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## **The Relationship between School Climate, Engagement, and Academic Achievements among Students, Focusing on Fifth-Grade Classes in the Dukagjin Region**

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### **Abstract**

The school climate and its effects on academic performance have been a feature of policy debates in countries around the world. Consistently, international empirical studies have shown that a positive school climate (student-teacher relationships, disciplinary climate, teacher expectations, etc.) can generally improve students' academic performance. The purpose of this research is to analyze the connection between school climate, academic engagement, and the academic performance of students. The sample in this study covers 413 fifth grade pupils from primary schools in the districts of Peja, Gjakova, Deçan, Istog, Klina, and Malisheva. Additionally, this study seeks to prove that a positive school climate is a contributing factor to the level of academic engagement and achievement of fifth graders. From the numeric data presented, the mean school climate assessment score is ( $M = 97.70$ ,  $SD = 11.11$ ). Amongst the different elements of the school's atmosphere, the students' engagement is on average higher than all the other elements. Bullying has a lower average compared to other aspects of the school climate.

Through this research, we conclude that fifth-grade students perceive school engagement more highly, meaning they feel more connected to their school environment compared to other aspects of the climate, such as teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, set expectations, appropriate rules, school safety, and other relationships.

**Keywords:** school climate, academic commitment, academic achievements, students, teachers.

### **1. Introduction**

School climate refers to the overall spirit and way of life at school. It is experience-shaped and reflects the prevailing norms, aims, values, relationships, teaching style, and organizational arrangements that are present (Cohen et al., 2009). Research suggests that a

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positive school climate can lead to better academic performance, especially when there are high academic expectations and strong relationships between teachers and students. (Wang, Degol, 2016). Student engagement refers to the active participation of students, their motivation, and investment in their learning experiences, which play an important role not only in the educational aspect but also in individual personality development. When students feel connected to their school environment and have positive interactions with peers and teachers, they are more likely to engage in their studies (Amerstorfer, 2021). Academic achievement refers to students' performance in academic tasks, such as grades, standardized test scores, and graduation rates. A considerable number of studies have shown a positive correlation between aspects of school climate and organizational outcomes related to learning, such as creativity, initiative, and effectiveness. These climate dimensions were found to be effective predictors of creative performance across various criteria, samples, and settings. Furthermore, these dimensions were especially strong predictors of creative performance in turbulent, high-pressure, competitive environments (Hunter et al., 2007). However, on the other hand, there are relatively few mechanisms responsible for the connection between school climate, academic engagement, and academic achievement. This is due to the influence of various factors that may exist within the framework of the school's climate. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the idea of school climate as a fundamental construct supporting academic achievement and engagement can serve as a reference point in evaluating the performance of the educational system in Kosovo and beyond. We haven't come across any studies in Kosovo that look at how students feel about their school environment and how that affects their school work and grades. This study aims to find out how school climate, student engagement, and academic success connect for fifth graders. The research questions are:

1. What are fifth-grade students' perceptions of school climate?
2. How is school climate related to students' academic engagement and academic achievement? As a hypothesis, we have included the hypothesis: H1: School climate is positively related to the academic engagement of fifth-grade students and their academic achievement. This study is among the first of its kind and has implications for students, academic levels, non-governmental organizations, central and local levels, and the community at large.

## **2. Literature review**

As social and biological beings, humans, in addition to the fundamental needs discussed by Maslow, certainly have other needs that are also manifested. Education is one of the important components for individuals as beings, as it benefits them not only in terms of professional advancement and preparation for labor market needs but also in expanding their knowledge base, strengthening social cohesion, and building social relationships as a prerequisite for the development of a democratic society. In this context, education also encompasses school climate and the relationships among students themselves and between students and teachers, with the aim of achieving academic success. Studies show that the way a school feels can really affect how well students do. Things like safety and how confident teachers feel matter a lot. Also, how involved students are – like how they act, feel, and think—plays a big role in their success in school (Tomaszewski et al., 2024).

