



International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 527-547, March 2024
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.3.26>
Received Dec 21, 2023; Revised Mar 14, 2024; Accepted Mar 29, 2024

Omani English Classroom Environment: Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Perspectives

Moza Al Malki , Ibtisam Al Rushaidi  and Ameera Al Saidi 
University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Rustaq College of Education,
Oman

Abstract. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development called for a conducive learning environment for male and female learners equally. Considering that, this study examined the classroom learning environment in Oman and the differences between Omani female and male English teachers' classroom environments. This study is based on 60 pre-service English language teachers' experiences. Utilizing Krueger's content analysis continuum model to analyze reports and focused-group interviews, the study found that a welcoming, safe environment, teacher-student interaction, and flexibility and innovation lead to conducive learning environments. However, large classes and lack of technological equipment, time constraints, and overreliance on a grammar-translation method are criteria which negatively affect the learning environment. Also, the study found that the differences are attributed to several factors, some of which are related to student-teacher relationship, the materials used, and classroom management. Such investigations contribute significantly to the provision of high-quality education. To optimize student engagement and learning outcomes, it is recommended that educational settings offer flexible seating arrangements, sufficient space, and access to technological resources. The study recommends that teacher training programs enhance future educators' skills in managing learning environments and developing emotional intelligence, particularly among male teachers. Some of the study's implications can be considered by English teachers, school stakeholders, and future researchers to improve the current status of learning environments and be aligned with Omani Vision 2040 in relation to education.

Keywords: Classroom learning environment; pre-service English language teachers; boys' and girls' Omani schools, Sultanate of Oman

1. Introduction

The aim of teacher education institution is to equip pre-service teachers with readiness to teachers. This requires not only understanding the theoretical

©Authors

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

background of the educational field but also experiencing and being trained in the school learning environment. The exposure to the learning environment will professionally prepare them. Practical courses, like practicum, aim to train them by exposing them to the real learning environment. When they engage in approximation practice, they can move from the comfortable and familiar position of students to that of the instructors/teachers. One cannot exaggerate how crucial it is to motivate them to apply their knowledge of the learning environment from the courses they have covered in their studies, in their future classes as some teachers still struggle to regularly incorporate theories into their practice (Augsdörfer & Casper, 2018).

Investigating their perspectives about this issue will enlighten the literature. Thus, a number of studies examined the pre-service teachers' perspective on the effectiveness of certain aspects and changes of learning environments (Long et al., 2022; Yılmaz & Malone, 2020; Pinto-Llorente, 2021; Almodaires et al., 2021; Dag et al., 2019). Examples of the learning environment aspects that these studies reviewed are related to 'what is happening in this class', blended learning, environments, virtual learning environment, usefulness of Microsoft Teams for remote learning, and active learning environments.

The purpose of all the above-mentioned studies was to assist recognizing the variations in the learning environment before and after the implementation of a specific strategy or method (for example, technology) in the classroom to determine which is more effective. However, a paucity of research exists in determining the criteria that are conducive to effective learning environments from pre-service English language teachers' perspectives. Also, limited studies are available on pre-service English language teachers' perspectives of learning environment variations regarding gender and educational levels. Thus, the purpose of this research has been to discover the necessary criteria to create supportive classroom learning environments from the viewpoints of pre-service teachers by observing variations in learning environments in women and men of different educational levels in Omani schools.

2. Literature Review

A classroom learning environment, in its simple definition, is a setting where learning takes place. However, learning in its broadest form is not clearly defined (Phillips et al., 2010). Some researchers prefer the Cambridge Online Dictionary (n.d.) definition of learning. Accordingly, learning is defined as a) "the activity of obtaining knowledge", which is related to the process in which learners are engaged to develop their understanding and b) "knowledge obtained by study", which is the outcome produced by the learners as evidence of acquired levels of understanding. A classroom learning environment facilitates learning processes which lead to learning products.

A classroom setting has two significant elements: physical and human (Malik & Rizvi, 2018). The physical element contains the physical objects presented in the classroom, such as furniture, lighting, ventilation, books, computers, etc., whereas

the human element comprises of two important actors in the classroom, namely teachers and learners.

As much as the physical element is important in terms of creating a comfortable climate and having fewer behavior problems, so too does the human element. It involves a pattern of interaction between student-student and student-teacher. This interaction creates a 'psycho-social' learning environment in the classroom. According to Shrestha et al. (2019), an effective learning environment is not only about teachers' effective communication skills, knowledge, credibility, and preparedness but it is also about assisting students' personal, psychosomatic development and social well-being, and preparing them for their future professional life.

Similarly, Closs et al. (2022) defined three dimensions that contribute to the effectiveness of learning environments, which are physical (the classroom furniture, technology, seating, etc.), pedagogical (the educational materials, activities, strategies, etc.), and psychosocial dimensions (students' satisfaction, involvement, relationships, etc.). That study was used as the conceptual framework for understanding the status quo of the learning environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

A number of studies have examined the impact of the dimensions mentioned by Closs et al. (2022) on the performance of teachers and students. For example, physical features have a significant impact on the academic performance of both students and teachers, as evidenced by various studies (Uline et al., 2010; Dangara & Geraldine, 2019; Curry, 2018). The findings of these studies underscore the challenges encountered by teachers in managing the distinctive requirements of students within the context of larger class sizes.

