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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP, POLITICAL SKILLS AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT: A PATH MODEL ANALYSIS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract:
The study tried to find the Best Fit Path Model for school climate in public schools as influenced by principal leadership, political skills, and teacher empowerment in public schools using descriptive-correlational technique through Path Model Analysis among 400 teachers in Davao Region, Philippines. Findings revealed very high levels of all variables, namely: principal leadership, political skills, teacher empowerment, and school climate. Further, significant correlations were revealed between independent variables and dependent variables, principal leadership and school climate; political skills and school climate; and teacher empowerment and school climate. Further, results showed that the generated Model 3, The Best Fit Path Model exhibited the relationship between principal leadership and teacher empowerment as they both impacted political skills. Additionally, it also displayed that teacher empowerment and the perceived political skills of the school heads are predictive factors of school climate. The findings of the study could be a significant baseline for policy-making for school programs and initiatives in maintaining school climate in public schools and a reference for further studies.

Keywords: education, transformational leadership of school heads, teamwork skills, teacher empowerment, organizational commitment, public school teachers, Path Model Analysis, Philippines

1. Introduction

Fostering favorable school climate of has been a challenge to school authorities in the Philippines (Arcinas, Ahorro, David, Molina & Pangilinan, 2021). Students frequently

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perceive a negative school environment as a result of juvenile misconduct. The study revealed that students' perceptions of a negative school environment had a 58.7% impact on their unsatisfactory academic achievement in Indonesia (Saputra, Supriyanto, Astuti, Ayriza & Adiputra, 2020). The prevailing issues of bullying and other forms of school violence were common scenarios attributed to poor school climate (Dagohoy, 2018).

2. Literature Review

The connection between principal leadership and school climate was strengthened by the following. Kullar (2011) posits that principal leadership has an impact on a positive school climate and increased student achievement in a charter school setting. Another study result stated that there is a correlation between principal leadership and the school climate (Hajarin, 2022). Moreover, the most prominent theoretical framework for understanding principal leadership and its impact on school climate is the Transformational Leadership Theory by Burns (2004). It posits that a transformational school head can influence the organization and create a school atmosphere favorable for learning.

Moreover, this study is further anchored to the Conservation of Resource Theory by Hobfoll (1989), which describes the motive that pushes people to protect their current resources as well as seek out new ones. It viewed political skills as a personal asset that employees might invest in to build leader-member exchange relationships with school leaders, which could subsequently improve the performance of the whole school. The political skill of a school head is the influencing power to preserve the goals set to accomplish among stakeholders both external and internal. Subsequently, a study result supported that political skills significantly predicted school climate (Şeker, Şeker & Kalkan, 2021).

Moreover, it was also supported by the Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1960). This theory emphasizes the importance of external resources for organizational survival and success. Principals with political skills are better equipped to negotiate with external stakeholders, such as district administrators, policymakers, and community leaders, to secure resources and support for their schools. These resources can be instrumental in empowering teachers and fostering a positive school climate.

Likewise, a study result manifesting the significance of teacher empowerment in creating a positive school climate came from Short and Rinehart (1992). Jiang, Li, Wang and Li (2019) added that teacher empowerment predicts school climate. Accordingly, increased empowerment might reduce organizational conflict and improve the climate in schools. This is supported by Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment (Kanter, 1993). Empowerment is encouraged in work environments that give teachers access to knowledge, tools, support, and opportunities to learn and develop, according to this theory. Teachers who are empowered are more devoted to the company, more committed to the organization, and better equipped to meet job expectations efficiently.

A positive school climate is essential for academic success. (Charlton, Moulton, Sabey & West, 2021). Also, a better school climate has been connected to positive student growth, learning, and educational success, as well as efficient risk reduction and health promotion, high student performance, low dropout rates, and teacher retention (Anderson, 2021). Because it considers a number of aspects that ultimately foster a feeling of community inside the school, school climate is a significant and influential component in student results (Arcinas *et al.*, 2021). Creating a healthy school climate will encourage more participation from all kids, even bullied students (Yang, Sharkey, Reed, Chen & Dowdy, 2018). Hence, a positive school climate manifested as beneficial in improving teacher performance (Mailool, Kartowagiran, Retnowati, Wening & Putranta, 2020).

The conceptual framework or the hypothesized models were treated as the best fit for this study and may contribute to the work engagement among public school teachers in Region XI. The first conceptual paradigm demonstrates the exogenous variables' direct influence: principal leadership, political skills, and teacher empowerment towards the endogenous variable, school climate, as supported by theories and studies. Because latent variables cannot be seen immediately, they cannot be measured directly either. Each latent construct is linked to numerous measures or observed variables in this way. As a result, one of the study's main concerns is the size of the regression paths between the unobserved and observed variables.

The first exogenous variable is the principal leadership, which is measured by *model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart* (Rowland, 2008). This was displayed according to To, Yin, Tam, and Keung (2023). The school administration publicly recognizes and recognizes instructors who demonstrate a consistent commitment to collective principles. They recognize teachers' outstanding performance by giving them significant autonomy and freedom in defining their work approaches, as Cirocki and Anam (2021) emphasized. Furthermore, as Sterrett and Richardson (2020) urge, they must promote a climate that encourages individuals to experiment with unique and inventive approaches in their professional endeavors.

They also have discussions about future developments that will influence the nature of our work. According to Louis & Kruse (2021), they aggressively foster agreement on a common set of principles that serve as the foundation for the organization's activities. In addition, they follow through on their expectations of others by setting an example and reiterating the conclusions of Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2021). By using these diverse strategies, the school administration creates an atmosphere that is favorable to individual development as well as organizational success by promoting a culture of acknowledgement, autonomy, creativity, foresight, consensus-building, and exemplary leadership (Ponsades & Guhao, 2021). Gningue, Peach, Jarrah and Wardat (2022) found that teacher empowerment was significantly related to principal leadership.

The second latent variable, the political skills of school heads, has four observed domains: *social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity* (Ferris *et al.*, 2005). The leaders should display these skills to influence others, and school

leaders should possess an innate understanding of appropriate words and actions (Em, 2023). Building relationships with others is something they do a lot of work on (Kilag, Largo, Rabillas, Kilag, Angtud, Book, & Sasan, 2024). Build strong relationships with the majority of individuals (Drosos, Kyriakopoulos, Ntanos & Parissi, 2021). They work to persuade others that they are serious in both their words and behaviour (Karsono, Suraji & Sastrodiharjo, 2022).

