs are determined by the cliques with who they associate. If the students' embrace fun over future and sport over studies, then they are unlikely to put their effort into learning. Therefore, the students develop a negative attitude where in the

classroom the teachers do not give equal support to both students who are good and the ones who are not performing very well. In addition to that, Schapps (2004:76) highlighted that if schools value learning, then this can cause the level of peer harassment to decrease and the teachers are willing to sacrifice their time for extra classes. The students usually do their home regularly; participate in the class and study together to share old and new information. The students work hard in these schools because their parents are more involved in school work. The administrators work together with the principal to provide the students with social and emotional learning opportunities. There is a strong link between the connectedness and the reduction in healthy risk behaviours in school. According to Blum & Libbey (2004), school connections are the way in which teachers take care of students as individuals with an aim of driving them to see the importance of education. There is a chance for students to succeed academically if they are connected to schools. The connectedness includes the student teacher relationship, parent child relationship, and positive physical environment.

### **2.3.3 Teacher Characteristics Associated With Student Learning**

Through different researches Hay McBer (2000) identified three main factors within teacher's control that significantly influence pupil progress, noting that these factors will predict over 30 per cent of variance.

- Professional characteristics: the underlying dispositions and patterns of behaviour that drive what teachers do, these are related to fundamental values, commitment, and attitudes.
- Teaching skills: the "micro behaviour" or the specific skills of teaching, these can be identified and learned.
- Classroom climate: "output measure" of student's collective perceptions about working in a particular teacher classroom. This relates very strongly to student's motivation to learn and work to the best of their ability.

The researchers are unable to give the correct evidence on how teacher's age and qualification contribute to teaching effectiveness. "Whilst the data that existed on the achievement gain of students was not ideal. It proved possible and practicable to reach broad judgements about teacher's effectiveness" (Hay Mcber: 2000). The researcher Hay McBer (2000:90) indicates that students must put more effort if they

want to succeed in life. The Table below presents the professional characteristics of teacher effectiveness.

**Table 1: Hay McBer (2000:92) Professional Characteristics of effective Teachers**

Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Challenge and support:</b> a commitment to do everything possible for each student and enable all students to be successful</li> <li>• <b>Confidence:</b> the belief in one's ability to be effective and to take on challenges</li> <li>• <b>Creating trust:</b> being consistent and fair; keeping one's word</li> <li>• <b>Respect for others:</b> the underlying belief that individuals matter and deserve respect</li> </ul>
Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Analytical thinking the ability to think logically,</b> break things down , and recognize cause and effect</li> <li>• <b>Conceptual thinking:</b> the ability to see patterns and links, even when there is a lot of detail</li> </ul>
Planning and setting expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Drive for improvement:</b> relentless energy for setting and meeting challenging targets, for students and the school</li> <li>• <b>Information seeking:</b> a drive to find out more and get to the heart of things; intellectual curiosity</li> <li>• <b>Initiative:</b> the drive to act now to anticipate and pre-empt events</li> </ul>
Leading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flexibility:</b> the ability and willingness to adapt to the needs of a situation and change factices</li> <li>• <b>Holding people accountable:</b> the drive and ability to set clear expectations and parameters, as well as to hold others accountable for performance</li> <li>• <b>Managing students:</b> the drive and ability to provide clear direction to students and to enthuse and motivate them</li> <li>• <b>Passion for learning:</b> the drive and ability to support students in their learning and to help them become confident and independent learners</li> </ul>
Relating to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impact and influence:</b> the drive and the ability to produce positive outcomes by impressing and influencing others</li> <li>• <b>Team working:</b> the ability to work with others to achieve shared goals</li> <li>• <b>Understanding others:</b> the drive and ability to understand others and why they behave as they do</li> </ul>

Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) found that there is connection between the participant's background and the school setting in the schools where there were doing research.

### **2.3.4 School Climate, Leadership, and Supervision**

The school culture can be changed by teachers working together and not by a teacher who works alone. However, many literatures highlighted that teachers can be more effective in very difficult environments, and students can also achieve their goals if the school that provides a safe environment, gets support from parents, have policy that has clear mission and vision, frequently monitor the progress of students, have good leadership skills, give students more time to study and, give them opportunities for exploration and discovery (Association for Effective School, 2006).

There are many literatures that encourage the importance of reflection and collaboration. One such literature is Barth (2000:56) who emphasizes the need of teachers together with principals to use culture collaborative with an on-going learning work with the goal of improving learning for every student. Gordon (2004:84) also noted that the trust and the good relationship between teachers and parents play an important part in developing a collaborative culture. According to Vegas and Petrow (2008), there is a direct link of the way decisions are taken and the personnel management within the school with the aim of improving the performance of a student. There is an emphasis that decentralization alone cannot help the local schools with support and provision of useful resources that is needed in the development of an effective learning climate.

Elmore (2004:76) highlighted ways that teachers and principals can use in school or outside the school to improve their leadership skills. He stated that collaboration is necessary but not sufficient for improvement: "in other words, participation in collaborative work increases commitment and satisfaction among teachers, but it is unlikely to result in changes in teacher's practice, skill, or knowledge in the absence of a clear organizational focus on those issues" (Elmore, 2004). He argued that it is important to recognise that both the school teachers and principals need to review their work as being comprised of a set of competencies and skills that can be learned. He presented the need for "distributed leadership," pointing out that in

learning organisations, “adults in terms of their contribution in education enhancing someone else’s capacity and performance”. In addition to that, Elmore (2004:27) provided five principles for distributed leadership:

- The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.
- Instructional improvement requires continuous learning.
- Learning requires modelling.
- The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution.
- The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity.

### **2.3.5 Learning Spaces**

The learning spaces are the factors that assists teachers in informing with learning outcomes, it considers the learning space which mediate the relationship and social practices of teaching and learning (Oblinger, 2006). There is a link on student learning outcome and the classroom space. However, learning spaces helps in improving the students learning and also promotes the good relationship of both teacher and students, and the platform where complex problems can be solved. Changes in physical spaces are more acceptable. For example, personalised learning, individual pathway planning, team teaching, inquiry approaches, teamwork, problem solving, rich tasks community based service learning, as well as organising multipurpose, open, and flexible spaces often requires longer instructional ‘blocks’ than teacher-centred transmission pedagogies (Arnot & Reay, 2007). The educational systems have spatial and temporal orders (Nespor, 2004). Temporality is a key factor in how organisations, teachers, and students respond to new learning spaces over time (Bruckner, 1997). Education has short and long term effects which affects pedagogical and organisational change which takes time (Paechter, 2004). Therefore, the physical aspects such as built and natural, cultural, temporal, and social are the virtual environment in the school (McGregor, 2004).

### **2.3.6 Learning Outcomes**

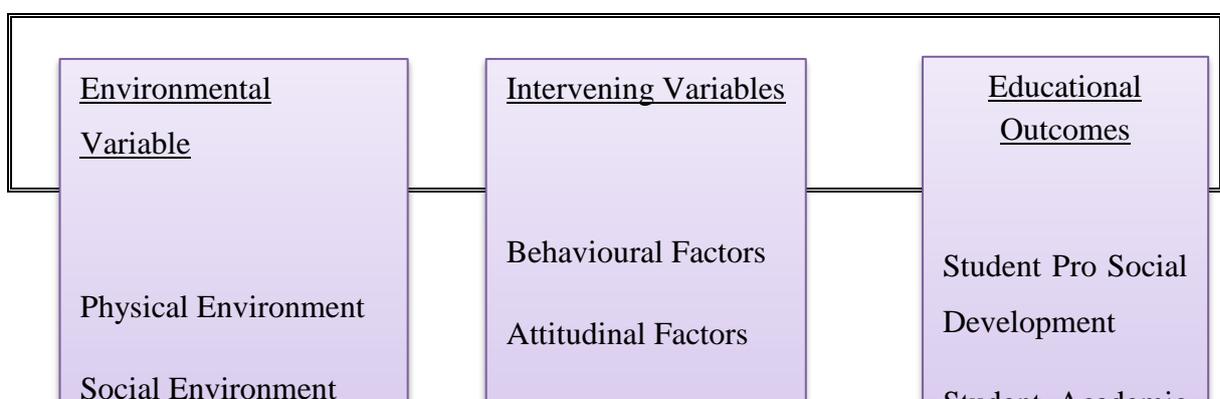
Leaning space and the school environment are the factors that cause difficulties in students learning. The other factors that can prevent or enhance learning are the physical wellbeing and behavioural characteristics of students. These factors also

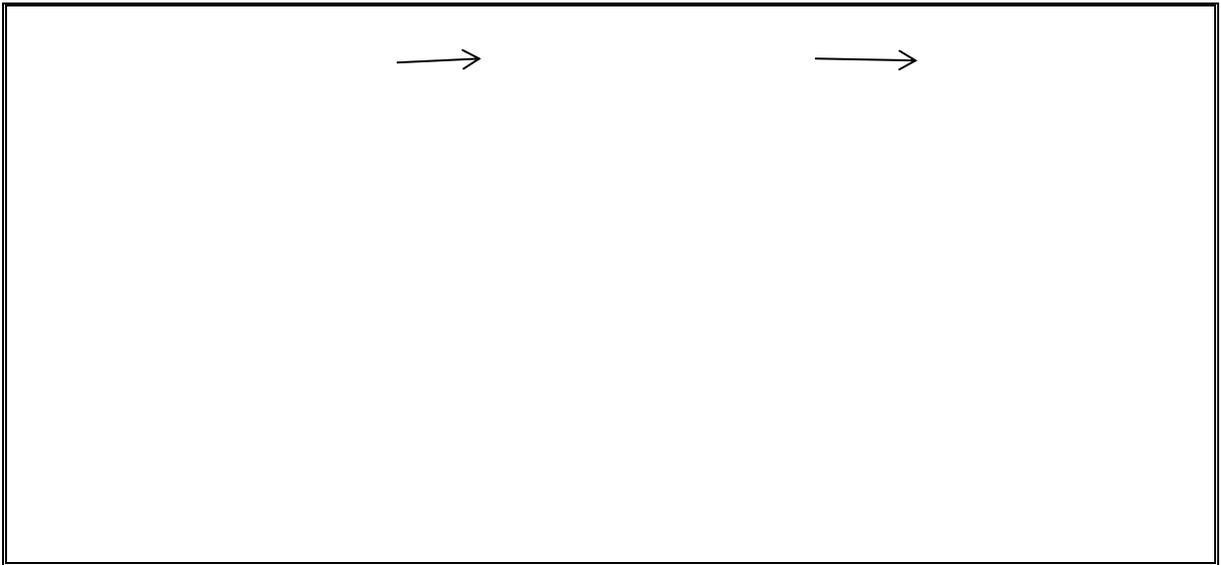
contribute to learning outcomes. The other factor that has an impact on students learning is the school environment.

The school environment is another factor that has the huge impact in learning and outcomes of student. Hattie’s systematic review (2003) of school effects indicates that after family and sets background, teacher student interactions are the greatest predictor of learning outcomes in standardised tests, with peer influences, prior learning, and social mix having some influence particularly in the post-compulsory years ( Woolley and Grogan- Taylor 2005 cited in Bowen 2008, Alton-Lee 2002, Bowen et al 2008). The student leadership also contributes indirectly in making the learning resources more conducive to learning and promoting teachers to be involved in professional development (Mulford, 2005).

There is strong evidence that students are affected if they are not engaged in learning. Disengagement results from multiple factors, many of them out of the schools’ control familial violence, poor health and wellbeing, discrimination, or bullying (Blackmore and Kamp 2008). Parent’s involvement makes a huge impact the student’s progress in their studies (Bowen et al, 2008). The teachers and principals manage curriculum and make students focus on learning. The rural areas mostly have schools which are not maintained well and people expect low educational achievement from students, this contributes to both teachers and students morale, which results in a negative impact on students achievement (Filardo, 2008). The factors affect the teachers in school work and even the attitude and the behaviours of teachers, which yield student learning to be affected. The below figure 1 and 2 illustrate it clear.

