

ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROSPECTIVE OFFICERS' INITIAL TRAINING ORGANISATION CONCLUSIONS OF A RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT. This study presents the conclusions of a broader research initiative carried out over a period of three years, between 2008 and 2011. The larger research study focused on making an interpretive analysis of the organisational culture as a determinant of school climate with a view to identify those factors that affect the teaching staff's degree of satisfaction and the students' level of academic achievement in the organizations for the initial training of prospective police officers. The research stage, which is the object of the present study, aims at identifying those features that characterize the climate of the educational organisations in charge of the initial training of prospective officers. Moreover, the study attempts to demonstrate the climate's potential influence on the teachers' job satisfaction and the students' academic performance.

Keywords: *school climate, professional satisfaction, academic achievement, prospective officers' initial training organizations*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die vorliegende Studie präsentiert die Schlussfolgerungen einer weiteren Forschungsetappe, die sich in der Zeitspanne 2008-2011 entfaltet hat. Diese Studie hat sich auf die interpretative Analyse der Organisationskultur im Schulumfeld aus der Perspektive einer Erfüllungsoptimierung und aus dem Fortbildungsniveau deren Mitglieder in den Ausbildungsfachschulen für die Offizierkarriere gerichtet. Durch diese Forschungsetappe, die den Zweck dieser Arbeit bildet, versuche ich jene Merkmale des Schulumfeldes für die Ausbildung der nächsten Offiziere zu identifizieren. Die Studie kann noch mehr beweisen, dass all diese Kennzeichen der Ausbildungsinstitution ein Einflussfaktor auf die berufliche Erfüllung der Lehrkräfte und auch auf die akademischen Leistungsfähigkeiten der Studenten ist.

Schlüsselwörter: *Schulumfeld, professionelle Erfüllung der Lehrkräfte, die akademischen Leistungsfähigkeiten der Studenten, die Ausbildungsfachschulen für die Offizierkarriere*

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1. Literature review

1.1. Conceptualization of school climate

Climate is a major variable of the educational organization. It is the school's collective personality (Norton, 1984) or that atmosphere which characterizes school's life (Halpin & Croft, 1963) impacting the nature of the inter-human relationships, as well as the quality of the teaching process. The literature shows that the quality of the organizational climate affects the "health" of the school (J.H. Friedberg, 1999), having effects on the staff's motivation and commitment, as well as on the teachers' job satisfaction and the students' academic achievement.

The interest for the study of the educational organization has generated in the speciality literature rather subjective views on school climate.

Climate is closely linked to the organisation's human resource and represents, in fact, the psychological and social atmosphere of the school. "Climate manifests through the nature of the psychological and social relations within school by means of the sort of authority employed, the degree of motivation and mobilization of human resources, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the level of cohesion of the school's community" (E. Păun, 1999).

More often than not the concept of climate is associated with that of "school ethos". Nevertheless, climate represents the collective perceptions of the organization's members, both teachers and students, on the school environment and the type of relations acceptable within school, whereas ethos designates the teachers and students' commitment to the school they belong to. However, the one-to-one dependence relation between school climate and ethos cannot be denied. This means that a positive climate is the guarantee of the school members' commitment to their organization and a high degree of the staff's commitment to school can generate a qualitative climate.

One of the pioneer research study on the educational organization was the one done by Halpin (1963), who believed that the concept of climate is equivalent with school's personality, which reflects the social interactions between school head masters and teachers, but also between teachers themselves. It is worth adding to these kinds of interactions those that take place between teachers and students, as the latter category are an important component of the school life, and quality of the teacher-student relation has significant effects on the school climate.

School climate differentiates depending on the inner characteristics of each school, being a set of inner features that distinguish a school from another and influences each member's behaviour (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). Moreover, according to the same authors, climate is the final product of the school's social groups – students, teachers, administrators – who work together to maintain the organizational equilibrium (Hoy & Miskel, 1987).

