THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THEIR DECISION-MAKING STYLES AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ANNING DISTRICT, LANZHOU CITY, CHINA

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between teachers' perception towards school climate and their decision-making styles at a selected primary school in Anning District, Lanzhou city, China. The study firstly assessed the teachers' perception towards school climate, examined the teachers' decision-making styles; lastly tested the relationship between these two main variables. A total of 71 full-time teachers replied the questionnaires adopted by the researcher. Means and Standard Deviations were used to report the teachers' perception towards school climate and their decision-making styles; Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis was applied to test the relationship between these two variables. The results showed that, the teachers in the target school had a relatively positive attitude towards school climate. Besides, teachers' most preferred decision-making style was group decision-making style. The Pearson Correlation test indicated that there was a significant relationship between teachers' perception towards school climate and their decision-making styles at the selected primary school in Anning District, Lanzhou city, China.

Key words: Teachers' Perception, School Climate, Decision-Making Styles

Introduction

Education does not exist alone, it always promotes human development, and always is influenced by the surrounding environment (Chawla & Cushing, 2007). As a key place for the implementation of systematic educational behavior, schools are undoubtedly given great social responsibility. An excellent school climate is not only a necessary condition for recruiting more superior teachers and cultivating more outstanding students (Freiberg, 1999), but also a salient indicator for parents and students to measure the school's characteristics. For students, the school is a bridge for transforming professional knowledge into technical job skills in the future, a superb school

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climate can have a positive impact on students' learning initiative and creativity, thereby improving their academic output and increasing the employment rate in the future (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Simultaneously, it is not only a place for students to get access to knowledge, but also a location for teachers to work, thence, school climate has a direct effect on teachers' work enthusiasm and career development (Sia-ed, 2016). Therefore, how to create a better and positive school climate is worth deeply considering.

Education is a life-long behavior, in this process, whether principal or teachers, making decisions is an indispensable behavior. The quality of decision-making ability can influence the course of events and results. As a key factor in education procedure, the decision-making of teachers plays an extremely import section in the school, and constitutes a linkage between the policy and the students, that is, according to their own understanding of the overall policy of school, to formulate their distinctive teaching method and management style that suits themselves (Maringe, 2012). As the manager for themselves, the teachers' decision-making abilities and styles decide the individual's career expansion. Meanwhile, as the students' leaders, teachers' decision-making styles will influence students' learning styles and motivations, thus affecting the output of teaching activities (Savas & Karakus, 2012). For the teachers, decision-making in the workplace is not only just a self-management behavior, but also an information-processing activity. In this process, there will be different social mechanisms affecting people involved in problem-solving or decision-making, thus affects the formation of results (Vroom & Jago, 1973). Therefore, making decision is an essential skill for teachers.

Nowadays, teachers need to constantly review their job-related skills or styles to cope with a more diverse and ever-changing world, the beneficiaries of strengthening school effectiveness are not only teachers themselves, but students' learning methods and motivation will also be bound up with it, thus affecting the success or failure of students (Tajasom & Ahmad, 2011). In particular, elementary education plays an indispensable role in a student's entire fundamental educational process, under the circumstance that the school climate and decision-making styles are of great significance to teaching output, therefore, the study of these two variables is particularly important. The selected primary school at Anning district, Lanzhou city, China is an important public school in Anning district, therefore, improving the management level and consolidating the teaching quality of the school are practically meaningful to the educational development in Anning district of Lanzhou city. In order to lay a solid foundation for improving students' academic achievement, how to further develop the teaching quality, and which

may affect the teaching quality are worthy of in-depth discussion. However, there was no previous research on school climate and decision-making styles of the primary school at Anning district, Lanzhou city. Under this circumstance, the researcher tried to start a study on the school climate and decision-making styles so as to to help improve its school performance in the future.

Research Objectives

There were three objectives in this research:

1. To identify the teachers' perception towards school climate at the selected primary school in Anning district, Lanzhou city, China;
2. To identify the teachers' decision-making styles at the selected primary school in Anning district, Lanzhou city, China;
3. To identify the relationship between teachers' perception towards school climate and their decision-making styles at the selected primary school in Anning district, Lanzhou city, China.

