

School Climate Determinants: Perception and Implications

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Abstract - *The study looked into determinants of school that reflect overall quality of the school. The study was anchored on the Invitational Theory to Practice' Starfish Analogy of Purkey (1995). Eighty-six participants (68 students and 18 teachers) responded to the adapted the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R) instrument. Results reveal that the five school climate determinants are significantly correlated to school climate. Significant differences in the perception were found between teacher and student groups for people ($t(95) = -3.18, p \leq .05$), process ($t(95) = -2.69$) and policy ($t(95) = -2.53$) determinants.*

Keywords – *school climate, star fish analogy*

INTRODUCTION

Schools are social institutions that provide education to the youth in molding them to become productive and noble citizens. Education is a priority in every country. Each educational institution maintains and updates standards mandated by government educational regulating bodies like the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in order to provide the best education to its stakeholders. Stakeholders comprised the parents, students, staff and teachers. These stakeholders constitute the important resource that makes educational institution unique and effective.

School climate reflects the quality of life in an educational institution experienced not only by the students but also parents, teachers and administrators. It is a construct which pertains to a multifaceted aspect of a learner's and other stakeholders' educational experience. According to Gruenert [1], the early use of the term denotes ethos, or spirit, of an organization. At present, school climate reflects the attitude of an organization. Furthermore, Gruenert asserts that school climate is "*the collective mood, or morale, of a group of people*" It is deemed important

given the increase demand for accountability. It entails that a happy school is a better school and this positive attitude influences the quality of instruction.

According to Freiburg [2], school climate is a vital but seemingly indefinable quality that one "feels" in being around for the first time in a school campus. Academic success is highly related with school climate. In the effective school climate, stakeholders of school collaborate and work together to realize its vision and mission in producing quality graduates with 21st century skills.

Moreover, Freiburg [3] describes school climate as relationships. This includes relationships among adults, relationships between adults and children and relationships among peers. It is about the quality of the relationships and in essence whether individuals inside schools treat each other appropriately. On the other hand, the National School Climate Center of the United States defined school climate as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

School climate already appeared in research literature as early as 1980s. The research was on effective schools demonstrated the importance of providing a safe and orderly school environment [4, 5]. It was recently that the topic of school climate has received more attention after being linked to school violence in reports by both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [6] and the U.S. Secret Service [7]. School climate has been associated with nearly every incident involving school shootings reported over the past fifteen years. It seems quite apparent that if teachers and school leaders are negligent to school climate problems, serious consequences may happen.

Positive school climate has also affected teachers. These studies have also reported that teachers' work

environment, peer relationships, and feelings of inclusion and respect are important aspects of positive school climate. In these studies, teachers feel supported by both the principal and their peers which made them more committed to their profession [8]. Positive school climate is also correlated with the development of teachers' beliefs that they can positively affect student learning [9;10]. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future defines school climate as a learning community and argues that school climate is an important contributing factor to teacher retention [11]. Moreover, research has shown that school climate enhances or minimizes teacher/staff emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment [12] and attrition [13].

Studies suggest that teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward students affect their students' behavior within the classroom [14; 15] – i.e. more deference to authority and self-regulation [16] and students' interaction among each other [17] specifically their sense of community [18]. It does not end there since students' attitudes about their teacher influence their sense of school satisfaction, particularly if the relationship is supportive [19].

The study is anchored on “Starfish Analogy” of Invitational Education by Purkey [8]. In this theory, school climate is composed of 5 domains, the 5P's [9] that define school climate namely: People, Places, Policies, Programs and Processes that constitute the school climate. The elements would reflect the areas that should be worked on in order to create a culture or “spirit” of excitement, satisfaction, and enrichment for students, staff and all visitors.

The school can be “inviting” in the following areas: its **People** which gives the face and the enacts the ‘culture’ illustrated, the **Place** which constitutes the physical environment; the **Policies** which composed the rules, the codes, and the procedures that regulate the functions of the organization; the **Programs** which include the organized activities that aligns with the school's mission; and **Processes** which contains the systematic means in order to realize school's goals. Challenges can be overcome by steady and continuous effect from the different domains.

