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Research Article

School Climate and Academic Stress Among Senior High School Students: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

School climate is considered an important factor in students' academic experiences and well-being, yet its influence on academic stress remains unclear in the Philippine context. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study examined the relationship between school climate and academic stress among 80 senior high school students in selected public schools in Kidapawan City, with qualitative interviews involving 10 students to explain the quantitative findings. Results showed that both perceived school climate (*M* = 4.06) and academic stress (*M* = 4.06) were high; however, school climate did not significantly predict academic stress ($\beta = -0.028$, *p* = .693). Qualitative findings indicated that students' stress was driven mainly by heavy workloads, time constraints, performance expectations, and personal and family pressures rather than the school climate. The study concludes that while a positive school climate promotes support and well-being, comprehensive interventions addressing academic demands and psychosocial needs are necessary to reduce students' academic stress.

Keywords: academic stress; explanatory sequential mixed methods; school climate; senior high school students; Philippines

1. Introduction

Academic stress has become a major concern in secondary education because of its adverse effects on students' psychological well-being, academic engagement, and learning outcomes. Increasing academic demands, performance expectations, and workload have contributed to heightened stress levels among adolescents worldwide (Hadi et al., 2025; Pascoe et al., 2021). In the Philippines, reports from the Department of Education and the Department of Health similarly indicate rising mental health concerns among learners associated with academic pressures. Empirical studies have consistently shown that Filipino secondary school students experience moderate to high levels of academic stress resulting from heavy workloads, frequent examinations, and high academic expectations (Tus, 2021; Villanueva et al., 2022). Similar findings have been documented in North Cotabato, where academic workload and parental expectations significantly contribute to students' stress (Bajenting, 2024; Collado et al., 2023). These findings highlight academic stress as a persistent educational and public health concern that warrants continued investigation.

Among the contextual factors associated with students' academic well-being, school climate has received considerable scholarly attention. School climate refers to students' perceptions of the quality of interpersonal relationships, organizational structures, teaching practices, and safety within the school environment. A positive school climate has consistently been associated with better psychological well-being, stronger academic engagement, and improved school adjustment, while supportive teacher–student relationships, positive peer interactions, and orderly learning environments have been shown to enhance students' capacity to cope with academic demands (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022; Wang & Degol, 2021; Mag-aso et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that school climate may function as an important protective factor against academic stress.

Despite these advances, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, existing studies have largely focused on general secondary school populations, providing limited evidence regarding senior high school students whose specialized academic tracks, transition to postsecondary education or employment, and increased performance expectations may shape their academic stress differently. Second, previous findings regarding the relationship between school climate and academic stress remain inconsistent. While numerous studies report that positive school climates reduce students' stress, others suggest that academic stress is influenced more strongly by academic workload, personal characteristics, and family-related factors than by school climate alone.

These inconsistent findings indicate that the mechanisms linking school climate and academic stress remain insufficiently understood. Third, most

previous investigations have relied primarily on either quantitative or qualitative approaches, limiting a comprehensive understanding of both the statistical relationship between these variables and the contextual experiences through which students perceive and respond to their school environment. Consequently, there remains a need for mixed-methods research that integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to explain how school climate relates to academic stress among senior high school students within the Philippine educational context.

To address these gaps, this study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the relationship between school climate and academic stress among senior high school students in selected public schools in Kidapawan City, Philippines. The quantitative phase assessed students' perceptions of school climate and their level of academic stress and determined whether school climate significantly predicted academic stress. The qualitative phase subsequently explored students' lived experiences to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. By integrating evidence from both strands, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between school climate and academic stress in senior high school settings. The findings may inform the development of school-based interventions, guidance programs, and educational policies that foster supportive learning environments and promote students' psychological well-being.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on School Climate Theory (Cohen et al., 2009) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). School Climate Theory posits that the quality of the school environment—including interpersonal relationships, safety, teaching practices, and organizational structures—significantly influences students' academic experiences and psychological well-being. A positive school climate characterized by respectful teacher–student relationships, organized learning environments, and a sense of safety has been associated with higher student engagement, motivation, and well-being, as well as lower levels of academic stress (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022; Mag-aso et al., 2025; Wang & Degol, 2021).

Complementing this perspective, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explains that stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands relative to their perceived coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In educational settings, students evaluate academic demands such as workload, examinations, and performance expectations based on the support and resources available within their school environment (Pascoe et al., 2021; Romano et al., 2022). Consequently, students who perceive their school climate as supportive, organized, and safe are more likely to appraise academic challenges as manageable, whereas unsupportive school environments may intensify

perceptions of academic stress (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2022).