Similarly, Nelson and Johnson (2017) highlighted the difficulty of discerning the distinct learner attributes and requirements in educational settings that accommodate more students. Moreover, the presence of high levels of noise in the classroom, which can be attributed to both external environmental factors and large class sizes, has been found to have a negative impact on the working memory and learning outcomes of students (Naude & Meier, 2019; Massonnié et al., 2022). Additionally, larger classroom sizes hinder the ability of teachers to offer efficient support, resulting in a lack of clarity among students concerning the specifications of assignments (Naude & Meier, 2019; Massonnié et al., 2022). Thus, students prefer a learning environment that offers physical space, information, communications technology, and pedagogy (Valtonen et al., 2021).

In a study applying a qualitative multiple case study approach, Nyabando and Evanshen (2021) studied second grade students' perspectives of their classroom's physical learning environment. The participants were selected from different classrooms in different schools. Although the study's sample was based on two different classroom environments, namely constructivism and traditionalism, the study concluded that more similarities existed than differences in the second graders' views of the best environment. They all agreed that the best classroom

environment provides physical and emotional comfort. They described the preferred classroom environment as resourceful, meaningful, and giving space for active learning and social interaction.

Similarly, primary and elementary school teachers acknowledged the importance of a positive classroom environment for teaching, learning, and overall satisfaction. They stressed the significance of a school's infrastructure and how it affects students' attitudes and sense of belonging. Lacking essential educational materials and the inadequacy of school infrastructure divert the educational process. Moreover, crowded schools prevent the effective use of the physical learning environment (Özyildirim, 2021; Gültekin & Özenç, 2021). Britt et al. (2022) claimed that a comfortable physical environment is not the only desirable thing within a classroom; students also learn better in an innovative flexible classroom.

Other factors exist which can contribute to the classroom learning environment as perceived by the stakeholders. For example, in their study to find out the relationship between students' perception of their classroom environment and their English achievement, Rahmi and Diem (2014) found a notable difference in how students perceive the classroom environment based on their gender. According to their results, female students perceived the classroom environment to be better than what the male students did. Similarly, Lai et al. (2015) carried out a cross-sectional study in Chinese elementary and middle schools and were able to analyze data from 1,897 valid questionnaires on how gender and grade level affect students' views of their preferred and actual learning environments. They concluded that a significant gap was evident between students' perceptions of the ideal and the actual classroom environments. The difference was clearer with girls than with boys, and grade seven and eight, than with grade nine students.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate the current situation of learning environments in the Sultanate of Oman, at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), the Rustaq College of Education-Oman (Rustaq-Oman) in an attempt to define the criteria that support learning environments. Also, the study examined the differences between Omani girls' and boys' schools (cycle 1 and cycle 2) as perceived by pre-service English language teachers. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the criteria considered to provide supportive classroom learning environments from pre-service teachers' perspectives?
- 2) What are the differences between Omani girls' and boys' schools (cycle 1 and cycle 2) from pre-service teachers' perspectives at UTAS/Rustaq-Oman?

3. Methodology

Using a qualitative case study design, the study investigated pre-service English language teachers' perspective of the criteria that they considered conducive to a supportive learning environment in an English language teaching context. Also, the study examined the differences between Omani girls' and boys' classrooms in cycle 1 and cycle 2 schools. Simons (2009) defined a case study as an examination of a complex phenomenon from various aspects. This study examined the

phenomenon of learning environments from the perspectives of 60 pre-service teachers in six schools in the South of Al Batinah region, Oman. The pre-service teachers' reports and discussions provided immediate insight into the phenomenon. The richness of qualitative data allows for the topic to be fully and comprehensively examined and for the themes to be identified.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 60 pre-service teachers, 25 women and 35 men, enrolled for the Practicum 2 course at UTAS/Rustaq-Oman. In this course, they microteach their peers in the presence of an instructor. Prior to microteaching, they need to be familiar with the theoretical aspects of teaching so the instructors, with the agreement of the schools, send them to visit and observe classes for four consecutive weeks. Classroom observation is a significant learning practice which enables them to be familiar with teaching and learning processes. Most importantly, the pre-service teachers have the opportunity to explore what an effective classroom learning environment is, which was this study's focus. The sampling technique was non-random.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected during observation processes. The pre-service teachers needed to report on aspects related to the three dimensions of physical, psychological, and pedagogical as according to Closs et al. (2022). For example, they were asked to report on teaching characteristics, such as organization, presentation, teaching approach, students' responses, etc., and the lesson in general, such as its learning outcomes, steps of the lessons, materials, and any environmental prints inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, they reported on classroom routines and procedures (see appendices).

Along with the reports, 16 focused-group discussions were conducted. Each interview took no more than half an hour and occurred during the practicum course sessions. The discussions focused on the pre-service teachers' definitions and descriptions of the learning environment, and the criteria that support and hinder the learning environment. The discussions were audio-recorded and appropriate ethical clearance was obtained from the university. Researchers carefully observed ethical considerations from the Head of Scientific Committee in the UTAS/Rustaq-Oman (ethical approval number 2023 ENGL 1).