Literature Review

School Climate

Although there are numerous studies on school or organizational climate, there is no uniform standard for how to accurately define the school climate, the explanation is differentiated by diverse researchers (Anderson, 1982; Freiberg, 1999). According to Cavrini (2014), school climate is an environment for students to learn and grow. The National School Climate Center (2010) defined school climate as the quality and character of school life, which embodies the views of the groups including teachers, students, and parents on school environment. Fisher and Fraser (1990) interpreted that school climate refers to the psycho-social context in which teachers work and teach. Further, in line with the description of Yao et al. (2015), school climate is a workplace where teachers work with a psychological background, it not only affects the teachers' emotions, but also further influences their work behaviors.

Halpin and Croft (1963) believed, as the key dominating factor of the effectiveness of a school, principal should give teachers a sense of social and work achievement through effective organization and certain incentives, and accompanied by a good relationship with the subordinates. The openness of the school climate determines the effectiveness of the school. For the open climate, its main feature is the openness of all members, which means all of them are working toward the goal of the school friendly and professionally. In this process, the principal supports subordinates rather than forcing them to work in accordance with his or her will. Therefore, teachers' job satisfaction and social needs are easily obtained. For the closed climate, it is characterized by the stagnation of the organization. The unprofessional, uncooperative

relationship between teachers, and the principal's unsupported and compulsive leadership style lead to a high level of apathy. Thence, in the process of achieving the common goal of school, neither the teachers' job satisfaction nor their social needs are difficult to obtain. In order to investigate how school teachers feel about the climate they are working in, The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) was designed by Halpin and Croft (1963).

Another famous theory about school climate is Healthy School Climate Theory which was also used in this study as the theoretical basis. Miles (1965) initially mentioned in his article about the concept of healthy school climate, after his further research and other researchers' supplementation and demonstrations, this concept has been improved. A healthy school climate refers to the characteristics of the school's institutional integrity, the principal can acquire resources through a certain influence. Therefore, teachers do not have to be subject to external pressures, so that they can focus on their own academic achievements and gain access to the principal's support and guidance, and the corresponding social welfare are acquired. In this process, the morale of teachers, parents and students is high. On the contrary, an unhealthy school climate means that the principal lacks the influence of external resources so that teachers are subject to outside pressure. Miles' (1969) initial conceptual framework about healthy school climate provided ideas and theoretical support to Hoy (1991) who established the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) to measure school climate.

Other researchers deemed that, there are overlapping parts of both open and healthy school climate, that is, an open school is often healthy. Therefore, Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland (2002) combined and redefined OCDQ and OCI to design the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), which includes the following four dimensions:

Dimension (1): Institutional vulnerability refers to whether the school is vulnerable to the external environment, such as a small number of prestigious parents and groups. If the principal and teachers are in an unprotected and defensive state, it indicates that the school has a high degree of institutional vulnerability.

Dimension (2): Collegial leadership means that the principal will set a code of conduct and expectations for teachers, but in this process he or she meets the teachers' social needs and achieves the school goals with equal, open, and friendly attitude as a colleague of them.

Dimension (3): Professional teacher behavior refers to the teacher has the ability to judge independently, respect the competence of colleagues and cooperate as well as support each other, and implement the commitment to students.

Dimension (4): Achievement press refers to the school sets high but achievable academic requirements, students who are persistent and striving for the academic achievement of the standard are respected by the teachers and classmates.

Decision-Making

For what decision-making is, the definition is differentiated by distinct researchers based on various cultural backgrounds, education levels, and research priorities. Malakooti (2012) comprehended that decision-making is evaluating and/or ranking possible alternatives of actions, it is the most intricate and multifaceted human behavior. Wild (1983) defined decision-making as a process of achieving goals that is affected by operability and personal preferences. Similarly, Mesut (2011) construed that decision-making is the process of solving problems that impacts the process of individuals, groups, and the entire organization. In an organization, different organizational models have divergent decision-making process (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). All in all, as the essence of management, decision-making plays an extremely important role in everyone's life, especially for managers. No matter in the enterprise or school, when facing the complicated and changing environment, the decision-making styles of leaders and employees may be affected to varying degrees, and this often leads to be unable to maximize the utility of decision-making.

