

School Climate and Teacher Attrition Intentions: A Case Study of Junior High Schools in Bole District, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have often alluded to factors influencing teacher attrition rates in schools, including inadequate compensation, limited career progression, excessive workload, lack of professional development, and poor work-life balance. Yet, the extent to which a hostile school climate prompts teacher attrition or, at the very least, attrition intentions has received relatively little attention. This study explores this gap by examining the relationship between school climate and teacher attrition intentions in the Bole District of Ghana. Data were collected from teachers and head teachers through interviews and focus group discussions, supplemented by a review of transnational discourse on school climate and teacher attrition. Using inductive thematic analysis, the study identified a distinctly hostile school climate in Bole's Junior High Schools, characterized by authoritarian leadership, a lack of collegial support, exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation, and prevalent student indiscipline. While actual attrition levels were low—primarily due to limited alternative employment opportunities, transfer difficulties, and teachers' reluctance to separate from their families—attrition intentions were high, fueled by the persistent hostility within the school environment. The study posits that a hostile school climate significantly increases the risk of teacher attrition by eroding job satisfaction and professional well-being. To mitigate these risks, the study recommends the adoption of participatory leadership approaches, the promotion of inclusivity in school environments, and the establishment of effective disciplinary measures to foster a more supportive and cohesive climate conducive to teacher retention and student success.

Keywords: Teacher Attrition, School Leadership, Exclusion, Teacher Support

INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition remains a pressing global challenge, with studies highlighting its adverse effects on educational quality and student learning outcomes (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The loss of experienced teachers disrupts the continuity of instruction, affects institutional stability, and increases recruitment costs. Globally, factors such as inadequate remuneration, lack of career advancement, high workload, and insufficient professional development have been widely identified as contributors to teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). However, while these factors are well-documented, the role of school climate—encompassing leadership styles, collegial relationships, student behavior, and overall workplace environment—has received comparatively less scholarly attention. Studies suggest that a hostile school climate can erode teacher motivation, leading to disengagement and eventual attrition (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Despite this, research exploring the direct link between school climate and teacher attrition remains limited, particularly in developing contexts where teacher shortages are more severe.

Failure to address the impact of school climate on teacher attrition could have significant long-term consequences for education systems worldwide. Persistent teacher turnover affects student performance due to the constant influx of inexperienced educators

and the disruption of learning continuity (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Moreover, excessive attrition places financial and administrative burdens on schools, which must continuously recruit and train new teachers (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Tseer et al., 2024). In regions already grappling with teacher shortages, such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the loss of qualified teachers exacerbates disparities in education quality, limiting students' academic success and future opportunities (UNESCO, 2021). Beyond academic concerns, a negative school climate can contribute to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction, and mental health challenges, further intensifying the attrition crisis (Richards et al., 2016; Tseer et al., 2025). Without deliberate interventions to foster a supportive and inclusive school environment, the teaching profession may continue to struggle with retention issues, ultimately affecting national development goals.

Several studies have investigated the enabling factors of teacher retention and attrition, as well as their consequences in Ghana (Bennell, 2023; Ngmenkpiew et al., 2023; Opoku et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2016) with many agreeing that it is influenced by leadership, professional development, financial incentives, and working conditions. Bennell (2023) found that unfavourable school environments contribute to high attrition rates, stressing the need for improved working conditions. Ngmenkpiew et al. (2023) highlighted that teacher motivation, including recognition and career growth, significantly influences retention. Opoku et al. (2020) revealed that professional development opportunities enhance teacher satisfaction and commitment. Richards et al. (2016) demonstrated that high stress and burnout lead to increased turnover, underscoring the importance of teacher well-being initiatives. While these studies offer insightful perspectives on teacher retention in Ghana, they do not specifically examine the relationship between teacher school climate and teacher retention in the specific region of Bole District. Consequently, we miss the opportunity to understand how the local school environment, including factors such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, inclusivity, and the physical environment, may influence teacher retention rates in this particular context. This lack of focus prevents us from identifying potential interventions and strategies tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities present in the Bole District, potentially limiting the effectiveness of efforts to improve teacher retention and educational outcomes in the region. Therefore, the current study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between teacher school climate and teacher retention specifically within the Bole District. To achieve this objective, the study raises these questions : (1) what are the dynamics of school climate in basic schools in the Bole District? (2) What is the level of teacher attrition in basic schools in Bole District? (3) What is the influence of the dynamics of school climates on teacher attrition in basic schools in the Bole District? Answers to these questions would not just contribute to existing literature on the influencing factors of teacher attrition but would also provide a framework for policy formulation and implementation that seek to shape school climate and reduce teacher attrition.

This article is structured into six sections. The first is the introduction which provides a background, the objective of the study and the justification for this study. The second section reviews relevant literature to provide explore what has been done already in the topic and the gaps that remain to be filled. The third section details the methodology that was adopted to conduct the study, the fourth presents and interprets the data that was collected to achieve the

study objectives. The fifth section discusses the results and the sixth offers a conclusion and policy recommendations.

Conceptual and Empirical Review

School climate refers to the overall atmosphere and environment within a school community, encompassing various factors such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning practices, inclusivity, and the physical environment. It reflects the subjective experiences of students, teachers, and staff, shaping their sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement with the school community (Addai et al., 2018). A positive school climate fosters a supportive, inclusive, and respectful environment where all members feel valued and respected, contributing to academic success, social-emotional development, and overall well-being (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

