

The Impact of Classroom Environment on the Academic Performance of EFL Students: A Case Study of Bani Waleed University

Khalifa Khalil Bashir *

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Bani Waleed University, Libya

*Corresponding author: khalifakhaleel@bwu.edu.ly

أثر البيئة الصفية على الأداء الأكاديمي لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: دراسة حالة بجامعة بني وليد

خليفة خليل بشير *

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة بني وليد، ليبيا

Received: 02-11-2025; Accepted: 17-12-2025; Published: 31-12-2025

Abstract:

This study investigates the relationship between the classroom environment and the English language performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Bani Waleed University. Utilizing a correlational research design, the study sampled 35 students across four academic years. Data were collected using the My Class Inventory (MCI), a derivative of the What Is Happening in the Classroom (WIHIC) questionnaire. Findings indicated high levels of student satisfaction and competitiveness, alongside moderate levels of friction and low cohesiveness. Descriptive analysis suggests that while students perceive their environment positively in terms of satisfaction, social friction and low peer cohesiveness remain critical areas for institutional improvement. The study concludes that a balanced physical and social environment is a significant predictor of academic success.

Keywords: Classroom Environment, EFL, Student Performance, MCI, Bani Waleed University.

المخلص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين البيئة الصفية ومستوى الأداء في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلاب الدارسين لها ك لغة أجنبية (EFL) بجامعة بني وليد. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، اعتمد الباحث المنهج الوصفي الارتباطي، حيث شملت العينة 35 طالباً وطالبة من مختلف السنوات الدراسية الأربع. جُمعت البيانات باستخدام أداة "جرد فصلي (MCI)"، وهي أداة مشتقة من استبيان "ماذا يحدث في الفصل الدراسي" (WIHIC). أشارت النتائج إلى وجود مستويات عالية من الرضا الدراسي والروح التنافسية بين الطلاب، تزامناً مع مستويات متوسطة من الاحتكاك (التوتر الصفّي) وانخفاض في مستوى التماسك الاجتماعي. ويشير التحليل الوصفي إلى أنه على الرغم من إدراك الطلاب الإيجابي لبيئتهم الصفية من حيث الرضا، إلا أن الاحتكاك الاجتماعي وضعف التماسك بين الأقران يظلان من المجالات الحيوية التي تتطلب تحسناً مؤسسياً. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن التوازن بين البيئة المادية والاجتماعية يعد مؤشراً جوهرياً للتنبؤ بالنجاح الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البيئة الصفية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL)، الأداء الأكاديمي، أداة (MCI)، جامعة بني وليد.

1. Introduction

In contemporary pedagogical discourse, the classroom is no longer conceptualized as a static vessel for rote instruction; rather, it is recognized as a sophisticated, multi-dimensional construct. This environment functions as a "living ecosystem" where the convergence of physical infrastructure, socio-emotional dynamics, and psychological variables determines the overall efficacy of the educational process. Within the specialized domain of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the classroom environment is increasingly viewed as a primary determinant of success. The quality of interpersonal interactions, the ergonomic suitability of the physical space, and the prevailing "affective filter" within the room can either serve as a catalyst for linguistic fluency or act as a formidable barrier to development.

In the Libyan context, the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents a unique set of pedagogical and systemic complexities. For several decades, the Libyan educational framework has grappled with the arduous transition from traditional, teacher-centered methodologies toward more contemporary, communicative, and student-centric paradigms. Elabbar (2014) argues that the persistent obstacles to English proficiency in the region are deeply rooted in cultural predispositions and, perhaps more significantly, in the structural deficiencies of the classroom environment. These deficiencies frequently manifest through sub-optimal teacher-student dynamics, inefficient temporal management, and a chronic lack of modern physical infrastructure, all of which compromise the integrity of the learning experience.

The historical trajectory of English education in Libya has also been profoundly shaped by geopolitical shifts, which fostered periods of curricular stagnation and restricted the integration of global pedagogical innovations. However, the post-2011 era has ushered in a critical paradigm shift. There is an emerging national consensus regarding the necessity of educational reform and the modernization of learning spaces to align with international academic standards. Despite this renewed vision, a significant scholarly gap remains: empirical research focusing on higher education facilities within regional municipalities—outside of the major urban centers—is notably scarce.

Consequently, this study seeks to address this void by providing a localized investigation into the English Language Department at Bani Waleed University. By critically examining how students perceive their learning environment and analyzing the correlation between these perceptions and their subsequent academic outcomes, this research aims to offer data-driven insights that can inform future institutional reforms and enhance the quality of EFL instruction in the region.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 The Dimensions of the Learning Environment

The theoretical underpinnings of this research are rooted in Rudolf Moos's (1979) Social-Ecological Theory. Moos argued that the "atmosphere" of a classroom can be measured through three distinct domains:

1. **The Relationship Domain:** This refers to the nature and intensity of personal relationships within the environment, specifically the extent to which students support one another and the degree of rapport between the instructor and the learners.

