

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTION
OF SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ACHIEVEMENT
MOTIVATION AMONG KOREAN STUDENTS IN
GRADES 6 TO 12 AT A SELECTED
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN BANGKOK,
THAILAND**

JungSoon Han¹

Richard Lynch²

Abstract: This study was conducted mainly to determine whether there was a significant relationship between Korean students' perception of school climate and their achievement motivation level. The perception of school climate was investigated by a researcher-created questionnaire and achievement motivation was examined by a questionnaire developed by Turner (1996). The school climate questionnaire measured four dimensions: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationship and institutional environment. The achievement motivation questionnaire measured need for achievement based on McClelland's (1987) theory of motivation. Eighty-three Korean students studying in grades 6 to 12 at an international school in Bangkok in the academic year 2013 participated in the study. The findings indicated that the students perceived average school climate at a relatively high level. Also, the students had a relatively high level of achievement motivation. A significant relationship was found between the Korean students' perception of school climate and their achievement motivation level.

Keywords: Achievement Motivation, Korean Student, School Climate, Studying Overseas, Thailand

Introduction

The world is becoming closer and more competitive as a consequence of globalization. The process of globalization has created an international education market which has become highly competitive. Over the past several years, world-wide student involvement in study overseas has increased steadily (Hatakenaka, 2004). According to Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), almost 3.7 million tertiary students were enrolled in educational institutions outside their country in 2009. Chinese, Indian and Korean students comprise the largest number of international students (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Korean parents send their children to study overseas because they want to give them a better quality of education which will afford them a higher

probability of success in life. Kim (2007) reported that 35.5% of Korean parents were 'unsatisfied with the Korean education system which they perceived as being too competitive, rigid, and expensive. This led Korean parents to seek different systems for their children which would cause them less stress and encourage them to develop their own talents. Even though many Korean students study overseas, some 44% of Korean students who went to top universities in America ended up dropping out (Park, 2008). Korean parents continually try to find good overseas schools for their children in order to more effectively prepare them to be successful in tertiary education abroad. Therefore, the question as to which school is more effective in terms of the success of its students becomes a critical question for the parents.

Recent studies and models of school effectiveness have incorporated school environment or climate as one factor contributing to school effectiveness (McGaw, Piper, Banks & Evans, 1993). Positive climate makes for a school to which parents will entrust their children (Howard, Howell & Brainard, 1987). Overseas students face communication and cultural problems which they must overcome (Seo, 2011).

McClelland (1985) defined achievement motivation as a constant drive to improve one's level of performance, to accomplish success in the face of difficulties. He mentioned that personal goals controlling actions result directly from the strength of this achievement motivation (McClelland, 1985). Also Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) noted that it is advantageous for learners to find their personal interests in their study through achievement motivation.

Together, school climate and achievement motivation have been considered as critical factors which influence the success or failure of students' school life and determine whether they will study overseas or not. The researcher, therefore, was interested in these two variables: students' perceptions of school climate and their level of achievement motivation as they affect overseas Korean students.

Objectives

The study sought to address four research objectives and one research hypothesis as follows.

1. To identify the demographics of grades 6 to 12 Korean students at an international school in Bangkok.
2. To determine the grades 6 to 12 Korean students' perceptions of school climate at an international school in Bangkok.

¹ M.Ed. Candidate, Master of Education in Educational Administration, Assumption University, Thailand
joyful.ari@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, Assumption University, Thailand
richardlynch@alumni.usc.edu

3. To determine the level of grades 6 to 12 Korean students' achievement motivation at an international school in Bangkok.
4. To determine if there is a significant relationship between grades 6 to 12 Korean students' perceptions of school climate and level of achievement motivation at an international school in Bangkok.

The research hypothesis was derived from the fourth objective. There is a significant relationship between grades 6 to 12 Korean students' perceptions of school climate and level of achievement motivation at an international school in Bangkok.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past 30 years, there has been a growing body of research on the impact of school climate in the fields of psychology, human resource management and educational research. However, it is hard to define school climate as there is no common definition (O'Malley, Katz, Renshaw & Furlong, 2012).

