

The influence of school climate on high school teachers' job satisfaction in a conflict-affected country

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ABSTRACT

School climate plays a vital role in a teacher's job performance, satisfaction, and school effectiveness. There were abundant studies on school climate and effectiveness and its relationship with teachers' job performance and job satisfaction for primary and secondary schools in developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, there were scarce studies on teachers' satisfaction in underdeveloped countries with prolonged conflicts and government instability. This study investigated the influence of school climate on teachers' job satisfaction in a conflict-affected country, Afghanistan. It employed a survey questionnaire to collect data from public high school teachers in the Takhar province of Afghanistan. The data were descriptively and inferentially analyzed with the aid of statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). Despite prolonged conflicts and government instability, the study found a statistically positive correlation between school climate and high school teachers' job satisfaction. It also revealed statistically significant differences in the satisfaction level of teachers by their demographic variables, i.e., gender, educational qualification, age, and working experience. The study suggests that education administrators, school leaders, and other stakeholders develop a policy advancing a peaceful and conducive learning environment to improve student's learning outcomes, teachers' job performance and satisfaction, and school effectiveness. Future studies may qualitatively examine schools in different parts of the country.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential in developing individuals and countries [1], [2]. Education has become the most critical tool for a country's social and economic development and improving individuals' lives. Thus, individuals need to acquire appropriate knowledge to contribute to the development of their community [3]. In acquiring knowledge, individuals expect a conducive and motivating learning environment from educational institutions [4]. The quality of a school's learning environment, often called school climate, can function as an impetus for the school community to perform various teaching and learning and other development activities based on the individual's duties and functions [5].

The school climate is the heart or soul of a school; it contains significant spheres of life such as behavior, relationship, safety, teaching, and learning [6]. Other researchers considered school climate as the feeling and attitude of a school that includes different physical, social, cultural, and academic dimensions.

Syahril and Hadiyanto [7] noted that improving the school climate could improve educational management outcomes. A healthy and positive school climate necessitates a high-quality learning environment and facilitates effective teaching and learning programs.

The educational leaders' understanding of the importance of school climate for teachers' job satisfaction cannot be taken lightly. MacNeil *et al.* [8] commented that many reform efforts to improve student achievement and quality of education failed to reach their targets simply because educational leaders could not address the school climate's significance. School leaders who inspire to create a positive learning environment must adequately emphasize the improvement of the school climate [9]. A deep understanding and adequate emphasis on factors influencing the school climate would allow school leaders to improve teacher performance and job satisfaction.

It is widely accepted that the organizational climate affects employees' job satisfaction and performance [10], [11]. A good learning climate changes how people think, react, and do their jobs. Similarly, there is a consensus that the poor climate of the schools, as learning organizations, affects teachers' performance and job satisfaction.

The research topic on school climate and teachers' job satisfaction and performance is not new. This topic has already received considerable attention from many educational leaders worldwide. There were abundant studies dedicated directly to examining the influence of school climate on teachers' job satisfaction and performance in schools in many countries. For example, MacNeil *et al.* [8] found that school climate influenced student achievement and job performance. The study revealed that students achieved high scores on the standardized test when engaged in a conducive learning environment. Treputtharat and Tayiam [12] found that different aspects of school climate affected teachers' job satisfaction, including work standards, acceptance of responsibility, school unity, reward and punishment, and effective leadership. The study also found a positive correlation between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction.

In determining the influence of organizational climate on job satisfaction, Alemi [13] examined the relationship between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction at teacher training colleges in Afghanistan. The study revealed that most teachers in the three teacher training colleges were satisfied with the job but not their salaries and working conditions. The study also revealed that apart from the location of the study, there was no significant correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and college climates, such as the opportunity for promotion, salary and working benefits, working environment, and teachers' interaction.

Ayim [14] examined the relationship between school climate and teachers' performance in Ghana. The study revealed a strong positive correlation between school climate and teacher performance. The study recommended that the Ghana education service organize in-service training for junior school teachers to improve school climate and leadership skills to promote a positive learning climate. Effective leadership skills help principals to change the school climate [15]. A study in China found a significant relationship between organizational climate and teacher job satisfaction and empowerment [16]. Principals were essential in improving school climate and teachers' job performance [17]. Ghavifekr and Pillai [18] reported that a positive organizational climate improved teachers' job satisfaction and performance.