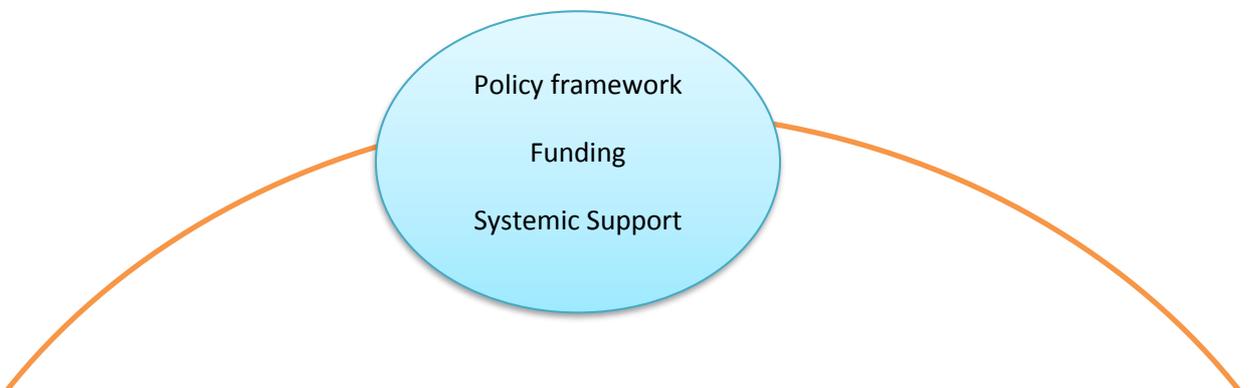
**Figure 1: Environmental Variables, Intervening variables and Educational Outcomes**

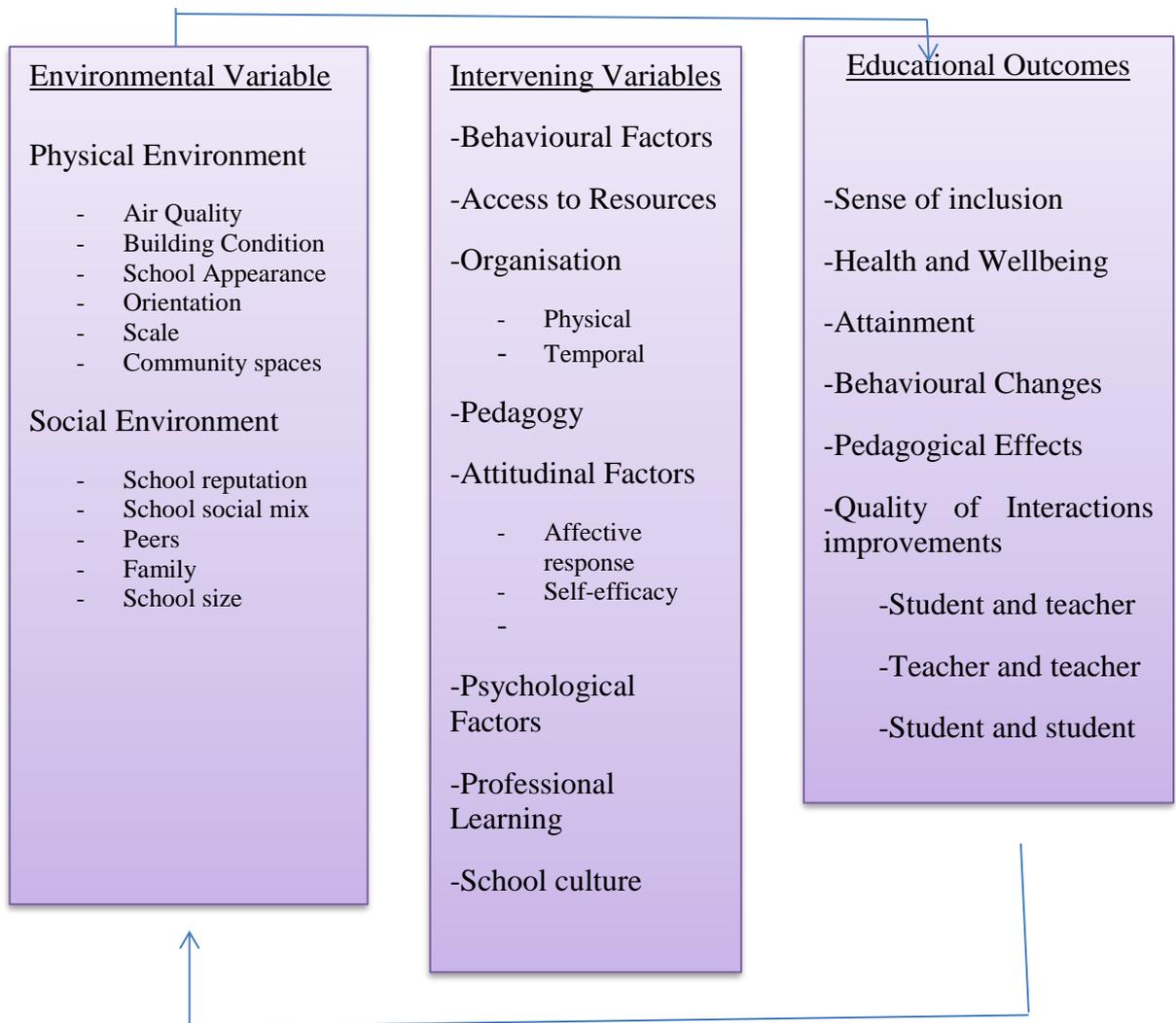




(Adapted from Lackney 2000:45)

**Figure 2: Policy framework funding systemic support**





(Adapted from Lackney 2000:46)

The use of learning spaces and built environment has a connection because of spatial density, classroom and school culture, and sense of belonging.

### 2.3.7 Environmental Impacts

Temple (2007) and Higgins et al (2005) refer to a number of sources that describe the ways in which specific environmental conditions impact upon student learning. The ventilation and air quality, temperature, and noise are the environmental condition factors (Keep, 2002). These conditions affect directly or indirectly on the way in which students perform. However, there is much debate over the relative

significance of specific elements such as air quality, colour, aesthetics, and furniture. Colour and physical presentation of space are highly contested elements (Temple, 2007). Rinaldi (2006) argue that aesthetics and access to resources and opportunities can work in different ways to accentuate student learning outcomes, this in contrast to Fisher (2002, 2005) and JISC (2006) opinions. There are issues such as furniture that are not addressed a lot as part of enhancing learning space. There is not much evidence that link the students comfort and student learning (Lomas & Oblinger, 2005) but, there are assumptions that increasing comfort will make both the student and teacher able to put more concentration on teaching and learning (Bateman, in press).

## **2.4 Filling the Positive Learning Environment**

More teaching and learning take place in a positive school environment. The research indicates that the school can support the students emotionally and academically. Both school connectedness and environment play an important part in the student's educational experiences. The students become more motivated if they see that teachers support them and have high expectations in seeing them achieve academic goals. The students believe that teachers must always take care of them. The teacher's satisfaction increases when they manage to create a school environment that is safe and nurturing for students. The empirical evidence indicate that a physical environment directly affects the achievement of students in school, therefore the student's academic achievement and building conditions must not be isolated to each other. Earthman (2004:18) raised the point that "there is sufficient research to state without equivocation that the building in which students spends a good deal of their time learning does in fact influence how well they perform".

An important dimension of school climate is teaching and learning. The principals of schools as well as teachers should provide the clear values and goals that can share the school teaching and learning environment. Research evidence indicated that once there is a positive school climate, the students' abilities to learn increases. A positive respectful school climate provides a solid foundation for supporting student's academic achievement and the development of positive attitudes and behaviours. Students who are connected to school experience less distress and engage in fewer risk-taking behaviours (Blum, 2005). The students' self-concept

increased if there is positive school climate. Blum (2005:64) added that “students, who feel safe, cared for, appropriately supported and sensitively encouraged to learn in challenging and meaningful ways experience increased academic achievement”.

Fisher (2005) argues that existing literature that links learning spaces to student behaviour and learning is over general and around key measures of building conditions. Gifford (2002) outlining the strengths and weaknesses of environmental psychology methodologies at three levels:

- fundamental processes,
- social management of space and,
- the complexity of behaviour within space

Evidence continues to emerge showing that poor indoor air quality can cause illness requiring absence from school, and can cause acute health symptoms that decrease performance while at school. In addition, recent data suggest that indoor air quality may directly reduce a person’s ability to perform specific mental tasks requiring concentration, calculation, or memory (Mendel & Heath, 2003).

National Academy Press (2006) concluded that there is considerable evidence concerning the effect of indoor air on the occupant’s productivity. In a school setting, O’Sullivan (2006:76) identifies a number of potential indoor air quality factors that could impact on health, comfort, and performance of the school occupants. These include internally generated pollutants, such as human bio-effluents, organic emissions from building materials and furnishings (e.g. the furniture, carpets, surface finishing), as well as allergens from house dust mites. There may also be external pollutants, such as ingress of combustion products from traffic, or fungi. In addition to that, also ventilation has the impact in school environment and results of students. The ventilation refers to the process of introduction and distributing outdoor and/ or properly treated recycled air into a building or a room (Etheridge and Sandberg, 2006). The ventilation process can involve airflow by either natural forces such as thermal buoyancy and wind or by fan force. It is known that ventilation is necessary to remove indoor generated pollutants from indoor air or dilute their concentration to acceptable levels. Inadequate ventilation in workplace results in various illness and disorders, either physiologically or psychology. The existing literature indicates that ventilation has a significant impact on several important human outcomes including; tasks performance and productivity and communicable

respiratory (Roberts & Robins, 2004). Currently, there is much evidence to support the strong relationship between temperatures and student performance and their behaviours (Parson, 2003).

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the local and international literatures highlighted the lack of promoting a positive environment as the global problem. In the researcher's literature review, it found that the poor academic performance of students in schools (due to the neglecting of school settings) is not only a problem that affects our poor community, but also affects communities internationally. As a result, developed countries decided to form policies that put the priorities of student's needs first, so that students can perform better or improve in their academic performance. . If parents put more effort in trying to support their children and create a positive culture environment, then that can have a positive effect and can be a good investment to students achievements. Also improving the critical accountability measures can be done by increasing the number of student connectedness to school. There is also the empirical evidence that students fighting, absenteeism, and vandalism in schools can be decreased by student's connectedness to school. The classroom motivation, school attendance, and academic performance are the factors that can improve by a student's connection to school. Moreover, the physical environment directly affects student's achievement, safety, and comfort which are the school settings. In the future, a comprehensive study should be conducted to find more factors that disturb teaching and learning in schools.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

#### **3.1.1 Research Site**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and substantiate the research methods used in this study. The positive learning school environment promotes the effectiveness of teaching and learning to take place. The research shows that schools can prevent or create the opportunity for a student to succeed in terms of students academically perspective (Stannow, 2010). The school environment and connectedness also contribute to the students' educational experience. If the students in the school see that teachers trust them and give support for their

learning, the students become motivated and put all their effort to succeed. The teachers must at all times create the environment that will promote the needs of students so that the students feel safe and secure.

The locations of schools, whether in rural and urban areas, contribute a lot to affecting the education of students. A simple example is the schools are graded according to the students' backgrounds and the socio-economic issues of people living in that particular community; as a result the students are rated on whether they are supposed to get free or exempted from school fees. The schools in rural areas are affected with high level of poverty and parents are unable to spend more money on their children for a better education (Anyon, 2003). The most evidence suggests that districts with more rural areas have a high number of students who live in poverty (Hatfield, 2002).

