# Students' perception of school climate and academic motivation in a blended learning lnvironment

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**ABSTRACT**

The school environment significantly influences students' performance, yet limited studies were conducted on the relationship between school climate and academic motivation in blended learning environments. This study aimed to describe the level of student's perception of school climate and academic motivation and analyze the relationships between these variables. Utilizing a descriptive correlational research design, data were gathered from 278 randomly selected high school students of a state university in Eastern Visayas using two standardized survey questionnaires, which were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that students generally have high levels of school climate perception and academic motivation in a blended learning environment. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between the high school students' school climate perception and academic motivation. This indicates that the university still needs to give its attention to focus on improving its environment and school climate in order for its educational system to thrive. In connection with this, this paper suggests interventions to improve the implementation of blended learning at the secondary level.

## 1. Introduction

The learning environment significantly influences students' academic achievement, attitude, and motivation (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015; Radovan & Makovec, 2015; Vandecandelaere et al., 2012). As schools in the Philippines abruptly transitioned to a Blended Learning (BL) environment in response to the global health crisis, there is a need to examine how students perceive the school climate in this new context and understand how it influences their academic motivation (Batac et al., 2021; Duropan & San Jose, 2022).

School climate refers to the feelings and attitudes elicited by a school's environment, influenced by attitudes, behaviors, and school norms (Cohen et al., 2009). A healthy school climate promotes positive attitudes, openness, and effective teaching and learning (Ismail et al., 2020). Previous studies have shown that a positive school climate is associated with increased achievement, decreased problem behavior (Ellis et al., 2022), and overall student success (Daily et al., 2019; Maxwell et al., 2017).

However, most studies have focused on academic performance, well-being, and satisfaction, with limited research on academic motivation (Bilgin et al., 2021; Dincer, 2021; Özgenel, 2020). It is important to examine how school climate perception influences academic

motivation because motivation is significantly correlated with academic performance (Amrai et al., 2011; Morrow, 2020; Pintrich, 2003).

Moreover, as previously pointed out, BL is a new teaching and learning modality in the Philippines, especially at the secondary level. With this, there is a dearth of studies that examined the dynamics of the teaching and learning process using this modality. Mainly, these studies have focused on the challenges of teachers in implementing BL (Alvarez, 2020), manifestations of cognitive presence of students in BL (Villanueva et al., 2022), readiness of teachers and learners in blended learning (Vergonia & Mombas, 2022) while others were keener on the impact of BL on the knowledge and skills of learners in a BL set-up (Germo, 2022; Hipol et al., 2020). In the case of the school where this study was conducted, there is an absence of a study that focused on students' perception of school climate in a blended learning context and how it influences the academic motivation of students.

This study aims to describe students' perceptions of school climate and academic motivation in a Laboratory High School of a state university and analyze the relationships between these variables. Understanding these perceptions in a blended learning environment is crucial for improving the implementation of this modality and ensuring the academic success and well-being of students.

## 2. Theoretical basis

### *2.1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory*

This study was chiefly anchored on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (EST). EST is a core element that describes human development as a joint function of the person in context and emphasizes the interactive, reciprocal effects of characteristics of the individual and the multiple contexts in which development occurs (Rudasill et al., 2018). Learners' development is viewed as a complex system in relationships that are influenced by a range of environmental factors, such as the school environment, to more general cultural values, laws, and practices (Guy-Evans, 2020). Moreover, Mohammadabadi et al. (2019) used an ecological framework to investigate the factors influencing language teachers at various levels. This study discovered that ecological systems have an impact on learning.

The Ecological Systems Theory aids educators in creating learning environments that are appropriate for students' requirements, traits, cultures, and family backgrounds (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Teachers and school administrators can use the model to improve students' academic performance and educational attainment by involving parents and observing other contextual factors (such as students' peers, extracurricular activities, and neighbors) that may aid or hinder their learning because the model focuses on the context (Schunk, 2012).