A similar reasoning is represented by belongs to Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp's theory (1991) on school climate, which is defined as the relatively stable quality of school's atmosphere, which is shared by all members, influences their behaviours and is derived from their collective perception.

Another view on school climate takes into account the school manager's behaviour as being an influential factor on the climate features, which, in turns, has effects on the teaching staff's motivation and behaviours (Hoy & Forsyth, 1986).

It goes without saying that every school should have the goal of developing a positive and beneficial climate, which cannot be created in the absence of collaborative relations between school members that will reinforce the organization's cohesiveness. Thus, there are important factors that contribute to the quality of school climate, which require the efforts of all members of the educational organization, such as the congruence between the individual and the organizational goals, the acceptance of each participant's role within organization, the positive perception of the school environment, as well as the staff's level of motivation.

Therefore, school climate is an organizational variable that describes the degree of cohesiveness between school's members and it influences the level of the staff's motivation, their degree of satisfaction and, inherently, their achievements.

1.2. Typologies of school climate

The most representative studies, which attempt to describe organizational climate typologies, often start with developing certain instruments for the investigation of the quality of organizations' climate, including school, and end with providing various taxonomies corresponding to certain criteria taken into consideration in the scientific investigation. These criteria define the type of relationships established between the members of the organization: the level of motivation, the decision-making and the degree of control. According to these criteria a certain climate typology arises, which corresponds to three distinct axes: open-closed, authoritative-participative, human-custodial (D. Ion Barbu, 2009).

Starting from Halpin and Croft's (1963) instrument called *Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire*, Hoy and Forsyth (2001) develop a new typology of school climate. This is a result of a combination between the teachers' and the school manager's behaviours, which range from open to closed. Our research study resorts to this typology, more specifically to the first two types of climate it describes, as these are the most frequently used in research.

- *Open climate* has basic features such as cooperation and respect between school members. It is a stimulating, normal climate, which is characterized by the members' high degree of commitment to the accomplishment of the school's objectives, professionalism, collaboration, collegiality, as well as satisfaction and

trust. The school manager provides support to the teachers, while being a role model, showing appreciation of the teachers' professional training, being careful not to overburden teachers with extra tasks or resort to an excessively controlling management and very strict rules.

- *Closed climate* is at the opposite pole. It has features such as teachers' non-involvement or disinterest for teaching, their lack of motivation, discontentment, non-commitment, routine, all of which generating a conflicting atmosphere. In such a climate, the school manager is ineffective, inflexible, intolerant, exerting an excessive control on school's members and imposing rigorous tasks. For this reason, the inter-human relations within school are characterised by tensions and the level of performance is low.

These two types of climate are the most realistic of all typologies described in the literature, having easily identifiable features of any organization, including school.

2. Research study

2.1. Research problem

The *problem* that was at the core of our *research study* consists in determining the extent to which school climate is a determinant of the teaching staff's professional satisfaction and the students' academic achievement within the educational organizations responsible for the initial training of prospective police officers.

2.2. Objectives and hypotheses

The *purpose* of our research study was to investigate the teaching staff and the students' perceptions on the climate features of the higher education institutions within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in charge of the initial training of prospective police officers.

From a *scientific point of view*, the study attempts to demonstrate the validity of the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1: The characteristics of the educational organization's climate vary according to the perceptions of each socio-professional group.*
- *Hypothesis 2: The quality of the educational organization's climate influences the teaching staff's job satisfaction and the students' academic outcomes.*

The research study pursued the following *objectives* derived from the working hypotheses:

- *Objective 1: To identify the climate features characteristic of the educational organization responsible for the initial training of prospective officers.*
- *Objective 2: To determine whether the organisational climate influences the teachers' professional satisfaction and the students' academic performance.*

2.3. Population sampling

The population sample subject to our research approach included both teachers and students of the faculties in charge of the initial training of the prospective officers of The Ministry of Home Affairs, which are part of the "AL. I. Cuza" Police Academy in Bucharest, namely The Police Faculty (specialisation: police, border police, gendarmerie, penitentiaries) and The Firefighters Faculty (specialisation: firefighting).

