Nexus of Classroom Environment and English Language Learning Skills in Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract: *This study has been designed to examine the nexus between classroom environment and English language learning skills among students in higher education in Pakistan. It has been observed that the classroom environment has a favourable effect on students' language learning not only at school and college levels but also at the university level. A quantitative approach was used for this study. The students of the BS (4 Years) program constitute the population of the study. Cross-sectional research has been conducted, and a well-structured questionnaire has been used as a tool for data collection. The measuring tool consists of different variables, including identification, socio-demographic characteristics, classroom environment, and English language learning skills. A pilot test was done for 30 randomly selected students and the value Alpha was reported to be above .700. A statistics analysis was conducted, including the Normality test and Kendall's tau_b test. The study findings revealed that the classroom environment favourably affects the English language learning skills of the students at the tertiary level. The results of Kendall's tau_b test confirm the positive correlation between variables (classroom environment and English language learning skills).*

Key Words: Classroom Environment, English Language Learning, Higher Education, Classroom Discussion

Introduction

Classroom environment plays a vital role in the process of language learning for students at all levels, generally and particularly at the tertiary level (Ali et al., 2020; Gottfried, 2014; Wan & Cheng, 2019). It has been observed that there are different attributes of the classroom environment and English language learning skills (Qutob, 2018; Wong et al., 2006). The classroom environment consists of physical infrastructure, teacher-student interaction, classroom discussion, presentation and assignment activities, study support material, and time management (Dollmann & Rudolphi, 2020). Similarly, English language learning skills have also been dissected into four different domains: reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Lai, 2019; Lee, 2018; Ma, 2019). Therefore, this study has been intended to examine classroom environment and English language learning skills among students at the tertiary level.

The Study Context

The classroom environment for language learning has attracted research scholars and academicians (Yakob et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). Several studies have been conducted in different contexts in the global south and global north (Weger, 2013; Yin et al., 2009; Yusuf et al., 2019). The subject also has attracted media, politicians, policymakers, educationists, and advocacy experts not only in advanced countries but also in developing countries (Sytsma et al., 2019; Tarrayo et al., 2023; Thu, 2020; Too, 2023; Ubbes et al., 2024). Advanced countries have tried to improve the classroom environment so that students can learn English (Anwar et al., 2024). However, developing countries are still in the

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process of transforming the classroom environment for better learning of language skills, and Pakistan is no exception (Shoaib et al., 2022). Hence, this study has been designed to examine the classroom environment and English language learning skills among students at the tertiary level.

Review of Literature

A huge body of literature has examined the classroom environment and language skills in the developing and developed countries (Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Bueno-Alastuey & López Pérez, 2014; Chen & Yeh, 2019). The speaking skills of language learners were developed with the help of different approaches like content-based approach, form-focused, literature-based, and mixed approaches (Mart, 2019; Shoaib et al., 2023). In addition, a study found that the perception of the teacher is very important in a virtual classroom of language learning (Manegre & Sabiri, 2022). In Africa, language anxiety in a multilingual classroom is a result of using only one mode of instruction (Madonsela, 2015). In England, France, and Spain, educational institutions used technology to develop linguistic competence in a language-learning classroom (Macrory et al., 2012).

The study outlined that the L1 of an English adult migrant affects the interconnection between student and teacher in an English classroom (Ma, 2019; Shoaib et al., 2022). Likewise, the crux of the study revealed that teachers' participation is very important toward learners' autonomy of foreign language learners in a virtual classroom (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2023; Shoaib, 2021). Correspondingly, the conclusion of the study reflects that technology inflates the foreign language learning environment developed for children suffering from ADHD (Liontou, 2019). Subsequently, there is a difference between literacy skills and literacy outcomes in the Chinese language by providing early and later teaching (Li et al., 2008). In the same way, the study finds that language teaching skills and techniques developed through virtual classes (Levy et al., 2009). Further, the findings of the study showed that there are different variables and learners' attitudes toward a second language that motivate language learning in a classroom (Lee, 2018). Moreover, the study findings depicted that many challenges hinder intercultural learning and teaching in a virtual language learning class (Lawrence, 2013). Furthermore, the data analysis reflected that technology helps learners learn language autonomously (Lai, 2019; Shoaib et al., 2022).

