

MEDIATING ROLE OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHERS' WORK PRESSURE

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Abstract:

This study investigates the mediating role of school climate in the relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure. Grounded in the positivist paradigm, a quantitative, correlational research design was employed. A sample of 354 secondary school teachers was drawn from a population of 3106 using stratified random sampling across five districts: Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, and Karak. Validated instruments measuring instructional leadership, school climate, and teacher work pressure were utilized, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.798, 0.755, and 0.836, respectively. Correlation analysis revealed significant negative associations between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure, and between school climate and teachers' work pressure, while a positive association was found between instructional leadership and school climate. Mediation analysis, using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4), confirmed that school climate partially mediates the relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure. These findings underscore the importance of fostering effective instructional leadership and a supportive school climate to reduce stress and enhance teacher well-being. The study offers practical implications for leadership development and policy reform in Pakistan's public education system.

Keywords: *Instructional Leadership, Work Pressure, School Climate*

INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership has emerged as a critical driver of school effectiveness and teacher performance in the 21st century. It encompasses practices that directly influence teaching and learning, such as curriculum management, classroom supervision, and professional development (Hallinger, 2020). In an era marked by increasing teacher accountability, workload intensification, and policy reforms, the role of instructional leaders—primarily principals—has become vital in shaping the experiences and outcomes of teachers. Globally, educational leadership is seen as a pivotal factor in promoting teacher satisfaction, reducing work-related stress, and ensuring high-quality instruction (Nguyen et al., 2021). This dynamic is especially pertinent in developing countries where institutional challenges often amplify the professional pressure teacher's face.

Teachers across the world are experiencing heightened levels of stress and burnout, resulting from excessive administrative tasks, performance expectations, and classroom management burdens. Prolonged exposure to these stressors can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced job commitment, and high attrition rates (Harmsen et al., 2019). Research suggests that effective leadership can mitigate such pressures by offering emotional support, promoting clarity of roles, and fostering collaborative cultures (Leithwood et al., 2020). However, without the right environmental conditions—particularly a positive school climate—these leadership efforts may not translate into improved teacher well-being.

School climate, defined as the quality and character of school life, plays a crucial role in influencing how teachers perceive their work environment (Wang & Degol, 2016). A supportive school climate is associated with lower stress levels, greater job satisfaction, and increased instructional efficacy (Lindahl, 2022). When instructional leadership creates open communication, trust, collegiality, and shared vision, it fosters a positive climate that can buffer the negative effects of work pressure (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Thus, school climate is not only an outcome of leadership but also a mechanism through which leadership influences teacher well-being.

In many developing countries, including Pakistan, school leaders face unique challenges such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and bureaucratic constraints (Aslam & Kingdon, 2022). These factors often exacerbate teacher stress, especially when leadership is weak or authoritarian. In contrast, transformational and instructional leadership styles have been shown to promote teacher morale and reduce pressure by offering pedagogical guidance and fostering trust (Iqbal & Rasool, 2019). Despite this, the mediating role of school climate in such relationships remains underexplored in South Asian educational contexts.

Pakistan's public and private school systems vary significantly in terms of leadership structures, professional development opportunities, and working conditions. Teachers frequently report feelings of being overburdened, under-supported, and unrecognized, particularly in public-sector institutions (Shah & Bano, 2021). While leadership reform is emphasized in policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (2017), implementation gaps remain. Moreover, empirical studies exploring the influence of leadership on teachers' psychological states, especially through school climate, are rare in the Pakistani context, leaving a gap in both academic literature and practical understanding. While global studies have examined the impact of instructional leadership on teacher stress, few have contextualized these findings within the sociocultural and institutional realities of Pakistan. Even fewer studies have tested school climate as a mediating variable in this relationship. There is a pressing need to empirically explore how instructional leadership can indirectly reduce teacher work pressure by fostering a supportive climate, especially in Pakistan's resource-constrained school environments. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the mediating role of school climate in the relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure, thereby contributing to theory, policy, and school improvement practices in Pakistan. The objectives of the study were:-

1. To find out the association of Instructional Leadership with teachers' work pressure at secondary school level.
2. To investigate the relationship of Instructional leadership on the school climate at secondary school level.
3. To examine the mediating role of school climate in the relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure.

Literature Review

Instructional Leadership and Its Role in School Effectiveness

Instructional leadership focuses on enhancing teaching quality and student achievement through the strategic actions of school leaders, especially principals. It involves curriculum oversight, teacher professional development, supervision, and alignment of instructional goals with classroom practices (Hallinger, 2020). Instructional leaders foster instructional coherence, support teachers' pedagogical efforts, and influence the organizational culture of schools. Research shows that strong instructional leadership enhances teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). Effective instructional leaders create a shared vision, emphasize academic expectations, and allocate resources that improve teaching

quality (Nguyen et al., 2021). In environments where instructional leadership is practiced consistently, teachers report higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intention.