### **3.1.2 Data Collection Methods**

Semi structured in-depth interviews was used in the collection of data. The focus of study is on perceptions and attitudes of different people on how they view a positive learning environment. Hence, the researcher collected the data from the participant in schools that were targeted for the study. Quantitative data was collected via survey instrument to augment the studies. The researcher also considered reflective journals maintained by participants. There was the initial visit to the selected schools. The study has involved investigating the setting of different schools in promoting a positive learning environment. The research study follows a mixed-methods design operating within the pragmatist paradigm (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Mixed methods help the researcher to get the research design that suitable for the research problems in order to make the study manageable. For the study to obtain the intended outcomes, a convergent parallel design was selected. Mixed methodologists usually operate within the pragmatist paradigm and are interested in both narrative and numeric data and their analysis. Pragmatism is defined as “a deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ and focuses instead on ‘what works’ as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Two factors have influenced the researcher's decision to select the mixed-method approach. Firstly, the mixed methods approach allows the researcher to obtain subjective and objective information from various viewpoints. Secondly, the mixed-method approach allows the researcher to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritizes the methods equally, keeps the strands independent during analysis, and then merges the two sets of results to assess in what ways the results about adolescent attitudes converge and diverge (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

## **3.2 Research Methodology**

### **3.2.1 Research Design**

Research design is used as the guideline in the collection of information and the researchers choices and actions form part of research design through the entire research process (Guo, 2012: 43). The concept "research design" in a qualitative study helps through the entire writing process of the research and there are no sequential steps or procedures that need to be followed (Creswell, 1994: 2). The quantitative and qualitative research approaches are the two paradigms that the researcher uses to guide the whole research process from the beginning to the last stage of writing the report.

#### ***3.2.1.1 Qualitative approach***

Qualitative research is a primary research in which the researcher collects first-hand information obtained directly from participants (Hill & Helmers, 2014:20). The information was collected from the participants who are the students, teachers, principals, and administrators in the selected schools by the researcher and there was no research assistance. The research was based on finding the factors that can lead to the promoting of a positive environment in schools. The important characteristics of qualitative research help the researcher to get the meaningful information from the words spoken by the participants (Cohen, et.al, 2013).

#### ***3.2.1.2 Quantitative approach***

Quantitative research differs from qualitative research in the sense that it typically operates within the setting where people create and maintain their social world (Laroque, 2008). Quantitative approach is good if the researcher wants to get the

meaningful information (Cornell & Sheras, 2013). This approach assist in separating out large number of confounding factors that often obscure the main qualitative findings during the study.

In this study, the use of the quantitative analytical approach makes the research get the information and summarise it in numbers so that more accurate evidence will be presented as the finding. Quantitative analyses approaches are particularly helpful when the qualitative information has been collected in some structured way, even if the actual information has been elicited through participatory discussions and approaches (Brown & Elias, 2012).

## **3.2.2 Research Methods**

### ***3.2.2.1 Interviews***

Interviews give the researcher the chance to interpret other peoples own experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This study used in-depth interview to gather the information, but only the teacher participants were interviewed. The reason that the researcher used this type of research method is because it does not limit the participants unlike the structured questionnaire. The semi-structured interview has specific areas that need to be covered during the course of the interview, however the order of the questions and the exact wording of the question are left to the discretion of the interviewer (Bryman, 2001). This allows the researcher to quickly respond to any issues, problems, or clarity seeking questions of the participants. A face to face interview was used as it has a distinct advantage of enabling the researcher to establish a good relationship with participants. The interview of approximately 20 minutes in length took place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to the participants. The participants were not forced; they could decide to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. With the kind permission of participants, the interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate the collection of accurate information and later will be transcribed for analysis. The transcription was completed and the copy of the transcript was given to the participants for an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the conversation and to add or to clarify any points.

### ***3.2.2.2 Questionnaires***

The close-ended survey questionnaires have been used in the research to get more information on participant's perspectives of a positive learning environment. The students, administrators, principals, and heads of departments received only the questionnaire whereas teachers were also interviewed. The reason is to keep the survey purely quantitative, meaning that only 28 4-point Likert scale questions were used in survey. Patton (2002:27) explained that "questionnaires mostly are used in research to collect the information from selected participants with an aim to scrutinize or analyze data, so that the researcher will provide recommendations". This means that questionnaires must use the language of targeted groups and the selected participants must be able to read and write. Merriam (2000:109) suggests a good point that the questionnaires should have clear and simple language that all participants will understand to speed up the process of returning the questions on time. The questionnaires were given to the participants first and the interview followed at a later stage. The reason behind that, there were many participants that needed to complete the questionnaire, but less time needed in doing the analysis, whereas interviews were given more time needed in transcription of the collected data and analysis.

The detail of the survey questionnaire is in APPENDIX A. The survey questionnaire aims to investigate a school setting for promoting a positive learning environment. The survey questionnaires consists of 28 4-point Likert scale items, with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Items 1 to 11 were concerned with participants' perceptions of classroom/learning environment for positive learning, items 12 to 16 were concerned with participants' perceptions of creating a positive learning environment, items 17 to 23 were concerned with participants perceptions of current school attitudes regarding positive leaning environment, and lastly, items 24 to 28 were concerned with participants' perceptions of the consequences of a positive learning environment.

### ***3.2.2.3 How the survey questionnaires will be distributed***

Section B, in appendix A has the open-ended questions that seek to guide the data collection process and will provide the answers for sub-questions of the research. The papers that have questionnaires will be distributed to different participants on

the same day but will be collected on the agreed date to prevent the delay of the process of analysis. The study is purely quantitative, i.e. meant to find the perceptions of students, heads of department, principals, and teachers and administrators about how the school setting influences the positive learning environment. The opinions and experiences of participants will also give the answers of whether there is a direct link or not between a positive learning environment and student's success.

### **3.3 Research Techniques**

#### **3.3.1 Population and Sampling**

The research used stratified sampling in selecting the schools because it wanted to investigate specific demographic school groupings and random sampling was used in the selection of participants. The research was done in two schools (Mbalenhle High School and Thembalihle High School) under Mnambithi circuit, UThukela District, KZN province, and UKhahlamba region in KwaZulu Natal. In this circuit there are 11 primary schools and 9 high schools. The department of education used quintile as a way of categorizing schools, looking at the community level of education and unemployment rate of people living around the schools. The lower quintiles one and two represent the community that is affected with poverty and with the high increased rate of unemployment. The schools at UThukela (the researcher's sample area) are in quintile one and two respectively, and the students qualified not to pay school fees (National Norms Standard School Funding Act, 1998). The other reasons of choosing these schools is because they are within the researcher's residential area and workplace and there are situated in Uitvaal area where all participants from both school stay and it's the only schools that are in deep rural areas, where there is a perception that learners do not perform very well in studies due to location (school setting). As a result, the researcher sought to find or investigate whether there is an impact of school setting on the student success or not.

#### **3.3.2 Participants**

The study includes the participants which were: the 2 principals, 8 heads of department, 12 teachers, 2 administrators and 120 students in two schools under Mnambithi circuit. The entire population is the sample of this study. In total, a sample

of 144 people has been selected from a targeted population. There was fair heterogeneous representation of the genders in each group. The inclusion of each participant is explained as follows:

- **Students:** the students spend their time within school compound hence were selected to explore the school setting. The characteristics of the students in both schools have different economic backgrounds, they are from the disadvantaged backgrounds and their parents are not employed.
- **Teachers and heads of departments:** teachers of both schools are a part of middle-income group, few that stay locally.
- **Principals:** principals of both schools are qualified and coming from the good background.
- **Administrators:** administrators also stay within the community, there are from the low-income group. They have experience in issuing materials to students that help in uplifting the standard of pass rates in both schools.

### **3.3.3 Permission to conduct research**

The researcher has applied the ethical clearance from the University Of South Africa (UNISA) in order to conduct the study. Also the researcher sought permission from KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education through submission of the letter (see appendix D), the school principals (see appendix B and C), and Letter to Parents (see appendix E). The purpose of study, data collection procedures, and research questions in (see appendix A) are explained clearly on how it will be used. The participants signed the individual informed consent form (see appendix F).

### **3.3.4 Ethical consideration**

The ethical confidentiality and privacy of the participants, which are the students, teachers, HODs, principals, and administrators, were taken into consideration. Other information disclosed by the participant was not recorded, only the ones that assists in achieving the goals of the research. The participation in the research study was not compulsory, but participants were volunteering. The participants that decided not to continue or want to carry on with the research were replaced. The participants that did not carry on with research mentioned that their parents did not permit them and refused to sign the forms and others found that it would take more

time while they use staff transports. The other participants thought they would get rewards at the end of the research, and as a result they withdrew.

It is the democratic rights of the participants or not to the study. The researcher got permission from different authorities. The Department of Education, Thembalihlehigh School and Mbalenhle high school, the principals, Heads of Departments, teachers, administrators, students, and parents gave permission for students who were under eighteen years to participate in the study. The participants information was kept confidential no other person would be allowed to view or see it. The participants were told verbally about the intention and the objective of the study and what will happen during the interviews.

### **3.4 Data Analysis and Results**

#### **3.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

The responses that the researcher received were captured into a Microsoft Word document, and responses from the interviews were put together and analyzed using the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006: Alhojailan, 2012: Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: Thomas, 2006). In qualitative research, the researcher selects a suitable data analysis method, because there are many methods. In the thematic analyses: the researcher derives the theory based on the data, instead of analyzing the data based on an existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, thematic analysis allows the generation help in minimizing the assumptions. The main aim in the analysis stage is to gain insights regarding the participants' perceptions of a positive learning environment. Also the thematic analysis is important in the sense that it allows for an understanding and interpretation of the responses of the participants from open-ended questions.

Thematic analysis was used to identify the data that was important or interesting, and used those themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This analysis helps in reflecting the fact that the data has been summarized and organized.

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#### **3.4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

In this phase of the data analysis, the themes of the narratives from the interview questions will be enhanced by the quantitative analysis results. The goal of enhancing the qualitative results is to assess the insight picture of the participants' perceptions of a positive learning environment. In addition, this assists the researcher to develop and prove the hypotheses through the quantitative survey. The quantitative research was used to focus on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across a group of participants or to explain a particular phenomenon. The main aim of using this analysis was to gather data using structured research instruments. As a researcher, tools such as questionnaires are used to collect numerical data.

### **3.5 Reliability**

A reliable study provides assurance to the researcher that the desired objectives will be successfully reached while remaining true to the research design and the methodological structures. The test of reliability helps the researcher to see that there is no repetition in terms of findings. Kumar (2002:13) noted when doing the research that the scaling methodology, such as surveying using Likert scale items, supports study reliability. There is more evidence that Likert scales are used in many researches because it can work in all phases of the research execution (Kumar, 2012). Finally, the study also aims to use the quantitative data to enhance the qualitative analysis results.

### **3.6 Validity**

In validity the threats to internal and external were limited. In this study, the two threats, which were the selection bias and subject history, can be eliminated as the whole population of the two schools will be included as the participants. External validity refers to the degree to which the results of an empirical investigation apply to other organizations, areas, and across individuals and times (Singleton & Straits, 2005). The participants are not forced or obligated to be a part of the consortium. Thus, the whole population of the two schools will be included as the participants; the research study will ensure that it represents the interest of the participants so that at the end, the objectives of the study are achieved.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the methodology of the research study and research techniques or instruments that were utilized. There was an identification and discussion of the questionnaire under the research methods section. Data analyses approaches were also discussed. This entails the discussion and description of measurement and reliability, validity, and appropriateness of the measurement. The pilot study pinpointed gaps that were found. Before the actual start of the research there was a need to rephrase the question and there was also a need to include other participants that will help in giving the answers in other questions of the research. More answers were given by participants on what factors that contributes to a positive learning environment. The qualitative research approach assisted in gaining more information that can be used to promote a positive learning environment. The important information was collected through the use of interview that made the researcher more satisfied. Pilot study was used to see the validity, time taken to fill up the questions, and common understanding and interpretation of the questions by a different target population. The face to face interview was used as it gave the opportunity for the researcher to actually assess the respondents' behavior and willingness to answer each question.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter represents the analysis of results of the data collected at Thembalihle and Mbalenhle High schools. Thembalihle High School is situated in deep rural area, where there are gravel roads, scarcity of water, and no electricity. The people only use water from the river and candle lights, but in school the teachers and students use a generator as the source of electricity. The area is affected with socio-economic issues, such as poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. This led to people getting involved in the vandalism of schools' property. The buildings of the school are not in good condition; also the classrooms are not sufficient. Inside the classroom, the students are overcrowded. It had the total of 12 teachers and 458 pupils. The second school, Mbalenhle high School is also situated in deep rural area. The buildings of

the school are in good condition but the students in other classes are overcrowded in such that the ratio of teacher to students in one class is 1:98, in comparison to Thembalihle high school where the ratio of teacher to students is 1:40. The infrastructure is good; the school environment is good in the way that teaching and learning can take place. It had 18 teachers and 520 pupils. The study is both descriptive and quantitative, it is basically designed to develop purely quantitative on whether there is or not the link between a positive learning environment and the success of students.