Finally, the third latent variable is teacher empowerment, which has *professional development, trust, status and cooperation,* as observed indicators (Hidiroglu & Tanriogen, 2020). According to Yao, You, and Zhu (2020), teacher empowerment is present when teachers are recognized as professionals with a higher social status, which emphasizes the significance of their jobs in the educational system. Furthermore, the educational community's promotion of a collaborative environment is significant. According to Wilcoxen, Bell, and Steiner (2020), educators are not only free to participate in professional networking but are also strongly encouraged to work together with their colleagues.

The results of Wilcoxen, Bell, and Steiner's (2020) study have been validated, providing more evidence that school administrators actively promote teachers' professional growth by providing them with opportunities to attend seminars and conferences with leading experts in their fields. This dedication reflects the administration's strong regard for teachers, as Zhang, Bowers, and Mao (2021) have highlighted.

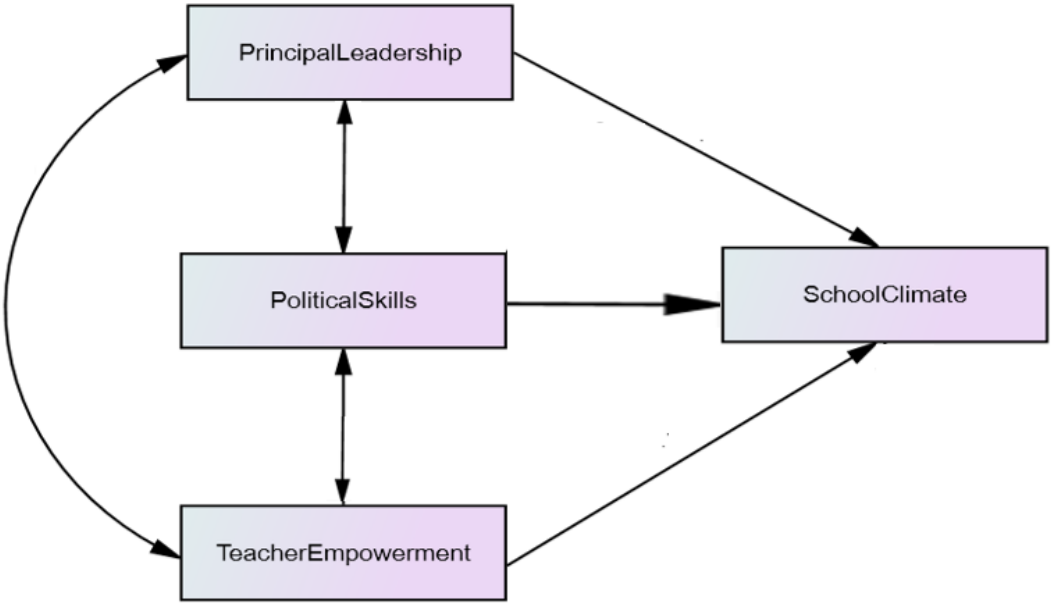
The latent endogenous variable school climate has four observed domains, namely: *collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press and community engagement* (Jurewicz, 2004). In order to create a high-quality learning environment, principals should, first and foremost, treat all faculty members with respect and follow their recommendations (Bayawa & Guhao, Jr., 2022; DeMatthews, Billingsley, McLeskey, & Sharma, 2020). The educators then use good judgement and put their all into their work (Lefstein, Vedder-Weiss, & Segal, 2020). The next group of students are those who achieve the high standards for academic success that the school has set (Engin, 2020). Not to mention, the community attends meetings to get information about the school, our goals, and our accomplishments (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Moreover, the hypothesized model shows the following: the oval shapes represent the latent variables of the study, the rectangular figures connected from the oval are the measured variables of a latent construct, the single-headed arrow represents the direct relation from one variable to another, while the double-headed arrow signifies correlation.

The Hypothesized Model 1 illustrated in Figure 1 reflects the correlation of the three latent exogenous variables and their direct causal relation to the latent endogenous variable. This is observed through the double-headed arrow connected among three latent exogenous variables: principal leadership and political skills, political skills and teacher empowerment, and principal leadership and teacher empowerment. The single-headed arrow pointing from the three-latent exogenous relates directly to the school

climate. This is illustrated through a single-headed indicator connected from the latent exogenous variables to the latent endogenous variable. Furthermore, the rectangular shapes represent the corresponding latent exogenous and endogenous variables' measured variables.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study showing the direct relationship of the latent exogenous variables towards the latent endogenous variables



Legend: PrincipalLeadership - Principal Leadership; PoliticalSkills - Political Skills; TeacherEmpowerment - Teacher Empowerment; SchoolClimate - School Climate.

A comprehensive understanding the quality of school climate and its connection to other factors, according to Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2023), is essential in making plans and intervention development. In the cultural context, some research disregards the subtle differences among culturally related responses. Hence, understanding the degree of school climate and problems can be enhanced or be solved with culturally based interventions (Liu & Wang, 2021). In the local setting, the researcher has not found a study that uses path model analysis to investigate the relationship between principal leadership, political skills, and teacher empowerment on school climate among public schools. While most studies made on school climate deal with only two variables. In this context, the researcher decided to conduct this multivariate study dealing with the three variables as a construct of school climate.

This study is crucial for education in numerous countries since it establishes the foundation for system adoption and improvement. This study will help to a better understanding of how external and internal factors influence school climate, enabling the formulation of more accurate conceptions in this field. As a result, it may offer light on or provide a viable solution to the persistent problem of school climate, which consequently led to lower student performance outcomes.

This study's findings could provide the Department of Education with useful information for planning programs and activities that could be implemented to improve any previously identified weaknesses in principal leadership, political skills of school leaders, and teacher empowerment that could affect the school climate in public schools. The findings of this study could serve as an important benchmark for educational institutions' faculty development programs. This would also help the school administration in controlling, maintaining, and improving the quality of the school climate.

This study aimed to determine the best-fit path model on school climate among public schools. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the level of principal leadership in terms of *model the way; inspire a shared vision; challenge the process; enable others to act;* and *encourage the heart*. To assess the level of political skills of school heads in terms *of social astuteness; interpersonal influence; networking ability;* and *apparent sincerity*. To evaluate the level of teacher empowerment of teachers in terms of *professional development; trust; status;* and *cooperation*. Also, to ascertain the level of school climate in public-schools in terms of *collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press* and *community engagement*.

Furthermore, this study intended to determine the significant relationship between principal leadership and school climate, political skills and school climate, and teacher empowerment and school climate among public schools. Finally, to recognize the best path model that predicts school climate among public schools. At the same time, the following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. First, there is no significant relationship between principal leadership and school climate. Second, the political skills of school heads and school climate; and third, teacher empowerment and school climate. Lastly, no best model for school climate among public schools.