Teachers' Work Pressure and Occupational Stress

Teacher stress is a growing global issue, often caused by workload overload, lack of autonomy, low administrative support, and student behavioral challenges (Harmsen et al., 2019). Work pressure not only impacts teacher well-being but also hinders classroom performance and student outcomes. In developing countries like Pakistan, teachers face additional stressors such as overcrowded classrooms, low pay, bureaucratic policies, and minimal professional growth opportunities (Shah & Bano, 2021). If not addressed, prolonged exposure to such stress can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and even attrition (Kyriacou, 2022).

School Climate: Definition and Dimensions

School climate is defined as the quality and character of school life, including interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Wang & Degol, 2016). It comprises dimensions such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning environment, institutional support, and expectations. A positive school climate fosters collaboration, trust, teacher autonomy, and emotional safety, which contribute to lower teacher stress and enhanced job satisfaction (Lindahl, 2022). Teachers who perceive their school environment as supportive are more likely to stay motivated and resilient (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Relationship Between Instructional Leadership and School Climate

Instructional leadership significantly shapes the school climate by promoting shared values, professional norms, and high expectations (Sebastian et al., 2019). When school leaders engage teachers in decision-making, support classroom instruction, and communicate clearly, the school climate becomes more conducive to professional growth. Studies reveal that principals who act as instructional leaders improve the affective tone of schools by fostering trust and transparency, which are core elements of a positive climate (Leithwood et al., 2020). This enriched climate, in turn, strengthens teacher commitment and reduces workplace stress (Collie et al., 2020).

Impact of School Climate on Teachers' Work Pressure

School climate acts as a contextual buffer that moderates how environmental and organizational demands affect teachers. In a climate where teachers feel supported, valued, and empowered, they report lower levels of stress even when workloads are high (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). Research by Liu et al. (2022) shows that school climate mediates the relationship between leadership and teacher burnout. A constructive climate reduces emotional exhaustion and increases engagement, suggesting that how leadership is perceived often depends on the overall school environment.

Mediating Role of School Climate: Conceptual and Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies increasingly support the mediating role of school climate in leadership-outcome relationships. For instance, Collie et al. (2020) found that instructional leadership influences teacher well-being indirectly through improvements in school climate. Similarly, Sebastian et al. (2019) argued that climate strengthens the effects of leadership on teaching conditions and reduces role ambiguity. However, in the Pakistani context, limited studies have tested this mediating model, especially in resource-constrained public schools. Given the pressing issues of teacher burnout and institutional instability, understanding the mediating role of climate can provide actionable insights for school reform and teacher support initiatives (Aslam & Kingdon, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Instructional leadership refers to the actions taken by school leaders to improve teaching and learning through curriculum support, professional development, and supervision. It plays a

crucial role in shaping the instructional environment of schools by aligning pedagogical goals, supporting teachers' practices, and promoting a culture of academic excellence (Hallinger, 2020). Strong instructional leadership fosters clarity, motivation, and consistent feedback, which can reduce uncertainties in teachers' roles, thereby potentially lowering their work-related stress. In the context of developing countries such as Pakistan, where administrative inefficiencies and limited professional resources often burden teachers, effective instructional leadership becomes even more critical for ensuring a well-managed school environment (Aslam & Kingdon, 2022). Teachers' work pressure refers to the psychological and emotional stress educators experience due to high workloads, time constraints, lack of autonomy, and insufficient support systems. Prolonged exposure to such stressors can lead to emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and ultimately attrition (Harmsen et al., 2019). When instructional leadership is weak or inconsistent, teachers often report a lack of direction and support, increasing their work pressure. Therefore, it is essential to explore factors that can either amplify or mitigate this relationship. In many Pakistani public schools, the situation is further exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching resources, and rigid bureaucratic structures, making teachers more vulnerable to stress and burnout.

School climate is introduced in this framework as a mediating variable that explains how instructional leadership impacts teachers' work pressure. School climate encompasses the quality of interpersonal relationships, supportiveness, and the institutional environment that teachers operate within (Wang & Degol, 2016). Leaders who demonstrate strong instructional leadership tend to foster a positive school climate by encouraging collaboration, promoting teacher autonomy, and maintaining transparent communication. A supportive school climate, in turn, enhances teacher morale, reduces emotional exhaustion, and serves as a buffer against occupational stress (Liu et al., 2022). Therefore, the mediating role of school climate helps clarify why some schools with strong leadership succeed in reducing teacher stress more effectively than others. In sum, this conceptual framework proposes that instructional leadership has both a direct negative effect on teachers' work pressure and an indirect effect mediated through school climate. It builds on theories such as Transformational Leadership Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which emphasize how organizational practices and resources influence employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bass, 1985). This framework is particularly relevant in the Pakistani educational context, where empirical studies exploring these dynamics remain limited. Investigating the mediating role of school climate can offer valuable insights for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to reduce teacher stress and improve school effectiveness through strategic leadership practices.