The teachers, students, heads of department, administrators and principals in the selected schools completed the questionnaires in Section A and B of Appendix A which provides the answers to the sub topic questions of the research. The research questions for part B are:

- 1) What are the things that the school can do to make classroom a safe and positive place for student to learn?
- 2) What are things that must be considered as essential if the students are to succeed in school?
- 3) Does the nature of school environment create the strong influence on the way students develop and learn?
- 4) What can be done in order to foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of a positive learning environment?

For the quantitative part of the study, 28 questions were developed and it's included as Section A in Appendix A. The survey questionnaires aim to investigate the setting of different schools in promoting positive learning environment. The survey questionnaires consists of 28 4-point Likert scale items, with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Items 1 to 11 concern of participants' perceptions of classroom/learning environment for positive learning, items 12 to 16 concern of participants' perceptions of creating a positive learning environment, items 17 to 23 concerns of participants perceptions of current school attitudes regarding positive leaning environment, and items 24 to 28 concerns of participants' perceptions of the consequences of positive leaning environment.

Pilot study was done to authenticate the questionnaire; Pilot study plays the important part in the research in helping the researcher to get important information (Babbie, 2000). The participants' teachers had some inputs at the end of the survey.

The teachers reported that the questions were well understood. The teachers felt that the questions were straight forward and nothing confused them, and also that nothing needed to be revised.

## 4.2 Survey Findings

The collected data was classified into four categories looking at the participant's perceptions about positive learning environment and the progress of the students. The participants were having differences in terms of opinions. As a result, the findings were categorized as follows; classroom/learning environment, creation of a positive learning environment, the school settings, and school evaluation. In the category on classroom environment, teachers, heads of departments, principals, students, and administrators were asked to mark the series of items using the four words: agree, strongly agree, disagree and/or strongly disagree. In analyzing the data the following symbols were used; please take note of it in reading the data collected:

Survey responds categories

<b>Symbols</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
A	Means Agree
SA	Means Strongly Agree
D	Means Disagree
SD	Means Strongly Disagree
Dash (-)	Means no opinions

The survey questionnaire, which answered the first three questions of the research; what are the things that the school together with community can do to promote a positive learning environment? What are causes and consequences that promote a positive learning environment? What creates a safe learning environment? The survey sought opinions of teachers' perceptions. All questions in Section are

consisted of a closed item response format (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). The instrument used numbers as a way of rating the responses of participants. This rating scale gave the participants the chance to have inputs even in terms of their feelings (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). When developing the survey, instrument validity was taken into consideration, and it measured what it is claimed be measured (Hughes, 2005).

#### 4.2.1 Classroom Environment for Positive Learning

Table 2: Classroom environment for positive learning by 12 teachers

Items	Opinions							
	S	A	A	SD	D			
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Layout of classroom supports inclusive, interactive teaching approach	8	66	4	33	-	-	-	-
2. Learning objectives displayed and used	5	42	4	33	2	17	1	8
3. Layout of classroom and provision of resource support collaborative learning	7	58	2	17	1	8	2	17
4. Tools are well organized, clearly labeled and accessible	4	33	3	25	3	25	2	17
5. There are opportunities to learn indoor and outdoor	4	33	6	50	1	8	1	8
6. The students are easily to move around the classroom	5	42	5	42	2	17	-	-
7. Teachers create order and remove clutter	4	33	4	33	-	-	4	33
8. Teachers ensure comfort in the classroom, such as temperature, furniture	4	33	4	33	2	17	2	17
9. Teachers include students in the creation of their environment	1	25	6	50	2	17	3	25
10. Teachers provide support, praise and feedback	6	50	6	50	-	-	-	-
11. Teachers provide discipline where necessary	5	42	6	50	-	-	1	8

Generally, in terms of the classroom environment over 33 percent of teachers strongly agree, and over 50 percent agree. This shows that teachers take care of their classrooms, and all the materials needed to promote a positive learning environment is considered such as availability of furniture, and poster on classroom

walls. This provided the students with opportunity to learn inside and outside the classrooms. Only less than 17 percent participants disagree with the statement that touched on the important elements that are used in the classroom to create positive learning environment.

Table 3: Classroom environment for positive learning by 2 principals and 2 administrators

Items	Opinions							
	S A		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>1. Layout of classroom supports inclusive, interactive teaching approach</b>	3	75	-	-	-	-	1	25
<b>2. Learning objectives displayed and used</b>	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-
<b>3. Layout of classroom and provision of resource support collaborative learning</b>	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-
<b>4. Tools are well organized, clearly labeled and accessible</b>	1	25	2	50	1	25	-	-
<b>5. There are opportunities to learn indoor and outdoor</b>	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>6. The students are easily to move around the classroom</b>	1	25	2	50	-	-	1	25
<b>7. Teachers create order and remove clutter</b>	3	75	-	-	-	-	1	25
<b>8. Teachers ensure comfort in the classroom, such as temperature, furniture</b>	1	25	1	25	-	-	2	25
<b>9. Teachers include students in the creation of their environment</b>	1	25	-	-	-	-	3	75
<b>10. Teachers provide support, praise and feedback</b>	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-
<b>11. Teachers provide discipline where necessary</b>	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-

The principals and administrators report highlights that mostly 75 percent strongly agree and over 50 percent agree that more resources are used promote positive learning environment. The principals take care of the school environment; there is the availability of environmental policy which is effective. The classrooms are encouraged to have classroom policies pasted on the wall that is seen by all students. The principals ensured that furniture is available and classrooms are in good condition that facilitates the promotion of good classroom atmosphere. But

less than 25 percent of participants raised the point that temperature in classroom is not good due to overcrowding of students and the space does not promote the smooth running in between the desks.

Table 4: Classroom environment for positive learning by 120 Students

Items	Opinions							
	S A	A	SD	D	%	%	%	%
1. Layout of classroom supports inclusive, interactive teaching approach	57	48	34	28	12	10	17	14
2. Learning objectives displayed and used	31	26	35	29	38	32	16	13
3. Layout of classroom and provision of resource support collaborative learning	92	77	11	9	-	-	17	14
4. Tools are well organized, clearly labeled and accessible	28	23	47	39	11	9	34	28
5. There are opportunities to learn indoor and outdoor	76	63	24	20	10	8	10	8
6. The students are easily to move around the classroom	4	3	16	13	30	25	70	58
7. Teachers create order and remove clutter	1	1	24	20	15	13	84	70
8. Teachers ensure comfort in the classroom, such as temperature, furniture	13	11	13	11	37	31	67	56
9. Teachers include students in the creation of their environment	56	47	39	33	12	10	13	11
10. Teachers provide support, praise and feedback	93	78	23	19	-	-	4	3
11. Teachers provide discipline where necessary	41	34	38		12	10	19	16

In terms of the students the scores are spread all over the possible answers, but over 30 percent agree and over 34 percent strongly agree that within the classrooms there are things that are used to promote positive learning environment. The students were saying teachers supported them and ensured that there is good atmosphere all time and feedback is given as part of support and praise and teachers involve the students during the teaching and learning. However, less than 45 percent disagree that the students are easily to move around the classroom, which is due to overcrowding in many classrooms and also the students strongly

that teachers ensure comfort in the classroom such as temperature and furniture. This is due to vandalism within some classrooms.

Table 5: Classroom environment for positive learning by 8 heads of departments

Items	Opinions							
	S	A	A	%	SD	%	D	%
1. Layout of classroom supports inclusive, interactive teaching approach	2	25	3	38	1	13	3	38
2. Learning objectives displayed and used	1	13	2	25	3	38	2	25
3. Layout of classroom and provision of resource support collaborative learning	3	38	3	38	-	-	2	25
4. Tools are well organized, clearly labeled and accessible	2	25	4	50	1	13	1	13
5. There are opportunities to learn indoor and outdoor	2	25	2	25	1	13	3	38
6. The students are easily to move around the classroom	3	38	2	25	-	-	3	38
7. Teachers create order and remove clutter	3	38	3	38	1	13	1	13
8. Teachers ensure comfort in the classroom, such as temperature, furniture	1	13	2	25	1	13	4	50
9. Teachers include students in the creation of their environment	1	13	5	63	-	-	2	25
10. Teachers provide support, praise and feedback	4	50	2	25	-	-	2	25
11. Teachers provide discipline where necessary	6	75	1	13	-	-	-	-

Generally, in terms of the classroom environment the heads of departments mostly 38 strongly agree and over 50 percent agree. The HODs ensured that the resources are available to the classrooms even though there are not sufficient enough. All the classrooms have resources and even students with disability are catered. Sanders (2006:112) agreed with participants that “the school must create the conducive environment that supports the individual study area, libraries and instructional materials, but the school must support the process of learning”. Less than 17 percent

disagree with the statement that touches the important elements that are used in the classroom to create positive learning environment. Many of the HODs suggested that even if outdoor learning took place or happened but it is not much fruitful in the sense that the school premises and grounds are not in good place to be used.

#### 4.2.2 Creation of Positive Learning Environments

Table 6: Creation of positive learning environments by 12 teachers

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>12. The students are motivated to be the best that they can be</b>	10	83	2	17	-	--	-	-
<b>13. Teachers uses a range of approaches during teaching</b>	6	50	5	42	--	-	1	8
<b>14. There is a culture of collaborative learning during teaching and learning</b>	6	50	4	33	1	8	1	8
<b>15. The teachers are ambitious for students and expectation of learning is high</b>	6	50	6	50	-	-	-	-
<b>16. Learning is valued as important and enjoyable and that everyone can achieve</b>	5	42	4	33	-	-	3	25

When looking at the reports of teachers over 50 per cent strongly agree and over 34 agree that elements that need to be considered in creation of positive learning environment are considered within the classroom. Most teachers bring different teaching approaches during the delivery of the lessons, but most are the student centred approaches that are encouraged. The students are encouraged so that they are motivated and take care of their education.

Table 7: Creation of positive learning environment by 8 heads of departments

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>12. The students are motivated to be the best that they can be</b>	7	88	1	13	-	--	-	-
<b>13. Teachers uses a range of approaches during teaching</b>	6	75	2	25	-	-	-	-

<b>14. There is a culture of collaborative learning during teaching and learning</b>	4	50	4	50	-	-	-	-
<b>15. The teachers are ambitious for students and expectation of learning is high</b>	6	75	1	13	-	-	1	13
<b>16. Learning is valued as important and enjoyable and that everyone can achieve</b>	3	38	4	50	-	-	1	13

The table gives the opinions or views of participants' perceptions about creation of positive learning environment with the school. Over 60 per cent of the reports agree and over 42 per cent strongly agree from the HOD's that within their schools creation of positive learning environment elements are considered. Thirteen per cent of heads of departments disagree that learning is valued and that everyone can achieved. The HODs have intervention programmes to uplift the standard of pass rate to students. Kwa (2007: 74) emphasis the point that it is important for the school to create an educational environment that promotes what is taught and shared within the classroom. The students are expected to pass all the subjects that are why heads of departments provide motivations to their best to ensure that students are motivated and willing to pass.

Table 8: Creation of positive learning environment by 2 principals and 2 administrators

Items	Opinions							
	SA	A	SD	D				
	%	%	%	%				
<b>12. The students are motivated to be the best that they can be</b>	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-
<b>13. Teachers uses a range of approaches during teaching</b>	4	100	--	-	-	-	-	-
<b>14. There is a culture of collaborative learning during teaching and learning</b>	2	50	2	50	--	-	-	-
<b>15. The teachers are ambitious for students and expectation of learning is high</b>	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>16. Learning is valued as important and enjoyable and that everyone can achieve</b>	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-

Generally, in terms of the classroom environment the principals and administrators participants mostly or over 33 percent strongly agree, over 50 percent agree and less than 17 percent disagree with the statement that touches the important elements that are used in the classroom to create positive learning environment. The principals always asked the administrators to make the students certificates as part of encouraging the students to improve the performance and have the goals about their studies. The school brought many motivational speakers and involves students to part take to school activities to freshen their minds.