School climate, encompassing safety, relationships, teaching and learning, inclusivity, and the physical environment, reflects the overall atmosphere and quality of interactions within a school community (Wang & Degol, 2016). A safe and supportive environment is fundamental, fostering emotional well-being and teaching (Allen et al., 2015; Berkowitz et al., 2017). Positive relationships among students, teachers, and staff promote community and belonging (Maxwell et al., 2017). Effective teaching and learning practices thrive in climates supporting academic rigor, engagement, and diverse learning needs (Huang et al., 2020). Inclusivity and equity policies create environments where all students feel valued and respected (Lewallen et al., 2015). The physical surroundings, including facilities and resources, significantly contribute to the overall climate, enhancing student motivation and well-being (Khalifa et al., 2016). Research indicates that a positive school climate correlates with better academic performance, social-emotional development, and reduced behavioural issues among students (Thapa et al., 2013). Thus, fostering a supportive, inclusive, and engaging school climate is essential for creating environments where all members of the community thrive (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Teacher retention as used in this study refers to the ability of a school or educational institution to maintain a stable workforce of qualified teachers over time. A supportive environment fosters higher job satisfaction and morale among educators (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). In Europe, concepts related to teacher retention and school climate have garnered significant attention in academia, reflecting a growing recognition of their importance in enhancing educational quality and outcomes. Many European countries prioritize teacher professionalism and well-being as key factors in maintaining high levels of teacher retention and school effectiveness (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Academic institutions conduct research to understand the factors influencing teacher retention and school climate, with research institutes like the Education Policy Institute (EPI) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) contributing to this effort (EPI, NFER) (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). There is a growing awareness of the social and economic impact of teacher retention and school climate, leading policymakers and researchers to invest in strategies to improve teacher retention and create positive school climates (OECD).

Several studies have investigated the enabling factors of teacher retention and attrition, as well as their consequences, in Ghana. Opoku et al. (2020) explored the impact of school leadership on teacher retention in rural Ghana, finding that supportive leadership

significantly influenced teacher commitment and job satisfaction, ultimately reducing turnover rates. Addai et al. (2018) focused on the role of professional development in teacher retention, revealing that access to training opportunities positively correlated with teacher satisfaction and retention, highlighting the importance of on-going learning and skill enhancement. Additionally, Allen et al. (2015) examined the influence of salary and incentives on teacher attrition, discovering that inadequate remuneration contributed to high turnover rates, emphasizing the need for improved financial incentives to retain teachers. Adu-Baffoe and Bonney (2021) investigated the impact of working conditions on teacher retention, finding that factors such as classroom resources, infrastructure, and administrative support significantly affected teacher morale and commitment, underscoring the importance of creating conducive work environments. Again, Kosi et al. (2015) explored the consequences of teacher attrition on student learning outcomes, concluding that high turnover rates negatively impacted academic achievement and school performance, emphasizing the urgent need to address teacher retention challenges to improve educational outcomes in Ghana.

Teacher attrition, on the other hand, refers to the phenomenon of teachers leaving their positions or exiting the teaching profession altogether (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). It encompasses voluntary departures, such as resignations and retirements, as well as involuntary exits due to factors like layoffs or dismissals. Teacher attrition has significant implications for schools, students, and the education system as a whole. High rates of teacher turnover can disrupt continuity in instruction, diminish student learning outcomes, and incur financial costs for schools and districts (Farmer, 2020; Kelchtermans, 2017). Understanding the dynamics of teacher attrition is crucial for identifying factors contributing to turnover and developing strategies to retain qualified educators.

Debates surrounding teacher attrition centre on identifying the root causes and consequences of turnover and exploring strategies to mitigate its impact. One key debate concerns the factors driving teacher attrition. Research suggests that various individual, organizational, and contextual factors contribute to teachers' decisions to leave their positions. These factors may include inadequate compensation, challenging working conditions, lack of administrative support, limited opportunities for professional development, and dissatisfaction with school leadership (Kelchtermans, 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2021). However, the relative importance of these factors and their interactions remain subject to on-going debate and empirical investigation. Another area of debate revolves around the consequences of teacher attrition for students and schools. While some studies suggest negative effects of high teacher turnover on student achievement, attendance, and behaviour (Mason & Matas, 2015), others argue that the impact may vary depending on factors such as school context, student population, and the quality of incoming teachers (Harris et al., 2019). Additionally, debates persist regarding the effectiveness of different retention strategies, with some scholars advocating for financial incentives, professional development opportunities, and supportive working environments, while others emphasize the need for systemic changes to address underlying issues of teacher workload, job satisfaction, and career advancement (Loeb et al., 2005).

Furthermore, debates around teacher attrition extend to questions of measurement and data interpretation. Critics highlight the limitations of existing data sources for accurately tracking teacher turnover rates and analyzing its causes and consequences. They argue for

more comprehensive and longitudinal studies that capture the complexities of teacher career trajectories and the interplay of individual, organizational, and policy factors influencing turnover decisions (Clandinin et al., 2015; DeMatthews et al., 2022).

Analytical Lens: Job Embeddedness Theory

The Job Embeddedness Theory formulated by Mitchell and Lee (2001), posits that employees' decisions to stay or leave their jobs are influenced by their embeddedness in both their work environment and the broader community. In the context of school climate and teacher attrition, this theory highlights the significance of organizational and community factors in shaping teachers' attachment to their schools and their likelihood of turnover. Firstly, organizational factors play a crucial role in job embeddedness. Teachers' connections to their jobs are influenced by various aspects of the school climate, such as the quality of leadership, opportunities for professional development, and collegial relationships. Positive perceptions of these organizational factors enhance teachers' sense of attachment to their schools and contribute to their job embeddedness (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). For example, supportive leadership and a collaborative work culture foster a sense of belonging and commitment among teachers, reducing their inclination to leave (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Secondly, community factors also influence job embeddedness among teachers. Personal ties and social connections within the local community contribute to teachers' sense of belonging and attachment to the area. Additionally, amenities and resources available in the community, such as housing options, recreational facilities, and access to healthcare, can impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave their positions (Cunningham et al., 2005). Teachers who feel integrated into the local community and have access to desirable amenities are more likely to be embedded in their jobs and less inclined to seek opportunities elsewhere (Mitchell et al., 2001). Again, the interplay between organizational and community factors is essential in understanding teacher attrition. A positive school climate, coupled with strong community connections, creates a supportive and enriching environment for teachers, enhancing their job embeddedness and reducing turnover. Conversely, negative organizational culture or limited community resources may undermine teachers' attachment to their schools and increase their likelihood of leaving. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving teacher retention should consider both organizational and community factors, fostering a sense of belonging and embeddedness among teachers to enhance their job satisfaction and commitment to their positions (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Job Embeddedness Theory has been applied in various organizational contexts, including education, to understand and address employee retention issues. In the field of education, this theory has been utilized to examine factors influencing teacher retention and turnover, investigating how organizational factors such as leadership support and professional development opportunities, as well as community factors like access to amenities and social networks, impact teachers' attachment to their schools and their likelihood of turnover. By identifying these factors, educational leaders can implement strategies to enhance job satisfaction and retention (Burton et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2004). Additionally, Job Embeddedness Theory has informed the development of interventions and policies aimed at reducing teacher turnover by considering both organizational and community factors (Birsal et al., 2012; Young, 2012).