It has been observed that classroom environments affect the English language learning skills of students (Mariam et al., 2022). Alumni are supportive of learners of the English language in the classroom in middle school (Lahey & Rizopoulos, 2023). In addition, the internet-based classroom environment of language learning helps students to achieve proficiency in a second language, such as Greek, as an academic language (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2008). In language learning, classroom-embodied learning consequences children's memory and their language-learning skills (Kosmas et al., 2019). A study investigated the importance of teachers' intervention in evaluating and administrating classroom communication (Karjalainen et al., 2020).

Klette (2023) examined the fact that teaching quality can be observed and understood by the observation of the classroom. Likewise, the crux of the study revealed that the dimension of classroom enjoyment of foreign language affects the achievement of foreign language (Anwar et al., 2022; Jin & Zhang, 2018). Correspondingly, the conclusion of the study revealed that experiences of the English foreign language of Japanese students showed emotions in poetic form (Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022). Subsequently, the study summarizes that computer-assisted language learning, such as a web-enhanced interface for the new environment of language learning (Hémard & Cushion, 2000; Shoaib et al., 2021). In the same way, the study asserted that children's oral language skills depend on the better union of classroom and home environment (Han et al., 2017). Further, the conclusion of the study showed that a toddler develops learning skills by engaging in group-based learning and starting from early childcare to preschool (Goodrich et al., 2015; Shoaib et al., 2021). Moreover, the study findings depicted that a virtual flipped classroom results in reading anxiety in a foreign language classroom (Gok et al., 2023). Furthermore, the data analysis reflected that English foreign language classrooms developed self-coaching skills that encourage students to study outside of class (Fukuda et al., 2019; Shoaib et al., 2021).

The classroom environment affects the English language learning skills of students. A study delved into the quantitative methodology intensive single-case study design was used to investigate classroom

emotions of language learners (Fraschini, 2023). A similar study was developed by Ernst-Slavit & Morrison (2018) and found that language skills and content learning are developed by 4th-grade students in a diverse classroom in America. Another study was conducted on foreign language learning classrooms developing literary hypertext (Ensslin, 2006; Mariam et al., 2021). A study presented physical infrastructure that included teacher-learner interaction, a whiteboard, a worksheet, and supportive material, which helped in learning the native language by using a colonial language framework (Engman, 2021).

The study outlined that writing skills for academic purposes and critical thinking are reflected by web-quest-based learning environments for English foreign language learners (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018). Likewise, the crux of the study revealed that the classroom environment at the school level and friends' circle are important factors that affect language learning skills (Dollmann & Rudolphi, 2020). Correspondingly, the conclusion of the study showed that taking different measures regarding classroom organization, like classroom time, management, and literacy environment, facilitates children to show varying language gains (Anwar et al., 2021; Cutler et al., 2023). Subsequently, the pointed-out issues regarding learning and teaching the Chinese language in Montreal at heritage language learning schools were highlighted (Curdt-Christiansen, 2006). In the same way, the study asserted that the Internet is useful in the learning of foreign languages (Conacher & Royall, 1998). Further, the conclusion of the study showed that the stimulated recall technique is highly effective for reflective practice in overcoming classroom anxiety in a foreign language learning classroom (Cinkara, 2016).

Moreover, the study findings depicted that in flipped classrooms, questioning strategies and game-based learning are highly effective in helping students learn language and enhance their performance (Chen & Yeh, 2019). Furthermore, the data analysis reflected that acquiring dual language in a classroom is supported through a self-regulated and co-regulated learning environment in an elementary school (Cerda et al., 2020).