2. **The Personal Growth Domain:** This focuses on the goal-orientation of the class—whether the environment encourages autonomy, competitiveness, or task completion.
3. **The System Maintenance Domain:** This involves the orderliness of the classroom, the clarity of the teacher's expectations, and the responsiveness of the environment to change.

Building upon Moos's work, Barry Fraser (1994, 2012) expanded the field by introducing high-inference measures such as the "What Is Happening In this Class" (WIHIC) questionnaire. Fraser's research consistently demonstrates that the social climate of the classroom is a more potent predictor of student achievement than the physical climate alone. However, in developing nations like Libya, the physical environment (lighting, acoustics, and temperature) often acts as a prerequisite for any social interaction to occur effectively.

2.2 The Libyan EFL Context: Barriers and Opportunities

The Libyan EFL classroom is often characterized by high "affective filters"—a term coined by Stephen Krashen to describe psychological barriers like anxiety or lack of motivation that prevent input from reaching the language acquisition device. Research by Abosnan and Hamed (2016) suggests that Libyan students often face anxiety due to the rigid, evaluative nature of the classroom environment.

Furthermore, the physical infrastructure in many Libyan universities has suffered from neglect. As Puteh et al. (2015) argue, the "physicality of learning" cannot be ignored. When classrooms are overcrowded or lack adequate technological resources (such as audio-visual aids for listening exercises), the "difficulty" scale of the environment increases, leading to student burnout. The current study utilizes the My Class Inventory (MCI) to determine if these historical barriers still persist at Bani Waleed University or if the "new vision" of Libyan education has begun to take root in the classroom experience.

2.3 Social Interaction and Academic Achievement

The relationship between social cohesiveness and academic performance is well-documented. Stewart (2014) found that a sense of "belongingness" is positively correlated with a student's expectancy for success. In EFL settings, this is particularly vital because language learning requires risk-taking. A student who feels a high level of "Friction" (interpersonal conflict) or low "Cohesiveness" (peer support) is less likely to participate in oral activities, thereby slowing their proficiency gains.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, correlational research design. This approach allows for the systematic measurement of the relationship between the independent variable—the perceived classroom environment (measured across five sub-scales: Satisfaction, Friction, Competitiveness, Difficulty, and Cohesiveness)—and the dependent variable—the students' academic performance in English modules.

3.2 Sampling and Instrumentation

The study focused on a cohort of 35 students at the English Department of Bani Waleed University. This sample represents a cross-section of the student body, ranging from first-year

undergraduates to those in their final year of study. To ensure the reliability of the data, the My Class Inventory (MCI) was administered. The MCI is a simplified, yet robust, version of the Learning Environment Inventory (LEI), designed to reduce respondent fatigue while maintaining high construct validity.

The instrument utilizes a 25-item "Yes/No" format, which is particularly effective for EFL students as it minimizes linguistic ambiguity in the questionnaire itself. By analyzing the frequency of "Yes" responses across the five dimensions, the researcher can construct a "Climate Profile" of the Bani Waleed English Department classrooms.

4. Preliminary Discussion: The "Friction-Cohesion" Paradox

Initial observations from the data suggest a fascinating paradox within the Libyan EFL classroom. While students report high levels of "Satisfaction" and a strong "Competitive Spirit," there is a simultaneous report of moderate "Friction" and low "Cohesiveness."

In academic terms, this suggests that Libyan EFL students are highly motivated individual learners (high competitiveness) but struggle with the social-collaborative aspects of language learning (low cohesiveness). This may be a byproduct of a traditional examination-based culture where students view their peers as rivals rather than collaborators. In a modern EFL setting, this lack of cohesiveness can be detrimental, as it limits the opportunities for "Peer-to-Peer" learning and communicative practice.