Job Embeddedness Theory has faced criticism on several fronts. One critique is related to its limited consideration of individual factors in job retention decisions. Critics argue that while the theory acknowledges the influence of organizational and community factors, it overlooks the importance of individual preferences, career aspirations, and personal circumstances in shaping employees' decisions to stay or leave their jobs (Birsal et al., 2012; William Lee et al., 2014). Some scholars have also raised concerns about the theory's applicability across diverse contexts and industries, suggesting that its effectiveness may vary depending on factors such as organizational culture, job market conditions, and socio-economic dynamics (Boyd, 2013; Chowdhury, 2021). Again, the theory has been criticized for its emphasis on static, rather than dynamic, factors influencing job embeddedness, potentially overlooking the evolving nature of employees' connections to their jobs and communities over time (Morris, 2000). Despite these criticisms, Job Embeddedness Theory continues to provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors influencing employee retention, prompting ongoing debate and refinement within the field of organizational psychology and management. It was particularly useful to the researcher in achieving the objectives of this current study.

Firstly, the theory facilitated the examination of the dynamics of school climate in basic schools in the Bole District by providing a framework for understanding the multifaceted factors that influenced teachers' attachment to their schools. Secondly, by considering the organizational and community factors emphasized in Job Embeddedness Theory, the study assessed the level of teacher attrition in basic schools in the Bole District comprehensively. Lastly, the theory guided the exploration of the influence of school climate dynamics on teacher attrition, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how factors such as leadership support, professional development opportunities, and community connections impacted teachers' decisions to stay or leave their positions. Overall, Job Embeddedness Theory served as a valuable theoretical lens through which to examine the complex interplay between school climate and teacher attrition in the Bole District, contributing to a deeper understanding of these dynamics and their implications for educational practice and policy.

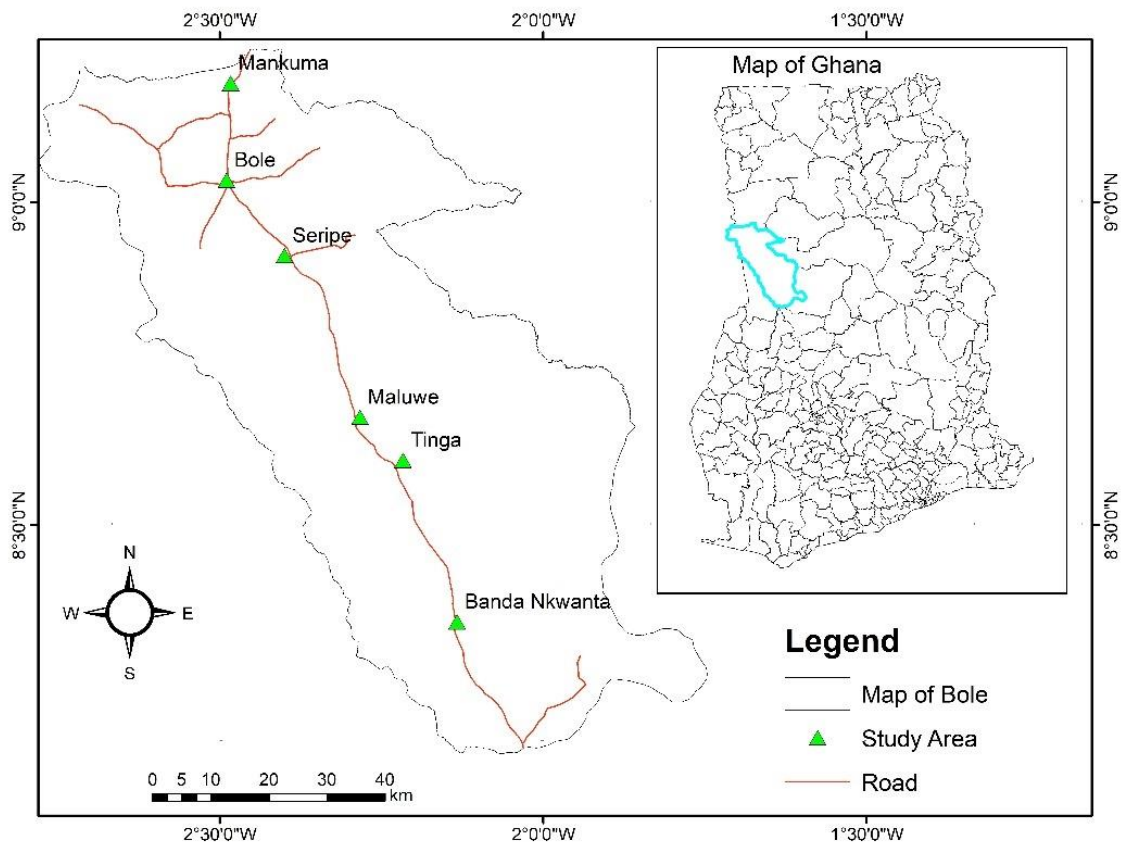
METHODS OF RESEARCH

The study Area

The Bole District, located in the Savannah Region of Ghana, spans approximately 4,800 square kilometers, accounting for about 6.8% of the region's total land area [Ghana Statistical Service, (GSS, 2022)]. As shown in Figure 1, geographically, it is situated between latitudes 8°10.5' and 9°N, and longitudes 1.50°E and 2.45°W. The district is bordered to the north by the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, to the west by the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire with the Black Volta River as the boundary, to the east by the West Gonja District, and to the south by the Kintampo and Wenchi Municipalities in the Bono Region [Bole District Assembly, (BDA, 2020)]. The district capital—Bole—, serves as the largest urban centre, with other significant towns including Bamboi, Maluwe, Tinga, and Banda Nkwanta.