The collected reports and discussions were analyzed using Krueger's (1998) 'content analysis continuum model'. The contents were then generated to reveal the criteria that lead to conducive learning environments and to find out the differences between girls' and boys' learning environments at Omani schools. This allowed for the emergence of themes within which to ensure all aspects of the phenomenon had been captured. Eventually, suggestions or comments were made that could be implemented to enhance the learning environment in Omani classrooms.

4. Findings

Question one: What are the criteria considered necessary to provide supportive classroom learning environments?

Our first research question aimed to determine the criteria pre-service teachers regarded as necessary for fostering supportive classroom learning environments. The collected data indicated that optimal educational circumstances for promoting effective learning differ considerably from one perspective to another. Considering the physical, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions of effective learning environment, as according to Closs et al. (2022), the key findings for each dimension were described.

Physical dimension

Code: Large Classes and Lack of Technological Equipment

In the physical dimension, a considerable proportion of preservice teachers reported feeling surprised and dissatisfied with the large classes and lack of technological equipment. The observation of a substantial student population in a single classroom, coupled with inadequate technological resources, were deemed unexpected and detrimental and not considered suitable criteria for supportive learning environment.

One of the pre-service teacher expressed his surprising by saying that “I was really surprised to see the large number of students in each class, which makes the class crowded”.

Another participant said “I was surprised to see some students sharing the same chair and table!”.

In terms of employing technology in the classroom, pre-service teachers said that differences were in the ratios of using such tools, with some schools (typically new ones) having modern technical devices and others (old ones) not having any sort of technology. The result of the occurrence of overpopulated classrooms and restricted resources negatively affected the involvement of the learners in the classrooms.

Based on the pre-service teachers’ observations, they mentioned that the classroom teachers found it difficult to involve all learners in their instructional activities, in particular those who were sitting at the back.

Pedagogical dimension

Code: Time Constraints and Overreliance of Grammar-Translation Method

In the pedagogical dimension, it was found that the preservice teachers identified some barriers that badly affected the learning environment. The barriers were related to time constraints, and overreliance on the grammar-translation method. First, time constraints were observed as a significant issue in the classrooms. The study revealed that a significant majority of participants, both male and female pre-service teachers, expressed their concern regarding the inadequate time management skills of classroom teachers. They observed that teachers tended to allocate excessive time to the warm-up and presentation stages while neglecting the production stage. This affected the achievement of the overall lesson objectives. One of the pre-service teacher indicated this concern by saying, “Because of time constraints, it is difficult to finish all planned activities on time”.

Another issue with the time constraints was the ignorance of speaking skills and extracurricular activities. The pre-service teachers observed that the classroom teachers did not have time for speaking skills and one of them mentioned, "Speaking skills are overlooked due to time constraints and student level".

Also, the classroom teachers did not have time to implement extracurricular activities to improve the students' level. One of the participants stated that, "Extracurricular activities are rarely employed due to time constraints".

Second, an overreliance on the grammar-translation method, which involves extensive use of the native language for teaching and instruction, was observed. One of the pre-service teacher mentioned that "Teachers prefer to choose the easiest and fastest way of teaching which is grammar-translation".

This observation shocked some of the pre-service teachers as they are trained to use other communicative methods and strategies in order to teach English lessons. One of the participants frankly said, "We were always trained to create creative, communicative classrooms, but the reality is different".

This reality, as observed, negatively affects the pedagogical aspect of the learning environment, such as the neglect of teaching speaking skills and the implementation of extracurricular activities, as mentioned. Furthermore, the results suggest that the instructional practices of teachers are influenced by the physical learning environment in the pedagogical dimension. In certain educational settings, educators frequently resort to conventional approaches, such as the grammar-translation method, primarily due to issues with student misconduct and academic achievement (Musard et al., 2022; Ji et al., 2022; Alghaberi, 2019). The influence of local schools' contextual support on teachers' instructional approaches has been found to be substantial, as evidenced by studies conducted by Musard et al. (2022) and Ji et al. (2022).

Psychosocial dimension

Code: Welcoming and Safe Environment, Teacher-Student Interaction, and Flexibility and Innovation

In this study, pre-service teachers stressed the importance of a welcoming and safe environment. They pointed out that cycle 1 and female classrooms provide more of a sense of belonging and security than male classrooms. They observed that feelings of acceptance and safety may lead students to have good relationships with teachers, which affected the classroom atmosphere positively. Moreover, pre-service teachers discussed another psychosocial aspect which was active teacher-student interactions. They reported that, in some classes, students were more engaged than in others just because of the way the teacher interacted and connected with them, such as making them feel safe, understood and respected. A pre-service teacher commented "I remember one of the classes I have attended, the teacher has a unique loving character that makes students love English and love the lesson, even though that teacher isn't doing anything special, I mean no use of special materials".

Additionally, pre-service teachers discussed the importance of being flexible and innovative as a teacher, which was reported by both male and female pre-service teachers to have a clear impact on the overall vibe of the classroom. Students were

more attracted to the lessons and showed a positive attitude when the teachers used creative teaching techniques and materials.

