

## **School Organisational Climate and School Size as Decisive Factors in Implementing Innovative Teaching Methods**

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### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** A favourable school organisational climate is key to teacher job satisfaction, engagement, and the successful implementation of innovative teaching methods. This study investigates how school size influences perceived school openness among vocational school teachers in Slovakia.

**Methods:** Data were collected from 474 teachers across vocational schools of varying sizes. The OCDQ-RS, adapted to the Slovak context, was used to assess five climate dimensions and the index of school openness was calculated.

**Results:** Contrary to expectations, the smallest schools (0-100 students) had the lowest perceived openness. Mid-sized schools (201-300 students) received the highest ratings, while openness declined slightly in the largest schools (>300 students).

**Discussion:** Mid-sized schools may offer the best balance between interpersonal closeness and professional autonomy. Very small schools may suffer from limited peer networks and interpersonal tensions.

**Limitations:** Limitations of the study are given by a lack of relevant research studies and the size and composition of the sample.

**Conclusions:** In vocational schools, there is a need to focus on fostering healthy interpersonal relationships, leadership support, and professional autonomy to promote teachers' openness to implementing innovative methods of teaching, regardless of school size.

**Key words:** school organisational climate, school size, innovative teaching methods.

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**Introduction**

A functioning system of education in the country and favourable conditions in schools contributing to teacher job satisfaction and engagement are necessary for an effective introduction of innovations in teaching. School organisational climate is among those factors that can significantly affect the quality of teachers' performance and, thus, student achievement (Tamášová & Barnová, 2011) as well.

Platania, Morando, and Santisi (2022) define organisational climate as a multidimensional construct, which reflects how people feel about an institution. It can be described as a relatively stable professional environment within an organisation as subjectively evaluated by its members. Weijie and Taek (2022) and Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey (2013) define organisational climate as shared perceptions about the work environment, policies, practices, and procedures, Herdman and McMillan-Capehart emphasise that employees' shared evaluations form it and Hoy (2022) adds perceptions of behaviour to the definition. According to Destler (2017), the quality of an organisational climate is determined by the subjective evaluation of the quality of employees' interpersonal relationships, work dynamics, and authority in the organisation. A favourable organisational climate is marked by loyalty and mutual trust, contributing to all participants' satisfaction, performance quality, engagement, and openness to innovations. It facilitates achieving the organisation's goals and objectives by creating healthy interactions (Kanu et al., 2022).

**1 School organisational Climate**

School organisational climate is a relatively stable phenomenon in time (Platania, Morando, & Santisi, 2022). It can be characterised by particular collective (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2008) or shared (Hoy, 2022) values, norms, attitudes, processes (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013), behaviours, work environment (Weijie & Taek, 2022), or by evaluating other phenomena, e.g. relationships, structures, and practices that influence a particular school's everyday work. It is closely related to the quality of existing relationships and interactions (Obdržálek, Horváthová et al., 2004). As Khun-Inkeeree et al. (2021) pointed out, the quality of the organisational climate impacts not only the school's overall functioning but also the results of its educational work. It reflects how the members of a school community feel in a particular institution.

According to Cohen et al. (2009), each school has a unique organisational climate. Social interactions, academic and administrative practices, and the leadership style in use shape it. Additionally, various other factors influence a

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school's organisational climate, such as organisational structure, the composition of the teaching and non-teaching staff, the qualities of individual teachers, class composition, students' parents, their characteristics, and the school environment. It must be noted that the quality of the organisational climate is subjectively perceived, meaning that while one teacher evaluates it as favourable, it can be considered harmful from another teacher's perspective (Barnová, Gabrhelová, & Veteška, 2022). This variety of individual teachers' perceptions results from the differences in how they interact with the school environment (Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021).

