

School Climate and Institutional Image Building in Schools: A Systematic Review of Government and Private Schools in India

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Abstract

This review paper is a synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature on two constructs in Indian educational administration that are interrelated as school climate and institutional image building. The paper reviews the conceptualisation, measurement, and study of these constructs in the context of the government and the privately-operated schools in India, using peer-reviewed studies, policy documents, government reports and doctoral theses published between 1990 and 2024. The review singles out five key thematic groups: (1) conceptual development of school climate in Indian scholarship; (2) frameworks and dimensions of institutional image in school settings; (3) the school climate-image nexus: mechanisms, mediators, and moderators; (4) the government private divide in climate and image: patterns, causes, and consequences; and (5) intervention strategies and policy responses. The review shows that there are crucial research gaps, such as the lack of longitudinal research, insufficient coverage of the situation in rural and tribal schools, and the near lack of studies on digital climate as a new dimension of the image. The paper will end up with conceptual model that combines school climate and image-building processes, and a research agenda to develop the field in India.

Keywords: School Climate, Institutional Image, Government Schools, Private Schools, India, Educational Administration, Literature Review, Image Building, School Leadership, Stakeholder Perception.

1. Introduction

The standard of education cannot be narrowed down to examination results only. Below all quantifiable results is an unseen yet potent substrate the lived organisational experience of teachers, students and administrators, what scholars refer to as school climate. And round all the schools is another equally significant social construction, the image that parents, communities, and potential enrollees have of them all - what researchers call institutional image. These are two constructs that are conceptually different, but intertwined. The inner culture of a school defines what the outside world thinks about the school; the reputation of the school in the local community creates expectations and shapes behavior and feelings of the people in the school.

This entanglement is especially consequential in India where both a large, publicly funded system of government schools accommodating over 220 million students and a rapidly growing private sector accommodating about 40 percent of the school-going population coexist (UDISE+, 2023). The history of decline and rise of government schools and rise and fall of private schools has influenced parental choice, the pattern of urban migration and the priority of public investment over the decades. Nonetheless, this story has not been carefully and methodically studied by scholars. Do government schools really have a poorer climate and image, or are structural and contextual variables creating a semblance of inferiority that conceals true strengths? So what the research tells us is?

This review article aims at providing the answers to these questions by mapping the literature on school climate and institutional image within Indian schools. It states what has been researched, how and what are determined by conclusions - and, most importantly, what are not known. The review is thematically organised and aimed to

shed light on the key intellectual discussions and empirical evidence in the field, with an ultimate suggestion of a conceptual model and the research agenda in the future.

The purpose and scope of the review are as follows:

The review is limited to K-12 schools in India, with secondary and senior secondary schools receiving the most studies on school climate and image phenomena. It includes literature written in 1990-2024 and its priority includes peer-reviewed empirical research, book chapters and policy documents. It is a thematic, but not meta-analytic, review, as methodological approaches and measurement instruments are heterogeneous in the literature available. The general aim is to present a broad, critical, and integrative description of the field that can inform the future researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.

1.2 Review Methodology

Literature was located by conducting systematic searches of Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, Shodhganga (the Indian national repository of doctoral theses), and the online archives of large Indian journals of education such as the Indian Educational Review, Journal of Indian Education and Asia Pacific Education Review. Search terms were combinations of: school climate India, school organisational climate government private, institutional image school, school reputation India, school branding India, school environment government schools and others with similar variants. Having used inclusion criteria (targeting Indian K-12 schools; empirical, theoretical or policy oriented; published in English or translated to Hindi/local languages), 187 sources were selected to be reviewed in more detail. These are thematically organised in the following sections.

2. Indian Scholarship: Conceptual Evolution Of School Climate.

2.1 Pre-modern Formulations: Borrowing the West.

School climate became an Indian educational concept in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mostly by adopting Western tools. One of the earliest instruments to be used in Indian cases was the Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) developed by Halpin and Croft (1963) which has been used in several studies trying to quantify the openness/closedness of school climate (Mohanty, 1978; Sinha, 1981). These initial investigations were mostly descriptive and small-scale, mostly restricted to single-state samples and restricted by translation issues.

