Psychosocial Learning Environments of English Classes and Students' Motivational Intensity in Learning English Language

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Abstract

The psychosocial learning environments of English classes could determine students' motivation to learn English because students spend much amount of time in English classrooms that are the primary setting in which English learning occurs. This study investigated the extent to which English classroom psychosocial learning environments influence students' motivational intensity in English learning. A correlational research design was used to attain this purpose. Simple random sampling was utilized to select 371 samples from the population. The data were gathered through "What Is Happening In this Class" and Motivational Intensity questionnaires, and were analyzed using inferential statistics. The results showed that each aspect of psychosocial learning environment was related to students' motivational intensity significantly. Further, the influence of the set of six psychosocial environment aspects on students' effort and engagement in learning English was significant. Three of the six aspects, namely, task orientation, student involvement, and teacher support accounted for the influence on students' motivational intensity significantly. This implies that students exert greater effort and engage in learning English when they are provided with more task-oriented classroom environment, opportunities to involve in the learning process, and adequate support by their English teachers. Therefore, the psychosocial environments of English classes need improvement to boost students' motivation in learning English. In particular, the learning environment aspects of task orientation, student involvement and teacher support play a vital role in motivating students to learn English.

Keywords: psychosocial learning environments, motivational intensity, learning English language, English classes

INTRODUCTION

The English language is used widely and dominantly around the world for the purposes of communication and in various areas. In Ethiopia, the language plays a pivotal role in numerous sectors. The education sector is one of the areas in which the language has dominantly been employed since long in the country; English language education began around 1908 (Heugh et al., 2006). English is a foreign language in Ethiopia and its teaching and learning is limited mainly to the formal classroom context. Although the mastery of English language is needed in the country to widen job opportunities, to travel to foreign countries, and to have good academic and career

success, among others, many Ethiopian students fail to communicate with the language after spending a significant amount of time in English classroom learning environment.

The educational system is carried out in classrooms where students spend much amount of time and participate in activities that promote learning. Noor et al. (2021, p. 5248) noted that "classroom environment is very important for students' learning, because, it is most fundamental and important part of human life." Fraser (2001) also stated that quality learning environment in a classroom is essential to attain educational goals, and the amount of time students has spent in the classroom environment is nearly 15,000 hours when they finish secondary education. According to Bell and Aldridge (2014), classroom learning environment refers to the overall setting in which learning takes place, and it includes the physical and psychosocial learning environment; the physical environment refers to the materials in classrooms and their arrangements whereas the psychosocial environment involves students and teachers, as well as their interactions in a classroom. The focus of the psychosocial classroom environment is on social, psychological, and academic character of learning environments (Bi, 2015). As Dorman (2002, p. 112) pointed out "Without a consideration of the crucial role of the psychosocial environment of classrooms, educational productivity cannot be optimized." Many studies have also shown that the learning environment in a classroom has a significant and consistent impact on students' learning (Fraser, 2007, 2012). Similarly, it is acknowledged that the learning environment determines how effectively students learn (UNESCO, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to classroom learning environment for the efficacy of education. As such, the emphasis of this study is on the psychosocial classroom environment.

It has been indicated in the past studies that the learning environment of a classroom tends to affect affective and cognitive learning outcomes of students (Fraser, 2007, 2012). The present study focused on English classroom psychosocial environments relation with students' motivational intensity (effort) in learning English. As far as the researchers' teaching experience is concerned, they have realized that numerous learners do not strive to improve their English command. For example, one of the researchers asked some of his students whether or not they endeavored to enhance their English skills. They said that they did not strive for improving their English skills; they did not make much effort to improve their English competence. Such feelings may emanate from low motivational intensity to learn English (which is one of the components of motivation). According to Noor et al. (2021), the learning environment in a classroom has a critical role in motivating students. As Wei and Elias (2011, p. 241) stated, "classroom environment plays an important role in motivating students to learn English language because the process of learning takes place mostly in the classroom." Bi (2015) also pointed out that the improvement of English classroom psychosocial environment has a pivotal role in boosting students' motivation in learning English.

