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Socio-emotional Climate of Schools as Predictors of Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students, gender-based differences in students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate, and educational aspirations. The socio-emotional school climate measure by using a self-structured 30-item scale with a five-point Likert response format, covering safety and security, teaching–learning environment, school environment, interpersonal relationships, and social and emotional culture. Educational aspiration is assessed using the standardised tool developed by Yasmin Gani Khan (2011), with dichotomous scoring of 0 and 1 and a maximum total score of 30. The data were collected from 255 students (138 boys and 117 girls) from five secondary schools. Pearson's product-moment correlation and independent-samples t-tests were used to analyse the data. Socio-emotional school climate was positively and significantly related to educational aspiration ($r = 0.202$, $p = .001$). The gender difference in socio-emotional school climate was not statistically significant ($p = .054$), and the gender difference in educational aspiration was also not statistically significant ($p = .676$).

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Introduction: Education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that does not solely depend on learning academic content and development of cognitive skills. Education equally contributes to social, emotional, psychological and interpersonal competencies of individuals. Schools, as institutions of formal education, are places where individuals develop their identities, build relationships, gain values and experience various aspects of social life. Hence, the quality of the educational environment affects not only academic involvement of students but also their sense of emotional safety, social adjustment and development altogether. The issue of school climate in this respect has been considered in educational studies as an important indicator of the quality and character of school life. Cohen et al. (2009) defined school climate as "the quality and character of school life, as experienced by its members". School climate, in this case, is not only determined by the physical environment of the educational institution but also by the social, emotional and academic experience that creates an educational environment.

As part of the larger framework of school climate, socio-emotional school climate is a crucial dimension, which is associated with the quality of social interactions, emotions, interpersonal relationships and the feeling of security and belongingness among students in the educational institution. This is a measure of the level at which students are accepted, appreciated, and motivated to engage in school activities. An environment that is conducive to socio-emotional wellbeing is associated with positive interactions between teachers and students, peer relationships, expression of emotions, mutual respect, and participation. On the other hand, a poor socio-emotional environment involving discrimination, bullying, exclusion, lack of emotional support, or negative interpersonal relationships may affect the students' ability to belong and participate in school life. In this connection, Thapa et al. (2013), in their detailed review of literature on school climate, identified safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment and school improvement processes as important dimensions to understand the overall school climate. Similarly, Wang & Degol (2016) have emphasized the multidimensionality of school climate and its relevance to the academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional outcomes of students.

Educational Aspiration is considered an individual’s expectation and ambitions with respect to the level of education they seek to achieve. Aspirations are considered a key motivating factor that can play a role in influencing choices, commitment, and future educational planning by an individual. According to Gottfredson (1981), using the theory of circumscription and compromise, individuals’ educational and career aspirations depend on their perceptions of opportunities and social constraints. Likewise, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) have emphasized the significance of achievement expectations and subjective task values that can help understand motivation and educational decisions by individuals. This shows that the aspirations of students are formed in the context of interaction between individual expectations and the society. In this regard, schools

could serve as the ideal platform where students form their confidence about their academic abilities, see opportunities for further studies, and form their aspirations for education.

The connection between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspiration can be defined via some dimensions. Safety and Security can give the students the psychological security needed to engage in learning tasks without being subjected to shame, discrimination and threats. Learning environment can affect aspirations because of teacher support, feedback and academic guidance that students receive. School Environment- school facilities and overall school environment- can influence students' perceptions regarding opportunities of studying and the importance of it. Interpersonal Relationships can help students build their aspirations with the help of positive teacher-student relationships and recognition as well as teacher's academic support. Social and Emotional Culture – empathy, cooperation, inclusion and mutual respect – can help students feel a part of the learning process and have confidence in continuing their studies. All those dimensions can be considered in analyzing the predictive relationship between socio-emotional aspects of schools and students' aspirations.

The importance of this relationship is especially relevant at the secondary level of education. Children who study in Classes IX and X are at a pivotal moment of their education since this is when they start making decisions about which subjects to choose, where to continue their education and in which direction to further develop their education. In this period of time, students' aspirations might be shaped by their academic performance, teacher encouragement, and peer contact and overall school environment. The secondary government schools in India cater for children coming from different social and educational backgrounds and thus represent a perfect setting for studying the link between school-related experiences and educational aspirations. The National Education Policy 2020 focuses on comprehensive development, equal education access, inclusion and creation of educational settings in which all children have a chance to reach their maximum potential (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite the existence of literature that has proven the multidimensionality of school climate along with its association with different students' outcomes (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016), there is a need for empirical analysis on the connection between the individual socio-emotional dimensions of school climate and the educational aspirations of students in the context of government secondary schools in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The exploration of the contributions of the individual dimensions of the concept can be better than the analysis of the entire construct of school climate.

