

**The Psychosocial Aspects of Learning Environment in English as A Foreign Language
Classrooms: EFL Students' Perspectives**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment in English as a Foreign Language classes. To attain this purpose, descriptive research design was employed. A stratified random sampling was used to ensure the proportion of male and female students while simple random sampling was used to select the participants from each stratum. The study involved the gathering of data through What Is Happening In this Class questionnaire from 371 students. Descriptive (mean and SD) and inferential (MANOVA and ANOVA) statistics were computed to analyze the collected data. The results show that students perceived the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment of their English classes positively though they perceived the aspect of task orientation more positively than the other aspects of the psychosocial environment. This implies that the activities related to the task orientation aspect of the learning environment were often practiced whereas the activities related to aspects of cohesiveness, teacher support, involvement, cooperation, and equity were sometimes practiced in English classes. Female and male students also did not depict significant differences in their perceptions of the English classroom psychosocial environment. The study concludes that the psychosocial environments of the English classes need improvement for students to learn better.

Keywords

Psychosocial aspects; Learning environment; Students' perspectives; English classes; Male and female students

Introduction

It is evident that the English language is used for wider communication purposes throughout the world. It is also dominantly used around the globe in a variety of areas (e.g.,

education, science and technology, business, media, and politics). In Ethiopia, the language plays an important role in these areas, particularly in the area of education. It is more than a century since English language teaching commenced in the country. Heugh et al. (2006) noted that its teaching began around 1908 in Ethiopia with the introduction of modern education. Since then, English has been employed in the Ethiopian education system. According to the Ministry of Education (2013), English is one of the few languages employed globally for communication and other types of interaction among nations of different countries; Because of this, “Its teaching...in countries like Ethiopia becomes inevitable to produce citizens capable of working at global level to aid the development of the country in every affair”. Overall, learning English is needed in Ethiopia for several purposes.

Despite its importance, there is a multifaceted problem that could determine the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) effectively. The learning environment in a classroom where English learning takes place could be one of the major determinants of EFL learning. In the EFL context, it is apparent that the learning and teaching of the English language is mainly confined to the formal classroom settings in which students spend much time. For example, Fraser (2001) pointed out that students complete secondary school after spending about 15, 000 hours in classrooms. In Ethiopia, students spend about 1360 hours in English classrooms when they complete secondary education (Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education, 2009). Fraser (2001: 1) contended that “It is the quality of life lived in classrooms that determines many of the things that we hope for from education.” This initiated the need to study the learning environment of English language classes; understanding what goes on in English classes has importance in improving the teaching and learning practices of the language and in helping students learn better.

In a classroom context, the word ‘environment’ refers to “the atmosphere, ambience, tone, or climate that pervades the particular setting” (Dorman, 2008b, p. 299). Studies in the field of learning environment focused on the psychosocial environment of a classroom (Dorman, 2008a) which refers to learning environments’ social, psychological, and academic characteristics (Bi, 2015). Considering the amount of time spent in a classroom, the psychosocial classroom environment has been conceptualized and assessed through the eyes of the participants of the milieu. Fraser (2014) suggests that defining the learning environment in this way has dual benefits of describing the environment through the participants’ eyes and collecting information that the observer may overlook or dismiss. Fraser added that the investigation of the psychosocial learning environment of English classes mainly from the perspective of students is essential because they can clearly tell what actually happens in their classrooms.

Students' perceptions of and reactions to their educational experiences in classrooms have paramount importance (Fraser, 2001, 2014). Despite the clear importance of the psychosocial environment of a classroom, "teachers and researchers have relied heavily and sometimes exclusively on the assessment of academic achievement and other learning outcomes" (Fraser, 2007: 103). Although the importance of achievement is indisputable, it cannot provide a full picture of the educational process that takes place in classrooms alone (Fraser, 2012, 2014). This means that to attain the objectives of education, the psychosocial classroom environment has equal importance (Fraser, 2001). Therefore, having information related to their students' perceptions of the psychosocial aspects of the classroom environment helps teachers improve the teaching and learning process (Aldridge et al., 2012) and create a conducive learning environment (Allen & Fraser, 2007). Students learn effectively when they perceive their classroom environment more favorably (Dorman, 2008a). Sağlam and Sali (2013) also noted that students' perceptions and experiences of their classroom environment is likely to influence their English language learning. Hence, it is worth investigating students' perceptions of the psychosocial learning environment of their English language classes; this is what the present study has attempted to do.

The psychosocial aspects of the classroom environment, such as student cohesiveness, teacher support, student involvement, investigation, task orientation, cooperation, and equity have been assessed in past research from the perspectives of students (Bi, 2015; Goksu, 2015; Okan, 2008; Telli et al., 2006; Tshewang et al., 2017; Yang, 2015). These studies reported inconsistent findings of the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment in terms of students' perspectives. In some studies (e.g., Tshewang et al., 2017) the participants had strong and favorable perceptions of all aspects of their classroom environment. In other studies (e.g., Bi, 2015; Okan, 2008), students perceived some learning environment aspects more favorably than other aspects. The inconsistencies in the results of previous studies indicated the need for further study in the area.