The findings of this study will create new concepts for the Department of Education and could be used in policy development, resource allocation and monitoring and evaluation. It also allows school heads to evaluate its effectiveness, leadership styles, and improvement and propose interventions to vital factors that may influence school climate. This study serves as a basis for professional development programs for teachers in fostering favorable school climate to uphold effective instruction and student engagement that aligned with the 2030 sustainable development goal of the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Further, this will serve a cross-reference and comparative purpose for a broader understanding of differences and commonalities in school climates across countries and for the development of frameworks and models to be applied in varied educational settings.

3. Material and Methods

This section describes how the study was conducted, the study participant or research subject, materials/instruments, design, and procedures as applicable.

The Davao Region, commonly known as Region XI, is one of the Philippine regions and is situated in the southernmost region of Mindanao. According to the map, it is bordered by the Philippine Sea on the east and south, the Bukidnon and Socsargen Region on the west and the Caraga Region on the north. The five provinces that made up the Davao Region were Davao Oriental, Davao de Oro, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, and Davao Occidental. Each of these provinces contained three component cities as well as three additional cities. There is no capital city in Mati City, Davao de Oro, Tagum City, Digos City, Davao Occidental. The other three cities are Island Garden City of Samal, Panabo City, and Davao City. Public school teachers from the region's eleven divisions made up the study's participants. Survey forms were distributed in the areas specified above.

Public schools in Region XI also demonstrated a positive school climate. However, there was a necessity to raise this quality as much as feasible. The effectiveness of school climate in raising student achievement, particularly in international assessments and standards, has been hindered by some schools' practices. Additionally, it was clear that school administrators and educators lacked motivation to meet the departmental goals for plenty of reasons. It is crucial to assess the quality of school climate among public schools in the area, given that the pandemic situation is bringing some serious issues to schools generally.

The study's respondents were chosen using a scientific method. There were 41,084 active teachers in the various schools in Deped Region XI, in this study, 400 teachers were polled to represent the whole population of the different divisions. The number of respondents per division was determined via stratified random sampling. Adhering to the essential guideline for determining the suitable number of participants for path analysis (Savalei, 2021), which is between 200 and 400, the researcher attempted to work backwards by using an appropriate quota sampling (Smith & Dawber, 2019) at the .05 significance level.

Furthermore, specific criteria were set to determine the eligibility of participants as research respondents (inclusion). The individual must possess the position of a tenured public-school educator under the Department of Education covering kindergarten up to senior high school. They can be of any gender. The participants were asked to provide accurate data on psychological capital, academic job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and work engagement. The researcher gave the questionnaire to other interested participants through the Google Forms link. Data gathering was conducted from July to September 2023.

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research approach and utilized the path modeling technique. Quantitative studies employ mathematical models and statistical analysis to examine data, producing numerical outcomes that are more objective. Quantitative research ascertains the causes and mechanisms behind changes in phenomena (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The objective of this study was to construct the best path model of school climate in public schools.

More precisely, the study employed the descriptive-correlational methodology. A descriptive correlational study is a research method that focuses on explaining the associations between variables without establishing a causal relationship (Quaranta, 2017). Descriptive pertains to the measurement of principal leadership, political skills of school heads, teacher empowerment, and school climate in public schools. However, this research is correlational as it assesses the association between the exogenous and endogenous variables.

Path analysis is a form of multiple-regression analysis and is useful for evaluating a number of problems in causal analysis. Path analysis, first formulated in the 1920s, is a method to examine causal patterns within a set of variables. To interpret data relative to a pre-specified causal model, researchers use path analysis most frequently. With path analysis, scientists perform a sequence of regressions within the model to analyze the effects on dependent variables. For later regressions within the model, dependent variables also function as independent variables. This method is highly valuable for analyzing intricate models with multiple variables, as it reveals both direct and indirect relationships between these variables. Consequently, it offers a significant advantage in displaying and analyzing complex models. Additionally, it is a favored method for analyzing graduate dissertations and academic studies (Civelek, 2018).

In this study, four instruments were employed, each of which was developed in response to the research problem. Information about the four aspects of the research was gathered through primary data, principal leadership, political skills of school heads, teacher empowerment, and school climate. The survey questionnaires utilized in the conduct of the study were sourced from various related research. The restructuring was carried out to make the instrument more applicable to the current and local setting.

The questionnaire on principal leadership was adapted from the work of Rowland (2008). It comprises five indicators, namely, *model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act* and *encourage the heart*. The questionnaire on the political skills of school heads was adapted from the work of Ferris and colleagues (2005). The tool had four indicators, namely *social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability* and *apparent sincerity*. The questionnaire on teacher empowerment was adapted from the research work of Hidiroglu and Tanriogen (2020). The tool had four indicators, namely: *professional development, trust, status* and *cooperation*. Furthermore, the questionnaire on school climate was adapted from Jurewicz's study (2004). It comprises the following indicators: *collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press* and *community engagement*.

To make the instrument more appropriate and credible, it was validated by five internal and one external expert validator with an overall rating of 4.68, which was described as very good. After validation, pilot testing was conducted. The validity of the questionnaires was checked through Cronbach's alpha. According to Gliem and Gliem (2003), the closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. In addition, Bonett and Wright (2015) said that an acceptable

reliability value depends on the type of application. Further, the focus should be on the population reliability value rather than the sample reliability value.

The rule of thumb, as provided by George and Mallery (2003), emphasizes that if the result is equal or greater than 0.9, it is excellent; equal or greater than 0.8 is good; equal or greater than 0.7 is acceptable; equal or greater than 0.6 is questionable; equal or greater than 0.5 is poor; and less than 0.5 is unacceptable. Moreover, according to Santos (1999), a score between 0.80 and 0.90 is considered very good. The Cronbach alpha of this survey instrument used is 0.968 in the endogenous variable and 0.955 average on the other three variables, indicating that the tools are valid and reliable.

The scale employed for interpreting the means of principal leadership, political skills, teacher empowerment, and school climate is the following ranges: 4.20 - 5.00, described as very high and interpreted as always evident; 3.40 - 4.19, labelled as high and interpreted as oftentimes evident; 2.60 - 3.39 defined as moderate and taken as occasionally evident; 1.80 - 2.59 labelled as low and interpreted rarely evident; and lastly, 1.00 - 1.79 described as very low and defined as never evident in public schools.