Together, these theories provide a coherent framework for examining the relationship between school climate and academic stress among senior high school students. School Climate Theory explains how the educational environment shapes students' learning experiences, while the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explains the cognitive processes through which students interpret and respond to academic demands. Collectively, they support the premise that a positive school climate may reduce academic stress by fostering supportive conditions that strengthen students' coping capacities.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the role of school leadership in addressing bullying among students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of the school climate as perceived by high school students in terms of:
   1.1 Respectful Environment
   1.2 Organized Environment
   1.3 Safe Environment

2. What is the level of the academic stress of high school students in terms of:
   2.1 Pressure to Perform
   2.2 Perceptions of Workload and Examinations
   2.3 Academic Self-Perceptions

3. Does school climate significantly predict academic stress of high school students?

4. What themes emerge from the qualitative data that help explain the quantitative findings of the study?

5. How do the qualitative findings explain the quantitative of the study?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design (EaSMM) to examine the relationship between school climate and academic stress among senior high school students. The study followed the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods (EaSMM) conceptual framework developed by Gempes and Obenza (2025). This framework described a three-phase process consisting of a quantitative phase, a qualitative phase, and an integration phase.

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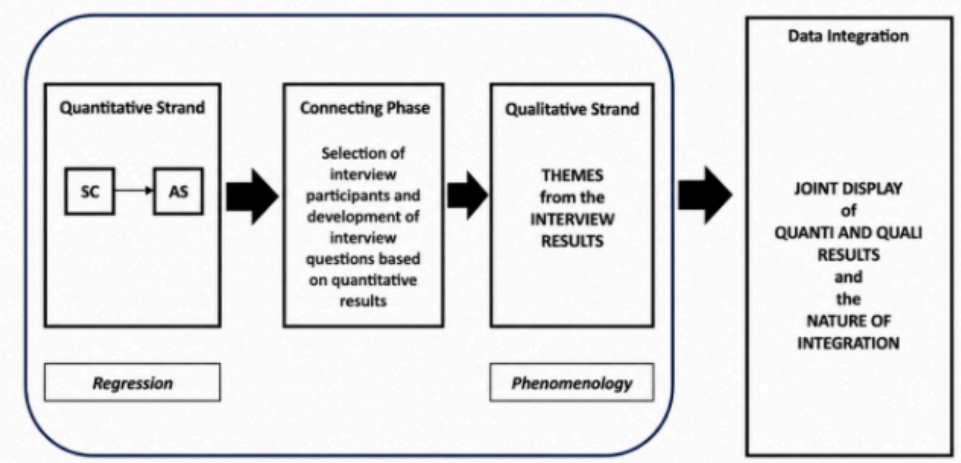
Explanatory sequential mixed methods research integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. In this study, it allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between school climate and academic stress among senior high school students using both statistical data and students' perspectives. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), the explanatory sequential mixed methods design enabled researchers to first analyze quantitative results and then use qualitative data to explain those findings, with both strands integrated through a joint display for a more complete interpretation of the results.



Legend: SC - School Climate
AS – Academic Stress

Figure 1. Conceptual Design Convergent Mixed-Methods

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public senior high schools in Kidapawan City, North Cotabato, Philippines, a component city in Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN) that serves as the province's administrative, commercial, and educational center. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020), the city has a population of approximately 160,000 residents across 40 barangays and hosts several public and private educational institutions, making it a major educational hub for students from the city and neighboring municipalities. Kidapawan City was selected because it provides a relevant context for examining the relationship between school climate and academic stress among senior high school students. As an expanding urban center, its schools accommodate learners from diverse backgrounds who experience increasing academic demands associated with the senior high school curriculum. Previous studies have shown that academic workload, performance expectations, and time constraints contribute significantly to students' academic stress (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015), while school climate influences students' learning experiences,

psychological well-being, and academic adjustment (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022; Mag-aso et al., 2025), making the city an appropriate setting for the present study.

2.3 Research Participants

The respondents of this study were Senior High School students enrolled in selected public secondary schools in District I of Kidapawan City. A total of 80 students participated in the quantitative phase of the study. The respondents were selected using proportionate stratified sampling to ensure that students from different schools in District I were proportionally represented. The inclusion criteria for the study were: (1) students currently enrolled in Senior High School (Grades 11–12) during the conduct of the study, (2) students officially enrolled in the selected public secondary schools in District I of Kidapawan City, and (3) students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that respondents shared relatively similar academic experiences within the same educational level. Excluded from the study were: (1) students enrolled in Junior High School (Grades 7–10), (2) students from schools outside District I of Kidapawan City, and (3) students who were not officially enrolled during the data collection period.