Any given school is a complex organization. Organizational theorists have long stressed the importance of paying attention to an organization's climate. To be precise, the climate is the total environmental quality within an organization (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

Hoy and Tarter (1992) identified that a healthy organizational climate was essential for a school to be successful. Moreover, school climate was one of the most important components for a successful instructional program (Hoyle, English & Steffy, 1985).

The National School Climate Center (NSCC, 2010) developed a common definition of school climate, noting that school climate provides the quality and character of a school and reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, leadership practices and organizational structures among the patterns of school life (2010).

Although it is hard to give a simple, comprehensive definition of climate, it is possible to identify 4 dimensions: (1) safety, (2) teaching and learning, (3) interpersonal relationships, and (4) institutional environment (Cohen, Pickeral & McCloskey, 2009). As demonstrated below, these aspects are interconnected.

Safety: Feeling safe and secure is an essential human need and is also an important component of school climate (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2010). Safety includes several dimensions: emotional, intellectual, and physical. Examples are having a school crisis plan, having policies against bullying, and students' ability to resolve conflicts (Devine & Cohen, 2007).

Teaching and learning: Teaching and learning includes the school's curriculum, the learning objectives, materials and methods used—as well as the teachers' professional development and school leadership. Teachers are responsible for the classes and the administrators help teachers to develop their teaching and learning practices and activities. Well-designed and implemented curricula

affect students' attitudes and their academic achievement. Thus, improving the school climate in terms of teaching and learning is vital for students' academic success (Murphy & Louis, 1999; Rowan, 1994).

Interpersonal relationships: Relationships include the ways that individuals interact with and connect with each other. Lee, Bryk & Smith (1993) noted that teachers and administrators are associated with positive outcomes in terms of organizational effectiveness. In addition, in terms of teacher-student relations, there are positive motivational outcomes if students feel the concern, care, support, and respect of the teachers (Calabrese & Poe, 1990).

Institutional environment (sense of belonging): Institutional environment includes school buildings and facilities. It also includes individuals' feelings that they belong to a school as an organization and that they are committed to the schools' goals and values. An effective relationship involves reciprocity such that the school or its representatives care about and concern about the individual members of the school community (Calabrese & Poe, 1990). Lee et al., (1993) noted that schools where the administration, faculty, and students seem to demonstrate mutual respect and concern for each other demonstrate positive outcomes for teachers and students. Literature reporting on students who are at risk and those who drop out also suggests that the absence of teachers' concern and care is a major factor mentioned by students who leave school (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Lee et al., 1993; Natriello, 1986). Sánchez, Colón, and Esparza (2005) found that the school climate dimension of institutional environment included a sense of belongingness that significantly predicted academic outcomes, influencing motivation, effort, and school attendance. Deci and Ryan (1985) also proposed that all individuals have a basic need to feel a sense of belongingness or relatedness which results in more intrinsic motivation and engagement in organization.

Achievement motivation is related to students' choice of learning goals, their participation in learning activities and their learning outcomes, which are related to Maslow's top level of personal growth (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). Hirase (2000) and Erpelding (1999) found that schools with positive climate also had a higher relationship between students' higher academic achievement motivation and their grades. Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1997) also found that school climate was among the top influences in driving improved student achievement. The positive perception of school climate generated a positive attitude toward school generally and fed into the personal attitude to complete their own goals as achievement motivation (Pepper & Thomas, 2001).

According to the McClelland (1985), achievement motivation (n-Ach) is the desire to succeed in competition with others. It encourages people to complete their work with high standards.

McClelland (1987) argued that human motivation was a combination of both person and situation. Achievement

needs theory attempts to explain and predict behavior and performance based on an individual's needs. Furthermore, a person's needs interact with the environment (McClelland, 1958). Additionally, McClelland identified three types of the needs that people develop and acquire from their life experiences: need for achievement (n-ach), need for affiliation (n-affil), and need for power (n-pow).

Need for achievement (n-ach): N-ach is the need to be successful. N-ach people have a high need for achievement and they seek challenging goals. They are eager to get feedback for their achievement and progress, and have a strong sense of accomplishment. They enjoy carrying out their personal responsibilities to find solutions to solve the problems. Moreover, they like to make things better. This is indicated by a willingness to compete with a standard of excellence as a guideline to evaluate personal performance.