Furthermore, very few studies have been carried out in language classroom environments (Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Bi, 2015; Chua et al., 2011; Goksu, 2015) although considerable learning environment studies have been undertaken in various contexts around the globe since long. For example, Goksu (2015: 72) observed this as follows: "Although many studies have been carried out in the world from various aspects of the classroom learning environment, the subject of classroom learning environment is a novel research field in terms of foreign language teaching". In particular, there is no study that has explored the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment in EFL classes in Ethiopia. Therefore, it is needed to undertake classroom environment studies to find ways to improve English classroom practices in Ethiopia.

Many of the previous studies also reported differences between male and female students in their perceptions of the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment (e.g., Peer & Fraser, 2015; Tshewang et al., 2017; Yang, 2015). However, gender difference was observed in one or more aspects of the classroom environment in different studies. In addition, in some studies, female students' perceptions of all or some aspects of the psychosocial environment was more positive than male students' perceptions. In other studies, male students had more positive perceptions of some aspects of the learning environment than female students did. A few studies also reported no significant difference between male and female students in their perceptions the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment (e.g., Goksu, 2015). Similarly, an attempt has been made to examine whether there were gender differences in students' perceptions of the English classroom psychosocial learning environment.

In general, the present study investigated the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment that happens in English classes from the perspectives and experiences of secondary-level students. In order to attain the purpose of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are students' perceptions of the psychosocial aspects of English classroom learning environment (student cohesiveness, teacher support, student involvement, task orientation, cooperation, and equity)?
2. Are there gender differences in students' perceptions of English classroom psychosocial learning environment?

Review of Related Literature

Psychosocial Learning Environment

The educational system is carried out in classrooms where students spend a lot of time and participate in activities that promote learning. Fraser (2001) stated that quality learning environment in a classroom is essential to attain educational goals. According to Bell and Aldridge (2014), the classroom learning environment is the overall setting where learning is carried out, and it includes the physical and psychosocial learning environment; the physical environment refers to the materials in classrooms and their arrangements whereas the psychosocial environment refers students and teachers and their interaction with each other in a classroom. As Dorman (2002) pointed out "Without a consideration of the crucial role of the psychosocial environment of classrooms, educational productivity cannot be optimized." The focus of the present study is on classroom psychosocial learning environment which could determine English language learning and teaching.

The history of contemporary learning environment research began in the late 1960s by Herbert Walberg and Rudolf Moos who were pioneers in engaging independently in the assessment of different learning contexts using the perceptions of the participants (Fraser, 2014). Walberg developed the first learning environment questionnaire, namely, 'Learning Environment Inventory (LEI)' and evaluated the implementation of 'Harvard Project Physics' by collecting perceptual data from the questionnaire. His work indicated that students were able to perceive their classes quickly, and their perceptions helped assess learning environments (Dorman, 2008a). At the same time, Moos engaged in research that focused on the psychosocial aspects of various human environments, including classrooms, and developed a conceptual framework that has three basic dimensions (Relationship, Personal Development, and System Maintenance and System Change dimensions) for the classification of any human environments in 1974 (Fraser, 2014).

The seminal works of Walberg and Moos were the foundation for the flourish of the field of classroom environment research. Following their studies, classroom environment research has attracted attention (Dorman, 2008a). Many studies from all around the world have shown that the learning environment in a classroom has a significant and consistent impact on students' learning (Fraser, 2012). Further, it is acknowledged that the learning environment determines how effectively students learn (UNESCO, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the classroom learning environment for the efficacy of education. The next section presents past research that examined psychosocial aspects of the learning environment using the WIHIC questionnaire.

Earlier Studies Examining the Psychosocial Aspects Learning Environment, Including in English as a Second /Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) Settings.

WIHIC questionnaire comprises seven learning environment scales: Student Cohesiveness, Equity, Student Involvement, Teacher Support, Cooperation, Task Orientation, and Investigation. Researchers have addressed all or most of these scales in the investigation of the classroom environment either by using its original name 'WIHIC' or by renaming it. This section reviews research that has investigated the psychosocial learning environment aspects in WIHIC and that has examined whether there was gender difference in this area in different countries and various settings, including in the setting of English as a second /foreign language (ESL/EFL).

Tshewang et al. (2017) investigated Bhutanese students' and teachers' perceptions of the learning environment in their mathematics classes. The samples were 608 grade eight students and 98 teachers. The study used the 'Mathematics Classroom Learning Environment Survey (MCLES)'. Five of the eight scales of the MCLES were taken from WIHIC with modification, and the others were from CLES. The item mean scores and standard deviation were computed for each

MCLES scale. The mean score of the Equity scale was the highest ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.73$). This was followed by the scales of Task Orientation ($M = 4.19$; $SD = 0.69$), Cooperation ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.69$), Student Cohesiveness ($M = 4.03$; $SD = 0.67$), Teacher Support ($M = 3.85$; $SD = 0.79$) and other three scales taken from CLES for the student sample. The findings indicate that for all the MCLES scales, the mean scores were very close to 4; students responded either sometimes or often for the items of all the scales. In general, the findings indicated that the participants perceived the learning environment of their mathematics classes favorably. Moreover, for student samples, females perceived their classroom environment more positively than males, but a statistically significant difference was found between female and male students' perceptions of the Cooperation scale.

