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## Exploring the School Climate in The Formation of Student-Athlete Morals At A Sports School in Johor

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### Abstract

Moral depravity is prevalent among adolescents nowadays, and student-athletes are not exempt from being exposed to bullying, electronic cigarette addiction, and other misconducts involving other adolescents. The school's climate is one of the social learning aspects that might contribute to students' well-being. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the school climate as a determinant of social learning by focusing on the daily routines of students at the Johor State Sports School. Case study qualitative research approaches were utilized for this study and involved ten informants, including student-athletes, teachers, and principals. Data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, supplemented by participant observations, document analysis, and field notes. According to the study's findings, several aspects of empowering everyday activities, such as spiritual practises, physical health, academic balance, sports, morals, and student self-management, are present in the school environment. The findings of this study are expected to provide guidance and encouragement to the school, administrators, teachers, and the Malaysian Ministry of Education, particularly in maintaining a conducive and suitable school environment.

**Keywords:** School Climate, Social Learning, Sports School, Athletes, Moral.

### Introduction

Without education, people will be considered to be living in the past. The educational system is one of the most influential factors in defining a nation's overall quality of life and civilisation (Hassan, 2007). If a country's education is allowed to decline, it will become stiff and inflexible. A powerful and technologically advanced nation is the outcome of a dynamic educational system. Formal education attained by enrollment in educational institutions is essential to every nation's social, political, and economic growth. The school climate plays a significant role in ensuring academic goals are accomplished. This is because achieving educational objectives is closely related to the school climate.

The school climate can impact student's life. A conducive school climate might motivate students to practice virtue. On the other hand, an adverse school climate promotes students to behave negatively. Both aspects play a crucial role in defining the learning environment for identity-forming students. Although students have a propensity to engage in negative

behaviour, effective educational methods and strategies will enable them to discriminate between righteous and wrongful behaviours.

### **Problem Statement**

In humankind, morality is the most valuable ornament. However, the crisis of moral deterioration among adolescents is not unusual. The Department of Social Welfare 2019 reported a total of 4,833 adolescents involved in crime by case type and gender (Isa et al., 2020), such as bullying (Shariff et al., 2021), electronic cigarette addiction (Hussain et al., 2020) pornography addiction (Razak, 2021) as well as delinquent behaviours ranging from minor misconduct such as school rule violations to more serious misconduct such as free sex and drug addiction (Karim et al., 2021).

According to the National Sports Council, those who participate in sports activities are dominated by teenagers. Sports development programs are implemented starting in schools, such as the National Football Development Program, which is placed in 120 schools nationwide (Medan et al., 2021). So, this group is also potentially involved in social misconduct, such as drinking alcohol during training (Awani, 2018), being absent from training (Arena, 2019), and smoking (Bharian, 2019). The matter is often reported in the mass media, and even worse, the government has to bear the cost of rent compensation from the crime of vandalism committed by national athletes during international tournaments (Hmetro, 2018). This social phenomenon should not happen in Malaysian society, known for its ethical norms and civilisation.

Athletes' mental health is sometimes affected by their participation in sports. A healthy mind enables individuals to form harmonious relationships, participate in community activities, and contribute to society. Physical stress associated with training, competition, performance, and injuries, as well as conflicts between athletes and coaches, are the causes of mental health problems in student-athletes. Basri (2018) states that the burden causes worry, despair, stress, and even disorientation, leading to social crimes such as bullying, vandalism, and other social misconduct. This shows that life stress contributes to criminal behaviour in society (Zakaria et al., 2022).

Behavioural problems among teenagers and athletes in Malaysia require a study on the formation of student morals. However, there are studies on the religious appreciation of sports school athletes, such as the study conducted by Osman and Yahya (2018), which examined the relationship between spiritual gratitude and psychological well-being among the students of the Malacca State Sports School. Nevertheless, the findings are limited. Therefore, this study explored the school climate as a social learning factor in forming student athletes' character.

### **Research Objective**

The social environment can influence morality. Environment plays a crucial role in developing soft skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, public speaking, professional writing, teamwork, leadership, professional attitude, work ethic, career management, and intercultural fluency (Sidik et al., 2018). Schools are a social environment component that can foster the growth of a fully functioning human capital. Therefore, schools must have a positive climate that emphasises educational excellence, a conducive learning environment, and zero instances of misconduct (Seman et al., 2021). From an Islamic perspective, the qualities of school climate should include Islamic lifestyle practices, good staff interactions, a conducive school environment, and a positive student attitude (Razak, 2006). This contrasts with the

climatic requirements of a successful sports academy, which must include comprehensive sports facilities, skilled instructors, and structured training and academic schedule (Thompson et al., 2022). Therefore, this study explores the school climate in producing well-behaved student-athletes in the Johor State Sports School.