Teacher evaluations of the quality of organisational climate within a particular school develop naturally based on their experiences and participation in school life. They can lead to feelings of both comfort and discomfort in the workplace. They are essential as they influence all aspects of a school's work, individual interactions within the organisation, and teachers' emotional responses and attachment to it (James & McIntyre, 1996). A positive school organisational climate can foster comfort throughout the organisation, enhance teachers' job satisfaction and overall employee performance. Such an environment, in turn, can facilitate the achievement of organisational objectives (Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021). Consequently, for a healthy school functioning, it is essential to cultivate physical and social settings where subjectively positively perceived experiences dominate, and teachers categorise their working experience as favourable. Affolter (2019) also emphasises the significance of a positive work experience. Being a dynamic concept, school organisational climate is influenced by a set of factors of varying intensity. It is difficult (or even impossible) to change the external conditions, but the internal factors can constantly be improved, and thus, the quality of the organisational climate can be shaped. Therefore, studying such phenomena as school culture, teacher job satisfaction, teacher engagement, educational leadership, or social relationships is important.

*1.1 School organisational climate and school openness*

Teachers with diverse characters and temperaments form heterogeneous groups in schools, which makes every teaching staff a unique social environment. Despite their differences, they are expected to work collaboratively, foster positive professional and friendly relationships, communicate effectively, share experiences and examples of good practice, and support each other. So, it can be assumed that teaching is at the core of teachers' roles, but simultaneously, they must get on well with their colleagues and contribute to a positive school environment.

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School openness is a characteristic of schools that provide their community members with a transparent, inclusive, and adaptable educational environment. Open schools are recognisable by open communication, trust, respect, collaboration, and following rules. Hoy (n.d.) defines them as an environment where teachers and leaders are loyal, supportive, genuine, satisfied, and engaged. In open schools, teachers show more satisfaction as they are granted autonomy, opportunities for self-realization, and both personal and professional growth are promoted within them. Recognized as active participants whose ideas are valued, they feel helpful within the organization. Consequently, they are more inclined to collaborate with their colleagues, support one another, and actively engage parents in decision-making processes and school life.

In closed schools, the functioning system is not open; there is distrust and distance between school community members (Hoy, n.d.), game playing, a lack of authenticity, and disengagement.

**2 The role of teacher job satisfaction and teacher engagement in implementing innovative teaching methods**

Two determinants of school organisational climate - teacher job satisfaction and teacher engagement - play a key role in teachers' willingness to implement innovative teaching methods.

School organisational climate has a significant impact on teachers' experience, performance, and satisfaction in an educational institution (Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021; Khun-Inkeree et al., 2021), but teachers are also important determinants of the quality of the organisational climate.

Teacher job (dis)satisfaction is a positive or negative reaction (Ulich & Wülser, 2004) to the experienced conditions, ranging from happiness to burnout (Stapleton, Garby, & Sabot, 2020). It is the result of a kind of negotiation between a teacher's needs and expectations and the everyday reality of an educational institution.

Work engagement can be defined as a long-term characteristic (Kärner, Bottling, Friederichs, & Sembill, 2021), a positive and fulfilling state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Timms and Brough (2013) summarised that work engagement is associated with greater work contentment, input, and productivity.

Based on available research studies, it can be assumed that teacher job satisfaction is associated with teacher engagement, and there is also research evidence on the existence of a relationship between teacher career satisfaction and work engagement (Timms & Brough, 2013). A favorable organizational

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climate is likely to enhance teachers' job satisfaction, which in turn positively influences the quality of their performance. Suppose teachers feel comfortable in their role as a teacher and are satisfied in their workplace (school), they tend to apply a responsible and positive approach to performing their job, work on improving their teaching by implementing new methods and practices, are creative, and show an inclination to collaborate with their colleagues. Also, engaged teachers' relationships with other school community members tend to be more favourable than those of their less engaged peers. According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), dedication, vigour, and absorption are characteristic of teacher engagement. Timms and Brough (2013) mention higher work contentment, input, and productivity in this context.

Kapa and Gimbert (2017) confirmed the association between teacher job satisfaction, engagement, and organisational climate on one hand and implementing innovative teaching methods on the other. They claim that a school's organizational climate plays a crucial role in influencing student achievement. An unhealthy climate can decrease teacher motivation and enthusiasm, resulting in dissatisfaction (Hur, Leon, & Buettner, 2016).

Another key factor is teacher autonomy, which significantly enhances teacher work engagement and reduces the likelihood of attrition (Vašíčková, 2014). Autonomy empowers educators with greater freedom, encourages innovation and experimentation - factors that increase the quality of the educational process and enhance teachers' job satisfaction and sense of professional fulfillment.