On the other hand, it was possible to identify a variety of inclusion-related barriers and facilitators that were related to the educational system, as well as the needs and characteristics of the young people, by using EST as a theoretical tool to guide data interpretation. More importantly, it was possible to keep an eye on the interaction between individual and contextual factors that were considered throughout to better understand the similarities and differences found among young people in terms of their social integration (Crawford, 2020).

### *2.2. School climate and academic motivation*

The concept of school climate encompasses various dimensions, including the emotional and relational atmosphere of a school, which can significantly impact student outcomes.

Research has shown that a positive school climate is associated with increased academic achievement, reduced problem behaviors, and enhanced teacher productivity. A supportive school environment fosters students' motivation and engagement (Ellis et al., 2022).

Teacher Connectedness, Peer Connectedness, School Connectedness, Rule Clarity, and Reporting and Seeking are key parameters of school climate that influence students' academic motivation. Previous studies have demonstrated that teacher support and peer relationships are crucial for students' academic success and motivation (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013; Mateos et al., 2020). School connectedness and clarity of rules contribute to students' sense of belonging and engagement (Daily et al., 2019; Maxwell et al., 2017). Furthermore, the ability to report and seek help is vital for academic motivation and performance (Li et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on school climate's impact on academic performance and well-being, there is a gap in studies examining its influence on academic motivation, particularly within blended learning environments (Bilgin et al., 2021; Dincer, 2021). Understanding how students' perceptions of school climate affect their academic motivation is critical, as motivation is a strong predictor of academic success (Verner-Filion et al., 2023).

In this study, the researchers examined the learning environment of the students based on their perception of the following school climate parameters; Teacher Connectedness, Peer Connectedness, School Connectedness, Rule Clarity, and Reporting and Seeking. It also aimed to analyze how these factors influenced students' academic motivation in a blended learning environment.

### *2.3. Hypothesis*

Based on the theoretical basis and literature review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the student's school climate perception and their academic motivation in a blended learning environment*

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Research design*

This quantitative research used descriptive correlational research design. The descriptive design determined the level of perceived school climate and academic motivation among students while the correlational design analyzed the relationships among the variables. The benefits of descriptive correlational research include its simplicity, affordability, and speed of completion. In many cases, it may act as crucial introductory research for follow-up studies that can be done to establish causal relationships between variables (Pratama et al., 2023).

By utilizing the described research design, data collection feasibility was ensured through the use of readily available standardized survey instruments and efficient data collection methods. The surveys were administered electronically to minimize logistical challenges and ensure a broad reach.

### *3.2. Research locale, respondents, and sampling*

This study was conducted at the Laboratory High School of a state university in an eastern province of the Philippines in the Academic Year (A.Y.) 2022 - 2023. The university is located in a rural community of an island province. Students of this educational institution mostly came from low to middle-income households. Utilizing a stratified random sampling technique, data were gathered from 278 Junior and Senior High School students.

The sample was randomly selected from a state university in Eastern Visayas, which helps generalize the findings to similar educational settings within this region. To enhance generalizability, future research could replicate the study in different locations or educational contexts.

### *3.3. Research instruments*

This study used two questionnaires to measure the level of students' perception of school climate and academic motivation, respectively, and one questionnaire for the validity of the survey questionnaires. The What's Happening In this School? (WHITS) Questionnaire is adapted from Aldridge and Ala'l's (2013) study on "Assessing students' views of school climate: Developing and validating the What's Happening In This School? (WHITS) questionnaire". The said questionnaire measured the school climate using a 5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Six scales were developed that can be used as indicators namely Teacher Support, Peer Connectedness, School Connectedness, Rule Clarity, and Reporting and Seeking Help.

The second questionnaire is the Motivated Strategies for Learning Survey (MSLQ) based on the study of Tisome Nugent, "The Impact of Teacher-Student Interaction on Student Motivation and Achievement", which measured student motivation. It is a 5-point likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The MSLQ was developed to assess university students' motivation and use of learning strategies (Alkharusi et al., 2012).

In addition, the applicability and validity of the questionnaires for the local setting were validated by a Social Science Professor, an Education Professor, and a Psychometrician using a survey instrument validation rating scale developed by Oducado (2020). Their feedback ensured that the questionnaires adequately covered all aspects of school climate and academic motivation. The validation yielded a mean score of 4.46 which means that the questionnaires are applicable to the local setting.

