

# Factors Affecting Learning Environment of English Language Learners at Universities

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## Abstract

The role of environment becomes more crucial in case of learning second or foreign languages. English proficiency skills can be acquired and utilized well in a learning friendly environment. The current study is an attempt to investigate the factors which affect learning environment of English language learners at government universities. In this context a questionnaire survey-based research design was used by following interviews with senior teaching staff members and administrative officers. Some universities in Myanmar still lack language learning facilities and qualified teachers (Average mean=3.52). The collected statistics also revealed that comments were in favour of fulfilling English teachers' teaching demands as their mean score was 3.97. The data revealed that university policy for teachers' performance is always fair and transparent as the mean score was 3.77. Teachers comment that university provides them most of the time with friendly and supportive atmosphere as most of the rating about the

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statements were with average Mean 3.58. According to students, they get moderate benefits (Mean=4.08) from the university events arranged for them. Thus, this research has found out teacher participants' positive views towards the university policy and university administration role. However, students remain neutral on expressions of views. The paper recommends that the existing facilities should be upgraded and significantly improved by the government.

**Keywords:** English language learner, Learning environment, Factors

## **Introduction**

Environment has strong effect on the development and growth of human beings right from the mother womb. Educational process is nurtured in physical, social, cultural and psychological environment. Various research studies were conducted to check the performance of students in old building and new buildings of universities. The studies found that significant number of students performed better in new building than students in old building.

### *1. Statement of the Problem*

The absence of suitable environment makes it difficult for the learners of a foreign language to learn the language easily and comfortably. A dire need is felt to make the university environment suitable for the adult learners to learn any native or foreign language. State-run universities in Myanmar faced plight situations in early 90s. However, the situation is being changed rapidly for the last two decades where concerned authorities shifted their attention to improve teaching learning conditions which could compete with the global challenges. Investments in upgraded classroom environments often incorporate features such as tiered (or stadium) seating, customized lighting packages, upgraded desks, and individual student computers (Conway, 2000). This study investigated the important factors that are necessary for establishing effective language learning environment at universities.

## **Literature Review**

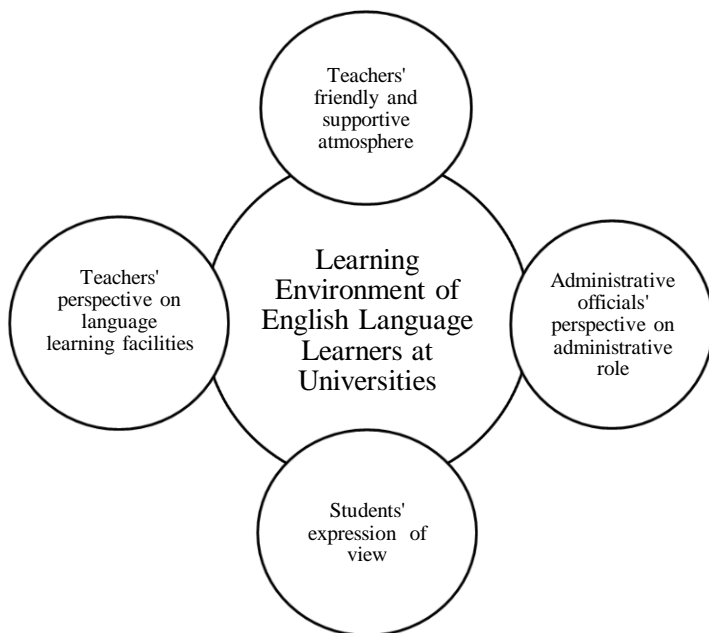
In learning environment, elements of teaching-learning process include: teacher, students, content, learning process and learning situation (Arul Laurence, 2012). The teacher as an individual personality is an important factor in the learning environment. They are key factors that create a favourable teaching-learning milieu that will make the instructional process easy, enthusiastically adaptable and useful (Usman, 2019). The way in which his personality interacts with the personalities of the students helps to determine the kind of behaviour which emerges from the learning situation (Usman, 2019). Environmental factors like classrooms, textbooks, equipment, school supplies, and other instructional materials etc. are the physical conditions needed for learning (Usman, 2019).

The extent to which students' learning could be enhanced depends on their location within the school compound, the structure of their classroom, availability of instructional facilities and accessories. It is believed that a school with adequate learning environment contributes to stir up expected outcomes of learning that will facilitate good academic performance, by encouraging effective teaching and learning (Duruji et'al, 2014). Learning environment encompasses learning resources and technology, means of teaching, modes of learning, and connections to societal and global contexts. The term also includes human behavioural and cultural dimensions, including the vital role of emotion in learning. The learning environment is a composite of human practices and material systems, much as an ecology is the combination of living things and physical environment. Contemporary learners deserve learning spaces that meet their individual and collective needs. To meet this challenge, educational leaders must provide physical and cultural environments that are empowering and engaging (Usman, 2019).