### **3 The presumed role of school size**

School size, usually given by the number of enrolled students, can influence the quality of organisational climate and implementation of innovative teaching methods in schools in several ways. Firstly, it is among the organisational factors impacting teacher stress levels in a schools (Tikkanen et al., 2022). School size is usually classified as a risk or protective factor impacting a school's social climate. Available studies suggest that building and maintaining a favorable school climate in smaller schools is easier than in larger ones. In schools with fewer students, the school community members have closer, i.e. more intimate relationships, which can facilitate the adoption of new pedagogical approaches (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Furthermore, smaller school communities are generally considered safer environments promoting all members' well-being (Gordon Rouse et al., 2019) and creating a collaborative culture building on strong interpersonal relationships and mutual trust and support (Bryk et al., 2010).

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Secondly, smaller school sizes allow more flexibility and provide more space for innovations which is based on the presumption that in smaller communities, communication is easier, more direct, and the administrative burden is smaller. On the other hand, larger schools typically have better access to technologies and resources in general. Moreover, a higher number of teachers in the school compared with smaller schools may bring a greater diversity in the educational approaches applied in a particular school and competition.

#### **4 Method**

The presented investigation was part of a more extensive research study conducted within the international grant project Interconnection between Teacher Resilience and School Organisational Climate (No. IGA005DTIPE/2024\_2026).

##### *4.1 Research sample*

474 vocational school teachers participated in the study. Based on the number of students at their respective schools, the participants were categorized into two main groups: 1. teachers from larger schools with 300 or more students (n=177; 43.7%), and 2. teachers from smaller schools with fewer than 300 students (n=267; 56.3%). The group representing smaller schools was further subdivided into three categories: 1. schools with 0-100 students (n=39; 8.22%), 2. schools with 101-200 students (n=93; 19.6%), and 3. schools with 201-300 students (n=135; 28.5%) (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Composition of the sample – School size*

	<i>Gender / School size (number of students)</i>				<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>		
0-100 students	9	1.90%	30	6.33%	39	8.23%
101-200 students	36	7.59%	57	12.03%	93	19.62%
201-300 students	54	11.39%	81	17.09%	135	28.48%
More than 300 students	93	19.62%	114	24.05%	207	43.67%
Total	192	40.51%	282	59.49%	474	100.00%

##### *4.2 Research instrument*

In this study, the standardized OCDQ-RS (Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Secondary Schools) developed by Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) was employed to assess the organizational climate of schools. Although a variety of research tools exist for evaluating school climate across different

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educational contexts and populations, the OCDQ-RS was selected due to two key advantages: 1. it was explicitly designed for use in all types of secondary schools, and 2. it had previously been adapted to the Slovak context by Gavora and Braunová (2010), making it suitable for application in Slovak vocational education settings.

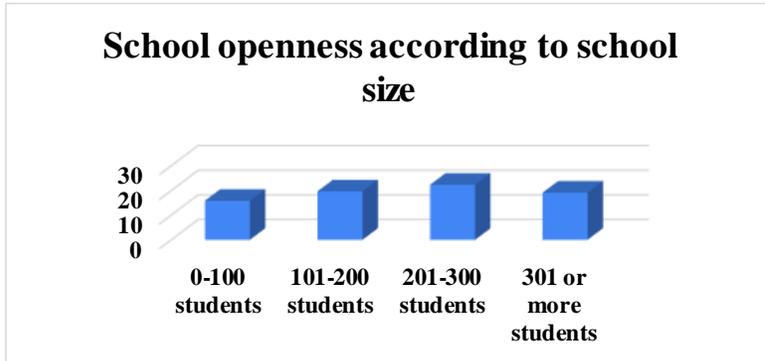
The OCDQ-RS consists of 34 items distributed across five dimensions: Supportive Principal Behaviour (SPB), Directive Principal Behaviour (DPB), Engaged Teacher Behaviour (ETB), Frustrated Teacher Behaviour (FTB), and Intimate Teacher Behaviour (ITB). Respondents rate how frequently certain behaviours or phenomena occur in their schools using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“rarely occurs”) to 4 (“very frequently occurs”). Although the original purpose of the scale was to explore and compare the perceived organizational climate and openness of individual secondary schools, the present study utilized it to capture teachers’ perceptions of the organizational climate in vocational schools across Slovakia. Specifically, it was used to investigate associations between principal and teacher behaviors. Additionally, the Index of School Climate Openness (IO) was calculated using the formula:  $IO = (SPB + ETB) - (DPB + FTB)$ .

