



School Climate and Teachers' Commitment: A Case Study of Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships, between school climate and teachers' commitment. The study investigates the predictability of key dimensions of school climate in related to collegial leadership, professional teacher behaviour, achievement press and institutional vulnerability towards teacher commitment. The population of this study consisted of teachers from 5 National Primary Schools [NPS] in the Island of Penang, Malaysia. Quantitative data was collected using two [Organisational Climate Index (OCI) and Teachers Organisational Commitment (TOC)] adopted instruments which were modified to form the Questionnaire for this study and its validity and reliability was established. The data were analyzed to determine the overall openness of school climate in selected National primary schools in Penang, Malaysia and to find out the commitment level of their teachers. The study found that the level of school climate openness and overall teachers' commitment of the selected 5 primary school is high. As for correlation between school climate dimensions, the result shows that there is a positive correlation with teachers' commitment. The regression analysis showed that only professional teacher behaviour made a significant contribution to teachers' commitment.

Keywords: School climate, teachers' commitment, relationship, collegial leadership, teacher behavior.

1. Introduction

Happy schools are passionately good, academically can be productive, which makes schools to be vastly different from one another. The appreciation of schools with full features and requirement for both teacher commitment and student learning come in all styles and ideologies. This is relatively important to school's age and history, to the constituency the school serves, and to school's professed goals. Unhappy schools, on the other hand are often unhappy in similar ways. Schools which function as focused communities where unique values are important; schools where caring for each other is the norm; schools where academic matters count; and schools where social covenants are established to brings parents, teachers, students and others together in a shared commitment to the common goal and good are able to use the values of the life world in their work, as a result, do surprisingly well in enhancing student achievement (McGrath & Nobel, 2010; Smith, 2010).

A healthy school climate can be described as one with a strong academic emphasis and a principal who has influence with superiors and is willing to use it on behalf of teachers, conductively to promote development of teachers' beliefs that they can influence students learning (Personal Teaching Efficacy [PTE]). Thus, this is an inbuilt teacher' confidences that they can reach students only by getting the support of the organization which will help to manage and teach students in a productive manner. Hence, it is the learners, teachers and school heads that must create a humane school culture in which every one will have total hope and confidence in the school (McGrath & Nobel, 2010; Bear, et al.

2011).

The issue of one's commitment comes as a result of experienced responsibilities for the outcomes of one's work. If what is done depends primarily on the boss's orders, impersonal controls over work or the efforts of others, results are not attributed to one's own efforts. In these situations, at least subjectively accountability rests with others. Experiencing responsibility for success is highly motivating and conducive to continuing successful practices, whereas personal responsibility for failure motivates individuals to change what they do (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Changing teacher commitments should prove important in efforts to spread newly developed images of good teaching. Recent research suggest that good teaching is a complex undertaking that requires careful planning as well as the capacity to adjust one's performance according to student responses (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Against this backdrop, how the teacher's commitment can best be measured and reported is a question the researcher feels is important. Therefore the factor that constitutes teachers efforts to be committed is an interesting aspect to focus on by scholars.

Apparently, committed teachers may have strong psychological ties to their school, their students or their subject areas. Committed teachers should be internally motivated. Teacher commitment may be directed towards a number of entities; for example, to the occupation of teaching, to student success, to specific programs, or to the school as an organization (Alfassi, 2004; Smith, 2010). Of these, the teachers' commitment to their schools as organizations served as the focus of the present study. Schools can become effective when there are committed teachers. Thereby, creating a positive school climate (Peterson & Skiba, 2001) that can be a great help to build teachers committed. School heads and administrators need to know the factors that are related to school climate. A positive school culture (Ellison, et al. 2005) is the critical first step administrators need to create and sustain irrespective of the challenges of differences. Thus, school management should be responsible in playing a neutral role in creating a pleasant working environment for the teachers; hence, it would lead to improvement of students' behaviour and scholastic achievement.

With many years of educating the young, the researcher has become gradually more aware and interested in the way which school climate influences teachers' motivation, dedication and satisfaction in their work. Having taught in different grades and having the opportunity to explore the work of teachers and the impact they have within schools regarding various school attributes towards their commitment and job satisfaction, the researcher strongly believes that school climate has a major effect on teachers' commitment. In order to achieve these goals, potential of the teachers must be realized to the maximum. In this research the variable that would be predicted with the four dimensions of climate is the teachers' commitment to schools. Understanding the relationship of teacher's commitment to school climate is important source efforts to improve schools. In the interest of this research paper, the researcher has chosen the Organizational Climate Index (OCI) to measure the four dimensions of school climate, which are collegial leadership, professional teacher behaviour, achievement press and institutional vulnerability, an instrument developed by (Hoy & Hoy, 2003).

