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Teachers' and Principals' Perception of Organizational Climate in Preschool: A Case of the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Organizational climate refers to the shared perceptions of behavior, the work environment, and daily life within an organization. This study is based on the assumption that, due to their differing roles and responsibilities in preschools, teachers and principals have significantly different perceptions of the organizational climate. The sample included 354 teachers and 410 principals from the Czech Republic. Data were collected using the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-P, a tool adapted and validated for the preschool setting. Overall, both teachers and principals viewed the preschool climate positively, with item averages above the midpoint of the scale. However, principals perceived their support for teaching staff significantly more positively than teachers did, and they also rated teacher involvement more favorably than the teachers themselves. Teachers reported encountering inappropriate behavior from colleagues infrequently and rated the level of directiveness from principals relatively low, suggesting they perceive their principals' leadership style positively. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between teachers' education levels and their perception of principal directiveness, as well as with school size.

***Keywords*:** organizational climate, preschool teacher, preschool principal, preschool management

The Concept of Organizational Climate

The concept of organizational climate was originally developed in business settings and has been defined in various ways, though most definitions share a common element. Organizational climate refers to the overall atmosphere of a workplace as perceived by both employees and leaders (Burton et al., 2004; Klinker et al., 2005; McLean et al., 2023; Parker et al., 2003; Schulte et al., 2006). It is a relatively stable characteristic that predominates within an organization over an extended period, changing only gradually. Rather than being an objective assessment made by an external observer, organizational climate is a subjective interpretation of the work environment. Research indicates that individual employees both shape and perceive the organizational climate based on their personal workplace experiences (Hewit & La Paro, 2019). The quality of this climate varies and is influenced by both objective and subjective factors. A positive organizational climate is typically associated with collegiality among staff and leaders, which correlates with lower levels of occupational burnout and a reduced likelihood of employees intending to leave the organization (Hur et al., 2023). Furthermore, a favorable organizational climate is positively linked to employees' occupational commitment (Berberoglu, 2018; Sugiarto, 2018).

The School Climate

In a school environment, the concept of school climate shares similar attributes with organizational climate in business settings. It is a relatively stable characteristic of the school, shaped and perceived by both teachers and administrators, based on their collective perceptions of behavior within the school (Hao et al., 2024; Tableman, 2003; The Aspen Institute, 2021).

Key elements of school climate include the quality of relationships among school members, teaching and learning practices, and the organizational structures in place (Bull et al., 2024). A positive school climate plays a crucial role in preventing teacher stress and other emotional challenges (Jeon & Ardeleanu, 2020). Examining the school climate provides valuable insight into how teachers and administrators feel within the school, while also shedding light on the broader dynamics and interactions that shape the daily life of the school (Welsh, 2000).

In the view of Bradshaw et al. (2014), school climate refers to beliefs, values, and attitudes that establish the interaction among teachers and administrators. School climate both creates and regulates acceptable behavioral parameters and norms that exist in schools. Organizational climate is a product of social interaction between teachers and administrators, and it is influenced by perceived values of education and social values preferred in school. School climate constitutes a crucial factor in fostering teaching, supporting teachers' and children´s development and promoting healthy relationships, which are essential for successful education and care (Grazia & Molinari, 2020). Thus, by establishing and maintaining positive school climate and a healthy working environment, the school leadership shapes teacher and student outcomes (Özdemir et al., 2024). Admiraal and Røberg (2023) and Bömeke et al. (2021) note that the school climate is associated with the school culture. School culture and climate and work-related wellbeing support early childhood professionals' decisions to stay in or leave the profession.

School climate is not a separate perception of principals and teacher but rather their shared view of behaviors, work environment, and organizational life (Veletić et al., 2023). The literature emphasizes a tight connection between school climate and school leadership (Bömeke et al., 2021). Examining the perspectives of teachers and principals on the shared aspects of school climate is one of the key variables of effective leadership in school (Brezicha et al., 2020) and in fostering its innovative culture (Admiraal & Røberg, 2023).