According to Vroom and Yetton (1973), as one of the leadership abilities, in an organization, decision-making is not made unilaterally by individuals, but is a social process within an organization. When decisions need to be made, there are generally a lot of different social mechanisms to choose from. These mechanisms vary with each individual, meanwhile, due to disparities in the way and the degree of information exchanged by group members, the final solution will not be alike. Therefore, Vroom and Yetton designed a decision-making model that contains three alternative styles, named autocratic style, consultative style and group style.

Dimension (1): Autocratic decision-making style refers to a completely autocratic decision-making method, the decision-maker makes decision based on his own knowledge or experience, without reference to the opinions of the others.

Dimension (2): Consultative decision-making style refers to a style that decision-maker will inform subordinates or colleagues and ask their opinions separately about the issue, and ultimately make their own decisions. Although they provide different information and opinions, it is uncertain whether the decision-maker's solution will finally be affected.

Dimension (3): Group decision-making style refers to a style that decision-maker chooses to use a collective approach to make decisions. Decision maker humbly accepts the opinions of everyone in the group, this is a complete teamwork approach, and the final decision is based on everyone's opinions and agreements.

Conceptual Framework

This study aimed to determine the relationship between teachers' perception of school climate and their decision-making styles at the selected primary school. Teachers' perception of school climate were measured by four dimensions, which were institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior and achievement press. Teachers' decision-making styles were measured by three dimensions, which were autocratic decision-making style, consultative decision-making style and group decision-making style. Figure 1 below is the illustration of the conceptual framework of this study.

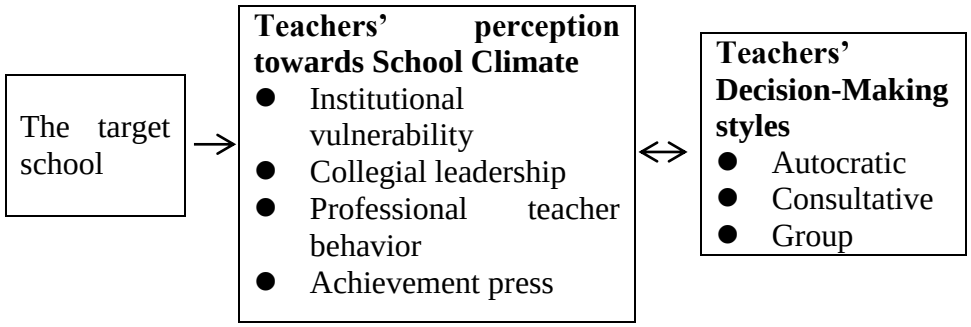

Figure 1: ***Conceptual Framework of This Study***

Research Method

This study was mainly a quantitative and correlational designed, a total of 75 full-time teachers in the academic year 2018 - 2019 from the selected primary school were used as the participants in this study, of the 75 questionnaires distributed, 71 were returned.

The questionnaire this study used was consisted of two parts. The first part used the Organizational Climate Index (OCI) designed by Hoy, Smith and Sweetland (2002) to investigate teachers' perception of school climate. The questionnaire has a total of 30 items divided into four dimensions which are institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, and achievement press. 4-point Likert scale was adopted, 1 to 4 represented the agreement level from rarely occurs to very frequently occurs. The Alpha Coefficient of questionnaire about school climate was .78 in this study.

The second part adopted the questionnaire created by Dennis (2012) based on Vroom and Yetton's (1973) decision-making theory, the questionnaire used in this study has 12 items in total which involved three dimensions: autocratic decision-making style, consultative decision-making style and group decision-making style. The 5-point Likert scale was used in this part, with 1 to 5 representing the agreement level from very disagreed to very agreed, and the lowest and highest levels were ranged from 1 to 5 points respectively. The Alpha Coefficient of concessionaire about decision-making styles was .89 in this study.

Findings

Research Objective One

Table 1 described the Mean and Standard Deviation of each dimension of school climate perceived by the teachers. Overall, the teacher's perception of school climate was 2.78, indicating a high level of perception on school climate. Among them, the Mean of institutional vulnerability was lower (2.49), described as "low level", while, the Mean of collegial leadership (2.77), achievement press (2.86), and professional teacher behavior (3.00) were described as "high level".

