

# Case Study of the Parents' Perception of the School Climate of a Rural Primary School in Tangshan, Hebei Province, China

Rui Li<sup>1</sup> & Mogana Dhamotharan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education, SEGi University, Kota Damansara, Selangor, Malaysia

Correspondence: Rui Li, Faculty of Education, SEGi University, Kota Damansara, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: liruleo@icoud.com

Received: October 29, 2020 Accepted: January 30, 2021 Online Published: February 20, 2021

doi:10.5539/jel.v10n2p61 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v10n2p61>

## Abstract

The main aim of this study was to find out the perceptions of the parents about the rural school climate. This study was set in a selected rural primary school located in Hebei Province, in China. Data were collected using questionnaires and a semi-structured interview protocol. 103 parents participated in the questionnaire and 10 parents were invited to take part in the focus group interview. The findings in the questionnaires had revealed that parents had positive perceptions of the rural school climate. Inferential statistics further showed that there was no significant difference in parents' perceptions based on education level, and the male parents' perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and students were higher than the female parents. The focus group interview further revealed that parents felt that the rural schools were unable to establish a complete school curriculum, lacked a sufficient number of teachers, had a shortfall of adequate infrastructure, had school violence, inadequate extracurricular activities, and programs.

**Keywords:** parents, school climate, policies, spaces, administrators, teachers, and students, programs, processes

## 1. Introduction

The state-run system of public education is governed by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. School climate has been associated with improved student success and stakeholder satisfaction (Bear et al., 2014). Keiser and Shulte (2009) have shown that there are many facets of school climate in primary, middle, and high schools. These facets involve safety at school; a student's feeling of belonging, and interactions between school staff and administration. School climate greatly impacts effective risk prevention, positive youth development, healthy development, and increased student and teacher retention (Huebner & Diener, 2008). Earlier studies have shown a correlation a school climate and teacher quality (Whitehurst, 2002), academic achievement (Demi et al., 2010), and employee morale (Mayer, 2007). Although there are many studies on school climate, studies targeting the rural settings are limited in number. Therefore, it is important to understand the perceptions of parents regarding the school climate in rural schools in order to promote a positive school climate. This study aims to investigate the parents' perceptions of the school climate in a rural primary school in China.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Definitions of School Climate

Numerous researches have also referred to school climate as school environment or school-level learning environment (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Carter et al. (2009) defined climate as situations that can be easily seen in a school, and is often defined by terms like, clean, open, wholesome, cold, dark, friendly, safe, and good learning atmosphere. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) concluded that school climate is an important element of an effective and successful educational environment. School climate is the school facilities and buildings, demographic and social characteristics of students, administrators, teachers, and school staff, school policies, values and rules, and the type of interaction that occurs between teachers, staff, students, and parents (Ramsey et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2013). The school climate is a learning environment built by the interaction of interpersonal relationships, psychological atmosphere, and physical setting (Perkins, 2007). The climate of the school depends on people's experiences during school life, and it reveals norms, values, goals, human relationships, organizational structure, and teaching and learning practices (Cohen et al., 2009).

Purkey and Siegel (2013) assert that the five factors of People, Places, Processes, Policies, and Programs provide a specific framework that they believe to contribute to the success or failure of a school. These powerful factors become highly significant due to their separate and combined influence. School reform demands systemic change based on a systemic examination of the five factors, namely people, policies, places, programs, and processes (the Five Ps). This structural analysis of a school climate reveals whether any part of the whole is disappearing. The Five P's present unlimited opportunities for evaluation and improvement of organizational climate and is grounded in The Invitational Education (IE) theory; it also addresses the overall culture or ecosystem of almost any organization. They also help create a positive school climate to ultimately become a healthy and successful organization. The final purpose of the model is to help in the improvement of the individual's potential in the intellectual, psychological, social, moral, and physical realms (Novak et al., 2006). This study views school climate as the perceptions of parents of their school's administrators, teachers, and students, policies, spaces, programs, and processes. This view is based on the definitions articulated by Purkey and Siegel (2013).