Several studies captured the contrasting roles of principals and teachers, but they did not examine the climate perception itself. For instance, Sebastian et al. (2016) explored how principals' leadership affects instructional quality and school climate, including how different perceptions between teachers' and principals' impact overall school effectiveness. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) described how trust between principals and teachers impacts the school climate and overall school effectiveness, emphasizing how leadership practices influence teachers' perceptions. However, they concentrated only on a specific area of "climate of trust" and not on broader areas of the school climate.

The literature shows that preschool climate is heavily under investigated. To our knowledge, there are only a few studies that examined preschool climate, doing so in differing complexity and validity. For instance, Dennis (2010) and Dennis and O'Connor (2013) used two of five subscales of the Organisation Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ-RE) to investigate preschools. In another study, Hewitt and La Paro (2019) inspected only two variables, teachers' collegiality and principals' support, in a small sample of 48 teachers. Somewhat wider lenses were employed in the study of Veziroglu-Celik and Yildiz (2018). They used the Turkish adaptation of Early Childhood Work Environment Scale, consisting of 10 subscales. However, they did not perform a factor analysis with the Turkish version nor a calculation of internal reliability of the instrument. The same instrument was used in Britain by Saunders (2018). Zinsser et al. (2016) investigated emotional climate in U.S. preschools; however, their sample was too small (12 preschool principals) to provide a thorough picture of preschool administration.

One significant gap in the research on preschool climate is the lack of distinction between the perceptions of teachers and principals. Apart from Hewitt and La Paro's (2019) study and the somewhat outdated work by Jorde-Bloom (1988), this distinction has only been explored at the K-12 educational level. This is paradoxical, as differences in preschool climate perception stem from the varying roles teachers and principals play within the preschool setting. Teachers often view the climate through their interactions with children, while principals have a broader perspective, encompassing not just classrooms but also administrative tasks and interactions with staff, children, and parents.

The current study focuses on the underexplored issue of differences in how teachers and principals perceive the preschool climate. Additionally, it expands our understanding of how preschool climate is associated with both individual factors—such as the role within the preschool, highest level of education, years of teaching experience, and age—and school-level factors, including the number of classes and teachers in the preschool. Data were collected using a rigorously validated research instrument, with participants drawn from a large sample of preschools in the Czech Republic. This study, therefore, contributes to the broader understanding of preschool climate, complementing findings from studies conducted in North America, Britain, and Turkey.

The Context of Preschools in the Czech Republic

To better understand the aims of this study, study participants' characteristics and findings, we present a short description of the Czech preschool. In the Czech Republic, preschools offer education for children from age two to six. By the state legislature, attendance in preschool is obligatory for children from age five until six. In state-run preschools, parents pay for education and food provided for their child. For children, preschool is the first environment outside of their families in which they spend a portion of the day. Therefore, teaching children to understand and acquire preschool rules and principles poses significant demands on teachers. The other challenging task of teachers is to align the developmental differences among children, as some of them live in families providing less stimulating developmental conditions. Preschool teachers are in daily contact with the child's parents; thus, forming partnerships with them is one of the most important tasks of preschool teachers.

Preschool teachers plan and organize children's activities with varying teacher involvement. They provide guidance, support, and scaffolding to children's learning, but they also enable children's choice play. Teachers employ a range of educational strategies in both large and small group instruction. Preschools provide a variety of materials and resources for children to manipulate and use, both in learning and play activities. The preschool physical environment is usually segmented into circles or corners to enable learning in a specific domain, e.g., science, pre-literacy, visual arts, or music. Instructional activities are managed by teachers, with emphasis on the needs of individual children

Preschools are managed by principals who are responsible for implementing the state preschool curriculum, as well as managing financial and personnel matters. Preschools are organized into classes, each with two teachers. The qualifications required to become a preschool teacher vary. The minimum qualification is graduation from a secondary vocational school specializing in preschool education, while the highest qualification is a master's degree in preschool pedagogy. Preschool teaching staff tend to be small compared to primary or secondary schools, which fosters close relationships among staff members. This close-knit environment contributes to the effective functioning of the institution. Preschools predominantly employ female teachers; in fact, it is uncommon to see a male teacher on staff.