Need for affiliation (n-affil): N-affil people are people-oriented. They have a need for friendly relationships and are motivated towards interaction with other people. The affiliation driver produces motivation for and need to be liked and held in popular regard. These people prefer to be team players and tend to think often about the quality of their relationships (McClelland, 1985).

Need for power (n-pow): N-pow people seek authority. The characteristics of a person with a high need for power are control and influence. They prefer to win arguments, to persuade others, to prevail, and to obtain positions where they can exert influence. They like to have an effect on other people through their direction and command. Also, they have a strong need for leading other people with their own ideas (McClelland, 1987).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is shown in the Figure 1. It shows the hypothesized relationship between variables. The primary variable is students' perception of school climate which consists of four dimensions: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and institutional environment. And the other variable is Korean students' achievement motivation level (Figure 1).

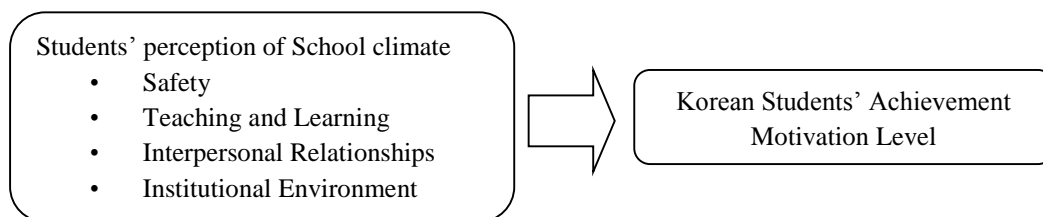


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Method/Procedure

Participants

The research participants of this study were 91 Korean students in grades 6 to 12 at an international School in Bangkok in the academic year 2013.

Instrumentation

This study utilized a quantitative design employing a questionnaire to identify selected demographic variables and to investigate the perceptions of school climate and level of achievement motivation of the respondents.

The scale used to measure the students' perceptions of school climate was researcher-designed and based on 4 dimensions of school climate: (1) safety (5 items), (2) teaching and learning (5 items), (3) interpersonal relationships (5 items), and (4) institutional environment (5 items) (Cohen et al., 2009). The scale used to measure the students' level of achievement motivation was developed by Turner (1996). Turner's items followed McClelland's (1958) motivational theory with a total of 15 items, 5 each for each of McClelland's dimensions of motivation: the need for achievement, the need for affiliation and the need for power. Since this research was only interested in measuring the need for achievement (n-Ach), only the 5 achievement motivation items were used.

The content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by four experts with at least 5 years' experience as teachers or educational administrators. According to their comments and suggestions, some items were grammatically changed and some words were replaced. After the validity of the questionnaire had been approved, the researcher did a tryout of the questionnaire involving 20 respondents similar to the intended respondents in the main study to compute the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed for each school climate dimensions of the questionnaire. The results were showed as follows:

Findings/Results

Based upon the study objectives, there were four main findings. There were also three additional findings based upon the collected data which the researcher determined to be of importance. The main and additional findings are presented below.

(See Table 1 on the next page)

Main Findings

- 49 % of the respondents had studied overseas between 10 and 12 years and 13 % of the respondents had studied between 1 and 3 years in the selected international school in Bangkok.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Results

	Valuables	Alpha Coefficient	
		Turner's study	Try Out
School climate Dimensions	Safety 5 items		.62
	Teaching and learning 5 items		.79
	Interpersonal relationship 5 items		.66
	Institutional environment 5 items		.69
	Total 20 items		.90
Achievement Motivation	Need for achievement	.89	.72

- Overall, the respondents mean of perception of school climate was 60.29, exhibited a relatively high level of perception of school climate.
- The respondents possessed 15.24 as a relatively high level of achievement motivation.
- The resulting data was that $r = .305$ and sig. was $.005$. There was a medium positive significant relationship between perceptions of school climate and the level of achievement motivation.

Additional Findings

These findings were not specifically derived from the four main stated research objectives, the researcher found meaningful information which was valuable in understanding issues related to the study with greater depth and precision.

