The Role of The School Management in Creating a Positive Climate in the School

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Abstract

This study investigates the key role of school management in fostering a positive school climate, crucial for both academic achievement and student well-being. By examining the relationship between school management demographics, driving factors, and climate quality, it aims to shed light on effective strategies. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study plans to interview 25 school principals and 25 school board heads and survey 150 teachers. Understanding the impact of management on climate is vital for effective leadership and educational success. This research contributes valuable insights to theory and practice, offering practical implications for school leadership in creating and sustaining a conducive learning environment.

Keywords: positive climate, management, factors of a positive climate, teacher relationships, student success

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the influence of school management in shaping a positive school climate has become increasingly recognized as essential for student well-being and success. While traditional educational approaches have predominantly prioritized academic development, it is now widely acknowledged that a comprehensive education should encompass a broader spectrum of skills essential for thriving in the 21st century. As such, fostering a positive school climate and addressing behavioral challenges are now fundamental objectives within educational institutions. Notably, researches has consistently demonstrated the strong correlation between a positive school environment and academic achievement, underlining its significance in facilitating student success.

As the role of education in societal and individual development becomes increasingly pivotal, the establishment and maintenance of a positive school climate emerge as critical components of the learning process and student growth. Within this context, school management, comprising principals, parent councils, and educators, assumes a central role in cultivating an environment that fosters respect, cooperation, and motivation among all stakeholders.

This study efforts to delve into the management practices and strategies employed to nurture a school environment conducive to positive interactions among students, teachers, and parents. Through the analysis of interviews with key participants in this process, the aim is to identify the key determinants of a positive school climate and provide recommendations for enhancing school management practices to achieve this vital educational goal.

Research on positive school climate has often been approached from an ecological and systemic theory based on the individual role, according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), where individuals have been analysed in different environments that create an interconnection as a system of common elements. In this framework, students exert influence within their immediate and distant environments, while simultaneously being influenced by these contexts. Thus, understanding the dynamics of these environments is integral to fostering a positive school climate.

While the concept of school climate has been explored for over a century, recent decades have witnessed an increase in research emphasizing its central role in promoting academic achievement, ensuring school safety, promoting healthy social interactions, and strengthening overall well-being (Cohen, 2010; Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008).

However, within the specific context of education in Kosovo, there appears to be a lack of in-depth studies addressing the creation of a positive school climate and the role of school management in this regard. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the nuances of fostering a positive school climate within the Kosovo education system, with a particular emphasis on the contributions of school management. By clarifying the complications of this dynamic process, the findings aim to inform policy and practice, ultimately enhancing the educational experience and outcomes for students in Kosovo.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The initial literature review provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of school climate and the pivotal role of school management in shaping it. Effective communication, clear leadership, parental involvement, staff support, and safety culture emerge as critical factors influencing school climate. The review highlights that a positive school climate is not only conducive to academic success but also essential for fostering healthy social interactions and overall well-being among students, teachers, and parents.

Notably, the literature emphasizes the importance of shared leadership, relationship building, change management, and diversity promotion as key strategies employed by successful principals to cultivate a supportive climate for teacher growth and development.

Zych (2021) suggests that principals can positively influence school climate through purposeful strategies tailored to their school's context. There's no universal solution, but a combination of personal leadership qualities and contextual understanding can foster pro-social relationships among students and mitigate problematic behaviors. Consistent follow-through is essential for sustained improvement.

Research by Arum (2003), Bier (2005), and Pianta (1999) indicate that how students, teachers, and parents perceive school climate strongly predicts social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Additionally, Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) found that the principal's influence on school climate significantly impacts teachers' feelings about their work.

Jones and Shindler (2016) identify various dimensions of school climate, including physical aspects, faculty relationships, student interactions, leadership, discipline, learning environment, attitude, culture, and school-community relations. They assert that a positive school climate is the most critical factor in supporting student achievement within a school.

Drago-Severson (2012) conducted interviews with experienced school principals across K-12 settings to uncover strategies for shaping school climate through teacher growth. Four key themes emerged: shared leadership, relationship building, change management, and diversity promotion. Principals prioritized involving faculty in decision-making and fostering appreciation among staff. Catholic school leaders emphasized spiritual leadership, while public school leaders focused on shared values. These findings underscore the importance of context-specific approaches to fostering a positive school climate.