Table 1: *Means and Standard Deviations of School Climate Perceived by Teachers (N=71)*

School Climate	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Professional Teacher Behavior	3.00	0.44	High
Achievement Press	2.86	0.43	High
Collegial Leadership	2.77	0.46	High
Institutional Vulnerability	2.49	0.48	Low
Overall	2.78	0.33	High

Research Objective Two

The researcher calculated the scores of each teacher on each item represented every decision-making style, then added and got the total score for each style, the one with the highest score was considered to be the teacher's own decision-

making style. As shown in table 2, group decision-making styles prevailed (43%), followed by consultative decision-making style (40.8%) and autocratic decision-making style (15.5%), indicating that teachers in this school were more inclined to make decisions through group work.

Table 2: *Teachers' Decision-Making Styles (N=71)*

Decision-making Styles	Number	Percentage
Group	31	43.7
Consultative	29	40.8
Autocratic	11	15.5
Overall	71	100

Table 3 is the Mean and Standard Deviation of the three decision-making styles. The Mean of these styles, autocratic decision-making style (3.28), consultative decision-making style (3.32) and group decision-making style (3.31), had small differences. From the data shown in Table 3, the score of group decision-making style was the highest, but in general the level of each style tended to be consistent, all expressed as "neutral", which meant that teachers used these styles equally rather than just using a particular style.

Table 3: *Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Decision-Making Styles (N=71)*

Decision-making Styles	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Autocratic	3.28	0.49	Neutral
Consultative	3.32	0.49	Neutral
Group	3.32	0.62	Neutral
Overall	3.33	0.44	Neutral

Research Objective Three

Table 4 is the analysis of the relationship between teachers' perception towards the overall school climate and their decision-making styles. The result showed that r =.376, Sig. (2-tailed) was .001, which was less than .05. That is, at the level of .05 (even .01), there was a positive correlation between school climate and decision-making styles perceived by teachers. Therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted, which means there was a significant relationship between teachers' perception towards school climate and their decision-making styles at the selected primary school in Anning district, Lanzhou city, China.

Table 4: *Pearson Product Moment Correlation between the Overall School Climate and Decision-making Styles Perceived by Teachers (N=71)*

		Decision-making Styles
School Climate	Pearson Correlation	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

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

Table 5 illustrates further about the relationships between the four dimensions that make up school climate and teachers' decision-making styles. The researcher used Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to test the results. The outcomes showed that the sig. (2-tailed) between collegial leadership, achievement press, professional teacher behavior and decision-making styles were .004 (r =.336), .000 (r =.427), and .007 (r =.320), which were all less than .05 (even .01), indicating that these three factors were closely related to decision-making styles at .01 level. Among them, achievement press was the most significantly related. However, institutional vulnerability was not associated with decision-making styles with sig. (.733) more than .05.

Table 5: *Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Each Dimension of School Climate and Decision-Making Styles Perceived by Teachers (N=71)*

		Decision-making styles
Institutional vulnerability	Pearson Correlation	.041
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.733
Collegial leadership	Pearson Correlation	.336**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
Achievement press	Pearson Correlation	.427**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Professional teacher behavior	Pearson Correlation	.320**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007

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

Discussion

1. Teachers' Perception Towards School Climate

The results have shown that the teachers' attitude towards school climate was positive in target school. The role of school climate in the education process should not be ignored, especially as the main body of the implementation of education, how teachers feel the atmosphere and climate of their working environment is closely related to their educational behavior (Liu, Ding, Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). Cohen, Mccabe, Michelli & Pickeral (2009) found

that a positive school climate is connected with the development and retention of teachers, which in turn affects students' healthy development and academic achievement. Identical with that, the results of Johnson & Stevens' (2006) article revealed that school climate perceived by the teachers is significantly associated to student achievement.

In this study, the teachers' enthusiastic attitude towards collegial leadership of school climate indicated that the teachers in the target school have a positive view of the principal's leadership, the principal can take care of the teachers' social needs and be friendly to them with fairly treatments in the process of achieving the set goals. Hoy & Feldman (1987) believed that the leadership of the principal and the principal's concern and resource support for the subordinates are one of the important factors for organizational health. Tajasom & Ahmad (2011) were in tune with it, they thought that the importance of the principal is that he or she sets standards and expectations for teachers and encourages morale through positive feedback. Leadership with beliefs and values is one of the indispensable factors of reaching school achievement.