Suriansyah and Aslamiah [19] studied teachers' job satisfaction related to the learning climate at an elementary school in Indonesia. The study revealed that the learning environment contributed to teachers' job satisfaction and performance. In contrast to Suriansyah and Aslamiah [19], Duan *et al.* [20] examined the effect of school culture and climate on teachers' job satisfaction in China. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between school culture and climate on teachers' job satisfaction. The researchers suggested that more attention should be paid to teachers' jobs to improve school climate and effectiveness. A similar study by Hayajneh *et al.* [21] in Jordan revealed similar findings. The study reported a significant positive correlation between organizational climate change and employee job satisfaction. This study showed that an excellent organizational climate positively impacted employees' job performance and satisfaction.

In addition, Aslami [22] studied why teachers left their profession in Afghanistan. He collected data through mixed-method research and found that the key factors of job attrition in Afghanistan were the heavy workload, low salary, lack of professional development programs, and administrative corruption. Furthermore, Khawary and Ali [23] found that teachers remained in their profession when they were motivated, valued, and satisfied with their job. This study also revealed that teacher turnover led to negative teaching and learning activities. Moreover, Safi [24] examined job satisfaction among private and public university lecturers in Afghanistan and found that public university lecturers were more satisfied with their profession than private universities.

Most previous studies on the school climate and its influence on teachers' job satisfaction were carried out in developed or developing countries with strong governments, competitive teachers' salaries, high teaching qualifications, and commendable working benefits that influence the learning climate. Unfortunately, minimal studies were conducted in third-world countries with long conflicts histories and government instability, like Afghanistan. Among minimal studies performed in Afghanistan, almost none

focused on the influence of school climate on teachers' job satisfaction. Similar studies to the current research are the studies of Alemi [13], who examined teachers' job satisfaction at teacher training colleges, and Safi [24], who explored job satisfaction among private and public university lecturers, which are different from the secondary school settings. Additionally, most studies related to the school setting in Afghanistan focused primarily on teaching and learning. For example, a study by Orfan [25] explored students' difficulties and strategies for learning English idioms.

The limitations that occurred in Afghanistan, a conflict-affected country, are understandable due to the prolonged conflicts and different social and political problems [26], [27]. With limited internet facilities and connectivity, frequent disruption of electricity supply, and poor security [28], [29], school learning and working environment are frequently disrupted [30], [31]. Although many development programs were designed to improve the education system and school climate [32], particularly with foreign forces, including the United States, school education and climate in Afghanistan are not comparable to neighboring countries [33]. In addition to poverty and limited access to proper facilities, school children in Afghanistan experienced war, displacement, and natural disasters to get an education, particularly female students [34]. This situation may adversely affect the school climate and job satisfaction among teachers.

Additionally, the school climate may affect teachers' performance, resulting from low salaries, poor working conditions, limited promotional opportunities, and lacking organizational communication. Thus, there is an urgent need to conduct a study that fulfills the abovementioned issues by examining the influence of school climate on high school teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan. The current study offers insights into satisfaction differences among teachers by their demographic factors such as gender, educational qualification, age, and teaching experience in the school context. This study is significant to instigate the development of policies for improving education quality and student achievement in a conflict-affected country. It may also help educational administrators and school leaders to create a good learning environment and enhance teachers' job satisfaction.

The study's objective was to explore the influence of school climate on high school teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan which addresses the research questions: i) What is teachers' perception of school climate and high school teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan?; ii) Is there a relationship between school climate and high school teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan?; and iii) Are there statistically any significant differences in the level of job satisfaction of high school teachers by their demographic variables such as gender, education qualification, age, and teaching experience?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative research was conducted in public schools in Takhar province of Afghanistan. An online survey questionnaire was used for data collection, adapted from Hoy *et al.* [35] for school climate and Lester [36] for teacher job satisfaction. Before the actual study, the questionnaire was distributed to three senior lecturers at Takhar University to check the content. Upon verification, the questionnaire was translated into Persian because English is a foreign language in Afghanistan, and many people cannot speak English [37], [38]. Upon completing the translation, it was sent to three senior lecturers for verification. Minor corrections were made based on the comments. Next, a pilot study was conducted online on randomly selected 35 school teachers in Taloqan city who were not involved in the study. The online link to the questionnaire was sent to those teachers through the school's WhatsApp group, and they were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was performed to measure the reliability of the study. The finding of the pilot study showed that the questionnaire had an overall Cronbach alpha value of 0.89, which shows a high-reliability value.