Reed and Swaminathan (2016) assert that understanding a school's specific context is crucial for successfully implementing shared leadership opportunities. This highlights the importance of tailoring leadership approaches to the unique characteristics and needs of each school environment. Drago-Severson (2012) emphasizes that a crucial element in fostering shared decision-making between principals and teachers in all school types is the establishment of a shared school mission. This involves connecting the mission to school members and integrating it into daily practices. This alignment ensures that all stakeholders are working towards common goals, enhancing collaboration and cohesion within the school community.

According to Cohen et al. (2009), school climate is rooted in the motivation to uphold the tradition of the school's learning environment, defining it as "the quality and character of school life." On the other hand, Maxwell, Reynolds, Lee, et al. (2017) emphasize it as "the social characteristics of a school among its stakeholders." They highlight that school climate is a dynamic and complex social construct shaped by various social actors and structures, contributing to the relational aspects of learning within schools.

A positive school climate remains a focal point in both scholarly and practical communities as a key factor supporting student success. Extensive research has consistently linked positive school climate to various beneficial student outcomes (e.g., Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; Berkowitz et al., 2017). Moreover, studies have connected elements of school climate with teacher performance outcomes (e.g., Collie et al., 2011, 2012; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

However, it is noted that the majority of school climate studies predominantly rely on student perspectives and reports. Berkowitz et al. (2017) underscore the importance of incorporating the views of teachers, administrators, and other staff members to gain a comprehensive understanding of how schools can cultivate positive climates and how staff members perceive their roles within schools. Integrating diverse perspectives is essential for developing effective strategies to foster positive school climates and promote student success.

According to the National School Climate Council (NSCC, 2023), school climate encompasses the establishment of a clear vision, school norms, goals, and expectations that promote social, emotional, and physical safety. A stable and positive school climate is essential for fostering the development and

learning of young people, preparing them for productive and satisfying lives in a democratic society (The National School Climate Council developed this definition of school climate and a positive and sustainable school climate consensually (NSCC, retrieved from web 2023).

Key components of a positive school climate include:

> • Norms, values and expectations that support people to feel safe socially, emotionally and physically.
>
> • People are committed and respected.
>
> • Students, families and teachers work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision.
>
> • Teachers model and foster attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
>
> • Each person contributes to the functioning of the school and cares for the physical environment.

By connecting to these principles, schools can cultivate a positive and sustainable climate that supports the holistic development and success of all students. As per the National School Climate Council (NSCC, 2023), school climate defines the overall quality of school life, reflecting the attitudes and experiences of students, parents, and staff. Effective school management is crucial in fostering a positive climate by prioritizing communication, creating a supportive environment, promoting cultural awareness, ensuring safety, and nurturing positive relationships. These efforts contribute to student well-being, engagement, and academic success.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of management on establishing and sustaining a positive school climate. By analyzing the perspectives of school principals, council members, and teachers, the study aims to uncover strategies, practices, and factors contributing to the development of a motivated, safe, and supportive learning environment.

The research aims to compare the perspectives of principals, chairpersons of governing bodies, and teachers on the influence of management at both the primary level (grades 1-5) and the lower secondary level (grades 6-9) regarding the creation of a positive school climate. The study seeks to understand why certain management strategies may be more effective in one educational level compared to another, particularly in fostering a positive climate within the school.

Understanding the factors contributing to a positive climate enables managers to implement strategies fostering conducive learning and working environments. This can enhance student engagement, motivation, and performance, as well as boost employee satisfaction.

3. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The problem of the study revolves around understanding the influence of school management, including principals and governing board chairs, on the creation and maintenance of a positive school climate. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how management strategies impact the attitudes and experiences of stakeholders, including principals, chairpersons of governing bodies, and teachers.

 Additionally, the research seeks to compare these perspectives across different educational levels, namely primary (grades 1-5) and lower secondary (grades 6-9), to identify any disparities or trends in management effectiveness. Ultimately, the study aims to provide recommendations for enhancing managerial skills to improve the overall quality of the school environment, with a focus on fostering a positive climate conducive to effective learning and working.

Research questions

1. How does a principal's leadership influence the creation of a positive school climate?
2. What factors contribute to the development of a positive school climate?
3. Which leadership styles are most effective in fostering a positive school climate?