Socio-economically, the Bole District is predominantly agrarian, with about 76% of the population engaged in agriculture (BDA, 2020). Major crops cultivated include maize, yam, cassava, sorghum, beans, millet, groundnuts, cowpea, rice, and various vegetables. The district also has a high density of sheanut trees, presenting opportunities for industrial development,

particularly in shea butter production (BDA, 2020). Despite its agricultural potential, the district faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and insufficient educational and health facilities. The population is sparsely distributed, with a density of about 10 persons per square kilometer, and as of 2017, the projected population stood at approximately 88,820, with a growth rate of 3.4% (GSS, 2022). The selection of the Bole District for this study is informed by reports from the Ghana Education Service indicating a high rate of teacher attrition in the area. To ensure a representative sample, data were collected from Junior High School teachers in Bole, Seripe, Tinga, and Banda Nkwanta, which are strategically located in the central, northern, eastern, and southern parts of the district, respectively. This geographic spread captures diverse socio-economic conditions and provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to teacher attrition within the district. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving educational outcomes and fostering sustainable development in the Bole District.



Source: Author's Construction using GIS files in 20

Figure 1 Map of Bole District

Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen over quantitative or mixed methods methodologies to deeply explore the intricate dynamics of school climate and teacher attrition in the specific context of the Bole District. The narrative research design of the qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate for this study because it enables the

collection and analysis of stories or narratives shared by participants, allowing for the exploration of lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study targeted head teachers and teachers because they are the ones who directly experience and contribute to the school environment, including factors such as leadership, professional relationships, and classroom management, which are known to impact school climate and teacher retention (Tamayo et al., 2020). Records from the Bole District Assembly (BDA, 2020) indicate that there are 106 teachers (head teachers inclusive) in the Bole District. An expert purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for this study. An expert purposive sampling technique is a technique that allows the researcher to purposefully selecting individuals who possess expertise, knowledge, or experience relevant to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). In the context of this study on school climate and teacher attrition in the Bole District, participants were selected based on their direct involvement and expertise in the educational system. By focusing on individuals with expertise and direct experience, the study generated in-depth insights into the complex dynamics of school climate and teacher attrition in the Bole District, thus contributing to a nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Data Sources and Instruments

Interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed as data collection methods for this study on school climate and teacher attrition in the Bole District. These instruments were self-developed and shared with experts in qualitative research for review. They were also reviewed by the SDD-UBIDS Institutional Review Board (see appendix II). The review enhanced the quality and clarity of the instrument. Interviews were conducted with individual participants to gather in-depth insights into their experiences, perspectives, and perceptions related to school climate and teacher retention. Observations allowed the researcher to directly observe and document the interactions, behaviours, and environmental factors within the school setting, providing contextual richness and depth to the study findings. Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with groups of teachers from the selected schools to facilitate collective exploration and discussion of key themes and issues related to school climate and teacher attrition. This triangulation of data collection methods enabled the study to capture diverse perspectives, experiences, and contextual nuances, enhancing the comprehensiveness and validity of the findings.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. Credibility was established through triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources, including teacher interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, ensuring consistency in findings. Member checking was conducted by providing participants with transcripts of their responses to verify accuracy, with 85% confirming that the interpretations reflected their views accurately. To ensure dependability, a detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting each stage of data collection, coding, and thematic analysis, making the research process transparent and replicable. Confirmability was enhanced by maintaining reflexive journals, where researchers recorded their reflections and biases, ensuring that findings emerged from

the data rather than researcher bias. Transferability was strengthened by providing rich contextual details about participants and research settings, allowing for an informed assessment of the applicability of findings to similar educational environments. Data Analysis

This study aimed to explore the relationship between school climate and teacher attrition in basic schools within the Bole District with the aim of : (1) examining the dynamics of school climate in basic schools, (2) assessing the level of teacher attrition in the district, and (3) analyzing how school climate dynamics influence teacher attrition. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach, following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows for the emergence of themes from the data without imposing predefined theoretical categories. The data analysis was conducted manually through a systematic coding process that involved five key steps.

The first was the familiarization with Data. During this stage, the researcher began by transcribing and thoroughly reading through interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and observation transcripts multiple times. This process facilitated an in-depth understanding of the data, enabling the researcher to identify preliminary ideas, recurring patterns, and potential themes. Notes were taken during this stage to capture key observations that could inform subsequent coding. This was followed by open Coding. Open coding was performed by systematically segmenting and labeling portions of the text based on emerging ideas. Each relevant phrase or sentence was assigned an initial code to reflect its meaning. For instance, statements related to administrative support were coded as "positive leadership support" or "lack of recognition." Similarly, responses referring to teacher attrition were coded as "high turnover rates" or "job dissatisfaction." Each teacher interviewed was assigned a unique participant code (e.g., T1 for Teacher 1, T2 for Teacher 2), while focus group discussions were coded as FGD1, FGD2, etc.