Conceptual Model

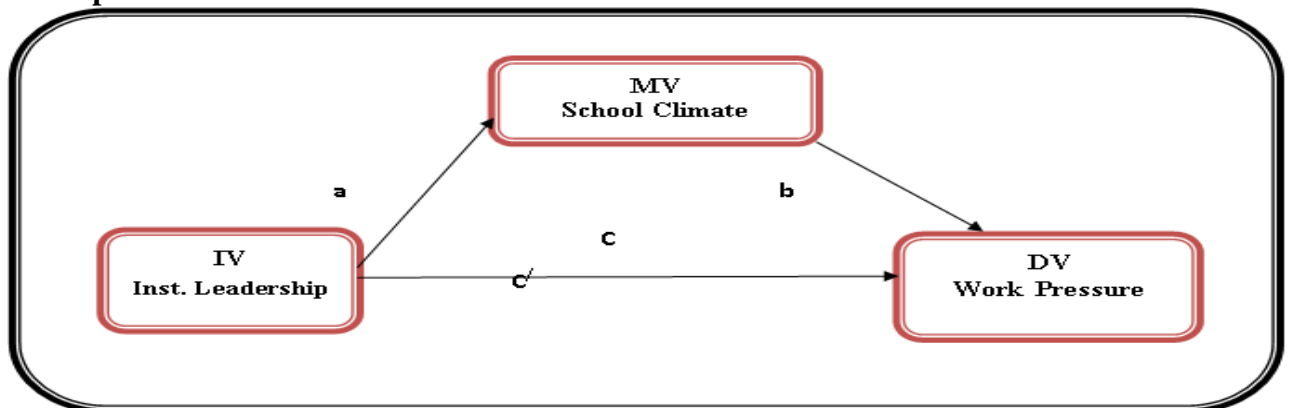


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a positivist research paradigm, utilizing a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the mediating role of school climate in the relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' work pressure. The population consisted of 3106 secondary school teachers from five districts in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan—Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, and Karak. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation from each district, and the sample size of 354 teachers was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising three standardized scales: the *Instructional Leadership Scale*, the *Teachers' Work Pressure Scale*, and the *School Climate Scale*. Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated to assess content validity, and all items were found to be valid. To establish reliability, Cronbach's alpha was computed, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.798 for instructional leadership, 0.836 for teachers' work pressure, and 0.755 for school climate—indicating good internal consistency. For data analysis, correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among variables, and mediation analysis was conducted to test the mediating effect of school climate.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1

Correlation between Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Work Pressure

Variables	N	r	p-value	Significance
Instructional Leadership & Teachers' Work Pressure	354	-0.421	.000	Significant

The Pearson correlation coefficient between Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Work Pressure is -0.421, which is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This negative correlation indicates a moderate inverse relationship between the two variables. In other words, as perceptions of instructional leadership increase, the level of teachers' perceived work pressure tends to decrease.

Table 2

Correlation between Instructional Leadership and school climate

Variables	N	r	p-value	Significance
Instructional Leadership & School Climate	354	0.548	.000	Significant

The Pearson correlation coefficient between Instructional Leadership and School Climate is 0.548, which is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Specifically, as instructional leadership improves, the quality of the school climate also increases. This implies that when school leaders actively support instructional practices, set clear goals, provide feedback, and promote professional collaboration, they contribute significantly to creating a more positive, supportive, and engaging school environment.

Table 3

Correlation between School Climate and Teachers' Work Pressure

Variables	N	r	p-value	Significance
School Climate &	354	-0.489	.000	Significant

Variables	N	r	p-value	Significance
Teachers' Work Pressure				

Pearson correlation coefficient between School Climate **and** Teachers' Work Pressure **is** – 0.489, which is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This result indicates **a** moderately strong negative relationship between the two variables. In practical terms, it means that as the school climate becomes more positive—characterized by trust, collegiality, support, and open communication—teachers experience less work-related stress. Conversely, a poor school climate tends to elevate teachers' work pressure. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a healthy and supportive school environment as a protective factor against burnout and emotional exhaustion among teachers, particularly in challenging educational settings like those found in many regions of Pakistan.