According to (Khan, 2019), the problems of learning English language derived from many different factors in different environments such as school resources, class size, quality of teachers, and the school attendance of learners. This paper, therefore, examines the concept of learning environment and its relationship with students' performance.

Most government universities lack basic facilities including university building, number of classrooms and availability of teacher according to the number of students. Although some universities have proper university buildings, science labs, classrooms, computer labs and playgrounds but

these universities are so much populated that students never get proper opportunity to flourish. Building conditions such as lighting, temperature, student comfort, and classroom technology are significantly positively related to student outcomes, including performance and attitude (Fisher, 2001& Hurst, 2005). However, there have been relatively few studies that have examined the impact of classroom environment at institutions of higher learning (Siegel, 2003). Tsavga (2011) asserts that the learning environment plays a crucial role in determining students' success as it determines how a student behaves and handles his learning tasks. Indeed, the environment in which one finds himself tends to mould his behaviour so as to meet the demands of learning. Teachers' friendly and supportive atmosphere, teachers' perspective on language learning facilities, administrative officials' perspective on administrative role and students' expression of view are important factors which affect learning environment of English language learners.



*Figure 1.* Factors affecting learning environment of English language learners.

## Research Objectives

Environment of universities play an important role not only in the academic development of the students but influence their personality as well. Therefore, it is necessary that such environment should be provided where they can get the opportunity to learn quickly and groom well (Horwitz, 2000). The objectives of the present study were:

1. To investigate learning environment of the government universities.
2. To explore whether students get proper opportunity to flourish.

## Methodology

### *1. Research Design*

It was a prospective cross-sectional questionnaire study. Quantitative survey data as well as in-depth qualitative data are collected from survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews over a period of two months.

### *2. Population and Samples*

The samples were composed of 211 English specialization students and 33 language teachers from government universities of Myanmar. In addition, 17 university administrative officials at these universities were also selected by using convenient sampling technique. Participants' demographic characteristics are given in the following tables.

Table 1

*Demographic Data of University Administrative Officials (n=17)*

SN	Variables	Number	Total	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	5	29.41%
		Female	12	70.59%
2.	Length of service	1 to 5 years	3	17.65%
		6 to 10 years	7	41.17%
		11+ years	7	41.18%

Table 2

*Demographic Data of English Teachers (n=33)*

SN	Variables	Number	Total	Percentage	
1.	Gender	Male	13	33	39.39%
		Female	20		60.61%
2.	Teaching experience	1 to 5 years	10	33	30.30%
		6 to 10 years	12		36.36%
		11+ years	11		33.34%

Table 3

*Demographic Data of English Specialization Students (n=211)*

SN	Variables	Number	Total	Percentage	
1.	Gender	Male	38	211	18.01%
		Female	173		81.99%
2.	Years of study	Second Year	62	211	29.38%
		Third Year	70		33.18%
		Fourth Year	79		37.44%

### 3. Instruments and Procedures

A questionnaire was used to collect data from students, teachers and university administrative officials about the effect of university environment on the academic performance of the students. This questionnaire consisted of five different components. Each component consisted of different statements and five-point Likert scale was given to the participants to scale their responses. Interview survey was also done with university authorities.

### 4. Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed to the students during the class by the author. It took about twenty minutes to answer the questions. In this study, the interviews were also used to collect the data. It took 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey. All the participants received written information and gave their consent to participate according to the research ethics clearance procedures in the respective jurisdictions.

## 5. Data Analysis

The simple descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data. The percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the quantitative data by applying SPSS version 15.

### Results

The data collected from questionnaire revealed opinions of students, teachers and university administrative officials related to different factors which affect learning mechanism of EFL learners at government universities of Myanmar. The following table shows whether selected universities are well-structured with language learning facilities and qualified as well as experienced teachers.