To ascertain the best-fit model, the following indices were employed along with their respective criteria:

Index	**Criterion**
Chi-Square / Degrees of Freedom	0 < value < 2
P-value	> .05
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	> .95
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	> .95
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> .95
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> .95
Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA)	< .05
P of Close Fit (Pclose)	> .05

The initial step in gathering the information used in this research involved obtaining approval to conduct a study from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee on May 5, 2022. The creation of survey questionnaires in Google Forms was facilitated from May 2022 to June 2022. A request letter signed by the dean was sent to Deped Regional Director. The approved letter was attached to the letters addressed to the different Superintendents of the eleven Deped divisions of Region XI. A schedule was established for the floating and retrieval of questionnaires, spanning from July 2023 to August 2023.

Specifically, on July 15, 2023, the researcher administered the questionnaires in the Division of Deped Davao Occidental, Deped Davao del Sur and Digos City, Deped Davao City, Davao Del Norte with Tagum City, Deped Davao De Oro, and Deped Davao Oriental schools simultaneously, sharing the questionnaires link to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of the researcher. Then, the collected data were systematically organized, analyzed, and interpreted in a manner that ensured confidentiality.

The data has been analyzed and interpreted utilizing appropriate statistical tools. The *Mean* was used to determine the level of psychological capital, academic job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and the level of work engagement of teachers. The *Pearson r* or Pearson Product–Moment Correlation was used for naturally dispersed joint data following a normal bivariate distribution (Schober, Boer & Schwarte, 2018). In this study, it was used to determine the interrelationship between the independent and the dependent variable. Lastly, Path Modeling, which incorporates the features of multiple regression and factor analysis was used to estimate a sequence of interrelated relationships of dependency simultaneously (Thakkar & Thakkar, 2020) and to test the hypothesized model and determine the best path model of school climate in public schools.

The focus on ethical conduct has intensified and expanded due to society's demand for increased responsibility. In addition to the crucial nature of choosing the right research methodology and methods, the ethical considerations surrounding the research process, as outlined in UMERC Form 2.2, are also of utmost importance. Hence, this paper was subjected to an ethics review by a panel of experts from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) and found to be in order and compliant with the minimum standards of the research ethics prescribed by the university. The researcher was granted a certificate of approval with a UMERC Protocol Number 2023-100.

4. Results and Discussion

Presented here are the statistics and results based on the responses of the study respondents regarding principal leadership, political skills, teacher empowerment, and school climate in public schools. The discussions are organized based on the subsequent subheadings: level of principal leadership, level of political skills, level of teacher empowerment and level of school climate in public schools; the relationship between principal leadership and school climate, political skills and school climate, teacher empowerment and school climate together with the best-fit model.

4.1 Level of Principal Leadership of School Heads

Table 1 displays the level of principal leadership manifested among school heads in Region XI. The mean score achieved is 4.25, with a standard deviation of 0.548, indicating a *very high* level. Consequently, the attribute behaviors of principal leadership were always evident. Explicitly, the mean ratings of the domains of principal leadership are unveiled as follows: enable others to act attained a mean rating of 4.34 or *very high*; model the way obtained a mean rating of 4.28 or *very high*; challenge the process and inspire a shared vision both had a mean rating of 4.23 or *very high*; and encourage the heart reaped a mean rating of 4.16 or *high*.

Table 1: Level of Principal Leadership

Indicators	SD	Mean	D.E.
Model the way	0.599	4.28	Very High
Inspire a shared vision	0.612	4.23	Very High
Challenge the process	0.622	4.23	Very High
Enable others to act	0.590	4.34	Very High
Encourage the heart	0.628	4.16	High
Overall	**0.548**	**4.25**	**Very High**

The overall very high response of public-school teachers displayed that school administrators manifested behaviors that publicly recognized teachers who demonstrate a strong commitment to common values. They reward teachers for a job well done. They allow teachers to choose how they want to carry out their work with a considerable amount of autonomy. Encourage individuals to experiment with fresh and creative approaches to their work. Discuss upcoming developments that will affect the way we do our tasks. Create an agreement on a shared set of principles for managing our company. Lastly, provide a personal model for others to follow.

This is consistent with the statement by To *et al.* (2023) that the administration of the school openly acknowledges and celebrates educators who embody a steadfast dedication to collective principles. They commend teachers for their exemplary performance, granting them substantial autonomy and flexibility in determining their approaches to work, as emphasized by Cirocki and Anam (2021). Moreover, they foster an environment that encourages individuals to explore novel and inventive methods in their professional endeavors, as advocated by Sterrett and Richardson (2020).

Additionally, they engage in dialogues about forthcoming trends that will shape the landscape of our work. They actively cultivate consensus surrounding a shared set of values that underpin the operations of the organization, as proposed by Louis & Kruse (2021). Furthermore, they lead by example, demonstrating the standards they expect from others, echoing the insights of Leithwood *et al.* (2021). Through these multifaceted approaches, the school administration cultivates a culture of recognition, autonomy, innovation, foresight, consensus-building, and exemplary leadership, fostering an environment conducive to both individual growth and organizational success.

4.2 Level of Political Skills of School Heads

A summary of the level of political skills of school heads in public schools is presented in Table 2. The overall mean rating is 4.23, which is described as *very high*, with a standard deviation of 0.574, which means that the political skills attributes of school heads are always evident. The mean ratings of the indicators of political skills are unveiled as follows: apparent sincerity landed a mean rating of 4.25 or *very high;* interpersonal influence acquired a mean rating of 4.24 or *very high*; networking ability acquired a mean rating of 4.23 or *very high*; and social astuteness had a mean rating of 4.22 or *very high.*

Table 2: Level of Political Skills of School Heads

Indicators	SD	Mean	D.E.
Social astuteness	0.617	4.22	Very High
Networking ability	0.649	4.23	Very High
Interpersonal influence	0.609	4.24	Very High
Apparent sincerity	0.662	4.25	Very High
Overall	**0.574**	**4.23**	**Very High**

The teachers' perceptions of school heads indicate that they instinctively possess the ability to discern the appropriate actions or words to influence others, reflecting a deep understanding of interpersonal dynamics. These school leaders invest considerable time in cultivating relationships within the school environment, fostering strong connections with colleagues and students alike. Their adeptness at establishing rapport with a wide range of individuals underscores their capacity to engender trust and sincerity, both in their words and actions, thereby fostering a conducive atmosphere for collaboration and growth.