In China, Bi (2015) addressed in his study the tertiary-level students' perceptions of the English classroom psychosocial environment; he used the WIHIC questionnaire after modifying it. The study involved 1000 English major students. Descriptive statistics, such as item mean score and standard deviation were performed to examine the general perceptions of classroom psychosocial environments. The item mean ranged between 3.19 for Teacher Support to 4.20 for Student Cohesiveness for each WIHIC scale. The overall results of the study revealed that Chinese English major students had a positive experience of the psychosocial aspects of the English classroom environment during their first year stay at the University. In particular, students' perceptions of the four aspects of the classroom environment: Student Cohesiveness, Equity, Task orientation, and Cooperation were favorable, and the two aspects: Involvement and Teacher Support were moderate.

In another study conducted in China, Yang (2013) investigated senior secondary school students' perceptions of their mathematics classroom environments using the modified WIHIC questionnaire. The study involved 2617 students chosen from 16 urban coeducational schools and six provinces. Descriptive statistics were performed and the item mean scores of the WIHIC scales were within the range of 2.80 and 3.93. The results indicated that the students' perceptions of their mathematics classroom environments was not very favorable. Gender differences were also found among students in their perceptions of five of the WIHIC scales except Task Orientation. Female students perceived that there was cohesiveness among students in the class and opportunities to work in cooperation in mathematics classes more than their male counterparts. However, male students perceived that their mathematics classes were investigative and that they got involved in lessons more than female students.

Yang (2015) also examined students' perceptions of their mathematics classroom environments at junior secondary schools in rural areas of West China by adapting the WIHIC

questionnaire. The study entailed data from 2455 students selected from 12 coeducational schools and three provinces. To describe students' perceptions of the learning environment in their mathematics classes, the researcher computed the mean and SD for each scale. The mean values of the WIHIC scales were within the range of 2.70 to 3.79. The overall findings of the study revealed that students' perspectives of the learning environment of their mathematics classes was not very favorable. The results also indicated that there were gender differences among students in their perceptions of four of six learning environment aspects (cooperation, involvement, task orientation, and investigation) except of teacher support and equality, and student cohesiveness. Female students perceived the task orientation and cooperation learning environment aspects more positively than male students. On the other hand, males perceived that their mathematics classes were more participatory and investigative than females.

In Australia and Indonesia, Fraser et al. (2010) conducted a study of the learning environment at a cross-national level using an Indonesian language version of a modified WIHIC. One of the objectives of this study was to investigate whether there were differences between the two countries and sexes in students' perceptions of their science classroom environments. The participants were 1,161 students (594 students in Indonesia and 567 students in Australia). Item mean and SD were computed for WIHIC scales for Australia and Indonesia. The range of mean scores for each WIHIC scale was from 2.95 (Involvement) to 3.74 (Student Cohesiveness) for Indonesia and from 2.51 (Investigation) to 3.81 (Student Cohesiveness) for Australia. To measure the statistical significance differences between the two countries, ANOVA was computed for each scale and it was found that students of the two countries had different experiences on four of the six WIHIC scales. That is, the Indonesian students had significantly higher Involvement and Investigation scores than Australian students. On the other hand, the Australian students perceived the learning environment aspects of Task Orientation and Equity significantly more positively than Indonesian students. In addition, students of the two countries had positive and almost similar perceptions on the Student Cohesiveness and Teacher Support scale. In terms of country and sex interaction, significant gender differences were reported on the learning environment scale of Student Cohesiveness. Australian female students perceived their science classes as more cohesive than did Australian male students, but there were insignificant differences between Indonesian males and females in student cohesiveness.

In India, Koul and Fisher (2006) explored the nature of learning environments in science classrooms. The WIHIC questionnaire was administered to 1,021 students in seven coeducational private schools. For each WIHIC scale, descriptive statistics were calculated, and the mean scores ranged between 3.89 and 4.84, which are very high for all scales. This suggests that the participants

perceived the science classroom environment very favorably. Among the WIHIC scales, the mean scores of Task Orientation, Student Cohesiveness, Equity, and Cooperation are 4.84, 4.77, 4.57, and 4.49, respectively; the results revealed that students perceived these four aspects of the learning environment most favorably. The results also suggested that students did not have a big difference in their perceptions of all aspects of the science classroom environment because for all WIHIC scales, the scores of standard deviations are less than 1. This study also examined whether there were gender differences in students' perceptions classroom learning environment. It was found that there were gender differences among students in their perceptions of four out of seven WIHIC scales (Student Cohesiveness, Cooperation, Task Orientation, and Equity). That is, female students perceived these four aspects of the science classes significantly and more positively than male students did. Overall, the study indicated that the learning environment of science classes was very positive.

Another classroom environment study was undertaken by Chua et al. (2011) who examined the learning environments of Chinese language classrooms at secondary schools in Singapore. The researchers administered 'The Chinese Language Classroom Environment Inventory (CLCEI)' to 1,460 Grade 9 students who were chosen from 25 government schools. CLCEI involves six WIHIC scales except the Investigation scale. The results indicated that students perceived the actual classroom environment positively because the mean scores of most scales were greater than 2.5. However, they would want improvements in all six aspects of the Chinese language classroom learning environment, particularly in Involvement and Cooperation. The study also examined whether there were differences between male and female students in their perceptions of the classroom learning environment. Overall, the results indicated that female students had significantly more positive perceptions of the actual classroom learning environments of Student Cohesiveness, Cooperation, and Task Orientation and of the preferred environments of Student Cohesiveness and Cooperation than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, Peer and Fraser (2015) investigated whether there were sex, grade-level, and stream differences in students' perceptions of the learning environment in science classes in Singapore. Five scales (Teacher Support, Involvement, Investigation, Cooperation, and Task Orientation) were chosen from the WIHIC questionnaire, and the other three scales were from CLES for this purpose. The participants were 1,081 students selected from 4 schools. Average mean scores and SD were performed. The range of mean scores was between 3.05 and 4.05, which were relatively high for all scales. Overall, students' perceptions of their science classroom environments were positive. Significant sex differences were found for the learning environment scales of Teacher Support, Cooperation, Task Orientation, and Involvement scales. That is, female