Study Aims

This study has four aims. Three aims are exploratory, one is methodological:

- Aim 1 is to explore how teachers and principals differ in their perceptions of the climate in their preschool.
- Aim 2 is to examine how the preschool organizational climate is related to teachers' and principals' variables (the working position in preschool, highest education completed, years of teaching practice and age of participants).
- Aim 3 is to examine how preschool size (number of classes and teachers) is associated with teachers' and principals' perceptions of the preschool climate.
- Aim 4 is to validate an instrument for measuring organizational climate in preschools and apply it to achieve research aims 1 through 3.

The demographic and contextual variables in aims 2 and 3 were examined because the literature shows that these variables play a strong role in how the preschool staff perceives the organizational climate in their preschools (cf., Early et al., 2006; Ho et al., 2016; Nasiopoulou et al., 2017).

METHOD

Study Participants

The participants of the study were 769 preschool educators, of which 359 (46.7%) were teachers and 410 (53.3%) were principals. They worked in preschools throughout the Czech Republic. The sampling strategy was judgmental. Preschools from Prague, along with all regions and districts of the Czech Republic, were represented. The sample of teachers consisted mainly of women (99.2%), which also applies to principals (98.5%). The average age of teachers was 42.5 years (SD = 12.6). The average age of principals was higher, at 52 years (SD = 8). The length of experience in teaching was higher for principals (28.9 years, SD = 11.1) than for teachers (23.5 years; SD = 11.6) and teachers (16.6 years, SD = 13.4). Most of the teachers completed secondary vocational school (28.4%), earned a bachelor's degree (18.1%), or a master´s degree (19.5%). Principals completed a secondary vocational school (30.2%), earned a bachelor's degree (12,4%), or earned a master's degree (34,4%). A rather large proportion of data on completed education were missing (32.9% of teachers and 22.4 % of principals). The size of preschools in which the participants were employed varied. Approximately 90% of preschools employed 2 to 12 teachers, while the remaining 10% of preschools had 13 to 41 teachers.

The Instrument

This study used a questionnaire called the Organisational Climate Description-P (OCDQ-P). Because it is costly and time consuming to construct an entirely new instrument, we opted to use items from two questionnaires measuring organizational climate of schools, i.e., OCDQ-RE and OCDQ-RS (Hoy, et al., 1991), and adapt them for measuring organizational climate in preschools in the Czech Republic. These questionnaires assess how teachers' and principals' behavior contribute to school climate. Each behavior constitutes several dimensions, thus providing a well-structured description of the institution's climate. Another reason for choosing these questionnaires was that we have had positive experience using these questionnaires in a previous study (Gavora & Braunová, 2010).

The OCDQ-RE comprises 42 items, while the OCDQ-RS contains 34 items, some of which overlap. In the process of adaptation, we checked the meaning of each original questionnaire item and decided on its relevance to the preschool teacher staff. Many items were reworded, and some were eliminated. Also, new items were constructed to make the instrument tailored to preschool. Together, we used 48 questionnaire items, al, of which we validated, as described below. The questionnaire uses a four-point Likert-type scale, from "rarely occurs" (1) to "very frequently occurs" (4).

The administration of the questionnaire took place separately in each preschool and was accomplished by STEM/MARK, an agency specializing in survey administration. The survey was administered in electronic form. Anonymity was ensured by assigning a code to each participant. Informed consent was signed by participants before they completed the questionnaire. To distinguish this new questionnaire from its predecessors, we named it OCDQ-P.

