

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE IN CREATING A CONDUCTIVE AND ENJOYBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Keyword

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Abstract

School culture and climate are two fundamental pillars that interact in shaping the quality of the learning environment. Although these aspects have received attention in various educational policies, the implementation of school cultural values and the development of a healthy school climate still face several challenges, such as bureaucratic dominance, resistance to change, and the limited socio-emotional competencies of educators. This study aims to explore in depth the role of school culture and climate in creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment for students in Indonesia.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data were collected through a systematic review of relevant national sources, including scholarly books, accredited journal articles, and official policy documents published in the last ten years. The data were analyzed thematically and critically to examine the relationship between school culture, school climate, and the quality of the learning environment.

The findings indicate that a school culture that upholds values of collaboration, openness, and appreciation for diversity contributes to a school climate that supports students' psychological well-being and active engagement in learning. Conversely, a school culture that is closed, authoritarian, and bureaucratic tends to create a rigid and pressuring learning climate. Therefore, synergy between school culture and climate is a strategic key to establishing an effective, enjoyable, and meaningful learning process.

INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially not merely aimed at transferring knowledge but also at shaping character, values, and the cultural identity embedded within students. This aligns with the mandate of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, noble in character, capable, creative, independent, and responsible democratic citizens. In pursuit of these goals, the Indonesian government has continuously carried out various educational reforms, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes differentiated learning, character education, and the creation of student-centered learning environments (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, the success of educational policies does not solely depend on curriculum design and pedagogical strategies but is significantly influenced by the cultural and psychosocial aspects surrounding the educational process, namely school culture and school climate.

School culture can be understood as a set of values, beliefs, norms, habits, and symbols developed and upheld by all members of the school community as a guide for behavior (Putri, 2021). School culture is not a static entity; rather, it is dynamic, formed through continuous social interactions, and manifested in various rituals, routines, and patterns of relationships among school members (Nizari & Hamami, 2020). A positive school culture serves as an important pillar

in instilling values of togetherness, a sense of belonging, and pride in the school, thereby fostering an atmosphere conducive to achieving educational goals (Khasanah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, school climate refers to the collective perception of the school community regarding the quality of social interactions, emotional conditions, and the physical environment within the school (Widyaningrum & Mahmudah, 2019). A positive school climate is characterized by a sense of safety, justice, respect for diversity, open communication, and emotional support, all of which significantly influence students' motivation, psychological well-being, and engagement in the learning process (Dodent et al., 2022).

Several studies in Indonesia emphasize the importance of school culture and climate in creating a conducive learning environment. Nurizka & Rahim (2020) state that a strong school culture serves as the foundation for character development and influences learning behavior, discipline, and other positive student habits. Research by Putri (2025) reveals that a school culture valuing openness, discipline, and recognition of achievement has a positive correlation with students' intrinsic motivation. Similarly, a study by Yolanda et al. (2021) found that a school climate marked by warm teacher-student relationships, two-way communication, and effective conflict management significantly enhances students' comfort, encouraging them to be more active and confident in expressing their ideas during learning. Furthermore, the KPAI report (2020) indicates that schools with a negative social climate—for instance, those experiencing bullying, discrimination, or authoritarian teacher attitudes—not only lower students' motivation but also increase the risk of stress and psychosocial problems. These findings highlight that school culture and climate are not merely complementary factors but are fundamental elements that directly affect both the learning process and students' psychological well-being.

Unfortunately, the reality in many Indonesian schools still reveals a gap between the ideal concepts of school culture and climate and their practical implementation. Widodo (2021) notes that many schools treat school culture merely as slogans written in vision and mission documents but fail to internalize these values into daily behavior. Desired cultural values, such as openness, tolerance, or respect for students' opinions, are often hindered by bureaucratic leadership styles, one-way communication, and hierarchical traditions positioning teachers as the sole source of truth. This leads to a rigid school climate, creating distance and even fear among students to ask questions or express their views. Yet, one of the main prerequisites for 21st-century learning is active student engagement, which requires a warm and inclusive school atmosphere (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Moreover, various national reports continue to reveal high rates of bullying, verbal violence, and discrimination within school environments, indicating that the school climate has not fully become conducive (KPAI, 2020). The PISA survey (OECD, 2019) even shows that Indonesian students experience relatively high levels of anxiety related to learning compared to the OECD average, partly due to school climates perceived as unsupportive. This condition serves as a serious alarm that improving school culture and climate is not just a need but a strategic imperative to achieve effective and enjoyable learning processes.