After open coding, axial coding was used to establish relationships between initial codes and form broader categories. Related codes were clustered to create overarching themes. For example, codes such as "lack of professional growth opportunities" and "limited career progression" were grouped under the theme "Career Development Challenges." Similarly, codes like "student indiscipline" and "workplace hostility" were categorized under "School Climate Factors." The researcher manually arranged the codes into categories using a matrix to ensure consistency and accuracy. The themes were further refined through continuous review and validation. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. Approximately 85% of participants confirmed that the identified themes aligned with their perspectives. Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were held to discuss and validate the coding framework, ensuring reliability and minimizing researcher bias. After finalizing the themes, the researcher constructed a detailed narrative synthesis to present the findings. Each theme was substantiated with direct quotes from participants to enhance credibility. For instance, under the theme "Leadership Support," Teacher 4 (T4) stated, "I often feel unsupported by the administration, which affects my motivation to continue teaching in this school." These verbatim quotes provided depth to the analysis and ensured transparency in data interpretation.

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect participant rights and ensure data integrity. The study instruments and processes were vetted and approved by the

Institutional Review Board of the Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Wa with ethical clearance number UBIDS/RERB/001/2025/05. Informed consent was obtained orally, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, potential risks, and voluntary participation. Anonymity was maintained using pseudonyms (e.g., T1, T2), and all data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. Additionally, methodological transparency was upheld through meticulous documentation of all research decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study examined a diverse group of 44 junior high school teachers from Bole, consisting of an equal number of male and female participants (22 each). The age distribution among these teachers revealed that 12 were between 20-29 years old, 18 were in the 30-39 age range, 9 were aged 40-49, and 6 were 50 years or older. This age variation indicates a mix of youthful and more experienced educators within the sample. Regarding teaching experience, the participants showcased a broad spectrum: 9 teachers had 1-5 years of experience; the majority (21 teachers) had 6-10 years, while 7 teachers each had 11-15 years and over 15 years of experience. This range of experience levels reflects a balanced representation of novice, mid-career, and veteran teachers. The gender balance and the wide distribution in age and experience suggest that the findings from this study provided comprehensive insights into the professional dynamics and needs of junior high school teachers in Bole. The balanced demographic spread also enhances the reliability of the study's outcomes, as it captures perspectives from a well-rounded cohort.

Table 1 Summary of Findings

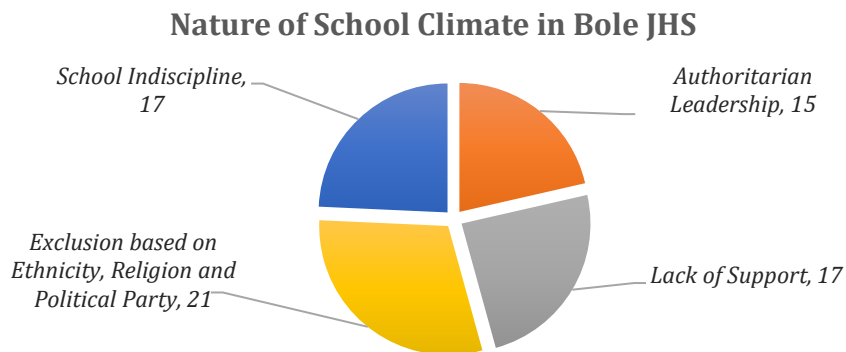
Category	Number of Participants
Gender	
Male	22
Female	22
Age Range	
20-29 years	12
30-39 years	18
40-49 years	9
50 years and above	6
Years of Experience	
1-5 years	9
6-10 years	21
11-15 years	7
Over 15 years	7

Source: Author's Compilation in 2024

Nature of School Climate in JHS in Bole District

The analysis of data on the nature of school climate in Junior High Schools (JHS) in Bole District reveals a complex environment marked by several key challenges. Four main themes emerged from the findings: authoritarian leadership, exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation, unequal access to school resources, and school indiscipline. Each theme

provides insights into the school climate and highlights areas that affect both teachers and students. The findings for this objective are summarised in Figure 2.



Source: Author's Construction in 2025

Note: The number of mentions may be more than the number of participants because participants were allowed to mention as many features as they could.

Figure 2 Nature of School Climate in Bole JHS

Authoritarian Leadership Style

Teachers expressed significant dissatisfaction with the leadership style of head teachers, describing it as authoritarian and disconnected from collaborative practices. Out of the 44 teachers, 15 shared their frustration with decision-making that disregards teacher input, contributing to a rigid and unapproachable leadership style.

One teacher remarked:

"Our head teacher acts more like a dictator than a leader, making decisions without consulting any of us." (Statement by a 36-year-old female teacher at Bole in 2024)

This statement reflects a sense of exclusion among teachers, who feel that their voices are disregarded in decision-making. The absence of collaborative leadership undermines teachers' morale, creating a sense of disconnect between teachers and school administration. Another participant also stated:

"The head's main concern is to please the higher-ups, not to make our school better."

This highlights a priority misalignment, where the head teacher's focus on pleasing authorities overshadows school improvement, eroding teachers' trust and commitment to school goals.

Lack of Support

A lack of mutual support among teachers emerged as a critical theme affecting the school climate in Bole District's Junior High Schools. Teachers reported feeling isolated and lacking assistance from their colleagues, particularly in navigating challenges related to instruction and classroom management. This lack of collaboration and mentorship among teachers has created an environment where individual teachers feel solely responsible for overcoming their difficulties, leading to burnout and dissatisfaction. A participant stated that:

"When I'm struggling with a class, it feels like I'm completely on my own. There's no system in place where teachers help each other." (Interview with a 32-year-old teacher at Bole JHS in 2024)

This statement highlights the absence of a supportive network among teachers, leading to feelings of isolation. In environments with supportive peer relationships, teachers are typically better equipped to handle classroom challenges. Here, however, the lack of such support diminishes resilience and job satisfaction. Another also shared:

"New teachers especially suffer. No one really shows you the ropes or helps you settle in; it's a sink-or-swim situation." (Interview with a 29-year-old male teacher at St Kizito JHS, Bole in 2024)

This quote stresses the difficulties faced by new teachers who receive little guidance or encouragement from more experienced colleagues. Such an environment can hinder the development of new teachers and contribute to high attrition rates, as the stress and loneliness may drive them to seek employment in more supportive schools. These findings reveal a significant gap in collegial support among teachers, resulting in feelings of professional isolation and heightened job stress. The lack of a collaborative culture impacts both new and experienced teachers, with new teachers especially vulnerable to burnout and frustration due to limited guidance. In healthy school climates, teacher collaboration fosters shared responsibility, continuous learning, and resilience. However, in Bole's JHS, the absence of this support structure has weakened teachers' ability to cope with professional challenges, ultimately affecting their instructional effectiveness and the overall school climate.