Because it was not clear how the questionnaire would behave in a preschool environment, we first assessed its construct validity and reliability, using the research sample described above. We first conducted exploratory factor analysis, followed by confirmatory factor analysis. In exploratory factor analysis, we used the maximum likelihood factoring. The number of factors was determined by parallel analysis (Hayton et al., 2004), and the factor load was set at 0.40, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Promax factor rotations were used to improve interpretability of results. In addition, we checked the intercorrelations of the questionnaire dimensions. Reliability (internal consistency) was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. In confirmatory factor analysis we calculated the following fit indices: RMSEA, CFI, TLI and NNFI. In general, CFI, TLI, and NNFI statistics greater than 0.90 are considered as an "adequate" model fit, whereas values greater than 0.95 are deemed as a "good" model fit. Fit indexes for RMSEA values less than 0.08 are considered "good" and values between 0.08 and 0.10 "mediocre" (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The calculations were performed in JASP 0.14.1 and SPSS Amos 25 software. Because we assumed different results for teachers and principals, we conducted separate analyses for these samples.

OCDQ-P Validation with Teacher Sample

For teachers, the exploratory factor analysis offered five factors (dimensions) that correspond to (1) supporting behavior of principal, (2) directive behavior of principal, (3) engaged teacher behavior, (4) frustrated teacher behavior, and (5) friendly teacher behavior. Examples of items (translation from Czech):

- **Supporting behavior of principal (SUPP):**
  The principal sets an example by working hard herself.
  The principal goes out of their way to help teachers.

- **Directive behavior of principal (DIR):**
  The principal monitors everything teachers do.
  The principal supervises teachers closely.

- **Engaged teacher behavior (ENG):**
  Teachers help and assist each other.
  The morale of teachers at our preschool is high.

- **Frustrated teacher behavior (FRUS):**
  The mannerism of some teachers at our preschool is annoying.
  Some teachers have evasive behavior.

- **Friendly teacher behavior (FRIEND):**
  Teachers' closest friends are other teachers at this preschool.
  Teachers socialize with each other on a regular basis.

Table 1 presents the number of items in each questionnaire dimension and its reliability. The number of items in the dimension ranged from six to eight, but only three items were obtained in the FRUS dimension, a critically low number. However, given the satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$), we decided to retain this dimension. ENG and SUPP dimensions demonstrate excellent reliability, while FRUS and DIR show satisfactory reliability (Field, 2018). An important element of instrument validation is the detection of correlations between individual dimensions. According to authors of the OCDQ-RE and OCDQ-RS (Hoy, et al., 1991), the intercorrelations among the dimensions pointing to a favorable climate (SUPP, ENG and FRIEND) should be positive, and these dimensions should be negatively or low correlated with the dimensions revealing unfavorable climate (FRUS and DIR). Table 2 shows that, in principle, these conditions have been met. SUPP, ENG and FRIEND correlated with each other from 0.25 to 0.54 and with DIR and FRUS from 0 to -0.51. As expected, the DIR and FRUS dimensions were positively correlated. Overall, we can summarize that the exploratory factor analysis for the teachers sample confirmed the reasonable structure of the instrument. In a final step in the questionnaire validation, we performed the confirmatory factor analysis. Indices with five latent variables (i.e., SUPP, ENG, FRIEND, DIR, and FRUS) indicated that the model adequately fit the data: RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, and NNFI = 0.90. We can therefore summarize that the OCDQ-P demonstrated good construct validity for the teacher sample.

Table 1

Number of Items, Dimension Reliability, and Explained Variance of the OCDQ-P

Dimension	ENG		SUPP		FRIEND		FRUS		DIR		Variance
	Items	Alpha	Items	Alpha	Items	Alpha	Items	Alpha	Items	Alpha	%
Teachers	8	0.89	6	0.90	7	0.79	3	0.77	6	0.72	44
Principals	8	0.85	8	0.75	6	0.84	-	-	-	-	31

Note. ENG = teachers' engagement, SUPP = supportive principal behavior, FRIEND = friendly teacher behavior, FRUS = frustrated teacher behavior, DIR = directive principal behavior. Alpha = Cronbach's coefficient of internal consistency. Scale: "rarely occurs" (1) to "very frequently occurs" (4).

Table 2

Intercorrelations among the OCDQ-P Dimensions in the Teacher Sample

	SUPP	ENG	FRIEND	DIR
ENG	0.54	-		
FRIEND	0.25	0.49	-	
DIR	-0.06	0.00	-0.06	-
FRUS	-0.31	-0.51	-0.26	0.30

Note. Spearman correlation. ENG = teachers' engagement, SUPP = supportive principal behavior, FRIEND = friendly teacher behavior, FRUS = frustrated teacher behavior, DIR = directive principal behavior.

