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# Professional Competence of Teachers and School Climate: A Conceptual Perspective

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## Abstract

This paper explores the conceptual perspective of professional competence of teachers and the school climate. Professional competence is explained in terms of professional knowledge, teachers' disposition, and their professional skills. Professional education courses in teacher training institutes play a crucial role in developing professional competence among teachers. These courses equip teachers for instructional planning, classroom management, assessment and evaluation and creating and managing a conducive learning environment. They also emphasize building a congenial relationship between the school and the community, aligning with various domains of school climate. School climate encompasses the cumulative experiences of students, teachers, and head teachers about different aspects of the institution. This conceptual paper conducts an extensive theoretical review of over 135 research articles on both professional competence and school climate, examining their concepts, dimensions, and measuring methods. Given the common factors of both the concepts, a conceptual linkage has been established. This paper aims to enhance understanding of professional competence and school climate and their interrelationship with various influencing factors.

*Keywords:* teacher training, professional competence, school climate, theoretical perspective

## Introduction

Teachers' competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a teacher possesses to effectively teach their subject matter to the students. It involves a range of qualities, such as effective classroom management, clear communication, and the ability to create engaging and effective lesson plans (Ahmad et al., 2017). It is said that a successful and competent teacher is not the person who has excellent subject command but the attitude and behavior with the profession, colleagues and with the students, he or she

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exhibits in educational institution matters a lot (Huang & Anyon, 2020). Such a teacher understands the individual difference and students' needs and relevant requirement. Samuseviča and Striguna (2017) are in opinion that combing professional education, training programs and field experience professional competence of teachers can be triggered. Continuous professional development (CPD) courses provide opportunities to the teachers to make them at par with the latest innovation and trends in the field of education and their subject of studies especially. That is the reason the teachers are encouraged to take part in professional development activities arranged by the department. They must also struggle to enhance their competencies in which they need improvement. There is a variety of platforms for this purpose self development. Professional competence of teachers is not only significant for the students growth and success but for the whole system of education (Ismail & Jarrah, 2019). This competence enables them to contribute more to teaching learning component and parallel to this in developing enabling learning environment for students (Aziz et al., 2014; Khan & Ahmed, 2015).

Going through professional development programs/course, they acquire necessary skills of planning and organizing teaching, which envtually help students to get better outcomes in their terminal examinations (Bilal & Chen, 2019). This professional competence enables teachers to use teaching methods and strategies according to the need and requirement of the subject and topic. It promotes the quality of critical thing and rationale writing instead of rote learning and memorization (Ghazi et al., 2013; Hakim, 2015). Just because, these professionally competent teachers have the basic knowledge and skills which they utilize in their teaching journey day by day and time to time covering all aspects of students development. Professionally competent teachers are capable of managing any disruption at class or school level in an effective way. The positive effects of all these efforts are basically the contributing factors of school climate. The researchers have added atmosphere, culture and physical environment as the factors which constitute the climate of and educational institution (Lenz et al., 2021; Thapa et al., 2013). All aspects including emotional, physical, psychological, interconnectedness of teachers and staff, regular compliance of official orders collectively make climate of the school (Bradshaw et al., 2014).

The concept of school climate is important because it affects both the academic success and the social and emotional well-being of the students. A positive school climate can lead to increased motivation, engagement, and achievement as well as improved mental health and behavior. Conversely, a negative school climate can contribute to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Thus, it has been proven that both concepts are interlinked.

Teaching is a profession, and like every profession, one needs to be professionally competent to perform his/her duties (Selvi, 2010). Teaching goes beyond the transfer of bookish material; a teacher must be skillful in managing the teaching-learning process for effective instruction. Professional knowledge, skills, and professional attitude make teachers a source of learning and establishthem as change agents for the students (Ahmad et al., 2017; Marraccini et al., 2020; Rizwan & Masrur, 2019; Rizwan & Masrur, 2018; Saleem et al., 2014). By applying professional knowledge and attitudes, teachers create a positive school climate that directly affects the students in multiple ways.

## Methodology

In the context of this review article, an explanatory research design has been used focusing on synthesizing and explaining existing research findings to provide a deeper understanding of a particular topic or phenomenon. This process involves defining the scope and research question, conducting a literature search and selection, data extraction and synthesis, extracting relevant information from the selected literature, including key findings, methodologies, variables studied, and theoretical frameworks used, and then organizing this information in a systematic manner to facilitate synthesis and analysis.