In sampling the population included in our research study we resorted to setting up a representative sample by random sampling technique. The sample was selected starting from a list of homogeneous groups of individuals (teachers and students), and the selection of the individuals included in the scientific investigation was carried out so as to cover several research variables such as: age, gender, socio-professional group, specialisation, seniority, which were going to be used later on in the data analysis and interpretation.

Numerically speaking the sample population totalled **356 respondents** as follows:

- **a number of 274 students** enrolled in all years of study (from the 1st to the 4th) from both faculties, both males and females from all specialisations (police, border police, gendarmerie, penitentiaries, fire-fighters);
- **a number of 82 teachers** from each department of the two faculties, both males and females, including teachers with various seniority degrees ranging from beginners to senior teachers, who had been teaching for more than 10 years.

Therefore, the research sample included persons (representing the two categories mentioned in the paragraph above), who were selected according to various criteria, so that the scientific study could benefit from a broader range of opinions on the research questions such as:

- socio-professional group: the population sample includes both teachers and students belonging to the educational institutions included in the research study;
- teachers' seniority and students' year of study: the population selected as a sample consists of teachers ranging from beginners to those close to retirement, whereas the students cover all years of study starting with freshmen and ending with those on the point of graduation;
- specialisation: teachers were selected so as to represent all curriculum areas and the students are representatives of the entire range of professional specializations they are allotted to during the academic cycle;
- gender: the teachers and students that make up the population sample are representatives of female and male genders.

2.4. Research methods

The quantitative research methods we resorted to in order to carry out our research study included:

• **Administration of questionnaires**, which included closed-ended, multiple choice, and Likert-scale questions, as well as open-ended questions (two questionnaires were designed, one that was administered to teachers and the other to students as representatives of the two socio-professional categories that made up the sample population).

In order to design some of the questionnaire items we resorted to:

• *Likert scale measurement method* to find out the level or frequency of the respondents' perception on or option for the various topics included in the questionnaires.

In order to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data collected through questionnaires we used *descriptive statistical methods* such as the arithmetic mean, the weighted arithmetic mean, relative frequency per unit, absolute frequency per unit, percentage cumulative relative frequency.

2.5. Data collection and procedure

The process of data analysis consists in determining the main *features of the climate* in the organization under study as they are perceived by the respondents, teachers and students.

Table 1.

What are the climate features of the educational organization you belong to?

Climate features	Relative frequency per unit		Percentage relative frequency		Absolute frequency per unit	Percentage cumulative relative frequency
	Teachers (82)	Students (274)	Teachers	Students	Teachers + Students	Teachers + Students
1. friendly atmosphere	48	116	19%	16%	164	17%
2. efficiency	50	102	20%	14%	152	16%
3. satisfaction	40	77	16%	11%	117	12%
4. motivation	35	116	14%	16%	151	16%
5. tensions/ conflicts	27	105	11%	15%	132	14%
6. dissatisfaction	16	67	6%	9%	83	8%
7. lack of motivation	25	73	9%	10%	98	10%
8. inefficiency	14	62	5%	8%	76	7%
TOTAL	255	718	100%	100%	973	100%

For this reason the questionnaires administered to both teachers and students included mixed, multiple-choice questions, which are either closed-answer or open-answer questions, offering the respondents the opportunity to choose from a series of climate characteristics (both features of open and closed climate) those which mostly characterize the organization they belong to. Moreover, in order to collect balanced opinions, the respondents were asked to add other climate features that adequately describe their organization in their opinions.

For each of the two types of climate referred to in the questions included in the questionnaires we chose the most illustrative indicators as follows:

- ▶ *Open climate* is described by indicators such as friendly atmosphere, satisfaction, motivation, efficiency, whereas
- ▶ *Closed climate* is represented by the following indicators: tensions/ conflicts, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, inefficiency.