Furthermore, school climate positively reflects on students' academic achievements, although it is also influenced by a variety of other factors, whether external or internal. It should be noted that, according to the author (Boykin, 2023), Research shows that a good school environment really helps students do better in their studies (Geleta, 2017). School climate really matters how well students learn and do in school. A positive school climate helps create a good vibe. It brings people together, like students and teachers, and even students with each other. This connection helps everyone get involved and shows what the school does well. Consequently, studies have emphasized the levels of school climate, incorporating the influence of a variety of factors, as race, gender, religion, culture, demographic aspects, the profile of the teacher, and other factors undoubtedly play a role in creating the school climate.

Therefore, a positive school climate leads to better outcomes for both teachers and students. Students who feel good about their school environment are more motivated to learn. They feel like they can succeed and grow. They also enjoy learning new things and are more likely to be kind and helpful to others (Hanuliaková, 2015). In the Kosovar context, a variety of reforms have been developed in recent years by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation. These changes are not just about fixing up schools. They also aim to improve how students do in

class. It's about training teachers at all levels, from elementary to college. Plus, they're working on how to set up and run classrooms better to create a good school environment. This study looks at how the school climate affects student engagement and success in the Dukagjin region (Peja, Gjakova, Istog, Klina, Deçani and Malisheva), focusing specifically on fifth-grade classes and analyzing the variables of city, age, gender, and residence. Overall results indicate a positive climate within the schools, which influences not only academic achievements in school but also personal development. We can say that school climate theory refers to how the overall atmosphere of a school, as perceived by both instructors and students, influences educational success and student development. It includes various aspects such as staff and student morale, satisfaction with the school, and the psychological climate of the classroom.

### 3. Methodology of the work research

This is a quantitative study that included data from 413 fifth-grade students from primary schools in the Dukagjin region: the cities of Peja, Gjakova, Deçan, Istog, Klina, and Malisheva. The sample selection was done randomly, this aims to fully engage students from these municipalities and compare their perceptions and evaluations on the topic, including the influence of such factors as: demographic, social, ethnic, gender, municipal, etc. Regarding data collection procedures, the data collection for this study was carried out by students of the Faculty of Social Sciences and students of the Faculty of Education. As for the progress of the research, it involved several important phases. First, permission was obtained from the school director for the implementation of the research. Subsequently, both the students and their teachers were very cooperative and willing to facilitate the realization of this research. Second, the completion of the questionnaires was done in classes in a group setting. There was no refusal to participate in the research from the students' side. The measuring tools included a demographic section. This section asked questions about age, gender, where you live, your lifestyle, how many siblings you have, and details about your family. It also covered parents' jobs and education, family income, school performance, especially in math, and any extracurricular activities. The School Climate Questionnaire (Delaware School Climate Survey –Student (DSCS–S), which includes 30 questions. The responses to the questions are ranked from 1-4 (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree). This questionnaire includes 8 aspects of school climate: teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, engagement in school, specific expectations, appropriate rules, safety in school, and bullying. This questionnaire has been applied in many countries around the world and has shown high psychometric values. In our research, this questionnaire demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of .81. The data for this study were analyzed using IBM SPSS No. 26. Descriptive analyses were applied to assess the school climate scale and its subscales. Since the distribution of the data is non-parametric in this case, Kruskal & Wallis analyses (instead of ANOVA) were conducted to evaluate significant differences in school climate and its aspects according to municipalities (Peja, Gjakova, Deçan, Klinë, Istog, Malisheva). This research included data from 413 fifth-grade students from primary schools in the cities of Peja, Gjakova, Deçani, Istog, Klina, and Malisheva. Pearson correlation analyses were applied to assess the relationship between academic achievements, school climate, and school engagement (see [Table 1](#)).