Table 9: Creation of positive learning environment by 120 students

Items	<b>Opinions</b>							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>12. The students are motivated to be the best that they can be</b>	112	93	4	3	-	-	4	3
<b>13. Teachers uses a range of approaches during teaching</b>	87	73	29	24	2	2	12	10
<b>14. There is a culture of collaborative learning during teaching and learning</b>	56	47	43	36	3	3	10	8
<b>15. The teachers are ambitious for students and expectation of learning is high</b>	111	93	9	8	-	-	-	-
<b>16. Learning is valued as important and enjoyable and that everyone can achieve</b>	97	81	13	11	1	1	9	8

The students, the spread of 63 per cent strongly agree and over 28 agree to the elements that create the positive learning environments, few or less than 10 percentage of opinion from the students that disagree with some items. Teachers involve the students during teaching and there is collaborative teaching and learning in classroom. The motivations had stimulated the minds of students and encourage them to put more effort to their studies. The involvement of students by teachers made it clear that learning is valued and taken seriously.

### 4.2.3 Current Schools Attitudes Regarding Positive Learning

#### Environment

Table 10: Current schools attitudes regarding positive learning environment by 12 teachers

Items	Opinions							
	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>The school settings: Are the below points considered in your school?</b>								
17. The emotional well-being of the learning community	5	42	3	25	1	8	3	25
18. Relationship within the learning community	-	-	5	42	4	33	3	25
19. How the environment is organised and care for	3	25	4	33	3	25	2	18
20. Systems for promoting good behaviour	5	42	4	33	2	25	2	18
21. System for promoting regular attendance	7	58	4	33	-	-	1	8
22. Language used within the school or setting	11	92	1	8	-	-	-	-
23. A shared understanding of the rights and responsibility of all members of learning community	3	25	3	25	3	25	3	25

The teachers' analysis show that over 25 agree and as many as 60 per cent under strongly agree show that schools take care of the positive attitudes regarding positive learning environment. The language used within the school is taken and considered as important. The teachers show that the well-being of the learning community is considered as part of school settings.

Table 11: Current schools attitudes regarding positive learning environment by 8 head of departments

Items	Opinions							
	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>The school settings: Are the below points considered in your school?</b>								
17. The emotional well-being of the learning community	8	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
18. Relationship within the learning community	6	75	2	25	-	-	-	-

<b>19. How the environment is organised and care for</b>	5	63	2	25	-	-	1	13
<b>20. Systems for promoting good behaviour</b>	8	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>21. System for promoting regular attendance</b>	8	100	-	-	-	-	--	-
<b>22. Language used within the school or setting</b>	7	88	1	13	-	-	-	-
<b>23. A shared understanding of the rights and responsibility of all members of learning community</b>	5	63	2	25	-	-	1	13

The HOD's analysis show that over 25 agree and many 90 per cent under strongly agree show that schools take care of the positive attitudes regarding positive learning environment. The HODs have ensured that for the smooth running of teaching and learning, community need to be considered and the systems within the school that will channel students to take care of the environment. The understanding of the rights and responsibility of all stakeholders' involvement in the school is considered.

Table 12: Current schools attitudes regarding positive learning environment by 2 principals and 2 administrators

Items	Opinions							
	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>The school settings: Are the below points considered in your school?</b>								
<b>17. The emotional well-being of the learning community</b>	2	50	-	-	1	25	1	25
<b>18. Relationship within the learning community</b>	2	50	-	-	--	-	2	50
<b>19. How the environment is organised and care for</b>	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-

<b>20. Systems for promoting good behaviour</b>	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>21. System for promoting regular attendance</b>	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	--
<b>22. Language used within the school or setting</b>	3	75	1	25	--	-	-	-
<b>23. A shared understanding of the rights and responsibility of all members of learning community</b>	2	50	2	50	--	-	-	-

The principals and administrators over 25 per cent agree and above 75 per cent strongly agree that there are many items regarding school settings that are considered. The schools have policies that regulate good behaviour and promote regular attendance of students to schools. The schools used English as medium of instructions and are governed by the codes of conducts of the schools. Many principals take care of the school environment by hiring the support staffs.

Table 13: Current schools attitudes regarding positive learning environment by 120 students

Items	Opinions							
	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>The school settings: Are the below points considered in your school?</b>								
<b>17. The emotional well-being of the learning community</b>	34	28	45	38	26	22	15	13
<b>18. Relationship within the learning community</b>	71	59	23	19	17	14	9	8
<b>19. How the environment is organised and care for</b>	55	46	34	28	3	3	28	23
<b>20. Systems for promoting good behaviour</b>	74	62	39	33	7	6	-	-
<b>21. System for promoting regular attendance</b>	88	73	28	23	-	-	4	3
<b>22. Language used within the school or setting</b>	100	83	11	9	8	7	1	1
<b>23. A shared understanding of the rights and responsibility of all members of learning community</b>	37	31	37	31	28	23	8	7

In terms of the students over 43 per cent agree with the schools attitudes regarding positive learning environment also less than 33 per cent the students disagree with the statement. Many of the students did not understand the questions they just ticked any block. But the students agreed that the medium of instruction is English, which is their first additional language. The students also agreed that community is involved in the school that made the parents also to be involved in school activities.

#### 4.2.4 Perceptions of the Consequences of Positive Learning

##### Environment

Table 14: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment by 12 teachers

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>The school: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment</b>								
<b>24. The nature of school environment creates the strong influence on the way students develop and learn</b>	12	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>25. Investing time and effort in creating a positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff</b>	7	58	4	33	-	-	1	8
<b>26. A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools</b>	7	58	5	42	-	-	-	-
<b>27. There are few chances that students can succeed in a positive learning environment</b>	1	8	-	-	9	75	2	17
<b>28. The support from both teachers and parents can contribute to the creation of positive learning environments.</b>	11	92	1	8	-	-	-	-

Over 55 per cent teachers strongly agree and 33 per cent agreed that consequences are taken care of. The teachers agreed in the sense that positive environment need to be taken into consideration if students are to succeed in their studies. There are

also good perceptions that if teachers and parents are more involved, it will be easy to change or promote the positive environment. High percentage of teachers knows that for students to succeed in school, positive teaching and learning environments are important.

Table 15: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment by 8 head of departments

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>The school: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment</b>								
<b>24. The nature of school environment creates the strong influence on the way students develop and learn</b>	8	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>25. Investing time and effort in creating a positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff</b>	8	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>26. A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools</b>	7	88	1	13	-	-	-	-
<b>27. There are few chances that students can succeed in a positive learning environment</b>	-	-	-	-	7	88	1	13
<b>28. The support from both teachers and parents can contribute to the creation of positive learning environments.</b>	6	75	2	25	-	-	-	-

The results indicate that of the heads of departments, over 88 per cent agree that positive learning environment contribute in the student's success and ensured that there are policies that encourage teachers to invest more time and put their effort in creating a positive school climate that can result in healthy academic environments. These can results in positive outcomes for students. Only 13 per cent of heads of departments disagree that positive learning environment in school will minimize learning of every student. It is more encouraging that heads of department ensured

that nature of school environment creates the important part in the learning and development of students.

Table 16: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment by 120 students

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>The school: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment</b>								
<b>24. The nature of school environment creates the strong influence on the way students develop and learn</b>	119	99	1	1	-	-	-	-
<b>25. Investing time and effort in creating a positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff</b>	112	93	6	5	-	-	-	-
<b>26. A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools</b>	97	81	17	14	-	-	6	5
<b>27. There are few chances that students can succeed in a positive learning environment</b>	2	2	4	3	78	65	36	30
<b>28. The support from both teachers and parents can contribute to the creation of positive learning environments.</b>	56	47	41	34	11	9	12	10

The students, over 47 per cent strongly agree and 14 per cent agree that within the schools, if teaching and learning take place then the consequences of positive learning environment are taken care of and this will lead to the good attainment of results. Less than 30 per cent disagree that positive learning environment in school can minimise learning of every student. Also the students' believe that there is a need to invest more time and effort in creating a positive learning. The more the school provide things that can promote positive environment; students will put more effort to their studies and develop passion to learn.

Table 17: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment by 2 principals and 2 administrators

Items	Opinions							
	SA		A		SD		D	
		%		%		%		%
<b>The school: Perceptions of the consequences of positive learning environment</b>								
24. The nature of school environment creates the strong influence on the way students develop and learn	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-
25. Investing time and effort in creating a positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-
26. A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
27. There are few chances that students can succeed in a positive learning environment	-	-	-	-	3	75	1	25
28. The support from both teachers and parents can contribute to the creation of positive learning environments.	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-

General comments: many of the principals and administrators indicated 85 per cent strongly agree that perception of the consequences of positive learning environment is considered in their school, 25 per cent of the principals that disagree and believing that there are few chance that positive learning environment can minimise the chance of students to pass in their studies. The principal's emphasizes the point of creating school policies that is aligned with the promotion of a positive environment.

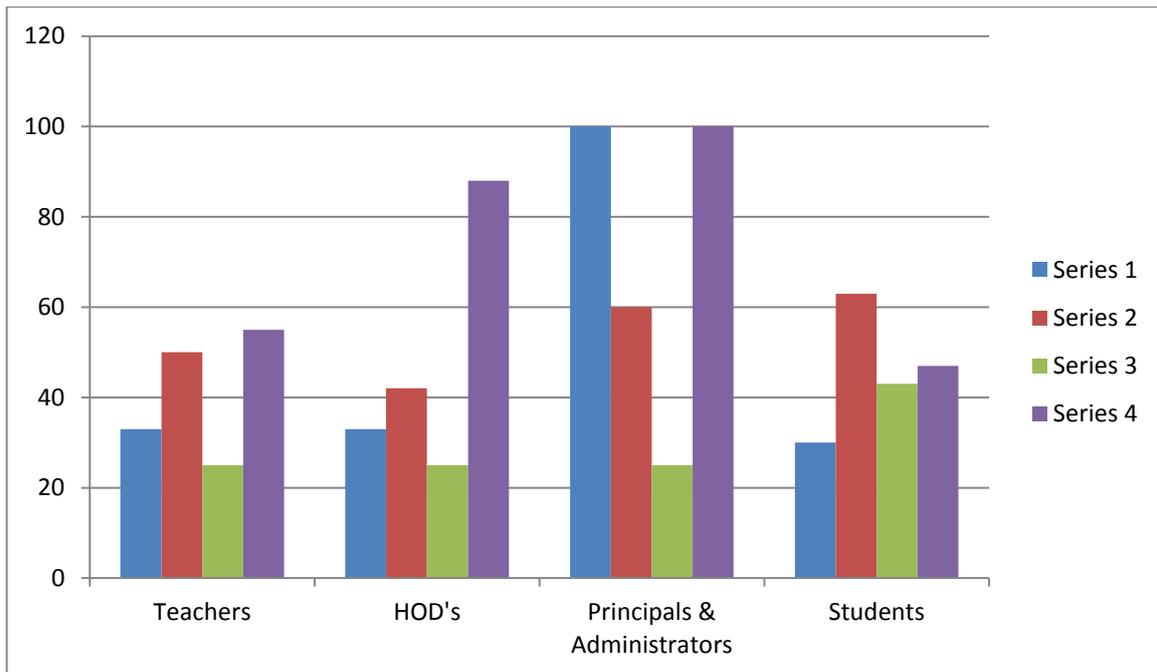
### **4.3 The Bar Graph illustration of the promotion of a positive learning environment**

The below Bar graph represents the overall representation of results gathered through the perceptions of the participant's which are the principals, head of departments, administrators, teachers and students

The meaning of series is as follows:

- Series 1: represents the overall information regarding questions checking classroom or learning environment.
- Series 2: represents the overall information regarding questions checking the creation of a positive learning environment in school.
- Series 3: represents the overall information regarding questions checking current schools attitudes regarding a positive learning environment.
- Series 4: represents the overall information regarding questions checking perceptions of the consequences of a positive learning environment.