These questions aim to explore the specific role of principal leadership in shaping school climate, identify the factors that contribute to a positive climate, and assess the effectiveness of different leadership styles in achieving this goal. Through these inquiries, the study seeks to provide insights into how school management can effectively cultivate environments that promote learning, cooperation, and well-being among students, staff, and the wider school community.

4. RESEARCH MODEL

The proposed research model for this study is a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach is chosen based on the research questions, which require both types of data for comprehensive analysis, as well as the study's model.

The study will have both descriptive and evaluative components. Quantitative data will be collected through teacher questionnaires, allowing for statistical analysis and providing a broad overview of school climate perceptions. Qualitative data will be gathered through interviews with school principals and chairpersons of the governing board, offering deeper insights into their perspectives and experiences regarding leadership and school climate.

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing school climate and the effectiveness of leadership styles in fostering a positive environment. This approach allows for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

4.1 Population and sample

The research population comprises school principals, chairs of school boards, and teachers from levels 1-9 across seven regions. The proposed sample will include 25 interviews with principals of public schools in compulsory education, 25 interviews with heads of school boards, and perceptions of positive school climate from the perspective of 150 teachers through questionnaires.

4.2 Research methods and instruments

The research methods and instruments for this study include statistical, descriptive, and comparative approaches to analyze and present the results. Data will be presented using tables, diagrams, and other visual aids to facilitate discussion with education stakeholders in Kosovo and beyond.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with school principals and heads of school boards using a questionnaire designed specifically for this purpose. The questionnaire will gather demographic information such as gender, age, experience, country, position, and role within the institution. The interview questions will primarily focus on the research questions, exploring the role and influence of principal leadership in creating a positive school climate, strategies employed, models used, and factors influencing a positive climate.

For teachers, a survey questionnaire will be used containing a mix of open-ended, alternative, and closed questions. The questionnaire will be anonymous and will address research variables, such as factors contributing to a positive climate, utilizing Likert's five-point scale.

4.3 Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure will utilize both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data will be gathered through questionnaires, while qualitative data will be obtained through interviews with school principals and heads of school boards.

Principals, heads of school boards, and teachers selected for the study will be notified in advance. Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually agreed-upon time and location. Each interview will follow a structured protocol and will last approximately 45-50 minutes.

Meanwhile, teachers will be administered questionnaires, mainly focusing on teaching levels 6-9. They will also be notified in advance about the questionnaire and its purpose. Questionnaires will be distributed and collected at the designated schools.

4.4 Data analysis procedure

The data collected will undergo thorough analysis and processing. Qualitative data from interviews will be transcribed and described. Relevant concepts will be coded, and themes and main concepts will be extracted and described. Data interpretation will involve triangulation, combining descriptive results with interview themes and analysis of other sources.

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires will be processed using the SPSS platform. Statistical analyses will be conducted to identify patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, will be calculated to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis and regression analysis, may also be used to examine relationships between variables.

By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing school climate and the effectiveness of leadership strategies in fostering a positive environment.

5. ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions for this study may include that principals, chairs of school boards, and teachers provided honest and accurate responses during interviews and questionnaires.

- The sample selected for the study is representative of the broader population of school principals, chairs of school boards, and teachers in the targeted regions.
- Participants have a clear understanding of the concept of a positive school climate and can provide meaningful insights into its creation and maintenance.
- The data collected through interviews and questionnaires accurately reflect the perspectives and experiences of the participants.
- The research instruments used, such as interview protocols and questionnaires, are valid and reliable measures of the constructs being investigated.
- External factors, such as changes in school policies or external events, will not significantly influence the research outcomes.
- Triangulation of data sources and methods will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.
- The researchers have the necessary expertise and skills to conduct data analysis and interpretation effectively.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Although this study is in progress, and the conclusions are based on the theoretical part, we assume that effective management plays a crucial role in shaping the school climate, impacting student engagement and performance. Utilizing support mechanisms provided by management can mitigate student behavioral issues and foster a safe and inclusive environment. By prioritizing factors like mutual respect and collaboration, schools can enhance student well-being and satisfaction, empowering them to succeed academically and personally. These findings underscore the importance of proactive management practices in creating a positive learning environment for all members of the school community.

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