The table above shows the statistical data expressed in numbers and percentages, which reflect the teachers' and students' perceptions of their organization's climate, taken both separately as representatives of two distinct socio-professional groups and, as a whole, as members of the same organization.

In order to facilitate the process of data analysis we resorted to the calculation of the weight of each type of climate as they are perceived by the respondents. The results are displayed in the table below.

Table 2.

The weight of the educational organization's climate features reflected in the respondents' options

Climate features	The weight of the respondents' options (teachers)	The weight of the respondents' options (students)	The weight of the respondents' options (teachers + students)
Open climate (items 1-4)	69%	57%	61%
Closed climate (items 5-8)	31%	43%	39%

Furthermore, for the clarity of the analysis, we converted the statistical data collected in graphs so as to easily analyse comparatively the differences in the perception of climate of each socio-professional group.

2.6. Results and discussion

Here are the detailed results expressed in percentages, which represent the proportion of the respondents' options for the open and closed climate features:

- 69 percent of the teachers perceive the organization they work in as being characterized by features of the *open climate* and 31 percent of the teaching staff consider that they organization has features of the *closed climate*;
- 57 percent of the students think that their organization has features of an *open climate* and 43 percent of them opted for features of a *closed climate*;
- on the whole, both teachers and students chose features of an *open climate* in a 61 percent and for those of a closed climate in a proportion of 39 percent.

Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that both socio-professional groups, taken either separately or as a whole, tend to have a positive perception of the organizational climate, though some of the features of a closed climate are also present. It is a known fact that the climate of an organization cannot be exclusively open or closed, but rather features of both climates coexist in the organization, only one of them being prevalent.

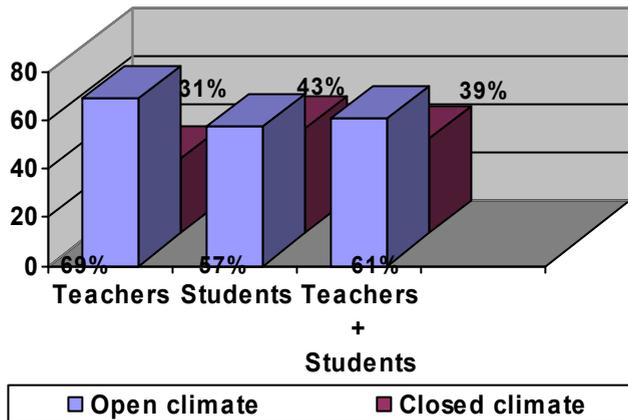


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the weight of the organization's climate features reflected in the respondents' opinions

However, it is worth mentioning that in the case of the organizations under study respondents did not overwhelmingly opt for the open climate as the average 60 percent in favour of the open climate proves. In our opinion, the overall rapport of 60 percent for the open climate to 40 percent for the closed

climate does not suggest a clear-cut direction towards a positive climate, but a relative balance between the two climates with a slight predominance of the open climate features. The percentage of 40 percent in favour of the negative climate, which demands attention, urges for a detailed analysis of the features of each type of climate in the organization under research, so that we could identify the features that determine either of the percentages recorded for the two climates.

Given the particular characteristics of each socio-professional group, the teaching staff and the students, we consider that it is relevant to analyse how representatives of each of these two groups perceive the climate features. Subsequently, we shall analyse the global perception on the climate characteristics of all respondents as representatives of the organization.

Thus, in the graph below the values 1 to 4 represent the following features of the two types of climate: 1- *friendly atmosphere vs. conflicts*; 2 - *efficiency vs. inefficiency*; 3 - *satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction*; 4 - *motivation vs. lack of motivation*.