- In perception of school climate, t was $.470$, and Sig (2-tailed) was $.639$, which was greater than $.05$. With achievement motivation, t was $.720$ and Sig (2-tailed) was $.474$, which was greater than $.05$. There was no significant difference between the perceptions of school climate and both achievement motivation and gender.
- The school climate dimensions; safety ($r = .303$, sig= $.005$), teaching and learning ($r = .221$, sig= $.045$), and interpersonal relationship ($r = .282$, sig= $.010$) have a significant relationship with achievement motivation.
- For institutional environment $r = .213$, Sig = $.53$, which was higher than $.05$. No significant relationship was found between the school climate dimension of institutional environment and achievement motivation.

Discussion

The study found that the perceptions of school climate among grades 6 to 12 Korean students were relatively high. In this study there were 4 dimensions of school climate; (1) safety, (2) teaching and learning, (3) interpersonal relationships, and (4) institutional environment (Cohen et al., 2009). Feeling safe and secure is an essential human need and is also, an important component of school climate (CSEE, 2010). Improving the school climate in terms of teaching and learning is vital for students' academic success (Murphy & Louis, 1999; Rowan, 1994). Lee et al., (1993) noted that teachers

and administrators were associated with positive outcomes in terms of organizational effectiveness. Deci and Ryan (1985) also proposed that all individuals had a basic need to feel a sense of belongingness or relatedness which resulted in more intrinsic motivation and engagement in the organization. Hoy and Tarter (1992) identified that a healthy organizational climate was essential for a school to be successful. Hoyle et al., (1985) stated that school climate was one of the most important components for a successful instructional program. In agreement with the above studies, the current study found that Korean students in grades 6 to 12 had positive perceptions of school climate.

The researcher concluded that the grades 6 to 12 Korean students had a relatively high level of achievement motivation. Overseas students required more achievement motivation than those who study in their own country because they routinely faced communication and cultural problems (Seo, 2011). With regard to this point, McClelland (1985) discovered that people who had a high need for achievement motivation tended to seek positive feedback for personal satisfaction and try to do their best to accomplish whatever tasks they undertake. Forty-six percent of the participants in this study experienced studying overseas for 10 to 12 years. Therefore, it can be assumed that they had a high commitment to succeed by successfully completing their overseas study.

The study found that respondents' perceptions of school climate were related to their level of achievement motivation. Hirase (2000) and Erpelding (1999) found that schools with positive climate also had a higher relationship between students' higher academic achievement motivation and their grades. Wang et al., (1997) also found that school climate was among the top influences in driving improved student achievement.

Also, it could be argued that a positive perception of school climate generated a positive attitude toward school generally and fed into the personal attitude to complete their own goals as achievement motivation (Pepper & Thomas, 2001). The study also found that there was a significant relationship between perceptions of school climate and level of achievement motivation.

The researcher investigated whether there was a significant relationship between each dimension of school climate and achievement motivation. As mentioned above, feeling safe and secure in school promotes students' learning motivation and healthy

development (Devine & Cohen, 2007). The current study showed a significant relationship between students' perception of school safety and achievement motivation. It can be assumed that feeling safe at school affects students' academic achievement motivation which in turn helps students to achieve their learning goals.

Improving the school climate in terms of teaching and learning is vital for students' academic success (Murphy & Louis, 1999; Rowan, 1994). In this regard, the current study found that there was a significant relationship between teaching & learning and achievement motivation. It is thus reasonable to assume that well-designed curriculum affects students' achievement motivation which is related to students' academic success.

Also in this study, it was found that students' perception of interpersonal relationships was related to achievement motivation. There are positive motivational outcomes if students feel concern, care, support, and respect from teachers (Calabrese & Poe, 1990). Lee et al. (1993) noted that teachers and administrators were associated with positive outcomes in terms of organizational effectiveness. It can be assumed that students' achievement motivation improves when they have good relationships with peers, teachers, administrators and staff.

A study by Sánchez et al., (2005) found that the school climate dimension of institutional environment included a sense of belongingness that significantly predicted academic outcomes, influencing motivation, effort, and school attendance. However, the results in this study revealed that the perception of institutional environment was not related to achievement motivation at the selected international school in Bangkok. This might reflect a different definition of institutional environment because the present study included the school's buildings and facilities, and individuals' feelings that they belonged to the group or organization, as part of the definition of institutional environment.