students had statistically more positive perceptions than males in Teacher Support, Task Orientation and Cooperation although the mean scores of male students were higher than the scores of female students for most scales. On the other hand, males had significantly more positive perceptions of the learning environment of Involvement than females.

Telli et al. (2006) also investigated Turkish students' perceptions of the learning environment of their biology classrooms at secondary school with the use of a modified version of the WIHIC Questionnaire. The samples were 1,983 high school students. The results of the mean scores indicated that students perceived task orientation strongly and student cohesiveness, equity, and cooperation moderately. It was also reported that students made less involvement and investigation and got less teacher support in their biology classes. Further, according to the result of standard deviations, Turkish students seemed to have diverse perceptions of Teacher Support, Equity, and Investigation. In another study which was conducted in Turkey, Okan (2008) evaluated the psychosocial language learning environment of computer laboratory classes with the use of the Turkish version of the WIHIC questionnaire. The samples were 152 university students who were taking one-year computer-supported English courses. It was found that Turkish students perceived strongly the learning environment of task orientation and moderately the learning environment of student cohesiveness, cooperation, and equity. However, students' perceptions of teacher support, involvement, and investigation are low, and it was suggested for the improvement of these aspects of the learning environment.

The classroom learning environment was also investigated from students' perspectives in Turkey. Goksu (2015) examined Turkish high school students' perceptions of actual classroom learning environments in EFL classes by focusing on gender and grade differences with the use of the WIHIC questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews. The samples were 166 high school students from different grades. The Overall results revealed that students perceived the learning environment of their EFL classes positively. Moreover, statistically significant differences were not found among grades in students' perceptions of almost all WIHIC scales except for Task Orientation. The reason why there were differences among the grades in students' perceptions of the classroom environment dimension of task orientation is that some students found it difficult to convey their ideas and opinions in tasks and activities because they were shy, unwilling, and lacked time (Goksu, 2015). Similarly, the findings of classroom observations and interviews were consistent with those of the questionnaire in terms of the seven dimensions among grades in students' perceptions of the actual classroom environment. This study also examined whether there were gender differences in classroom environment perceptions. In general, the study indicated that the difference between male and female students was not statistically significant,

but when the t-test was calculated for each WIHIC scale, a statistically significant difference was found between genders for the Teacher Support scale. Female students had significantly more favorable perceptions in terms of teacher support than male students.

Methods

Research Design

This study investigated the psychosocial aspects of the English classroom environment. To attain the objectives of the study, descriptive survey research design was used. Since the study focused on explaining the classroom environment practices of English language classes through the eyes of the milieu participants, such a design was found to be appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Selection of the Research Participants

From the total population of 1124 (male: 513 (45.6%); female: 611 (54.4%)) grade eleven students of Menelik II Preparatory School, 393 students were chosen as samples for this study. This sample constituted 35% of the total population. Among the sample students, 179 (45.6%) and 214 (54.4%) were male and female students, respectively.

Gender was one of the variables considered in this study. Stratified random sampling was, therefore, employed to ensure the proportion of male and female students in the sample as they existed in the population. That is, the proportion of male and female students is 45.6 and 54.4 percent, respectively, both in the sample and in the population. Subsequently, 35 percent of participants were selected from each stratum of the population using simple random sampling to give equal opportunity for all students to participate in the study. This resulted in the selection of 179 male (35 percent of 513) and 214 female (35 percent of 611) students from the two strata. On the whole, 393 grade eleven students were taken as participants to fill in the questionnaire. Out of these, 15 students did not fill out the questionnaire properly; as a result, the questionnaires filled out by these students were discarded. Further, 7 students did not give back the questionnaire. Therefore, the data obtained from 371 students were analyzed and utilized in the results of this study.

The study participants, i.e., grade 11 students, who were selected to participate in the study had ample experience of and exposure to the psychosocial characteristics of the classroom learning

environment. They had also been learning English in grade eleven for about six months during data collection; they had already made observations of numerous English lessons when data for this study were gathered. In line with this, Fraser (2012) suggested that students tend to portray a better understanding of or interpretation of the dynamic in the classroom. Thus, the participants were asked to give witness to their classroom practices that took place in English classes during the learning and teaching process in their respective grades.