Exclusion Based on Ethnicity, Religion, and Political Affiliation

The study found significant social divides among teachers rooted in ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. These divisions have created an environment marked by distrust and limited collaboration, affecting the school's overall unity and cohesion. Of the respondents, 21 noted this division, describing it as a barrier to effective teamwork. A participant shared:

"You can see the staff sitting in groups under trees, each sticking with their own kind, whether by ethnicity or political belief." (Interview with a 35-year-old female teacher at Methodist JHS, Bole in 2024)

This quote highlights how visible these divisions have become, forming cliques that diminish the sense of belonging and cooperation among teachers. The lack of a unified staff weakens collective problem-solving and impacts students' experiences. Another participant also indicated that:

"It is like a mini-political battlefield; our ethnic and political differences overshadow our primary role as educators." (Interview with a 39-year-old female teacher at Islamic JHS, Bole in 2024)

This sentiment illustrates how personal affiliations overshadow the educational mission, diverting focus from students and fostering an atmosphere of tension.

School Indiscipline

Indiscipline within the school was another major theme, with teachers reporting issues such as disruptive behavior among students and a lack of respect toward teachers. This

indiscipline not only disrupts the learning environment but also creates a challenging atmosphere for teachers striving to maintain control and deliver effective instruction. A participant stated:

"Students are often loud and dismissive; they don't take school seriously, and it's difficult to get through a lesson without interruptions." (statement in an FGD by a 43-year-old teacher at St Kizito JHS, Bole in 2024)

This statement illustrates the frustration teachers feel when faced with a lack of student cooperation. Such an environment makes it difficult to maintain classroom order, impacting instructional quality and learning outcomes. Another indicated:

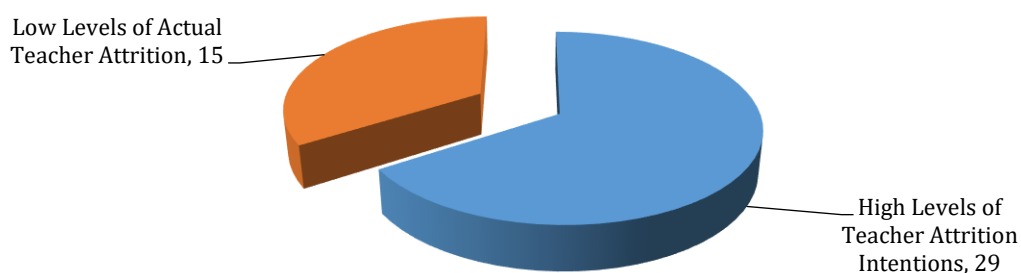
"Discipline is a daily struggle, and without support from the administration, it feels impossible to make a difference." (Interview with a 44-year-old male teacher at RCM JHS, Bole in 2024)

This quote reveals the perceived lack of administrative support, which exacerbates teachers' difficulties in managing classroom behavior and achieving instructional goals.

These findings illustrate the complex dynamics within the school climate in Bole's JHS, marked by authoritarian leadership, poor collegial support, social exclusion and disciplinary issues. These challenges collectively contribute to a school environment that hinders effective teaching, collaboration, and student engagement making the environment very toxic for many teachers.

Levels of Teacher Attrition

The analysis of data collected to achieve this objective revealed two main themes: low actual attrition rates and high levels of attrition intentions (Figure 3). Despite a low turnover rate, many teachers express a desire to leave the profession. This discrepancy highlights the complex factors that impact teachers' decisions to remain in their roles despite dissatisfaction.



Source: Author's Construction

Figure 3 Levels of Teacher Attrition

Low Levels of Actual Attrition

Though many teachers express dissatisfaction, actual attrition rates remain low. A significant reason for this is the lack of alternative employment opportunities within the region. Teachers in Bole District often find that few local job opportunities match their skills and qualifications, making it difficult to transition into other careers. Additionally, logistical challenges such as the difficulty of obtaining transfer approvals further restrict mobility. As a

result, many teachers choose to stay in their current positions, even if reluctantly. A participant stated:

"Leaving is not an option when there's nowhere else to go. Teaching might not be perfect, but it's the only option available." (Interview with a 44-year-old male teach at Bole DA JSH in 2024)

This quote reflects a widespread sentiment that alternatives are limited, particularly in rural or remote areas. Many teachers feel "trapped" by the lack of job prospects, resulting in low actual attrition despite the desire for change. Another also expressed that:

"The process for getting a transfer is long and discouraging. By the time it's processed, most of us have given up." (statement by a 32-year-old female teacher at Bamboi JHS in 2024)

This statement highlights the logistical and bureaucratic challenges that hinder teachers' mobility, making it easier to stay in their roles rather than attempt to navigate the transfer process. These obstacles contribute to the low attrition levels observed, as teachers feel limited in their ability to leave.