Table 1. Proportionate Stratified Sampling Distribution of Senior High School Students in District I, Kidapawan City

#	School	Total Senior High School Students	Stratified Sample
1	Kidapawan City National High School	120	25
2	Juan L. Gantuangco School of Arts and Trades	90	19
3	Saniel Cruz National High School	80	17
4	Lanao National High School	70	15
5	Kidapawan City National High School – Annex	60	14
	Total	**420**	**80**

For the qualitative phase of the study, 10 senior high school students were purposively selected for in-depth individual interviews. The selection of participants was based on their ability to provide rich and relevant information regarding their experiences of school climate and academic stress. Specifically, participants were chosen from the quantitative sample to represent varying levels of perceived school climate and academic stress (e.g., high, moderate, and low levels), ensuring diverse perspectives

2.4 Research Instruments

For the quantitative phase, data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections: school climate and academic stress. The school climate scale, adapted from Mag-aso et al. (2025), measured three dimensions: respectful environment, organized environment, and safe environment. The academic stress scale was adapted from the Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS) developed by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) and assessed four dimensions: pressure to perform, perceptions of workload and examinations, academic self-perceptions, and time constraints. The adapted instruments underwent expert validation prior to data collection.

The study employed a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' perceptions. Mean scores ranging from 4.51 to 5.00 were interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicating a Very High level; 3.51 to 4.50 as Agree, indicating a High level; 2.51 to 3.50 as Neutral, indicating a Moderate level; 1.51 to 2.50 as Disagree, indicating a Low level; and 1.00 to 1.50 as Strongly Disagree, indicating a Very Low level. These interpretations served as the basis for analyzing and describing respondents' ratings across the study variables.

For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed after the quantitative analysis. The interview questions were informed by the quantitative findings to further explain the relationship between school climate and academic stress. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification.

2.5 Data Collection

The study followed a systematic process consistent with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. First, the researcher secured approval from the research adviser and obtained ethical clearance. The questionnaire underwent expert validation, and revisions were incorporated. Permission was then requested from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of the Department of Education and the school heads of the selected senior high schools in District I of Kidapawan City. Informed consent was also obtained from the student participants. For the quantitative phase, the validated survey questionnaire was distributed to selected senior high school students through printed copies or an online form.

Clear instructions were provided to ensure voluntary participation. The completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, encoded, and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures to determine the level of school climate and academic stress and the relationship between the variables. After the quantitative analysis, the qualitative phase was conducted to explain the survey results. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the significant quantitative findings. Selected participants were then interviewed to

gain deeper insights into their experiences of school climate and academic stress. The responses were organized and analyzed to help explain the quantitative results. The study was conducted during School Year 2025–2026 in the selected senior high schools in District I of Kidapawan City.

2.6 Data Analysis

To ensure that the data gathered were systematically analyzed and aligned with the objectives of the study, appropriate quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques were employed. For the quantitative phase, the mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of school climate and academic stress among senior high school students. Linear regression analysis was also applied to determine whether school climate significantly predicted students' academic stress. For the qualitative phase, the interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis. This involved identifying significant statements, forming meanings, and clustering them into themes that described students' experiences of school climate and academic stress. To integrate the results, a joint display analysis was used to present the quantitative findings alongside the qualitative themes in a single matrix. This helped explain how the qualitative results supported or expanded the quantitative findings.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, approval to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and participating school administrators. Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation involved minimal risk, and respondents were free to decline or skip any question they found uncomfortable. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, participants' identities were protected through the use of identification codes instead of names, and all research data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent the identification of individual participants or schools. Participant selection followed proportionate stratified sampling to ensure fair representation, and all procedures were conducted with honesty, transparency, and adherence to institutional policies and accepted standards of educational research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of School Climate

Table 2 presents the level of school climate as perceived by senior high school students in terms of respectful environment, organized environment, and

safe environment, including their corresponding mean, standard deviation, and descriptive interpretation.