**The Bar graph showing the perceptions of participants regarding promotion of positive learning environment**



#### 4.4 The summary of answers from Section B and Appendix A

This part of research responded to the sub-questions of the research and it also included the answers that were most common to all the participants:

1. How teachers can promote a positive learning environment?

- The teacher must be enthusiastic and energetic about his or her work.
- Teachers must come to the classroom with a positive attitude.
- The teachers must lead by example.
- The teachers must show the students how there must be independent.
- Teachers must stress the respect and spirit of taking care of each other among the students.
- Teachers should keep on learning and finding new strategies to create positive learning.
- The students must feel and also see that they are important.
- The teachers should help instead of laugh.
- Teachers must know the strong points of the students.
- The teacher must a make positive statement before issuing a correction.
- The teacher must give the student a second chance to respond.
- If the student misbehaves, the teachers must try and redirect their behaviour in a subtle way.
- The teachers must allow time for student to reflect.

- The teacher must use and ask questions that are not bias to students.

2. What are the things that the school can do to make classroom a safe and positive place for student to learn?

- Teachers must arrange the classroom so that they have all the resources they need.
- The classroom must be clean, orderly and inviting.
- The classroom setting must make it easy to supervise the students.
- The teachers must involve students and encourage them to be involved during learning sessions.
- In the classroom the activities must allow students to express their thought and ideas.
- The teacher must paste the students work on the wall, so that if the students sees their own work they will be encouraged to work hard in their studies.
- Students appreciate when teachers show humanity.
- Read with students if you are a teacher.
- The teachers must take every opportunity to model kindness.
- Provide frequent positive feedback.
- Conduct daily community meetings with students.
- The teacher must create the platform where students account in whatever that they are doing as part of discipline.

3. What are things that must be considered as essential if the students are to succeed in school?

Many responses were “Yes it is”, reasons were as follows:

- If teaching and learning environment is considered important students perform better.
- The students get more opportunity to exceed the educational expectance.
- The learning support given to students equips them to focus more on their studies.
- The varieties of teaching strategies cause the students to engage more in problem solving.

- The students must be given the chance to work in groups and be assisted by teachers so that they will achieve their academic goals.
- Technology must be used to support students to achieve academic goals.
- Choosing of materials based on student's interest and developmental needs.
- Encourage of varieties of teaching techniques as the provision of students support.

4. Does the nature of school environment create the strong influence on the way students develop and learn?

Positive responses were suggested as followed:

- The teachers motivate the students to have goals to achieve.
- The teachers motivate and give rewards to students as part of encouraging them to perform better.
- The objectives of learning play an important role in developing the students.
- Teachers ensures that there is clear planning and good organisation for students
- More skills and knowledge acquired by students if the nature of school is considered.
- Availability of resources and eradication of obstacles that prevent learning not to take place cause students to focus on learning.
- Learning activities allow students to construct knowledge through exploration.
- The autonomous learning that involves self-study gives the students an opportunity to get mature.

#### **4.5 Semi-structured Interview**

For the qualitative part of the study, the semi-structured interview was conducted to facilitate the objectives of the study. The selected participants which were the teachers participated in semi-structured interviews that took forty minutes. The participants were asked six questions and the interview was at the place of work where the research was carried out. The research questions for this position of study were:

- 1) "What can be done in order to foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of the positive learning environment?"
- 2) "What are the things that the school together with community can do to promote positive learning environment?"

- 3) “How does a teacher foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of a positive learning environment?”
- 4) “What factors do you think can promote success or create barriers in promoting a positive learning environment?”

1. What can be done in order to foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of the positive learning environment?

The following responses were given by participants during the research:

- There must be a safe learning environment and school climate.
- Problem solving and active engagement to learning should not be isolated.
- The physical school features must always show safety.
- Consider the context of each school.
- Fully integrate learning support.
- Equip young people with relevant skills.
- Ensure that basic literacy and numeracy are learned in school.

2. What are the things that the school together with community can do to promote positive learning environment?

The participants responded that schools and community must be caring places for students. This can help the school reduce the number of students that have problems and it will enhance the teacher morale, and the school, to have the resources that are sufficient enough. Reciprocally, families of students and the communities can work together with schools in trying to provide parenting and strengthen socialization among students. Collaborative efforts of the school and community not only involve co-operation, co-ordination, or working together, but it also goes beyond this. De Vos (2001:11) agreed with the participants that “by coming together in the context of a school-community collaborative, stakeholders can move together a critical mass of insufficient of resources and come up or devise strategies to enhance safe, caring schools and communities that support all the students and their families and enable success at school and beyond”. However, building an effective collaborative requires new multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities, stakeholder readiness, as well as for family

and other community members willing to assume leadership and creative leadership.

3. How does a teacher foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of the positive learning environment?

The participants responded by saying that many teachers are able to use pedagogical strategies for the students with social-emotional, academic, and physical development so that the students increase their academics performance. The teacher who believes that in school there are different students who learn in different ways, use different teaching strategies to support and make the students engage in teaching and learning, and use different tools to assess the students. Such that teachers need to:

- Have time with students; develop teacher-student relationship where students can feel a need to share personal problems and things that prevent them from performing better in their study.
- The classroom must be filled with positive messages and quotes that will make the students feel that they are important and there are not lost.
- Always provide constructive feedback and encourage, support, and appraise the students to show them that what they are doing is noticed, so that they will work hard.
- The teacher values the student's work and finds a place to display it so that they will be encouraged to do more.
- Always have a meeting with students as part of support.
- Have time that is strictly for private issues that they need to be discussed.
- Make the students understand that they need to respect and protect other student's property, and conduct themselves in a respectful manner at all times.
- Make disciplinary policies and teach the students the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Discuss various ways that can be used to correct wrong doings instead of punishing the students.
- Try, by all means, to make sure that the classroom environment is more comfortable and there is a good atmosphere.

Education for sustainability requires trans-disciplinary learning in which students construct and integrate knowledge across disciplines, applying knowledge to address real community problems (Weiss & Pasley, 2007). The teacher must use different strategies in encouraging students to engage in problem solving and be able to apply existing knowledge to real world situations. The teacher thinks out of the box and finds connections of things, and makes the students to think and provide solutions to problems.

4. What factors do you think can promote success or create barriers in promoting a positive learning environment?

Most of the factors that were raised by participants emphasised that: the school needs to look at the students who are performing well and the ones that are struggling academically, and the opportunity to study in the environment where teachers successfully employ the effective classroom strategies. The students are different and they learn in different ways, therefore the teachers must use varieties of instructional approach and different assessment forms. The teachers need to expose students in podcasts and educational websites.

Different assessment gives the students the opportunity to engage in different activities and expose them with various teaching and assessment styles, where they can showcase their understanding. The examples of activities that help the students to master topics and boost the student's eagerness to learn are the presentations, oral examinations, and building of portfolios. These activities also help students who are struggling to pick it up and motivate them to do better in their studies. A good teacher-student relationship and, the full support provided by teachers make the student believe that he or she can succeed, but both student and teacher need extra time. The students' emotional needs must be considered as important if the teacher wants the instructional strategies to work effectively. If students feel comfortable and relaxed in the classroom, then they are likely to express themselves without being pushed or punished. The strong bond between the student-teacher relationships helps the students feel valued, wanted, and a sense of being a part of a larger school community where real learning can occur.

5. What is the significance change that can be done to accommodate students' learning, social, and physical needs?"

A classroom is an important structure that helps the smooth teaching and learning process to take place. Traditionally, it is a space which is designed by the architect to accommodate various elements such as chairs, desks, cupboards, whiteboards, and audio-visual equipment (Mendel & Heath, 2003). The physical environment contributes, or has a positive or negative impact, on the students' outcomes. Researchers agreed with participants that a physical environment, from an ergonomics science perspective, consists of various elements such as temperature, humidity, noise thermal, air pressure ventilation, air quality, acoustic, dust, vibration, lighting, air flows, and radiation (Mullin, 2005). In fact, on the participants report, they suggested good points that students always sit at their desk and try to discuss with other students and engage themselves with several activities to promote critical thinking. The students sometimes do not know the elements of a physical environment that can contribute to their safety or performance.

The students are encouraged to be seated in the classroom where they can see all the class displays and presentations done during the lesson. The arrangement of classroom desks should help the students feel relaxed, and have good posture that will assist the students to be involved in classroom activities. The space between the student's desks should be large in the sense that it promotes the teacher to move in between to give assistance to students. The classrooms should have places that the students can use to put their belongings, if desks are not large enough.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter the researcher summarised the findings in terms of the factors contributing to the promotion of a positive learning environment looking at the school setting of both Mbalenhle and Thembalihle High schools. The issue of participant's socio-economic background, parental support, and academic difficulties were discussed. The researcher found issues concerning the availability of resource.

After the analysis of data was collected, the objectives of the study were maintained and even the research question was answered by participants. For the students to produce the required or expected outcomes, a sense of belonging is considered to be important for student success. The school principals need to ensure that teachers and parents take care of the environment and emphasize academic excellence to students. The school needs to provide an environment that will fully support even students with difficulties or challenges, so that they will feel warm and welcome. If the school has a positive learning environment, then there will be a great link between the students' success and the environment.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The school serves as the important educational environment if student's success is considered as important (Kennedy, 2005). This chapter provides an overview of the study and a review of the research questions, the methods used and the findings. This chapter provides the answers of the research questions based on the findings. The implications and recommendations have been made for further research to teachers.

The factors that affect the school environment include the unavailability of resources and the way desks are arranged. Also the classroom rules and the sound within the classrooms contribute to the prevention of a school environment that is conducive to learning. These factors can affect the students' focus in the classroom and the way the students perform. These can also affect teachers' attitude and demotivate them in the classroom. The way in which teachers control and manage their classrooms can have a negative or positive influence on students. If the teacher is not motivated and shows no interest in the students, then that will have a direct impact in the classroom and the way the students behave. Also if a teacher is well motivated and supportive of students, that will have a good impact even to the students success.

## **5.2 Discussion of survey and findings**

The findings of the participant's views suggested that, in both schools, the teaching and learning environment were good for students learning. The findings showed that the school grounds were in good condition and the whole school buildings were renovated. The conditions of classroom were very good and even the floors were clean. There was evidence that the school equipment were looked at by participants. Moreover, there was great evidence that the students' performance in high school was influenced by the school's physical facilities. This finding is consonance with the opinion of Hallack (2000:68) who highlighted, in his finding, that for the students to perform better, physical facilities contributes a lot to the educational system. The physical facilities were the school buildings and classrooms, furniture's in the classrooms, and school libraries. The researcher went further to say that the physical facilities such as relevance and availability contributed to students' achievement.

However, the researcher also raised the point that other factors that contribute to students to have poor academic achievement are the overcrowding of students in one class and the school neglecting the school building (Dart, 2006). The other finding suggests that students' academic achievement at Thembalihle High and Mbalenhle High are significant influence by school climate. Megan (2002:78) supported the finding that "even in urban areas the school climate significantly shaped students' academic success, therefore the environment that is positive and supportive is more encouraged". The finding also revealed that other factor that

contributes to student's academic achievement in high school is the way the teachers conduct themselves in front of the students. This finding is supported by Okeke (2004:102) who states that the unacceptable behaviour of teachers has a great influence on students' academic achievement and affects teaching and learning. The most common unacceptable behaviour of teachers includes: refusal to go to classroom to deliver the lesson, coming late to school and deciding to absent themselves from school, non-preparation of lesson notes, failure to mark students exercise books, non-completion of school records such as dairies, registers, students results, involvement in examination. Teachers are expected at all times to behave like professionals and ensure that they steer students in the right direction, otherwise this affects students' academic achievement.

### **5.2.1 The Findings in Classrooms that promote a Positive Learning environment**

The teacher participants had seen that the layout of classroom support is inclusive and promotes interactive teaching approaches. The learning objectives were displayed on walls also everyone knew about them. The layout of classrooms as well as the availability of resources supports collaborative learning (Onukwo, 2004). In the classroom the desks were always well organised and clearly labelled charts that accessible to all students. The school grounds were in good conditions as the results that gave the teachers and students the opportunities to go outside for outdoor learning or interaction with environment.

