



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

International Journal of Current Research  
Vol. 13, Issue, 07, pp.18161-18164, July, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.41785.07.2021>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# PRINCIPAL'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2021  
Received in revised form  
17<sup>th</sup> May, 2021  
Accepted 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2021  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

#### Key Words:

Principal, Communication Skills, School Climate,  
Secondary Education.

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Citation: Malama Sidiropoulou, 2021. "Principal's communication skills and school climate", *International Journal of Current Research*, 11, (06), 18161-18164.

### ABSTRACT

Literature highlights the importance of effective communication as well as the impact of a positive school climate. The objectives of this research are to investigate principals' communication skills and their effect in shaping school climate. A sample of 321 teachers of secondary schools in Greece was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Communication skills were assessed by a section of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire when School Climate evaluated by a new questionnaire structured for this study and tested for its reliability and its validity. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used to check the two hypotheses of the study. The results revealed that principals in Greek schools, in Secondary education, have "a lot of" communication skills and that skills have significant, moderate positive correlation ( $r=0,338$ ) with school climate. Findings could be used in principal's training programs to practice effective communication techniques.

## INTRODUCTION

Research in recent decades indicates that the school climate is one of the key factors influencing school performance (Maxwell *et al.*, 2017). Principals have a crucial role in forming the school climate, since with his daily presence, attitude and behavior, but mainly with the ability to communicate with other members of the school community (teachers, parents, students, etc.), largely determines the atmosphere of this social organization (Subadrah *et al.*, 2021). The present study aims to examine (1) whether the principals of Greek secondary schools have communication skills and (2) whether these skills help in shaping a positive school climate.

### Theoretical approach

#### Communication

"Communication remains one of the most important aspect of human existence and very important in any organization (School inclusive) for the achievement of its set goals and objectives. It helps improve effective management of any organization because it improves the mutual understanding between the management and subordinates. Effective communication increases staff involvement and commitment in the organization for a better result" (Manafa, 2018:17). Communication is the transmission of facts, ideas, opinions, attitudes and feelings and helps people to become aware and learn (Richmond *et al.*, 2012). In schools, communication happens at all times, in all directions and in different ways. It was observed that principals approximately spend 70% - 80% of their time in interpersonal communication (Okotoni and Akinwale, 2019). According to Manafa (2018), principal's communication skill is the competency to speak appropriately, to write clearly with concise language, to listen

effectively while maintaining good eye contact and at the same time be aware of peoples' non-verbal behavior and be skillful of "reading" them. Principals' communication style is unique and is associated with the leadership style they apply (Ali and Sherin's, 2017). The effective communication style of the principal in a school plays an important role in its performance. In addition, communication is the most powerful tool a leader can force or eliminate if he knows how to use it (Ooand and Wai, 2020). Ali and Sherin's (2017) investigated the association between principal's communication style and school's performance. The results proved that of all the seven styles examined (Expressiveness, Supportiveness, Preciseness, Niceness, Reflectiveness, Moodiness, Threateningness), Expressiveness seems to be the style almost always practiced by school principals. Furthermore, all of the styles except threat and mood can contribute positively to the development of school performance. It is pointed out that when principals communicate with an individual, they must be precise and supportive while when communicating with teams they must use precision style. Threatening style and mood are not related to school performance so they should be avoided altogether, while expressiveness or authorities' speech should be minimized.

**School Climate:** A school climate is defined as the personality of a school that includes the values, rules, expectations, interactions and relationships as perceived by the school members involved (Okeke *et al.*, 2020). For some researchers it is considered the invisible side of school life (Pinkas, 2017) and for some others is the model of people's experience in school life and the reflection of interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures (Brookshile, 2016). The school climate is an indicator of school performance and includes four dimensions: The first concerns school safety, which is measured by the existence of clear rules on physical and social harm, the feeling of safety from physical harm at school and the feeling that all members of the school are safe from