Table 2. Level of School Climate

Constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Description
Respectful Environment	4.087	0.370	High
Organized Environment	4.085	0.334	High
Safe Environment	3.997	0.368	High
Overall Mean	**4.056**	**0.206**	**High**

Respectful Environment. Respectful environment obtained a mean of 4.087, interpreted as high, indicating that students generally perceive their school as fostering positive interpersonal relationships characterized by respect and mutual understanding. Among the indicators, respectful environment recorded the highest mean, suggesting that students most strongly experience fairness, support, and courteous interactions within the school setting. This implies that school leadership and policies effectively promote respect among students and teachers, which may contribute to a positive learning atmosphere. However, despite being the highest among the indicators, it remains within the high level rather than very high, indicating that there is still room for strengthening respectful interactions, particularly in addressing subtle forms of disrespect or peer-related issues such as bullying.

Supporting literature affirms the importance of a respectful school environment in shaping students' experiences. Aldridge and McChesney (2022) emphasized that respectful interactions within schools are strongly associated with improved student well-being and reduced emotional distress. Similarly, Gonzales and Dioso (2024) found that a positive relational climate enhances both student engagement and teacher commitment, highlighting the role of respect in fostering collaboration. Ortega and Ramada (2024) further noted that respectful classroom climates significantly influence student behavior and discipline, reducing instances of misconduct. In addition, Mag-aso et al. (2025) reported that students who perceive respect in school environments demonstrate higher levels of engagement and satisfaction. Moreover, Pagliarani and AlGhamdi (2025) stressed that respectful school climates are critical in addressing bullying, as they establish norms of empathy and accountability among students.

Organized Environment. Organized environment yielded a mean of 4.085, also interpreted as high, indicating that students perceive their school as structured, orderly, and conducive to learning. Although the difference is minimal, organized environment is slightly lower than respectful environment but higher than safe environment. This suggests that while systems, rules, and

routines are generally well-established, there may be inconsistencies in implementation or clarity that affect students' perception. The relatively strong rating implies that school leadership ensures proper management of classroom activities, schedules, and expectations, contributing to an environment that supports academic focus. However, the slightly lower mean compared to respectful environment may indicate areas where organizational practices could be further improved, such as consistency in rule enforcement or classroom management strategies.

This finding is supported by several recent studies emphasizing the role of organization in school climate. Ahmed (2024) highlighted that an organized school climate significantly influences students' academic engagement and performance by providing clear expectations and structured learning conditions. Baharuddin et al. (2024) similarly found that well-managed school environments enhance both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Furthermore, Dorji (2024) noted that organizational climate directly affects commitment and productivity within schools, reinforcing the importance of systematic structures. Sun et al. (2024) also reported that effective organizational climate promotes positive behaviors and collaborative practices among teachers and students. Additionally, Villan (2024) emphasized that strong organizational systems within schools contribute to overall school effectiveness and improved learning environments.

Safe Environment.. Safe environment obtained a mean of 3.997, interpreted as high, indicating that students generally feel secure within the school, though this is the lowest among the three indicators. This suggests that while safety is present, it is comparatively less strongly perceived than respect and organization. The lower mean may imply that some students still experience concerns related to bullying, peer aggression, or inadequate safety measures. This highlights a critical area for school leadership to address, particularly in strengthening policies and interventions related to student protection and well-being. Despite being rated high, the comparatively lower score suggests that safety remains a priority area for improvement to ensure a fully supportive school climate.

The result is consistent with existing literature emphasizing the importance of school safety. Archambault et al. (2025) found that perceptions of school safety significantly influence students' mental health, with unsafe environments linked to higher levels of depressive symptoms. Similarly, Magana and Abad (2025) reported that students' sense of safety directly affects their participation and engagement in school activities. Somboonsap and Koolnaphadol (2025) also identified a strong relationship between school climate and student victimization, indicating that weaker safety perceptions may increase bullying incidents. In addition, Fernández-Sogorb et al. (2024) noted that unsafe school environments contribute to anxiety and stress among high school students.

Furthermore, Cornell and Huang (2022) emphasized that authoritative and structured safety climates are essential in promoting student security and reducing behavioral problems.

Overall School Climate. Overall, school climate obtained a mean of 4.056, interpreted as high, indicating that students generally perceive their school environment as positive, supportive, and conducive to learning. Among the indicators, respectful environment recorded the highest mean, while safe environment had the lowest mean, suggesting that interpersonal relationships are a strength of the school, whereas safety requires further enhancement. The overall high level implies that school leadership plays a significant role in maintaining a functional and supportive climate; however, targeted interventions, particularly in strengthening safety measures, are necessary to achieve a more holistic and optimal school environment.