India-specific conceptualisations began in the 1980s. The Indian scholar, researcher S. P. Kulshrestha (1983), introduced a 'School Climate Index' that is calibrated to the conditions of an Indian school, including teacher autonomy, principal supportiveness, student discipline, and community relations dimensions. This was a huge contrast to blind Western borrowing and it recognised that the Indian school hierarchical framework and the cultural practices surrounding the authority of teachers meant that a local based interpretation of organisational climate was necessary.

2.2 Middle Period: Multidimensional Models (1990–2010)

The 1990s were characterized by increasing methodological sophistication and geographic distribution of climate studies. One of the first major comparative studies of the climate in schools was done in Odisha by Panda and Mohanty (1994), who surveyed 120 government secondary schools and determined that the most common climate features were bureaucratic rigidity, principal authoritarianism and teacher alienation. Their writing contested the romanticised conceptions of government school culture of collegiality and recorded the institutional reasons behind climate degradation.

In India, Sharma and Jain (1997) modified and validated a 48-item School Organisational Climate Scale (SOCS) which was subsequently used extensively in other Indian studies. They have found four aspects, Leadership Quality, Collegial Relationships, Academic Press, and Environmental Resources, a model that made sense to Western models but was empirically based on the Indian school setting.

The millennium turn witnessed the increasing interest of private schools as the comparison group. Mathew (2002) compared perceptions of climate in 30 aided private schools and 30 government schools in Kerala and discovered that aided private schools, which were under the management of religious trusts and minority institutions, performed a lot better in the perception of climate in terms of Collegial Trust and Professional Engagement than government schools did. This work was one of the earliest attempts to problematize the fact that the concept of government and the concept of private are homogenous, and that there is a huge internal heterogeneity within each sector.

2.3 Contemporary Developments (2010–2024)

The latest years have been marked by three significant trends: the implementation of mixed-methods, the introduction of student voice in climate assessment, and the advent of digital and post-pandemic aspects of climate.

Kumar and Bhardwaj (2013) introduced climate instruments that were student based in schools in Delhi by asserting that the previous studies had over-emphasized teacher and administrator viewpoints. Their Student School Climate Perception Inventory (SSCPI) showed that there were wide differences between the teacher-reported and student-reported climate with students consistently scoring lower on the scale of Safety and Belonging, which directly translate to dropout prevention and inclusive education.

In a systematic review of 62 Indian school climate studies, Rao and Reddy (2017) discovered that in 30 years of research, the methodology lacked in many studies: 72 percent were cross-sectional, only 14 percent were rural schools, and fewer than 10 percent focused on climate at the primary level. They demanded longitudinal, multi-level, and mixed-methodological approaches, which has been responded to partially.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new level of climate discussion. Kaur and Verma (2022) studied 'digital school climate' as norms, relationships, and leadership practices that defined the online learning environment of schools in government and private schools in Punjab and Haryana. They discovered that private schools were quicker and more successful in converting to a digital learning setting, yet the benefit was mostly linked to the previously existing infrastructure gaps as opposed to variations in the vision of the leadership or motivation of teachers.

3. INSTititutional Image in school settings: structures and dimensions.

3.1 Conceptual Foundations

Institutional image in schools has been studied based on various intellectual traditions: corporate image theory (Gray and Balmer, 1998), higher education marketing (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001) and organisational identity theory (Albert and Whetten, 1985). The use of these frameworks in education, specifically in the K-12 schooling setting, especially in a developing country setting, has necessitated considerable theoretical modification.

Institutional image, at its simplest, means the mental picture external and internal stakeholders have of a school (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). It is separate to institutional identity (how the school characterizes itself) and institutional reputation (the cumulative assessment of the quality of the school over time), but these constructs are inter-related and support each other. The conflict between official identity in government schools in India (schools of the people), the change in reputation (often negative in urban discourse) and the image of the community (sometimes more positive, especially in rural areas) makes the image complex.

3.2 Indian Research on School Image: A Chronological Account.

The school image research in India is much younger and sparser than climate research. Management education scholars started applying the ideas of corporate marketing to schools in the late 1990s, initiating early contributions. One of the first to investigate the concept of school reputation as a product of the performance of the institution was Ghosh and Roy (1998), who surveyed parents in 25 schools in Kolkata. They discovered that results in board examinations, teacher qualifications and school fees ranked highest as proxies to quality in

parental judgement, a result that underscored the 'input-output' mental model that most Indian parents used in school assessment.