Moreover, the reliability of the instruments was tested by conducting a pilot test with at least 30 respondents who were not included in the sampling frame, to further evaluate the stability of the instruments over time. Afterward, the results of the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a score of 0.94 for the WHITS Questionnaire and 0.78 for the MSLQ. These scores indicate acceptable internal consistency for the scales measuring school climate and academic motivation. As such, the consistency of responses was checked to ensure that the instruments produced reliable results across different instances.

### *3.4. Statistical treatment of data*

Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation, were used to treat the demographics and the level of students' perception of school climate and academic motivation in a blended learning environment. Meanwhile, Pearson's r Correlation was used in analyzing the relationship between the students' school climate perception and academic motivation. All statistical analyses were done at a 5% level of significance. The fundamental characteristics of a dataset found in a particular study are described, illustrated, and summarized using descriptive statistics; it aids analysts in better understanding the data (Cooksey, 2020). Inferential statistics allows one to describe data and draw inferences and conclusions from that data. By using sample data, an individual can deduce what a population may think or how it has been affected using inferential statistics (Li, 2022).

### *3.5. Ethical considerations*

Prior to the data gathering, approval to conduct the study was secured first from the university administration. After this, parental consent was secured for respondents of the study who were of minor age. Likewise, consent and assent forms were secured from the respondents for their voluntary participation in the study. The researchers ensured the respondents of the study of their anonymity and that the data were gathered and stored with utmost confidentiality.

## 4. Result and discussion

Table 1 presents the levels of school climate perception and students' academic motivation in a blended learning environment. Results showed that in general, students have a high level of school climate perception (M = 3.37, SD = 0.571). This result implies that students generally view school climate positively. It complements previous studies which also showed positive school climate perception among students in a blended learning environment (Rahman et al., 2020). This is due to their sense of optimism in teacher support, peer connectedness, school connectedness, affirming diversity, rule clarity, and reporting and seeking help, which are identified factors of school climate (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013).

**Table 1**

*Levels of School Climate Perception and Students' Academic Motivation in a Blended Learning Environment*

| Variables | School Climate Perception | | | Students' Academic Motivation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | **SD** | **Int.** | **M** | **SD** | **Int.** |
| ***Sex*** | | | | | | |
| Female | 3.80 | 0.559 | High | 3.94 | 0.550 | High |
| Male | 3.73 | 0.588 | High | 3.82 | 0.549 | High |
| ***Grade Level*** | | | | | | |
| 7 | 3.97 | 0.579 | High | 3.99 | 0.671 | High |
| 8 | 3.71 | 0.640 | High | 3.85 | 0.500 | High |
| 9 | 3.59 | 0.555 | High | 3.68 | 0.622 | High |
| 10 | 3.78 | 0.549 | High | 3.87 | 0.580 | High |
| 11 | 3.79 | 0.593 | High | 3.88 | 0.561 | High |
| 12 | 3.79 | 0.524 | High | 3.97 | 0.438 | High |
| ***As a whole*** | **3.77** | **0.571** | **High** | **3.89** | **0.552** | **High** |

*Note.*

| Point Values | Statistical Limit | Descriptive Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4.20 - 5.00 | Very High |
| 4 | 3.40 - 4.19 | High |
| 3 | 2.60 - 3.39 | Moderate |
| 2 | 1.80 - 2.59 | Low |
| 1 | 1.00 - 1.79 | Very Low |

*Source.* Data analysis result of the research

As the respondents were grouped based on their sex, results revealed that females have higher levels of school climate perception (M = 3.80, SD = 0.559) than males (M = 3.73,

SD = 0.588). This means that between males and females, females have a more positive perception of the school climate. This supports previous studies that found that males have lower levels of school climate perceptions than females (Turhan & Akgül, 2017). This can be because, compared to females, males have a lower sense of belonging at school, and female students are more engaged in counseling activities and feel more at ease speaking with teachers and administrators (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Furthermore, when respondents were grouped according to their grade level, it is evident that grade 7 students have the highest levels of school climate perception (M = 3.97, SD = 0.579) while the grade 9 students have the lowest (M = 3.59, SD = 0.555). This means that students in lower grades have more positive perceptions of school climate than those in high-grade levels. The findings of the study deviate from earlier findings which suggested that students in their first years of high school have a significantly poorer school climate perception (Waasdorp et al., 2019). The lack of exposure to all the topics and the lack of study stress among first-year students may help to explain the differences (Shrestha et al., 2019).