Motivation could be among the determinants of students' learning of English language. Motivation refers to the extent to which attention and effort are invested in various learning activities based on past experiences, willingness to involve in the activities, and the reasons for doing so in the context of classroom (Brophy, 2010). Motivation can be deduced from behaviors, such as the decision to take a certain step, the amount of effort put into it, and the persistence with which it is pursued (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). According to Gardner (1985), foreign language learning motivation includes effort exerted and desire to learn the language, as well as positive attitudes toward language learning. Motivation is an essential element in English education (Wei & Elias, 2011). It is one of the determinants of students' success or failure in learning a second/foreign language (Gardner, 2007). Ersanli (2015) emphasizes that the role of students'

motivation in foreign language learning success is vital. Motivational intensity, which is one of the components of motivation, refers to the effort students expend in L2 learning (Gardner, 1985).

This study examined whether English classroom psychosocial learning environment is related to secondary school students' motivational intensity in English learning. Evidence available in past research indicates that it is likely that students' motivation is influenced by aspects of the psychosocial classroom environment (Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Bi, 2015; Fraser, 2012; Noor et al., 2021; Susanti et al., 2020; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Velayutham & Aldridge, 2013). Nevertheless, in examining to identify the learning environment scales that influence student motivation, the results of past studies were different. For example, in Opolot-Okurut's (2010) study, among five of the WIHIC scales used in the study, only Task Orientation scale influenced student motivation significantly, whereas in Chua et al.'s (2009) study, only Involvement, Teacher Support and Task Orientation scales predicted students' motivation of Chinese Language learning; among the three, the Task Orientation scale determined it strongly and consistently. In addition, in the analysis of simple correlation, some studies found significant relationships between all aspects of learning environment and motivation (e.g., Ariani, 2017; Chua et al., 2009) whereas other studies found the associations of some or most learning environment scales with motivation (e.g., Opolot-Okurut, 2010).

Susanti et al. (2020) noted that the motivation of students can be influenced by a favorable learning environment. Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) also suggest that in order to boost students' motivation, the psychosocial aspects of learning environment that are likely to influence their motivation need to be emphasized. Nevertheless, Bi (2015) observed that the relationship between students' motivation in EFL learning and their perspectives of psychosocial learning environments has been given little attention; only a few studies examined the psychosocial learning environment influence on students' motivation in EFL classes though there was no such study in Ethiopia. Besides, the influence of psychosocial learning environment on students' motivational intensity (which is one of the components of motivation) has not been investigated previously. This study makes a contribution in this area. Therefore, in the present study, an attempt has been made to investigate whether students' motivational intensity in English learning was influenced by the psychosocial learning environments of English classes and to identify which aspects of the psychosocial learning environment contributed to the influence on students' motivational intensity in learning English. As such, the following research questions have been addressed in the study.

- Are there significant associations between each aspect of psychosocial learning environment and students' motivational intensity in English learning?
- To what extent does the set of psychosocial learning environment aspects influence students' motivational intensity in learning English?
- Which aspects of the learning environment contribute to the influence on motivational intensity of students?

METHOD
Research Design
A research design establishes a system for gathering and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012). This study examined whether the psychosocial classroom environment of English classes is associated with students' motivational intensity in English language learning. Hence, the correlational research design was used to attain the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the study employed a quantitative research approach to gather and analyze data through WIHIC and Motivational Intensity questionnaires.

Participants

Three hundred ninety-three participants were selected using simple random sampling method from the total population of 1124 grade eleven students (male: 513; female: 611) of Menelik II Secondary School. From the sample students, 179 students were males and 214 of them were female students. Among the participants of the study, fifteen students did not fill the questionnaire properly, and 7 students did not return it. Thus, the data from 371 students were retained and considered for analysis in this study.

Data Gathering Instruments

The WIHIC and Motivational Intensity (MI) questionnaires were employed for data gathering in this study. The WIHIC was adapted and utilized to examine English classroom psychosocial learning environments at secondary level. Further, MI questionnaire was adapted to assess students' effort and engagement in learning English. The details of each questionnaire are presented below.

WIHIC was the first questionnaire that was used in the study for the assessment of English classroom psychosocial learning environment as perceived by secondary school students. The initial version of the WIHIC involved nine ten-item scales (Fraser et al., 1996) and the final version, which was modified by Aldridge et al. (1999) incorporates seven eight-item scales. A five-point frequency response alternatives (Almost Never-Almost always) was used to respond to each item. Students were required to rate the frequency of the actual situations taking place in their English classes. As Fraser (2014) stated, the WIHIC questionnaire amalgamates scales from a variety of prevailing questionnaires with new scales, such as equity that address current educational issues.