However, the findings that were not desirable relate to Thembalihle high school having some elements of unsafe school environment. The school paid no attention in useful facilities such as books, students' latrines, classroom doors and walls. It had the problem in maintaining a good relationship, especially between the principal and staff. The school has problems regarding the behaviour of students and teachers, and their discriminations against each other. The school windows were broken and destruction of teaching and learning materials.

Research has suggested that where leadership is disorganised, the relationship becomes sour in the school and the staff do not work together to solve their problems (Jama, 2011). These problems relate to no teaching instructions that allows the

involvement of students in activities, and sometimes no rules or code of conduct of both teachers and students. Additionally, undesirable school culture is created by the strong negative peer.

### **5.2.2 Findings on Creation of a Learning Environment**

The findings under the creation of a positive learning environment revealed that the participant's perception agreed that in their schools the students are motivated to be the best that they can be, thereby promoting the vision of their schools. The students are encouraged in different forms so that they will value the importance of education. The findings strongly suggested that during normal teaching and learning the teachers used different approaches in the delivering of the curriculum that made the students more flexible or understand the content taught. In the creation of a positive learning environment, the culture of collaborative learning during teaching is valued. The students involved themselves in different presentations, the students are not forced but most of them volunteering during the lessons. The teachers were ambitious for students and expectation of learning is high. Everyone within the schools was motivated and eager for the creation of positive learning. As per the results, learning is more valued and everyone enjoyed being at schools. The students were wishing to be recognised as the top students that are capable of reaching a place in a different country.

### **5.2.3 Finding on Current School Attitudes Regarding Positive Learning Environment**

The participants saw that different school attitude had the influence in positive learning environment. The point of taking care of environment was more strongly valued at Mbalenhle High School than at Thembalihle High School. The reason for that, the resources such as cutting machines and computers from UThukela Municipal to nurture the environment at Mbalenhle High School was donated to help the school, whereas in Thembalihle High School there was a scarcity of resources that made the school struggle. UThukela Municipal did not donate these resources to Thembalihle High School because in the beginning of the year, the Municipal came to the school to donate uniforms to the students who are needy. Hence, the following year was the turn for Mbalenhle High School to get something from UThukela Municipal. Both schools use English as the medium of instruction that has

the impact in the progression of students. The shared understanding of rights and responsibilities of all members of the learning community in schools were seen as important.

#### **5.2.4 Findings of Perceptions of the Consequences of Positive Learning Environment**

The opinions of the participants here strongly answered the hypothesis that stated: a good true learning environment promotes learning and it has a good impact on the student's success. All the participants strongly agreed that the nature of school environment creates a strong influence on the students learning and development also that investigating this and an effort in creating positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff. As revealed in the results, the students, teachers, principals and HODs, perceptions were all indicating (100 per cent) strongly agreed that means there is a relationship between a positive learning environment and academic results of students. Moreover, both schools agreed that a positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools. The support and dedication of teachers and parents were considered important that any environment can be transformed into teaching and learning environments. With regards to the point that, "positive learning environment school will minimise learning of every student", the participants totally disagreed, they believe that it must be changed or reviewed and instead of minimum they must exert maximum.

#### **5.2.5 Overall Finding regarding Promotion of Positive Learning Environment**

The findings of the survey at the selected public schools suggested that the views of participants in percentages are increasing, but in some bars there is a slight or minor decrease. This showed that the participants (teachers, students, principals and HOD and administrators) thoroughly looking at the positive environment against the success of students. The opinion of participants showed clearly that there is a directly link between the positive learning environment and progress or success of students. Even though the investigation was done in two schools with different school environment, the results are slightly the same. All the bars in a Bar graph in

chapter four, that represent that perception of participants, are going up indicating the importance of taking care of the school environment.

### **5.2.6 Findings on Areas that has Impact on Student Success**

The arrangements of desks in many classrooms were aligned in rows. In many classrooms the arrangement of desks has a great effect in causing disturbance and making the students lose focus during teaching and the learning process (Okeke, 2004). This arrangement does not promote the interaction between students but more forces the students to work alone. The students in school want attention at all times and if they do not get it, they demand it from their classmates or their teachers. The physical environment of the classroom is the one factor that is noticeable and causes an impact on the student's success. Both the teacher and students have a great effect on creating an environment that is conducive to learning. The students will notice the classroom surroundings when they enter and draw conclusions. The students will also notice what is hanging on the classroom wall.

The teachers communicate non-verbally with students if they decorate or set up their classrooms. The addition of various learning activity centres will let students know, or expect them to do "the hands on" school work. The "hands on" activities convey the message to students to prepare themselves that the learning requires more contribution or interaction. The display of students work on the classroom wall demonstrates that the teacher takes interest and sees the value in them. Hence, also the students understand what they have to do by looking at the way a classroom is arranged. The teacher needs to create a good classroom environment by developing a good relationship with students. The non-physical environment also has the great an impact to the learning of students. The sound, temperature, and seating arrangement in the class act as the non- physical environment. The teacher can sometimes find it impossible to increase classroom productive but can use what is available by that time to increase focus for students. The teachers can find different leaders among students to maintain the good rapport. These leaders will use many ways to motivate others. The teachers can also use the strategy of grouping the students that are performing better with the ones that are not performing well, with an aim of supporting each other academically.

With a classroom full of students who need to learn the material; it can be hard to ensure that every student has a firm understanding. Sometimes it is not easy to assess whether they have understood the information or not. Finding someone who has content knowledge can solve the problem. While the teacher is busy instructing the class as a whole, the person who has the knowledge can be able to group the students who are struggling and provide personal assistance in small groups. This will help the students that are struggling to gain more knowledge and enable them to demonstrate what they are learning.

This can also work the other way around. The teacher can give the platform to the students who are performing better to lead a discussion in the classroom while trying to assist the students that are struggling. This can allow the peers to share information in the class while the teacher is busy doing other things. The interaction of peers keeps the students awake and able to focus on what they are doing. This also allows the students who are struggling to get help from the teachers who are well versed with content knowledge. This will also build the strong relationship between students who are struggling and teachers who show care and provide support for their success. This encourages the students to ask for assistance from their teacher in the future, if the teacher shows interest and the willingness to support them.

### **5.3 Discussion of semi-structured interview**

Semi-structure interviews were conducted to allow focus and two way communication between a participant and the researcher. This was used with an aim of giving and receiving information. The participants were guided by the questions that they were required to answer. This was done with the aim of channelling the participant to answer the main question of the research.

#### **5.3.1 Effect of Human Resources on Students' Academic Performance**

The scarcity or availability of human resource plays an important role in contributing to the academic performance of students. Many teachers agreed that resources prevent good delivery of lessons in the classroom. This emphasis is that human resources need to be well managed as it contributes to students performing well in

their studies. The students, support staff, and teachers are examples of human resource in schools. The production factor which is human resource is mostly affected by quality (motivation level and training level), and adequacy (Jama, 2011). The teacher student ratio shows the adequacy of teachers. More clarity about teacher student ratio is that it implies that one teacher is allocated a certain number of students to be handled during a lesson (Lumuli, 2009).

### **5.3.2 Influence of Physical Resources on Students' Academic Performance**

Physical resources have an impact on students' academic performance, because it makes teaching and learning comfortable. This conclusion was done by studying the availability of a spacious playing ground for students, adequate toilets, adequacy of classrooms to handle all the students, and latrines, and the availability of a spacious library. The research shows that learning cannot be effective if school environments are not conducive to learning and that can result in poor performance by students (Chimombe, 2011). The provision of resources makes the students acquire new skills and knowledge and be able to perform better at their studies (Lumuli, 2009). The students must interact with the environment and there must be the availability of textbooks, resources, playing fields for students, and school buildings such as libraries, laboratories, and more classrooms to make teaching more effective.

The schools that prioritise on students instructional materials are likely to have the student's performance increase than those schools that have poor quality physical resources. The school that has classroom shortages are being forced by circumstances to accommodate more students than expected, to prevent the right of students to learn.

## **5.4 Implications**

### **5.4.1 Implications to Student's Learning**

The student-teacher relationship has a great positive influence in the development of student academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers, will improve achievement. However, the students who have good relationships and get fully support from the teachers have the

chance of performing better in their studies, and students who perform worse usually they have conflict and bad relationship with teachers. The students that get full support, guidance, and constructive criticism from their teachers are more likely to develop a strong personal connection that results in the student feeling free and talking more often about anything to his or her teacher. The students are likely to trust the teacher, and show more interest in teaching and learning activities that lead the students to achieve more in school subjects and have good behaviour. The good student-teacher relationship promotes and motivates the student to develop more desire to learn. The teaching instructions are more emphasis to be appropriate to students and must cater all students' level of understanding. This also encourages students to think and be able to analyse things, and use feedback effectively and encourage the students to use prior knowledge to existing experience. Promoting positive learning environment makes the students emotionally and academically supported, and gives the students the chance for development.

#### **5.4.2 Implications for Teaching and Learning**

In a school that lacks resources such as textbooks, and classrooms with no light and ventilation make it hard for teaching and learning to take place and this has a negative on the teachers and students' performance. The environment conducive to learning makes teaching and learning effective and efficient. Hence, a fundamental aspect of education is to eradicate all factors that can prevent the performance of students, with the aim or goal of improving the students' performance. The research has shown more evidence that environment factors have a negative impact on teaching and learning and that also affect the psychological and physical potential of students in a negative way. The development of student's potential is more affected by negative environmental factors. The inadequate school facilities; school climate, and home background are the environmental factors which contributed to the students performing poor academically in schools.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

The research results of this study are essential for both teachers and students from advantaged or disadvantaged schools. Therefore, the following recommendations stemming from this study may contribute to the increase of students' success in any subjects:

- The school acts as the second home for the student and it contributes to the strong relationship with students' academic performance.
- The principals and the teachers have the negative or positive influence to students' success. Therefore, the teachers must be willing to help students who are in need and should at all times create the environment that is conducive to learning.
- The teachers should come up with strategies to motivate students to work hard and provide them with resource that will stimulate interest in students.
- There must be no big difference between a school environment and home environment.
- If together the parents and teachers can motivate, encourage, and provide support to students, the student will have high chances of improving their academic performance.
- The good performance of students lies in a positive school environment.

In the future the teachers must cultivate positive relationships in the classroom by:

- Create a positive classroom climate conducive to learning

The teachers must give the students the chance of using their experience to master the concepts and new skills and develop or create fun in classroom. Plan the activities that will expose the students to their community or find information so that they will see the link between what they are doing in the classroom or school and discover new things from the community, and get the chance to socialise with other students. The teachers must ensure that they motivate, support, and provide social support to students.

- Being sensitive to adolescents of students

The strong supportive teacher student relationships are highly valued or encouraged from elementary students until high school students. The students are more active in learning if there are motivated and receiving positive encouragements from their teachers. The teachers need to cater the opinions and interest of older, or both older and young students. The teachers' actions and words have the positive and negative effects, even in time where the students are affected with adolescents' stage.

- Development and sustaining relationships with difficult students must be prioritised by teachers

The teacher needs to spend more time with students who have problems in learning so that they will understand the student's interests and be able to find ways that will motivate them so they will value the importance of education. The more time spent by a student with the teacher, more trust will be developed, that will allow the teacher to give the student the clear instructions, motivation that will boost the student to have eagerness to learn or further study. The students in high school, who have frequent and intense discipline problems, show less defiant behaviour and they trust teachers more when they reach adolescents stage.