This is in consonance with Adom *et al.* (2020) statement that this observation is consistent with the assertions made by Em (2023), suggesting that school leaders possess an innate understanding of how to effectively influence others through their words and actions. Moreover, research conducted by Kilag *et al.* (2024) highlights the significant amount of time school leaders dedicate to nurturing relationships within their professional environment. Additionally, the findings of Drosos *et al.* (2021) emphasize the importance of school leaders' ability to establish positive rapport with a diverse array of individuals.

Furthermore, Karsono *et al.* (2022) suggest that effective school leaders employ strategies to genuinely convey sincerity in both their words and deeds, thus enhancing trust and credibility among their peers and stakeholders. These collective insights underscore the multifaceted nature of effective leadership in educational settings, where the cultivation of interpersonal relationships and the demonstration of authenticity play crucial roles in fostering a conducive environment for growth and collaboration.

4.3 Level of Teacher Empowerment

Table 3 shows the level of teacher empowerment in public schools. The overall mean score is 4.26 with a standard deviation of 0.560, which is *very high,* which means that teacher empowerment is always evident in schools. The mean ratings of the domains of teacher empowerment are illustrated as follows: cooperation obtained a mean rating of 4.29 or *very high;* status attained a mean rating of 4.29 or *very high*; trust garnered a mean rating of 4.28 or *very high*; and professional development accumulated a mean of 4.19 or *very high.*

Table 3: Level of Teacher Empowerment

Indicators	**SD**	**Mean**	**D.E.**
Professional development	0.669	4.19	High
Trust	0.594	4.28	Very High
Status	0.597	4.29	Very High
Cooperation	0.599	4.29	Very High
Overall	**0.560**	**4.26**	**Very High**

This result showed that teachers in the region were able to attend seminars and conferences with leaders in their areas of expertise thanks to the support of the school administrators. The authorities placed a significant priority on teachers. It was believed that teaching was a vocation with a positive reputation in society. Teachers are allowed to work together with other educators.

The findings from Wilcoxen *et al.* (2020) have been confirmed, supporting the idea that the school administration actively promotes the professional growth of teachers by allowing them to participate in seminars and conferences alongside influential figures in their fields. This dedication reflects the administration's high regard for teachers, as emphasized by Zhang *et al.* (2021). The acknowledgement of teachers as professionals with significant societal status, as suggested by Yao *et al.* (2020), further highlights the importance placed on their roles in education. Additionally, the collaborative atmosphere within the teaching community is notable. Teachers not only have the freedom to engage in professional networking, as noted by Wilcoxen *et al.* (2020), but are also actively encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues.

4.4 Level of School Climate in Public Schools

Table 4 shows the level of school climate in public schools in Region XI. The overall mean rating is 4.33 with a standard deviation of 0.487, labelled as *very high*, which implies that quality school climate is always evident in public schools. The mean score of school climate is carried by its indicators such as: collegial leadership and academic press, which gained a mean of 4.35 or *very high*; community engagement, which garnered a 4.34 mean or *very high;* and collegial leadership with a mean rating of 4.30 or *very high*.

Table 4: Level of School Climate

Indicators	**SD**	**Mean**	**D.E.**
Collegial leadership	0.574	4.35	Very High
Teacher professionalism	0.568	4.30	Very High
Academic press	0.486	4.35	Very High
Community engagement	0.508	4.34	Very High
Overall	**0.487**	**4.33**	**Very High**

The results demonstrated that the following points were consistently visible in schools throughout the region. First, school administrators consider all faculty members as equals and implement faculty recommendations. Next, the teachers use professional judgement and do their jobs with passion. Students who meet the school's high academic

achievement standards come next. Finally, the community attends meetings to stay up to date on our school's goals and successes.

The outcome validated the following claim for a high-quality school climate. The head of the schools should, first and foremost, respect every faculty member equally and implement their recommendations (DeMatthews *et al.*, 2020). Subsequently, the educators apply sound judgement and work with passion (Lefstein *et al.*, 2020). Students who meet the rigorous standards set by the institution for their academic performance come next (Engin, 2020). Last but not least, the community attends meetings to learn about the school and our objectives and successes (Kelty *et al.*, 2020).

4.5 Correlation between Transformational Leadership of School Heads and School Climate Among Public Schools

Table 5 presents the findings regarding the correlations between the transformational leadership of school heads and organizational commitment of teachers.

Table 5: Significance of the Relationship Between Levels of Principal Leadership of School Heads and School Climate

Principal Leadership	**School Climate**				
	Collegial Leadership	**Teacher Professionalism**	**Academic Press**	**Community Engagement**	**Overall**
Model the Way	.515* (0.000)	.579* (0.000)	.484* (0.000)	.541* (0.000)	.582* (0.000)
Inspire a Shared Vision	.552* (0.000)	.630* (0.000)	.484* (0.000)	.587* (0.000)	.620* (0.000)
Challenge the Process	.547* (0.000)	.632* (0.000)	.499* (0.000)	.601* (0.000)	.626* (0.000)
Enable Others to Act	.578* (0.000)	.608* (0.000)	.553* (0.000)	.602* (0.000)	.642* (0.000)
Encourage the Heart	.626* (0.000)	.671* (0.000)	.619* (0.000)	.642* (0.000)	.702* (0.000)
Overall	**.628* (0.000)**	**.696* (0.000)**	**.588* (0.000)**	**.663* (0.000)**	**.707* (0.000)**

*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

The combined statistics yielded an overall r-value of 0.707, with a p-value less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Thus, refuting the null hypothesis that there is no significant association. Besides, it was detected that model the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encourage the heart, the indicators of principal leadership of school heads as perceived by the teachers when associated with school climate, modelling the way displayed an overall r-value is 0.582 with $p< 0.05$ hence, significant. When the indicator inspires, a shared vision is correlated to school climate. The overall r-value was 0.620 with $p<0.05$, henceforth significant. Also, the domain challenges the process when correlated to school climate, with an overall r-value of 0.626 with $p<0.05$; therefore, it is also significant. When the indicators that enable others to act were correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.642, which

indicates statistical significance with a p-value of less than 0.05. Lastly, as encouraging the heart was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.702 with $p<0.05$; hence, it is also significant.

This study result aligns with the findings of Hajarin (2022), which underscored a correlation between principal leadership and the overall school climate. Kullar's (2011) assertion emphasizes the pivotal role of principal leadership within the context of charter schools, highlighting its profound impact on cultivating a positive school climate and enhancing student achievement. Together, these research outcomes underscore the critical importance of strong leadership in charter school environments, not only for fostering a supportive climate but also for driving academic success among students.