Under the above backdrop, the current research entitled "Socio-emotional Climate of Schools as Predictors of Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Uttar Pradesh" attempts to explore the link between

the five dimensions of socio-emotional climate of schools and educational aspirations of secondary school students. The research is grounded in a quantitative study that includes 255 students including 138 male and 117 female students in ten government secondary schools of Chandauli district of Uttar Pradesh. Through the use of statistical methods to analyze the links and predictive values of various dimensions of socio-emotional climate of schools, the research aims to bring empirical insights on the various school-related factors that play a role in shaping the educational aspirations of the students. It is anticipated that the results obtained through the research would help understand the significance of positive, inclusive and emotionally responsive school environment in developing educational aspirations of the students.

Review of Related Literature:

It has been shown by previous studies that there exists a relationship between school environment and aspirations of education among students; yet, previous studies differ in the way school environment is perceived and the elements that are taken into account. For example, according to the study carried out by Cornell et al. (2016), who performed a comprehensive analysis of middle and high school students in Virginia, USA, student support and school discipline positively affect education aspirations. It shows how crucial it is to combine supportive relations with an appropriate structure of the school. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2016) discovered in their study of 1,027 middle-grade students that the factor of school support is significant for predicting school enjoyment and academic aspirations. Cornell et al. (2016) focused on disciplinary structure and student support in relation to school climate, Smith et al. (2016) paid more attention to the needs of development and school experience of students. Taking this research into consideration, Almroth et al. (2021) decided to investigate how pedagogical and social school climate relate to adolescents' academic aspirations. The distinction, in turn, becomes important in terms of the fact that it can be argued that the connection between school climate and educational aspiration varies depending on the source of the assessment and the specifics of the considered characteristics. Moreover, some evidence from Indian educational environment serves as an additional basis for studying this connection within particular institutional and regional contexts. So, Bashir and Kaur (2017), studying the relationship between school environment and educational aspiration among 400 secondary school students in Kashmir Division, found a positive correlation between these variables ($r = .346$). In other words, their results coincide with those obtained by Cornell et al. (2016) and Smith et al. (2016) in general, their research was concerned with the whole school environment rather than socio-emotional school climate dimensions. In addition, Bora (2016), considering the educational and occupation aspirations among 490 students of Class X in 12 provincialized secondary schools in South Kamrup, Assam, and studied school environment.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students.

2. To examine Gender-based differences in students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate.

3. To examine Gender-based differences in educational aspirations.

Research Hypotheses:

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students.

$H_0$2: There are no significant gender-based differences in students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate.

$H_0$3: There are no significant gender-based differences in educational aspirations.

Research Design

The study follows a quantitative, correlational and comparative approach. Pearson's product-moment correlation is used to examine the relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations. Independent-samples t-tests are used to examine gender-based differences in socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations. **The findings are based on empirical data collected from a sample of 255 students studying in government secondary schools.**

Sample of the Study

The sample was consisting of 255 students from five high schools. There were 138 boys and 117 girls in all. The gender-wise distribution of the participants across the five selected government secondary schools is presented in Table -1. Our study looks at differences between boys and girls and at how the variables in the study relate to one another. So we did not compare the schools against each other. That kind of comparison did not fit with what we set out to do.

Research Tools

Socio-emotional School Climate Scale: A self-structured tool developed by the researcher, comprising 30 items measured on a five-point likert scale. The tool covers five dimensions: (i) Safety and Security, (ii) Teaching–Learning Environment, (iii) School Environment, (iv) Interpersonal Relationships (v) Social and Emotional Culture. For the illustrative dataset, six items have been assigned to each dimension. Each item is

scored from 1 to 5, giving a possible total score of 30–150. The allocation of items across dimensions and any reverse-scored items should be checked against the final questionnaire.

Educational Aspiration Scale: The study uses the standardised tool developed by Yasmin Gani Khan (2011). As clarified by the researcher, the items are scored dichotomously: 0 and 1. The maximum possible total score is 30. Higher scores therefore indicate a greater number of items receiving a score of 1, subject to the official scoring key of the instrument.