The final version of the WIHIC is the most frequently utilized instrument of classroom environment in different settings and countries across the world (Fraser, 2012, 2014). The reliability and validity of WIHIC has been confirmed at various educational levels and in numerous countries (e.g., Aldridge & Fraser, 2000; Dorman, 2003). The questionnaire was also valid and reliable after it was translated into various languages (e.g. Spanish (Helding & Fraser, 2013); Arabic (Afari et al., 2013); Greek (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2017)). The WIHIC has been applied and found useful in learning Environment of English (ESL/EFL) classes (e.g., Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Bi, 2015; Goksu, 2015). Therefore, the final version of Aldridge et al.'s (1999) WIHIC questionnaire was adapted and used in this study. The WIHIC was also translated into Amharic language for this study.

The Motivational Intensity questionnaire, which assesses students' effort and engagement in learning English, was the other questionnaire employed for the purpose of this study. It was adapted from Gardner's (2004) "Attitude/Motivational Test Battery (AMTB)" which was designed for use with students learning English. The modified questionnaire includes eight items; the frequency response of each item ranges from (Almost Never-Almost Always). The response alternatives were modified to match the frequency responses in the WIHIC scales. The information obtained from students' responses was used to examine whether students' perspectives of their English classroom psychosocial environment influenced students' effort and engagement in learning English. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire has been supported by past research when used with modifications and apart from the original AMTB scales (e.g.,Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Noels, 2001). It has also been translated into various languages and used successfully in Brazil, Poland, Croatia, Spain (Catalonia), Japan and Romania (Gardner, 2004). The MI questionnaire was also translated into Amharic language.

In order to utilize the Amharic version of MI and WIHIC questionnaires in the Ethiopian EFL context, the validity and reliability of the questionnaires were checked first using data collected form one hundred seven samples with similar characteristics to the target participants. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the instruments' internal consistency reliability. The overall alpha reliability of WIHIC was 0.93, and the range of alpha coefficients for each scale of WIHIC was between 0.73 for Student Cohesiveness scale and 0.88 for Teacher Support scale. Further, the alpha coefficients for MI scale was 0.81. The alpha coefficients of each WIHIC scale and MI scale were above 0.70 which are considered to be acceptable value for use (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition to this, the discriminant validity of the instruments was checked. Discriminant validity is determined by the correlation between the mean values of each scale. Discriminant validity decides the extent to which a scale in a questionnaire is independent of the other scales. According to Brown (2006) recommendations, the results of correlations that are above 0.80 reveal overlap of concepts and the discriminant validity is poor. For this research, the highest correlation between scales was 0.63 which is less than Brown's (2006) recommendation of discriminant validity requirements (0.80). Hence, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires were established for use in Ethiopian EFL context.

Data Analysis

In order to address the research questions, several data analysis techniques, such as multiple regression and Pearson correlations were utilized to analyze the quantitative data for this study. To do so, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24 version) was employed. To examine whether each WIHIC scale was associated with motivational intensity, Pearson correlations were computed. In addition, multiple regression was performed to investigate the combined WIHIC scales' influence on students' motivational intensity in learning English. The set of the six WIHIC scales was the independent variable and the motivational intensity scale was the dependent variable in multiple regression analysis. In addition, to identify the learning environment aspects that influence significantly students' motivational intensity, the standardized regression coefficient (β) was computed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Relations Between Each Psychosocial Learning Environment Aspect and Motivational Intensity

The first research question of this study asked whether there were significant relationships between each aspect of psychosocial environment of EFL classes and students' motivational intensity in learning English. As such, Pearson correlation was performed. The findings of the study are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: **Pearson Correlation Analyses for Each WIHIC Scale and Motivational Intensity**

WIHIC Scales	Motivational intensity	
	Pearson Correlation	.404**
Student Cohesiveness	p-value	.000
	N	371
	Pearson Correlation	.447**
Teacher Support	p-value	.000
	N	371

Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.486**
	p-value)	.000
	N	371
Task Orientation	Pearson Correlation	.627**
	p-value	.000
	N	371
Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	.373**
	p-value	.000
	N	371
Equity	Pearson Correlation	.453**
	p-value	.000
	N	371