OCDQ-P Validation with Principals' Sample

With preschool principals, exploratory factor analysis extracted five factors. These were ENG, SUPP, and FRIEND. They had six to eight items and satisfactory to excellent reliability (Table 1). FRUS had only four items and demonstrated rather low reliability ($\alpha = 0.59$), DIR had only two items. Because of low reliability, these two factors were removed from further consideration. As expected, the intercorrelations between these dimensions were positive. The SUPP dimension correlated with ENG 0.57 and with FRIEND 0.32. ENG correlated with FRIEND 0.47. The confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model with the three dimensions fit the data adequately: RMSEA = 0.04, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.93, and NNFI = 0.93.

RESULTS

First, we will compare the averages of the climate dimensions, then we will interpret the differences between teachers and principals, and finally we will show the relationships between the dimension averages and characteristics of the participants

and preschools. Because the OCDQ-P instrument measured dimensions on a 4-point scale, the higher the average score, the higher the frequency of the behavior.

The basic results are shown in Table 3. Teachers and principals had rather high averages in the SUPP and ENG dimensions—from 3.18 to 3.51 points. The averages are above the midpoint of the four-point scale, so we can assert that both teachers and principals perceive these aspects of the climate of their preschool favorably. The results show that principals are good models of hardworking employees, they appreciate teachers' work, often advise them on professional matters, accept their good ideas, understand their personal situation, and care about the well-being of preschool (SUPP dimension). As for the teachers, they often help each other, have a relatively high work ethic, quite enjoy working in preschool, are quite proud of it, have a sense of collegiality, value the expertise of their colleagues, and are usually able to get excited about new ideas (ENG dimension).

The averages of the FRIEND dimension are surprisingly low, both in teachers' and principals' perceptions. Both teachers and principals rated this dimension below the midpoint of the scale (2.04). Since preschool collectives are rather small, we expected them to be more close-knit, which would bring higher averages in this dimension. However, this did not happen. It may be because the FRIEND dimension items concentrated on socializing of the staff members rather than on work cooperation and collaboration of the staff.

The FRUS dimension in the teachers' sample had a rather low average (1.55). This indicates that the behavior of the teaching staff is not a major source of friction. Teachers encounter inappropriate behavior of their colleagues infrequently; they are not irritated by their behavior and do not hear excuses on their part. It should be noted that the FRUS dimension evaluated the behavior of colleagues, not the behavior of their principals.

The DIR dimension measured the teachers' perceptions of managerial behavior of their principals. The average of the dimension is 2.17, which is below the midpoint of the scale. We can therefore state that teachers perceive the management behavior of their principals rather positively, e.g., teachers are rarely or only occasionally dissatisfied with the behavior of the principal. Teachers rated the principal's consistency favorably in checking teachers' activities with children or their strictness in requiring teachers' duties.

The comparison of teachers' and principals' ratings can be accomplished only in the SUPP, ENG, and FRIEND dimensions. At first glance, the differences are slight but are statistically significant. In the SUPP and ENG dimensions, the averages of principals are somewhat higher than those of teachers. The items in the SUPP dimension, which emerged from the factor analyses, are not identical for teachers and principals, so we could only compare the same items (six out of eight). Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, all items showed a difference at the 0.1% level in favor of principals. Therefore, principals rate their support of the staff significantly better than teachers perceive this support. Principals appreciate and praise the teachers, they help them professionally and in personal matters, they are inclined to accept their ideas, they set examples of working hard and have a clear vision of the preschool. In all these items, principals scored significantly higher than teachers. In the ENG dimension, where the items were identical for teachers and principals, it was possible to calculate the difference for all items of the dimension. Here, too, a significantly higher rating was shown for principals (Kruskal-Wallis test, $H(1) = 4.31$, $p = 0.04$). Therefore, principals rated the commitment of teachers higher than the teachers rated it. Principals value their support, work ethic, dedication, and collegiality; they also appreciate their expertise and ability to become inspired about new ideas. The FRIEND dimension was rated identically by both teachers and principals and below the midpoint of the four-point scale.