We always hear that the schools are not up to the expected standard or effective. One of the reasons could be the lack of teachers' commitment. In spite of the fact that much research had reported the need for establishing a school climate or environment which will be conducive to facilitate effective changes in school mechanism. This should be seen as an impact of positive school climate, influences on the behaviour and attitude of people in an organization. It is indeed useful and helpful for schools to reach, describe and define its climate in order to find out the factors that could be a positive influence or a barrier to school's effectiveness. The principal's perception towards the climate of the school frequently is not the same with the teacher's perception (Hoy, et al. 1990). To find out such a discrepancies, is not only finding whether the climate is open [Democratic in nature] or close [Autocratic in nature], healthy or unhealthy [to both teachers and students], but also to find out the root cause for the discrepancies in perceptions. Suppose, when finding of the high scores on teacher frustration would indicate that the teachers felt the administrative practices were held to heavy a hand. This can be a useful piece of information, but it would much be better if principals' can determine the actual of their frustrations.

This study will attempt to examine the predictability of key the dimensions of school climate in related to collegial leadership, professional teacher behaviour, achievement press and institutional vulnerability towards teacher commitment in the primary schools of Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organizational climate

One of the key factors that may influence employees' perceptions of involvement is organizational climate, this can equally be referred to as a bureaucratic organisational climate, considering if operational roles of bureaucracy. This is described as the totality of the inbuilt personality of school and it is viewed to a large extent to operate in an open or a close manner (Macionis, 2006). In another study, scholars posited that school climate and classroom management determines that skills, experience and relevant qualification do not always prove successful when personality and school culture do not match. By implication to have a perfect school climate which operational features will cover the school organisation, dealing with issues of the authority, teachers commitment to official designation and student academic development, both the quality of staff, environment and efficiency of the operational system have to be considered (Ellison, et al., 2005; Marshall, 2004).

Furthermore, results in a healthcare institution indicate that role conflict and role ambiguity are detrimental to commitment, while a participative climate, power, teamwork, reading professional journals, satisfaction with work and promotion opportunities, age level, tenure, and length of professional employment are positively related to organizational commitment.

2.2 Teachers' commitment

Considering the levels of teacher's commitment and attitudes to work, which invariably is the personality of the teachers and this count on the teacher and students relationship, burned out teachers are less sympathetic towards students, have low tolerance for frustration in the class room, and feel more anxious and exhausted. They develop fewer plans to improve the academic quality of their instruction and are less likely to challenge authority when faced with rules that keep them from teaching in ways they define as effective (Marshall, 2004).

Deci & Ryan (1985) expresses, experiencing responsibility for success is highly motivating and conducive to continuing successful practices, whereas personal responsibility for failure motives individual to change what they do.

Moreover, Abraham Maslow created a theory of his famous hierarchy of needs which consists of five broad categories. Out of them, researcher would just highlight on the esteem needs and the needs to actualize self.

The esteem needs: Maslow noted two versions of esteem needs, a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity, even dominance. The higher form involves the need for self-respect, including such feelings as confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom. Note that this is the "higher" form because, unlike the respect of others, once you have self-respect, it's a lot harder to lose.

2.3 Self- actualization

This is the level teachers need to keep in account. Maslow has used a variety of terms to refer to this level: He has called it growth motivation (in contrast to deficit motivation), being needs (or b-needs, in contrast to d-needs), and self- actualization.

These are needs that do not involve balance or homeostasis. Once engaged, they continue to be felt. In fact, the level of commitment would become strong when there is a continuous desire to do so.

According to Maslow, keeping with his theory up to his point, if you want to be truly self- actualizing, we need to have our lower needs taken care of, at least to a considerable extent. If we have a low sense of self- esteem, we have to be defensive or compensate. When lower needs are unmet, we can't fully devote ourselves to fulfilling our potentials.