Blended learning, which includes information and communication technology, is more useful for the development of language skills (Bueno-Alastuey & López Pérez, 2014). In addition, Bosmans and Hurd (2016) conducted a study and found that pronunciation skills are attained through distance settings, which also causes low levels of foreign language anxiety. Another study showed that the classroom is highly effective in learning English as a second language in a flipped classroom environment (Anwar et al., 2013; Bicen & Beheshti, 2022). The professional development model is beneficial for teachers' training to improve the classroom environment and also assess children for their literacy and oral language (Abbott et al., 2011).

The Data and Methods

Study Design and Population: This study is based on the quantitative approach. It is worth mentioning that students enrolled in the BS (4 Years) program at the university were the population of this study. However, the students of the Faculty of Arts constitute the target population of this study.

Sample and Sampling: The element of the present study was the students of BS 6th and 8th semester from the Faculty of Arts, University of Gujrat. A complete list of attendance has been collected from the administrative office of the related departments. A proportionate random sampling technique was used to draw the sample from the target population. The researcher calculated the sample size by using the sample size determination formula (Yamane, 1967);

$n = N / 1 + N (e)^2$

Here,

N= Total number of students

e= Margin of errors, i.e., .05

n= Sample size

After the calculation of the sample, a sample of 238 students was selected, and only 176 students participated in the study.

Technique and Tool of Data Collection: The present study is quantitative, and a cross-sectional survey was used as a data collection technique. The rationale for opting for this technique has been based on the objectives, sample, and nature of the study. A well-structured questionnaire was administered and used to collect information. Close-ended questions were used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of an attitudinal scale of (dis)agreement. The response of the students was scored as strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Pilot Testing: Before the collection of the actual data, the measurement tool was tested on 30 randomly selected students from the target population. The value of Alpha has been given below;

Table 1

Reliability test

Sr. No.	Variables	Code	Item	Alpha value
i	Physical Infrastructure	PHIN	8	.718
ii	Teacher-Student interaction	TESI	8	.725
iii	Classroom Discussion	CLDI	8	.767
iv	Presentation and Assignment Activity	PAAA	8	.732
v	Study Support Material	STSM	8	.754
vi	Time Management	TIMA	8	.713
vii	Classroom Environment (i+ii+iii+iv+v+vi)	CLEN	48	.852
viii	Reading Skill	RESK	8	.722
ix	Listening Skill	LISK	8	.728
x	Writing Skill	WRSK	8	.761
xi	Speaking Skill	SPSK	8	.772
xii	English Language Learning Skills (viii+ix+x+xi)	ELLS	32	.869
	Total		80	.920

Data Analysis: The data has been analyzed and presented along with interpretations. The socio-demographic analysis presents frequency distribution, normality test, and Kendall's tau_b test, which has been employed to present results and conclusions.

Results and Discussion

This section provides the inferential statistics of the data and its interpretations as follows;

Table 2

Socio-demographic profile of the student

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	24	13.6
Female	152	86.4
Total	176	100.0
Family Occupation		
Agriculture	35	19.9
Government Job	31	17.6
Private Job	25	14.2
Business	60	34.1
Abroad	18	10.2
Retired	04	02.3
Unemployed	03	01.7
Total	176	100.0

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Siblings		
No Sibling	02	01.1
1 – 2	14	8.0
3 – 4	91	51.7
5 – 6	57	32.4
7 & Above	12	06.8
Total	176	100.0

The study findings pointed out that 86.4 per cent were female participants and 13.6 per cent were male participants who participated in this study. The study findings outline that 34.1 per cent of the students were from a business background, and 01.7 per cent of the students were from an unemployed background. The study findings indicated that 51.7 per cent of the students have 3-4 siblings. Similarly, the study asserted that 01.1 per cent of the students had no siblings.