Table 3

Descriptive Data from the OCDQ-P

	SUPP		ENG		FRIEND		FRUS	DIR
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Teachers
M	3.18	3.51	3.22	3.34	2.04	2.04	1.55	2.17
SD	0.71	0.35	0.59	0.44	0.56	0.62	0.60	0.57
Min	1	2.13	1.25	2	1	1	1	1
Max	4	4	4	4	3.71	4	3.7	4

Note. SUPP = supportive principal behavior, ENG = teachers' engagement, FRIEND = friendly teacher behavior, FRUS = frustrated teacher behavior, DIR = directive principal behavior. Scale: "rarely occurs" (1) to "very frequently occurs" (4).

Variables Associated with the Organizational Climate in Preschool

The age and length of experience of teachers and principals can be a significant factor that affected the rating of the preschool organizational climate. Older and more experienced teaching staff may be more committed (Urbánek, 2006), but it can show a higher level of frustration. Therefore, we expected different relationships between participants' age and length of practice with ratings in the questionnaire dimensions. As shown in Table 4, our assumption was not true for teachers. All correlation coefficients are low and statistically insignificant; however, the results are different for principals. There are statistically significant correlations between length of experience and age with ratings in the ENG and FRIEND dimensions. The correlations are negative, indicating that older and longer-practicing principals rated the commitment of teachers and social relations among them rather unfavorably. In this study, principals were older than teachers (52 versus 42.5 years, on average) and had longer experience (28.9 versus 16.6 years, on average). It is therefore likely that because of their many years of experience, principals have a stricter view of their subordinates and expect a higher work commitment, dedication, and professional competence. They also expected a higher degree of collegiality and teamwork in the preschool staff. The principals went through different professional trajectories than teachers, and their ideas about children and preschool had different frames. They had longer experience, worked with more teachers during their careers, and often served as principals in different preschools. These factors might have affected the principals' ratings.

Another demographic variable that we correlated measured dimensions was participants' highest level of education. Only one significant correlation was found: education in relation to teachers' DIR dimension rating. The higher the teachers' education, the higher the tendency to rate the behavior of their principals as more directive. Teachers were more critical of principals and, given their level of professional competence, considered their management to be unnecessarily strict and even authoritarian.

The size of the preschool, i.e., the number of teachers and children, is a variable that can significantly determine the organizational climate. This is because the size of preschool affects the division of labor, interaction, and social relations of the staff (Ho et al., 2016). According to Urbánek (2005), in large schools, teachers prevent the development of closer, integrated, and less anonymous professional relationships, and they hamper cooperation of teachers. However, Urbánek's data from elementary schools showed only modest differences between small and large schools in all climate dimensions examined. Sizes of preschools must be judged differently to that of elementary schools. A preschool with 10 classes is large, but an elementary school with this number of classes is small. In this study, the average number of teachers in a preschool was 7. Approximately 90% of preschools in the current sample had from 2 to 12 teachers, and the rest had 13 to 41 teachers. Table 4 shows significant but negative correlations between preschool size and ENG and FRIEND dimensions in teachers' ratings. The negative correlations indicate that the larger the school, the lower the perception of teachers' commitment and less favorable the relations in the teaching staff. For the FRUS and DIR dimensions, the relationship is reverse for teachers. The larger the preschool, the more likely teachers are to experience frustration and perceive the principal's behavior as directive. For preschool principals, only one statistically significant relationship with preschool size was identified, which pertains to the ENG dimension. The negative correlation indicates that from the principal's perspective, the larger the staff, the lower the teachers´ commitment. Teachers help each other less frequently, support each other less often, have little joy in their work and are less often able to get excited about the innovative plans of preschool.