On one hand, table 1 also shows the level of students' academic motivation in a blended learning environment. Results reveal that students have a high level of academic motivation (M = 3.89, SD = 0.552) in a blended learning environment. This implies that students are highly motivated academically in a blended learning environment. The study is consistent with Saritepeci and Cakir's (2015) study which also showed high levels of academic motivation perception among students in a blended learning environment. This may be because of factors such as students' family support, family socioeconomic status, parental expectations, students' perspective gender, and the average educational level of their parents (Gao et al., 2021; Taghipour et al., 2012).

Moreover, when respondents were grouped according to their sex, it was found out that females have a higher level of perceived academic motivation (M = 3.94, SD = 0.550) than males (M = 3.82, SD = 0.549). This indicates that females have a more positive perception of academic motivation than males. The results can be supported by the findings of previous studies which proved that females have greater motivation (McGeown et al., 2012). Due to cultural norms that stereotype men as being more assertive and masculine than women, there may be differences in academic motivation between men and women, which may also be reflected in the different social roles and academic expectations that apply to men and women (Carvalho, 2016). Furthermore, this is also because females appeared to have greater self-control than males (Duckworth et al., 2015). It contradicted the findings of Naz et al. (2020) that males, compared to females, have higher levels of motivation, which may be because of the different settings in which the said study was conducted where other environmental factors may have affected the results.

When grouped according to grade level, the grade 7 students showed the highest level of academic motivation (M = 3.99, SD = 0.671), while the grade 9 students had the lowest (M = 3.68, SD = 0.622). This means that students in lower grades have positive perceptions of academic motivation. However, results contradicted the study of Koyuncuoğlu (2021) that grades 9 and above have higher academic motivation levels than grades 7 and 8. The differences may be because students in grades 7 and 8 are more likely to please their parents and teachers, and they may view going to school as a means of pleasing parents and avoiding negative repercussions from the community (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017).

In addition, even if the educational setting is in a blended learning environment, the level of students' perceptions of school climate and academic motivation still remains high. The

results imply that the student's opinions of the school and their drive to succeed in the classroom remain unchanged whether or not the educational environment is changed to incorporate blended learning. This can be further proved by Dziuban et al. (2011) study that the transformative potential of blended learning increased course completion rates, improved retention, and increased student satisfaction.

Table 2 shows the level of school climate perception in each sub-domain. Based on the results, all domains have high levels of perception, namely peer connectedness, teacher support, school connectedness, rule clarity, affirming diversity, and reporting and seeking help. It is evident that the affirming diversity factor showed the highest level (M = 3.77, SD = 0.682). This means that students with various cultural experiences and origins are appreciated and acknowledged. Meanwhile, reporting and seeking help has the lowest level (M = 3.57, SD = 0.719). This indicates that students are not highly aware of policies and assured that they are able to report incidents. Thus, university policies should be properly disseminated to the students and ensure the students' understanding of the guidelines.

**Table 2**

*Level of School Climate Factors and Students' Academic Motivation in Blended Learning*

| Variables | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peer connectedness | 3.75 | 0.594 | High |
| Teacher support | 3.75 | 0.600 | High |
| School connectedness | 3.74 | 0.623 | High |
| Rule clarity | 3.69 | 0.646 | High |
| Affirming diversity | 3.77 | 0.682 | High |
| Reporting and Seeking help | 3.57 | 0.719 | High |
| **As a whole** | **3.77** | **0.571** | **High** |