Data Gathering Instrument

‘The What Is Happening In this Class’ questionnaire was employed for this study to assess the English classroom psychosocial environment that students experience during instruction. (Fraser et al., 1996) developed the original WIHIC that incorporated nine ten-item scales. Then, (J. M. Aldridge et al., 1999a) modified this questionnaire that involves seven scales, with each scale having eight items. Each item of the questionnaire is presented in the form of a five-point Likert scale response ranging from (Almost never = 1 to Almost always = 5). Students were required to rate the frequency of the actual situations taking place in English classes. Aldridge et al. (1999) validated the questionnaire and used it in Taiwan and Australia. In addition, many studies carried out in different countries using a large number of students at various grade levels as samples reported the validity of the WIHIC questionnaire (e.g., Aldridge et al., 2009; Aldridge et al., 1999; Chionh & Fraser, 2009; Helding & Fraser, 2013; MacLeod & Fraser, 2010). The questionnaire contains statements that describe what the class is like for students in terms of classroom practices. Thus, the WIHIC questionnaire was adapted from Aldridge et al. (1999) and used for the purpose of this study.

The adapted version of the questionnaire was translated into the Amharic language to help students’ comprehension of the items. Three English language instructors (PhD in ELT) evaluated the content and the readability and understandability of the items in the research instrument and provided constructive comments. Further, they compared the two versions of the questionnaire to ensure that they retained similar intent. Based on their comments, the Amharic version of the instrument was modified slightly by making changes to the wording of some of the items. The pilot study was also conducted on some students to test the contents of the research instrument. During the pilot study, the students were informed to ask for clarification in case of a misunderstanding of the items of the questionnaire. Furthermore, after returning the questionnaire, they were asked to comment on the clarity of the items, and slight modifications were made considering their comments.

The WIHIC questionnaire was also pilot-tested using data collected from one hundred-seven samples who had similar characteristics to the target participants and found reliable and

valid for use in the Ethiopian EFL context. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the instrument's internal consistency reliability. The overall alpha reliability of WIHIC was 0.93, and the range of alpha coefficients for each scale of WIHIC was between 0.73 for the Student Cohesiveness scale and 0.88 for the Teacher Support scale. The alpha coefficients of each WIHIC scale were above 0.70 which is considered to be an acceptable value for use (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition to this, the discriminant validity of the instrument was checked. Discriminant validity is determined by the correlation between the mean values of each scale. Discriminant validity decides the extent to which a scale in a questionnaire is independent of the other scales. According to Brown's (2006) recommendations, the results of correlations that are above 0.80 reveal an overlap of concepts and poor discriminant validity. For this research, the highest correlation between scales was 0.63 which is less than Brown's (2006) recommendation of discriminant validity requirements (0.80). Hence, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires were established for use in the Ethiopian EFL context.

Methods of Data Analysis

Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the data as per the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics (mean and SD) were employed to investigate students' perceptions and practices of their English classroom psychosocial learning environment. In line with this, 'Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)' was computed to examine whether differences exist between male and female students in their perceptions of the English classroom psychosocial environment. For the MANOVA, the combined WIHIC scales were used as the dependent variables and sex was the independent variable. To ensure whether there was a statistically significant difference in terms of the whole set of learning environments, Wilks' Lambda was checked. Then ANOVA was calculated whether sex differences exist for each scale. Effect sizes were also used to describe the magnitude of the effects of sex differences.

Results

Psychosocial Aspects of English Classroom Learning Environment as Perceived by Students

One of the objectives of this study was to investigate secondary school students' perspectives of some aspects of the psychosocial learning environment of their English classes. To attain this objective, the modified WIHIC questionnaire was employed. Students responded to forty-eight items on a five-point Likert scale to indicate how often they practiced each item in English classes. Descriptive statistics (average item mean and SD) were calculated for each WIHIC scale. Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics for each WIHIC scale.

Table 1: Average Item Mean (AIM), Standard Deviation (SD), Minimum (Min.), and Maximum (Max.) for the WIHIC Scales