The review addresses following research questions:

1. What are the concepts of professional competence and school climate?

2. What are the various dimensions of Professional Competence and School Climate as highlighted in the existing body of literature?

3. What are the different methods and instruments to measure professional competence and school climate?

The systematic review pertains to professional competence of teachers who were teaching in high schools (till grade-10) level in line with their corresponding school climate.

Potentially relevant studies were identified and 300 documents were retrieved through different electronic databases including ProQuest dissertations and theses,ProQuest Central (Education, Psychology, Social Sciences, UK & Ireland) and Psych Info and Psych Abstract. The general search terms used to find the closest possible documents were, 'Competence OR teachers' competencies* AND "school climate" OR "School environment*" OR "pedagogical competencies*" OR "professional competencies" AND "academic climate" OR School culture* OR "classroom climate*". The documents found were limited to only publications in English language and published until December 2021. After thorough screening of all retrieved articles, and the removal of duplicates, finally 137 studies were included that met the criteria of the study.

After a thorough review of these articles, the criteria devised to discuss professional competence and school climate were divided into three major sections. In section I, the concepts of professional competence and school climate are discussed as referred by different authors. In section-II, different dimensions of professional competence and school climate are explored. In section-III, different methods of measuring professional competence and school climate have been explained. Literature showed that a variety of methods have been employed by the researchers under the umbrella of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ahmad et al., 2017; Aziz et al., 2014; Bear et al., 2018; Berg & Aber, 2015; Fefer & Gordon, 2020).

## Section – I: Concept of Professional Competence and School Climate

### Professional Competence

Until the 1980s the concept of competence began to permeate globally. According to Saeed (2009), teacher competence refers to the instructor's ability, skill, or capability to accomplish his/her work appropriately and to instruct effectively. Teachers' competency encompasses a collection of information, varied skills, understanding, beliefs, and attitudes. Competency is the capacity to perform well in a variety of situations, including unpredictable ones. Even if success can be assessed, there is no evidence that successful performance is indeed a reliable predictor of high levels of competence (Ghazi et al., 2013; Hakim, 2015; Jabeen et al., 2020).

In addition to this concept, competence can be described in two different ways. Firstly, a narrow view i.e., the ability to perform teaching tasks. Secondly, there is a broader view of competence in terms of a "psychological construct", requiring evaluation of the ability of the teachers to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills while teaching to be successful in their job. Competency is a description of a specific action, behavior, or result that a person should be able to demonstrate (Kunter et al., 2013; Mahmood et al., 2013).

Any professional must have the necessary experience, aptitude, and expertise in compliance with the fieldwork. Teacher competence is of great importance in the educational context,  as there is a strong positive relationship between teacher professional competence and the effectiveness of teaching (Gudmundsdottir & Hatlevik, 2018; Jabeen et al., 2020). Rychen and Salganick (2003) explained competency as the capacity to carry out difficult activities with ease, accuracy and flexibility. Selvi (2010) investigated other dimensions of teachers' competence on the values, behavior and teaching.

Taking a bird's eye view of professional education programs for teachers in Pakistan, it can be observed that these programs  equip prospective teachers with professional knowledge, skills and professional dispositions, collectively termed as professional competence (Mahmood et al., 2013). Competence refers to the capacity and capability to act effectively in a given situation.  Competency is measured by comparing actual job performance against the performance expectations established in the workplace setting. Competency pertains to a person's actual accomplishment in a given situation (Mulder, 2014). This suggests that before achieving competency, one must first demonstrate competence (Shafiq & Rana, 2016; Shah & Abualrob, 2017) and as a result, integrity qualifies an individual to carry out his or her job duties.

According to Goe and Stickler (2008), teachers' characteristics describe their competence. However, these are rarely measured in terms of students' learning achievement. Certaincharacteristics of teachers are unquestionable such as race and gender. Teachers who are punctual, share information, have subject matter knowledge, and show ownership of their students are seen as trustworthy and productive (Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020). Since the 1990s, the concept of 'competence' has gained popularity in areas requiring the integration of various skills and knowledge domains. When a

practitioner performs responsibly and efficiently in accordance with established performance criteria, he or she is considered competent. This practitioner also possesses ample integrity as compared to others. A competency is a subset of general competence. Professional competency is influenced by teaching experience (Ali et al., 2012) as well as intelligence, self-esteem (Bilal & Chen, 2019)  and it has a great impact on school professional development and learning environment of students  (Ali et al., 2020).

