

The school environment of Patikul District, Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education in Sulu: Teachers' perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent of the school environment in Patikul District, Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE)–Sulu, from the teachers' perspective during School Year 2022–2023. Using a quantitative descriptive–correlational research design, data were gathered from 100 elementary school teachers selected through purposive sampling from ten public schools in Patikul East and West Districts. A structured questionnaire adapted from Kate's (2005) instrument was employed to assess three dimensions of the school environment: school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership. Descriptive statistics, t-test, one-way ANOVA,

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and Pearson Product–Moment Correlation were utilized for data analysis. Findings revealed that teachers generally perceived the school environment as favorable across all three dimensions, with notable strengths in comfortability and school leadership, despite identified limitations in specific facilities such as library resources, internet connectivity, and laboratory equipment. Results further indicated no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of the school environment when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service. However, significant high to moderate correlations were found among school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership, suggesting that these dimensions are interrelated and collectively contribute to a conducive teaching–learning environment. The study concludes that a positive school environment in Patikul District supports teachers' professional engagement and underscores the need for sustained improvements in physical resources to further enhance educational quality.

Keywords: school environment, teachers' perspective, school facilities, school leadership, comfortability, elementary education

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INTRODUCTION

The school environment is a critical determinant of educational quality, functioning as a complex ecosystem that directly influences student development, academic performance, and teacher efficacy. It is broadly conceptualized as the interplay of physical (e.g., infrastructure, safety, aesthetics), social (e.g., relationships, morale, leadership), and academic (e.g., instructional practices, expectations) dimensions that collectively shape the teaching-learning process (Cohen et al., 2009; Maxwell, 2016). Internationally, a robust body of research affirms that a positive, supportive school environment correlates strongly with improved student motivation, socio-emotional well-being, and academic achievement (Hattie, 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). Concurrently, it is a key factor in teacher retention, job satisfaction, and professional commitment (Boyd et al., 2011; Talikan, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021).

Beyond delivering curriculum, schools are primary sites of socialization. The environment thus acts as a "hidden curriculum," profoundly impacting cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). The physical dimension alone—encompassing factors like classroom density, acoustics, and lighting—has demonstrated measurable effects on student attention and behavior (Barret et al., 2015; Earthman, 2004). For educators, challenges such as inadequate resources and a lack of collegial support can erode pedagogical effectiveness (McCoy et al., 2016; Talikan, 2024; Ajan et al., 2024). This is particularly salient in contexts facing resource constraints, where leadership and climate are pivotal for resilience (Talikan, 2024).

Despite this well-established global understanding, the perception and impact of the school environment are deeply contextual, mediated by local culture, policy, and resources (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). In Patikul District, under the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education in Sulu, public schools operate within a unique socio-cultural and administrative framework. While national standards mandate basic requirements, there is a pressing need to evaluate whether the

extant environment holistically supports the educational mission from the vantage point of those who implement it daily: the teachers. This study addresses a significant gap, as no prior localized study has systematically assessed the school environment in this specific district through the professional lens of its teaching staff.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the school environment of Patikul District from the teachers' perspective. It aims to determine how educators perceive their school's physical, social, and organizational conditions, and to evaluate the extent to which these conditions constitute an enabling professional environment.

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent of the school environment in the Patikul District during School Year 2022–2023. Specifically, it seeks to describe the characteristics of the teacher respondents, assess their perceptions of the school environment across key dimensions, examine differences in these perceptions when respondents are grouped according to selected demographic variables, and determine the relationships among the identified dimensions of the school environment. In line with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service?
2. What is the extent of the school environment in the Patikul District as described by teachers in terms of school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership?
3. Is there a significant difference in the extent of the school environment as described by teachers when respondents are grouped according to age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service?
4. Is there a significant correlation among the subcategories subsumed under the school environment?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive correlational design to determine teachers' descriptions and perceptions of the school environment in the Patikul District under the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education in Sulu during School Year 2022 to 2023. The design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the systematic description of existing conditions and the examination of relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment. Data were gathered through a survey questionnaire, which is suitable for descriptive research because it enables the collection, testing, and validation of data relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive research focuses on identifying what exists rather than explaining how or why it occurs, making survey methods particularly effective for capturing respondents' perceptions and experiences, as supported by established research methodology literature.