### *2.2 The Importance of School Climate*

Previous research has indicated supportive climates in schools potentially impact beliefs, practices, and relationships, whereby making a major difference in student success (Bear et al., 2014). According to Cornell and Huang (2016), a positive perception of the school environment can produce pro-social student behavior and reduce peer aggression and bad behavior in school. Bodovski et al. (2013) posited that a positive school climate makes a difference in student academic achievement. Studies have also shown that schools with positive school climates tend to have less student discipline issues such as belligerence and violent behavior, and fewer suspensions and expulsions from school (Cohen & Geier, 2010; Lee et al., 2011). Positive school climate is reflected in a supportive teacher student relationship, and students' high academic expectations (Konold et al., 2017). Poor school climate can lead to low performance and expectations of students in the school, resulting in decreased success on student assessments (Tanriogen & Emerec, 2008). A non-harmonious school produces a situation where it would be very hard for a school to operate at a high level of educational performance (Kelley et al., 2005).

### *2.3 Parents Perceptions of the School Climate*

Researchers agree that parental involvement has the most positive impact on children's educational performance and social adaptation (Gordon & Louis, 2009). McCoy et al. (2014) indicated that various forms of parental involvement can all lead to an improvement in the school climate. According to Rumberger and Palardy (2005), school climate is more caring and supportive when parents are highly involved in the school community. Parents can make a huge contribution to their children's school learning outcomes and improve a more caring and responsive school environment by keeping close relationships with the school (Houtenville & Hall, 2007). Parental involvement influences a student's sense of psychological well-being, self-evaluation, self-esteem, and peer relationships (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Studies show that when parents consider their children's school climate is positive, they are more completely involved in their children's school (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013; Lavenda, 2011). Patrikakou (2008) indicated that students whose parents participate in education have a more positive perception of the school, less behavioral problems, more preparation for class, better academic performance, higher self-efficacy, and a higher chance of graduating from high school.

## **3. Research Method**

The main aim of this study was to find out the parents' perceptions of the rural school climate. And the paper guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) What are the parents' perceptions of the rural school climate?
- 2) Are there any significant differences in parents' perceptions of the rural school climate based on gender?
- 3) Are there any significant differences in parents' perceptions of the rural school climate based on Education Level?

The data of this study were collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interview protocol. The questionnaires used in this study were adapted from the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R) (Smith, 2011), and were divided into two sections. The first section of the parent questionnaire requires the parents to provide their demographic background including gender, age, occupation, and educational level. The parents' questionnaire comprised 32 questions with 5 components, there were 4 items for administrators, teachers, and students, 11 items for spaces, 6 items for processes, 5 items for policies, and 6 items for programs. The respondents were required to respond to a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 indicated strongly disagree, 2

disagree, 3 somewhat agree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 22) software was employed for analyzing the quantitative data.

There were a total of four steps to analyze the semi-structured focus group interviews protocol data. Step one; listen carefully to the tape and transcribe the interview content. Step two; read the transcripts several times to familiarize with what has been transcribed. Step three; use the NVivo (Version 12) software to analyze the qualitative data to get an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the parents about the school climate. Step four; write a summary of the coded data. Each theme from the qualitative data was adapted to the relevant part of the quantitative results to verify the connection between the results revealed by both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the study.

#### 4. Findings

This study was set in a selected rural primary school located in Hebei Province, in China. There were 103 parents participated in the questionnaires and 10 parents take part in the focus group interviews.

##### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The parents' demographic background includes gender, age, occupation, and educational level. The parents' demographic information shows below.

Table 1. Gender of parents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	50.5
Female	51	49.5
Total	103	100.0

According to Table 1, it could be seen that a total of 103 parents responded to the questionnaires. 52 of the parents who responded to the questionnaire were males while the remaining 51 were females.

Table 2. Age of parents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
≤ 30	5	4.9
31–35	47	45.6
36–40	30	29.1
41–45	14	13.6
46–50	7	6.8
Total	103	100.0

According to Table 2, the data showed that 4.9% of parents were less than 30 years old, 45.6% of parents were between 30 and 35 years of age, 29.1% of parents were between 36 and 40 years of age, 13.6% of parents were between 41 and 45 years of age, 6.8% of them were 41 to 50 years old.

Table 3. Educational level of parents

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary School	3	2.9
Secondary School	48	46.6
High School	32	31.1
Diploma	18	17.5
Bachelor	2	1.9
Total	103	100.0

According to Table 3, the data also revealed that 3 of the parents were primary school graduates, 48 of them were secondary school graduates, 32 of them were high school graduates, 18 of them held the diploma, and only 2 of them had a bachelor's degree.