Teachers' competence is considered crucial for successful teaching and learning activities. It encompasses various aspects such as, teachers' planning, workplan implementation, assessment of the curriculum etc. Teachers' competence has been elaborated in a variety of aspects including research, curriculum, lifelong learning, social-cultural, emotional, information and communication technologies and environmental aspects (Selvi, 2010). Competence exerts special emphasis on teaching activities of prospective teachers including their abilities to evaluate and analyze (Ismail & Jarrah, 2019).

It can be summarized from the discussion that the capacity to perform well in the teaching-learning process is referred to as professional competence of teachers. The teachers' activities in school leave lasting impressionsin the minds of students,as these day-to-day actions contribute to the overall climate of the educational institution.

### School Climate

Till now researchers have not been successful in framing a single agreed upon elaboration of school climate (Cohen et al., 2009). However, many researchers (Lenz et al., 2021) defined school climate as "feeling, tone and environment". The focus of school climate is seen in terms of  views of school life as perceived by the stakeholders and comprises accepted beliefs, attitudes and norms,  interpersonal interactions, and all the actions taken, felt , seen by the people inside the school during the whole process of teaching and learning. It recognizes the physical, emotional, intellectual, and environmental aspects of school life. Since the 17th century, school climate has been identified as a crucial aspect in contributing to higher academic achievements of students. Extensive studies on school climate over the last two decades have lead to a deeper understanding of the importance of school climate  (Thapa et al., 2013). School is actually a

collection of many features which are interconnected and those features become the source of differentiation among educational institution. These features also frame the actions of students. The school climate is composed of shared beliefs and experiences among school staff and other stakeholders. Because of its connection to attitude and interpretation, the environment plays a major role in a school's overall composition (Yang et al., 2018).

Up to mid-1990s, the research in the area of school climate primarily focused on students and teachers separately. By the end of the 1990s, social scientists began to explain the term school climate in terms of attachment, bonding and connectedness. Reviews reveal various domains of school climate including, safety, discipline, academic outcomes, social relationships and school facilities. Extension of these dimensions was investigated by Wang and Degol (2016) which were concluded as order, safety, & discipline (perceived safety, respect for peers and authority), academic outcomes (recognition sense of academic ineffectiveness, academic norms and instruction, social relationships (teacher-student relationships, interpersonal relationships), school connectedness, school facilities (classroom arrangement, school decorations). These aspects provide further insights into the standards, morals, and prospects that sponsor the socio-emotional development of students. Now in section-II, various dimensions/factors/aspects as referred in literature, regarding both variables, will be discussed.

### Section-II: Dimensions of Professional Competence and School Climate

This section provides different aspects as investigated by various researchers. First of all, in the given table the conceptual diversity of professional competence has been explained. Then dimensions of competence and at the end dimensions of school climate have been discussed.

**Table 1**
*Dimensions of Professional Competence*

| Researchers | Dimensions of Professional Competence |
| --- | --- |
| Rauner et al. (2013) | The skill of effective instructional planning, its evaluation, its execution |
| Mulder (2014) | The skill to bridge the gap between theory and practice |

| Researchers | Dimensions of Professional Competence |
|---|---|
| Mousavi et al. (2016) | The skill of transferring knowledge and attitude. |
| Xinrong et al. (2018) | The skill of explaining the facts |
| Gudmundsdottir and Hatlevik (2018) | Adaptability with the climate |
| Bilal and Chen (2019) | The skill of effective communication |

The above data explain the ways in which competence helps professionals perform various activities in the field. And those activities are interlinked with different skills. It is evident from the research mentioned above that the professionals are required to analyze the facts, resolve conflicts, plan and execute duties, communicate effectively with students, colleagues, seniors, juniors and the community, maintaining adaptability to organizational changes. Literature has proved that competence aids in achieving these aspects. It can be summarized that when measuring professional competence, these aspects should be considered when enlisting the dimensions. Competence has been demonstrated through the application of knowledge and skills to get positive achievement (Mahmood et al., 2013).