verbal abuse. The second element is school support for learning knowledge and skills and is measured by providing rich learning opportunities in and out of school. The third element is healthy interpersonal relationships such as respect for diversity and cooperation. The last element is the institutional environment that includes the feeling that they belong to the school, participate in school life and keep the school clean and tidy (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011). According Nwangwu (2017) there are six types of school climate. Includes: open, autonomous, controlled, intimate, paternal and closed school climate. The open climate reflects a creative and innovative environment, where all the members of the school work together to achieve their common goals. It is highly associated with educational innovations (Paige, 2016). The autonomous climate is characterized by the freedom of action of the teachers and the taking of initiative (Rapti, 2013). The controlled climate focuses on the hard work of the principal to achieve the goals of the school without attach importance to the personal needs of the teachers (Olibie *et al.*, 2015). On the contrary, the familiar climate is more focused on teachers' interests rather than school performance. The paternalistic climate refers to situations of absolute leadership of the principal's leadership, who does not encourage leadership behaviors of the staff and takes on all responsibilities. Finally, the closed climate is described as a rigid non-supportive and completely controlled by the principal environment, which is dominated by lack of job satisfaction and teacher's commitment (Oo and Wai, 2020).

**Principal's communication and school climate:** Hoy and Miskel (2012) claimed that school leaders must possess great interpersonal skills in order to create a positive school climate. Communication skill is one of the most important traits of principal's personality (Friedman, 2020). Literature outlines the connection between principal communication styles and school climate.

Wang and Degol (2015) stated, "*Climate shapes the quality of the interaction of all students, teachers, parents, and school personnel and reflects the norms, values and goals that represent the broader educational and social missions of the school*" (pg. 1).

Aligned to this, Shalle and his collaborators (2018) studied the communication style and practices of school principals and their effect on school climate. The sample consisted of twenty-five elementary school's principal and one hundred sixty-five teachers. The results revealed that the commonly used communication style was the assertive style. Additionally, the frequent pedagogical meetings are the common practices used by the principals. Under these conditions the school climate was physically, socially and academically favorable. Teachers work in a secure and collaborative environment and harmonious relationships between teachers and principals improve school performance. Some years later, Oo and Wai (2020) investigated the relationship between principals' communication style and school climate in Basic Education High Schools, in Myanmar. The sample comprised 147 teachers of 5 high schools. The factor communication style consisted of seven dimensions; expressiveness, preciseness, niceness, supportiveness, reflectiveness, threateningness, and emotionality while the factor school climate composed of five dimensions which are divided into two categories; principal and teacher behavior. The findings indicated that all principals used various types of communication style. The first five styles are positive in nature while the last two are negative. In general, it was proved that a relationship exists between positive styles of a school principal's communication and school climate behavior. A very recent research explores the association between principals' communication style and school climate, as well. The sample was 60 teachers of elementary schools in Malacca. The research hypotheses were (1) There is no relationship between primary school principals' communication styles and the school climate, (2) There is no relationship between principals' styles of expressiveness and the school climate, (3) There is no relationship between principals' style of preciseness and the school climate, (4) there is no relationship between principals' style of niceness and the school climate, (5) There is no relationship between principals' style

of supportiveness and the school climate and (6) There is no relationship between principals' style of reflectiveness and the school climate. Findings of this study clearly show that principals' communication styles have a significant, strong positive correlation with school climate. Furthermore, principals' style of expressiveness, preciseness, niceness, supportiveness and reflectiveness have significant, strong positive correlation with the school climate (Subadrah *et al.*, 2021).

**Objectives and Hypotheses:** The purpose of the present study is to examine whether (a) Greek principals in Secondary Education Schools have communication skills (b) whether principal's communication skills are associated with the school climate.

**Based on the aims of this study two hypotheses are formulated:**

**Hypothesis 1:** Secondary education principals in Greece have communication skills.

**Hypothesis 2:** Principals' communication skills are positive associated with school climate.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Sample:** A sample of 321 teachers of secondary schools in Greece was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The 38,6% were men and the 61,4% women. Most of them (256) belong to the age group 41-60 years, while the largest percentage (25.9%) have 11-15 years of experience.

### Research instrument

**Communication:** Communication skill is an attribute of transformational leader, so it is investigated by a section of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio and Bass, 1995). More specifically four items examine if (1) principal expresses his thought clearly and distinctly, (2) he is competent in both verbal and non-verbal communication with teachers and students, (3) adjusts the language and style of communication, depending on who communicates with and (4) he is a good listener.