The targeted population of the study was school teachers teaching in different high schools in the Takhar province of Afghanistan. Based on the National Statistics and Information Authority report, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [39], there were 7880 teachers in public schools in Takhar province. According to the sampling criteria introduced by Krejcie and Morgan [40], 425 respondents were chosen randomly as the study's sample. The researchers wrote the names of schools on pieces of paper and put them in a container. They shuffled the pieces of paper and selected 25 schools to conduct the study. The same practice was applied to choose the 17 respondents from each school. The link to the online questionnaires was shared with the teachers via individual schools' WhatsApp groups, and voluntary participation was requested. The teachers were given four weeks to complete the questionnaire. It took around 10 minutes for the respondents to complete the questionnaire, and all 425 respondents provided complete responses to the questionnaire. Online questionnaire responses were entered into Ms. Excel 2013 and imported to statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed with the aid of SPSS; descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed in the study.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Teachers' perception of school climate

Around 80% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed that teachers were committed to helping their students, accepting additional duties, respecting each other, and being friendly with the students. Almost 60% of the respondents believed that they liked their principals' behavior, principals complimented and respected teachers, and their principals were easy to understand. Their principals were available at school before and after the official school time. In addition, about 50% of the respondents stated that their students solved their problems through logical reasoning, worked collaboratively, helped each other learn, and their schools had a good learning climate.

3.2. Teachers' perception of job satisfaction

Almost 35% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their teaching profession, salary, benefits, educational supervision at school, the support they received from their direct supervisors, and the developmental skills provided by their schools. Around 40% of teachers also exposed that their colleagues supported each other, felt secure in their jobs, and were quite competent in their teaching profession. It shows that the teachers' satisfaction level is very low, which might negatively affect their job security.

3.3. Correlational Analysis between school climate and job satisfaction

The Spearman correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction. Table 1 shows that the P-value for school climate and teachers' job satisfaction was $P=0.001$, which is less than 0.05 (significance level). Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan.

Table 1. Correlational analysis between school climate and job satisfaction

		Correlations		
			School climate	Job satisfaction
Spearman's rho	School climate	Correlation coefficient	1	.575**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.001
		N	425	425
Job satisfaction		Correlation coefficient	.575**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	.
		N	425	425

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

3.4. Analysis based on participants' demographic variables

Table 2 shows the respondents' demographic information: gender, education level, age group, and years of teaching experience. It indicates that most respondents were male teachers (62%), while 38% were female. About 88% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, 10% had a teacher training certificate, 1% possessed a master's degree, and 1% held other degrees. A majority of the respondents were young teachers whose 46% had between 1-5 years of teaching experience, 23% of them had 6-10 years of teaching experience, while 16% of them held 11-15 years of teaching experience and only 15% of them had more than 16 years of teaching experience.

Table 2. Analysis based on demographic variables

Variables		N	Mean	SD	p-value
Gender	Female	265	2.21	0.62	0.001
	Male	160	3	0.41	
Education qualification	Teacher training	43	3	0.21	0.001
	Bachelor	374	2.52	0.69	
	Master	3	2.17	0.63	
	Other	5	2.81	0.68	
Age	20-29	221	2.24	0.51	0.001
	30-39	180	2.27	0.78	
	40 and above	24	2.87	0.22	
Years of teaching experience	1-5 years	194	2.56	0.57	0.001
	6-10 years	98	2.59	0.81	
	11-15 years	68	2.67	0.46	
	16 and above	65	2.93	0.23	

The independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Table 2) were conducted to determine the teachers' job satisfaction based on their demographic variables, i.e., gender, educational qualification, age, and teaching experience. The study revealed that the p-value for all four variables was $p=0.001$, less than 0.05 (significant level). Thus, it is concluded that there were significant differences in the level of job satisfaction of high school teachers by their demographic variables such as gender, education qualification, age, and teaching experience.