High Levels of Attrition Intentions

Despite low actual attrition, many teachers express a strong desire to leave their current roles. High attrition intentions stem from widespread dissatisfaction due to factors like hostile environments, lack of integration, inadequate compensation, limited career advancement, nepotism and lack of professional recognition. However, personal considerations, particularly the fear of separation from family, also play a significant role in restraining teachers from following through on their intentions to leave. A participant stated that:

"Many of us want to leave, but it's hard to imagine separating from our families. Our lives are here, even if the job is tough." (Interview with a 38-year-old female teacher, JHS Tinga in 2024)

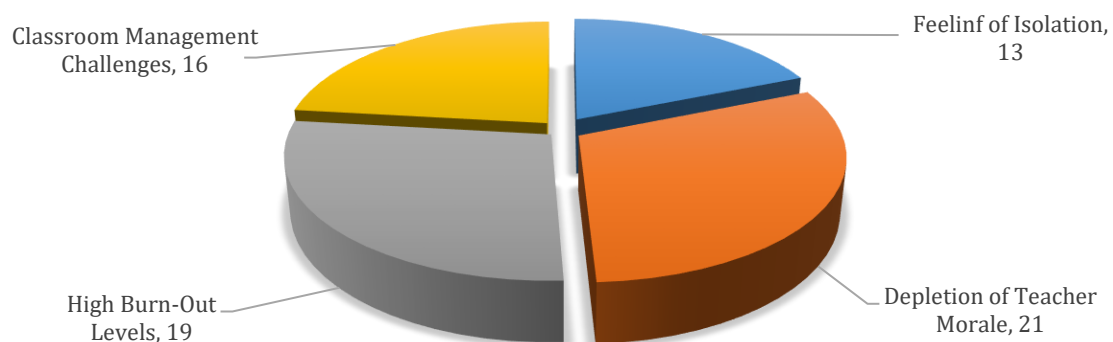
This sentiment illustrates a common dilemma: while teachers may wish to pursue opportunities elsewhere, their family ties and community connections hold them back. For many, the prospect of relocation is emotionally challenging, leading them to stay despite a desire to leave. Another stated:

"The idea of starting over somewhere else is daunting, especially with family commitments here. It feels like there's no real choice." (Statement by a 35-year-old teacher at Bole DA JHS in 2024)

This quote reflects the personal and emotional factors that often outweigh professional dissatisfaction, limiting teachers' willingness to act on their attrition intentions. Family and community bonds create a sense of commitment that discourages relocation, resulting in high attrition intentions but low actual turnover. Overall, the analysis reveals that while teacher attrition levels in Bole JHS in Bole District are low, attrition intentions remain high. Factors such as limited alternative employment options, challenging transfer processes, and emotional ties to family and community contribute to this discrepancy.

Influence of School Climate on Teacher Attrition

The study revealed four major themes linking the school climate to teachers' high intentions of leaving. Teachers reported that factors such as an authoritarian leadership style, ethnic and political exclusion, lack of support from school administration, and issues with student indiscipline create a challenging work environment that drives them to consider leaving despite logistical and personal constraints. Themes that emerged around this objective are summarised in Figure 4.



Source : Author's Construction

Note : A participant could mention more than one effect so the number of mentions may not tally the number of participants who took part in the study.

Figure 4 Influence of School Climate on Teacher Attrition

Depletion of Teacher Morale

Participants reported that the authoritarian leadership style prevalent in Bole District's JHS significantly impacts teacher morale and increases attrition intentions. Teachers feel that their head teachers exclude them from important decisions, which creates a climate of frustration and disconnection. This lack of participative leadership leads teachers to feel undervalued, diminishing their motivation and prompting them to seek roles elsewhere. One of the participants stated:

"Our head teacher runs the school like a personal fiefdom, making all the decisions without ever consulting us. It makes us feel like we're not trusted or respected as professionals. It's disheartening to work where our voices don't seem to matter." (Interview with a 36-year-old female teacher at Bole DA JHS in 2024)

This statement reflects the widespread frustration among teachers who feel side-lined by an autocratic leadership style. The absence of collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of isolation, leading many teachers to consider leaving due to their dissatisfaction with school management. Another stated:

"It's not just the lack of input—it's also that there's no openness to our ideas or feedback. We're treated like subordinates instead of colleagues, and that makes the environment very discouraging. I sometimes wonder if staying is worth it." (Interview with a 33-year-old male teacher at St Kizito JHS A in 2024)

This remark highlights the deep-seated disconnect between teachers and administrators, a factor that significantly contributes to teachers' intentions to leave. Teachers

feel their expertise is undervalued, which erodes their commitment to the school and increases their desire to move on.

Feeling of Isolation

Ethnic and political exclusion is another prominent theme influencing attrition intentions. Teachers report that biases based on ethnicity and political affiliation creates a divided and polarized environment, hindering collaboration and unity. This exclusionary climate leads many teachers to feel isolated, particularly those who don't share the predominant ethnicity or political beliefs of their colleagues. A participant stated:

"People here tend to form groups along ethnic or political lines, making it hard to connect with everyone as a team. This atmosphere makes it difficult to work together, and at times it even feels like a hostile environment. It's exhausting to navigate these divides every day." (Interview with a 45-year-old head teacher at Bole Methodist JHS in 2024).

This observation reflects how the divisive climate reduces collaboration, fostering a desire to leave as teachers feel they are working in a fragmented environment. Another participant also indicated:

"If you're not in the same political or ethnic group as the majority, you feel like an outsider. There's this unspoken tension that makes work very uncomfortable, and it affects everything, from teamwork to even simple conversations. It makes me question if I belong here." (Interview with a 51-year-old head teacher at Bole in 2024)

This quote underscores how exclusion fosters a lack of belonging, heightening teachers' intentions to seek a more inclusive work environment elsewhere.

High levels of teacher burn out

The lack of administrative support is another critical factor impacting teacher attrition intentions in Bole's JHS. Teachers often feel their challenges are dismissed, and they receive limited assistance in classroom management, resource provision, or professional development. This absence of support leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed and burnt out, increasing their desire to leave the profession. A participant indicated that:

"When we have issues with resources, or even when it comes to managing difficult students, the administration just seems uninterested. It's like we're expected to handle everything ourselves without any help. It's really draining to work in a place that doesn't support you." (Interview with a 34-year-old teacher at RCM JHS, Bole in 2024)

This statement illustrates how the lack of support fosters frustration and helplessness among teachers. Without administrative backing, teachers feel undervalued, and their motivation to stay diminishes as they seek roles in more supportive environments. Another stated:

"There is no encouragement, no acknowledgment for the work we do. We're expected to keep going no matter what challenges we face, and it feels like there's no appreciation. Sometimes, I think leaving is the only way to find a workplace that respects what I bring to the table." (Statement in an FGD by a 37-year-old teacher at St Kizito JHS A in Bole in 2024)

This quote highlights the need for acknowledgment and assistance, which are often unmet, creating a challenging environment that leads teachers to consider leaving.