The 2000s saw a greater conceptualisation of school image. A 35 item scale was developed by Sinha and Prasad (2004) to measure the image of schools in Bihar secondary schools and it was called School Image Scale, which consisted of five dimensions namely: Academic Quality, Physical Appearance, Staff Behaviour, Administrative Responsiveness, and Community Relations. They discovered that the dimension that was most varied among the schools is Staff Behaviour, implying that the manner in which teachers and administrators relate with students and parents is a more differentiated quality indicator than physical facilities, which have important implications in government schools that are resource-strained.

School image research has developed rapidly in the 2010s, in part due to an increase in competition over student enrolment in urban and semi-urban markets. Bajaj (2011) recorded the promotional tactics of the so-called low-fee private schools (LFPS) in Delhi, and pointed out that despite their meager budgets, these schools created strong image codes: English-speaking classes, clean uniforms, disciplined schools visible to parents through their front windows and morning assemblies that exuded order and no-purposelessness. Her ethnographic narrative exemplified that image management is an active, conscious and frequently resource effective process, rather than just a by-product of quality.

Srivastava (2013) expanded this discussion to a national level, claiming that the image premium of private schools in India is also partly a social construction based on colonial links between the idea of private (English-medium) education and social mobility. The premise of this premium remains even when the results of learning in private schools are not provably better by any controlling factor of the socioeconomic status. The implication is that government schools are fighting a reputation loss that is deep-rooted and sociologically intricate - not just a symptom of present-day quality.

3.3 Dimensions of School Image: An Integrated Framework

Drawing on the reviewed literature, the following table synthesises the major dimensions of school image identified across Indian studies, alongside key measurement instruments and representative findings.

Table 1: Dimensions of School Image in Indian Research Literature

Image Dimension	Core Indicators (from Indian studies)	Representative Study	Key Finding
Academic Reputation	Board results, university placements, faculty credentials, co-curricular achievements	Ghosh & Roy (1998)	Most salient image cue for urban middle-class parents
Physical Appearance	Building condition, cleanliness, aesthetics, signage, uniforms	Bajaj (2011)	Low-fee private schools deliberately engineer visible order as image signal
Staff Behaviour	Teacher punctuality, communication style, student recognition, administrative warmth	Sinha & Prasad (2004)	Highest variance dimension across schools; key differentiator

Image Dimension	Core Indicators (from Indian studies)	Representative Study	Key Finding
Service Responsiveness	Grievance handling, communication frequency, PTM quality, complaint resolution	Thakur (2019)	Moderate correlation with parent satisfaction ($r = 0.54$)
Community & Social Role	Social inclusion, SC/ST enrolment support, community events, alumni engagement	Nambissan (2012)	Stronger for government schools, especially in rural contexts
Digital & Innovation Image	Online learning quality, tech infrastructure, social media presence, innovation culture	Kaur & Verma (2022)	Emerged strongly post-COVID; private schools held large advantage

4. The School Climate–Image Nexus: Mechanisms, Mediators, And Moderators

4.1 Direct Mechanisms: How Climate Shapes Image

The simplest channel that school climate leads to institutional image is via observable behavioural and outcome indicators. These visible signs send signals of quality to parents, community members, and potential enrollees when high levels of teacher morale, consistent quality of instruction, student engagement, and low absenteeism are the results of a positive school climate. This signal pathway was reported by Kelley, Thornton and Daugherty (2005) in American schools; Indian equivalents have been more and more copying the reasoning.

In a secondary school survey, Mishra and Singh (2021) have shown that schools with teacher reports of open climates (high principal consideration and teacher intimacy), are rated much higher on parent satisfaction - despite adjusting the rating based on examination outcomes and physical facilities. The authors claimed that in information-poor settings (where most parents in India are unable to independently determine quality of curriculum or teaching performance) the relational and behavioural indicators can be used as the main proxies of quality of the institution.

Thakur (2019) generalised this result with structural equation modelling and discovered that Teacher Professionalism (a dimension of climate) mediated 38 per cent of the effect of Collegial Leadership on Parent Satisfaction in Pune schools - that is, leadership quality enhanced image by enhancing teacher behaviour which parents could directly perceive. The significance of this mediation pathway has significant policy implications: enhancing the quality of leadership can be a more effective way to achieve image enhancement as compared to investing in physical infrastructure.