### Literature Review

Bandura's theory of social learning emphasises observing the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses of others. Most human behaviour is acquired through observing others, establishing an idea of how the new behaviour is carried out, and then using this encoded information as a guide for action. Teenagers frequently face an identity crisis, which consists of discovering their identity to interact with family, peers, and the surrounding community. Therefore, an unfavourable environment will detour children off the correct route, resulting in negative behavioural indicators (Yung et al., 2019). Thus, the substantial role of the environment in creating an individual's identity should not be understated, and it is played by significant individuals such as parents, family members, peers, teachers, and the media. All of these factors can influence the development of an individual's identity in society.

According to Ibn Khaldun's book *al-Muqaddimah*, it is human nature to imitate the actions of those around them, whether good or bad. Humans will incorporate visual information into their activities. Therefore, if the environment is positive, they will automatically imitate excellent conduct and learn something from it (Raihan & Kamarul, 2018).

McBrien and Brandt (1997) define school climate as the combination of a school's values, culture, safety practices, and organisational structure. Thus, a quality school climate can influence student and teacher behaviour (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). According to Benard (1995), a school climate that includes love and support, high standards, and opportunities to participate in school activities can build resilience and cope with risk factors in students' lives. In contrast, according to al-Quran and al-Sunnah, climate can influence human personality, behaviour, and psychology, such as mental peace, self-confidence, and life satisfaction (Yusoff, 2020).

Environmental factors, such as family (Ibrahim et al., 2019), friends (Azizan et al., 2021), school (Hodzori et al., 2020), residential neighbourhood (Johari et al., 2019), and mass media (Zainan et al., 2021), have a substantial impact on adolescents' life. One of the current causes of adolescent involvement in social problems is a religiously indifferent upbringing and a lack of grasp of the fundamentals (Ismail et al., 2022). According to a study on teenage girls aged 13 to 18, conducted by Othman et al (2019), the dysfunctionality of the family in terms of low socioeconomic status, inappropriate parenting styles, and the absence of role models within the family are the major causes of adolescents' involvement in social misconduct. However, as Ibrahim et al (2019) discovered, the amount of familial care for problematic pupils is high, indicating that even if the teenager receives appropriate affection, this group is at risk of engaging in the symptoms of misbehaviour.

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to maintain concentration in the middle of disagreement, criticism, and resentment and deal with various life-threatening adversities (Nazirah et al., 2020). According to a study by Bakar and Hamzah (2019) on adolescent girls at the Selangor State Protection Center, the causes of adolescent engagement in social problems are self-factors and the mass media. This suggests that those with insufficient emotional intelligence and mental and spiritual deficiencies will be easily tempted to violate religious orders (Azizan & Yusoff, 2018). In order to produce adolescents with an identity that

may serve as a barrier against becoming entrapped by social symptoms, adolescents must develop positive mental health and emotional intelligence.

Social learning aspects supported by true Islamic beliefs help the development of mental and spiritual resilience (Daud & Kadir, 2020). Islam is a faith that bestows kindness on the entire world, protects human rights as social creatures in need of protection, and guarantees their dignity (Hafniati, 2018). From a religious perspective, humans can recover the original meaning and goal of their happenings, which is to seek God's delight (Yusoff, 2020). A positive environmental climate is a social learning component that contributes to the formation of an individual in order to achieve these goals. Spiritual purity will be the primary purpose in a society regulated by sharia. People with a pure heart will endeavour to do what makes them suitable, to protect themselves from horrible deeds, respect the rights of all living things, and establish justice among humans (Abd Razak et al., 2021).

Students' emotional intelligence and mental health can be nurtured through a school climate that encourages a balanced approach to future achievement. Suppose every activity and program established by the school seeks to build a holistic individual, that is, achievement from a physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual standpoint. In that case, our nation may produce individuals with high-quality human capital (Norasid & Abdullah, 2019). Mustapha et al. (2019) found that spiritual activities nourish the soul so that it does not stray, is serene, and avoids wrongdoing. However, the practice is flawed if it lacks knowledge. Therefore, every Muslim is responsible for seeking facts (Aemy et al., 2021). Action and knowledge must coexist, action without knowledge is ineffective, and knowledge without action is pointless (Mukit, 2019). Islam is a faith that encompasses all aspects, including physical activity, without eliminating worldly things. Hadiths consequently exhort Muslims to learn swimming, horseback riding, and archery (Azimoha, 2018). This demonstrates that Islam does not prohibit the physical activity, as a healthy body leads to a healthy mind (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Today, everything moves quickly due to the rapid rate of global advancement, and those who are slow will be left behind. Therefore, Islam instructs its adherents to be strong since Allah prefers and loves firm believers more than weak believers (Fakih, 2020). The study by Sari and Surat (2020) indicated that resilient and self-managing students could mould their personalities and attain excellent academic accomplishments while enhancing their soft skills (Jamal & Azlan, 2021).