Scoring

For the socio-emotional school climate scale, each of the 30 items is scored on a five-point likert scale. The total score ranges from 30 to 150, with higher scores indicating a more favourable perceived socio-emotional school climate, subject to the final scoring key and any reverse-scored items. For the Educational Aspiration Scale developed by Yasmin Gani Khan (2011), each item is scored 0 or 1. The maximum total score is 30 and the minimum is 0.

Statistical Techniques

The statistical techniques correspond to the three objectives:
(i) Pearson's product-moment correlation to examine the relationship between overall socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations;
(ii) An independent-samples t-test to examine gender differences in overall socio-emotional school climate; and
(iii) An independent-samples t-test to examine gender differences in educational aspiration. Statistical significance is evaluated at the .05 level.
Before analysing actual data, the distribution of scores and the assumptions of the selected tests should be examined.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All statistical analyses presented in this section are based on primary data collected from 255 students across five government secondary schools. The results represent the empirical findings of the present study in relation to its three stated research objectives.

Table-1 Total Sample of the study

School	Boys	Girls	Total

School A	27	22	49
School B	28	23	51
School C	29	18	47
School D	27	28	55
School E	27	25	53
Total	138	117	255

The study comprised a total sample of 255 students drawn from five government secondary schools, of whom 138 were boys and 117 were girls.

Table-2 Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum observed	Maximum observed
Socio-emotional school climate (30–150)	255	97.89	14.23	60	135
Educational aspiration (0–30)	255	13.12	4.26	4	26

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 show the scores and standard deviations for students on two measures. The mean socio-emotional school climate score was 97.89. Its standard deviation was 14.23. The mean educational aspiration score was 13.12. Its standard deviation was 4.26. These scores were measured on a scale that ranges from 0 to 30.

Objective 1: Relationship between Socio-emotional School Climate and Educational Aspirations

Table-3

Variable	Pearson's r with educational aspiration	p-value
Overall socio-emotional school climate	0.202	0.001

As presented in Table 3, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a weak, positive and statistically significant relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students ($r = .202$, $p = .001$). The positive correlation indicates that students reporting a more favourable socio-emotional school climate tended to have higher levels of educational aspirations. However, the magnitude of the correlation suggests that the association between the two variables is relatively weak. Since the obtained p-value (.001) is below the .01 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that there is no significant relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations, is rejected. Thus, the findings establish a statistically significant positive association between the two variables, although they do not imply a cause-and-effect relationship.

Objective 2: Gender-based Differences in Students' Perceptions of Socio-emotional School Climate

Table-4 Gender-wise Descriptive Statistics of Socio-emotional School Climate Scores

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Boys	138	99.48	13.80
Girls	117	96.02	14.57

Table-5 Results of the Independent-Samples t-test for Gender-based Differences in Socio-emotional School Climate

Test	t	df	p-value
Independent-samples t-test	1.937	241.3	0.054

The results presented in Tables 4 and 5 show the gender-wise comparison of students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate. Boys obtained a mean score of 99.48 (SD = 13.80), while girls obtained a mean score of 96.02 (SD = 14.57), indicating a comparatively higher mean score among boys. However, the independent-samples t-test revealed that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(241.3) = 1.937$, $p = .054$. Since the obtained p-value exceeds the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is not rejected. It may therefore be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their perceptions of socio-emotional school climate. The observed difference in mean scores is insufficient to establish a significant gender-based variation in students' perceptions.

Objective 3: Gender-based Differences in Educational Aspirations

Table-6 Gender-wise Descriptive Statistics of Educational Aspiration Scores

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Boys	138	13.22	4.23
Girls	117	13.00	4.31

Table-7 Results of the Independent-Samples t-test for Gender-based Differences in Educational Aspirations

Test	t	df (Welch)	p-value
Independent-samples t-test	0.418	244.7	0.676

As presented in Tables 6 and 7, the mean educational aspiration score of boys was 13.22 (SD = 4.23), while that of girls was 13.00 (SD = 4.31). The difference in mean scores indicates that boys had marginally higher educational aspiration scores than girls. However, the independent-samples t-test revealed that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(244.7) = 0.418$, $p = .676$. Since the obtained p-value exceeds the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{03}), stating that there is no significant difference in educational aspirations between boys and girls, is not rejected. Thus, the findings indicate that educational aspirations did not differ significantly by gender among the students included in the study.