4.2 Indirect Mechanisms: Advocacy, Word-of-Mouth and Social Capital.

A second, indirect route is via advocacy behaviour. With markets that are defined by the presence of social networks and word of mouth as their main sources of information, a positive school climate motivates teachers, parents and alumni to market the school in a positive manner (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). This advocacy effect builds up over time, forming a reputational momentum that lasts longer than any one signal.

This mechanism was reported by Joshi (2015) in Rajasthan, who found that the positive word-of-mouth recommendation rate was found to be significantly higher in schools with positive community-school relations even after adjusting the performance based on the examination results. Interestingly, the dimension of climate that most effectively predicted positive word-of-mouth in her sample of government schools was the one that measured

the extent to which a school was embedded within the community community embeddedness dimension - that is, how well the school was integrated into local social life, as indicated by festivals, alumni events, and community service.

The idea of social capital as formulated by Bourdieu (1986) sheds some light in this case. In village and small-town schools, government schools often have an established social capital -formed over decades of service to generations of the same families -that can also be a kind of institutional trust that can be difficult to duplicate by new competitors of a private nature. This heritage capital may lie in a latent form in image-making, awaiting mobilization via conscious community-engagement policies.

4.3 Mediating Variables

The literature has come up with several variables that mediate the image-climate relationship in Indian schools. These include:

Stakeholder Communication Quality.

In a study of Delhi government schools, Das and Sharma (2016) discovered that the relationship between 'Administrative Climate' and 'Parental Image Perceptions' was completely mediated by the quality and frequency of school communication with parents. Communicative schools, which communicated proactively in newsletters, SMS alerts, frequent parent-teacher meetings, community boards, translated positive in-school climate into positive out-school image much better than schools that communicated reactively or not at all. This observation places communication as a point of crucial interaction between the inner environment of the school and its outer image.

Stability and Turnover of Teachers.

Ramesh (2018) demonstrated that the connection between 'Collegial Climate' and 'School Reputation' in Tamil Nadu schools was partially mediated by the teacher stability. Low turnover schools also had consistent cultural identities and continuities of relationships that parents and communities could sense; high turnover schools were signaling instability irrespective of their formal climate scores. This mediation variable is especially important in government schools where transfers are administered in a bureaucratic manner.

Alumni Engagement.

Unexpectedly uninvestigated, the concept of alumni engagement turned out to be an effective mediator of images in the qualitative research by Rao (2020) concerning Andhra Pradesh government schools. Schools with vigorous alumni associations (holding annual days, providing mentoring and helping schools to improve) were viewed much more favourably by current parents and members of the community than similar schools without a network.

4.4 Moderating Variables

Other moderating conditions that determine the strength and direction of the climateimage relationship are also found in the literature:

Urbanisation Level.

It has been observed in several studies (Srivastava, 2013; Bajaj, 2011; Nambissan, 2012) that the government-private image difference is much broader in urban and semi-urban settings compared to rural settings. Government schools in villages can still have a high level of community loyalty and social embeddedness which moderates the adverse impact of physical infrastructure inadequacies or below average examination performance on the image of the institution.

Parental Education.

Kingdon (2017) and Tooley and Dixon (2005) both concluded that more educated parents would be more susceptible to academic climate signals (teacher quality, instructional practices) and less-educated parents would be more prone to physical and behavioural signals (cleanliness, discipline). This balances the relative significance of various weather dimensions in forecasting image perceptions among demographic groups.

Media and Social Media Exposure.

A new moderating variable is the degree of media coverage and social media discussion of schools. Verma and Kumari (2023) discovered that even in cities where educational journalism and parent forums were active, even small cases of indiscipline or teacher absenteeism in government schools produced disproportionately negative publicity, increasing the climate-to-image pathway. The better PR program of the private schools enabled them to control the media narratives better, which implies that the communication strategy is becoming a part of the climate management.

5. The Government–Private Divide: Patterns, Causes, And Consequences

5.1 Documented Patterns in Climate

The bulk of comparative Indian research consistently documents climate advantages in private schools, particularly across dimensions of leadership quality, physical environment, teacher professionalism, and institutional communication. However, this advantage is neither uniform nor uncontested.