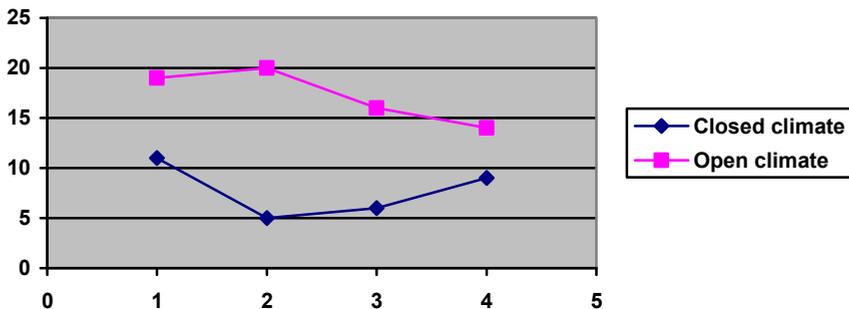


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the values of both open and closed climates in the respondents' opinions (teachers)

The graphical representation of the teachers' perception of the characteristics of the open and closed climates shows that:

- climate is characterised by both friendly and conflicting relations, though there is a slight tendency for harmonious interactions as the proportion of 19 percent for *friendly atmosphere* and the 11 percent for *tensions/conflicts* proves;
- teachers consider that the organisation they belong to is efficient; as the graph shows while efficiency increases, inefficiency decreases (the rapport *efficiency-inefficiency* is 20 to 5 percent);
- the teachers' level of *satisfaction* is relatively high, reaching a maximum value of 16 percent, whereas *dissatisfaction* has a low value of 6 percent;

- the teaching staff's level of motivation is relatively low, as the graph shows that motivation has a tendency to decrease, whereas lack of motivation has a slightly increasing tendency (the rapport between *motivation* and *lack of motivation* is of 14 to 9 percent).

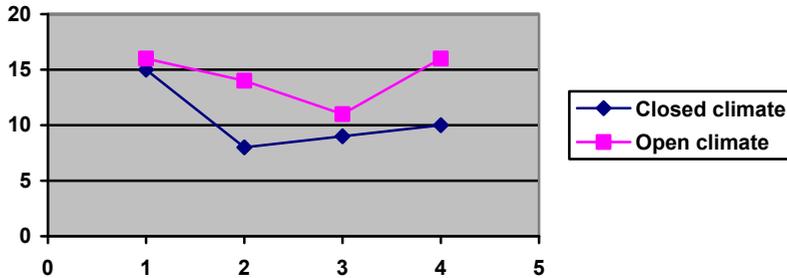


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the values of both open and closed climates in the respondents' opinions (students)

The graph above shows the same features of the open and closed climate under values 1 to 4 in the students' opinions.

As to the students' perception of the organisational climate, we can conclude that:

- the organisation's climate is characterised equally by friendly and conflicting relations; the graphical representation shows the tendency to overlap of the two climate features (the rapport friendly atmosphere – tensions/ conflicts is 16 to 15 percent);
- students perceive their organisation as efficient (the graph shows that students opted for efficiency in a considerable proportion of 14 percent, whereas inefficiency was chosen in a lower proportion of 8 percent);
- the students' level of satisfaction is rather low if we take into consideration that satisfaction has a decreasing tendency, whereas dissatisfaction an increasing (the rapport satisfaction-dissatisfaction is 11 to 9 percent);
- the students are relatively motivated (we can notice that the level of motivation takes rather maximum values, whereas the lack of motivation has average values, the rapport between the two climate characteristics being 16 to 10 percent).

Thus, it can be noted that the perceptions on the climate characteristics differ from a socio-professional category to another. This difference is due to the particularities of each group. The teachers display a tendency to perceive climate features more positively than the students, as the two groups of respondents are

not equally exposed to the rigors imposed by the military discipline and, in addition, the role expectations imposed to each professional group differ as well. The teachers have to accomplish qualitatively the role of instructors of the future officers, whereas students have to take on both the role of future officers and the responsibilities and behavioural norms associated with this role.

However, this does not mean that teachers are not required to observe the behavioural norms and the demands of the officer's profession, all the more so as they hold police ranks. Yet, the pressure imposed on them as to the role expectations they have to meet in the organisation is not as high as that imposed on the students, who will work as police officers after graduation.