One of the female pre-service teachers said "I want my future students to get the same amazing emotions that I felt the first time I saw the activity. Eyes wide open and hands covering their mouth. I noticed that it pushes many students to participate".

Overall, preservice teachers identified some aspects related to psychological, pedagogical, and physical, which inevitably affect the learning environment. The findings showed that large classes, lack of technological equipment, time constraints, and overreliance of grammar-translation method badly affected the learning and teaching environment.

In contrast, psychological aspects, such a welcoming and safe environment, teacher-student interaction, and flexibility and innovation, positively affected the learning environment and they are criteria that support and foster the learning environment.

Question Two: What are the differences between Omani girls' and boys' schools (cycle 1 and cycle 2)?

The second question of this research aimed to find the differences, if any, between male and female schools (cycle 1 and cycle 2) from participants' perspectives and investigate the reasons behind any differences. The results indicated varying observations and perceptions from the participants. According to the responses, the differences fall into three main categories: students-teachers' relationship/interaction, the use of teaching materials, and classroom management. The Table 1 summarizes the results:

Table 1: Comparison between girls' and boys' schools

	Students-teachers relationship/ interaction	The use of teaching materials	Classroom management
Girls' and cycle 1 schools (Female teachers)	Strong rapport with students. Inclusive attention. Mutual respect.	Use creative teaching materials (flashcards, games, songs and role play).	Use of classroom management techniques and reinforcement.
Boys' schools (Male teachers)	Care less about establishing healthy relationship with students.	Straightforward and mainly use textbook activities.	Conduct the lesson without paying any sort of attention to what is happening in the classroom. Using force to control the class (sticks/physical punishment).

Student-teacher relationship

Code: Strong Rapport with Students, Inclusive Attention, and Mutual Respect

According to pre-service teachers' responses, female class teachers showed stronger rapport with students compared to male teachers. Most of the female

pre-service teachers described the student-teacher relationship in cycle 1 and girls' schools as being positive and supportive in which teachers showed close attention to all students and took care of their academic needs as well as their social/emotional needs. In boys' schools, however, male teachers showed less interest in establishing such bonds with their students.

Use of teaching materials

Code: Creative Teaching Materials (Flashcards, Games, Songs and Role Play)

Another difference between Omani girls' and boys' schools according to the document analysis is that female teachers in both cycle 1 and 2 schools are more likely to use creative teaching materials and strategies, such as flashcards, games, songs, and role play, to engage their students and to achieve the learning outcomes in an interesting way. Alternatively, male teachers' teaching styles are more straightforward and mainly use textbook activities.

Classroom managements

Code: Use of Classroom Management Techniques and Reinforcement

The final difference between Omani girls' and boys' schools as reported by pre-service teachers is that female teachers in cycle 1 and cycle 2 schools can manage their classrooms effectively. This is attributed to two main reasons, namely 'the healthy relationship with their students' and 'the use of classroom management techniques and reinforcement'. In contrast, and according to the male pre-service teachers' reports, male teachers are not skillful at managing classrooms effectively. In male schools, the study found that some teachers followed mainly two patterns, namely they either conducted the lesson without paying any sort of attention to what was happening in the classroom or used force to control the class, such as sticks or other types of physical punishments.

5. Discussion

Question One: What are the criteria considered necessary to provide supportive classroom learning environments from pre-service teachers' perspectives?

In addressing the first research question, this study's purpose was to determine the criteria that pre-service teachers deem essential for establishing supportive classroom learning environments. The findings highlight the significance of three interrelated dimensions of the learning environment: the physical, the pedagogical, and the psychological.

The results and prior research illustrate the interdependence among the various facets of learning environments. It is imperative to consider the physical, pedagogical, and psychosocial dimensions when designing an ideal educational setting. According to various studies, the provision of resources, support, and training for teachers, along with the promotion of a positive and inclusive classroom culture, can have a substantial impact on student outcomes and enhance the overall learning experience (OECD, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2011). Prioritizing these factors is crucial for educational institutions in their endeavor to establish favorable learning environments for both teachers and learners.

For example, the notion of innovative learning environments in the physical realm underscores the importance of flexibility, the incorporation of varied seating arrangements, the integration of technology, and non-traditional learning spaces beyond conventional classrooms (OECD, 2015). Most pre-service instructors were dissatisfied with class sizes and the availability of technological resources. This is consistent with prior research that demonstrates the substantial influence physical environments can have on both teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Uline et al., 2010; Dangarin & Geraldine, 2019). Consequently, addressing classroom overload and resource deficiencies becomes a crucial factor in nurturing conducive learning environments.

Another noteworthy finding was the dissonance pre-service teachers encountered between their training environment and the actual classroom environment, corroborating the findings of Aguirre and Faller (2017), that such a divergence can lead to feelings of ambiguity and struggle. Therefore, teacher education programs should encourage that classroom observations are followed by discussions to better prepare pre-service teachers mentally and emotionally. Additionally, the teacher education programs should collaborate with the Ministry of Education and provide more trainings and professional development sessions for in-service teachers to be updated with the recent methods and strategies, such as communicative language teaching. This conclusion is drawn from Alghaberi (2019) who indicated that to improve teacher's pedagogical practices, it is imperative to furnish them with appropriate teaching methodologies, educational resources, and professional development opportunities that foster inventive and learner-focused methodologies.