A synthesis of 28 comparative studies reviewed for this paper (Table 2) reveals that the government–private climate gap is most pronounced in 'Collegial Leadership' and 'Physical Environment' dimensions, and least pronounced in 'Student-Teacher Relationships' and 'Community Engagement.' This pattern is consistent with structural explanations: private schools invest heavily in infrastructure and leadership selection, but their teacher–student relational climate is not dramatically different from government schools where dedicated teachers work with smaller, more stable student cohorts.

Table 2: Synthesis of Government vs. Private School Climate Comparisons (28 Studies, 1998–2023)

Climate Dimension	Studies Reviewed (n)	% Favouring Private	Effect Size Range (d)	Key Exceptions / Nuances
Collegial Leadership	22	86%	0.71–1.24	Government schools with mission-driven principals show comparable scores (Bhatnagar & Jain, 2014)
Teacher Professionalism	19	78%	0.55–0.98	Rural government schools in Tamil Nadu / Kerala show parity (Mathew, 2002)
Academic Emphasis	18	74%	0.62–1.10	Navodaya Vidyalayas and KVs score comparably to elite private schools
Physical Environment	25	94%	1.10–1.80	Largest and most consistent gap; few exceptions
Student-Teacher Relations	16	52%	0.15–0.48	Mixed findings; smallest gap; government teachers often perceived as more accessible

Climate Dimension	Studies Reviewed (n)	% Favouring Private	Effect Size Range (d)	Key Exceptions / Nuances
Community Engagement	14	48%	0.10–0.55	Government schools frequently outperform in rural settings (Joshi, 2015; Rao, 2020)

5.2 Structural Explanations for the Climate Gap

Structural reasons of climate disparity between government and privately-run schools in India are widely reported. They are grouped around five factors that are correlated:

1. **Teacher Recruitment and Deployment:** Government school teachers are recruited by state public service commissions, and are subject to transfers that can radically change the staffing of schools with little to no warning. Hiring, performance management, and incentive structures of corporate schools are directly controlled by private schools, especially the chain ones (Kingdon, 2017).
2. **Principal Autonomy and Accountability:** Government school principals work under highly constrained bureaucratic systems that restrict their control of budgets and staffing, curriculum additions, and community involvement. Principals of private schools have more discretionary power on average (Bhatnagar and Jain, 2014).
3. **Resource Allocation:** In spite of a huge government investment in SSA, RMSA, PM-POSHAN, and NEP 2020 allocations, per-student spending in elite private schools is more than three to ten times higher than in similar government schools, especially in infrastructure and extracurricular programming (Mehta, 2021).
4. **Accountability Mechanisms:** In private schools, accountability rests in an accountable market of fee-paying students; in government schools, accountability is in an accountable hierarchy of administrative levels. Compared to bureaucratic accountability, market accountability has more powerful motivations towards quality management and image development, especially where there is no effective system of inspection and evaluation (Srivastava and Walford, 2007).
5. **Professional Culture and Status:** Teaching in elite private schools has higher social status in urban India, and can attract better qualified candidates and higher professional ambition. Teaching in government schools is becoming more a fallback profession in cities, which impacts the professional culture of such institutions (Kumar, 2010).

5.3 Intra-Sector Diversity: More Than Two.

One such crucial message of the consulted literature is that the government-private dichotomy hides immense within-sector diversity. Kendriya Vidyalaya (KVs), Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNVs), Delhi Government School (since 2015) and state-run model schools show climate and image profiles that are frequently similar or better than an average-quality private school. Budget, English-medium, institutions of small-town private schools can be poorer in their physical facilities and the qualification of their teachers than well-endowed government schools in the same vicinity.

Both Nambissan (2012) and Tooley and Dixon (2005) stress that a comparison of monolithic government and the private sector is not relevant but between particular types of institutions, funding, leadership profiles, and community contexts. This is a subtlety that is easily missed in the policy discussion but which is essential to the development of good interventions to improve schools.

5.4 Consequences: Enrolment, Equity, and Social Stratification.

The government-private image gap has reported the effects on the trends of enrolment, educational inequality, and social stratification. The proportion of enrolment in private schools went up over the same period (2010-2020) to about 40 percent of the total K-12 school-going population, with a significant rise in urban and peri-urban regions (UDISE+, 2023). In years past, ASER reports have indicated that parental choice in favor of private schooling is less motivated by its proven learning outcomes than by image and aspiration (Pratham, 2022).