Table 4

Correlations between the OCDQ-P Dimensions, the Characteristics of Participants, and the Size of Preschool

	Teachers				Principals			
	Experience	Age	Education	Size of preschool	Experience	Age	Education	Size of preschool
SUPP	-0.06	-0.03	0.05	-0.17	-0.05	-0.08	0.02	-0.04
ENG	0.02	0.04	0.19	-0.20***	-0.10*	-0.15**	0.01	-0.20***
FRIEND	0.00	-0.06	-0.09	-0.13*	-0.13**	-0.17***	-0.09	0.00
FRUS	-0.03	0.07	-0.15	0.17**	-	-	-	-
DIR	0.04	0.03	0.19**	0.14**	-	-	-	-

Note. Spearman´s correlation; *$p < 0{,}05$; ** $p < 0{,}01$; ***$p < 0{,}001$. SUPP = supportive principal behavior, ENG = teachers' engagement, FRIEND = friendly teacher behavior, FRUS = frustrated teacher behavior, DIR = directive principal behavior.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the organizational climate of preschools from the perspective of both teachers and principals. To obtain data, we developed a questionnaire, the OCDQ-P, which we then validated independently with a sample of teachers and principals. For teachers, the factor analysis yielded five dimensions: SUPP, ENG, FRIEND, FRUS and DIR. For principals, only the SUPP, ENG, and FRIEND dimensions were extracted. The FRUS and DIR dimensions were not supported by factor analysis among principals. Using this multidimensional approach, and presenting data on each dimension, this study is in contrast with authors who dichotomized school climate as strictly open/closed (Hoy et al., 1991) or high/low (Saunders, 2018).

The data show that principals indicated a relatively favorable rating of support (SUPP) of teachers, and teachers indicated favorable ratings of work commitment (ENG). This positive perception is a good indicator of cohesion in the preschool staff. However, principals rated their support by teachers statistically significantly higher than teachers. Principals therefore perceive their own supportive management style more strongly than teachers do. Principals also rated the commitment of teachers statistically significantly higher than the teachers' own ratings.

The principals' positive perception of organizational climate may be attributed to several circumstances. In general, leaders have a tendency to overestimate their performance (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992). Principals tend "to paint a nice picture" of the workplace they are responsible for. Jorde-Bloom (1988) explained this phenomenon by differences in principals' and teachers' locus of control. Their control orientation is related to their perceptions of organizational climate. In general, it can be stated that principals' and teachers' perception is strongly determined by their different roles and hierarchical positions in the workplace (Ramsey et al., 2016).

Another circumstance that can be attributed to perceptual differences between principals and teachers is gender. Urbánek (2006) suggests that female principals exert more friendliness towards employees than male principals. Females are more emotional in creating a preschool environment (Zinsser et al., 2016) and, as such, they judge the environment in milder terms. In the current sample, females constituted 98.5% of the principal sample, which could have shaped the findings, particularly those related to interpersonal dynamics, emotional climate, and overall environmental assessment. However, testing the assumption of the gender effect in preschool organizational climate would need an empirical comparison of the perception of climate by both female and male principals. But because the number of male principals in preschools in the Czech Republic is considerably small, this test would be difficult to administer. Needless to say, not only male principals but also male teachers affect the preschool education. Male teachers bring children a different learning experience, e.g., the positive male model of behavior or different learning style. Therefore, many administrators aim to change the gender imbalance in staff by hiring more male teachers. This task is difficult because males are reluctant to enter the job in preschool because of low salaries, low social prestige, and the negative stigma associated with men working at this level of education (Alharahsheh et al., 2021; Majerčíková & Urbaniecová, 2020).

Additional interpretation of the relatively favorable organizational climate can be attributed to the small size of preschools. Size is an important characteristic of institutions (Ho et al., 2015; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Urbánek, 2005). Small schools tend to have more favorable characteristics than large schools. However, not only the size matters but also its composition. In the Czech Republic, the staff of a preschool consists of a principal, a senior teacher and a small team of teachers. A small and simple organizational structure has the advantage of providing support in straightforward supervision, communication, and work coordination (Ho, 2010). Previous studies found that a smaller staff promoted greater group cohesion, collegiality, and generally a more positive perception of the workplace (McGinty et al., 2008; Saunders, 2018). Ho et al. (2016) found that in small preschools, teachers reported significantly higher support than their counterparts in medium and large schools in aspects including teacher participation in decision making, school management support, and school performance. On the other hand, large schools often have highly formal relationships, less flexibility, and individuals feel less valued (Dekker & Barling, 1995). In the Czech Republic, the majority of preschools have a small teaching staff. In the current study, about 90% of preschools had from 2 to 12 teachers. These circumstances created a specific climate that was favorably perceived by both teachers and principals.