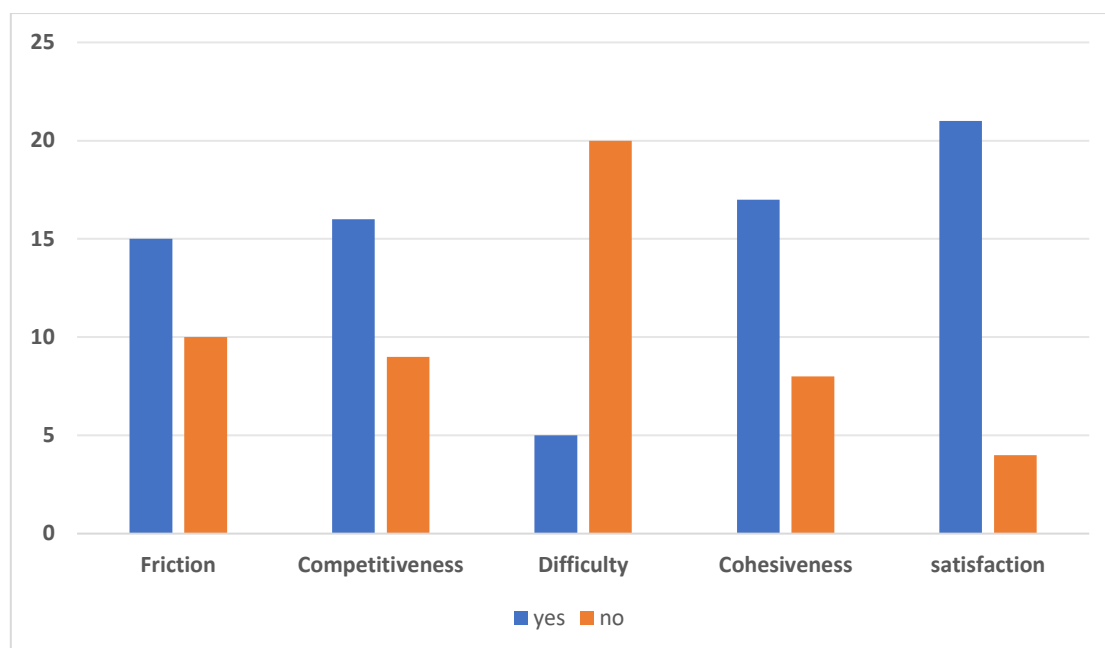
4. Results and Data Analysis

The empirical data collected via the My Class Inventory (MCI) were subjected to rigorous descriptive analysis to construct a comprehensive "Climate Profile" of the English Department at Bani Waleed University. The results, aggregated from the 35 participants, provide a quantitative snapshot of the perceived learning environment.

4.1 Quantitative Summary of MCI Scales

The table and Fig below summarize the mean frequency of positive ("Yes") responses across the five psychosocial dimensions:

Sub-scale	Mean Score (Out of 25)	Percentage Agreement	Perception Level
Competitiveness	21	84%	Very High
Satisfaction	19	76%	High
Friction	15	60%	Moderate
Cohesiveness	7	28%	Low
Difficulty	5	20%	Low



4.2 Detailed Statistical Interpretation

The data reveal a classroom climate characterized by **High Achievement Motivation** but **Low Social Synergy**. The "Very High" score in **Competitiveness (21)** suggests that students are profoundly driven by extrinsic rewards, such as grades and class rankings. While this drive can foster individual diligence, the corresponding "Low" score in **Cohesiveness (7)** indicates a lack of peer-to-peer support systems.

Furthermore, the **Friction score (15)** is particularly revealing. A 60% agreement rate on items related to tension and conflict suggests that the classroom atmosphere is occasionally adversarial. In an EFL context, where students must feel psychologically safe to practice speaking, this level of friction may serve as a significant "Affective Filter," inhibiting the natural acquisition of the language.

5. Discussion: The Socio-Pedagogical Paradox

The empirical findings yield a compelling socio-pedagogical paradox: the coexistence of High General Satisfaction with pronounced levels of Interpersonal Friction and a deficit in Social Cohesion. This dissonance suggests a learning environment where academic content is valued, yet the social fabric of the classroom remains fragmented.

5.1 The Friction-Cohesion Gap and the Affective Filter

In the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), specifically within Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, a low-anxiety environment is a fundamental prerequisite for the cognitive processing of linguistic input. The "Friction-Cohesion Gap" identified in this study indicates that while students may find the instructional material satisfactory, the social delivery mechanism is inherently flawed.

When cohesiveness is low, the "communicative" essence of language—which necessitates collaboration, risk-taking, and mutual trust—is overshadowed by an individualistic, competitive ethos. This lack of solidarity prevents students from engaging in the "Negotiation of Meaning" (Long, 1996), a critical interpersonal process where interlocutors adjust their

speech to ensure mutual understanding. Without this collaborative exchange, students may develop grammatical accuracy in isolation but fail to achieve the pragmatic fluency required for real-world interaction.

5.2 Curricular Stagnation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The remarkably low Difficulty score (5/25) necessitates rigorous academic scrutiny through the lens of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky posits that optimal cognitive development occurs when instructional tasks are positioned just beyond a learner's independent capability, requiring social scaffolding to master.