## **5 Results and discussion**

In the present part of the research study, we focused on school openness in relation to school size, given by the number of enrolled students, and statistically significant differences in favour of small schools were presumed.

As shown in Figure 10, contrary to our expectations, the openness score increases with the number of enrolled students in the school, following the trend: 0-100 students → 101-200 students → 201-300 students. However, the respondents from schools with more than 300 students subjectively rated school openness less favourably than those with 201-300 students.

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*Figure 1.* School openness according to school size.

The finding that teachers from schools with 100 or fewer enrolled students rated school openness with the lowest average score, which was even significantly lower than in large schools with 301 or more students, was surprising. This was unexpected, as we assumed that these small schools' organisational climate would be evaluated more positively since it theoretically should be easier to maintain a warm and supportive environment in smaller schools than in larger ones. It was presumed that in small schools, for which a more intimate school climate is characteristic, teachers and students know each other better and respect each other more. This expectation aligns with Oh (2024), according to whom in smaller organisations, the workload is more manageable and the experienced stress levels are lower. However, the data suggest that, at least among our respondents, very small schools do not have this advantage over larger schools and limited interpersonal dynamics and higher visibility of individual behaviour in them may have played an important role. It means that in very small groups, it is difficult to "blend in", mistakes and shortcomings are more easily noticeable, and the choice of relationships within the teaching staff is limited. For example, if a problematic teacher disrupts the team with their behaviour, this can become a significant source of stress in a small school. In contrast, in larger schools, teachers have more opportunities to form smaller groups based on mutual preferences, shared subjects, common interests, etc., allowing them to avoid interactions with problematic colleagues.

From the perspective of using innovative teaching methods in the classroom, the finding that teachers working in larger schools evaluated the school

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organisational climate more positively than teachers in small schools suggests that in larger schools, teachers may have more resources for experimenting with innovations and the conditions may be more favourable. Higher competition in larger schools can be another motivating factor for teachers to implement innovative teaching methods in the classroom. This is in line with Collie's (2021) finding that there is an association between larger school sizes and teacher engagement.

**Conclusions**

The quality of school organisational climate plays a crucial role in cultivating teachers' job satisfaction, engagement, and openness to implementing innovative teaching methods. In the present study, the validity of the presumption regarding the existence of statistically significant differences in evaluating the quality of school organisational climate by vocational school teachers according to the variable of school size was confirmed. While smaller schools are often expected to offer a more positive organisational climate, the present results suggest that mid-sized schools provide more favourable conditions for teacher collaboration and innovation. Surprisingly, the detected openness scores were the lowest in the smallest schools. Larger schools may benefit from greater resources, diversity of teachers and their educational approaches, and opportunities for selective collaboration.

These findings highlight the need to focus more on fostering healthy interpersonal relationships, leadership support, and professional autonomy, regardless of school size. More attention should be paid to teacher well-being and job satisfaction, which are influenced by school culture (Day, 2014), supportive peer relationships, mutual communication and constructive dialogue among school community members, access to mentoring, and a collaborative social environment (Brunetti, 2006). Key factors also include supportive leadership (Cameron & Lovett, 2014), opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making (Johnson et al., 2014), and a manageable workload.

Unfortunately, despite an extensive search, only a few studies addressed the association between subjectively perceived quality of school organisational climate and school size. Due to the lack of existing research on this topic, comparing our findings with those of previously published studies is not feasible, which represents a limitation of the study. Additionally, the comparability of our results with international research is further complicated by differing definitions of school size - schools with more than 300 students, categorized as large in our study, are still considered small in many other countries. Based on the above, it can be assumed that it is not possible to generalise the present findings to the

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entire population of vocational school teachers, and further research is needed in the field.

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