The study was conducted in the Patikul District of the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education in Sulu and involved ten selected public elementary schools. These schools were drawn from both the Patikul East District and the Patikul West District. The schools from the Patikul East District included Don Jose Godinez Elementary School, Kawmpang Elementary

School, Latih Elementary School, Anuling Elementary School, and Mudjunun Elementary School, while those from the Patikul West District included Gandasuli Elementary School, Kasulitan Elementary School, Kaunayan Elementary School, Kadday Mampallam Elementary School, and Datu Uddin Bahjin Central School. The respondents of the study consisted of one hundred teachers from these ten elementary schools, with ten teachers representing each school. The selection of respondents ensured adequate representation of both districts and allowed for meaningful comparison and analysis of teachers' perceptions across different school contexts.

A non probability sampling technique employing purposive sampling was utilized in selecting the respondents. This approach enabled the researcher to deliberately choose teacher respondents who were directly involved in the instructional process and were therefore capable of providing informed and relevant responses regarding the school environment. The use of purposive sampling was intended to ensure the collection of data that met both the quality and quantity requirements of the study and supported the attainment of its research objectives.

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire checklist adapted from the work of Kate in 2005 on teachers' perceptions of the school environment. The instrument was composed of two main parts. The first part elicited information on the demographic profile of the respondents, while the second part consisted of thirty items measuring the extent of the school environment as perceived by teachers across three categories, namely school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership. Although the instrument was adapted from an existing study, slight revisions were made to align it with the specific objectives and context of the present research.

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought formal permission to administer the questionnaire through a written request addressed to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies of Sulu State College. Subsequent approval letters were also prepared and sent to the school heads of the selected elementary schools, as well as to the teacher respondents, to inform them of the purpose and nature of the study. The researcher personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure a high response rate and to address any clarifications that respondents might require during the data gathering process.

To establish the validity and reliability of the instrument, the revised questionnaire was subjected to expert evaluation. At least two research experts from the School of Graduate Studies of Sulu State College reviewed the instrument to assess its content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. Their feedback and recommendations were incorporated to enhance the appropriateness and accuracy of the instrument prior to its final administration.

The data gathered were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools appropriate to the nature of the research questions. Frequency counts and percentages were employed to describe the demographic profile of the teacher respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the extent of the school environment as perceived by teachers in terms of school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership. To examine differences in teachers' perceptions when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service, the study utilized the t test for independent samples and one way analysis of variance. Furthermore, the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was applied to determine the degree of relationship among the subcategories of the school environment, specifically school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results of the study based on data obtained from one hundred teacher respondents in the Patikul District under the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education in Sulu during School Year 2022 to 2023. Guided by a quantitative descriptive correlational research design, the study utilized purposive sampling to select participants and employed an adapted questionnaire checklist as the primary data collection instrument. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistical techniques including the t test, one way analysis of variance, and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient were applied to examine differences and relationships among variables. The discussion that follows is grounded strictly in the gathered data and interprets the findings in relation to the objectives of the study, focusing on teachers' perceptions of the school environment and the influence of demographic variables on these perceptions.

The demographic profile of the respondents provides essential context for understanding teachers' perceptions of the school environment. In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 31 to 40 years old group, accounting for thirty four percent of the sample, followed closely by those aged 41 to 50 years old at thirty two percent. Teachers aged 30 years old and below comprised twenty five percent, while only nine percent were 51 years old and above. This distribution indicates that a substantial majority of the teachers were in their early to middle professional years, suggesting a workforce that is relatively young and potentially adaptable to changes in the educational environment. Such an age composition may influence perceptions of school facilities, comfort, and leadership, as teachers in these age groups are often actively engaged in professional development and instructional innovation.

With respect to gender, the teaching force in Patikul District was predominantly female, with seventy seven percent of respondents identifying as women and only twenty three percent as men. This pattern reflects a broader trend observed in elementary education, where teaching is often female dominated. The predominance of female teachers may shape the overall climate of the school environment, particularly in terms of collaboration, interpersonal relations, and leadership dynamics, although the present study later demonstrates that gender does not significantly differentiate perceptions of the school environment.

In terms of civil status, most respondents were married, representing seventy three percent of the sample, while twenty three percent were single and only four percent were either separated or widowed. This distribution suggests that a majority of teachers carry family responsibilities alongside their professional roles. Such responsibilities may heighten the importance of a supportive, safe, and comfortable school environment, as teachers balance work demands with personal and family obligations.

Educational attainment data reveal that more than half of the respondents, or fifty two percent, held only a bachelor's degree, while thirty two percent had earned master's degree units. Only fifteen percent had completed a full master's degree, and a very small proportion of one percent reported having doctorate units. These findings indicate that the majority of teachers had not yet completed graduate level education, which may be influenced by contextual factors such as access to graduate programs, financial constraints, or workload demands. This profile suggests opportunities for institutional support in encouraging further professional growth through graduate studies.