Table 4. Occupation of parents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Cook	3	2.9
Driver	5	4.9
Doctor	1	1
Educator	1	1
Housewife	1	1
Peasant	16	15.5
Security guard	2	1.9
Shopkeeper	3	2.9
Unemployed	22	21.4
Waiter	2	1.9
Steelworker	38	36.9
Others	9	8.7
Total	103	100.0

According to Table 4, in terms of the occupation, there were 3 cooks, 5 drivers, 1 doctor, 1 educator, 1 housewife, 16 peasants, 2 security guards, 3 shopkeepers, 22 unemployed, 2 waiters, 38 Steelworkers, and 9 others.

Table 5. Parents-demographic profile (interview)

NO	Age	Gender	Occupation	Educational Level
Parent 1	32	Female	Educator	Diploma
Parent 2	33	Female	Steelworker	High School
Parent 3	33	Female	Steelworker	High School
Parent 4	33	Female	Steelworker	Diploma
Parent 5	33	Female	Peasant	Secondary School
Parent 6	35	Female	Steelworker	Secondary School
Parent 7	40	Female	Shopkeeper	Secondary School
Parent 8	41	Female	Steelworker	High School
Parent 9	43	Female	Peasant	High School
Parent 10	45	Female	Steelworker	Diploma

According to Table 5, ten parents participated in this interview. There were ten females, aged between 32 and 45 years old. In terms of occupation, 6 of them were steelworkers, 2 peasants, 1 shopkeeper, and 1 educator. 3 of them were secondary school graduates, 4 of them were high school graduates, and 3 of them held the diploma.

#### 4.2 Parents' Perceptions of the School Climate

Table 6. Parents' perceptions of the policies

Question Items	Distribution of responses (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Students have the opportunity to talk to one another during class activities.	1	0	3.9	38.8	56.3	4.50	0.67
The grading practices in this school are fair.	1	0	5.8	35.9	57.3	4.49	0.70
School policy encourages freedom of expression by everyone.	1	1	3.9	40.2	53.9	4.46	0.71
The messages and notes sent home are positive.	1.9	1	6.8	39.8	50.5	4.36	0.82
A high percentage of students pass in this school.	1	1.9	14.6	35.9	46.6	4.25	0.85
Overall	1.2	0.8	7	38.1	52.9	4.41	0.75

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Findings displayed in Table 6 show the parents' perceptions of policies. 91% of the parents were of the view that the school policies were good ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ). Majority of parents (56.3%) strongly agreed that the students had the opportunities to talk to one another during class activities ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). 93.2% of them felt that the grading practices in this school were fair ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). 94.1% of the parents agreed that the school policies encouraged freedom of expression for everyone ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). 90.3% of the parents thought that the messages sent home were positive ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). 82.5% of the parents endorsed that a

high percentage of students pass in this school ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). Similar sentiments were also recorded during the interview sessions. Parents felt that the teachers were responsible and caring for their children, the school grading method protected the students' self-esteem. Meanwhile, parents felt that the curriculum arrangement needed improvement, and the school needed to increase the number of teachers.

Table 7. Parents' perceptions of the spaces

Question Items	Distribution on responses (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The lighting in this school is more than adequate.	1	0	3.9	37.9	57.3	4.51	0.67
The air smells fresh in this school.	1	1.9	5.8	33	58.3	4.46	0.78
The school grounds are clean and well-maintained.	1	2.9	4.9	34	57.3	4.44	0.80
Furniture is pleasant and comfortable.	1	3.9	8.7	35	51.5	4.32	0.87
Fire alarm instructions are well posted and seem reasonable.	1	3.9	6.8	38.8	49.5	4.32	0.84
There are comfortable chairs for visitors.	1	2.9	12.6	34	49.5	4.28	0.87
Classrooms offer a variety of furniture arrangements.	1	2.9	15.5	35	45.6	4.21	0.88
The restrooms in this school are clean and properly maintained.	3.9	2.9	14.6	31.1	47.6	4.16	1.04
Clocks and water fountains are in good repair.	4.9	3.9	16.5	27.2	47.6	4.09	1.11
Space is available for students' independent study.	3.9	5.8	14.6	32	43.7	4.06	1.08
The principal's office is attractive.	2.9	3.9	20.4	35.9	36.9	4.00	1.00
Overall	2.1	3.2	11.3	34	49.5	4.26	0.92