References

- Bryk, A., Lee, V. & Holland, P. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Calabrese, R. L. & Poe, J. (1990). Alienation: An explanation of high dropout rates among African American and Latino students. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 14 (4), 22-26.
- Center for Social and Emotional Education. (CSEE, 2010). School climate brief, *Center for Social and Emotional Education*, 1(1).1-2, Retrieved from http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/SCBrief_v1n1_Jan2010.pdf
- Cohen, J., Pickeral, C. & McCloskey, M. (2009). The challenge of assessing school climate. *Educational Leadership*, 66 (4). Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/The-Challenge-of-Assessing-School-Climate.aspx>
- Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G. & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26 (3 & 4), 325-346. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00461520.1991.9653137>
- Deci, E.L., Koestner, R. & Ryan, R.M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125 (6), 627-668.doi: 10.1037//0033-2909.125.6.627, Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.125.6.627>
- Devine, J. & Cohen, J. (2007). *Making your school safe: Strategies to protect children and promote learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hatakenaka, S. (2004). Internationalism in higher education: a review. United Kingdom: The Higher Education Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/466-1127/Internationalism-in-Higher-Education-A-Review.html>
- Hirase, S. K. (2000). School climate. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 61(02), p. 439. (Publication Number AAT 9963110)
- Hoy, W. K. & Tarter, C. J. (1992). Measuring the health of the school climate: A conceptual framework. *NASSP Bulletin*, 76, 74-79.
- Hoyle, J., English, E. & Steffy, B. (1985). *Skills for Successful Leaders*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.
- Howard, E., Howell, B. & Brainard, E. (1987). *Handbook for conducting school climate improvements projects*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa
- Kim, J. Y. (2007, February 24). 강남극성 엄마들의 '올인 교육'['All-in education' by overeager Kangman moms]. *Maeil Business*, p. A23.
- Lee, V., Bryk, A. & Smith, J. (1993). The organization of effective secondary schools. In L.Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *Review of research in education* (Vol.19, pp.171-267). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Lunenburg, F. C. & Ornstein, A. O. (2008). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.
- McClelland, D. C. (1958). Methods of measuring human motivation. In J. W. Atkinson (Ed.), *Motives in fantasy, action, and society* (pp. 7-42). Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.
- McClelland, D. C. (1985). How motives, skills, and values determine what people do. *American Psychologist*. 40 (7), 812-825.
- McClelland, D. C. (1987). *Human motivation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. McGaw, B., Piper, K., Banks, D. & Evans, B. (1993). *Making Schools more effective: Report of the Australian School*

- Effectiveness Project. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Murphy, J. & Louis, K.S. (1999). Handbook editor's introduction: notes from the handbook, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35 (4), 472-476.
- National School Climate Center. (NSCC, 2010). *School climate*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/index.php>.
- Natriello, G. (1986). *School dropouts: Patterns and policies*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- O'Malley, M., Katz, K., Renshaw, T. & Furlong, M. (2012). Gauging the system: Trends in school climate measurement and intervention. *International research and practice*. pp. 317-329.
- Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011). "How many students study abroad?" in *Education at a Glance 2011: Highlights*, OECD Publishing. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2011-12-en
- Park, S. S. (2008, October 3). 44% of Korean Ivy League Students Quit Course Halfway. *Korean Times*. Retrieved from http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/10/117_32124.html
- Pepper, K. & Thomas, L. (2001). Making a change: The effects of the leadership role on school climate. *Learning Environments Research*, 5, 155-166. Kluwer Academic Publisher: Netherlands.
- Rowan, B. (1994). Comparing teachers work with work in other occupations: notes on the professional status of teaching, *Educational Researcher*, 23(6), 4-17.
- Sánchez, B., Colón, Y. & Esparza, P. (2005). The role of sense of school belonging and gender in the academic adjustment of Latino adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(6), 619- 628.
- Seo, D. S. (2011, March 20). For early study abroad convinced to have motivation. *Digital Times*. Retrieved from http://www.dt.co.kr/contents.html?article_no=2011032102012351744002
- Turner, J. P. (1996). *Motivational needs of students enrolled in Agricultural education programs in Georgia* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens, GA. retrieved from <http://pubs.age.tamu.edu/jae/pdf/vol38/38-04-30.pdf>
- Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D. & Walberg, H. J. (1997) Learning influences, in: H. J. Walberg and G.D. Haertel (eds) *Psychology and Educational Practice* (pp. 199–211).Berkley, CA: McCuthan.