However, schools whether private or public are beset with challenges. Both public and private schools in the Philippines are experiencing problems with enrollment whether tremendous ballooning in the public institutions or significant drop in the private institutions. It is with the latter concern that we focus. Socio-economic factors may be the obvious reason as

some school administrators may surmised but there are other factors in the attrition of some private schools. Added to the challenge is the implementation of the K to 12 education program which is set to be implemented this school year. Standards and other requisites have to be attained including the need to improve the school climate to complement and support the effective implementation of the K-to-12 education. With this study, factors that contribute to the overall quality of school climate will be determined. It is aimed at enhancing areas that would be address through program development and policy making. Furthermore, it contrasts students' and teachers' perceptions of the determinants of school climate.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study intends to find out the school stakeholder's – students' and teachers' perception on the school climate determinants. Specifically, this would endeavor to determine the stakeholders' perceptions on the school climate determinants – People, Places, Programs, Policies, Processes and the Over-all school climate. This would also determine significant differences between faculty and students' perceptions on the said school climate determinants.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study employed the cross-sectional predictive research design which one or more samples of the population is selected and information is collected from the samples at one time. It used the adapted version of Inviting School Survey-Revised School Climate Survey Questionnaire by Purkey [20, 21]. It is a standardized research instrument that measures school climate conditions and its determinants were originated from the Invitational Education Theory of Purkey and Novak, 1996, 1984). Random sampling was used to select 68 Grade 7 student respondents and convenience sampling to 18 high school teachers from the University of San Carlos–North Campus. The respondents were in heterogeneous groups both students and teachers.

Ethical considerations were employed to ensure integrity and quality of this study. A formal consent from the school administrator to conduct a research survey secured by the researcher. A transmittal letter showed the purpose of the study and assurance of confidentiality regarding respondent's names and results had been duly observed.

The data gathering were made through distribution of the research survey questionnaires to

the respondents. The researcher had personally met the students during their vacant time in order to have a proper time in answering the questionnaires. While the teachers asked for plenty of time to answer the survey instrument. The answered questionnaires were collected and its responses were tallied and totaled.

Using the SPSS, the mean, standard deviations were computed. T-test for independent measures was used to determine significant differences between stakeholder groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents of the study included 68 students and 18 teachers. They comprised 30% of the Grade 7 student population and high school faculty population respectively (Male-44.2%; Female-55.8%). The mean age of students is $M=13.2$ while $M=34.4$ for faculty respondents. The mean age of students is $M=13.2$ while $M=34.4$ for faculty respondents.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Stakeholders on School Climate Determinants and School Climate in General

| <i>Determinants</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| People | 3.99 | 0.47 |
| Programs | 3.90 | 0.62 |
| Process | 3.70 | 0.62 |
| Policy | 4.04 | 0.66 |
| Place | 3.26 | 0.82 |
| Overall School Climate | 3.78 | 0.50 |

Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations and interpretation of stakeholders' perceptions on the school climate determinants and school climate in general. Four school determinants showed high ratings – people ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.47$), programs ($M=3.90$, $SD=0.62$), process ($M=3.70$, $SD=0.62$), policies ($M=4.04$; $SD=0.66$). This reflects the positive perception of the respondents to the school. Place is an area in the school that needs further attention for improvement. The over-all assessment of school climate by the respondents seems high. Standard deviations indicate a homogeneous score distribution.

Table 2 shows the differences of students' and faculty's perceptions of the five school climate determinants and the over-all school climate. The faculty showed higher mean scores in the 5 school climate determinants than the students. Both groups assessed people, process, and programs, policy highly (M , SD). The standard deviations are low which means that the scores are spread towards the mean.

The overall school climate impression was also good. This reveals that teachers give high rating on the determinants than the students.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviations of Stakeholders on School Climate Determinants

| <i>Determinants</i> | <i>Student</i> | | <i>Faculty</i> | |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| People | 3.93 | 0.48 | 4.22 | 0.31 |
| Programs | 3.86 | 0.62 | 4.02 | 0.62 |
| Process | 3.62 | 0.62 | 4.01 | 0.53 |
| Policy | 3.98 | 0.70 | 4.29 | 0.37 |
| Place | 3.25 | 0.84 | 3.30 | 0.73 |
| Overall School Climate | 3.73 | 0.52 | 3.97 | 0.38 |