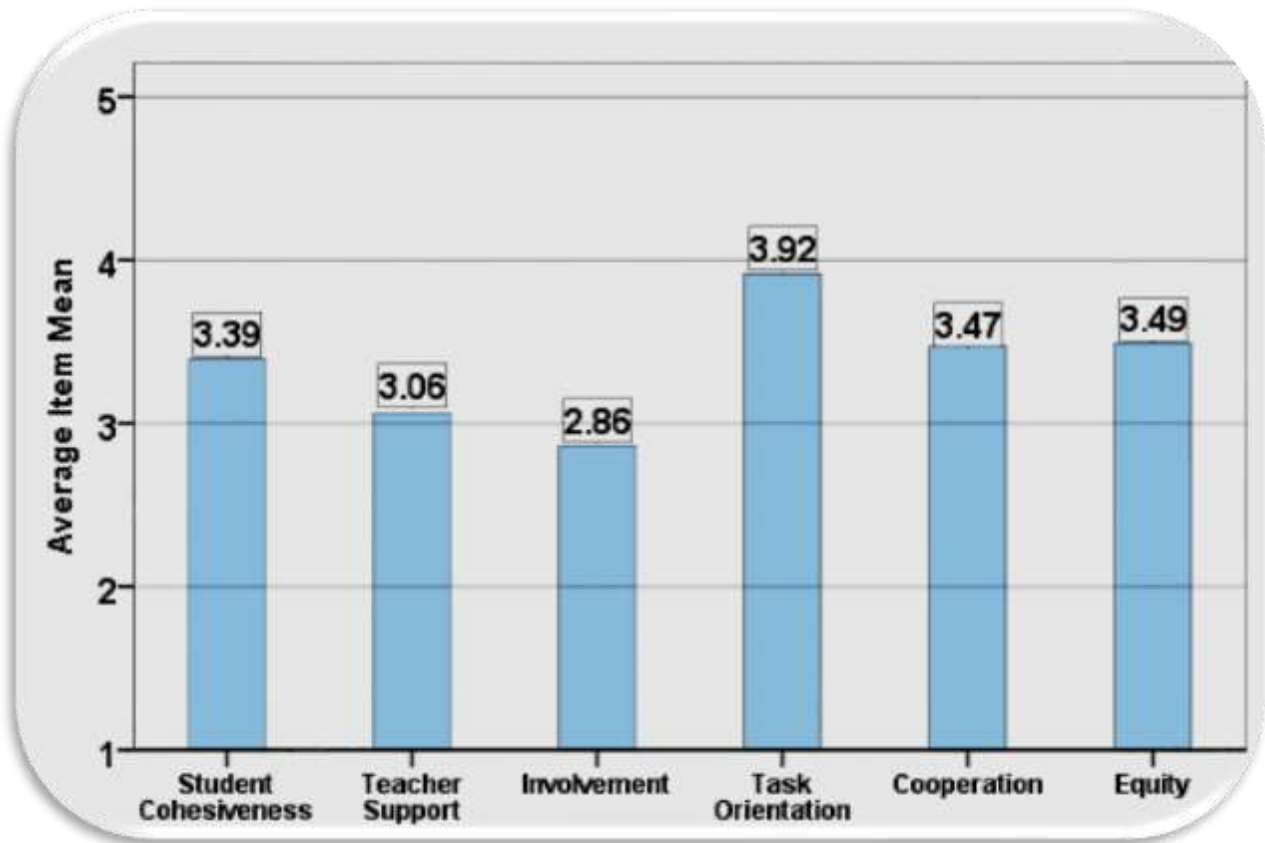
WIHIC Scales	AIM	SD	Min.	Max.
Student Cohesiveness	3.39	0.79	1.25	4.88
Teacher Support	3.06	1.04	1.00	5.00
Student Involvement	2.86	0.86	1.00	4.63
Task Orientation	3.92	0.72	1.38	5.00
Student Cooperation	3.47	0.93	1.00	5.00
Equity	3.49	1.00	1.00	5.00

N=371 student; Almost never = 1; Seldom= 2; Sometimes = 3; Often = 4; Almost always= 5

According to Bi (2015), an average item mean that ranges from 3.50–5.00 were considered as indicating favorable perceptions of the environment, and that ranges from 2.50–3.49 were regarded as suggesting positive but moderate perceptions of the environment; the scale mean that fell within the range of 1.00–2.49 were considered as negative perceptions of the environment. Based on this, as indicated in Table 1 above and illustrated in Figure 1 below, the analysis of the average item mean of this study ranges from 2.86 (Student Involvement) to 3.92 (Task Orientation) for various WIHIC scales. Overall, the results suggested that students had positive perceptions of the psychosocial environments of their English classes for all WIHIC scales. In other words, students perceived the learning environment of student cohesiveness, teacher support, student involvement, student cooperation, and equity moderately. The mean scores of these scales fell within the range of 2.50–3.49. On the other hand, they perceived the learning environment of task orientation favorably; the mean value of this scale fell within the range of 3.50–5.00. This scale had the highest mean score in this study. Furthermore, as indicated in Table 1 above, the SD of student cohesiveness, task orientation, student involvement, and student cooperation were less than 1 and that of teacher support, and equity were 1. This seems that the participants of the study had almost similar perceptions of the four aspects of the learning environment, but had slightly diverse perspectives about teacher support and equity aspects.

In addition, as indicated in Table 1, the average item mean value of the Task Orientation scale was close to 4 (corresponds to the response alternative of ‘Often’). It means that the average responses of the participants to the items in the scale were between sometimes and often. On average, the result of the mean score indicated that the items in the learning environment of task

orientation were often practiced in English classes. The average mean scores of the five scales: Student Cohesiveness, Teacher Support, Student Involvement, Student Cooperation, and Equity were close to 3 (corresponds to ‘Sometimes’) although the mean value of the Student Involvement scale was less than 3. The results suggested that the items in the learning environment of these scales were sometimes practiced at an average level. The learning environment aspect that had a low average mean score was student involvement (AIM=2.86, SD=0.86) which seldom or sometimes took place in English classes. That is, students’ involvement in classroom activities and their attention to English lessons were rarely happening. On the whole, most students perceived task orientation as an aspect of the learning environment that often occurred in their English classes and student cohesiveness, student cooperation, student involvement, teacher support, and equity as aspects that sometimes took place in their classes at an average level.



N=371; Almost never = 1; Seldom= 2; Sometimes = 3; Often = 4; Almost always= 5

Figure 1: Average item mean scores for the WIHIC scales

Gender Differences in Students’ Perceptions of English Classroom Psychosocial Environment

To examine whether a difference exists between male and female students in their perceptions of the psychosocial learning environment of English classes, a one-way MANOVA was computed. For the MANOVA, the set of the six WIHIC scales was used as the dependent variable and gender was the independent variable. According to the multivariate test using Wilks' lambda criterion, there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female students on the set of WIHIC scales, $F(6, 364) = 1.26, p > 0.05$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.98; partial eta squared = 0.02.