In terms of length of service, fifty eight percent of the respondents had been in service for six years and above, nineteen percent had four to five years of service, and twenty three percent

had one to three years of experience. The dominance of teachers with longer service implies a relatively stable workforce with substantial institutional experience. Such experience may contribute to more informed and consistent perceptions of the school environment, as these teachers have had prolonged exposure to school facilities, leadership practices, and working conditions.

The extent of the school environment in the Patikul District was examined from the teachers' perspective across three dimensions, namely school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership. In terms of school facilities, the overall average mean was 2.813, which falls within the interpretation of agree. Teachers expressed agreement that several basic facilities were available and functional, such as ventilation with good functioning fans with a mean of 3.380 and standard deviation of .488, safe tables and chairs with a mean of 3.340 and standard deviation of .476, enough lighting in classrooms with a mean of 3.202 and standard deviation of .428, and appropriate classroom furniture with a mean of 3.051 and standard deviation of .437. They also agreed that the school was equipped with projectors with a mean of 2.780 and standard deviation of .883 and with computers and printers that met required standards with a mean of 2.930 and standard deviation of .913.

However, teachers expressed disagreement regarding the adequacy of certain key facilities. The availability of library learning materials such as books obtained a mean of 2.404 with a standard deviation of .832, the sufficiency of the computer laboratory yielded a mean of 2.310 with a standard deviation of .837, and the availability of WiFi network registered the lowest mean at 1.810 with a standard deviation of .961. These results suggest that while basic physical facilities were generally present, gaps remained in instructional resources and technological infrastructure. The absence or inadequacy of these facilities may limit opportunities for enriched learning experiences and place learners at a disadvantage compared to those in better resourced schools.

In terms of comfortability, teachers consistently rated the school environment positively, with an overall average mean of 3.029 interpreted as agree. Respondents agreed that the school environment was clean and in good condition with a mean of 3.010 and standard deviation of .461, that teachers and students were safe with a mean of 3.230 and standard deviation of .617, and that the school was a good place to work and learn with a mean of 3.160 and standard deviation of .369. Teachers also agreed that they felt safe in other parts of the school grounds with a mean of 3.100 and standard deviation of .560 and that they could collaborate easily in small groups with a mean of 3.140 and standard deviation of .725. Although some items related to temperature comfort such as usually feeling too hot with a mean of 2.680 and too cold with a mean of 2.750 were still interpreted as agree, they suggest minor environmental discomforts that could be addressed to further enhance the learning and working atmosphere. Overall, these findings indicate that the school environment in Patikul District was perceived as conducive, safe, and supportive of teaching and learning activities.

School leadership also received favorable evaluations from teachers, with an overall average mean of 3.007 interpreted as agree. Teachers agreed that principals involved them in decision making and problem solving with a mean of 3.000 and standard deviation of .000, that school leaders and staff communicated effectively with a mean of 3.000 and standard deviation of .000, and that the school staff respected diversity with the same mean and standard deviation values. High agreement was also noted in items such as teachers being treated and respected as educational professionals with a mean of 3.280 and standard deviation of .451, being provided time to plan collaboratively with a mean of 3.162 and standard deviation of .273, and teachers having close working relationships with each other with a mean of 3.110 and standard deviation

of .315. These findings suggest that leadership in the Patikul District fostered collaboration, inclusion, and shared responsibility, which are essential elements of a positive school climate.

Inferential analyses were conducted to determine whether significant differences existed in teachers' perceptions of the school environment when grouped according to demographic variables. A t test was employed to examine differences based on gender. The obtained t value of 41.024 with 99 degrees of freedom and a significance value of .000 exceeded the .05 level of significance, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This result indicates that there was no significant difference in the extent of the school environment as perceived by teachers when grouped according to gender. This finding suggests that male and female teachers shared similar perceptions of facilities, comfortability, and leadership in their schools.

One way analysis of variance was used to test differences based on age, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service. For age, the computed f value was 1.276 with a significance value of .292, which is greater than .05. For civil status, the f value was 2.717 with a significance value of .158. Educational attainment yielded an f value of 2.560 with a significance value of .020, and length of service produced an f value of .843 with a significance value of .288. Despite some variation in f values, all significance values exceeded the .05 threshold as interpreted in the study, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis across all variables. These results indicate that teachers' demographic characteristics did not significantly influence their perceptions of the school environment. This finding aligns with perspectives in environmental psychology suggesting that shared physical and organizational conditions exert a stronger influence on perceptions than individual demographic differences, as articulated by Holahan, Gump, Bell and colleagues, Gifford, and Amedeo and colleagues.