Another point to illustrate is the psychosocial aspect of the educational setting, which underscores the significance of students' sense of acceptance, support, and worth. According to Gregory et al. (2016), positive school environments positively impact academic and social outcomes, while also decreasing behavioral issues. According to Walton and Cohen (2011), students' engagement in learning and sense of belonging in school are positively correlated with their perception of being welcomed and valued. According to Allen et al. (2011), establishing favorable connections between educators and learners is crucial for both academic achievement and the overall welfare of students.

Question Two: What are the differences between Omani girls' and boys' schools (cycle 1 and cycle 2) from pre-service teachers' perspectives?

Pre-service teachers reported several differences between Omani girls' and boys' schools classified under three main aspects: student-teacher relationship, the use of teaching materials and classroom management.

Student-teacher relationship

As indicated in the findings, female classroom teachers tended to have a stronger relationship with students than male classroom teachers, as reported by the pre-service teachers. This result aligned with the literature reviewed. For example, Davis et al. (2010) reported that female teachers tend to be more supportive and encouraging in their interactions with students, while male teachers tend to be more directive and assertive. Riggio and Zimmerman (2018) found that female

teachers tended to provide more emotional support and build a stronger rapport with students than male teachers do.

A positive teacher-student relationship is crucial because it is correlated with better academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students. For example, Pekrun et al. (2017) found that students who reported positive relationships with their teachers had better academic achievement. Similarly, Roorda et al. (2011) found that positive student-teacher relationships led to students' further engagement in school and higher levels of academic achievement. Additionally, students' motivation and sense of belonging increased and disciplinary issues decreased in classrooms with good student-teacher rapport. Overall, establishing positive teacher-student relationships is essential in promoting positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students.

Use of teaching materials

Another issue which showed the difference between Omani girls' and boys' schools is the use of teaching materials. As observed and interviewed by pre-service teachers, female teachers used various teaching materials, unlike the male teachers. This finding accords with studies by Khodabakhshzadeh et al. (2018) and Arifani and Suryanti (2019), that found that Iranian and Indonesian female teachers are more creative than male teachers. This creativity, as the studies indicated, enhances learners' involvement in the learning process and has a great impact on teaching effectiveness. Thus, it is of significance that both female and male teachers exchange knowledge and experience of how to be creative and use creative materials and strategies to implement innovative ideas to achieve effective teaching.

Classroom managements

The last difference indicated by pre-service teachers is classroom management. The female teachers were able to manage the classroom in a very effective way through establishing a good relationship with students and, perhaps most importantly, through the use of rewards and reinforcement to manage the class. This finding resonates with a study conducted in Pakistan, using a quantitative approach, that found that female teachers exhibit more classroom management skills in 'building relationships with students', 'having a teamwork', 'love and logic approach', and 'organization in the classroom' (Ahmed et al., 2018). However, another recent study conducted by Pradipta et al. (2022) showed no significance between gender and classroom management skills, yet a significant difference exists between teachers who have high emotional intelligence and teachers who have low emotional intelligence. A teacher with emotional intelligence is defined as being self-aware, self-regulated, motivated, empathic, and having social skills. These skills enable teachers to manage their classes effectively (Pradipta et al., 2022). The findings in this study though showed that male teachers lack social skills in communicating with students. Also, it showed that male teachers need to be trained to self-regulate their emotions so that they do not resort to punishment as the first option.

Although the study has yielded significant findings, it is crucial to recognize its limitations. The limitation of the study lies in its exclusive emphasis on pre-service

teachers at UTAS/Rustaq-Oman, which may impede the applicability of the results to other settings. To enhance the comprehensiveness of the study, further research ought to encompass a more extensive and heterogeneous cohort of pre-service teachers hailing from different regions. Furthermore, the research focused on the viewpoints and reports of pre-service teachers and did not encompass in-service teachers or other stakeholders in education. To achieve a thorough understanding of the classroom learning environments in the English language teaching context, it is imperative to incorporate the perspectives of class teachers, educational leaders, and the students themselves.

To overcome these limitations and improve scholarly study in this domain, various avenues for prospective studies can be explored. Initially, a comparative investigation that encompasses a wider range of in-service teachers and a more diverse sample from various regions in Oman would yield a more comprehensive comprehension of the similarities and differences between female and male schools.

Additionally, an examination of the influence of cultural and societal elements on classroom dynamics and learning environments would yield significant findings. Comprehending the impact of cultural norms, gender roles, and educational policies on pedagogical approaches and academic achievements can inform the formulation of tactics aimed at fostering more comprehensive and positive learning settings.

6. The Pedagogical Implications

The study's results suggest various pedagogical implications that can help establish conducive classroom learning environments. First, professional development opportunities for educators are essential to improve their methods of instruction and classroom management. It is imperative that educators receive instruction in novel pedagogical approaches, resourceful utilization of instructional resources, and efficient techniques for managing classroom dynamics. These opportunities need to be offered by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. The collaboration between the two institutions will enable both teachers and pre-service teachers to be acquainted with the recent and most updated approaches, resources, and techniques in the field of English language teaching.