In general, even though there was not a statistically significant gender difference in terms of the combined learning environment scales, the AIM and SD and the strength of sex differences for each of the six scales were reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2: AIM, SD, and Sex Differences for each WIHIC scale

Scale	Sex	AIM	SD	Sex Difference	
				<i>F</i> df (1, 369)	Partial Eta Squared
Student Cohesiveness	Male	3.38	0.80	0.07	0.00
	Female	3.40	0.79		
Teacher Support	Male	3.16	0.97	2.88	0.008
	Female	2.98	1.09		
Student Involvement	Male	2.88	0.83	0.15	0.00
	Female	2.84	0.88		
Task Orientation	Male	3.87	0.77	1.44	0.004
	Female	3.96	0.69		
Student Cooperation	Male	3.43	0.96	0.54	0.001
	Female	3.50	0.90		
Equity	Male	3.51	0.96	0.13	0.00
	Female	3.48	1.04		

N=164 male students and 207 female students $p > 0.05$

The results of the mean scores seem to suggest that male students had relatively more positive perceptions of the learning environment aspects of teacher support, involvement, and equity than female students. On the other hand, female students relatively perceived more positively the psychosocial environment of student cohesiveness, task orientation, and cooperation than their male counterparts. This result is illustrated in Figure 2 below. However, the findings of univariate ANOVA (*F*), which was produced when MANOVA was computed, indicated the

absence of statistically significant differences between male and female respondents for all WIHIC scales ($p > 0.05$).

ANOVA was computed to test the statistical significance of sex differences for each scale, while effect sizes were used to describe the magnitude of the effects of sex differences. As indicated in Table 2 above, the effect sizes for the WIHIC scales ranged from 0.00 to 0.02 and the strength of sex differences for each scale was weak. According to Muijs (2004), eta squared (the effect size index in ANOVA) that ranges from 0-0.1 cut-off points is interpreted as a weak effect. Generally, both male and female students had almost similar perspectives in all psychosocial aspects of their English classroom learning environment.

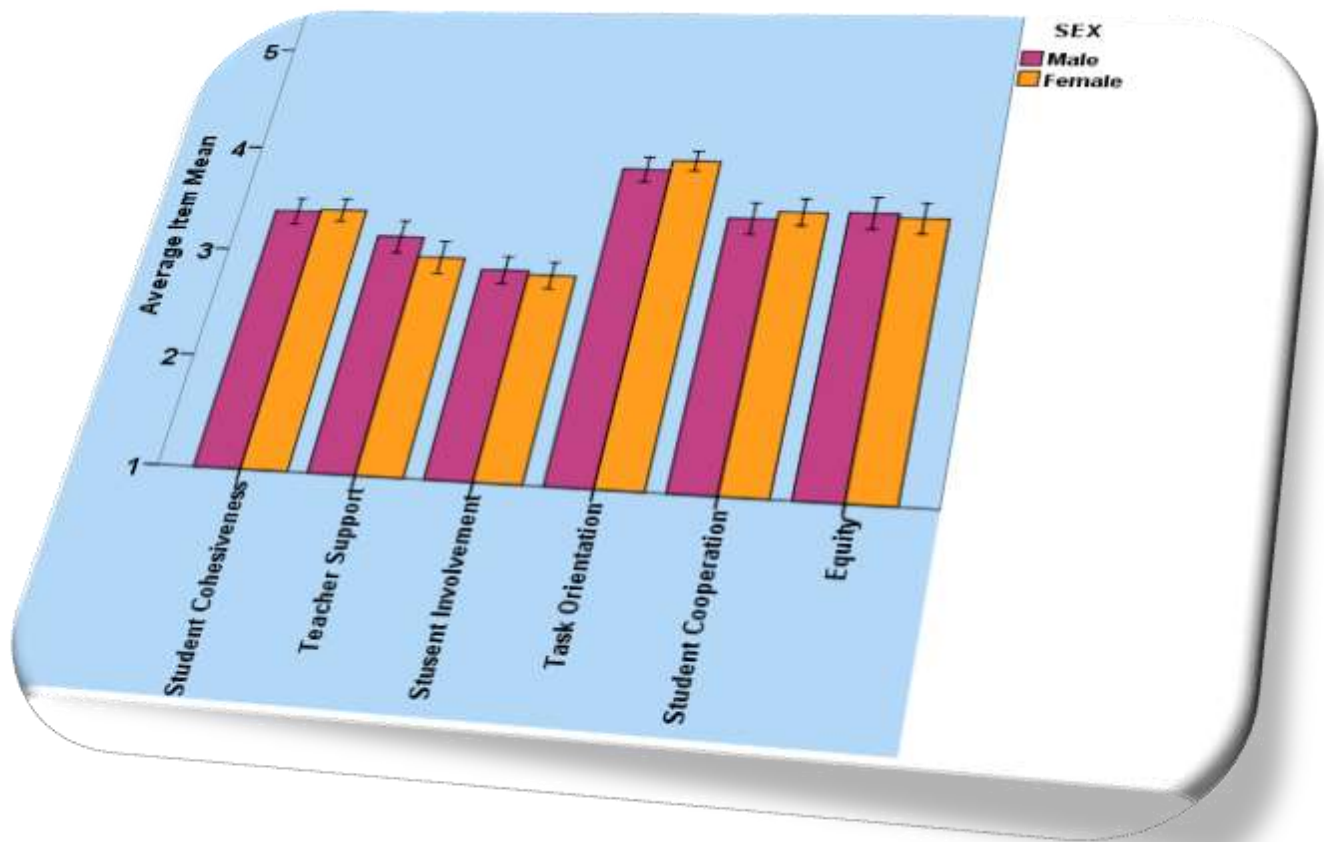


Figure 2: Average item mean scores of male and female students for WIHIC scales

Discussion

This study investigated the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment in EFL classes and whether gender differences exist in this regard. The learning environment aspects in the modified WIHIC were considered in this study.