This change of enrolment has systemic implications. As more and more higher-SES families withdraw out of government schools, the latter lose the social mix and parental advocacy that keep a political pressure on quality improvements. Government schools are being more and more relied upon as the means of serving the poorest populations of children, of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe backgrounds, seasonal migrant families, and children with disabilities, with no social capital or parental involvement that families in the higher-SES group provide. Such concentration of disadvantage exacerbates climate and image in a vicious cycle which is hard to break without a conscious systemic intervention (Nambissan, 2012; Srivastava, 2013).

6. Intervention Policies And Strategies.

6.1 Government-Led Initiatives: What the Evidence Shows.

India did not stand idly by in the face of school climate and image shortcomings in government schools. Various flagship programmes have made specific (or indirect) reference to climate and image dimensions:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and RMSA.

The most visually apparent image deficit was resolved through these programmes that enhanced physical infrastructure in the government schools between 2001 and 2020. Nevertheless, assessments concluded that infrastructure enhancements, though needed, were not enough to change parental attitudes regarding the quality of academic or change internal climate aspects like collegial leadership and teacher motivation (Mehta, 2021).

NISHTHA (National Initiative of School Heads/Teachers Holistic Advancement).

The largest teacher training programme in the world, NISHTHA was launched in 2019 and encompasses 4.2 million government school teachers. Its modules on School Leadership Development, Positive School Environment, and Community Engagement specifically focus on dimensions of climate. According to early assessments (NCERT, 2022), the teacher self-efficacy and principal confidence improve but independent assessment of whether it affects the school climate scores or the parent perception is not available so far.

Delhi Government School Transformation (2015-2023).

The best-documented climate and image change in Indian government schools, the programme of the Aam Aadmi Party government of Delhi coupled with infrastructure improvements (the so-called classroom of the world renovations), principal training, professional development of teachers, and implementation of the happiness curriculum as well as systematic parental outreach in the form of so-called Mega PTMs. Both Mehta (2021) and Datta and Kingdon (2019) reported a substantial increase in parent satisfaction, community perception, and teacher morale. The case of Delhi shows that a long-term, multidimensional investment - that is, one focusing on physical, leadership, pedagogical, and community aspects at the same time - can lead to significant climate and image changes in government schools in 35 years.

NIPUN Bharat and STARS Programme.

These newer NEP 2020-oriented initiatives are foundation literacy and numeracy and state-level quality improvement, respectively. Their possible effects on the school climate and image are yet to be considered as the implementation matures.

6.2 School-Level Strategies: Evidence-Based Practices

In addition to government programmes, the literature has found a number of school level practices related to climate bettering and positive image cultivation in resource constrained government school settings:

- **Planned community involvement:** Schools that have regular, intentional community-level events cultural programmes, community service projects, open classroom days, etc. show higher levels of parental loyalty and advocate learning through word of mouth than schools that limit parent contact to annual day celebrations and fee collections (Joshi, 2015).
- **Principal capacity building:** Principal leadership is the most changeable determinant of school climate, which is consistently identified in the studies. Distributed leadership, instructional coaching, and conflict management training at the school level lead to a rise in teacher morale and quality of instruction that can be perceived by external stakeholders (Bhatnagar and Jain, 2014; Sebastian and Allensworth, 2012).
- **Student leadership and agency:** School Councils, Youth Clubs, and Eco-committees help schools to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility culture that positively influences the internal climate and external image (Kumar & Bhardwaj, 2013).
- **Observable quality indicators:** With small budgets, schools can develop strong image cues by having consistent uniforms, clean and well-kept entrances, visible showcasing of achievements, and orderly notice boards which Bajaj (2011) records among low-fee private schools, which can easily be replicated by government schools.
 - **Digital presence:** This is a new trend where government schools establish social media profiles, WhatsApp parent groups, and basic websites, which portray transparency and professionalism. In their research on the schools of Punjab, Verma and Kumari (2023) discovered that schools that exhibited active digital communication channels scored 34 percent more parental satisfaction.