4.6 Correlation between Political Skills and School Climate

Table 6 presents the findings on the correlations between political skills and school climate in public schools. The test achieved an overall r-value of 0. 787, with a p-value below 0.05, indicating significance. As a result, the null hypothesis of no significant association is rejected.

Further, when the indicator social astuteness was correlated to school climate, it obtained an overall r-value 0.701 with $p<0.05$; when the indicator networking ability was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.738 with $p<0.05$ hence, significant; when the indicator interpersonal influence was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.695 with $p<0.05$ hence, significant; lastly, the indicator apparent sincerity and school climate were correlated to organizational commitment, the overall r-value were 0.714 with $p>0.05$ hence, significant.

Table 6: Significance on the Relationship between Levels of Political Skills and School Climate in Public Schools

Political Skills	**School Climate**				
	Collegial Leadership	**Teacher Professionalism**	**Academic Press**	**Community Engagement**	**Overall**
Social Astuteness	.597* (0.000)	.671* (0.000)	.647* (0.000)	.646* (0.000)	.701* (0.000)
Networking Ability	.639* (0.000)	.704* (0.000)	.669* (0.000)	.682* (0.000)	.738* (0.000)
Interpersonal Influence	.596* (0.000)	.673* (0.000)	.623* (0.000)	.643* (0.000)	.695* (0.000)
Apparent Sincerity	.670* (0.000)	.656* (0.000)	.667* (0.000)	.609* (0.000)	.714* (0.000)
Overall	**.693* (0.000)**	**.747* (0.000)**	**.720* (0.000)**	**.713* (0.000)**	**.787* (0.000)**

*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

The findings of this study supported the contention of study conducted by Şeker *et al.* (2021) indicated that political skills played a significant predictive role in shaping the

school climate. Thus, these concurrent research outcomes collectively emphasize the pivotal influence of political skills on fostering a positive school climate.

4.7 Correlation Between Teacher Empowerment and School Climate

Table 7 displays the findings about the correlations between teacher empowerment and school climate. The overall measures resulted in an overall r-value of 0.850, which is statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis, which suggests no significant relationship, was rejected. Moreover, when indicator professional development was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.763 with $p< 0.05$, hence, significant; when indicator trust was correlated to school climate, it got an overall r-value of 0.769 with $p< 0.05$, hence, significant; when indicator status was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.810 with $p< 0.05$ hence, significant; and finally, when indicator cooperation was correlated to school climate, the overall r-value was 0.787 with $p< 0.05$ hence, it is also significant.

Table 7: Significance on the Relationship between Levels of Teacher Empowerment and School Climate in Public Schools

Teacher Empowerment	**School Climate**				
	Collegial Leadership	**Teacher Professionalism**	**Academic Press**	**Community Engagement**	**Overall**
Professional Development	.681* (0.000)	.691* (0.000)	.649* (0.000)	.660* (0.000)	.736* (0.000)
Trust	.744* (0.000)	.738* (0.000)	.623* (0.000)	.688* (0.000)	.769* (0.000)
Status	.760* (0.000)	.749* (0.000)	.732* (0.000)	.710* (0.000)	.810* (0.000)
Cooperation	.723* (0.000)	.731* (0.000)	.717* (0.000)	.697* (0.000)	.787* (0.000)
Overall	**.796* (0.000)**	**.797* (0.000)**	**.746* (0.000)**	**.755* (0.000)**	**.850* (0.000)**

*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

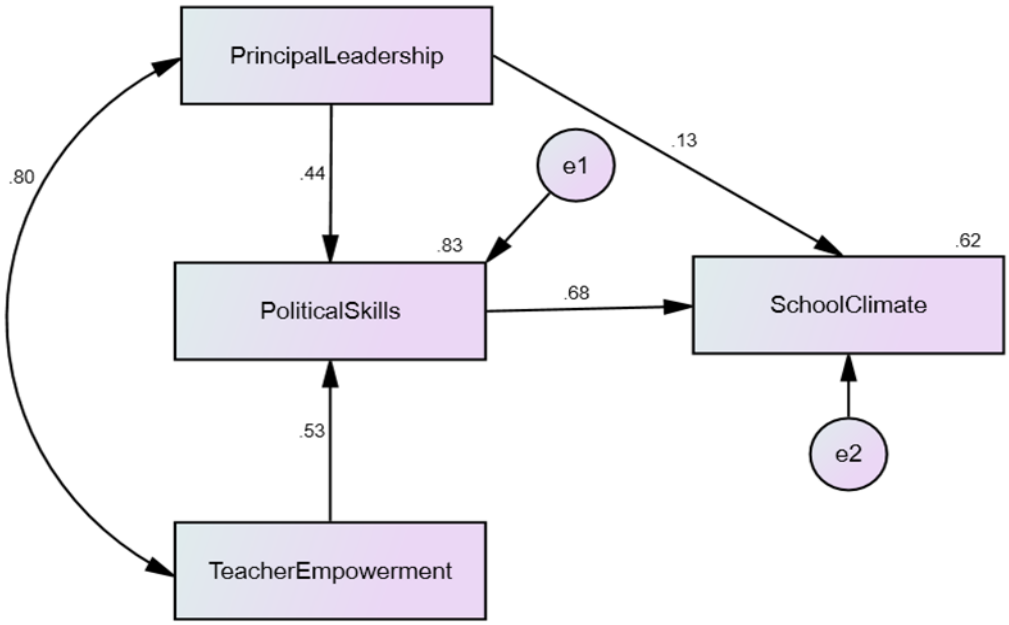
Research findings underscore the significance of teacher empowerment in fostering a positive school climate. Short *et al.* (1992) provided support for this notion, highlighting the correlation between teacher empowerment and the creation of a conducive school environment. Building upon this, Jiang *et al.* (2019) further reinforced the idea by demonstrating that teacher empowerment serves as a predictor of school climate. Consequently, heightened levels of empowerment among teachers are posited to mitigate organizational conflicts and enhance the overall climate within educational institutions.

4.8 Best Path Model on School Climate

Modifications are necessary to align the data with the original proposed model depicted in Figure 1. The study offered three generated path models. When determining the most

suitable model, all contained indices must be within their allowable ranges. The Chi-Square Value divided by the Degrees of Freedom should be between 0 and 2, and the corresponding p-value should be greater than 0.05. The Root Mean Square Error Approximation value should be below 0.05, while its related P-close value should be over 0.05. All other indices, including the Normed Fit Index, Tucker-Lewis Index, Comparative Fit Index, and the Goodness of Fit Index, must exceed a value of 0.95.