Maslow hoped that his efforts at describing the self- actualizing person would eventually lead to a "periodic table" of the kinds of qualities, problems, pathologies, and even solutions characteristic of higher levels of human potential. Over time, he devoted increasing attention, not to his own theory, but to humanistic psychology and the human potentials movement.

2.4. Research on school climate

The position and impotence of school climate has clearly indicated that is multi-dimensional and influences many individual, including students, parents, school personnel, and the community. He noted that school climate, if positive, can provide an enriching environment, both for personal growth and academic success (Marshall, 2004).

Regarding the roles of teachers and administrators, Taylor and Tashakkori (1995) found that a positive school climate is associated with increased job satisfaction for school personnel (Cohen, et al.2009;

Smith,2010) In prior research, an analysis of the perception of parents, teachers, and students regarding the climate of their schools was conducted biannually in the United States from 1979 to 1982 and discovered that the climate of the school was a function of several school-related factors (Freiberg, 1983). These factors included leadership qualities of principals, teacher-colleague relations, parent-teacher relations, student-teacher interpersonal relations, student-teacher instruction-related interaction, school buildings and facilities, and student-peer relations.

The elements that comprise a school's climate are extensive and complex. As a result, researchers have identified the following factors that influence school climate are number and quality of interactions between adults and students, students' and teachers' perception of their school environment, or the school's personality, environmental factors (such as the physical buildings and classrooms, and materials used for instruction), academic performance (Kadhim et al., 2012), feelings of safeness and school size (Freiberg, 1998) and feelings of trust and respect for students and teachers.

3. Research Design

The researcher considered quantitative method more appropriate because it uses the survey in collecting data from a wide by selecting a representative sample of a large population as compared to qualitative method that uses case study, selecting few individuals, which in most cases will not represent the entire population. According to Gay, et al (2006) it would be effective to gather the necessary data through the use of instruments. The use of questionnaire has some definite advantages over other methods of collecting data. It requires less time, is less expensive, and permits collection of data from a much larger sample. As mentioned before the questionnaire is break up in to three sections. From a practical stand point, the selection of the method for this research is carefully taken in to account as to find the effect on the outcomes.

Apparently, the researcher believes that quantitative method is successful to gather the necessary data for this research through the use of instruments. Hence, quantitative research method minimizes the chances of personal biases.

These five primary schools have a total number of 485 teachers as of January 2008. This data was obtained from the education office. A total of 218 teachers would be the researcher's population as the correspondents in this research according to the figure below. From each school the sample will be selected as total number of 485 divided 218 times number of teacher from each school which gives the sample in table 1. However it is based on the table developed by (Gay et al., 2006). The table is determined the appropriate sample size for a given population size.

3.1 Research instrument

The researcher used questionnaires to collect quantitative data on the school climate and commitment of teachers. This will give the teachers a chance to indicate their level of involvement in several areas of school leadership as well as offered teachers the opportunity to indicate their willingness to school activities. In reviewing and reporting the data, the instrument the researcher has used plays a vital role.

In light of the need to carry out the research, the researcher administered a questionnaire which was divided in to three categories, where the first section (section a) deals with the demographic information and (section b) involves the instrument by Hoy et al. (2003) organizational climate index (OCI) with 33 items that relates the four dimension of the school climate, and lastly, (section c) is the instrument by Cevat celep (2000) teachers' organizational commitment in educational organizations which included 26 items and was used to measure organizational commitment.

Some word modifications have been done to the instruments without losing much of its originality. The items also utilized four likert-type response categories from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The organizational climate index (OCI) is an organizational climate descriptive measure of schools which was developed by Hoy, et al (2003). This is a revised version of organizational climate description questionnaire (OCDQ) developed by (Halpin and Croft in Hoy, et al. 1991). The researcher has changed 2 phrases connected with the conjunction "and" separately in to 2 items. Like, "the principal is friendly: as one item and "the principal is approachable" as another. The OCI measures the four dimensions of school climate which are considered to be as institutional vulnerability which deals with the relationship between community and school, the relationship between principal and teachers which is collegial leadership, professional teacher behaviour dealing with the relationship among teachers and finally the teacher, parental and principal press for achievement which is from achievement press.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Profile of the respondents

Out of 218 teachers from the selected five primary schools, 174 respondents responded well by participating in the research and completing the questionnaires correctly. The researcher did the follow up twice through telephone as well as by visiting the schools to collect the questionnaires personally.