The result of this study indicates that students had positive perceptions of the psychosocial learning environment of their English classes. This suggests that there was a positive learning environment in English language classes; students perceived that the items in each WIHIC scale were practiced at least to a certain extent. Similarly, previous studies (Bi, 2015; Chua et al., 2011; Goksu, 2015; Koul & Fisher, 2006; Telli et al., 2006; Tshewang et al., 2017; Yang, 2013, 2015) reported that students perceived their learning environment positively.

In terms of each aspect of the psychosocial English classroom environment, the average item mean of WIHIC scales ranged from 2.86 to 3.92; the mean scores of all scales were lower than 4 (this corresponds to the response alternative 'Often'). This indicates that the students' perceptions of the psychosocial aspects of their English classroom environment was less than 'often'. This means that the activities indicated in each WIHIC scale were rarely practiced. This finding is consistent with findings of past studies (Bi, 2015; Chua et al., 2011; Fraser et al., 2010; Peer & Fraser, 2015; Telli et al., 2006; Yang, 2013, 2015) in which the mean scores of all scales were lower than 4 except the Student Cohesiveness scale in Bi (2015) study and Task Orientation scale in the study of Peer and Fraser (2015). On the contrary, other studies found the highest mean scores which were greater than 4 for most scales (Koul & Fisher, 2006; Tshewang et al. 2017).

However, the findings of this study depict that students' perceptions of the learning environment aspect of task orientation was relatively high; the mean score was close to 4 (AIM = 3.92). This suggests that the activities involved in the scale are often practiced in English classes; the students perceived that the learning environment aspect of task orientation often takes place in their English classes. In other words, students often know the goals of learning English and what to complete when learning English.

Students perceived the learning environment aspects of student cohesiveness, student involvement, student cooperation, teacher support and equity moderately; the mean scores ranged from 2.86 for student involvement to 3.49 for equity which were close to 3 (this corresponds to the response alternative 'sometimes'). This suggests that the activities indicated in the scales were sometimes practiced during English instruction; students perceived that these learning environment aspects sometimes took place in their English classes. This means that students were friendly and supportive of one another, received support from their English teachers, worked

cooperatively with other class members and received fair treatment from their teachers during English lessons only to some extent. Nevertheless, it appears that students seldom or sometimes involved themselves in classroom activities and they rarely paid attention to English lessons.

The present study also examined whether gender differences exist in psychosocial learning environment perceptions. Numerous studies that examined the differences between male and female students disclose that female students typically perceive their psychosocial classroom environment more favorably than male students do (Fraser, 2007). However, as indicated in the result section, there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female students in their perceptions of the set of learning environment scales. A statistically significant gender difference was also not found in each learning environment aspect. This implies that both male and female students have almost similar perspectives in all psychosocial aspects of their English classroom learning environment: student cohesiveness, task orientation, student involvement, student cooperation, teacher support and equity.

The findings of this study replicated that of Goksu (2015) who found that there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of psychosocial learning environment. On the other hand, this result is inconsistent with the results of many previous studies (Chua et al., 2011; Fraser et al., 2010; Koul & Fisher, 2006; Peer & Fraser, 2015; Tshewang et al., 2017; Yang, 2013, 2015) who found gender differences in the overall learning environment aspects. When gender difference was examined in terms of each aspect of classroom environment, the results of the present study were consistent with most of these studies which reported no gender differences in most or some of the learning environment scales. For example, in Tshewang et al.'s (2017) study, there were no statistically significant gender differences in four of the five WIHIC scales: Student Cohesiveness, Teacher Support, Task Orientation and Equity. Similarly, in other studies, there were no significant differences between male and female students in learning environment perceptions of involvement, teacher support, investigation and task orientation (Fraser et al., 2010), in task orientation (Yang, 2013), in student cohesiveness and teacher support and equality (Yang, 2015), in teacher support, involvement and investigation (Koul & Fisher, 2006), and in teacher support, involvement and equity (Chua et al., 2011).

Conclusions

The study participants perceived the psychosocial aspects of English classroom environment positively. They perceived the learning environment aspect of task orientation favorably and of student cohesiveness, student cooperation, student involvement, teacher support, and equity moderately. In other words, on average, the items in these aspects of the psychosocial environment were sometimes practiced whereas the items in the task orientation aspect were often

practiced in English language classes. Of all aspects, students' involvement in learning seems limited during English lesson classes. Therefore, the psychosocial aspects of English classroom learning environment need improvement for students to learn better and for effective English language education.

The findings of the study also revealed that male and female students did not depict significant differences in their perceptions of the psychosocial learning environment. It is possible to conclude that both male and female students had almost similar perceptions of each aspect of their English classroom environment.

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