This overall finding is supported by contemporary research highlighting the significance of school climate in student development. Aldridge, Blackstock, and McLure (2024) emphasized that a positive school climate contributes to improved academic outcomes and well-being through a strong person–environment fit. Dadeh et al. (2025) also found that school climate significantly influences students' emotional regulation and psychological adjustment. Tang (2024) reported that a supportive school climate reduces academic burnout and enhances students' resilience. Pramesti and Hernawati (2024) further noted that school climate plays a crucial role in shaping academic stress levels among students. Finally, Mag-aso et al. (2025) concluded that a positive and balanced school climate fosters student engagement, well-being, and overall academic success.

3.2 Level of Academic Stress of Senior High School Students

Table 3 presents the level of academic stress of senior high school students in terms of pressure to perform, perceptions of workload and examinations, academic self-perceptions, and time constraints, including their corresponding mean, standard deviation, and descriptive interpretation.

Table 3. Level of Academic Stress Among Senior High School Students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Pressure to Perform	4.068	0.360	High
Perceptions of Workload and Examinations	4.025	0.361	High
Academic Self-Perceptions	4.050	0.426	High
Time Constraints	4.079	0.400	High
Overall	**4.055**	**0.184**	**High**

Pressure to Perform. Pressure to perform obtained a mean of 4.068, interpreted as high, indicating that senior high school students frequently experience expectations to achieve academically. Among the indicators, this dimension recorded one of the higher mean values, suggesting that performance-related demands are a dominant source of stress among students. This implies that learners are consistently challenged by expectations from teachers, parents, and themselves, which may influence their academic engagement and emotional well-being. In contrast, while still high, this is slightly lower than time constraints, indicating that although performance pressure is significant, it is not the most intense stressor compared to time-related demands.

The findings are supported by recent studies emphasizing the prevalence of performance-related stress among students. For instance, Cabañas and Bautista (2025) found that academic pressure is a primary contributor to stress among senior high school learners, particularly in competitive academic environments. Similarly, Dela Cruz et al. (2024) highlighted that self-imposed pressure to excel significantly affects students' well-being and may lead to emotional strain. Sangma et al. (2023) also reported that academic expectations are closely linked to psychological distress among adolescents. Moreover, Doegah (2024) emphasized that high expectations from both internal and external sources intensify students' stress levels. Additionally, Deb et al. (2021) noted that parental and academic pressure significantly contribute to increased stress and mental health concerns among secondary school students.

Perceptions of Workload and Examinations. Perceptions of workload and examinations yielded a mean of 4.025, interpreted as high, indicating that students perceive academic tasks and assessments as demanding and stressful. Among the indicators, this dimension recorded the lowest mean, suggesting that while workload and examinations contribute to stress, they are relatively less intense compared to other stressors. This implies that although students recognize the burden of assignments and tests, they may have developed some level of adaptation or coping with academic demands.

This result is consistent with several studies highlighting the role of workload and examinations in academic stress. Aiman et al. (2024) found that excessive assignments and frequent assessments are major contributors to students' stress experiences. Similarly, Nurwulan et al. (2021) reported that increased academic workload significantly elevates stress levels, especially during demanding academic periods. Qisthi et al. (2024) also emphasized that examination pressure is a critical factor influencing students' psychological strain. Furthermore, Ga-as and Luzano (2024) identified workload as a recurring stressor that affects students' coping mechanisms. Lastly, Rawal (2023) noted that transitions in learning modalities further intensify students' perceptions of workload and examination stress.

Academic Self-Perceptions. Academic self-perceptions obtained a mean of 4.050, interpreted as high, indicating that students experience stress related to how they view their academic abilities and performance. This dimension falls between the highest and lowest means, suggesting a moderate level of influence compared to other indicators. This implies that students' confidence, self-efficacy, and perceived competence play a significant role in shaping their stress experiences, as doubts about their academic capabilities may lead to increased anxiety.

The findings align with studies emphasizing the importance of self-perception in academic stress. Villanueva et al. (2025) found that students' academic self-perception significantly influences their stress levels and overall academic performance. Al-Harbi (2024) also reported that academic self-concept is a strong predictor of stress, particularly when students perceive themselves as underperforming. Dela Cruz (2024) highlighted that low self-efficacy contributes to higher stress and reduced academic confidence. Additionally, Zhao (2024) emphasized that students' perceptions of their abilities directly affect their stress responses and coping strategies. Moreover, Dogham et al. (2024) found that negative academic self-perceptions are associated with maladaptive learning behaviors and increased stress levels.