Table 4

#### *Teachers' Perspective on Language Learning Facilities*

SN	Statement	M	SD	Measurement
1	Computer is used for English teaching purpose in my university.	3.46	0.65	Yes, most of the time
2	Audio-visual aids are used for making English language learning easy.	3.53	0.67	Yes, most of the time
3	English teachers use latest technology in classroom.	3.39	0.56	Yes, sometimes
4	Teachers also use authentic material for teaching language.	3.33	0.57	Yes, sometimes
5	Teacher provides extensive reading material for teaching English.	3.50	0.67	Yes, most of the time

Table 4 (continued)

SN	Statement	M	SD	Measurement
6	Teachers discuss local affairs for learning purpose.	3.63	0.71	Yes, most of the time
7	Teachers discuss global affairs for learning purpose.	3.83	0.78	Yes, most of the time
8	Teachers also introduce world history for language leaning.	3.52	0.73	Yes, most of the time
9	Economic challenges are discussed for language learning.	3.47	0.68	Yes, most of the time
	Average	3.52	0.67	Yes, most of the time

Note: 1.00-1.80=No response, 1.81-2.60=No, never, 2.61-3.40=Yes, sometimes, 3.41-4.20=Yes, most of the time, 4.21-5.00=Yes, all the time

Table 4 mentions teachers' perspective about university environment. The statistics collected from the questionnaires revealed that majority of participants agreed that computer and other technologies were used most of the time for English teaching purpose in the university as average mean scores was 3.52. However, some of them agreed that teachers discuss local, global and historical issues for teaching English language as the mean value was 3.63 and 3.83. However, many universities still lack basic resources like buildings, furniture, drinking water, instructional materials, and qualified teachers. Due to rapid increase in population, number of universities could not be increased in the country. Digital literacy and computer mediated technology have made university environment learner friendly. However, the university reforming and revolution plan is much slower than the need and expectations.

Building in a university community is a means of fostering academic success. Students who experience their university as a caring community become more motivated, unambiguous and engaged in their learning. Students' active connection with head teachers and their perceptions that



head teachers care about them stimulate their effort and engagement in English language class.

After that, administrative role of university has been investigated through the interview survey with university administrative officials. They discussed that in a good university, every member is important in the decision-making process, and students should be usually disciplined and possess positive academic attitude.

Table 5

*University Administrative Officials' Perspectives on Administrative Role of University (n=17)*

SN	Statement	M	SD	Measurement
1	Teaching staffs are fully aware of the needs and demands of English learners.	3.99	0.74	Yes, most of the time
2	Teacher-student ratio in English class is according to international standards.	4.00	0.85	Yes, most of the time
3	University authorities fulfill English teachers' teaching demands.	4.05	0.78	Yes, most of the time
4	Teachers are given appreciation from university authorities.	3.86	0.75	Yes, most of the time
5	There is proper monitoring and assessment system of English teachers.	3.98	0.84	Yes, most of the time
6	Teachers share their teaching and learning experiences among one another.	4.06	0.87	Yes, most of the time
7	University offers professional development workshops for English teachers.	3.70	0.81	Yes, most of the time

Table 5 (continued)

SN	Statement	M	SD	Measurement
8	Timetable adequately fulfill English language teachers' needs and demands.	4.16	0.79	Yes, most of the time
	Average	3.97	0.80	Yes, most of the time

Note: 1.00-1.80=No response, 1.81-2.60=No, never, 2.61-3.40=Yes, sometimes, 3.41-4.20=Yes, most of the time, 4.21-5.00=Yes, all the time

Table 5 shows university administrative officials' perspectives about university administration. The statistics collected revealed that comments were in favour of fulfilling English teachers' teaching demands as their mean score was 3.97. Moreover, mostly they were also in favour of the statement on preparation of academic timetable adequately to fulfil English language teachers' needs and demands. However, their comments were not in favour of these statements that teacher-student ratio in English classes are according to international standards and they also admitted that some universities could not arrange to offer professional development workshops for English teachers on frequent basis because of the budget limitation; though other university events take place under their control. They also discussed that university administrative officials regularly monitor the work of the teachers and give needed support in positive manner most of the time.

The role of university administrative officials has a significant influence on the academic achievement of students. Data in the following table shows that majority of participants told that they adopt best measures to develop learning friendly environment in university. They admit that, they should cooperate and provide a more favourable practice regarding fair policy for teachers' assessment and reward criteria. However, they confirmed that they can maintain university discipline and motivate teachers to work hard and they should work together with students on how to attain success in academic and personal life.

Table 6

*University Administrative Officials' Interview Responses on University Policy (n=17)*

SN	Statement	Mean	SD	Measurement
1	University has fair policy for teachers' assessment and reward criteria.	3.55	0.75	Agree
2	University maintains discipline through documented code of conduct.	3.99	0.81	Agree
	Average	3.77	0.78	Agree

Note: 1.00-1.80=Strongly disagree, 1.81-2.60=Disagree, 2.61-3.40=Not sure, 3.41-4.20=Agree, 4.21-5.00=Strongly agree

Table 6 expresses the opinions of university administrative officials' views about university policy. The data revealed that policy for teachers' performance is always fair and transparent at university as the mean score was 3.77; Whereas they respond neutral about the statement on fair policy for teachers' assessment and reward criteria as the mean score was 3.55.