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Findings displayed in Table 7 show the parents' perceptions of the spaces. 83.5% of the parents were satisfied with the school spaces ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). 95.2% of the parents thought that the lighting in this school was more than adequate ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). 91.3% of them thought that the air smelled fresh in this school ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ). Many parents (91.3%) believed that the school grounds were clean and well-maintained ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ). 51.5% of the parents strongly agreed that the furniture was pleasant and comfortable ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). Almost half the parents (49.5%) strongly agreed that the fire alarm instructions were well posted and seemed reasonable ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) and there were comfortable chairs for visitors ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). 80.6% of the parents agreed that the classrooms offered a variety of furniture arrangements ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). 78.7% of the parents thought that the restrooms in this school were clean and properly maintained ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). 91.3% of the parents thought that the clocks and water fountains were in good repair ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). 75.7% of the parents felt that enough space was available for students' independent study ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). 72.8% of the parents felt that the principal's office was attractive ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Similar sentiments were also recorded during the interview sessions. Parents felt that the school environment was good, clean, and hygienic, the school had new facilities, equipment, and good security. Meanwhile, parents felt that the school toilets and the school playground need to be improved.

Table 8. Parents' perceptions of the administrators, teachers, and students

Question Items	Distribution of responses (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
People in this school are polite to one another.	0	0	5.8	33	61.2	4.55	0.61
Teachers spend time after school with those who need extra help.	0	0	6.8	32	61.2	4.54	0.62
People in this school try to stop vandalism when they see it happening.	0	0	8.7	45.6	45.6	4.37	0.64
Teachers exhibit a sense of humor.	1	1.9	13.6	33	50.5	4.30	0.85
Overall	0.3	0.5	8.7	35.9	54.6	4.44	0.69

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Findings displayed in Table 8 show the parents' perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students. 90.5% of them were of the view that the school administrators, teachers, and students had a good relationship ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). 61.2% of the parents strongly agreed that people in this school are polite to one another ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). 61.2% of them strongly agreed that the teachers spent time after school with those who needed extra help ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ). 91.2% of the parents thought that people in the school tried to stop vandalism when they saw it happening ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ). 83.5% of the parents thought that the teachers exhibited a sense of

humor ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). This concern was also articulated during the interview sessions. Parents felt that the teachers loved the children and were responsible for their children. Parents felt that the relationship between the school staff and the parents was harmonious. Meanwhile, parents said that some students lacked mutual respect and care.

Table 9. Parents' perceptions of the programs

Question Items	Distribution on responses (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Everyone is encouraged to participate in athletic (sports) programs.	1	0	6.8	38.8	53.4	4.44	0.71
Good health practices are encouraged in this school.	1	1	6.8	36.9	54.4	4.43	0.75
There is a wellness (health) program at this school.	1	1.9	7.8	39.8	49.5	4.35	0.71
Interruptions to classroom academic activities are kept to a minimum.	1	1	4.9	48.5	44.7	4.35	0.79
School programs involve out of school experience.	1	2.9	16.5	39.8	39.8	4.15	0.87
Mini courses are available to students.	1	5.8	24.3	24.3	44.7	4.06	1.01
Overall	1	2.1	11.2	38	47.8	4.29	0.82

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Findings displayed in Table 9 show the parents' perceptions of programs. 86.6% of them felt that the school programs were good ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). Almost half the parents (53.4%) strongly agreed that everyone was encouraged to participate in athletics (sports) programs ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). More than half of the parents (54.4%) strongly agreed that good health practices were encouraged in the school ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ). 89.3% of the parents thought that there was a wellness (health) program at the school ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). 93.2% of the parents felt that interruptions to classroom academic activities were kept to a minimum ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). 79.6% of the parents agreed that school programs involved out of school experience ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). 44.7% of the parents strongly agreed that mini courses were available to students ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). This concern was also articulated during the interview sessions. Parents said that the school activities could develop and train children's abilities. Meanwhile, they felt that the school did not organize various activities.