Classroom Management Challenges

Challenges with school indiscipline also heavily impact teachers' intent to leave. Many teachers express frustration with high levels of student misconduct, which they feel the administration fails to address adequately. Constantly dealing with disciplinary issues without proper support diminishes teachers' enthusiasm for their roles and drives them to consider leaving the profession. A participant stated:

"Managing unruly students without any support is overwhelming. We're left to figure it out on our own, and it's really hard to maintain control. Every day feels like a battle, and sometimes I wonder if it's worth the stress to stay." (Interview with a 37-year-old teacher,

This quote reflects the strain teachers experience from dealing with student behaviour, which they feel unprepared to handle without administrative intervention. The persistent challenges drain teachers' motivation, making them increasingly inclined to leave. Another indicated:

"The administration seems to have given up on handling discipline issues. We're left to deal with everything, and it's tiring. At times, I think it would be easier to leave and find somewhere with proper support." (Interview with a 39-year-old female teacher at Banda Nkwanta JHS in 2024)

This statement shows how the lack of a clear, effective disciplinary approach creates a discouraging atmosphere that fosters teachers' intentions to leave as they seek a more organized and supportive environment. In summary, authoritarian leadership, ethnic and political exclusion, lack of administrative support, and issues with student indiscipline are key elements of the school climate that contribute to high attrition intentions among teachers in Bole District's JHS. Addressing these issues may help reduce attrition intentions, create a more positive work environment, and support teacher retention within the district.

The study found that school climate in Junior High Schools in Bole District was hostile due to authoritarian leadership, exclusivities, lack of support and students' indiscipline. These align with existing literature emphasizing the role of school climate in teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Research shows that authoritarian leadership negatively impacts teacher morale and collaborative potential, as seen in studies by Allen et al. (2015), which suggest that supportive, participatory leadership models are crucial for positive school environments. Similarly, exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation resonates with findings by Bartone et al. (2002), which highlight how a lack of inclusivity reduces staff trust and cohesion. School indiscipline issues reinforce conclusions from the studies by Ofori et al. (2018), indicating that ineffective discipline systems undermine academic focus and teacher morale. The findings of this study add to the literature by examining how these elements uniquely affect rural settings, revealing how exclusion and authoritarian leadership are compounded in such environments, intensifying the negative school climate. The Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) connects to these findings by showing that teachers are less "embedded" in school communities that lack supportive

leadership, inclusivity, and equitable resources. Without these key "links," teachers are less likely to feel a strong "fit" within their schools and are more inclined to consider leaving, even if actual attrition is limited. This study, therefore, contributes to understanding how specific climate factors in rural settings weaken job embeddedness and risk retention issues.

Examining the levels of teacher attrition, the study finds relatively low actual turnover but significant intentions to leave among teachers in JHS in the Bole District. Many teachers express a desire to leave but are restricted by financial, familial, or transfer constraints, leading to a high level of "silent attrition" or disengagement while staying employed. This finding aligns with the findings of Dachille and Ruff (2017) on the revolving door of teacher turnover, which shows that intent to leave often precedes actual departure, impacting classroom performance and morale. Studies by Buckman (2021) and Kotok and Knight (2022) similarly note that turnover intentions harm school culture and teacher-student relationships even before attrition occurs. This study adds a unique perspective by exploring how geographic isolation and limited transfer options contribute to silent attrition in rural schools, which is less discussed in urban-centred attrition literature. By broadening our understanding of teacher attrition levels in challenging rural settings, this finding emphasizes that teacher dissatisfaction remains prevalent even without actual turnover, suggesting a pressing need for policymakers to address underlying constraints to prevent disengaged teachers from remaining in the system due to limited mobility.

The study further reveals that school climate factors significantly impact teacher attrition intentions, with authoritarian leadership, ethnic exclusion, and insufficient support creating a negative environment that drives teachers toward leaving. This aligns with research by DeMatthews et al. (2022) which suggest that supportive leadership and inclusive climates reduce teacher turnover intentions. The works Madigan and Kim (2021) and García et al. (2022) also supports these findings, indicating that positive work climates are linked to retention. Yet, this study contributes a unique insight by focusing on rural, ethnically diverse settings, where exclusion and political tensions amplify the negative impact of poor school climates on retention. The Job Embeddedness Theory again becomes relevant, as it suggests that teachers are less likely to stay when their "fit" with the school culture is poor. Here, the hostile climate reduces teachers' embeddedness, pushing them toward attrition despite constraints, highlighting the urgent need to improve rural school climates (Shah et al., 2020). This finding thus provides valuable insight for school leaders in addressing attrition by fostering inclusive and supportive environments to retain teachers more effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides critical insights into the school climate in Bole District's Junior High Schools, revealing key challenges affecting teacher satisfaction and retention. The findings highlight the influence of authoritarian leadership, social exclusion, unequal resource allocation, and student indiscipline on teacher morale and attrition intentions. These factors create a challenging working environment, particularly in rural and ethnically diverse settings where such issues are often more pronounced. Educationally, the findings emphasize the need for leadership training that fosters inclusive and collaborative school management, reducing authoritarian tendencies. Politically, the study calls for policy interventions promoting resource equity to ensure fair access to teaching materials and support. Socially, implementing

comprehensive disciplinary programs can enhance school order, improving the teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students. The study's limitations stem from its qualitative approach, which, while providing in-depth insights, does not allow for broad generalization. Additionally, focusing solely on Bole District may limit the applicability of findings to other regions with different socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Future research could incorporate quantitative methods and comparative studies across multiple districts to enhance generalizability and policy relevance.

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