**Table 1.** Description of the sample characteristics

Variable	N = (413)	%
<b>Cities</b>		
Peja	142	35.3
Gjakova	103	25.6
Deçan	93	23.1
Istog	36	9.0
Malisheva	18	2.5
Klina	23	4.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Girl	210	52.2
Boy	192	47.8
<b>Residence</b>		

Variable	N = (413)	%
Rural	267	65.2
Urban	146	34.8

**Table 2.** Results – Descriptive Analysis of the Level of School Climate and Its Aspects

Tab. 2	N	Mean M	Standard Deviation DS	Minimum	Maximum
School Climate	413	97.70	11.11	60.00	148.00
Student Engagement with the School	413	19.84	3.63	12.00	63.00
Teacher-Student Relationships	413	14.08	2.39	6.00	42.00
Student-Student Relationships	413	12.68	2.19	7.00	16.00
Appropriate Rules	413	13.28	1.96	6.00	41.00
Clear Expectations	413	13.41	2.63	4.00	16.00
Safety in School	413	9.93	2.76	3.00	52.00
Bullying	413	7.73	2.10	3.00	12.00

Descriptive analyses reveal the averages for school climate and its various aspects. The overall average score for school climate is  $M = 97.70$ ,  $SD = 11.11$ ,  $M = 97.70$ ,  $SD = 11.11$ ,  $M = 97.70$ ,  $SD = 11.11$ . Among the aspects of school climate, engagement with school has the highest average, whereas bullying shows the lowest average. Additionally, this research supports the hypothesis that a positive school climate is correlated with the academic engagement and academic achievements of fifth-grade students.

**Table 3.** Kruskal-Wallis Analyses of School Climate and Its 7 Aspects by Cities

Variable	Pejë		Gjakovë		Deçan		Istog		Klinë		Malishevë		Kruskall & wallis	p
	N	MR	N	MR	N	MR	N	MR	N	MR	N	MR		
School Climate	142	203.24	103	231.91	93	161.60	36	181.65	23	308.60	18	200.08	27.635	.000***
Engagement in school	142	210.52	103	217.96	93	217.96	36	173.11	23	272.30	18	245.47	21.089	.001***
Teacher-Students Relationships	142	212.85	103	216.82	93	159.16	36	205.17	23	281.20	18	191.50	27.540	.000***
Student-Student Relationships	142	210.70	103	226.93	93	159.15	36	169.69	23	288.75	18	217.42	21.350	.000***

Appropriate Rules	142	193.37	103	224.25	93	180.63	36	217.82	23	253.50	18	181.78	11.175	.048*
Clear Expectations	142	206.56	103	227.42	93	166.85	36	183.89	23	294.35	18	175.94	22.292	.000***
School Safety	142	195.55	103	234.01	93	174.46	36	188.42	23	271.85	18	189.22	18.414	.002***
Bullying	142	182.88	103	192.85	93	243.19	36	186.15	23	227.35	18	198.86	17.681	.003***
*p<.050, **p<.010, ***p<.005														

The Kruskal-Wallis H analyses indicate a significant difference in school climate values among the cities of Peja, Gjakova, Deçan, Malisheva, Klina, and Istog,  $\chi^2(3) = 27.635, p = .001$ . Fifth-grade students in the municipality of Klina reported higher and more positive perceptions of school climate compared to students from other municipalities. The table shows that students in Klina also had higher perceptions of other aspects of climate compared to students from other municipalities. The lowest perceptions of school climate were reported by fifth-grade students in the municipality of Deçan.

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlation Analyses for School Climate and Its Aspects, Academic Success, and Academic Engagement

	Academic Achievements	Engagement with School	Climate in school	Teacher-Student Relationships	Student-Student Relationships	Specific Expectations	Appropriate Rules	School Safety	Bullying
Academic Achievements	1	.068	.129**	.130	.074	.106*	.160*	.064	-.112*
Engagement with School		1	.774**	.476**	.376**	.398**	.494**	.280**	-.143**

Pearson correlation analyses show a positive and significant relationship between academic achievement and school climate,  $r(413) = .129, p = .010$ . Furthermore, students' academic achievements also showed a significant and positive correlation with the aspect of specific expectations,  $r(413) = .106, p = .034$ , and appropriate rules,  $r(413) = .160, p = .009$ . Conversely, a negative and significant correlation was found between school success and bullying,  $r(413) = .112, p = .025$ .