Table 10. Parents' perceptions of the processes

Question Items	Distribution on responses (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Student discipline is approached from a positive standpoint.	1	1	4.9	34	59.2	4.50	0.73
Grades are assigned by means of fair and comprehensive assessment of work and effort.	1	0	5.8	43.7	49.5	4.41	0.69
All telephone calls to this school are answered promptly and politely.	1	0	9.7	36.9	52.4	4.40	0.75
Everyone arrives on time for school.	1	1.9	10.7	32	54.4	4.37	0.83
Classes get started quickly.	1.9	1	7.8	36.9	52.4	4.37	0.83
People often feel welcome when they enter the school.	1	2.9	15.5	39.8	40.8	4.17	0.86
Overall	1.2	1.1	9.1	37.2	51.5	4.37	0.79

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Findings displayed in Table 10 show the parents' perceptions of processes. Parents (88.7%) were hold a positive perception of the school processes ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). More than half of the parents (59.2%) believed that student discipline was approached from a positive standpoint ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and almost half of the parents (49.5%) strongly agreed that grades were assigned by means of fair and comprehensive assessment of work and effort ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). 89.3% of the parents agreed that all telephone calls to this school were answered promptly and politely ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) and 86.4% of the parents felt that everyone arrived on time for school ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ). 52.4% of the people felt that the classes could get started quickly ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ). 80.6% of the parents agreed that people often felt welcome when they entered the school ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ). Similar sentiments were also recorded during the interview sessions. Parents felt that the communication with the teachers was smooth. They believed that the teachers could help their children build personal confidence, good moral character, and the teachers used the positive way to discipline students.

4.3 ANOVA Test

Table 11. Parents’ perceptions based on gender

Perceptions of Parents	Male (n = 52)		Female (n = 51)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Administrators, Teachers, and Students	4.54	0.64	4.34	0.73	3.982	.049*
Spaces	4.31	0.93	4.20	0.92	.598	.441
Processes	4.39	0.84	4.34	0.73	.182	.671
Policies	4.42	0.81	4.39	0.70	.065	.799
Programs	4.37	0.85	4.22	0.78	1.466	.229

Note. \*p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001.

The one-way ANOVA was used to determine if a significant difference existed in parents’ perceptions of school climate between females and males. It could be seen from Table 11 that there was no significant difference between all the subscales except for the administrators, teachers, and students (F = 3.982, P = 0.049). The female parents’ perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students (M = 4.34, SD = 0.73) was slightly lower than those of the male parents (M = 4.54, SD = 0.64).

Table 12. Parents’ perceptions based on Education level

Perceptions of Parents	Primary School (n = 3)		Secondary School (n = 48)		High School (n = 32)		Diploma (n = 18)		Bachelor (n = 2)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
	Administrators, Teachers, and Students	4.42	0.79	4.39	0.74	4.56	0.60	4.32	0.69	4.88		
Spaces	4.27	0.88	4.23	0.99	4.34	0.86	4.17	0.85	4.55	0.74	.247	.911
Processes	4.67	0.49	4.31	0.87	4.42	0.70	4.31	0.73	5.00	0.00	.812	.521
Policies	4.47	0.74	4.37	0.82	4.49	0.69	4.36	0.69	4.50	0.53	.233	.919
Programs	4.50	0.71	4.29	0.80	4.31	0.80	4.22	0.70	4.88	0.35	.312	.869

Note. \*p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001.

The one-way ANOVA was used to determine if there was any significant difference in parents’ perceptions of the school climate by their education level. Table 12 shows that when the parents’ perceptions of the school climate were analyzed based on education level, no significant differences were found on any subscale.

5. Conclusion

The present study findings agreed with various studies related to rural school climate. The current study revealed that rural schools could not establish a complete school curriculum. The findings of the study coincide with the findings from Toldson et al. (2006) which established that rural schools tend to have a narrower curriculum than other schools. Taneri and Engin-Demir (2011) reported that limited access to appropriate curriculum related materials would have a negative impact on students’ success. The current study also revealed that rural schools lacked teachers. The findings of the study coincide with the findings from Marwan et al. (2012) which established that rural schools consistently suffer from serious teacher shortage. Lack of teachers in basic schools grossly leads to poor student performance (Ramesh-Rao & Jani, 2011).