4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the influence of school climate on high school teachers' job satisfaction in Afghanistan. The results showed that the majority (80%) of teachers accepted that they were committed to helping their students, tended to accept additional duties, and had a good attitude in school. Furthermore, around 60% believed they liked their principals' behavior and management style, and only half (50%) said they liked their school climate and students' performance. As Afghanistan is a conflict-affected country, education and school climate might have been heavily influenced by issues like prolonged war, undeveloped economy, poor social and political security, limited internet facilities, and unstable school electricity supply. This study tries to validate that a school climate in a country with decades of war and government instability is different from schools in developed and developing countries that are free from those unintended incidents. The findings also revealed that less than half of teachers (35%) were satisfied with their profession, salaries, benefits, and supervisors' support. 30% also reported feeling job security and admired their colleagues' teaching skills and collaboration. It is indicated from this finding that teachers seem unsatisfied with their profession because the prolonged conflicts and government instabilities limited the education-related resources in the country. The government is paying fewer salaries to teachers in Afghanistan than in other neighboring countries, which devastatingly affects the country's education system.

The study found a statistically positive correlation between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction. The finding of the study is in line with several studies [12], [19], [41]–[43]. The previous studies found a positive correlation between organizational climate and teachers' job satisfaction. A positive school climate enhances teachers' job satisfaction, performance, motivation, and students' learning outcomes [12]. Duan *et al.* [20] believed that teachers are motivated and satisfied with their jobs when there are good learning environments, effective working conditions, and reasonable pay. A good learning environment strongly impacts students' learning outcomes, teachers' job satisfaction, and performance [44]. Teachers' job satisfaction and good performance affect students' achievement and motivation [41].

In addition, teachers' job satisfaction influences teaching and learning, teachers' retention, and students' academic achievement [44]. Teachers' job satisfaction varies in developed, developing and underdeveloped countries because conflict-affected countries have limited resources and facilities. This limitation may influence job satisfaction in schools [4]. Teachers' job satisfaction is essential in Afghanistan because teachers with a better level of satisfaction have better performance and enthusiasm [24]. Unfortunately, the prolonged war and government instabilities tore the country's education system apart, and many schools were closed [45]. Therefore, teachers may not have felt a good school climate and might be satisfied with their school climate based on the country's situation. It is stated from these studies that school climate has a significant impact on teachers' job satisfaction and performance. Subsequently, educational leaders should take the necessary actions to improve the school environment. As a result, teachers' job satisfaction will lead to high motivation and retention in schools [23].

The study also revealed statistically significant differences in the level of job satisfaction of high school teachers by their demographic variables, i.e., gender, education qualification, age, and teaching experience. The results showed that female teachers were more satisfied with their profession than their male counterparts. According to the country's culture, male teachers may expect higher salaries because most civil servant employees are males, and most of them are the source of income for their families. In addition, the data also revealed that women's participation in education and society is still low, although international forces have orchestrated the country for more than 20 years. The finding of this study supports the study of Safi [24], who reported that female teachers were more satisfied than their male counterparts.

Moreover, teachers with lower education qualifications were more satisfied than those with higher qualifications. Likewise, older teachers were more satisfied with their profession than their younger counterparts. Teachers with more years of teaching experience were more satisfied with their teaching job than novice teachers. This finding supports previous studies [46], [47], who reported that experienced teachers seemed to be more satisfied with their profession. However, it contradicts the study by Koustelios [48], who found that teachers with more teaching experience were slightly less satisfied with their jobs. It is relatively reasonable because younger teachers and teachers with higher qualifications have more expectations and are concerned with their future responsibilities [13].

5. CONCLUSION

The results indicated that teachers viewed the school climate positively but they expressed dissatisfaction with their profession and its associated benefits. Furthermore, the findings revealed a positive correlation between school climate and teachers' job satisfaction. This underscores the significant influence of school climate not only on teachers' job satisfaction but also on students' academic performance. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the factors affecting school climate and teachers' job satisfaction to enhance the learning environment.

This study found statistically significant differences in teachers' level of satisfaction by their demographic variables such as gender, education qualification, age, and working experience. Consequently, female teachers were more satisfied with their profession than their male colleagues. In addition, teachers with lower qualifications were more satisfied than those with higher education qualifications. Furthermore, older teachers were more satisfied than younger teachers, and teachers with more teaching experience were more satisfied with their profession than those with less teaching experience. Therefore, educational managers and leaders may improve the school environment to enhance students' achievement and teachers' job satisfaction by considering all those demographic factors.

The study has some implications. The school environment in a conflict-affected country is different compared to developed and developing countries. Thus, education administrators should involve teachers and other stakeholders in school affairs and develop policies to create a conducive learning environment to boost teachers' job satisfaction and students' learning outcomes. The study had some limitations, such time was limited, and the research findings could not be generalized to all schools in the country. Future researchers may target larger samples and conduct qualitative studies targeting more schools in different parts of the country.

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