This gap is the fundamental rationale for this study, which seeks to analyze more deeply the role of school culture and school climate in creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment within the context of Indonesian education. This analysis is not merely descriptive but also aims to be analytical and critical, with the hope of contributing practical insights for school management, educational leadership strengthening, and the development of educational policies so that the vision of schools as a second home that is safe, comfortable, and enjoyable for students can truly be realized.

METHOD

This research is a literature study (library research) employing a descriptive qualitative approach. The literature study was chosen as it is considered relevant for exploring, examining, and analysing in depth various concepts related to school culture, school climate, and conducive learning environments within the context of Indonesian education. The objective of this approach is to gain comprehensive conceptual and theoretical insights through a systematic review of relevant, credible, and verified literature sources.

Data collection was conducted through extensive searches of various scholarly sources, including academic books, accredited national journal articles, research reports, and educational policy documents published by official institutions. Searches were carried out using digital platforms such as Google Scholar, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), Neliti, and the Digital Library of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Keywords employed in the search included: *school culture*, *school climate*, *conducive learning environment*, *student learning motivation*, *educational leadership*, and *psychosocial factors in schools*. The literature reviewed was limited to publications from the last ten years (2015–2025), written in the Indonesian language, and focused specifically on the context of education in Indonesia, to ensure relevance and maintain the local context of the analysis.

The inclusion criteria for literature selection comprised: (1) publications originating from credible academic sources, such as accredited national journals and educational textbooks from academic publishers; (2) discussions focusing on topics relevant to school culture, school climate, and learning environments; and (3) literature presenting systematic data or conceptual arguments. Conversely, literature consisting of personal opinions in popular media, lacking clear academic foundations, or addressing educational issues in general without directly discussing school culture and climate was excluded from the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using a thematic approach, identifying key themes emerging from the literature related to the role of school culture and climate in shaping learning environments. Data collected from various sources were analyzed comparatively and critically by grouping similar concepts, examining the consistency or discrepancies among sources, and linking these findings to the empirical context of education in Indonesia. This process aimed to produce a theoretical synthesis that is not merely descriptive but also reflective and argumentative, aligning with the primary purpose of the research, which is to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how school culture and climate contribute to creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment.

Through this approach, it is expected that this study will not only present a summary of different perspectives but also offer significant theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educational management, the strengthening of school leadership, and policy-making at both school and government levels

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. School Culture as the Fundamental Basis of Learning Values

School culture is a set of values, norms, habits, and beliefs that shape the identity of a school and influence the behaviour of all its members. Arifandi (2020) emphasizes that school culture is an essential element that not only defines how a school is perceived by the community but also serves as a behavioural framework for teachers, students, and school staff.

A positive school culture facilitates the development of a sense of togetherness, discipline, responsibility, and pride in the school. Sulistiyono (2021) states that school culture plays an important role as a system of collective meaning that influences students' motivation and attitudes toward learning. Such culture should not remain merely at a symbolic level but must be implemented in daily practices—for instance, in communication styles, problem-solving approaches, and the establishment of policies related to rewards and sanctions within the school

2. The School Climate as a Determining Factor for Students' Psychological and Cognitive Aspects

School climate is a psychosocial dimension formed through daily patterns of interaction within the school environment, directly influencing the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of all school members. Istiqomah (2022) defines school climate as the collective perception of how a school functions, encompassing the quality of social relationships, communication patterns, and the emotional atmosphere it creates. A positive school climate is characterized by open communication, a sense of justice and safety, and the recognition of each individual's contributions. Such an environment not only fosters comfort but also boosts learning motivation and enhances students' active engagement in the learning process.

Halawa and Fensi (2020) emphasize that school climate has a significant impact on students' learning motivation, self-confidence, and participation in academic activities. A warm, communicative, and participatory learning environment encourages students to feel valued, heard, and confident in expressing their ideas freely. Conversely, an authoritarian, closed, and high-pressure school climate may trigger academic anxiety, stress, and hinder the development of students' creativity (Setiyadi & Loviansi, 2020). This highlights that school climate affects not only cognitive aspects but also emotional well-being—an essential factor in 21st-century learning.

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2020) also highlights that bullying remains one of the primary factors that damage school climate in Indonesia. The presence of bullying is not merely a disciplinary issue; it also reflects imbalances in social relationships and a lack of justice, empathy, and social concern within the school community. This condition has a serious impact on students' psychological well-being, diminishing their sense of safety and weakening their motivation and willingness to engage actively in learning.

In line with this, Adzkiya (2021) asserts that a positive school climate is strongly influenced by the leadership style of the principal and the teacher's ability to build humane interactions with students. She emphasizes that a democratic, respectful, and expressive climate helps foster a conducive learning environment, which not only improves academic performance but also supports students' character development. Therefore, building a positive school climate is an urgent need to ensure that schools truly become safe, joyful, and student-centered spaces that support holistic well-being.