The present study findings concluded that rural schools’ toilets and school playground needed to be improved. Majra and Gur (2010) supported the current findings, that the environment and sanitation facilities at many of the rural schools are not fully satisfactory. Findings from Ching and Loke (2016) also concluded that rural schools’ environments were plain, lacking visual and physical embellishment. The present study findings concluded that rural students lacked mutual respect and care. Cohen and Geier (2010) reported that students who have a negative perception of the school climate and interpersonal relationships often face academic challenges and difficulties in schools. The present study findings concluded that rural schools’ programs had not been conducted very well and needed improvement. Extracurricular activities play an important role in the lives of students. They can improve behavior, school performance, school completion, to make successful adults, and many such social aspects. There is a need to be aware of the impact of extracurricular activities on education (Massoni, 2011). The findings in this study also revealed that there was a significant difference in parents’ perceptions of the school climate by gender. The female parent’s perceptions of administrators, teachers, and

students were slightly lower than those of the male parents. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in parents' perceptions of the school climate based on education level.

In conclusion, the government should send more teachers to small rural schools to establish a complete school curriculum, improve teachers' welfare by increasing their salary and providing good work condition, mentoring, and professional development to attract them to work in rural areas, and retain the qualified experienced teachers for rural schools. The government needed to continue to invest in rural schools in rehabilitating and renovating the existing building stock, increase, repair, and maintain of school infrastructure and facilities, improve students' behavior and school discipline to reduce school violence, and provide students with various extracurricular activities. Therefore, create a positive school climate to improve students' educational results (Demi et al., 2010), increase the teachers' efficacy and productivity (Pas et al., 2010), and improve parental involvement (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013; Lavenda, 2011).

Finally, it cannot be denied that the sample size of 103 parents from a selected rural primary school cannot lend weight to generalize the findings for all rural schools in China. Moreover, the data were only collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interview protocol. Both these instruments have their own limitations as respondents may provide the socially desirable answers. Nevertheless, the study identified the obstacles to a positive school climate in rural schools; the study has brought valuable insights to the existing literature. It is hoped this research could provide more insights for improving the rural school climate.

## References

- Bear, G. G., Yang, C., Pell, M., & Gaskins, C. (2014). Validation of a brief measure of teachers' perceptions of school climate: relations to student achievement and suspensions. *Learning Environments Research, 17*, 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-014-9162-1>
- Bodovski, K., Nahum-Shani, I., & Walsh, R. (2013). School climate and students' early mathematics learning: Another search for contextual effects. *American Journal of Education, 119*(2), 209–234. <https://doi.org/10.1086/667227>
- Carter, G., Lee, L., & Sweatt, O. (2009). Lessons learned from rural schools. *The Center for Rural Alabama, 1*(1), 1–37.
- Ching, M. Y. K., & Loke, S. H. (2016). A Preliminary Study of Educational Leadership in the Rural Context in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of University Education, 12*(2), 1–19.
- Cohen, J., & Geier, V. K. (2010). Cohen, J., & Geier, V. K. (2010). School climate research summary: January 2010. *School Climate Brief, 1*(1), 1–6. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0084-392X\(10\)79275-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0084-392X(10)79275-3)
- Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*, 180–213.
- Cornell, D., & Huang, F. (2016). Authoritative school climate and high school student risk behavior: A cross-sectional multi-level analysis of student self-reports. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*(11), 2246–2259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0424-3>
- Cornell, J., & Geier, V. K. (2010). *School climate research summary*. New York, NY: Center for Social and Emotional Education.
- Cripps, K., & Zyromski, B. (2009). Adolescent' psychological well-being and perceived Parental involvement: Implications for parental involvement in middle schools. *National Middle School Association, 33*(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2009.11462067>
- Demi, M., Coleman-Jensen, A., & Snyder, A. (2010). The rural context and post- Secondary school enrollment: An ecological systems approach. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 26*(7), 1–23.
- Goldkind, L., & Farmer, G. L. (2013). The enduring influence of school size and school climate on parents' engagement in the school community. *School Community Journal, 23*(1), 223–244.
- Gordon, M. F., & Louis, K. S. (2009). Linking parent and community involvement with student achievement comparing principal and teacher perceptions of stakeholder influence. *American Journal of Education, 116*(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1086/605098>
- Houtenville, A. J., & Hall, K. S. (2007). Parental effort, school resources and student achievement. *The Journal of Human Resources, 47*, 437–453. <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.43.2.437>
- Huebner, E., & Diener, C. (2008). Research on life satisfaction of children and youth: Implications for the delivery of school-related services. In M. Eid & R. Larsen (Eds.), *The science of subjective well-being* (pp.