**School Climate:** School climate was investigated with a new questionnaire structured for this research, and tested for its reliability (Cronbach Alpha = 0,750) and its validity (Normed X<sup>2</sup> = 1,486, GFI = 0,998, Structural Reliability = 0,738, Exported Variance = 37,348%, CFI = 0,997, RMR = 0,008, RMSEA = 0,036). It consists of twenty-five items referring to the factors which improve or aggravate school relationships and also explore the nature of them. The responses were provided on a 5-point Likert-scale, where meant (1) "not at all", (2) "a little", (3) "moderately" (4) "a lot of" and (5) "very much". The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS Program for Windows version 21.0. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) were used in analyzing the data.

## RESULTS

This study attempts to test the two hypotheses using Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. The findings and discussions are reported according to the research hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1:** Secondary education principals in Greece have communication skills.

The first hypothesis in this study investigates the perceptions of school staff members of the communication skills of principals. Table 1 presents the means, medians, modes, and standard deviations for statements of the communication skills. Table 1 indicates that all the Statements had means higher than 3, which is the measure for "a lot

**Table 1. Communication skills of principals**

		Statements			
		Principal expresses his thought clearly and distinctly	Principal is competent in both verbal and non-verbal communication with teachers and students	Principal adjusts the language and style of communication, depending on who communicates with	Principal is a good listener
N	Valid	321	321	321	321
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,74	3,64	3,80	3,74
Mode		4	4	4	4
Std. Deviation		1,107	1,168	1,003	1,126

of” on the Likert scale. The results prove that principals in the sample have “a lot of” communication skills. So, Hypothesis1 is accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** Principals’ communication skills are positively associated with school climate

Pearson's correlation coefficient. was applied, in order to explore possible associations between the two factors, *principal's communication skills* and *school climate*. The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the two factors,  $r = 0,338$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . According to Davis (2017) the  $r$  value of  $+0.30$  to  $+0.49$  would be considered positive with a moderate linear relationship. Linear regression analysis was also used to examine the contribution of *principal's communication skills* to the prediction of *school climate*. The results showed that *principal's communication skills* contributed statistically significantly to the prediction of *school climate* (Table 2). The 11,5 % of the variation of *school climate* is explained by the variation in the dimension of *principal's communication skills*. The rest of the variation of *school climate* that cannot be interpreted (cannot be predicted) by *principal's communication skills* is Residual Sum of Squares (= 88,5%).

**Table 2. Regression model- Principal’s communication skills in relation to School Climate**

Predicting Factor of School Climate			
	t	p	
Principal’s communication skills	3,659	35,394	0,000

=321, R=0,338, R square=0,115, F=10,219, p<0,01

## DISCUSSION

The current study has revealed that principals in Greek schools, in Secondary education, have “a lot of” communication skills. Precisely leaders express their thought clearly and distinctly, have the competence to communicate in both verbally and non-verbally way, they adapt the language and style of communication according to who they communicate with and they are good listeners. The findings disagree with those of Ferudun’s and Emre’s (2016) research in Turkey. It was proved that communication within primary schools, perceived by interviewed teachers, was inefficient. In more detail, the majority of teachers realized the school principal’s communication style in disagreements as aggressive. Furthermore, teachers stated that the school principals sermonize them, use communication overload and maintain insufficient listening skills. This is in line with Manafa’s (2018) results which showed that there were problems caused by poor usage of communication skills in secondary schools in Alabama. These include low level of education, difficulty in implementing educational policies, mistrust, lack of unity and disorder in schools. All this creates tensions and a lack of commitment from staff, and even mismanagement of school funding. The researcher also points out that the communication skills needed for effective management of secondary schools includes constant use of eye contact and face-to-face communication, adequate use of verbal communication, making use of active listening and hearing always, often use of open-ended question and constant use of non-verbal and writing. According to our results are Tyler’s (2016) findings. The purpose of his study was to identify communication strategies consistently used by principals at high-performing elementary schools in Virginia.