Table 2 shows the respondents' demography in this study. Demographic variables that were measured from the respondents were their background in terms of age group, gender, years of teaching experience and highest academic qualification attained. The respondents' background was analyzed using descriptive statistics which involves frequency and percentage.

Of all the teachers answering the questionnaires, only 3 teachers (1.7%) are in the age group of 51 and above. This may be explained more likely that older teachers move into administrative positions. Similarly there are 6 teachers (3.4%) in the age group of 41 to 50 years. Surprisingly, the researcher highlights that most of the teachers fall under the age group of 20 to 30 years, 98 teachers (38.5%), which indicates that selected primary schools constitute a young set of teachers. However, those from the age group of 31 to 40 years make up 67 teachers (38.5%). As might be expected, majority of the respondents participated in the study are females with 156 (89.7%) in comparison to only 18 male teachers with 10.3%.

More than half of the respondents had taught one to ten years at their present school. The teaching sample was quite young overall. Thereby, majority of the teachers who have answered the questionnaires are those with the least number of years of teaching experience. There are 109 (62.6%) teachers who fall in the category, 1 to 10 years. Nevertheless, only 3 teachers (1.7%) who have the teaching experience of 31 years and above participated in the study. As for those from 11 to 12 years make up a total of 57 teachers (32.8%) whereas, 5 teachers (9.2%) with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience have answered the questionnaires.

Given that 76% of the primary teachers hold a diploma certificate or less, is cause for concern. It may be that provisions for upgrading programs of teachers are nonexistent or that not enough teachers can be accommodated in these programs to change the ratio appreciably. Furthermore, the few teachers who do get upgraded may either move into administration or into service in other educational levels.

For research question 1 and 2, all the data collected were aggregated since the unit of analysis is the school and not individual teachers.

4.2 Findings of research question one

What is the overall openness of the school climate?

As recommended by Hoy, et al. (2003), the data collected from the questionnaires are aggregated and scores were converted standardized scores with a mean of 500 and a stand deviation of 100. The formula used is as follows.

Standard score for collegial leadership (CL) = $100 (cl-20.75)/2.658+500$

First the difference between the school score (CL) and the mean for the normative sample (cl-20.75) 9s computed. Then the difference is multiplied by one hundred [100(cl-20.75)]. After that the product is divided by the standard deviation of the normative sample (2.658). Then 500, is added to the result. The process is repeated for each climate dimension as follow:

Standard score for prof. Teacher behaviour (PTB) = $100 (ptb-21.280)/1.520=500$

Standard score for achievement press (AP) = $100 (ap-20.80)/2.352 +500$

Standard score for institutional vulnerability (IV) = $100 (iv-12.417)/1.687 + 500$

The score is standardized against the normative data provided in a typical sample of high schools from Ohio (Hoy et al., 2003). The overall openness of school climate is computed using the following formula:

Openness: $(sds \text{ for } cl) + (sds \text{ for } ptb) + (sds \text{ for } ap) + 1000 - sds \text{ for } iv) / 4$

Table 3 indicates that 2 schools that are 40% have a very high level of school climate openness, whereas 1 school (20%) is high. The remaining 2 schools (20%) have an average and above average level of school climate openness respectively. This coincides with the result of general openness of school climate as reported in the standardized score in table 3 which shows a very high level of openness.

4.3 Findings of research question two

What are the levels of teachers' commitment among teachers in primary schools?

The results of the analysis are reported in table 4 and 5 respectively.

The analysis represents the overall teachers' commitment of 5 selected primary schools. This denotes that there is a high level of openness with means score value of 3.35 and a standard deviation score of 0.09 respectively.

Table 6 represents that all the selected schools of primary schools show a high level of teachers' commitment. Thereby overall teachers' commitment in the selected primary schools is at a high level.

4.4 Findings of research question three

Is there a significant relationship between the four dimensions of climate?

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the four dimensions of climate.

Table 7 represents that the dimension of collegial leadership shows a positive correlation with professional teacher behaviour ($r = 3.99, p < 0.01$) and achievement press ($r = .539, p < 0.01$). Teacher behaviour has a weak correlation coefficient indicates that there is a statistically significant linear relationship between the three dimensions. It also indicates that the more open the collegial leadership, the more open the professional teacher behaviour shows a strong positive correlation with achievement press ($r = .774, p < 0.01$). This shows that the more open the professional teacher behaviour, the more open the achievement press. There is a positive but weak correlation with professional teacher behaviour and institutional vulnerability. ($r = .338, p < 0.01$). Institutional vulnerability does not have a significant effect on collegial leadership ($r = .063, p < 0.01$). However, institutional vulnerability seems to show a weak significant relationship with professional teacher behaviour and achievement press. ($r = .338, p < 0.01$) and ($r = .324, p < 0.01$) respectively.