- 376–392). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Johnson, B., & Stevens, J. J. (2006). Student achievement and elementary teachers' perceptions of school climate. *Learning Environment Research, 9*, 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-006-9007-7>
- Keiser, K. A., & Schulte, L. E. (2009). *Seeking the sense of community: A comparison of two elementary school's ethical climates*.
- Kelley, R., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate. *Education, 126*(1), 117–124.
- Konold, T., Cornell, D., Shukla, K., & Huang, F. (2017). Racial/ethnic differences in perceptions of school climate and its association with student engagement and peer aggression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 46*(6), 1289–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0576-1>
- Lavenda, O. (2011). Parental involvement in school: A test of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model among Jewish and Arab parents in Israel. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(6), 927–935. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.12.016>
- Lee, T., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). High suspension schools and dropout rates for black and white students. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*, 167–192. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2011.0014>
- Majra, J. P., & Gur, A. (2010). School environment and sanitation in rural India. *Journal of Global Infectious Diseases, 2*(2), 109. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0974-777X.62882>
- Marwan, A., Sumintono, B., & Mislán, N. (2012). Revitalizing rural schools: A challenge for Malaysia. *Educational Issues, Research and Policies, 172–188*.
- Massoni, E. (2011). Positive effects of extra curricular activities on students. *Essai, 9*(1), 27.
- Mayer, J. E. (2007). *Creating a safe and welcoming school*. Geneva: UNESCO.
- McCoy, S., Smyth, E., Watson, D., & Darmody, M. (2014). Leaving school in Ireland: A longitudinal study of post-school transitions. *ESRI Research Series, 36*.
- Mitchell, M., & Bradshaw, C. (2013). Examining classroom influences on student perceptions of school climate: The role of classroom management and exclusionary discipline strategies. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*, 599–610. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2013.05.005>
- Novak, J., Rocca, W., & DiBiase, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Creating inviting schools*. San Francisco, California, CA: Caddo Gap.
- Pas, E., Bradshaw, C., Hershfeldt, P., & Leaf, P. (2010). A multilevel exploration of the influence of teacher efficacy and burnout on response to student problem behavior and school-based service use. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25*, 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018576>
- Patrikakou, E. N. (2008). *The power of parent involvement: Evidence, ideas, and tools for student success*. Lincoln: Center on Innovation and Improvement.
- Perkins, B. K. (2007). *Where we learn: The CUBE survey of urban school climate*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.
- Purkey, W. W., & Siegel, B. L. (2013). *Becoming an invitational leader: A new approach to professional and personal success*. Atlanta, GA: Humanics.
- Ramesh-Rao, R., & Jani, R. (2011) Teacher Allocation and Equity in Malaysian Schools. *International Journal of Institutions and Economies, 3*(1).
- Ramsey, C. M., Spira, A. P., Parisi, J. M., & Rebok, G. W. (2016). School climate: Perceptual differences between students, parents and school staff. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research Policy and Practice, 27*(4), 629–641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2016.1199436>
- Rumberger, R., & Palardy, G. (2005). Does segregation still matter? The impact of student composition on academic achievement in high school. *Teachers College Record, 107*(9), 1999–2045.
- Smith, K. (2011). Cross cultural equivalence and psychometric properties of the traditional Chinese version of the Inviting School Survey-Revised. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice, 17*, 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t15393-000>
- Taneri, P. O., & Engin-Demir, C. (2011). Quality of education in rural schools: A needs assessment study. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 3*(1), 91–112.

- Tanriogen, A., & Ermec, E. G. (2008). *The relationships between teacher morale and student achievement*. In Symposium conducted at the forum Teaching to Learning, Denizli, Turkey.
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907>
- Toldson, I. A., Harrison, M. G., Perine, R., Carreiro, P., & Caldwell, L. D. (2006). Assessing the impact of family process on rural African American adolescents' competence and behavior using latent growth curve analysis. *The Journal of Negro Education, 430*–442.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2002). *Scientifically based research on teacher quality: Research on teacher preparation and professional development*. In White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teacher.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).