Professionally competent teachers are expected to perform a variety of professional activities. A summary of various professional activities and their relevant elements performed by the teachers has been presented below:

**Table 2**

*Elements of Competence*

| Teachers' Professional Activity | Elements of Competence |
|---|---|
| Special | • proficiency in a foreign language at a level required for professionalcommunication |
| Social | • intercultural awareness<br>• the ability to communicate with different groups,<br>• cultural tolerance, acceptance of cultural differences |
| Social responsibility | • understanding of one's belonging to the global community |
| Personal competence | • tolerance, responsibility, initiative, readiness for intercultural dialog |

| Teachers' Professional Activity | Elements of Competence |
|---|---|
| Individual competence | • ability to work with sources of information<br>• developed critical thinking<br>• creativity |

*Note.* Source:(Kuldarkhan, 2016)

Quality instruction can be given by efficient and professionally skilled teachers. The teachers professional competence and students' learning is clearly highlighted in the following figure.

**Figure 1**

*Teachers Professional Competence and Students' Learning*
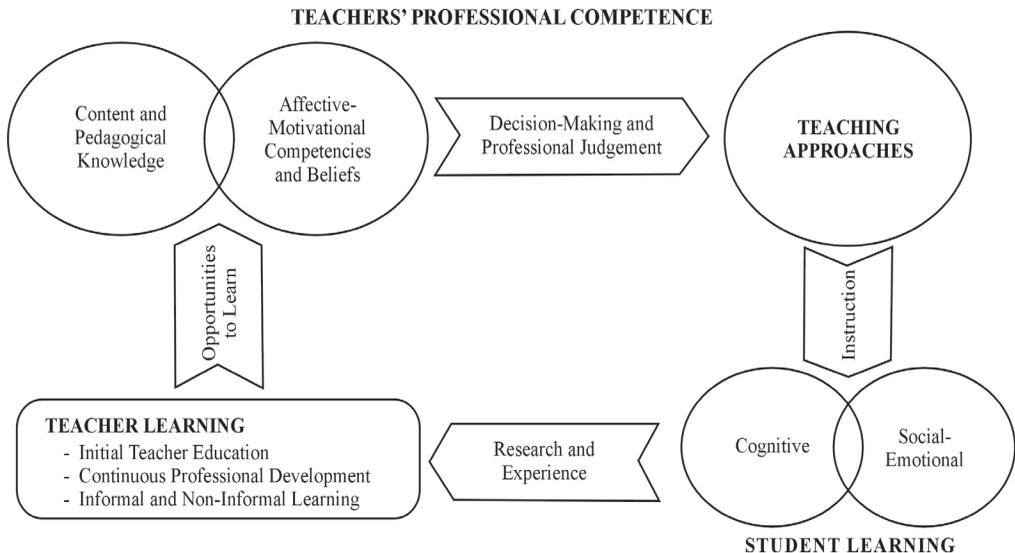


*Note.* Source: Guerriero and Reval (2017, p. 261)

***Dimensions of School Climate***

Every school possesses unique characteristics influenced by various psychological and structural factors. The climate of a school is shaped by uncontrollable variables such as its covered and uncovered area, geographical location etc. Such factors influence both the learning environment of students and the working environment of staff.

School climate is determined by many factors such as student characteristics , school resources, and teacher attributes. There is consensus

on the large aspects of the learning atmosphere which influence school climate including four dimensions:

- Safety
- Teaching and learning
- Relationships
- Institutional environment (Thapa et al., 2013).

Students' safety requires both physical and mental protection. Teaching and learning include aspects of classroom climate such as student performance indicators, social and cognitive learning and teaching (Hussain et al., 2019). The final component, institutional environment, encompasses aesthetically pleasing facets of the environment such as school building and the degree to which teachers and students work to keep the school in good condition. Discovering a school's climate is a vital step in implementing management plans and improving an organization's overall wellbeing. The overall environment of educational institutions has a direct impact on staff members' workplace satisfaction levels.