In regard to the demographics of the teacher sample, the length of experience and age of teachers did not show statistically significant relationships with perception of organizational climate. Only the level of education correlated significantly with the DIR dimension, indicating that higher educated teachers tend to consider their principal's management rather directive. Since the DIR and SUPP dimensions correlate negatively, one might expect a significantly positive correlation between lower teacher education levels and perceived support. This assumption, however, was not confirmed. This finding is in contrast with the study of Hewett and La Paro (2019), who documented that teachers with lower education reported a higher frequency of positive principal support in preschool. Similarly, Dennis (2010) and Dennis and O'Connor

(2013) revealed a strong negative relationship between the professional experience of teachers and organizational climate. According to the authors, teachers with longer professional experience make more comparisons between the current and previous work environments, becoming more critical. Conversely, new teachers lack the experience to compare their current work environment, focusing instead on their own professional competence and classroom dynamics rather than the overall conditions of the work environment (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). Regarding the principals, both age and years of experience showed significant correlations with the ENG and FRIEND dimensions. This can be attributed to the fact that principals tend to be older than teachers, have more years of experience, have often worked in various preschools, and generally possess higher levels of professional education and training.

Overall, the findings have several important implications. They demonstrate that examining preschool climate provides valuable insight into how teachers and administrators perceive their workplace. The study also highlights that teachers and principals differ in their perceptions of the preschool climate. Furthermore, the research supports the theory that preschool climate consists of several distinct dimensions, each with varying characteristics. Specifically, it provides evidence for five dimensions of climate — supportive principal behavior, directive principal behavior, engaged teacher behavior, frustrated teacher behavior, and friendly teacher behavior — as validated by the OCDQ-P instrument, confirming their theoretical and empirical relevance. The results of this study offer a significant source of information for researchers, educators, and policymakers at both national and local levels who aim to improve preschool functioning. While the data are based on a sample from Czech preschools and reflect specific Czech educational traditions, they present valuable opportunities for comparison with preschools in other countries.

Limitations and Implications

The present study has two key limitations. First, the unit of analysis was limited to individual teachers and principals, rather than the preschool as an organizational unit. As a result, the study does not capture how the climate is perceived collectively by the entire preschool staff. This broader perspective could have been obtained if the entire preschool staff had been the unit of analysis. The second limitation is the exclusive focus on state-run preschools. Including private or church-run preschools would have provided more comprehensive and valuable results.

Future research should focus on at least two important areas. First, it should explore the factors and circumstances that shape the specific climate within preschools. This could be best identified through qualitative methods, such as individual or focus group interviews with preschool teachers and principals. Another important objective for future research would be to examine how parents, children, and the broader community perceive the climate of a particular preschool. One key area for further investigation is the relationship between preschool climate and its overall functioning. This includes how teachers and principals engage with the curriculum, their interactions with children, the type of learning environment they create, and the nature of their relationships with the children's parents. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine how the preschool climate evolves over time and to identify the factors driving these changes.

Conclusion

The organizational climate of preschools in the Czech Republic is a relatively little-studied phenomenon. Although this topic is generally considered essential for understanding the functioning of this institution, with a noticeable impact on children entering preschool, there is a lack of data that would reveal more deeply how teachers and management perceive their relationships, environment, and cooperation. Investigating the climate of individual types of preschools (specifically combined preschools, small-class preschools, etc.) seems to be a potential for research. In order to deepen our knowledge, it is also important to determine not only how these actors perceive the current state, but also the desired climate and how they explain the path to this goal.

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