Table 4

Mediation Analysis of School Climate in the Relationship between Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Work Pressure (PROCESS Macro – Model 4)

Pathway	Coefficient (B)	SE	t-value	p-value
Instructional Leadership → School Climate (a)	0.672	0.054	12.44	.001
School Climate → Teachers' Work Pressure (b)	–0.392	0.067	–5.85	.001
Instructional Leadership → Teachers' Work Pressure (c')	–0.230	0.064	–3.59	.001
Indirect Effect (a × b) (Bootstrap)	–0.263	0.046	—	—
Total Effect (c)	–0.493	0.057	–8.65	.001

The mediation analysis was conducted following Baron and Kenny's (1986) method using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4). The total effect of Instructional Leadership on Teachers' Work Pressure was significant ($B = -0.493$, $p < .001$), indicating that better instructional leadership is associated with lower teacher stress. The first condition (path **a**) was satisfied, as Instructional Leadership significantly predicted School Climate ($B = 0.672$, $p < .001$). The second condition (path **b**) was also met: School Climate significantly predicted Teachers' Work Pressure ($B = -0.392$, $p < .001$). For the third condition (path **c'**), even when controlling for School Climate, Instructional Leadership still significantly predicted Teachers' Work Pressure ($B = -0.230$, $p < .001$), though the effect size was reduced. This result confirms that **School** Climate partially mediates the relationship between Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Work Pressure. Strong instructional leadership contributes to a positive school climate, which in turn reduces teacher stress. These findings reinforce the critical importance of leadership not just in guiding pedagogy but also in shaping the broader working environment that affects teacher well-being — particularly within the context of Pakistani public schools, where institutional climate and stress levels are often intertwined.

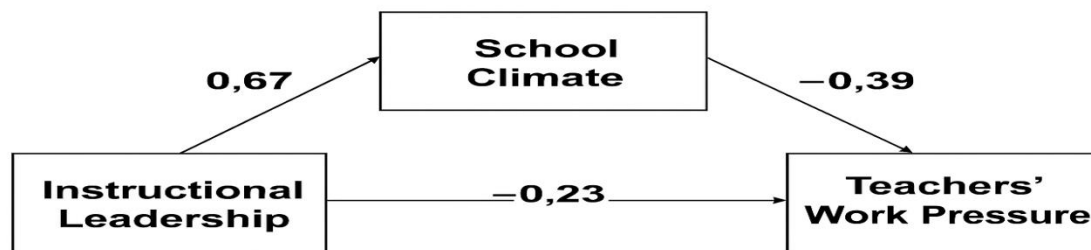


Figure 2: Mediation path

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that instructional leadership significantly reduces teachers' work pressure, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of school climate. The strong negative correlation between instructional leadership and teachers' stress levels suggests that when school leaders engage in active instructional supervision, set clear goals, and provide professional development, they create a structured and supportive environment that reduces ambiguity and emotional burden among teachers. These results are consistent with recent research indicating that effective instructional leadership enhances teacher confidence and work satisfaction by aligning pedagogical expectations and providing continuous feedback (Hallinger, 2020; Tian et al., 2022). In resource-constrained environments such as Pakistan, this leadership function becomes even more critical as it compensates for administrative and infrastructural shortcomings (Aslam & Kingdon, 2022). Moreover, the partial mediation of school climate highlights that leadership alone is not enough; the environment shaped by leadership is equally vital. A positive school climate—marked by collegiality, trust, open communication, and recognition—serves as a psychological buffer that reduces burnout and enhances teachers' emotional well-being (Liu et al., 2022; Berkowitz et al., 2018). This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which asserts that a supportive organizational climate can offset high job demands and prevent emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The mediation effect further suggests that instructional leadership's impact on stress is not solely hierarchical but also ecological, functioning through the daily social and professional experiences within the school. This is particularly relevant for Pakistan's public education system, where teacher stress is often intensified by systemic issues like overcrowding, lack of autonomy, and administrative inefficiencies (Rehmani, 2021). Therefore, school improvement strategies must focus not only on leadership training but also on cultivating a collaborative and emotionally safe school climate to sustain teacher motivation and retention.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that instructional leadership plays a pivotal role in alleviating teachers' work pressure, both directly and through the mediating effect of a positive school climate. The findings underscore the importance of school leaders not only in guiding curriculum and instruction but also in shaping an emotionally supportive and professionally collaborative environment. A well-functioning school climate enhances communication, trust, and recognition, which collectively serve as buffers against stress and burnout. These insights are particularly significant in the context of Pakistan's public education system, where structural constraints often heighten teacher workload and emotional fatigue. By establishing clear

expectations, offering professional support, and nurturing a positive school culture, instructional leaders can substantially enhance teacher well-being and school effectiveness. The study recommended that that policy makers and education departments invest in structured leadership development programs for school principals, with a strong focus on instructional leadership and emotional intelligence. These programs should include training on how to build trust, improve teacher collaboration, and foster an inclusive school culture, especially in resource-limited regions. Secondly, schools should institutionalize mechanisms for regularly assessing and improving school climate, such as anonymous teacher surveys, peer support groups, and participatory decision-making processes. These strategies would not only help reduce stress among teachers but also contribute to sustainable improvements in instructional quality and student outcomes.

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