** $p<0.01$; N= number of students; p = significance level

The analyses of Pearson correlations, reported in Table 1 above, indicated that all of the six WIHIC scales were significantly ($p<0.01$) correlated to motivational intensity. The range of the correlations for the scales was from 0.373 (Cooperation) to 0.627 (Task Orientation). Muijs (2004) suggests that the effect size or the strength of relationship is moderate if it is $<+/–0.5$ and is strong if it is $<+/–0.8$. Accordingly, the strength of relationships of all WIHIC scales with motivational intensity were moderate (r ranging from 0.373 to 0.486) with the exception of Task Orientation scale (r = 0.627). Task orientation had fairly strong effect size. The learning environment scale of Task Orientation accounted for high variance in student motivational intensity ($r^2 = 39.3\%$). This is followed by student involvement ($r^2 = 23.6\%$), equity ($r^2 = 20.5\%$), teacher support ($r^2 = 19.98\%$), student cohesiveness ($r^2 = 16.3\%$) and student cooperation ($r^2 = 13.9\%$).

The Influence of Psychosocial Learning Environments on Students' Motivational Intensity

Investigating whether the psychosocial learning environments of English classes influence students' motivational intensity in learning English is the other objective of this study. To address this objective, multiple regression was computed. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
1	.687ᵃ	.472	.463

a. Predictors: (Constant), Equity, Cooperation, Student Cohesiveness, Task Orientation, Involvement, Teacher Support

As indicated in Table 2 above, the analysis of multiple regression also indicated that the effect of the six WIHIC scales in combination on student motivational intensity was significant ($p<0.01$) and positive. Furthermore, the combined WIHIC scales accounted for 47% of variance in motivational intensity of students ($R^2 = 0.472$). The Adjusted R^2 was also 0.463. This suggests that students' motivational intensity is predicted well by the predictors. According to Muijs's (2004) criteria, the Adjusted R square (the model) that ranges from 0.11–0.3 has modest fit and

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from 0.31-0.5 has moderate fit. Therefore, the set of WIHIC scales moderately predicts students' motivational intensity in learning English.

The Contribution of Each Aspect of Psychosocial Learning Environment to The Influence on Motivational Intensity

In addition, the standardized regression weights (β) were calculated in order to identify which psychosocial learning environment aspects contributed most for the influence on students' motivational intensity in English learning. Table 3 below presents the results.

Table 3: The Influence of Each Psychosocial Learning Environment Aspect on Motivational Intensity

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.336	.193		1.739	.083
Student Cohesiveness	.050	.049	.047	1.006	.315
Teacher Support	.090	.042	.111	2.117	.035
Involvement	.141	.049	.144	2.852	.005
Task Orientation	.513	.054	.443	9.569	.000
Cooperation	.050	.041	.055	1.224	.222
Equity	.066	.043	.078	1.508	.132
a. Dependent Variable: Motivational Intensity					

As reported in Table 3 above, the results indicated that three WIHIC scales (Task Orientation (β = .443; p<0.01), Involvement (β = .144; p<0.01) and Teacher Support (β = .111; p<0.05)) had a statistically significant and positive influence on students' motivational intensity. The effect size was the strongest for Task Orientation scale. This is followed by Involvement and Teacher Support scales.

Discussion

This study examined whether English classroom psychosocial environments influence students' motivational intensity in English language learning. Multiple regression and Pearson correlations were used for data analysis. The standardized regression coefficients (β) were also calculated to identify the learning environment aspects that influenced student motivational intensity.

Analyses of Pearson correlations indicate that all WIHIC scales were related to motivational intensity significantly and positively. The strength of all correlations (effect sizes) were moderate with the exception of Task Orientation. Task Orientation scale was strongly related to motivational intensity. This suggests that the task orientation aspect of learning environment accounts for high variance in motivational intensity (39.3%). In this study, students' motivational intensity was likely to be influenced by each psychosocial learning environment aspect. The positive relationship found between each psychosocial environment aspect and motivational

intensity suggests that the improvement of psychosocial environment aspects of teacher support, student cohesiveness, task orientation, student cooperation, student involvement and equity in English language classes could enhance students' motivational intensity to learn English. Similarly, previous studies (Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Ariani, 2017; Chua et al., 2009; Opolot-Okurut, 2010; Velayutham & Aldridge, 2013) found positive and a statistically significant associations between each aspect of psychosocial environment and motivation.