## **Methodology**

The researcher employed a qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative research is inductive research suited to an in-depth investigation (Merriam, 2009). While the case study approach comprises thorough descriptions of persons and leads to a unique explanation of the experience and information gained from a particular topic, the narrative approach consists of general statements (Silverman, 2013).

Several informants participated in the research. There are a variety of staff at SMK Tun Hussien Onn State Sports School, including athletes residing in hostels, teachers, and administrators. The researcher chose informants from among student-athletes who are able to share information, have no disciplinary issues, and have resided in the Sport School hostels for at least one year. These requirements ensure that informants are able to communicate their knowledge of the school environment. Regarding the criteria for teacher informants, the researcher chose teachers with over ten years of experience in Sports Schools and direct participation in spiritual programmes in schools and hostels. Furthermore, the researcher decides on the principal as the informant from the administrator's perspective since the

principal is the policymaker for the school and the hostel, thus, the principal is the most appropriate informant to be considered as the research informant for the administrator. In the context of qualitative research, a purposive sample consists of informants who may help answer research questions or provide copious amounts of precise data.

### **Collecting and Analysing**

In this study, methodological triangulation is applied. Interviews are the primary method of data collecting, complemented by document analysis and observation. The technique of semi-structured in-depth interviews was chosen because it is more flexible and can assist the researcher in managing the flow of conversation interrupted by responses to crucial questions. Utilising participant observation, the researcher explains to the informant the objective, intention, and desire to research activities related to the informant. Even though the Covid-19 Movement Control Order phase began in March 2020, the observation session can still be conducted from when the school year begins in July 2020 until November 2020. Document analysis is conducted on all relevant written, visual, and document materials. In order to manage the data, the researcher used Nvivo 11 software. Based on the data obtained from interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the researcher has opened an independent code on each piece of information obtained. After completing all the coding processes, the researcher examines all the independent codes and connects the codes as axial coding. Next, sub-themes will be formed from the compilation of related categories. The researcher names each category so there is no overlap with categories under other sub-themes because the overlap will affect the theme formed. In the end, the newly formed themes from the sub-themes can be considered exclusive and mutually exclusive (Yin, 2011). The themes developed by the researcher complement each other with other themes to form answers to the research questions. Therefore, the theme formed by the researcher will be mutually exclusive to the research question (Arshad, 2016).

### **Findings**

As a consequence of the investigation of school climate, various factors have been identified, including the issue of empowering everyday practice. The practice is orderly by requirements and suitability, so the available time may be utilised effectively. Through document analysis and observation with the researcher's participation, the schedule board for daily activities in the dorm and school is plastered large, clear, and written with a permanent material, so that student-athletes are always aware of their daily schedule and may organise their time use efficiently. Several factors are highlighted in empowering daily routines, including applying spiritual practices, physical fitness, an emphasis on academic balance, sports and morals, and student self-management.

### **Implementation of Spiritual Practices**

Spiritual practice is the most influential factor in forming an athlete's character. Following the school's motto, prioritising academics, character, and extracurriculars reveals that the school prioritises character and morality. Student-athletes routinely engage in traditions like congregational prayer, *Quran* recitation, and *tazkirah*. The following comment provided by the principal's informant demonstrates this:

'In practice, religious activities that are essential to the moral development of students are always prioritised. Continuously scheduled are congregational prayer, recitation, lectures, and *tazkirah*. These religious activities did not cease

even during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are fortunate to have many THO members who ensure that student-athletes lead a religious life.

The statements provided by the Principal's Informant reveal that his leadership practices are based on Islamic *Shari'a* since he believes that programs such as congregational prayers, reciting *Quran*, lectures, and *tazkirah* are among the techniques that might instil morals in student-athletes. In addition, his encouragement and support contribute to the school's ability to acquire support from third parties to make better religious programs. Furthermore, as Teacher A mentioned, the *surau* has been used to foster student-athlete values to form a sense of integrity.