Time Constraints. Time constraints recorded the highest mean of 4.079, interpreted as high, indicating that limited time to complete academic tasks is the most prominent source of stress among senior high school students. This suggests that students struggle to manage multiple academic responsibilities within restricted timeframes, leading to heightened pressure and potential burnout. As the highest-rated indicator, it reflects that time management challenges are more critical compared to other stress dimensions.

This result is supported by studies highlighting time-related pressures as a major stress factor. Santos et al. (2022) found that poor time management and academic procrastination significantly contribute to students' stress levels. Lovin and Bernardeau-Moreau (2022) also emphasized that difficulty in managing time is strongly associated with increased academic stress. Pascoe et al. (2021) reported that time pressure negatively impacts students' well-being and academic performance. Furthermore, Qisthi et al. (2024) identified time constraints as a key challenge in managing academic responsibilities. Lastly, Kumar et al. (2025) noted that limited time for task completion intensifies stress and reduces students' ability to cope effectively with academic demands.

Overall Academic Stress. Overall, academic stress obtained a mean of 4.055, interpreted as high, indicating that senior high school students generally experience considerable levels of stress across all dimensions. This suggests that academic demands consistently place pressure on students, affecting their well-being and academic experiences. The high overall mean reflects that stress is

a pervasive issue among learners, requiring attention from educators and school leaders to provide appropriate support systems.

This finding is supported by recent literature emphasizing the widespread nature of academic stress among students. Hadi et al. (2025) highlighted that academic stress is a global concern affecting students' psychological well-being and academic outcomes. Fernández-Sogorb et al. (2024) found that stress in school contexts is closely linked to anxiety and overall well-being among high school students. Pramesti and Hernawati (2024) also reported that school-related factors significantly influence students' stress levels. Additionally, Ga-as and Luzano (2024) emphasized that academic stress is a persistent issue that requires effective coping strategies and institutional support. Finally, Jagiello et al. (2025) concluded that interventions targeting academic stress are essential in promoting students' mental health and academic success.

3.3 Predictor of Academic Stress

Table 4 presents the regression analysis examining whether school climate significantly predicts the academic stress of senior high school students, including the unstandardized and standardized coefficients, t-value, p-value, and model fit indices.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Stress from School Climate

Variable	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*	Remark
Constant	4.157	0.258	—	16.120	< .001	—
School Climate	-0.025	0.063	-0.028	-0.395	.693	Not Significant

Note. R=.028a, R-square=.001, F=0.156, P>.05

3.4 Themes Explaining School Climate

The themes Supportive and Structured School Environment and Areas for Improvement in School Safety and Consistency explain the quantitative findings indicating a generally positive level of school climate. Students described respectful teacher–student relationships, cooperative peer interactions, and clear classroom organization, suggesting that the school environment promotes a sense of order and support. However, the persistence of subtle bullying, inconsistent rule enforcement, and occasional safety concerns indicates that not all aspects of school climate are uniformly experienced.

This suggests that while the overall perception is positive, certain dimensions, particularly safety and consistency, remain weaker and require improvement. Supporting literature affirms that a positive school climate is

characterized by respect, organization, and supportive relationships that enhance students' sense of belonging and engagement (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022; Wang & Degol, 2021). At the same time, inconsistencies in discipline and unresolved safety concerns can negatively affect students' perceptions and experiences within the school environment (Cornell & Huang, 2022; Archambault et al., 2025).

Table 5. Emergent Themes on Students' Experiences of School Climate

Issues/Probes	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Respect, fairness, teacher support	"Teachers treat us fairly"; "They listen to students"	Supportive and Structured School Environment	School climate is generally positive and promotes respect
Peer relationships, cooperation	"Classmates help each other"; "We get along most of the time"		Positive peer interactions strengthen the climate
Rules, routines, classroom management	"Schedules are clear"; "Classes are organized"		Organization helps create a conducive learning setting
Bullying, subtle conflicts	"Some jokes are offensive"; "Bullying still happens quietly"	Areas for Improvement in School Safety and Consistency	Not all interactions are consistently respectful
Rule enforcement gaps	"Some teachers are strict, others are not"		Inconsistency affects students' perceptions of order
Safety concerns	"I feel safe but not always"; "Some issues are ignored"		Safety remains a weaker aspect of school climate

3.5 Themes Explaining School Climate

The themes Pressure-Driven Academic Demands and Time and Workload Management Challenges explain the high level of academic stress reflected in the quantitative results. Students reported experiencing strong external pressures from teachers and academic expectations, as well as internal pressures such as fear of failure and self-imposed standards. In addition, heavy workloads, overlapping deadlines, and limited time to complete tasks emerged as the most significant stressors, indicating that academic demands are a primary source of strain.