- Understanding on how teacher-student relationship relate to classroom climate
- The teachers in the elementary schools must show, encourage, and promote caring among students so that the students will develop and practise caring to others and eliminate the rejection. In addition, the students that are aggressive but have positive relationship with their teachers are accepted by peers compared to aggressive students who have negative teacher relationship (Blum, 2005). Ultimately, constructive relationships between teacher and students have an important positive influence on social skills of students. This suggests that enhancing the relationship of both student and teacher relationships has beneficial and important cumulative effects for classroom life aspects. The student's relational and emotional needs are the first steps in improving the student-teacher relationship. The teacher should provide support to students and create an environment that students accept. This effort promotes positive students' engagement and improves the nature of students' interactions in school.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the success of students' in their academic performance lies in the creation of a stimulating teaching environment. There is no instant or extraordinary recipe for success. The type of school that the students spend time in has the great influence in the students' academic success. The school composition, school climate and school structure are also the school factors. There are many studies that are done in order to come up with ways to improve the achievement of all the students. The schools are accounting the performance of students to the parents

and the district. The school location also has an influence on the academic studies of high school students. Onukwo (2004:34) states that the school that has a positive environment contributes to students' development and growth. However, the school sited next to the road, like Mbalenhle High School, has an environment that does not promote learning and this leads to disturbance in students mental concentration. The school climate can cause a barrier to the students or contribute to promoting an environment that is conducive to learning. The school climate research highlighted one of the important things that the positive relationship between students and a teacher, can increase or decrease maladaptive behaviour of students.

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## COVERING LETTER FOR A QUESTIONNAIRE

## APPENDIX A

Dear respondent

This questionnaire forms part of my Master's research entitled "Promoting a Positive Learning Environment: School Setting Investigation" for the degree of M Ed at the University of South Africa. You have been selected by a random sampling strategy from the population of 120. Hence, I invite you to take part in this survey.

The findings of the study will benefit the school and the department of education. You are kindly requested to complete this survey questionnaire, comprising two sections as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately One hour to complete.

You are not required to indicate your name or organisation and your anonymity will be ensured; however, indication of your age, gender, occupation position etc. will contribute to a more comprehensive analysis. All information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the right to omit any question if so desired, or to withdraw from answering this survey without penalty at any stage. After the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Permission to undertake this survey has been granted by the UNISA and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. If you have any research-related enquiries, they can be addressed directly to me or my supervisor. My contact details are: 084 42 56534 e-mail: [njabsjobe@gmail.com](mailto:njabsjobe@gmail.com) and my supervisor can be reached at any time, Department of Science and Technology, College of Education, UNISA, e-mail: [mapotta@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mapotta@unisa.ac.za).

By completing the questionnaire, you imply that you have agreed to participate in this research.

Please return the completed questionnaire to \_\_\_\_\_ before \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION A

For each of the question, tick the box that applies to your answer on scale of 1-4

QUESTIONS	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagree	4 Strongly Disagree
Classroom/learning Environment:				
1. Layout of classroom supports inclusive, interactive teaching approach				
2. Learning objectives displayed and used				
3. Layout of classroom and provision of resources support collaborative learning				
4. Tools are well organised, clearly labelled and accessible				
5. There are opportunities to learn indoor and outdoor				
6. The students are easily to move around the classroom				
7. Teachers create order and remove clutter				
8. Teachers ensure comfort in the classroom, such as temperature, furniture				
9. Teachers include students in the creation of their environment				
10. Teachers provide support, praise and feedback				
11. Teachers provide discipline where necessary				
Creation of a Positive Learning environment:				
12. The students are motivated to be the best that they can be				

13. Teachers uses a range of approaches during teaching				
14. There is a culture of collaborative learning during teaching and learning				
15. The teachers are ambitious for learners and expectation of learning is high				
16. Learning is valued as important and enjoyable and that everyone can achieve				
The School settings: the below points are considers in school				
17. The Emotional well-being of the learning community				
18. Relationship within the learning community				
19. How the environment is organised and care for				
20. Systems for promoting good behaviour				
21. System for promoting regular attendance				
22. Language used within the school or setting				
23. A shared understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all members of a learning community				
The School:				
24. The nature of school environment creates the strong influence on the way students develop and learn.				
25. Investing time and effort in creating a positive climate can result in healthy academic environments and positive outcomes for students and staff.				

26. A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if the students are to succeed in schools				
27. Positive learning environment in schools will minimize learning of every student				
28. With the support and dedication of teachers and parents any learning environment can be transformed into a positive learning environments				

Demographic Information:

The questions below are about you. Cross the relevant answer

1. Gender: Male/ Female
2. Age: 13-15 / 16-18 / 19-21 / between 21-30 / between 30- 45 / above 45
3. Grade you are doing: Learner only 10 / 11 /12
4. Teaching Experience: 1-5 years /5-10 years /10-15/ above 16 years / none

SECTION B

1. How teachers can set the tone for positive learning environment?

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2. What are the things that the school can do to make classroom a safe and positive place for student to learn?

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3. Does positive learning and teaching environment essential if the students are to succeed in schools? Yes/No\_\_\_\_\_

Give reasons

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4. Does the nature of school environment create the strong influence on the way students develop and learn? Yes/No\_\_\_\_\_

Give reasons

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APPENDIX B

P O Box 1246

Dundee

3000

20 January 2016

Att: The Principal

Limehill High School

P O Box 414

Wasbank

2920

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request Permission to Conduct Research

I Njabulo Sithole, the Masters Student at University of South Africa supervise by Prof T.A Mapotse. I hereby request permission to conduct research at your school.

The topic for my study is “Promoting Positive Learning Environment: School Setting Investigation”.

The purpose of study is that in many schools people view environment as isolated from learning and teaching, they do not think that environment play a crucial role in the performance of the learners, they consider curriculum alone. Therefore it needs to be considered or looked thoroughly.

I intended to work with selected FET phase learners (10-12), the Principal, Heads of Departments, students and administrators. The selected participants will be expected to complete the questionnaires; other participants are going to be interviewed. The participation in the study is voluntary and they are free to withdraw anytime. The questionnaire will take approximately one hour to complete and the interview with takes two hours. The collection of data will be strictly used for the purpose of the study.

If your school is willing to take part in the study the parent will be made aware.

Your positive response to the above plea will be highly valued.

Yours truly

N. Sithole (Mr)

Cell No: 084 4256534

Email add: njabsjobe@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

P O Box 1246

Dundee

3000

20 January 2016

Att: The Principal

Mashinga High School

P O Box 1110

Nkandla

3558

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request Permission to Conduct Research

I Njabulo Sithole, the Masters Student at University of South Africa supervise by Prof T.A Mapotse. I hereby request permission to conduct research at your school.

The topic for my study is “Promoting Positive Learning Environment: School Setting Investigation”.

The purpose of study is that in many schools people view environment as isolated from learning and teaching, they do not think that environment play a crucial role in the performance of the learners, they consider curriculum alone. Therefore it needs to be considered or looked thoroughly.

I intended to work with selected FET phase learners (10-12), the Principal, Heads of Departments, students and administrators. The selected participants will be expected to complete the questionnaires; other participants are going to be interviewed. The participation in the study is voluntary and they are free to withdraw anytime. The questionnaire will take approximately one hour to complete and the interview with takes two hours. The collection of data will be strictly used for the purpose of the study.

If your school is willing to take part in the study the parent will be made aware.

Your positive response to the above plea will be highly valued.

Yours truly

N. Sithole (Mr)

Cell No: 084 4256534

Email add: [njabsjobe@gmail.com](mailto:njabsjobe@gmail.com)

Att: The District Education Manager/District Officer/  
Circuit Manager

APPENDIX D

Research Conducted by:

Njabulo Sithole

P O Box 1246

Dundee

3000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for Permission to Conduct Research in Secondary Schools under Mnambithi

Circuit.

I am writing to request for your permission to conduct research at two of the Secondary Schools under Mnambithi Circuit, in a research project that I am conducting for my dissertation in fulfilment of my Master's Degree.

The topic for my study is "Promoting a Positive Learning Environment: School Setting Investigation".

The purpose of study is that in many schools people view environment as isolated from learning and teaching, they do not think that environment play a crucial role in the performance of the learners, they consider curriculum alone. Therefore it needs to be considered or looked thoroughly. The selected participants will be expected to complete the questionnaires; other participants are going to be interviewed. The participation in the study is voluntary and they are free to withdraw anytime. The questionnaire will take approximately one hour to complete and the interview with takes two hours.

In the collection of data I assure you that the information provided would be strictly kept confidential.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration in this important undertaking.

Yours Truly

N. Sithole (Mr)

Cell no: 084 4256534

Email add: [njabsjobe@gmail.com](mailto:njabsjobe@gmail.com)

To: The Parent

APPENDIX E

Re: Requesting Parental Consent for the Child to Participate in the Research Project

Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in the study entitle “Promoting Positive Learning environment: School Setting Investigation”. I am undertaking this study as part my masters research at UNISA. The purpose of study is that in many schools they view environment as isolated from learning and teaching, they do not think that environment play a crucial role in the performance of the learners, they consider curriculum alone. Therefore it needs to be considered or looked thoroughly.

I am asking permission to include your child in this study. The Study will be conducted in school and it needs the learners input regarding their success in academic. I expect to use 120 other children participating in my study. The selected participants will be expected to complete the questionnaires; other participants are going to be interviewed. The participation in the study is voluntary and they are free to withdraw anytime. The questionnaire will take approximately one hour to complete and the interview with takes two hours.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him/her to complete the questionnaire. All information obtained with your child will remain confidential. The responses will not be linked to his/ her name or the school name in any written or verbal report base on this study.

Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary.

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the qualitative data collection method.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname :.....(please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname :.....( please print)

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

## APPENDIX G

### **A LETTER REQUESTING ASSENT FROM LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Title of study: Promoting a positive learning environment: School setting investigation

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am doing a study on school setting investigation as part of my studies at the University of South Africa. Your principal has given me permission to do this study in your school. I would like to invite you to be a very special part of my study. I am doing this study so that I can find ways that your teachers can use to improve education better. This will help you and many other learners of your age in different schools.

This letter is to explain to you what I would like you to do. There may be some words you do not know in this letter. You may ask me or any other adult to explain any of these words that you do not know or understand. You may take a copy of this letter home to think about my invitation and talk to your parents about this before you decide if you want to be in this study.

The child's participation entails: As a participant I would like you to complete a questionnaire other participants are going to be interviewed by me as the researcher. The questionnaire will take approximately one hour to complete and the interview with takes two hours. I will not share your test results with your teachers or parents. The completion of questionnaire and the interviews will take place during the school. As the participant you will be formed.

I will write a report on the study but I will not use your name in the report or say anything that will let other people know who you are. You do not have to be part of this study if you don't want to take part. If you choose to be in the study, you may stop taking part at any time. You may tell me if you do not wish to answer any of my questions. No one will blame or criticise you. When I am finished with my study, I shall return to your school to give a short talk about some of the helpful and interesting things I found out in my study. I shall invite you to come and listen to my talk.

If you decide to be part of my study, you will be asked to sign the form on the next page. If you have any other questions about this study, you can talk to me or you can have your parent or another adult call me at: .....Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered and understand what I would like you to do.

Researcher: ..... Phone number: .....

Do not sign written assent form if you have any questions. Ask your questions first and ensure that someone answers those questions.

.....

**WRITTEN ASSENT**

I have read this letter which asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood the information about my study and I know what I will be asked to do. I am willing to be in the study.

Learner's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Learner's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Witness's signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the witness is over 18 years old I will be present when they sign

Parent/guardian's name (print) : \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H

### **A LETTER REQUESTING AN ADULT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW**

Dear .....

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I, Njabulo Sithole am conducting as part of my research as a masters student entitled Promoting a positive learning environment: School setting investigation at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has been given by Department of education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of environment in education is substantial and well documented. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve our education system.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 20 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for five years in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0844256534 or by e-mail at njabsjobe@gmail.com.

I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on.

Yours sincerely

Mr Sithole Njabulo

\*\*\*\*\*

**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study of school setting investigation in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participants Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX I

**FOUCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW ASSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY  
AGREEMENT**

I \_\_\_\_\_ grant consent/assent that the information I share during the group discussions (focus group interviews) may be used by the researcher, Njabulo Sithole, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent/assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J

### **Interview questions**

1. What can be done in order to foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of the positive learning environment
2. What are the particular issues of diversity that can exist within groups of students and how it can affect their success in learning?
3. What are the promising practices that schools, working in partnerships with their communities can use to promote positive learning environments?
4. How does a teacher foster the creation and ensure the sustainability of the positive learning environment?
5. What factors do you think can promote success or create barriers in promoting a positive learning environment?
6. How can you adapt the classroom design to accommodate students' learning, social and physical needs?