Analysis of multiple regression also show that the relationship between the set of psychosocial environment aspects and motivational intensity was significant and positive. The set of scales of learning environment accounted for 47% of variance in Motivational Intensity scale ($R^2 = 0.47$). The Adjusted R^2 was also 0.463 (moderate fit). This means that the predictors are relatively good at predicting students' motivational intensity. That is, the set of environment scales moderately predicts students' motivational intensity in learning English. Similarly, past studies (Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Ariani, 2017; Chua et al., 2009; Opolot-Okurut, 2010; Velayutham & Aldridge, 2013) reported a statistically significant associations between the set of classroom environment aspects and students' motivation.

The analyses of standardized regression coefficients (β) also revealed that out of six WIHIC scales, three scales (Teacher Support, Task Orientation and Involvement) had a statistically significant and positive influence on students' motivational intensity. This means that the three scales accounted for the variance in motivational intensity though the influence of task orientation was the strongest. The implications of the findings for the three scales of learning environment which accounted for the influence in students' motivational intensity are discussed below.

In this study, the teacher support aspect of learning environment had a significant and positive influence on motivational intensity of students in learning English language. This implies that students are likely to possess high motivational intensity to learn English in classes where English teachers provide them with adequate support. Similar to this finding, Chua et al. (2009) reported that the aspect of teacher support was one of the scales that had positive and statistically significant predictors of students' motivation in Chinese language learning. In Bi's (2015) study, the teacher support aspect of learning environment was associated positively with information medium and immediate achievement motivation types. Aldridge et al. (2012) also indicated that students' motivation is affected by the roles a teacher plays in a class.

The learning environment aspect of student involvement in this study had also a significant and positive influence on students' motivational intensity. Previous studies, such as Bi (2015) and Chua et al. (2009) also found that the involvement aspect was associated with motivation. This implies that students who are given opportunities to involve actively in the process of learning are likely to exert greater effort to learn English language. Students who are encouraged to get involved in class activities, such as asking questions, explaining ideas, giving opinions, using other students' ideas and suggestions in classroom discussions could engage actively in learning English language. Teachers who could create contexts in which students can communicate in English language in real-life situations are likely to motivate students to involve in English language tasks. Aldridge et al. (2012) suggest that students need to be provided with opportunities to involve in class discussions and teachers should encourage their students to attend actively what is taking place in a classroom.

Task Orientation scale in this study strongly accounted for a statistically significant and positive influence on students' motivational intensity in learning English. This finding agrees with the findings of past research which indicated that the aspect of task orientation was a strong

predictor of student motivation (Alzubaidi et al., 2016; Ariani, 2017; Bi, 2015; Chua et al., 2009; Opolot-Okurut, 2010; Velayutham & Aldridge, 2013). Since the role of motivation is vital in learning a language (Dörnyei, 2008), teachers could create a task-oriented classroom environment that motivates students to learn English.

CONCLUSION

The learning environment in a classroom has a crucial role in motivating students' learning (Bi, 2015; Noor et al., 2021; Wei & Elias, 2011). This study focuses on the extent to which the psychosocial aspects of learning environment in English classes influence students' motivational intensity in learning English. The study found that there were significant relationships between each aspect of psychosocial learning environment and student motivational intensity. Among the learning environment aspects, task orientation accounted high variance in student motivational intensity. That is, each aspect of psychosocial environment tends to predict the motivational intensity of students in learning English. It seems that the aspect of task orientation strongly influences student motivational intensity. It was also found out that the combined learning environment aspects had a positive and significant influence on student motivational intensity. Nevertheless, only three of the six learning environment aspects, namely, task Orientation, student involvement and teacher support accounted for a statistically significant and positive influence on students' motivational intensity although the influence of task orientation was likely to be the strongest. It means that teacher support, student involvement and task orientation aspects of learning environment are likely to influence students' motivational intensity in learning English. In particular, the contribution of student involvement and task orientation aspects are consistent in influencing students' motivational intensity. This implies that a classroom environment that is involving and task oriented tends to motivate students in learning English. Therefore, it is appropriate to create teacher supportive, involving, and task oriented English classroom environments to boost students' effort and engagement in learning the English language. Considering their roles in a classroom, teachers should show interest in students' work and should be helpful and friendly to students in a classroom so that students' motivation to learn English can be enhanced. It is also important that teachers provide students with clear goals of language learning in order to motivate students to learn English.

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