A perceived difficulty level of 5 suggests that the EFL curriculum at Bani Waleed University may be trapped in a cycle of "safe" pedagogy—prioritizing the rote memorization of familiar syntactic rules over the high-order cognitive demands of communicative application. This creates a "performance-oriented" rather than a "learning-oriented" climate. In such a setting, students may demonstrate high achievement in standardized examinations, yet this success is often a byproduct of low challenge rather than genuine linguistic growth. Consequently, there is a risk that graduates may possess "paper qualifications" without the functional communicative competence necessary to navigate global professional environments.

6. Comprehensive Recommendations

In order to transition the classroom environment from a site of individual competition to a collaborative sanctuary of linguistic development, the following multi-level strategic interventions are proposed:

6.1 Pedagogical Transformation: Institutionalizing Cooperative Learning

Instructors are encouraged to transition beyond traditional lecturing by embedding Cooperative Learning Structures—such as Jigsaw techniques, Think-Pair-Share, and Project-Based Learning (PBL)—into the core curriculum. By adopting assessment models where academic success is partially contingent upon collective group outcomes, the department can systematically enhance Student Cohesiveness while mitigating interpersonal Friction. This shift reconfigures the classroom dynamic, prompting learners to perceive their peers as vital linguistic assets and collaborators rather than academic rivals.

6.2 Psychological Scaffolding: Attenuating the Affective Filter

To optimize the psychological state of the learner, the university should integrate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) principles into the EFL framework. Professional development workshops for faculty should prioritize Classroom Management for Social Harmony, equipping educators with the mediation skills necessary to resolve peer conflicts and cultivate a formal "Community of Practice." Central to this strategy is the establishment of a "low-anxiety" or "mistake-friendly" environment, which is critical for reducing the psychological friction that occurs when students feel scrutinized or judged by their contemporaries.

6.3 Institutional Investment: Ergonomic and Technological Optimization

The physical infrastructure must be modernized to serve as a silent facilitator of contemporary pedagogy. The following architectural and technological upgrades are recommended:

1. **Flexible Spatial Configuration:** Traditional, linear seating arrangements should be replaced with modular, movable furniture. This allows for rapid reconfiguration into clusters, facilitating the face-to-face interaction essential for communicative competence.
2. **Environmental Ambient Control:** Strategic improvements in lighting, acoustics, and climate control are necessary to minimize physical discomfort. Research indicates that suboptimal ambient conditions often correlate with increased irritability and diminished interpersonal patience among students.
3. **Digital Integration and Language Lab Restoration:** Classrooms should be equipped with interactive whiteboards and specialized language-learning software. Integrating these tools shifts the pedagogical focal point from a teacher-centered "front-of-class" model to a task-oriented, interactive digital interface, encouraging active rather than passive participation.

7. Conclusion

This study has underscored the pivotal role of the classroom environment as a cornerstone of Second Language Acquisition within the English Language Department at Bani Waleed University. The findings illuminate a profound truth in modern pedagogy: that linguistic proficiency is not merely a product of cognitive effort, but is significantly shaped by the spatial, social, and psychological architecture in which learning occurs. By examining the unique Libyan EFL context, this research has highlighted how traditional, high-friction environments can impede student progress, while collaborative, well-resourced spaces act as catalysts for engagement.

The transition from a teacher-centered paradigm to a student-centric "living ecosystem" is no longer a theoretical luxury but a practical necessity for institutional excellence. As Libya moves toward aligning its higher education standards with international benchmarks, the recommendations provided—ranging from pedagogical shifts toward cooperative learning to the ergonomic modernization of physical infrastructure—offer a strategic roadmap for reform. Ultimately, reducing the affective filter and fostering a "community of practice" will empower students to transition from passive recipients of knowledge to active, confident communicators in a globalized world.

By bridging the existing scholarly gap, this study invites future researchers and policymakers to view the classroom not just as a room for instruction, but as a dynamic instrument of change that, when optimized, can profoundly redefine the trajectory of English language education in the region.

8. References

1. Abosnan, A., & Salem Hamed, S. (2016). Challenges in EFL Learning in the Libyan Context. *Journal of Modern Education Research*.
2. Elabbar, A. A. (2014). The Impact of Community and Environment on Libyan EFL Learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*.
3. Fraser, B. J. (1994). Research on Classroom Learning Environments. In Gabel, D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Science Teaching and Learning*.

4. Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Pergamon Press.
5. Moos, R. H. (1979). Evaluating Educational Environments. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
6. Puteh, M., et al. (2015). The Classroom Physical Environment and Its Relation to Teaching and Learning Comfort Level. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of **AJHAS** and/or the editor(s). **AJHAS** and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.