Table 3

Normality test

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statis.	df	Sig.	Statis.	Df	Sig.
Physical Infrastructure	.083	176	.005	.990	176	.227
Teacher-student Interaction	.125	176	.000	.976	176	.003
Classroom Discussion	.083	176	.005	.985	176	.062
Presentation Assignment Activity	.088	176	.002	.980	176	.013
Study Support Material	.116	176	.000	.961	176	.000
Time Management	.136	176	.000	.949	176	.000
Reading Skill	.085	176	.003	.978	176	.008
Listening skill	.150	176	.000	.912	176	.000
Writing Skill	.135	176	.000	.959	176	.000
Speaking Skill	.111	176	.000	.978	176	.007
English Language Learning Skills	.077	176	.012	.957	176	.000
Classroom Environment	.036	176	.200[*]	.976	176	.004

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3 depicts the normality test of the variables. The primary data analysis revealed that the calculated values of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test confirm that the normality of data is non-parametric. Hence, the researcher applied a non-parametric statistical test such as Kendall's tau_b.

Table 4

Kendall's tau_b test (independent sub-variables and dependent variable)

Variables	PHIN	TESI	CLDI	PAAA	STSM	TIMA	RESK
PHIN	1.000	.415**	.246**	.208**	.321**	.239**	.178**
TESI		1.000	.433**	.316**	.323**	.266**	.300**
CLDI			1.000	.327**	.183**	.102	.315**
PAAA				1.000	.390**	.331**	.365**
STSM					1.000	.409**	.218**
TIMA						1.000	.293**
RESK							1.000

Table 4 describes Kendall's tau b statistical test between the sub-variable of the independent variable (classroom environment) and the dependent variable (English language learning skills). It is stated that all the variables have significant positive, weak, moderate, and high correlations.

Table 5

Kendall's tau_b test between sub-variables of English language learning skills

Variables	RESK	LISK	WRSK	SPSK
RESK	1.000	.441**	.548**	.400**
LISK		1.000	.428**	.328**
WISK			1.000	.420**
SPSK				1.000

Table 5 provides Kendall's tau_b statistical test between two sub-variables of English language learning skills among students at the tertiary level. The primary data analysis asserted that there is a moderate positive correlation (r=.441) between reading skills and listening skills among students at the tertiary level. Similarly, the study findings asserted that there is a moderate positive correlation (r=.548) between reading skills and writing skills among students at the tertiary level. Likewise, the crux of the study revealed that there is a moderate positive correlation (r=.400) between reading skills and speaking skills among students at the tertiary level. Subsequently, the study summarized that there is a moderate positive correlation (r=.428) between listening skills and writing skills among students at the tertiary level. Further, the conclusion of the study showed that there is a weak positive correlation (r=.328) between listening skills and speaking skills among students at the tertiary level. The study findings asserted that there is a moderate positive correlation (r=.420) between writing skills and Speaking skills among students at the tertiary level.

Table 6

Kendall's tau_b test between classroom environment and English language learning

Variables			Classroom Environment	English Language Learning Skills
Kendall's tau_b	Classroom Environment	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.388**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	176	176
	English Language Learning Skills	Correlation Coefficient	.388**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	176	176

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 outlines Kendall's tau-b statistical test between classroom environment and English Language Learning Skills among university students. The analysis revealed that there is a moderate positive correlation between classroom environment and English language learning skills (r=.388).

Conclusion

The study concludes that classroom environments have a favourable effect on English language learning skills among students in higher education institutions. The physical infrastructure, along with teacher-student interaction, has a positive effect on the English language learning skills of the students. Similarly, the study also concludes that classroom discussion presentations and assignment activities enhance the confidence of the students and also result in improving speaking and reading skills among students at the tertiary level. Likewise, the findings of the primary data also conclude that study support material and time management during the study have a favourable effect on listening and writing skills among students at the tertiary level. The study findings assert that all the variables have a significant correlation with English language learning skills among students at the tertiary level.

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