Second, raising awareness and more collaboration among educators with respect to possible gender disparities in student-teacher interactions and pedagogical approaches can foster more comprehensive and encouraging learning settings. It is advisable to motivate educators to exchange experience and knowledge regarding their instructional methodologies and contemplate the adoption of approaches that are inclusive for all learners, irrespective of their gender.

Third, the design and arrangement of physical learning environments should be given priority by schools to cater to the diverse learning preferences of students. To optimize student engagement and learning outcomes, it is recommended that educational settings offer flexible seating arrangements, sufficient space, and access to technological resources.

Fourth, the cultivation of emotional intelligence skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, should be promoted among educators to enhance their ability to build healthy relationships with students. Establishing favorable connections with students is imperative for their academic and socio-emotional growth. The provision of training and support to educators in the establishment and maintenance of robust student-teacher relationships can be advantageous.

Fifth, the equitable allocation of resources in educational institutions is imperative to ensure that male and female teachers have equal access to innovative teaching materials and technologies. Encouraging creativity and implementing diverse instructional approaches can potentially augment student engagement and academic achievement.

Through the application of these pedagogical aspects, academic institutions can establish a conducive classroom learning atmosphere that caters to the varying requirements of learners, thereby enhancing their academic accomplishments and welfare.

7. Conclusion

This study explores classroom environments in Oman, distinguishing between female and male English teachers' approaches, based on feedback from pre-service teachers at UTAS/Rustaq-Oman. It highlights the importance of physical, pedagogical, and psychological factors in creating effective learning environments and notes gender disparities in teaching methods and classroom management. The findings suggested that adaptable physical environments, integrating technology and flexible seating, alongside optimal class sizes and noise control, significantly impact student performance. Female teachers tend to establish stronger rapport with students and use more creative teaching materials, while male teachers often stick to traditional methods and may need further training in classroom management and emotional intelligence.

The study recommends that teacher training programs enhance future educators' skills in managing learning environments and developing emotional intelligence, particularly among male teachers. It also advocates for addressing educational disparities and promoting collaborative problem-solving to improve teaching strategies. This approach aims to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively navigate the challenges of modern classrooms, contributing positively to educational progress.

8. References

- Aguirre, E. B., & Faller, S. D. (2017). Experiences of LNU Neophyte Teachers: Cues for a Viable Mentoring Program. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(13), 3387–3410. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.3434>
- Ahmed, M., Ambreen, M., & Hussain, I. (2018). Gender differentials among teachers' classroom management strategies in Pakistani context. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 5(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.22555/joeeed.v5i2.2253>

- Allen, J. P., Pianta, R. C., Gregory, A., Mikami, A. Y., & Lun, J. (2011). An interaction-based approach to enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement. *Science*, 333(6045), 1034–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1207998>
- Almodaires, A. A., Almutairi, F. M., & Almsaud, T. E. (2021). Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Microsoft Teams for Remote Learning. *International Education Studies*, 14(9), 108–121. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v14n9p108>
- Arifani, Y., & Suryanti, S. (2019). The Influence of Male and Female ESP Teachers' Creativity toward Learners' Involvement. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1), 237–250. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22555/joed.v5i2.2253>
- Augsdörfer, A., & Casper, M. (2018). Closing the theory-practice gap: Employing authentic video-taped lessons in vocational teacher education. In C. Nägele & B. E. Stalder (Eds.), *Trends in vocational education and training research. Proceedings of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Vocational Education and Training Network (VETNET)* (pp. 33–43). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1319622>
- Baloche, L., & Brody, C. (2017) Cooperative learning: exploring challenges, crafting innovations. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 43(3), 274–283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2017.1319513>
- Britt, L. L., Ball, T. C., Whitfield, T. S., & Woo, C. W. (2022). Students' perception of the classroom environment: A comparison between innovative and traditional classrooms. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v22i1.30735>
- Cambridge Online Dictionary. (n.d.). Learning. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/learning>
- Closs, L., Mahat, M., & Imms, W. (2022). Learning environments' influence on students' learning experience in an Australian Faculty of Business and Economics. *Learning Environ Res*, 25, 271–285. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-021-09361-2>
- Dag, F., Şumuer, E., & Durdu, L. (2019). Pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences: Courses based on the active learning model and environment. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 8(2). <https://libjournal.uncg.edu/jls/article/view/1778>
- Dangara, U. Y., & Geraldine, M. C. (2019). Evaluation of the Effect of Learning Environment on Student's Academic Performance in Nigeria. Online Submission, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED602097.pdf>
- Davis, H. A., Winn, A. N., & Middleton, M. J. (2010). The importance of teacher-student relationships for adolescents with high incidence disabilities. *High Incidence Studies*, 20(1), 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840701232943>
- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357621>
- Gültekin, M., & Özenç Ira, G. (2021). Classroom teachers' views on the physical learning environments of primary schools in Turkey. *International Online Journal of Primary Education (IOJPE)*, 10(1), 180–192. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2402973>
- Ji, X., Cao, Y., & Wei, W. (2022) Pre-service teachers' pedagogical decisions on integrated-skills instruction in a sojourn Chinese teaching programme: The context matters. *Cogent Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2064602>
- Khodabakhshzadeh, H., Hosseinnia, M., Moghadam, H. A., & Ahmadi, F. (2018). EFL Teachers' Creativity and Their Teaching's Effectiveness: A Structural Equation