Similarly, the teachers' feelings about achievement press were positive, indicating that the school's high but achievable academic goals are recognized by the teachers in target school. The teachers respect the students who meet the standards, as well as students themselves. As Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Alessandro (2013) explained, a certain level of press can motivate students' potential, and in this positive learning environment, students can be facilitated to attain higher academic achievement.

In addition, the professional teacher behavior also had a high score, which shows that the target school's teachers have relative good professional abilities and attitudes, including professional skills, respect and help colleagues, and focus on the commitment of students. A healthy and good school climate has a positive guiding effect on teachers' behavior management (Yao et al., 2015). Under the environment that the teachers' self-efficacy is improved and job satisfaction is increased, students' behavior management ability can be effectively obtained, as well as learning outcome (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016).

However, as the data showed, teachers had a low-level perception on institutional vulnerability, which seems to be very different from their attitude towards the other three factors, but this does not represent a negative view. The low vulnerability indicated that the school has a strong ability to withstand stress. When facing external pressure, the school can protect the integrity of

the organization and resist the impact of unfavorable factors on the organization without being susceptible to external pressure. As pointed out by Yao et al. (2015), in a relatively stable school climate, teachers can manage emotions more effectively and focus more on teaching.

2. Teachers' Perception Towards Decision-Making Styles

This study found that group decision-making style was the most preferred and used by the teachers in target school, while the autocratic style was used as the least. It showed that most teachers in target school would like using teamwork to solve problems, it was identical to the result of Panyacekka's (2015) study on instructors' perception of decision-making styles. According to Vroom and Yetton's (1973) theory, which decision-making style to choose to solve problem depends on a series of factors, personal experience and the personality of the decision-maker, the urgency of the problem to be solved, and the time limit all have an impact on decision-making behavior.

For the school teachers, they are both the managers and decision-makers of their own classrooms, and the participants in the entire school teaching system as well. Therefore, the teacher's personal decision about teaching is related to the process and quality of the entire school education. It not only depends on their teaching experience and the degree of understanding of their students, but also depends on the teachers' macro awareness to having a certain degree of comprehending of the organizational policy (Mesut, 2011). Therefore, in terms of school goals, group decision-making style is a way to benefit the overall quality of teaching.

However, in this study, although the implementation of the group approach to making decisions was more prevalent in target school, the number of teachers who preferred a consultative approach was also impressive. This type of decision-maker has a sense of team and is willing to listen to others, but in the decision-making process, he or she always dominates (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). This style has certain advantages in teaching activities, that is, when teachers (especially young teachers) lack certain leadership and have sufficient time to make final decisions, it is definitely advisable to help themselves by consulting other experienced teachers separately (Maringe, 2012).

3. The Relationship Between School Climate and Decision-Making Styles

The statistical results were consistent with what the researcher expected, that is, the school climate of the target school is significantly related to the decision-making styles chosen by the teacher in the workplace. Moos (1973) believed that human environment, including the ecological environment,

organizational structure, organizational climate, and so on, will have an impact on individual and group behavior. For teachers in organizations (schools), their behavior is closely connected with school climate. Teachers' professional behaviors, such as the improvement of professional skills, cooperation with colleagues, commitment to students, and decision-making (Hoy et al., 2002), are influenced by the surrounding environment and climate that they feel.

According to Savas and Karakus (2012), teachers' in-role (task performance) and extra-role (organizational citizen behavior) performance can be effectively and positively predicted by a healthy school climate. Specifically, three dimensions of school climate (collegial leadership, achievement press, professional teacher behavior) were significantly linked to decision-making styles. When perceiving a friendly, supportive leadership, teachers are more willing to participate in group discussions to share their information and opinions (Thapa et al., 2013). At the same time, certain achievement pressures, whether for students or teachers themselves, are an incentive (Sia-ed, 2016), which can motivate teachers to seek more ways, such as improving their professional skills, consulting other experienced teachers, working with others to accomplish the school goals. In addition, the target school teachers have a positive attitude towards professional teacher behavior, indicating that the relationship between colleagues is harmonious, and committed to professional development with mutual assistance. In this state, teachers are naturally willing to solve teaching problems in a professional and collective way to maximize the effectiveness of the school.

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