**4. Results and discussion**

This study found that a good school climate really helps fifth graders do better in their studies and stay engaged. These findings are consistent with previous results, which have concluded that

school climate is linked to students' academic achievements and academic engagement. On the flip side, research shows that a school where bullying happens can be scary for students. This kind of atmosphere makes it hard for kids to adjust and learn. When students are afraid of being picked on or left out, they are more likely to drop out and do badly in school (Mehta et al., 2013). When it comes to school climate, there's a clear link between academic success and having clear rules and expectations. These come from the structure that teachers set up. Additionally, the results of this study demonstrate that bullying has a negative correlation with academic achievements and academic engagement among fifth-grade students. These results are also consistent with findings made thus far in this field. It is worth noting that regarding aspects of school climate, our study shows that fifth-grade students perceive higher engagement with the school, feeling more connected to their school environment, compared to other aspects of climate such as teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, established expectations, proper rules, school safety, and other significant issues.

### **School Environment**

In recent years, school climate has been the focus of an increasing number of systematic empirical studies. School climate is one of the important factors that determine the success or failure of educational management. A good or conducive school climate can provide support or encouragement to the school principals, teachers, staff, and students to perform various activities according to their respective duties and functions. (Syahril, 2018). School climate is about what it's like at school. It affects how students learn. This includes things like the school's atmosphere, safety for students, and how involved everyone in the school community is. A good school climate means the school takes care of students' needs, whether that's their learning, feelings, behaviors, or mental health. What's school climate? It's all about how people feel and get along at school. It includes things like rules, goals, values, and how students and teachers interact. A good school climate helps kids grow and learn. This is important for them to lead happy, productive lives in our society (NSCC & CSEE, 2021). School climate is how students relate to each other and can show how they act in the community. When schools have a positive and stable climate, it helps kids grow and learn. It's important for a good life in a democracy. A positive school environment helps everyone feel safe and welcome. When people feel involved and respected, it makes a big difference. Students, families, and teachers should all team up to shape a shared vision for their school. Teachers help show how fun and useful learning can be. Everyone plays a part in making the school run well and keeping it clean. But, there isn't a clear agreement on what parts of school climate should be looked at for evaluation.

We looked at past studies on school climate and combined them with current research NSCC, the National School Climate Council and NSCC. There are five important areas to think about when assessing school climate. These are safety, relationships, social media, teaching, and the school environment. Each area has its own specific details to look at. Research shows that many educational agencies at federal, state, and local levels back policies to improve school climate. Having a good school climate is key for several reasons. It can help create a safe space and support positive outcomes for students in life (CMEC, 2021). Studies show there are five key things that help improve school climate: Safety: this includes physical safety, emotional safety, rules, norms, and bullying policies. Students and staff need to feel safe at school, both in body and mind. Clear behavioral expectations and the enforcement of rules help achieve this. Teaching & Learning: High academic standards, support for learning, professional development opportunities for teachers, and the use of interactive teaching methods promote student achievement. Relationships: Positive and respectful relationships between students, teachers, support staff, and families/community members build connections. Encouraging social engagement helps achieve this. Environmental-Physical: The physical surroundings, available resources and supplies, and the aesthetic appeal of the school building and classrooms also impact the climate. Institutional Environment: Factors such as leadership, student participation, collaboration, and morale contribute to the overall atmosphere. A shared vision and inclusive decision-making are important in this context (Lesson Bud, 2023). A good school environment helps students succeed in their classes. It also brings everyone together and makes sure no one feels left out. The development of a positive climate is a prerequisite for the holistic education of students and the continuous development of the pedagogical and social aspects of the school and family (Zuna, 2017). This development reflects not only in teaching or student outcomes but also in other psychological and social aspects. This shows



that a good environment helps students feel more motivated. It affects their social, cultural, and physical experiences. The findings showed that students who felt there was more discipline and order in school, along with better relationships with their teachers, had fewer behavior problems. This means a positive school environment can help reduce issues with students acting out. (Wang et al., 2010). According to Blum et al., (2002), Good relationships and solid classroom management are key. They help create an environment where all students can succeed, including those with disabilities. These strategies not only help students feel more connected but also cut down on behavior issues. They can also help close achievement gaps, lower dropout rates, and keep teachers in the classroom (CII, 2010). When institutional mechanisms exist, it is also easier to promote classroom climate, which then reflects in the relationships between teachers and the students themselves.