*Note.*

| Point Values | Statistical Limit | Descriptive Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4.20 - 5.00 | Very High |
| 4 | 3.40 - 4.19 | High |
| 3 | 2.60 - 3.39 | Moderate |
| 2 | 1.80 - 2.59 | Low |
| 1 | 1.00 - 1.79 | Very Low |

*Source.* Data analysis result of the research

The relationship between the perceived school climate and academic motivation of the students in a blended learning environment was analyzed using Pearson's R Correlation. The correlation matrix in Table 3 shows the relationship between School Climate and Academic Motivation in a blended learning environment using Pearson's r product moment correlation. Results revealed that with r = .58 and a p-value = < 0.00001, it can be concluded that there is a moderately positive significant relationship between school climate and academic motivation at a 5% significance level. This implies that a high-level school climate results in a high level of academic motivation. With this finding, the hypothesis of this study, which states that there is no statistically significant relationship between the students' school climate perception and academic motivation in the blended learning environment, is hereby rejected.

The results of the present study contradict the findings of previous studies, which argued that affirming diversity in school is challenging, which may be due to the lack of knowledge in sign language, and lack of gender-responsive pedagogy practices among students and teachers (Possi & Milinga, 2018; Safder et al., 2012). Moreover, results also contradicted other studies which found a high level of perception of students on reporting and seeking help (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). This may be because support was regarded to be more present in their school in terms of reporting anomalies happening in their environment (Eliot et al., 2010). Furthermore, it may also be due to students having expressed feelings of embarrassment, anxiety about being thought of as "stupid" by others, and an elevated threat to their self-esteem (Russell & Topham, 2012). Thus, these explain the low level of the school climate factor reporting and seeking help in the present study.

**Table 3**

*Correlation of Perceived School Climate and Academic Motivation*

| Variables | 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. School Climate Perception | - | |
| 2. Academic Motivation | .58*** | - |

*Note.* * p < .05, ** p < .01, ***.001
*Source.* Data analysis result of the research

The above findings concur with the previous studies which emphasized that school climate is a predictor of academic motivation (Bilgin et al., 2021; Dincer, 2021; Ioverno & Russell, 2021; Özgenel, 2020). The student is more likely to reflect and incorporate the school's values and norms, emphasizing learning and achievement, into their behavior if the school climate is supportive and positive, which in turn helps the student identify with the school as a salient group (Maxwell et al., 2017). The results of the present study may be due to Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (EST) which says that the learner's development is influenced by a range of environmental factors such as lack of teacher support, peer connectedness, school connectedness, rule clarity, and reporting and seeking help influence the academic motivation and performance of students specifically in a blended learning environment (Guy-Evans, 2020).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### *5.1. Conclusion*

This study generally sought to describe the level of student's perception of school climate, and academic motivation in a Laboratory High School of a state university and analyze the relationships of these variables. Results have revealed that students have high levels of school climate perception and academic motivation in a blended learning environment. The study also found that there is a significant correlation between school climate and academic motivation, which implies that the two variables are strongly associated. These results imply that in order for the university's educational system to thrive it needs to give its attention to improving its environment and school climate, especially in disseminating school policies since reporting and seeking help had the lowest level of perception among the domains of school climate.

### *5.2. Recommendations*

Given the study's findings, it is recommended that the school still needs more intervention, especially for students in a blended learning environment even though the findings

show that school climate and academic motivation have high levels. It is worth considering the students who may not have as much face-to-face interaction with teachers as they would in a traditional classroom. In this context, it is essential that teachers provide support and encouragement through online channels. When students feel supported by their teachers, they are more likely to be motivated to learn. A positive school climate that prioritizes teacher support, peer connectedness, school connectedness, affirming diversity, rule clarity, reporting, and seeking help can promote academic motivation in a blended learning environment.

It is also worth noting that the impact of gender on students' perceptions of school climate in blended learning environments may vary depending on the specific characteristics of the environment, such as the degree of interactivity and collaboration involved, the level of teacher support, affirming diversity, and reporting and seeking help. Future researchers may study other variables to further broaden the findings such as considering the financial status of the students, and incorporating school climate with another variable in a blended learning environment.

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