These findings are supported by existing research identifying academic pressure, parental expectations, and social comparison as key contributors to student stress (Deb et al., 2021; Dela Cruz et al., 2024). Moreover, workload intensity and time constraints have been consistently recognized as major predictors of academic stress among high school students (Pascoe et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2022; Ga-as & Luzano, 2024)

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Table 6. Emergent Themes on Students' Experiences of Academic Stress

Issues/Probes	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Teacher expectations, grades	"We are expected to perform well"; "Grades are important"	Pressure-Driven Academic Demands	External expectations contribute to stress
Self-pressure, fear of failure	"I pressure myself to do better"; "I feel bad when I fail"		Internal expectations intensify stress
Comparison with peers	"I compare my performance with others"		Social comparison increases pressure
Assignments, exams	"There are many tasks and tests"	Time and Workload Management Challenges	Academic tasks create stress load
Overlapping deadlines	"Deadlines come at the same time"		Poor distribution of tasks increases pressure
Limited time	"There is not enough time to finish everything"		Time constraints are the strongest stressor

3.6 Themes Explaining the Relationship Between School Climate and Academic Stress

The themes Limited Influence of School Climate on Academic Stress and Dominance of Academic and Personal Stressors explain why school climate did not significantly predict academic stress in the quantitative findings. Although students acknowledged that their school environment is generally supportive and respectful, they emphasized that such conditions do not reduce the stress caused by academic demands. Instead, stress was largely driven by deadlines, workload, personal expectations, and family pressure, indicating that these factors have a stronger influence than school climate. Supporting studies suggest that while school climate contributes to student well-being, its direct effect on academic stress is often limited and may be overshadowed by stronger academic and personal stressors (Hadi & Salman, 2025; Pramesti & Hernawati, 2024). Additionally, academic stress is widely recognized as a multifactorial construct influenced more by workload, expectations, and individual factors than by environmental conditions alone (Aiman et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2025).

Table 7. Emergent Themes Explaining the Persistence of Academic Stress Despite a Positive School Climate

Issues/Probes	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Positive environment but stress persists	"Even if teachers are kind, I still feel stressed"	Limited Influence of School Climate on Academic Stress	Positive climate does not directly reduce stress
Support vs stress disconnect	"Support does not lessen workload pressure"		Environmental support and stress sources are different

Academic demands dominate	"Deadlines stress me more than anything"	Dominance of Academic and Personal Stressors	Academic factors outweigh climate influence
Personal expectations	"I set high standards for myself"		Internal pressure drives stress
External pressure	"My family expects me to do well"		Stress is influenced by factors beyond school

3.7 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings provided a deeper explanation of the quantitative results by revealing how students experience school climate and academic stress in actual contexts. Although the quantitative data indicated a generally positive level of school climate, the qualitative themes clarified that this positivity is primarily rooted in supportive teacher–student relationships, cooperative peer interactions, and structured classroom environments. Students described fairness, respect, and organization as consistent features of their school experience, suggesting that the environment promotes stability and engagement. This supports the idea that a positive school climate is characterized by strong interpersonal relationships and structured systems that enhance student well-being and participation (Aldridge & McChesney, 2022). Similarly, school climate has been shown to influence students' academic engagement and performance through supportive institutional conditions (Ahmed, 2024). However, the qualitative data also revealed subtle but important inconsistencies, including quiet forms of bullying, uneven rule enforcement, and occasional safety concerns, indicating that not all dimensions of school climate are equally strong. Such inconsistencies can weaken students' perceptions of safety and order despite an overall positive environment (Cornell & Huang, 2022). Moreover, variations in safety climate have been linked to differences in students' emotional outcomes, suggesting that even minor gaps can have meaningful effects (Archambault et al., 2025).

In relation to academic stress, the quantitative findings showing high levels of stress were strongly supported and elaborated by the qualitative data. Students identified both external pressures—such as teacher expectations, grades, and academic demands—and internal pressures, including fear of failure and self-imposed standards. In addition, workload-related issues such as overlapping deadlines and insufficient time emerged as dominant stressors. These findings align with research indicating that academic stress is largely driven by performance expectations, heavy workloads, and time constraints (Pascoe et al., 2021). Empirical studies also emphasize that self-imposed pressure and academic expectations significantly intensify students' stress experiences (Dela Cruz et al., 2024). Furthermore, qualitative evidence from school-based studies confirms that workload, assessments, and academic competition are primary contributors to student stress (Aiman et al., 2024). Time management difficulties and clustered academic tasks further exacerbate stress levels, making them one of the most immediate challenges faced by students (Santos et al., 2022).