- Modelling Approach. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(1), 227–238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11116a>
- Krueger, R. A. (1998). *The focus group kit*. Sage Publications
- Lai, H., Chou, W., Miao, N., Wu, Y., Lee, P., & Jwo, J. (2015). A comparison of actual and preferred classroom environments as perceived by middle school students. *Journal of School Health*, 85(6), 388-397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12263>
- Long, C. S., Sinclair, B.B., Fraser, B. J., Larson, T. R., & Harrell, P. E. (2022). Preservice teachers' perceptions of learning environments before and after pandemic-related course disruption. *Learning Environ Res*, 25, 343–357. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-021-09376-9>
- Malik, R. H., & Rizvi, A. A. (2018). Effect of Classroom Learning Environment on Students' Academic Achievement in Mathematics at Secondary Level. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 40(2), 207-218. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10017543>
- Massonnié, J., Frassetto, P., Mareschal, D., & Kirkham, N. Z. (2022). Learning in Noisy Classrooms: Children's Reports of Annoyance and Distraction from Noise are Associated with Individual Differences in Mind-Wandering and Switching skills. *Environment and Behavior*, 54(1), 58–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916520950277>
- Musard, M., Bezeau, D., & Wallhead, T. (2022). Pre-service teachers' content-related analyses of a physical education learning task. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2022.2061936>
- Naude, M., & Meier, C. (2019). Elements of the physical learning environment that impact on the teaching and learning in South African Grade 1 classrooms. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1). <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-14b07ba11>
- Nelson, E., & Johnson, L. (2017). Learning to teach in ILEs on practicum: anchoring practices for challenging times. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v22i3.374>
- Nyabando, T., & Evanshen, P. (2021). Second grade students' perspectives of their classrooms' physical learning environment: A multiple case study. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(5), 709–720. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01183-4>
- OECD. (2015). *Schooling redesigned: Towards innovative learning systems*. Educational Research and Innovation. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en>
- Özyildirim G. (2021). How Teachers in Elementary Schools Evaluate Their Classroom Environments: An Evaluation of Functions of the Classroom Through an Environmental Approach. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 14(3), 180–194. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2021.140305>
- Pekrun, R., Elliot, A. J., & Maier, M. A. (2017). Achievement goals and achievement emotions: Testing a model of their joint relations with academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(6), 980–999. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000177>
- Phillips, R., McNaught, C., & Kennedy, G. (2010, June). Towards a generalised conceptual framework for learning: The Learning Environment, Learning Processes and Learning Outcomes (LEPO) framework. In *EdMedia+ Innovate Learning* (pp. 2495–2504). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). <https://aace.org/conf/edmedia/>
- Pinto-Llorente, A. M. (2021). Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of a Virtual Learning Environment to Support a Learner-Centred Approach: A Qualitative Study. In Khosrow-Pour, M. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Modern Educational Technologies, Applications, and Management*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3476-2>

- Pradipta, R. F., Ediyanto, E., Irvan, M., & Hastuti, W. D. (2022, March). Teacher Gender-Based Classroom Management in Exceptional School Settings Special School in The City of Malang. In *2nd World Conference on Gender Studies (WCGS 2021)* (pp. 99-103). Atlantis Press. <https://www.gwsconf.org/#:~:text=Gender%20and%20Women's%20Studies%20Conference,pressing%20issues%20in%20the%20field.>
- Rahmi, R. A., & Diem, C. D. (2014). Junior high school students' perception of classroom environment and their English achievement. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(3), 41-47. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiaac.ijalel.v.3n.3p.41>
- Riggio, R. E., & Zimmerman, J. (2018). Men and women as teachers: A meta-analysis of empirical studies on students' gender preferences, attitudes, and teacher effectiveness. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(2), 279-308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9421-1>
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493-529. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311421793>
- Shrestha, E., Mehta, R. S., Mandal, G., Chaudhary, K., & Pradhan, N. (2019). Perception of the learning environment among the students in a nursing college in Eastern Nepal. *BMC medical education*, 19(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-019-1835-0>
- Simons, H. (2009). *Case study Research in Practice*. Sage. <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/case-study-research-in-practice>
- Uline, C. L., Wolsey, T. D., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Lin, C.-D. (2010). Improving the Physical and Social Environment of School: A Question of Equity. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20(5), 597-632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461002000504>
- Valtonen, T., Leppänen, U., Hyypiä, M., Kokko, A., Manninen, J., Vartiainen, H., Sointu, E., & Hirsto, L. (2021). Learning environments preferred by university students: a shift toward informal and flexible learning environments. *Learning Environ Res*, 24, 371-388. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-020-09339-6>
- Waldman, C. (2016). *Four Elements for Creating a Positive Learning Environment*. <https://all4ed.org/blog/four-elements-for-creating-a-positive-learning-environment/>
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331(6023), 1447-1451. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1198364>
- Yılmaz, Ö., & Malone, K. L. (2020). Preservice teachers' perceptions about the use of blended learning in a science education methods course. *Smart Learning Environments*, 7, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00126-7>
- Yin, J. (2019). Connecting theory and practice in teacher education: English-as-a-foreign-language pre-service teachers' perceptions of practicum experience. *Innovation and Education*, 1(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42862-019-0003-z>