Thereby, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the four dimensions of climate is rejected.

4.5 Findings of research question four

Is there a significant relationship between the dimensions of school climate and the level of teachers' commitment?

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between the dimensions of school climate and the level of teachers' commitment.

The result shows that dimensions of school climate are positively correlated with the teachers' commitment. Collegial leadership has a very weak correlation with the teachers commitment level ($r = .240, p < 0.01$), where professional teacher behaviour shows a moderate correlation ($r = .569, p < 0.01$). However, achievement press seems to show a weak significant relationship with the teachers' commitment ($r = .162, p < 0.05$). Since, there is a significant relationship between the four dimensions of school climate teachers' commitment, the hypothesis is rejected.

4.6 Findings of research question five

Is there a significant relationship between school and teachers' commitment?

Ho3: there is no significant relationship between school climate and teachers' commitment.

The table 8, 9 and 10 indicates that there is a significant but weak correlation between school climate and teachers' commitment. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between and teachers' commitment is rejected.

4.7 Findings of research question six

Is there any significant predictor of school climate dimensions for teachers' commitment?

Ho4: there are no significant predictors of school climate dimensions for teachers' commitment.

In order to find out the predictors, the researcher used a regression equation as presented using symbols. $\check{U} = a + b_2X_2$; where \check{U} = dependent variable, A = intercept of \check{u} , $B_2 = b$ value and $X_2 =$ professional teacher behaviour.

The regression analysis of teachers' commitment on all school climate dimensions denotes professional teacher behaviour is the only variable which has made a significant contribution (r^2 change = .320, $p < 0.01$) for teachers' commitment. It explains that 32.0% of the total variance on teachers' commitment.

Yet, the other dimensions; collegial leadership, achievement press and institutional vulnerability failed to be predictors of teacher commitment. However, the hypothesis that there are no significant predictors of school climate dimensions for teachers' commitment is rejected.

5. Discussion

This study attempted to investigate the predictability of key dimensions of school climate related to collegial leadership, professional teacher behaviour, achievement press and institutional vulnerability towards teacher commitment. In order to find out this, the researcher tried to find out the overall openness of school climate, the level of teachers' commitment and the relationship between school climate and teachers' commitment and finally predictors of school climate dimension for teachers' commitment.

The researcher explored the research background in the context of the current situation in primary schools focusing on school climate and its relation to teachers' commitment. Based on the statement of the problem, the researcher carefully delineated the objectives of the study, research questions and the hypothesis that was tested in this study.

The main problem found was in spite of the fact that much research has been reported on the need for establishing a pleasant climate or environment to facilitate effective change mechanism in schools. The impact that positive school climate has on the teacher commitment is still unclear. Based on the results of the study, the level of school climate openness and overall teachers' commitment of the selected 5 primary school is high. As for correlation between school climate dimensions, there was a statistically significant linear relationship school climate dimensions, there was a statistically significant linear relationship seen between the dimensions. It was also determined that dimension of school climate are positively correlated with the teachers' commitment. However the correlations were reported as weak and moderate. Apart from this, there is a significant but weak correlation between school climate and teachers' commitment. The regression analysis shows that only professional teacher behaviour made a significant contribution to teachers' commitment.

6. Conclusion

This study would help teachers and school administrators to be sensitive to the climate factors that enhance teachers' commitment. Yet, sensitivity to factors that enhance teachers' commitment in schools may be critical in promoting the goals of school restructuring, besides promoting interpersonal relationship and academic achievement. The climate measurement tool can be used to identify discrepancies in perceptions between the school head and the teachers which will lead to improve teachers' commitment in schools. Hopefully this study can be used to help educators take a critical look at the aspects of school success and attempt to initiate change with fruitful success.