**Figure 2**
*Dimensions of School Climate*
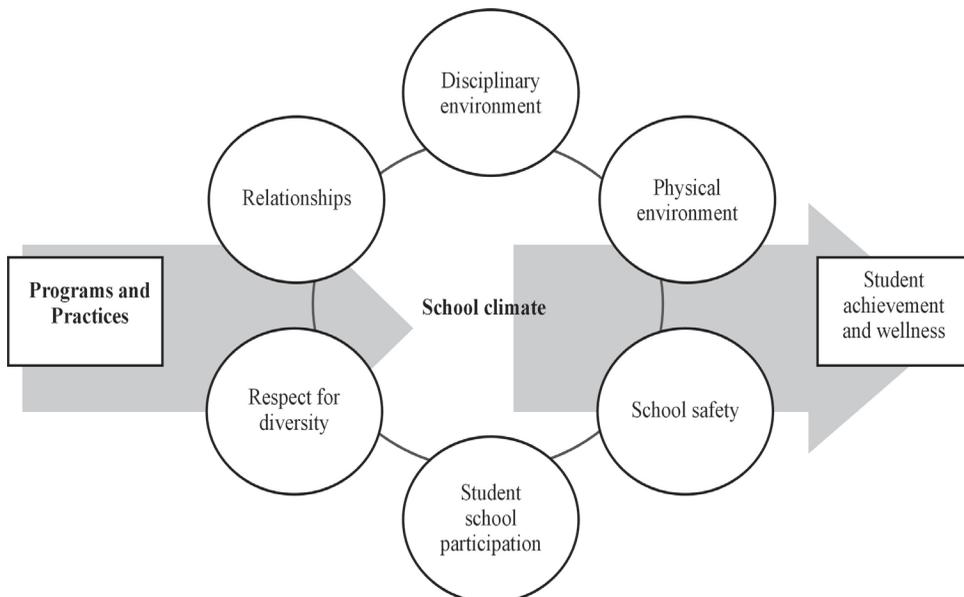


*Note. Source:* (Voight & Nation, 2016)

### *Physical Environment*

A school's climate is influenced by physical conditions. The condition of the laboratories, classes, rooms and grounds can evoke either positive or negative feelings among students and staff. Other aspects such as classroom arrangement and level of noise all affect the physical component of school climate. When learners and their instructors  perceive their school environment to be chaotic or substandard, students are less likely to succeed and achieve academic excellence.

### *Social Relationships*

Relationships of stakeholders within school significantly impact student performance (Bradshaw et al., 2014). Social features of the school climate can be categorized into psychological attributes and structural attributes including faculty, staff and students. The psychological characteristics include teamwork, confidence and transparency, teaching activities, and aspirations of students, parents etc. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering long-term engagement within school community, as they form those partnerships, and they  work together to increase student success and create a healthy learning environment.

Several studies have shown that a healthy school environment improves teachers' self-efficacy, fitness, and student performance outcomes. Furthermore, a positive climate fosters feelings of trust and respect while fostering common interests and convictions. Teachers who serve in schools with a supportive environment are more satisfied with their employment. A healthy school environment is essential for students to maximize their academic performance as well as their social and emotional success. The researchers discovered that the students' levels of empathy, victimization, and intellectual comprehension influence their interpretation of their interpersonal environment (Berg & Aber, 2015).

In samples of elementary, middle and high school students, the quality of an academic environment has been well established as a significant predictor of student performance. Instructional methods that boost student's academic motivation are challenging and include hands-on activities. Teachers communicate their expectations by presenting academic difficulties and emphasizing student growth and development. The umbrella of "community" covers the relationship among all the person present inside the schools during working hours  (Simons et al., 2017).

The community domain of school climate comprises four dimensions: interpersonal relationship quality, connectivity, diversity respect and community collaborations. The consistency, regularity and type of the interactions that occur inside the school: student-teacher interactions, connections among students, and networks among staff members are all examples of the quality of interpersonal interactions. Mutual opinions of support, trust, respect and compassion describe positive interpersonal interactions. School connection may be defined as students' collective perceptions of school connection and bonding, which indicate the school's capacity to inculcate a feeling of identity and connection in its students and teachers (Marraccini et al., 2020). The existence of cultural understanding and respect for everyone is referred to as respect for diversity. A school that values diversity treats all members to the same norms regardless of race, gender or religious affiliation. A good school-community collaboration is welcoming to parents and community people, and it supports the establishment of mentorship programs, community collaborations all of which can improve student achievement and behavior.