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviations of Stakeholders on School Climate Determinants

| <i>Determinants</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>T</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| People | | | | |
| student | 3.93 | 0.48 | -3.18 | .003* |
| faculty | 4.22 | 0.31 | | |
| Programs | | | | |
| student | 3.86 | 0.62 | -0.957 | .347 |
| faculty | 4.02 | 0.62 | | |
| Process | | | | |
| student | 3.62 | 0.62 | -2.691 | .011* |
| faculty | 4.01 | 0.53 | | |
| Policy | | | | |
| student | 3.98 | 0.70 | -2.537 | .014* |
| faculty | 4.29 | 0.37 | | |
| Place | | | | |
| student | 3.25 | 0.84 | -2.537 | .014* |
| faculty | 3.30 | 0.73 | | |
| Overall School Climate | | | | |
| student | 3.73 | 0.52 | -2.195 | .035* |
| faculty | 3.97 | 0.38 | | |

Table 3 shows the t-test for independent means between faculty and students' perception of the five determinants of school climate and perception of school climate in general. Findings show that among the respondents ($N=86$), there was a statistically significant differences between the two groups stakeholder groups: People_{stud} ($M = 3.93$, $SD= 0.48$) and People_{fac} ($M = 4.22$, $SD= 0.31$), $t(95) = -3.18$, $p \leq .05$, $CI.95$; Process_{stud} ($M = 3.62$, $SD= 0.62$) and Process_{fac} ($M = 4.01$, $SD= 0.53$), $t(95) = -2.69$, $p \leq .05$, $CI.95$; Policy_{stud} ($M = 3.98$, $SD= 0.70$) and Policy_{fac} ($M = 4.29$, $SD= 0.37$), $t(95) = -2.53$, $p \leq .05$, $CI.95$; and over-all school climate SC_{stud} ($M = 3.73$, $SD= 0.52$), SC_{fac} ($M = 3.97$, $SD= 0.38$), $t(95) = -2.19$, $p \leq .05$, $CI.95$.

Further, Cohen's effect size values for the People ($d=0.71$), Process ($d=0.67$) and Policy ($d=0.55$) school determinants suggested a moderate to high practical significance while the Cohen's effect size value ($d=0.25$) for the Programs school determinant suggested low practical significance. The effect Cohen's effect size value for the over-all school climate ($d=0.52$) suggested moderate to high practical significance.

Faculty showed significantly higher perceptions compared to students. Both groups did not differ significantly in their perceptions on the school programs, and places. The findings of this study suggest that students and faculty have discrepant impression of the school's climate. Teachers' higher perceptions of school climate determinants and the overall school climate may be attributed to their role in the school. It can be theorized that teachers enjoyed more benefits given by the school administration. Teachers are provided better working conditions as reflected in their own comfort rooms, air conditioned faculty room and kitchen. In contrast, students have electric fans and communal comfort rooms.

Teachers play an active role in designing school programs, improving school policies and processes, student discipline, classroom management, academic performance of students and also in the improvement of school facilities. Likewise, as front liners of internal and external clients they have greater awareness of the services that is provided to the clients.

The Place school determinant is perceived by both stakeholder groups fairly. This entails that both groups find the need to improve physical facilities of the school. It can also be gleaned that the students tend to have higher expectations of school physical facilities needing further improvement.

Table 4. Table of Correlations among Six Variables

| Determinants | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | OSC |
|--------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| People | 3.99 | 0.47 | | 0.63** | 0.57** | 0.70** | 0.62** | 0.87** |
| Programs | 3.90 | 0.62 | 0.63** | | 0.49** | 0.56** | 0.39** | 0.76** |
| Process | 3.70 | 0.62 | 0.57** | 0.49** | | 0.45** | 0.53** | 0.76** |
| Policy | 4.04 | 0.66 | 0.70** | 0.56** | 0.45** | | 0.44** | 0.78** |
| Place | 3.26 | 0.82 | 0.62** | 0.39** | 0.53** | 0.44** | | 0.78** |
| Over-all | 3.78 | 0.50 | 0.87** | 0.76** | 0.76** | 0.79** | 0.79** | |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix and the significance level of the five determinants of school climate and overall school climate. It can be gleaned that the correlation ranges from .44 to .87. As can be seen, all five predictors correlate significantly ($p<.01$)

with overall school climate, and all correlate substantially to each other.

The study endeavored to determine statistical significant differences between the teachers' and the students' perceptions of the five elements or Ps of Starfish Analogy – people, places, policies, programs and processes through which Invitational Theory to Practice may be implemented.