They were revealed 11 specific communication strategies practiced by most or all of the principals in the participating schools. Further uncovered were 5 themes of communication in leadership which include a student-centered approach to decision-making, transparency of decision-making, shared decision-making with principal and teachers, the role of faculty trust, and principal preparation. Specific principal communication behaviors with teachers were implemented in motivating teachers toward earning high-performing status. These included frequent face-to-face and personal communications, minimal use of whole-school meetings, and weekly principal participation in grade level meetings.

Regarding the second hypothesis, findings have shown that principal’s communication skills have significant, moderate positive correlation with school climate. Additionally, the 11,5 percent of the variance of *school climate* is explained by the variance of *principal's communication skills*. The rest of the variance of “*school climate*” that cannot be interpreted (cannot be predicted) by “*principal's communication skills*” is Residual Sum of Squares (= 88,5%). These findings confirm other relative studies like Oswalt’s (2011), Sapian *et al.*, (2019), Shalle *et al.*, (2018), Oo and Wai (2020) and Subadrah *et al.*, (2021). The purpose of Sapian’s and his collaborators’ (2019) study was to examine the relationship of principal’s communication style and school climate in primary school in Malaysia. The sample consists of 300 primary school teachers who were selected based on two-stage random sampling. The findings showed that principal in primary school’s principal strongly practiced relinquish style, equalitarian style, structure and dynamic style in daily routine as perceived by primary school teachers. Teachers also perceived least number of primary schools’ principal practicing control style and withdraw style in daily routine activities. Some others also perceived that school climate is in supportive and engaged environment. The findings also revealed that there was a moderate and positive relationship between principal’s communication style and school climate. In term of determining the contributions of the significant predictors of school climate, the result revealed that dimension of principal’s communication and style contributed 28.7 percent the variance of school climate. The relationship between the principal's communication style and the school climate shows that communication plays a crucial role in school success. Effective principals are good communicators, while ineffective communicators are not. Principals have two great communication roles, which help teachers to strengthen their feelings as a member of the school and developing responsibility by understanding school requirements (Subadrah *et al.*, 2021). Living in a climate of harmonious interpersonal relationships and having good cooperation between school co-workers is bound to play a decisively positive role in the school's administrative and teaching functions (Kor and Opare, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

The Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards (ELCC), which guide the preparation and development of school leaders in the US and many other countries, point out communication as a dominant component of school leadership. According to ELCC standards, communication is the vehicle that enables leaders to improve their schools. Principals are asked to be responsible for articulating the vision, leading an effective instructional program, managing all aspects in schools ethically and professionally, working in partnership with communities including students’ families, and understanding and

influencing the larger society. None of these responsibilities is possible without effective communication (Ali & Sherin, 2017). The character and quality of school life based on its values and norms, social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures (National School Climate Center, 2015), that is to say school climate is doubtless one of the most crucial factors of school effectiveness. This research aims to examine if principals in Greek secondary schools have communication skills and whether these are associated with a positive school climate. It is revealed that principals have communication skills in a very good degree, according to teachers' perceptions. In addition, findings of this study clearly show that principals' communication has a significant, moderate correlation with school climate. These results are in line with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory which emphasized that the reciprocal interaction of a behavior, person, and environment is where learning occurs in a social setting (Boston University School of Public Health, 2013). Thus, there is a strong influence on social factors and the role of internal and external reinforcements that may affect those factors. This clearly explains why principals' communication skills affect school climate. Furthermore, the findings support Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlighting the vital effect of communication on shaping school climate. Communication could be considered as necessary trait for socialization and affiliation, which lead to higher tiers representing the need to achieve, be competent, and gain recognition or approval. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that teachers are contended with principals' communication skills which leads to healthy, positive school climate. The results certainly present a view of what is happening in secondary schools in Greece, but the sample of the research does not allow for their generalization (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Finally, a positive school climate and effective principal communication are also required by the Greek Ministry of Education, as main aspects of effective schools. So, from the point of practical implications, the results of this study could be used in principals' training programs to practice effective communication techniques and to raise their awareness of the communication styles that can lead to better performance.

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