3. Symbiotic Relations of School Culture and Climate

School culture and school climate are two closely interrelated elements that fundamentally determine the quality of the learning environment. School culture shapes the core values embraced by all members of the school community, while school climate represents the tangible manifestation of how those values are felt, practiced, and reflected in daily interactions (Arifandi, 2020). Schools that uphold values of collaboration, openness, and respect for diversity tend to foster a warm, inclusive climate that supports the creation of a joyful and engaging learning atmosphere. In contrast, schools characterized by hierarchical structures, excessive formalism, and rigid power dynamics often produce a tense and distant climate that limits student voice and inhibits active participation in learning (Setiyadi et al., 2025).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), in the Guide to Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, emphasizes that student-centered learning can only take place in a psychologically safe, comfortable, and enjoyable environment. A school culture that instills respect for differences, encourages active participation, and fosters confidence in students' potential is a prerequisite for establishing a positive school climate. In line with this, Ardiansyah et al. (2022) found that transforming school culture and climate requires visionary leadership and consistent engagement from all school stakeholders. The harmony between school culture and climate not only impacts students' cognitive development but also significantly influences their emotional and psychological well-being—key foundations for achieving meaningful and competitive learning in the 21st century.

4. Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Enhancing School Culture and Climate

Establishing a positive school culture and climate is a multifaceted endeavor that cannot be resolved solely through administrative policies. One of the fundamental challenges lies in the entrenched mindsets of school stakeholders, who often demonstrate resistance to change. Rigid bureaucratic practices, authoritarian leadership styles, and one-way communication patterns remain pervasive issues in many Indonesian schools (Gumilar & Munzir, 2018). Moreover, the substantial administrative workload placed on teachers diminishes their capacity to foster warm and meaningful interpersonal connections with students—an essential element in cultivating a conducive and engaging learning environment.

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2020) further highlights that cases of bullying and discrimination persist at alarming levels, indicating that the social climate in many schools remains far from healthy. The lack of adequate training for teachers in socio-emotional competencies exacerbates this problem. Yet, as Basith (2024) underscores, a teacher's ability to

establish emotional rapport and practice empathetic communication is critical for nurturing a positive school climate that safeguards students' psychological well-being and promotes their engagement in learning.

Consequently, strategies to strengthen school culture and climate must be holistic and involve every layer of the school ecosystem. Principals must adopt transformational leadership styles, articulating a shared vision, inspiring teachers, and fostering inclusive spaces for dialogue and participation. Teachers, in turn, should receive targeted professional development in empathetic communication, humanistic classroom management, and constructive conflict resolution techniques (KH Rasyidin, 2024). Equally important is the active involvement of parents and the wider school community, ensuring that efforts to transform school culture and climate are not merely imposed from the top down but become deeply internalized practices woven into the school's daily life.

As Furkan (2013) aptly points out, genuine transformation in school culture occurs only through the collective and consistent internalization of shared values. Therefore, strengthening school culture and climate is not merely a pathway to improved academic outcomes; it is a vital step toward creating learning environments that uphold human dignity, foster happiness, and nurture the holistic well-being of every student.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that school culture and school climate play a highly significant role in creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment. School culture serves as the foundation of values and norms that shape the behavior, social interactions, and mindsets of school members. Meanwhile, school climate represents the psychosocial manifestation of how these values are internalized and experienced in daily life. The relationship between the two is symbiotic: a positive school culture fosters a supportive school climate, while a healthy climate, in turn, reinforces the internalization of school culture.

National research indicates that schools with a collaborative culture, open communication, and respect for diversity tend to create a school climate that encourages student engagement, reduces academic anxiety, and enhances learning motivation. Conversely, schools characterized by authoritarian, bureaucratic, and administratively driven cultures often produce rigid climates that diminish students' psychological well-being and potentially undermine the quality of learning processes.

However, efforts to establish a positive school culture and climate still face numerous challenges, including resistance to change, leadership practices that are not yet transformational, and teachers' limited capacity to build strong socio-emotional relationships with students. Therefore, it is crucial to implement integrated strategies for strengthening school culture and climate through visionary leadership, teacher training in socio-emotional skills, and the involvement of all school stakeholders in the transformation process.

Overall, these findings underscore that school culture and school climate are not merely supplementary aspects of education but fundamental elements that determine the success of learning processes. The practical implication of this study is the necessity for education policies that place greater emphasis on transforming school culture and building a humanistic school climate, so that learning processes not only yield academic achievement but also foster psychological well-being, happiness, and the development of competitive and resilient student character in the modern era.

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