Therefore, a comparative analysis of the two socio-professional categories' perceptions on organisational climate shows that:

Table 3.
Teachers' and students' perceptions on organisational climate

TEACHERS	STUDENTS
average friendly relations	relatively low friendly relations
high efficiency	relatively average efficiency
relatively high satisfaction	low satisfaction
relatively low motivation	relatively average motivation

These differences of perception on climate between teachers and students will bring along different results in the global analysis of how teachers and students together perceive the climate characteristics of their organisation.

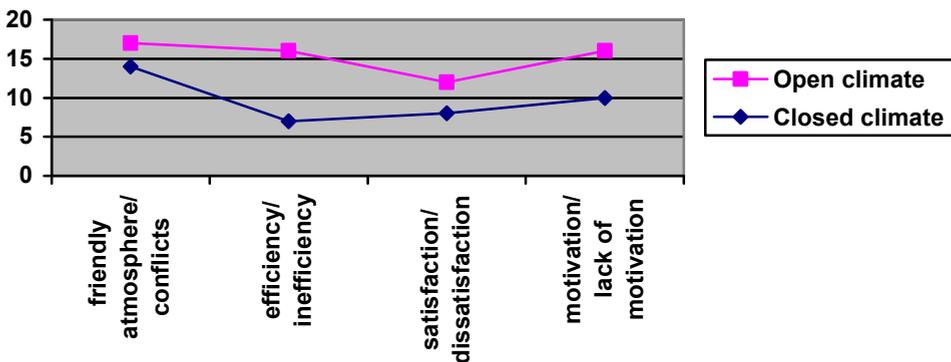


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the values of both open and closed climates in the organizations under study

The graph above shows the proportion of each dimension of the two types of climate as perceived by the respondents, teachers and students, which will allow us to make further comparative observations and reach some conclusions.

On the one hand, the values of the *open climate* expressed in percentages are as follows: *friendly atmosphere* 17%; *efficiency* 16%; *satisfaction* 12%; *motivation* 16%.

On the other hand, the percentages corresponding to the values of the *closed climate* are: *tensions/conflicts* 14%; *inefficiency* 7%; *dissatisfaction* 8%; *lack of motivation* 10%.

If the percentages obtained are contrasted, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the organisational climate is characterised by both friendly relations and tensions/conflicts (as the rapport friendly atmosphere 17% - tensions/conflicts 14% proves, showing a rising tendency for both);
- the organisation is relatively efficient (we can note that efficiency is represented by 16 % and inefficiency only 7%);
- the degree of satisfaction of the respondents is relatively low (the graphical representation shows the decreasing tendency of satisfaction and the increasing tendency of dissatisfaction, the rapport between the two being rather close of 12% and 8%);
- the members of the organisation are motivated in an average proportion (according to the graphs, the levels of motivation and lack of motivation have a rising tendency, which demonstrates that the respondents are partly motivated, partly unmotivated, as the rapport motivation 16% - lack of motivation 10% proves).

Table 4.

To what extent the teaching staff's job satisfaction in your organization is influenced by the quality of the organizational climate?

The degree of intensity of the climate's influence on the teaching staff's job satisfaction	Number of respondents (teachers)	Percentage
very much	31	38%
considerably	41	51%
moderately	9	11%
slightly	-	-
not at all	-	-
TOTAL	81 (1 respondent didn't answer)	100%

The percentages discussed in the previous paragraph demonstrate that the score between the features of the open and closed climates is rather tight, with a slight tendency towards a positive perception, which justifies the overall rapport of 61% for the open climate as compared to 39% for the closed climate.

Another issue our research study focused on was to identify the teaching staff's and the students' perceptions on the effects the organisational climate may have on their professional satisfaction and academic achievement.

As concerns the teachers, 89% consider that the level of their own job satisfaction is due in a very high and considerable proportion to the quality of the organisational climate. Moreover, the remaining percentages of the teachers considered that the climate's influence on their satisfaction is moderate.