School safety refers to the degree of discipline of a school. The physical safety of a school relates to the level of violence, aggressiveness, and victimization present, as well as the steps taken to safeguard the protection of its students. The presence of caring and supporting personnel, and the absence of verbal bullying or harassment are all examples of emotional safety. O'Malley et al. (2015) investigated the degree to which a favourable school climate influences a student's capacity to meet the challenges in his or her family system. They found that a supportive school climate would help students succeed academically. If a bad school environment will have a short-term negative impact on student performance (Marraccini et al., 2020), it may also increase students' inclination to commit crimes as adults. School violence can vary from coercion to violent attacks, and it can lead to trauma, making it much more difficult for a person to respond to negative situations.
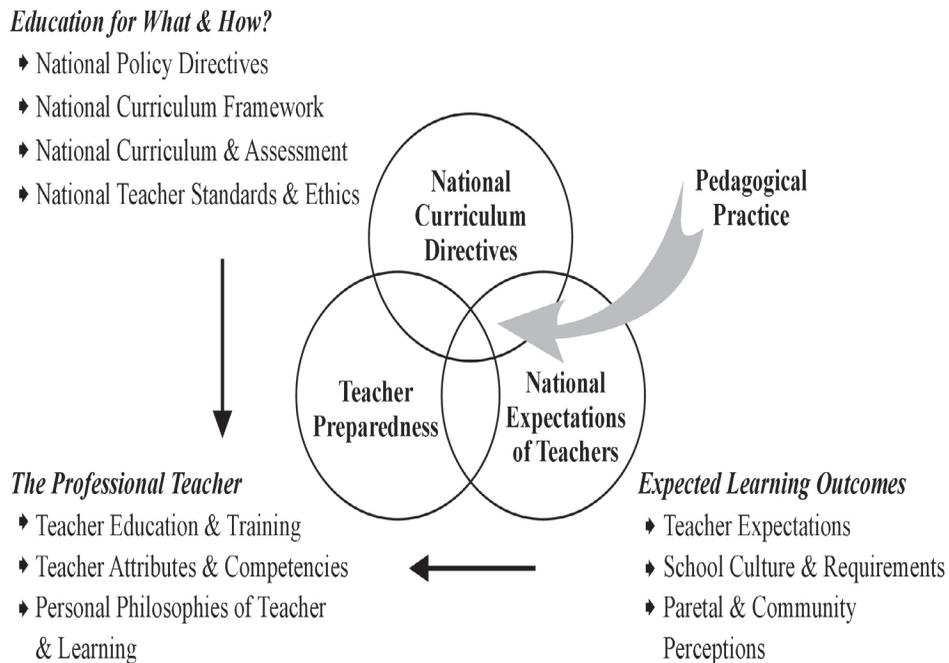
**Section III: Measuring Professional Competence and School Climate**

*Measuring Professional Competence*

Competence basically comprises of different competencies like expertise, abilities and values that a prospective teacher must contain for successful completion of a teacher education program (Ghazi et al., 2013).

To meet today's challenging situations, teachers must possess a diverse set of skills. Teaching competence is a core component of a good teacher training process, which ultimately contributes to the overall well-being of a country or the global community (Idrees et al., 2021). Professional instructors' teaching abilities and life-long learning capabilities include the ability to perform complex pedagogical tasks, effective communication skills, mental and physical health, stablity, tolerance, and a tendency to work with the younger generation, strong verbal and observational skills, tact, creative imagination, and leadership. A positive school climate is created with the help of professional competence of the teachers (Khan & Ahmed, 2015). The professional competency of the school staff contributes in overall climate of the school (Khan, 2018; Jabeen et al., 2020). Another author Koya (2018) has linked different concepts with professional competence that aids in comprehending and measuring the concept of professional competence of teachers. Following diagram shows that link:

**Figure 3**
*Concepts of teachers professional competence*



*Education for What & How?*
- National Policy Directives
- National Curriculum Framework
- National Curriculum & Assessment
- National Teacher Standards & Ethics

National Curriculum Directives

Pedagogical Practice

Teacher Preparedness

National Expectations of Teachers

*The Professional Teacher*
- Teacher Education & Training
- Teacher Attributes & Competencies
- Personal Philosophies of Teacher & Learning

*Expected Learning Outcomes*
- Teacher Expectations
- School Culture & Requirements
- Paretal & Community Perceptions

*Note.* Source:(Cresantia, 2015)

In Pakistan, the Ministry of Education (2009) framed National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPSTs) to gauge the professional competence of teachers.

| 1 | • Subject Matter Knowledge |
|---|---|
| 2 | • Human Growth and development |
| 3 | • Knowledge of Islamic Ethical Values/social life skills |
| 4 | • Instructional planning and strategies |
| 5 | • Assessment |
| 6 | • Learning Environment |
| 7 | • Effective communication and effective use of ICT |
| 8 | • Collaboration and partnership |
| 9 | • Continuously professional development and code of conduct |
| 10 | • Teaching of English as second language |

*Note.* Source: (Government of Pakistan, 2009)

The researchers have used both qualitative (interview, focus group discussions) and quantitative (observations, questionnaires) instruments to measure professional competence (Xinrong et al., 2018). But the choice of selection of the instruments is dependent upon the operational definition of professional competence the researchers used in their studies.