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Figure 1: Dimensions of organizational climate index by Hoy, Smith and Sweetland (2003)



Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study

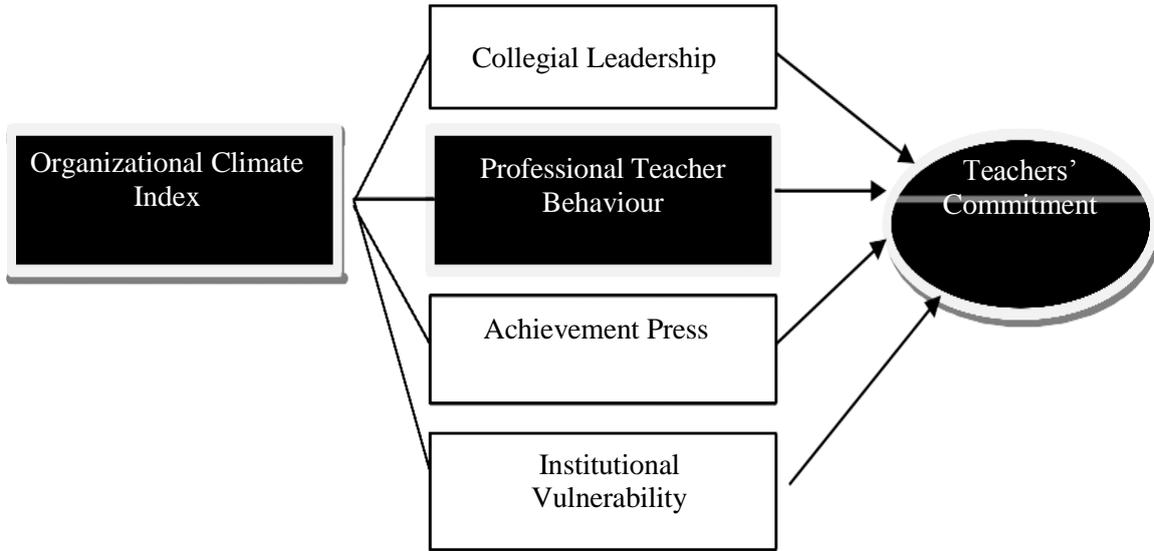


Table 1: Population and sample size for the research

School	Population	Sample size
A	104	47
B	98	44
C	113	51
D	83	37
E	87	39
Total	485	218

Table 2: Respondents' demography

Items	Frequency	Percentage	
Age group	20-30 years	98	56.3
	31-40 years	67	38.5
	41-50 years	6	3.4
	51 years and above	3	1.7
Gender	Male	18	10.3
	Female	156	89.7
Teaching experience	1-10 years	109	62.6
	11-20 years	57	32.8
	21-30 years	5	2.9
	31 years and above	3	1.7
Highest academic Qualification	Certificate	39	22.4
	Diploma	93	53.4
	Bachelor degree	28	16.1
	Masters degree	14	8.0

Table 3: Percentage of school climate openness

Openness	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	2	40.0
High	1	20.0
Above average	1	20.0
Slightly above average	0	0.0
Below average	1	0.0
Low	0	0.0
Very low	0	0.0
Total	5	0.0

Table 4: Level of teachers' commitment

Mean score	Openness
1.00 - 2.00	Low
2.01 - 3.00	Average
3.01 - 4.00	High

Table 5: Means, standard deviation and level of teachers' commitment

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of openness
Teachers' commitment	5	3.35	0.09	High

Table 6: Percentages of teachers' commitment

Level of openness	Frequency	Percentage
Low	0	0.0
Average	0	0.0
High	5	100.0
Total	5	100.0

Table 7: Pearson correlation between school climate dimensions

Climate dimensions	1	2	3	4
1. Collegial leadership		.399**	.539**	.063
2. Professional teacher behaviour			.774**	.338**
3. Achievement press				.324**
4. Institutional vulnerability				

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

Table 8: Pearson correlation between dimensions of school climate and the level of teachers' commitment

	Collegial leadership	Professional teacher behaviour	Achievement press	Institutional vulnerability
Level of teachers' commitment	.240**	.569**	.437**	.162*

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

Table 9: Pearson correlation between school climate and teachers' commitment

	School climate
Teachers' commitment	.461**

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

Table 10: Regression analysis to predict teachers' commitment based on school climate dimensions

Variables	B	B	R ²	R ² Adjusted	R ² Change	T	Sig
Constant	1.872					11.099	.000
Professional Teacher behaviour	.470	.569	.324	.320	.320	9.069	.000

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)