Table 7 shows the teacher participants' views on importance of supportive atmosphere towards students' performance. The environment provided at university has its impact on the academic achievements of the students. Teachers play significant role in maintaining and sustaining a learning friendly environment at university. Moreover, university infrastructure also plays a positive role in motivating students towards language learning.

Table 7

*Teachers' Perspectives on Providing a Friendly and Supportive Atmosphere (n=33)*

SN	Statement	Mean	SD	Measurement
1	Students are trained to bear caring and supportive attitude for fellows.	3.82	0.83	Yes, most of the time
2	Students participate in English speech and debate competitions.	3.26	0.54	Yes, sometimes
3	Teachers always facilitate students who face anxiety in the language class.	3.67	0.74	Yes, most of the time
4	Students are motivated through appreciation and awards.	3.37	0.65	Yes, sometimes
5	University environment brings confidence among language learners.	3.79	0.81	Yes, most of the time
	Average	3.58	0.71	Yes, most of the time

*Note:* 1.00-1.80=No response, 1.81-2.60=No, never, 2.61-3.40=Yes, sometimes, 3.41-4.20=Yes, most of the time, 4.21-5.00=Yes, all the time

Table 7 describes teachers' perspective about providing friendly and supportive atmosphere. Data in statement 2 indicate that some universities could not arrange language contests, competitions and events on frequent basis; though other university events take place under their control (Mean=3.26). According to the statistics, teachers comment that university does not provide them *all the time* with friendly and supportive atmosphere as most of the rating about the statements were with average Mean 3.58. Data also show that according to teachers, university sometimes motivates

and appreciates students as the mean score was 3.37. Data also show that university environment is conducive to English language learning to some extent and it sometimes provides confidence and trust to students to learn and grow.

When students' expressions of views were explored, it has been found that their university environment is supportive and caring, they are less likely to become involved in substance abuse, violence and other problem behaviour. The data in Table 8 indicated that supportive universities foster these positive outcomes by promoting students' sense of connectedness.

Table 8

*Students' Perspective on Expressions of Views (n=211)*

SN	Statement	Mean	SD	Measurement
1	We express our views in English with interest and confidence.	4.05	0.88	Moderate
2	University arranges events that promote English proficiency skills.	4.07	0.82	Moderate
3	We benefit from events and polish our writing and speaking skills.	4.13	0.82	Moderate
	Average	4.08	0.84	Moderate

*Note:* 1.00-1.80= Minimum, 1.81-2.60= Meek, 2.61-3.40= Mild, 3.41-4.20= Moderate, 4.21-5.00= Maximum

Table 8 demonstrates the role of university in motivating learners to express their ideas and opinions in English language. According to students, they get moderate benefits (Mean=4.08) from the university events arranged for them. However, teachers and students opined about same phenomenon differently. According to students and teachers, their university arranges events and programs that facilitate language learning. However, they were of the view that students could not get maximum language benefits from such events.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the current study reveal that physical environment of university is an important factor in enhancing English proficiency skills among learners. There is a significant relationship between physical university environment and students' academic performance. The physical facilities, human resources, and the relationship among them determine the physical environment of the university. Favourable university environment gives room for students to work hard and enhance their academic achievement. The findings also reflect the positive influence of university environment on the learning capacity of language learners.

Effective teachers have the ability to set achievable goals and present content so that students can learn (Good & Brophy, 1994) while building strong relationships with their students in a caring and supportive classroom environment (Cotton, 1995; Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans, 1997). Therefore, the teachers should be friendly and supportive to students, teachers and to university authorities. It is important to note that when healthy teacher-teacher relationship exists in university, it determines learners' academic success, positive attitude, high interest and sound character. If the teachers are motivated and positive, they will have a beneficial impact on their students as well. It is important for the teachers to understand this cause and effect in order to understand how to organize their classroom to create a better learning environment.

## **Recommendations**

### *1. Implications*

Therefore, it is necessary that teacher's attitude should be friendly and positive in teaching and learning environment. Moreover, other research studies conducted by Arul, et al. (2012) also supported the findings of this study and revealed that environment provided them in university not only influence their character but also has a significant influence on their academic achievements.

### *2. Further studies*

In the light of findings obtained from recent study, it is recommended that teachers should understand and appreciate the diverse domestic environment of their students. Thus, teachers should modify their language teaching methodologies according to the needs of the ELLs. It is suggested

for the teachers that they should involve actively with university authorities and get feedback about their student education. Lastly, it is also suggested for future researchers to conduct further research on developing healthy learning environment for ELLs at university level.

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