'We utilise the *surau* as a moral orientation point." Therefore, this prayer is the primary cause and reason for the student's discipline in the beginning...the situation is not good, the middle is somewhat better, and finally...alhamdulillah. They are based in the *surau*, and when based in the *surau*, they have five prayer times from dawn to night; this is what we emphasise'.

The view presented by the informant indicates that the programme centred on the *surau* is a culture that exists in the school's climate. This is demonstrated by a statement explaining that the *surau* in the school was initially used to discipline students and that the culture ultimately had a positive impact on the moral character of student-athletes.

Based on the two statements, it can be concluded that spiritual activities are a component of the school's culture to accomplish the school's goal of generating disciplined and moral student-athletes.

### **Physical Fitness**

This study defines physical fitness as training for athletics, track and field, netball, football, hockey, takraw, rugby, judo, archery, and bowling. Professional trainers from teacher groups and the National Sports Council conduct the sessions. As the only sports school for Johor athletes, there are several collaboration initiatives between the school and various associations, including the Johor Rugby Union, which sponsors student-athletes at the school and provides most of them with scholarship support and allowances. Consequently, the parties' desired outcomes are certainly of a high calibre, indirectly affecting the amount and duration of training given to student-athletes. Therefore, student-athletes must always maintain their level of achievement to avoid expulsion from the program and the loss of scholarship funding. In order to prevent such occurrences, student-athletes must devote their total commitment. This can be achieved by completing the specified training time and calibration, as mentioned by student-athlete Informant 5:

'At 3.30 I go down to the.... track for training if it is the training I... my sport is long-distance running, I do many activities such as running for 30 minutes or 1 hour. I practised for approximately 2 hours during this MCO period until 5.30.'

The statement of student-athlete three further supports the assertion that there is a component of physical fitness:

'After performing the prayer at the *surau*, I will prepare aaa for training in the afternoon until ....until 6 o'clock. Yes... training until 6 o'clock.

According to the sharing session, physical fitness is a vital component of the Johor State Sports School, which functions as a distributor and supplier of great athletes to Malaysian Sports Schools.

### **Emphasise the Balance of Academic Sports and Morals**

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge. It strives to balance Physical, Emotional, Spiritual, and Intellectual development based on the Curriculum Standard of the Malaysian Ministry of Education. As mentioned by the Principal's Informant, the fact that a school is designated as a sports school does not imply that teaching and learning are abandoned. Instead, teaching and learning continue to be the school's priority.

'..there is sometimes a conflict in emphasis, strategy, program, and purpose. Sometimes schools are perceived to be too inclined toward students participating in sports. Whatever happens, the verdict in many cases prioritises academics and character (morality) over sports.

Despite being a sports school with non-academic students, this institution prioritises academics, according to the Principal's Informant. The school continues to receive positive feedback from student-athletes who continue to prioritise academics and sports equally, as highlighted by student-athlete informant 5:

'..and go down to do... prepare to study at night, and then I will study a bit about aaa after *suhoor*, I read a book, then aaa while waiting for the dawn, I study. After that, we go to school at seven in the morning, and at seven fifteen, we go upstairs. Afterwards, I read a book in class while waiting for the teacher. After the break, I will return to class to finish the next lesson.

According to the comments, the school atmosphere emphasises the balance of academics, athletics, and ethics in accordance with the National Education Philosophy, which emphasises the balance of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual well-being.

### **Student Self-management**

Self-management refers to a student's ability to manage and be independent without depending on others. In this study, student-athletes are trained to manage their time and fulfil personal chores, such as their clothing, residence, and schedule.

'I normally get up at 4.30 a.m. and go straight to the shower; after that, at 4.45 a.m., I head down to *sahur*.' After that, I walked downstairs and cleaned the dorm before putting on all my school clothes and heading to school'.

The school climate can form student-athletes not only to be aware of the timeline that has been set but also to value time, feel guilty if they procrastinate on a task, and encourage an attitude of responsibility. This can be seen when student-athlete informant 3 stated that he would rush the task that is being done to do the next task. The school climate can nurture these behaviours in student-athletes.



'I quickly took a shower after the training and then went upstairs to break the fast and perform the obligatory Maghrib prayer.'

In addition, based on the school climate, it appears that student-athletes are aware of the priority for each action, as revealed by student-athlete informant 2:

'..while waiting for aaa training aaa I rest, I sleep for 30 minutes, and at the same time I aaa do work like washing clothes mmm aaaaaa ironing school clothes for tomorrow.'