Figure 2: Path Analysis Model 1 in Standardized Solution



Legend: PrincipalLeadership - Principal Leadership; PoliticalSkills - Political Skills; TeacherEmpowerment - Teacher Empowerment; SchoolClimate - School Climate.

Figure 2 shows the generated path model 1. It shows the relationships of the two exogenous variables, principal leadership and teacher empowerment, while manifesting influences toward political skills. The principal leadership and political skills displayed a direct influence on the school climate.

Furthermore, the first generated model garnered a P-close of .000; the Chi-Square Value divided by the Degrees of Freedom was 132.737; the corresponding p-value was equal to .000; the Goodness of Fit Index was .876; the Comparative Fit Index was .919; the Normed Fit Index shown .919; Tucker-Lewis Index was .515; and the Root Mean Square Error Approximation value was .575. However, none of the indices met the allowed thresholds, as shown in Table 9. Hence, it is a poor fit.

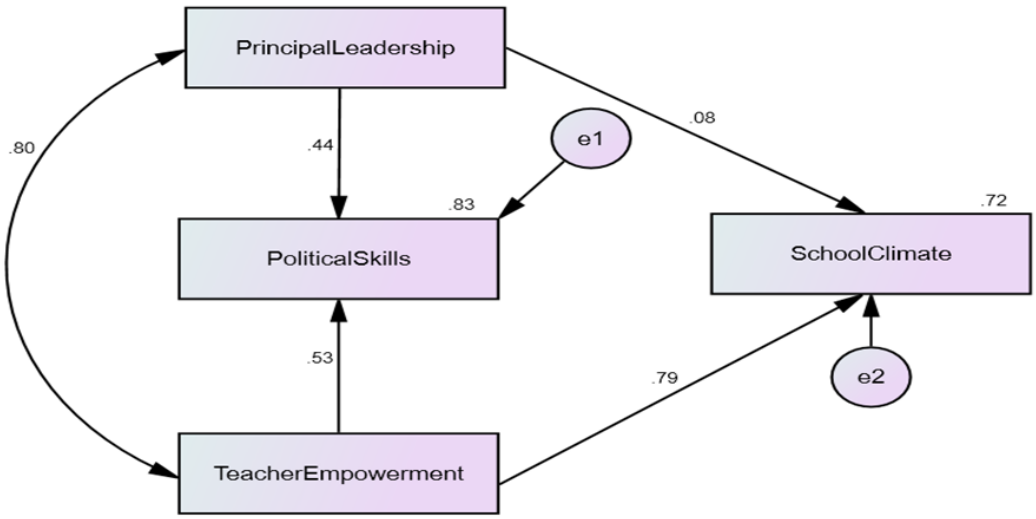
Table 8: Goodness of Fit Measures of Structural Model 1

Index	Criterion	Model Fit Value
P-Close	> 0.05	.000
CMIN/DF	0 < value < 2	132.737
P-value	> 0.05	.000
GFI	> 0.95	.876
CFI	> 0.95	.919
NFI	> 0.95	.919
TLI	> 0.95	.515
RMSEA	< 0.05	.575

Legend: CMIN/DF - Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom; **NFI -** Normed Fit Index; **TLI -** Tucker-Lewis Index; **CFI -** Comparative Fit Index; **GFI -** Goodness of Fit Index; **RMSEA -** Root Means Square of Error Approximation; **Pclose -** P of Close Fit; **P-value -** Probability Level

The generated Model 2, as shown In Figure 3, is the generated path model 2. It shows the relationship between exogenous variables principal leadership and teacher empowerment while they manifested direct influence on school climate. Further, noticeable improvement was demonstrated in most of the criteria set forth when compared to model 1. The P-close from .000 to .020; the Chi-Square Value divided by the Degrees of Freedom from 132.737 to 9.372; the corresponding p-value from .000 to .002; the Goodness of Fit Index from .876 to .989; the Comparative Fit Index from .919 to .995; the Normed Fit Index shown from .919 to .994; Tucker-Lewis Index from .515 to .969; and the Root Mean Square Error Approximation value from .575. to .145. However, the model was deemed not fit even if some criteria fell within the ranges, while others did not achieve the acceptable value, as shown in Table 9. Therefore, path model 2 was a poor fit.

Figure 3: Path Analysis Model 2 in Standardized Solution



Legend: PrincipalLeadership - Principal Leadership; PoliticalSkills - Political Skills; TeacherEmpowerment - Teacher Empowerment; SchoolClimate - School Climate.

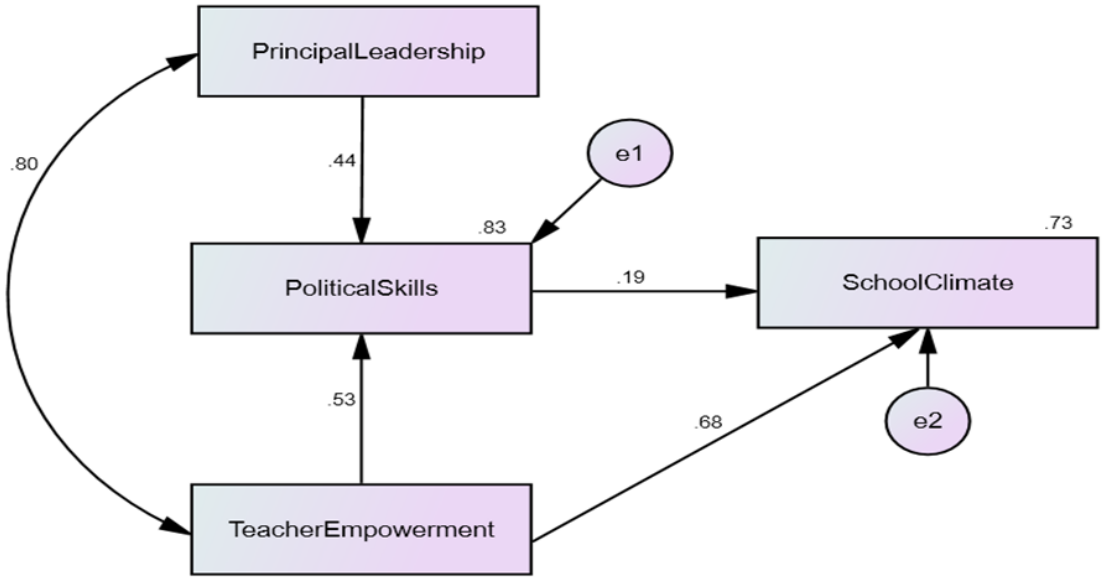
Table 9: Goodness of Fit Measures of Structural Model 2