Most importantly, the qualitative findings explained why school climate did not significantly predict academic stress in the quantitative results. While students acknowledged that their school environment is supportive and generally positive, they emphasized that such support does not reduce the stress caused by academic demands. This indicates a disconnect between environmental conditions and the actual sources of stress. Academic stress was found to be more strongly influenced by workload, deadlines, personal expectations, and family pressure rather than by the school climate itself. This supports the view that academic stress is a multifactorial construct influenced more by academic and personal variables than by environmental factors alone (Hadi et al., 2025). In addition, studies have shown that although school climate contributes to student well-being, its direct effect on academic stress is often limited when stronger stressors are present (Pramesti & Hernawati, 2024). The role of family expectations further reinforces stress levels, indicating that external influences beyond the school context significantly shape students' experiences (Al-Harbi, 2024).

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings demonstrates that a positive school climate does not necessarily translate into lower academic stress. While the school environment provides emotional and social support, it does not directly address the structural and personal sources of stress experienced by students. This suggests that interventions aimed at reducing academic stress should focus not only on improving school climate but also on managing academic workload, aligning expectations, and supporting students' coping mechanisms. Systematic reviews highlight that effective stress reduction requires targeted interventions addressing both academic demands and students' psychological coping strategies rather than relying solely on environmental improvements (de Jonge et al., 2025). Thus, the qualitative findings enrich the quantitative results by revealing the underlying mechanisms that explain why academic stress persists despite a generally positive school climate.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school leaders strengthen the consistent implementation of policies related to school safety, discipline, and bullying prevention to ensure a supportive learning environment for all students. Schools should implement comprehensive stress management initiatives, including time management training, counseling services, and balanced academic scheduling, to help students cope with academic demands. Teachers and administrators are likewise encouraged to improve coordination in task scheduling and assessment practices to minimize overlapping deadlines and excessive workload. Because school climate alone was not found to significantly predict academic stress, interventions should extend beyond environmental improvements and address academic workload, assessment policies, and students' psychosocial needs. Future school-based programs should adopt a holistic approach that integrates a positive school climate with strategies that strengthen

students' coping skills, engage parents, and provide sustained academic and emotional support.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, teacher education and professional development programs may continue strengthening practices related to Cultural Integration, Linguistic Responsiveness, and Instructional Adaptability, particularly because differences were observed across school types. Since Community-Informed Instruction obtained the lowest mean and showed the greatest variability, schools may encourage more structured engagement with families, elders, and community members to support the integration of community knowledge into classroom instruction. Future studies may further examine the seven-factor structure through confirmatory factor analysis and test the 56-item measurement tool in other multicultural or island contexts. Further qualitative inquiry may also focus on Community-Informed Instruction to better understand the conditions that shape its varied implementation among teachers in American Samoa.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the quantitative phase was limited to 80 senior high school students from selected public schools in District I of Kidapawan City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional explanatory sequential mixed methods design, capturing participants' perceptions at a single point in time; therefore, causal relationships between school climate and academic stress cannot be established. Third, the quantitative analysis examined school climate as the sole predictor of academic stress using simple linear regression, although academic stress is a multifactorial construct that may also be influenced by personal, familial, psychological, and academic factors not included in the model. Finally, the study relied on self-reported survey responses and interview data, which may be subject to response bias and participants' subjective perceptions. Despite these limitations, the explanatory sequential mixed methods design provided complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence that enhanced the understanding of how school climate relates to academic stress among senior high school students.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement (If Applicable):
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly

available due to privacy and confidentiality restrictions, as they contain information that could compromise the anonymity of the research participants.

Author Contributions:
Aurren I. Capatan led the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, project administration, and manuscript writing. Aiza P. Hernale contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, validation, and manuscript review. May-An L. Martel, Libelee B. Euligio, Hazel Joy Obongen, Mae Ann A. Lumambas, and Marisa E. Casas contributed to the investigation, data curation or resources, validation, and manuscript review. Sarena G. Salindal contributed to the methodology, validation, and manuscript review. Dianne Mariz N. Obenza provided supervision, methodological guidance, validation, manuscript review, and final evaluation of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement:
The study adhered to ethical standards in research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time without

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Artificial intelligence tools were used only to assist in improving the readability, grammar, organization, and clarity of the manuscript. All AI-assisted content was

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