### **The relationship between school climate and academic engagement**

In numerous studies on school climate, there is a recurring question of how school climate is related to academic outcomes. Which specific aspects of school climate are linked to student achievements, and what is the mechanism underlying this relationship? Based on the study by Phuntsho, (2020), student engagement has long been recognized as one of the important factors in student learning and academic achievement. When students are really engaged, they tend to do better in their classes. This shows up in their grades and test scores. It also helps connect the school climate with how well students do in their studies. Meanwhile, in identifying directions for further research, Wang, Degol, (2016) argue that school climate should be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct and that specific components of school climate should be identified in relation to students' academic outcomes. They pointed out that earlier studies were too simple. They only looked at school climate from one angle using one tool and one source. Additionally (Phuntsho, 2020: 109) cite authors Wang and Holcombe (2010) found in their study that school climate was positively correlated with all dimensions of engagement. Furthermore, emotional engagement was significantly correlated with student academic achievement compared to the other two dimensions. These studies illustrate how school climate directly or indirectly predicts student academic achievement by influencing student engagement. They also highlight the mediating role of student engagement between school climate and student academic achievement. We can say that these studies show a correlation between school climate and academic engagement. In this context, both teachers and students play important roles, as cooperation and collaboration between both parties are needed to achieve results in the field of education. However, it is also significantly influenced by various factors, including demographics, geographical areas, gender, student personality, ethnicity, or other significant factors. Researchers think that how a school feels impacts things like student behavior, attendance, school size, and how happy teachers are at their jobs. According to Bryk and Schneider (2003), When schools make a good environment for learning, students do better. They often achieve more than you might expect based on their background. (Belton, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a connection between the creation of a positive school climate and academic achievements, which also serve as additional motivation for students to achieve concrete results.

### **The link between school climate and how well students do in school is important. We should look at this from different points of view**

Studying student engagement can help us understand how school climate and achievement go hand in hand. Some research shows that when schools have a positive climate, students are more engaged. Other studies suggest that when students are engaged, they learn better and do well in school. Thus, educational engagement fosters student effort and promotes personal academic success. Membership is successfully established when students form social bonds with peers or adult authorities within the school context. From this perspective, students who fail to achieve these two goals are at a higher risk of dropping out (Archambault et al., 2009). Student engagement is a key factor that connects school climate and student success. Knowing this helps us understand how a positive school environment can boost learning. For school leaders, this information is crucial. It helps them see if the changes they make in schools really improve how students engage and, in turn, their grades. By figuring out how different aspects of school climate impact student performance, we can find better ways to support schools and students. (Konold et al., 2018). Additionally, the relationship between school climate and academic achievement is significantly influenced by various important factors. Thus, the authors (Boykin et al., 2024) cite

studies related to this issue. The authors found that students who feel unsafe in class tend to score lower on tests. Those who felt safe did better on their math exams and didn't miss school because they felt unsafe. When kids are absent too often, it hurts their learning. Plus, it can impact other students in the same class. More research on student attendance was done by Van Eck et al. (2017) researchers discovered that students in schools with a tough atmosphere often have more absenteeism. In other words, when the school environment is not great, students tend to miss more days. The good news is that this works both ways. A better school climate can help boost attendance.