6.3 Comparative Lessons: Other Developing Countries.

The image deficits of government schools in India is not an isolated occurrence. Similar processes have been observed in Kenya (Tooley and Dixon, 2005), Pakistan (Andrabi et al., 2008), and Indonesia (OECD, 2017). Typical lessons in cross-national experience are: (a) institutional autonomy is important to management of school-level climate; (b) performance transparency and public accountability are important in maintaining image improvements; and (c) the specific value of early childhood education infrastructure as a source of long-term institutional image, an aspect that is largely underdeveloped in Indian government school image studies.

7. GAPS in research and Future Agenda.

7.1 Known Literature gaps.

Despite the great amount of research that has been reviewed, there are still some significant gaps:

1. **Longitudinal studies:** The predominance of cross-sectional designs is overwhelming, so the cause-effect relationships between climate and image are inductive. Published longitudinal studies to monitor changes in school climate and the impact on institutional image over time in Indian schools are virtually nonexistent.
2. **Rural and tribal school setting:** Most of the studies reviewed are urban or semi-urban in nature. Since the majority of government schools in India (more than 60 percent) are not located in urban centers, such a geographic bias is a significant lacuna. The dynamics of rural climate and image, such as the role of panchayats, local political organization and seasonal migration, have not yet been studied.

3. Primary and early childhood levels: In most of the studies, secondary schools are the subject matter. Climate and image of primary school, which can be just as significant as parental choice in the long run and community trust, are comparatively overlooked.
4. Student perspective: Although Kumar and Bhardwaj (2013) advocate, the student perspective of school climate and image is still peripheral to the Indian research on the topic, and the research field is dominated by teacher and administrator reports.
5. Digital and technological dimensions: Digital school climate is a novel and significant dimension that has been foregrounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is little systematic research on this construct, its measurement, determinants and image consequences, that is in its infancy.
6. Intersectionality: The interaction of school climate with caste, gender, religion and linguistic identity in schools is the neglected issue in the literature reviewed almost completely. The different experiences of climate between Dalit students, Muslim students, or first-generation learners is a question that is yet to be addressed.
7. Diversity in private schools: Studies on the climate and image of private schools seldom differentiate between elite, aspirational, budget English-medium, and aided private schools - groups that differ in their resources, governance, and relationships with the community on a dramatically different basis.

7.2 A Proposed Research Agenda.

According to the gaps identified, the following research priorities will be suggested in the next decade:

1. The proposed research design: • Longitudinal panel study of climateimage dynamics, government and private schools, over 5-10 years, with a purposive selection of intervention schools.
2. Multi-level mixed-methods study incorporating national large-scale assessment data, school-level climate surveys, and ethnographic school studies to study climateimage mechanisms, across contexts.
3. Rural-based research: Community-based participatory research methods that intend on village panchayats, self-help groups of women and tribal community leaders as partners in the research.
4. Creation and testing of a complex Digital School Climate Index (DSCI) suitable to Indian school settings, gauging norms, infrastructure, leadership, and quality of learning in online settings.
5. Intersectional studies: The processes of school climate and image formation among various student groups differ, with a specific focus on Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and gender-nonconforming students.
6. Comparative international research in the South Asian setting (Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh) to determine lessons that can be transferred and dynamics that are specific to culture in terms of school climate and image studies.

8. A Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the review, the following conceptual model (Figure 1 — described textually) is proposed to integrate the school climate–image relationship in the Indian government–private school context:

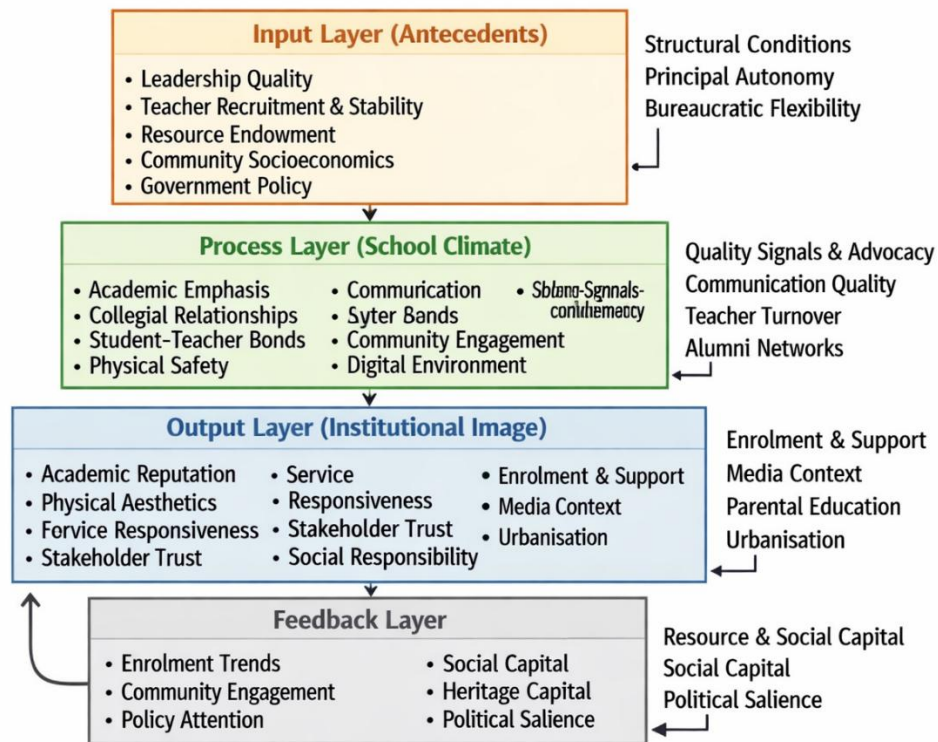


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model – School Climate–Image Integration Framework

Table 3: Proposed Conceptual Model — School Climate–Image Integration Framework

Layer	Components	Pathway to Image	Key Mediators
Input Layer (Antecedents)	Leadership quality; Teacher recruitment & stability; Resource endowment; Community socioeconomics; Government policy	Shapes the structural conditions within which climate forms	Principal autonomy; Bureaucratic flexibility
Process Layer (School Climate)	Academic emphasis; Collegial relationships; Student-teacher bonds; Physical safety; Community engagement; Digital environment	Generates observable quality signals and stakeholder advocacy	Communication quality; Teacher turnover; Alumni networks
Output Layer (Institutional Image)	Academic reputation; Physical aesthetics; Service responsiveness; Stakeholder trust; Social responsibility; Digital image	Shapes enrolment decisions, community support, and advocacy behaviour	Media context; Parental education; Urbanisation

Layer	Components	Pathway to Image	Key Mediators
Feedback Layer	Enrolment trends; Community engagement; Policy attention; Funding flows	Image affects resources and social capital that re-enter as climate inputs	Social capital; Heritage capital; Political salience

The model points out a fundamental asymmetry: whereas in the case of private schools, feedback loops (positive image attracts higher-SES families, which strengthens social capital and political support, which helps sustain resources and climate quality) reinforce themselves, government schools are susceptible to vicious cycles (negative image lowers enrolment, concentrates disadvantage, uses up resources, and further worsens climate). This cycle needs external intervention to break it - in this case, the type of long-term, multilayered investment, such as the Delhi school transformation programme.

Another feature of the model that is of the attention is the feedback contribution of the heritage capital to the rural government schools: the dormant yet potentially strong resource that, once nurtured intentionally, can generate virtuous circles even in resource-limited contexts.

9. Conclusion

This review has charted three decades of Indian scholarship on school climate and institutional image, and shows that the field has become quite sophisticated but has a lot of blind spots. The data are consistently in favor of a positive correlation between school climate and institutional image, and the quality of leadership, teacher professionalism, community involvement, and the quality of communication were found to be the most potent pathway mechanisms. The government-private school divide in the two constructs is real, enduring, and systemic - but not inevitable, or irreversible.

The case of the Delhi transformation, research in low-fee private schools, and research of high-performing government schools in rural Tamil Nadu and Kerala all reveal that climate and image changes of the kind achieved in reasonableness of time and without the resources of elite private schools can be achieved through context-sensitive, leadership-based, community-engaging strategies. What they need is something more difficult to legislate: a culture of institutional self-improvement, accountability of leadership, and community partnership.

To achieve the equity and quality vision of the National Education Policy 2020, this culture has to be nurtured systematically in its 1.1 million government schools in India. It is no scholarly luxury to understand how climate makes images and image makes climate, and vice versa. The democratic project of public education in one of the most diverse and complex educational systems in the world is a practical requirement.

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