### Measuring School Climate

Measuring the climate of a school is indeed a challenging task. A single aspect may have such a significant impact on school climate, school administrators must be able to pinpoint exactly where there is a deficiency. Wang and Degol (2016) examined 297 empirical types of research. Literature pointed out evidently that researchers (Lenz et al., 2021; Huang & Anyon, 2020; Fefer & Gordon, 2020) have used interviews (qualitative tools) and questionnaires, rating scale, checklist etc (quantitative tools) to measure school climate.

Some questionnaires measure the organizational climate of the school, including the School Culture Questionnaire, and School Climates Questionnaire. The School-Level Environment Questionnaire has been used successfully in researches to measure school teachers' views of psychosocial aspects of school climate in Nigeria.The factors of School

Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ) have been updated so ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

The school size, teacher attrition, and teachers' experience were significant factors influencing students' perceptions of their school climate. Many national organizations have taken interest in school climate since research has shown a correlation between school climate and positive student outcomes. After reviewing over 200 sources, the National School Environment Center identified five common aspect that constitute a school's community: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the school improvement process (Thapa et al, 2013), three domains: safety, student involvement and the school atmosphere. Existing literature supports psychological characteristics of bullying victims and offenders, as well as the victim's response to the bullying, as general causes of bullying.

School climate directly affects school performance indicators e.g., dropout rates, absenteeism, truancy, and suspension. According to Thapa et al. (2013), the schools which lack good norms, students there are more likely to encounter harassment and peer victimization. Resultantly, school administrators must create a formal climate for students in order to maintain discipline. Schools with disciplinary policies that promote good interactions tend to have fewer behavioral issues.

## Conclusion

 The theoretical review gave insight into how professional competence and school climates have coinciding areas where they influence teaching-learning process in an educational institution. Research consistently demonstrates that both teacher professional competence and school climate have significant impacts on student outcomes, including academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. Understanding how these factors interact and influence each other can provide insights into effective strategies for promoting positive outcomes for students. The linkage of both concepts highlighted that professional competence positively affects the quality of teaching, students' achievement , teachers' performance, teachers' professionalism, and eventually school climate. Above mentioned aspects are only the factors contributing academic climate of school i.e. one domain of school climate. Professional education programs prepare prospective teachers for their

better performance in many areas which overall constitute school climate in terms of academic climate, safety, institutional environment, and community relations.

Researchers have found that some of the aspects are also outcomes of school climate i.e. causing lesser aggression and violence, reduces students' delinquency, and improving students' retention. The professional competence of a teacher includes his knowledge about subject, pedagogy, teaching- learning process and teaching experience. Different aspects of professional competence of teachers have been measured using a variety of methods and instruments (Xinrong et al., 2018). All types of knowledge should be adjusted in teacher education programs. Student's academic, behavioral, and psychological outcomes are influenced by school climate. Depending upon the nature and purpose of study, school climate can be assessed through a variety of methods (Bear et al., 2017; DoriO et al., 2020; Daily et al., 2019; Fefer & Gordon, 2020; Huang & Anyon, 2020; VanLone et al., 2019).

In the discussion, it has been revealed that professional competence causes positive effects on various domains of school climate. Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between teachers' professional competence and school climate. Effective teaching practices contribute to a positive school climate by fostering student engagement, motivation, and achievement. On the other hand, teachers' job satisfaction, moral and professional development is being enhanced by the motivational source of good school climate. Moreover, its concluded that with the help of strong collaboration among school stakeholders, building trust among them, and promoting efficacy among teachers can contribute to school climate, and the basic factors of these innervations for teachers' professional competence can be enlisted as counselling and guidance services, developing learning communities and professional growth of teachers in the area which they lack. The research in professional competence of teachers and relevant school climate indicates the importance regarding various initiatives for teachers from their pre-service teacher training till in service professional development activities. It clearly guides the policy makers and the concerned quarters regarding planning and managing tangible policy initiatives. Because professional competence of teachers not only effect teaching learning component but also the connectedness of all stakeholders within school and outside the school i.e. parents and community members,

and all this collectively contribute in developing school climate and stable culture. An encouraging school climate becomes the source of teachers retention, students engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities, promoting wholistic development of students personality.

## Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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