Findings reveal that teachers had higher mean scores than students in the five school determinants and the over-all score. Although, it was only statistically significant with People, Policies and Processes and the over-all school climate. In comparing teachers' perceptions to students' perceptions of school climate and academics, Mitchell et al [22] theorized that teachers' perceptions of school climate are higher because they are more sensitive to classroom-level factors, such as classroom management and number of students with disruptive behaviors. On the other hand, students' perceptions were more responsive to school-level factors, such as "student mobility, student-teacher relationships, and principal turnover" [22].

People factor is considered to be a central ingredient as evidenced in the quality of relationships among students and school personnel. This may also be reflected in the shared ownership of the people in the school and feelings of belongingness. Moreover, the connectedness people feel to one another makes it even stronger. The process of teaching and learning is fundamentally relational. This is in interplay with the norms, goals, values, and interactions which together shape relationships in schools.

Policies factor that invite inclusion, encouragement and involvement are highly appraised particularly if it is fairly applied and reasonably enforced which serve as one of the important criteria in positive school environments. Feeling safe whether socially, emotionally, intellectual, and physically is a fundamental human need postulated by Maslow [24]. When this factor is addressed, it can significantly promote student learning and healthy development [25]. In educational institutions without supportive norms, structures, and relationships, students are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization, punitive disciplinary actions, often accompanied by absenteeism and poor academic performance [26].

Rules and norms are related to the safety dimension of schools. Results reflect how respondents put premium on school rules and the perceived fairness in dealing with students' behavior. In other studies that show effective enforcement of discipline,

there are decrease rates of student victimization and student delinquency [27].

Processes are defined as the ways the other 4 components function [23]. Perceptions of teachers and students can be ascribed as being supported by administrators or where communication lines are seen as open. Processes are closely associated with policy for the former would be less systematic if clear-cut rules are established. But both factors must be disseminated and made understood to the intended stakeholders.

The Place factor is the lowest appraised school climate determinant factor. Given the visibility of this factor, people can easily pinpoint to its value. Likewise, Stanley et al [28] emphasized that it is the easiest to change particularly since it is visible highlighting aesthetic, functionality and efficiency. This area includes studies on the institutional environment, which includes both school connectedness/engagement and physical layout and surroundings of school as well as resources and supplies.

Specifically, school size and space affects student achievement, safety, and relationships among members of the school community. Other environmental variables, such as classroom layout, activity schedules, and student-teacher interactions may have contributed to feelings of safety as reflected in the growing number of researches [29, 30]. Place is also attributed to the quality school facilities. However, Griffith [32] did not find school size to be a significant factor in students' perceptions of school climate. These discrepant findings suggest that school size may be related to some aspects of school climate but not to others.

Results have implications in the creation and development of proactive and preventive programs that would further enhance the quality of life of people in the school. School climate is an important factor in the successful implementation of school reform programs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

School climate is important in determining the quality of life of the students and its faculty. The study attempted to assess the health of the five Ps – people, places, policies, programs and processes in the school. Anchored in the Invitational Theory of Practice of respect, trust, optimism and intentionality, it is an important and innovative assessment tool that will be used as basis for program development. The making of proactive and development programs

would also improve the quality of instruction, physical structures, policies and school services of the academic community. On the determinant of Place, the students and teachers had responded that there is still more to be improved especially that schools in the Philippines is having on-going implementation of the Kto12 education program. Preparing and updating the physical structures, facilities and learning environments are part of the change implementation brought by the new program. This would create a domino effect with other factors of school climate which evaluates the school health condition both in sectarian and non-sectarian schools.

The quality of education of the Kto12 education program can be possibly seen and experienced if the areas of school operation and management had been properly aligned and giving equal attention by school top management and school owners. Whereas, attaining the best quality of school climate is a collective effort between the stakeholders such as the school leaders, teachers, staff, parents, students, and those in the top management. The government has the exclusive jurisdiction in monitoring and evaluating all schools as mandated in the Constitution. The implementation of new education program had provide a great reason for government to implement change management in education in which all schools should adopt and embrace in responding to the 21st Century Education.

In the light of the present limitations of the study, it is recommended that a multi-level, multi-sectoral, multi-school study approach be used in order to increase generalizability of findings. This will strengthen and validate findings on current literature of school climate in the country which will address educational issues. The study included two stakeholders groups which includes parents and students. Tapping into other stakeholders like parents and administrators would provide interesting findings in the future attempts. Future research may look into employing qualitative design that would broaden understanding of the areas not addressed in the current research.

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