On the other hand, when measurement is a matter of perspective or perception, using assessments from multiple informants is considered best practice as a tool for capturing a range of viewpoints that can enhance the evaluation of a particular trait. (Bauer et al., 2013). School climate ratings can come from both students and teachers. But their views on the school might not be the same because they have different roles. For example, student engagement can be defined by three specific dimensions: behavioral, affective, and cognitive. Collectively, these dimensions represent the complexity of the student experience (Wang, Degol, 2016: 667). Similarly, studies by Ramsey et al. (2016) show that students experience schools as recipients of services; they are expected to follow the academic schedule and adhere to the rules of conduct within their school building. Conversely, teachers perceive schools as providers of services; their role is to deliver academic instruction, guidance, and discipline within their classrooms. While students and teachers engage with their school environment regularly, parents' experiences are more intermittent and less structured. Nonetheless, it is also noted from studies that school climate is positive when there is collaboration among the three parties: school, parents, and students. However, over the past decades, not only in Kosovo but also in other countries, there have been fluctuations in school climate, with periods of both decline and improvement. While in the past, school climate was under the authority of the teacher, thereby respecting a hierarchy in the classroom, it can no longer be said the same today, as a constructive climate now requires collaboration with parents and students. The National School Climate Council (2008) talks about how a good school climate helps kids grow and learn. This is important for a happy life in a community. A positive school climate includes a few key things:

- Norms and values that help everyone feel safe emotionally and physically.
- School members who respect and engage with each other.
- Students, families, and teachers working together to build a shared vision for the school.
- Teachers who show how much fun and rewarding learning can be.
- Everyone in the school cares about how the school runs and looks.

School climate matters a lot. When schools focus on being positive places, every student gets a fair shot at success. This helps them become caring and responsible adults. Good school practices also help students graduate. Graduates are more likely to lead happy lives. They care about others, take part in their communities, and know how to work well with others. This way, they can be valuable members of society (National School Climate Council, 2008: 2). More and more reports and studies are stressing how important a positive school climate is. It helps to reduce gaps in achievement and supports healthy growth. A good school environment also helps students build the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's world (Piscatelli, 2011) and improving teachers' job satisfaction by creating an effective learning environment for students. Therefore, in the context of creating and developing school climate, specifically in the classroom, the factors mentioned above clearly have an impact. Thus, each of the aforementioned factors represents a characteristic, as they are also key elements in ensuring an inclusive climate, thereby creating a physically, socially, and culturally warm environment that would, in principle, foster motivation for students and enhance learning outcomes.

## **5. Limitation**

This study is cross-sectional in nature, which limits its ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the study variables. Additionally, the factor of honesty in participants' responses when completing the questionnaires should be considered when interpreting the results.

## **6. Conclusion**

School climate should be considered an important aspect of students' academic achievements and engagement by policymakers, school management, and teachers. Attention is also needed on the phenomenon of bullying, as the results of this study indicate a negative relationship with



students' academic achievements. Future studies should take into account the examination of these variables, including students from different school years. This study is inherently multi-sectoral, and as such, it cannot assess causal relationships among the study variables. However, it is still a model that reflects data for a specific region, which includes schools from 6 municipalities with 413 fifth-grade students. Based on what we have elaborated so far, we have seen that the climate in the schools of the Dukagjin region shows that the Kruskal-Wallis H analyses indicate a significant difference in school climate values among the cities of Peja, Gjakova, Deçan, Malisheva, Klina, and Istog. Fifth-grade students in the municipality of Klina reported higher and more positive perceptions of school climate compared to students from other municipalities. The table shows that students in Klina also had higher perceptions of other aspects of climate compared to students from other municipalities. The lowest perceptions of school climate were reported by fifth-grade students in the municipality of Deçan. Additionally, Pearson correlation analyses show a positive and significant relationship between academic achievement and school climate. Furthermore, students' academic achievements also showed a significant and positive correlation with the aspect of specific expectations. Conversely, a negative and significant correlation was found between school success and bullying. Overall, this work, despite its limitations, with a small and representative sample, is nonetheless a model that can serve other stakeholders for future steps in the study. In conclusion, the study shows that school climate is correlated with students' behaviors and attitudes, as well as academic achievements. Outside and inside factors play a role too. These include things like race, gender, where you live, and your income level. These elements are important for making everyone feel included. They help create a friendly place where students feel comfortable. This can boost their motivation and improve how much they learn.

### 7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors say there is no conflict of interest, and they have properly credited all the sources used.

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None.

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