The relationships among the dimensions of the school environment were examined using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. School facilities and comfortability showed a correlation coefficient of .454 with a significance value of .000, interpreted as a moderate correlation. School facilities and school leadership were correlated at .348 with a significance value of .000, also interpreted as moderate. Comfortability and school facilities yielded a higher correlation coefficient of .567 with a significance value of .000, interpreted as high, while comfortability and leadership were correlated at .482 with a significance value of .000, interpreted as moderate. School leadership and comfortability demonstrated a lower correlation coefficient of .260 with a significance value of .000, interpreted as low, while leadership and facilities showed a moderate correlation of .438. The average correlation coefficients of .401 for school facilities, .543 for comfortability, and .349 for school leadership indicate that the dimensions of the school environment were moderately to highly interrelated. These findings suggest that improvements in one aspect of the school environment are likely to influence other aspects, reinforcing the idea that school facilities, comfort, and leadership function as interconnected components of a holistic educational environment.

In summary, the findings of the study indicate that teachers in the Patikul District generally perceived their school environment as positive and supportive in terms of facilities, comfortability, and leadership, despite notable deficiencies in instructional resources and technological infrastructure. Teachers' demographic characteristics did not significantly differentiate their perceptions, suggesting a shared experience of the school environment across groups. The moderate to high correlations among the dimensions of the school environment highlight their interdependence and underscore the importance of integrated interventions in school improvement efforts. Collectively, these results contribute to a deeper understanding of the school environment

in the Patikul District and provide an empirical basis for strengthening facilities, enhancing comfort, and sustaining collaborative leadership practices, thereby setting the stage for the discussion of implications and recommendations in the succeeding section of the manuscript.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study lead to a comprehensive conclusion regarding the school environment in the Patikul District under the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education in Sulu and its implications for teachers and the broader school community. The demographic profile of the teacher respondents indicates that the teaching force is generally young to early middle aged, predominantly female, largely married, and composed mostly of individuals who have not yet completed postgraduate studies. A substantial proportion of the teachers have been in service for six years and above, reflecting a workforce that combines relative youth with growing professional experience. This profile provides important context for understanding teachers' shared perceptions of the school environment, as it reflects a group that is actively engaged in teaching responsibilities while still navigating professional growth and development.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the school environment in the Patikul District exerts a positive influence on teachers. Teachers generally perceived their schools as conducive to teaching and learning in terms of available facilities, comfortability, and leadership practices. Although certain limitations were identified, particularly in relation to instructional resources and technological facilities such as internet connectivity, libraries, and laboratory equipment, the overall environment was still viewed as supportive and functional. This positive perception suggests that a favorable school environment enhances teachers' sense of responsibility, commitment, and motivation, which in turn encourages them to exert greater effort to ensure that pupils learn effectively. A supportive environment therefore serves not only as a physical and organizational setting but also as a catalyst for professional dedication and instructional effectiveness.

The absence of significant differences in teachers' perceptions of the school environment when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service further reinforces the conclusion that demographic characteristics do not predict how teachers experience their school context. This uniformity of perception implies that teachers in the Patikul District share common experiences and encounter similar conditions regardless of their personal or professional backgrounds. Such a finding underscores the central role of the school environment itself rather than individual characteristics in shaping perceptions, and it aligns with theoretical perspectives in environmental psychology that emphasize the influence of shared physical and organizational conditions on behavior and attitudes.

Moreover, the identified high to moderate correlations among school facilities, comfortability, and school leadership highlight the interdependent nature of these dimensions of the school environment. Each component contributes in varying degrees to the overall quality of the school setting, and none operates in isolation from the others. Effective leadership supports the maintenance and improvement of facilities and promotes a climate of comfort and safety, while adequate facilities and comfortable conditions reinforce positive leadership practices and collaborative relationships. These interconnections suggest that efforts to improve the school environment must be comprehensive and integrated in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

In light of these conclusions, the study emphasizes the importance of sustained collaboration among teachers, school leaders, parents, and other stakeholders. Future research is encouraged to extend the present findings by examining the direct effects of the school environment on learners' academic performance, particularly by focusing on relationships between teachers and stakeholders. Subsequent studies may also benefit from including additional variables such as principals' qualifications, availability of financial resources for facility improvement, and the management trainings attended by school leaders. At the practical level, teachers are encouraged to actively support programs and initiatives introduced by school principals as a manifestation of professional respect and collaboration, while school heads are urged to reciprocate by supporting teachers' efforts that benefit learners and the school as a whole. Likewise, parents and other stakeholders play a critical role and are encouraged to provide consistent support to schools for the welfare and educational success of their children. Collectively, these conclusions and recommendations underscore the shared responsibility of all members of the school community in fostering a positive, supportive, and effective school environment.

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