Index	Criterion	Model Fit Value
P-Close	> 0.05	.020
CMIN/DF	0 < value < 2	9.372
P-value	> 0.05	.002
GFI	> 0.95	.989
CFI	> 0.95	.995
NFI	> 0.95	.994
TLI	> 0.95	.969
RMSEA	< 0.05	.145

Legend: CMIN/DF - Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom; NFI - Normed Fit Index; TLI - Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI- Comparative Fit Index; GFI - Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA - Root Means Square of Error Approximation; Pclose - P of Close Fit; P-value - Probability Level

Lastly, the generated Model 3 exhibited in Figure 4 shows the relationship between principal leadership and teacher empowerment with an r-value of .80. In contrast, they showed an impact on political skills with Beta equals .44 and .53, respectively. Subsequently, the principal leadership did not show a direct influence on the school climate. Moreover, political skills and teacher empowerment emerged to be a predictive factor of school climate, accounting for 19 and 68 percent of the variance of school climate can be explained by the two mentioned variables, respectively. Hence, political skills and teacher empowerment were the predictive factors of school climate in public schools.

Figure 4: Path Analysis Model 3 in Standardized Solution



Legend: PrincipalLeadership - Principal Leadership; PoliticalSkills - Political Skills; TeacherEmpowerment – Teacher Empowerment; SchoolClimate - School Climate

Finally, all criteria set forth were met in Model 3. The P-close from .020 to. .956; the Chi-Square Value divided by the Degrees of Freedom from 9.372 to .008; the corresponding

p-value from .002 to .927; the Goodness of Fit Index from .989 to 1.000; Comparative Fit Index from .995 to 1.000; the Normed Fit Index shown from .994 to 1.000; Tucker-Lewis Index from .969 to 1.004; and the Root Mean Square Error Approximation value from .145 to .000. Hence, all model fit values were fall within the ranges shown in Table 10. Therefore, Model 3 was the best-fit path model.

Table 10: Goodness of Fit Measures of Structural Model 3

Index	Criterion	Model Fit Value
P-Close	> 0.05	.956
CMIN/DF	0 < value < 2	.008
P-value	> 0.05	.927
GFI	> 0.95	1.000
CFI	> 0.95	1.000
NFI	> 0.95	1.000
TLI	> 0.95	1.004
RMSEA	< 0.05	.000

Legend: CMIN/DF - Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom; NFI - Normed Fit Index; TLI - Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI - Comparative Fit Index; GFI - Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA - Root Means Square of Error Approximation, Pclose - P of Close Fit; P-value - Probability Level.

This is in accordance with the findings of Gningue et al. (2022), who found that teacher empowerment was significantly related to principal leadership. Another, Şeker *et al.*, (2021), that political skills significantly influence the school climate. Thus, the Political skill of school heads is considered to be the influencing power to preserve the goals set to accomplish among stakeholders both external and internal. Also, a similar finding by Jiang *et al.* (2019) that teacher empowerment predicted school climate. Accordingly, increased empowerment might reduce organizational conflict and improve the climate in schools is emphasized in this study.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, as revealed on the level of principal leadership, the researcher recommends that the Department of Education introduce the following activities: Establish feedback mechanisms to solicit input from stakeholders. Conduct surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one meetings to gather feedback on leadership effectiveness, school climate, and areas for improvement. Hence, the Department of Education strengthened in carrying out the program, initiated by the Civil Service Commission that encourages individuals doing business with schools to report or provide feedback, either to the agency or to the CSC, in order to monitor the provision of frontline services offered by the school personnel.

In terms of political skills, it is suggested that school heads are encouraged to develop and practice active listening skills to understand the perspectives, concerns, and interests of others. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, ask clarifying questions, and

demonstrate empathy to build rapport and trust and hone their ability to influence and persuade others to achieve desired outcomes.

Subsequently, in keeping with the high degree of teacher empowerment, it is advised that the Department of Education enhance the Shared Decision-Making Structures, which allow teachers to actively engage in important decisions about curriculum, policies, and professional development opportunities at the national or school-wide level.

Furthermore, to sustain a very high-quality school climate among public schools, it should be anchored on teacher empowerment and the political skills of school heads. Besides, the Department of Education may consider the result of this study by implementing the above recommendations in sustaining the sound level of teacher empowerment and political skills, which will possibly create a better school climate.

Lastly, it is also suggested that researchers validate the findings of this study by conducting additional research with a wider range of respondents or in different environments. They may also investigate additional variables, methods, and tools in order to improve social understanding of the undercurrents and mechanisms of school climate. This research will serve as a solid foundation for the development of educational policies and initiatives that will result in a better school climate that will foster quality learning outcomes.

6. Conclusion

Results revealed that principal leadership manifested among school heads in Region XI was very high. Consequently, the attribute behaviors of principal leadership were always evident. Similarly, the level of political skills of school heads in public schools is very high, which means that the political skills attributes of school heads were always evident. Also, the level of teacher empowerment in public schools was very high, which means that teacher empowerment is always evident in schools. Lastly, the level of school climate in public schools was very high also, which implies that quality school climate is always evident in public schools.

Findings revealed that there was a correlation between principal leadership and school climate. Further, the association between political skills and school climate was observed. Finally, teacher empowerment and school climate were discovered to be associated. Furthermore, the most sparing model (Model 3) conveyed a generalized new concept that the endogenous variable, the school climate of public schools, was significantly predicted by the levels of political skills of school heads and teacher empowerment. However, principal leadership showed no direct impact on the school climate. Model 3 was conclusively the best-fit model for school climate among public schools.

The results of the study supported the Transformational Leadership Theory of Bass (1999), which stated that principal's leadership and political skills determined the school environment in both tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspects were

manifested through resource allocation, infrastructure development, curriculum implementation and community engagement, while the intangible aspects were displayed through vision and mission, conflict resolution innovation and adaptability.

It also supported the Conservation of Resource Theory by Hobfoll (1989), which viewed political skills as a personal asset that employees might invest in to build leader-member exchange relationships with school leaders, which could subsequently improve the performance of the whole school. The political skill of a school head is considered to be the influencing power to preserve the goals set to be accomplished among stakeholders, both external and internal. However, it refused Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment (Kanter, 1993), which posited that empowerment is encouraged in work environments that give employees access to knowledge, tools, support, and opportunities to learn and develop.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

This study had no trace of conflict of interest as the researchers personally funded this undertaking, and the administration and interpretation of data were made independently.

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