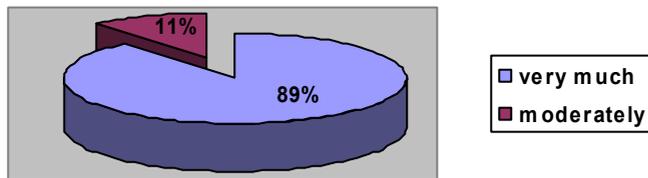


Figure 5 *The graphical representation of the degree of intensity of the climate's influence on the teaching staff's job satisfaction*

In their turn, the students opted in a proportion of 51% in favour of the opinion according to which the organisational climate has consequences on their academic performance, 43% considered that the influence is moderate, and only 6% answered that the level of their performance is little or not at all influenced by the organisation's climate.

Table 5.

To what extent the students' academic achievement is influenced by the quality of the organizational climate?

The degree of intensity of the climate's influence on the students' academic achievement	Number of respondents (students)	Percentage
much	140	51%
moderately	116	43%
slightly	14	5%
not at all	2	1%
I don't know	-	-
TOTAL	272 (2 respondents didn't answer)	100%

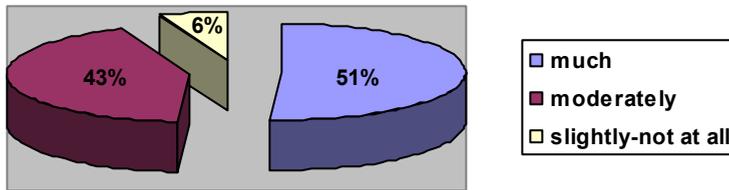


Figure 6. The graphical representation of the degree of intensity of the climate's influence on the students' academic achievement

3. Conclusions

The research study revealed that the respondents' perceptions on the organisational climate vary from a socio-professional group to another. These variations of perception can be explained by the characteristics specific to each group. The teaching staff displays a tendency to perceive climate in a more positive light than the students, as they are not as exposed to the rigors imposed by the military discipline as students are and, moreover, the role expectations they have to fulfil differ from those of the students. The teachers have to provide qualitative training for the prospective officers, whereas students have to meet the role expectations associated with the officer career and whole-heartedly embrace the responsibilities and behavioural norms brought along by this profession. Thus, these specific cultural characteristics of the organisation under study are accountable for the fact that respondents did not expressed a very definite option for the features of the open climate as the slightly above the average 60 % in favour of the open climate proves. In our opinion, the overall rapport of 60 percent for the open climate to 40 percent for the closed climate does not suggest a clear-cut direction towards a positive climate, but a relative balance between the two climates with a slight predominance of the open climate features.

Moreover, the research approach showed that although the organisational climate is characterised by a higher proportion of positive features, the levels of motivation and satisfaction of both teachers and students are relatively average-low. These results can be accounted for by the "weaknesses" of the organisational culture, which correspond to those cultural characteristics determined by the structure of the organisation, which impacts negatively on its climate. The broader research endeavour showed that the organisation included in the study is bureaucratic, where the staff's roles and statuses correspond to the positions

they occupy in the organisational hierarchy, the rules and behavioural norms are formal, there is a clear focus on the accomplishment of tasks and a preference for social control, as well as a predominantly centralised decision.

Last but not least, the research demonstrated that the teachers' degree of professional satisfaction and the students' academic outcomes are dependent on the quality of organisational climate. However, the teaching staff's job satisfaction and the students' academic achievement are not determined exclusively by the organisational climate, but only to a certain extent. For instance, the literature has identified several endogenous and exogenous factors, which influence the degree of the teachers' professional satisfaction such as the working conditions, their salaries and bonuses, the nature of organisational relations, especially those established between the school manager and the teachers, the teachers' involvement in decision-making, as well as their students' behaviours, the managerial control and organisational resources. As far as the students are concerned, their academic performances are not only due to the quality of the organisational climate, but also to other factors such as their teachers' experience and professionalism, the quality of their interactions, their own knowledge, as well as their own seriousness.

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