Student-athletes must go to school at 7:30 a.m to participate in the instructional and educational session, which runs from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Following that, they must report to the sports practice, which runs from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. They need physical and mental preparation because athletic training is usually highly intense. Therefore, student-athletes need to have the ability to give priority to their own physical and mental demands, such as getting enough rest rather than chatting or doing other pointless things that could influence their performance when they are training.

As a result, it is possible to conclude, based on the sharing, that the component of self-management is present in the life of a student-athlete at the Johor State Sports School to form an independent personality.

## **Discussion**

Many environmental factors influence the formation of human personality, a positive environment will implant positive characteristics in the individual and vice versa. School is a social learning component that shapes a student's behaviour and personality. Therefore, a positive school climate is a social environment that develops a generation of high-quality and well-rounded students.

In a school where the majority of students are Muslims, the study's findings indicate that spirituality is a practice that must be emphasised. This conclusion implies that the spiritual aspect is of the utmost importance. In addition to the support and assistance supplied by other parties, the incorporation of spiritual components is made possible by the principal's leadership style, which is seen to have a preference for religious traditions (Zakaria et al., 2018). Physical training performed by student-athletes can sometimes result in physical injuries, depression, and stress (Annear et al., 2019). This can contribute to mental health disorders and emotional intelligence, which are the causes of social misconduct such as vandalism, bullying, and electronic cigarette addiction (Basri, 2018). Therefore, spiritual practise is one of the solutions to the crisis. According to the findings of the study, spiritual practices that have been shown to educate students to become disciplined and moral individuals provide further support for the opinion of Mustapha et al (2019) that spiritual practices are nourishment for the soul to remain calm and avoid doing evil. The study found that spiritual practices educate students to become disciplined and moral individuals.

When we comprehend the concept of religious life, we will not limit religion to matters of spiritual practices. Islam is a holistic religion encompassing all parts of life (Basiron & Ajmain, 2021). As a result, Islam requires its believers to pursue knowledge that can liberate them from ignorance and mistake. Without the proper foundation of knowledge, practices will inevitably result in an error. Findings show that there is an element of academic activity in the school environment, implying that the importance of academics is emphasised alongside the importance of sports as a process to help student-athletes who are unable to continue their

careers as athletes choose between entering the academic stream or pursuing skills-based careers (Seman et al., 2021).

However, physical activity will not be excluded from making Islam a lifestyle. The outcomes of the study indicate that the aspect of physical activity is unquestionably implemented, this conclusion is also consistent with the demands of Islam, which requires its followers to learn swimming, horseback riding, and archery (Azimoha, 2018) In addition to adhering to the suggestions of the study by Ibrahim et al (2021), a healthy body is the foundation of intelligence. Life in the hostel is a lesson in developing a resilient self-identity. Individuals with a high level of resilience can withstand obstacles to their growth (Mensih et al., 2021). Elements of self-management can be used to achieve the objective of creating student-athletes with identity and resiliency. Student-athletes are taught to set priorities and make decisions based on a consideration of impacts and consequences.

### **Conclusion**

The study's findings indicate that the school climate is one of the social environment components that contribute to the moral development of individual students. Although Ibrahim et al (2019) found that the individual is responsible for social misbehaviour, if he is in a pleasant environment, he would absorb the positive things indirectly over time. In other words, the school climate is one of the social environment aspects that contribute to the moral development of students. As a result, from an Islamic perspective, the heart is regarded as a reciprocating organ, meaning that with the proper upbringing, the heart may be shaped toward virtue and vice versa (Nasikin & Iskandar, 2021).

Even if this study has the potential to make a negligible contribution toward the development of students' personalities in the context of a healthy educational environment, additional research on this topic is still required. Suppose the limits of the research findings that focus on the group of student-athletes comprised of students who do not have disciplinary problems are considered. In that case, additional research can be focused on the group of student-athletes associated with disciplinary problems. Even in a favourable setting, social misbehaviour can be caused by several circumstances, this can give certain parties an indirect hand up in determining those causes. In conclusion, the study into the role of the school environment in the moral development of student-athletes opens up a considerable amount of space and the possibility of conducting comparable research from a novel perspective. It is vital to do the research in order to strengthen it and increase its theoretical and practical contribution.

Overall, this study is one of the efforts to explore solutions to resolve the moral crisis among students in general and provide relevant ideas to be used in sports schools to produce competent athletes. In order to analyse school climate practices and their implementation, this study has also discussed school climate practices. As a result, this study aims to be a reference for other sports institutions in developing student-athletes with a healthy balance in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development.

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