Discussion:

The findings of the present study revealed a weak but positive and statistically significant relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students ($r = .202$, $p = .001$). This indicates that students who perceived their school climate more favourably tended to report higher levels of educational aspirations. Although the strength of the relationship was relatively weak, the result highlights the relevance of the school environment in understanding students' educational aspirations. A supportive school climate, characterised by a sense of safety, positive interpersonal relationships and a conducive teaching–learning environment, may provide conditions that encourage students to develop and pursue higher educational goals. This observation can be discussed in relation to earlier studies by Cohen et al. (2009), Thapa et al. (2013) and Wang and Degol (2016), which highlighted the importance of different dimensions of school climate in students' educational experiences and development. Similarly, Bashir and

Kaur (2017) examined the relationship between school environment and educational aspirations among secondary school students. The present finding adds to this discussion by indicating a statistically significant association between students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate and their educational aspirations. However, the correlational nature of the analysis does not establish a causal relationship between the two variables.

With regard to gender-based differences in socio-emotional school climate, the results indicated that boys obtained a higher mean score (M = 99.48, SD = 13.80) than girls (M = 96.02, SD = 14.57). However, the difference was not statistically significant (t = 1.937, p = .054). Although a difference was observed in the mean scores, the statistical analysis did not provide sufficient evidence to establish a significant gender-based difference in students' perceptions of socio-emotional school climate. This suggests that, within the present sample, boys and girls reported broadly comparable perceptions of their school climate. The finding also indicates that the observed difference in mean scores should not be interpreted as evidence of a systematic difference between the two groups.

Similarly, the comparison of educational aspiration scores revealed no statistically significant gender-based difference. Boys obtained a mean score of 13.22 (SD = 4.23), compared with 13.00 (SD = 4.31) among girls. The difference between the two groups was statistically non-significant (t = 0.418, p = .676), indicating that gender was not associated with a statistically significant variation in educational aspiration scores in the present sample. Although boys recorded a marginally higher mean score, the difference was too small to establish a statistically significant distinction between boys and girls. Thus, the findings suggest that both groups demonstrated comparable levels of educational aspirations.

Taken together, the findings indicate that socio-emotional school climate was positively and significantly associated with educational aspirations, whereas gender-based differences in both socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations were not statistically significant. These results suggest that students' perceptions of their school environment may be relevant to understanding their educational aspirations, while the observed gender differences in the two variables were not statistically established. The findings, however, should be interpreted in relation to the specific sample of 255 students drawn from five government secondary schools and should not be generalised beyond the study population without further investigation.

Major Findings

1. A weak, positive and statistically significant relationship was found between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations among secondary school students (r = .202, p = .001). This indicates that

students reporting a more favourable socio-emotional school climate tended to have higher educational aspirations.

2. The comparison of socio-emotional school climate scores revealed no statistically significant gender-based difference between boys and girls ($t = 1.937$, $p = .054$), although boys obtained a comparatively higher mean score than girls.

3. No statistically significant gender-based difference was observed in educational aspirations between boys and girls ($t = 0.418$, $p = .676$). The mean scores of the two groups were closely comparable.

4. The study was conducted on a sample of 255 secondary school students drawn from five government secondary schools, comprising 138 boys and 117 girls.

5. Overall, the findings indicate a significant positive relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations, while no statistically significant gender-based differences were observed in either variable.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations, along with gender-based differences in both variables, among secondary school students. The study was conducted on a sample of 255 students drawn from five government secondary schools, comprising 138 boys and 117 girls. Socio-emotional school climate was assessed using a researcher-developed 30-item scale based on a five-point Likert response format and comprising five dimensions. Educational aspirations were measured using the standardised tool developed by Yasmin Gani Khan (2011), consisting of dichotomously scored items (0 and 1), with a maximum possible score of 30.

The findings revealed a weak but positive and statistically significant relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations ($r = .202$, $p = .001$). This suggests that students who perceived their school climate more favourably tended to report higher educational aspirations. The gender-based comparison of socio-emotional school climate indicated that boys obtained a comparatively higher mean score than girls; however, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.937$, $p = .054$). Similarly, no statistically significant gender-based difference was observed in educational aspirations ($t = 0.418$, $p = .676$). Overall, the findings suggest that socio-emotional school climate is significantly associated with students' educational aspirations, whereas gender-based differences in socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations were not statistically established. The study highlights the relevance of creating a supportive school environment characterised by safety, positive interpersonal relationships and a conducive teaching–learning environment. Such an environment may contribute to students' educational experiences and

aspirations. However, given the correlational nature of the study, the findings do not establish a causal relationship between socio-emotional school climate and educational aspirations. The conclusions are limited to the students included in the study and should be interpreted within the context of the five participating government secondary schools.

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