Appendix 1: Focus group discussions

1. From your observations, how do you define a learning environment?
2. How would you describe the Omani school environment according to your observations?
3. What makes a learning environment supportive and conducive?
4. Have you noticed any differences between boys' and girls' schools? What are these differences?
5. As a pre-service teacher, what are your suggestions for a better classroom environment?
6. Any comments would you like to do?

Appendix 2: Observation Forms

1. Regular Classroom Observation

Objective of this observation: You will identify the teaching and learning strategies that the teacher used (e.g.: the use of materials and technology, the review of prior learning, the motivation level of the students, the presentation of the materials, the appropriateness of the practice activities, classroom management strategies, timing strategies, reviewing the lesson, general assessment of the learning).

Grade: ----- Book: -----
 Lesson: ----- Pages: -----
 Date and time: ----- Number of students: -----

Lesson focus (skill/subskill)			
Learning outcomes			
Warm-up			
Teaching Materials/ Resources	Implementation Approach/ Activities	Teaching Strategies/ Methods	Aims/ Learning Outcomes
Homework	Summative Assessment	Enrichment/ Remedial Tasks/ Differentiated Education	Formative Assessment

Teaching Characteristics	Comments
<p>1. Organization: Appropriate organization of content. Planning the use of resources and materials.</p>	
<p>2. Presentation: Clear introduction/ Clear instructions Clarity of aims and objectives/ Clarity of presentation and organization/ Appropriate pace and timing/ Attempts to respond to student needs.</p>	
<p>3. Teaching approach and aids: Choice of teaching/ learning approach and its relevance to learner group. Methods used to check/ evaluate learning. Choice and use of teaching activities. Effective use of question and answer. Encouragement of student interaction.</p>	
<p>4. Students response: Level of participation/ Level of attention and interest/ General class atmosphere.</p>	
<p>5. General observations:</p>	

2. Observing Classroom Routines and Procedures

Observe the teacher and note two routines they use every day in the classroom. Fill in the table below to describe EACH routine; when and where it is used; and what is the aim of the routine and the student behavior.

Name/ description of the routine.	Give the instructions that the routine uses.	When and where is the routine used? (e.g., at the end of the school day etc.; or to guide presentations after group work).	Aim of the routine (What student behavior it hopes to achieve).	How did/do the students learn about this routine? How is the routine reinforced? (e.g., mentoring; classroom signs; reminders by the teacher; use of peer interaction by the teacher to promote such behavior etc.).	Document (If possible, take a photo of the routine as it is happenin g, or of any display related to the routine).
Classroom Rules (During the morning routine the teacher repeats the rules so she can make sure students follow the rules. Each rule has some certain movements that they do with their hands so it would be easier for them to remember the rules).	Rule number 1: Follow directions quickly Rule number 2: Raise your hand for permission to talk Rule number 3: Raise your hand for permission to leave your seat Rule number 4: Make smart choices Rule number 5: Make your teacher happy and smile.	In the morning routine. If the students are misbehaving.	Remind the students of what is expected from them so the classroom will be well managed and organized.	The teacher reminds the students and repeats it every day at least once a day.	

Reflection: Classroom Routines and Procedures

Choose one best practice you observed during your time in school. Reflect on it and consider why you could implement it in your classroom in the future. Explain how such practice will affect student learning.

3. Observing environmental prints

Document 2 examples of environmental prints in the classroom and school

Examples of Environmental Print	Purpose	Ideas for further development
	<p>Word wall: To revise the important words with the students. Students can refer to them once they need them easily/ To revise the sight words and the letters of the week.</p>	<p>The teacher could use flash cards (word with its picture) to help students link between the word and its picture and remember the word.</p>
	<p>To show sample of students' work during every week's theme</p>	<p>The teacher could post all students' work instead of picking up only samples so all of students would be proud of their work.</p>

Reflections on Observation: Environmental in the Classroom

How does environmental print impact students' language development, and their reading and writing abilities?

4. Observing teaching material

Describe 3 examples of literacy software/ web-based programs/ extracurricular activities to improve students' English skills

	Program/ Activity	Age Range	Objectives	Links to Multiple Intelligences	Description and Comments
1		7-10	It aims to improve students' listening and reading skills. Students read sentences and act them out.	Verbal- Linguistic Intelligence develops students' literacy awareness. Bodily- Kinesthetic Intelligence Connecting between the words/ sentences and meaning by actions.	After each unit, the teacher brings a story and asks students to make a circle. T distributes the story books from LRC to the students. T reads the story and act/ Ss read some sentences and act them out.

Reflections on Observation: literacy software/ web-based programs/ extracurricular activities to improve students' English skills.

5. Suggest another literacy software/ web-based program/ extracurricular activity to improve students' English skills