The Nature of Psychosocial Environment in Arabic Classroom among Malaysian Public Universities

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Abstract: This study discusses the nature of the psychosocial environment for learning the Arabic language in the classroom among Malaysian public universities. This research is significant because mastery of the Arabic language among students is crucial, which is seldom observed in the aspects of teaching and learning only. A total of 494 students from eight Malaysian public universities participated in this study, and the research instrument adopted from Fraser. It consists of six elements, which are Students’ Cohesiveness, Lecturer’s Guidance, Involvement, Task Orientation Collaboration, and Equity. The data analyzed using descriptive statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) by assisting the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS-22). The results of this study showed that the nature of the psychosocial learning environment for learning the Arabic language in the classroom interpreted to derive an analysis of perception scores. Despite positive views from the Malaysian public university students in the classroom environments for Arabic language learning, they are hopeful for an improvement in the six elements of the classroom learning environment.

Keywords: Psychosocial environment, Classroom, Malaysian Public Universities, Arabic language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning environment plays a crucial role in the process of a student’s language learning experience (Dulay, Burt & Krashen 1982; Marshall, 2002; Wan Sakiah Wan Ngah, Kamarulaman Abdul Ghani & Maimun Aqsha Lubis, 2014). He ought to be exposed to an apt learning environment, especially in mastering a second or foreign language. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) suggested the creation of a partial or completely new learning environment for students. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) added that building a conducive learning environment is the sole responsibility of any language center, which is not practiced in the present community.

Psychosocial environment combines both aspects of psychology and social, which forms a new
branch of Knowledge that associates students’ psychological development or emotional needs, which interacts with the social environment (Haliza Hamzah & Joy Nesamalar Samuel, 2014; Ahmad & Ahmad, 2019). In fact, the psychosocial environment shapes a unique internal process, taking place within an individual as a result of interacting with his environment (Che Nidzam Che Ahmad, 2011). A healthy psychosocial classroom environment takes up eight characteristics: (i) comfortable and friendly ambiance, (ii) free from threats and physical harm, (iii) sense of belonging, (iv) sensitivity and alertness towards individual differences, (v) an environment that stimulates learning, (vi) the creation of open communication and encouraging for idea sharing, (vii) stimulates cooperative learning, and (viii) equal opportunity for all students (Haliza Hamzah & Joy Nesamalar Samuel, 2014; Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018). Meanwhile, factors that impact a healthy psychosocial environment are teachers’ teaching approach, students’ learning approach, teachers’ leadership style, students’ learning style, shapes and patterns of communication between teachers and students in the classroom (Haliza Hamzah & Joy Nesamalar Samuel, 2014). All these calls for a significant commitment to creating a good and effective psychosocial learning environment.

Studies on the psychosocial learning environment were first traced to Moos 40 years ago (Shaper, 2008; Okan, 2008; Webster & Hazari, 2009). Moos (1979) outlined three crucial dimensions, which needed evaluating to perceive a holistic impression of any social environment, which are (i) relationship that identifies the nature and intensity of relationship between the individual and his environment, and assesses the extent to which man’s involvement with his environment as well as mutual support, (ii) personal development, which assesses the direction of individual development basis in certain environments, and (iii) change system and maintenance system, which involves the control and arrangement of environment, its clarity in expectation, its maintenance of control and responsiveness towards change, such as classroom rules and clear learning objectives and goals.

Moos’s (1979) research which is related to the three dimensions, was said to be personal and internal. Fraser (1986; 1994; 1998) further developed Moos’s studies by focusing on classroom or laboratory learning environment. Moos’s first dimension, which is the relationship dimension was further expanded into elements of cohesiveness, involvement, cooperation, teamwork and support while the second dimension, which is the personal dimension, was improved into elements of independence, competitiveness and task orientation. Meanwhile, the third dimension, which is the change and maintenance of system dimension was developed to become elements of rules and organization, clarity and equity (Ahmad & Sahar, 2019; Fraser 1998). All three dimensions are inter-related and can be used globally in order to develop and shape the inventory of the learning environment and questionnaire (Fraser 1998; Walker, 2002).

The classroom learning environment for the Arabic language is assessed using a questionnaire called WIHIC (What Is Happening in this Class?), which contains Fraser’s (1998) five psychosocial learning environment. WIHIC has also been used as a research instrument in Singapore (Chua, Wong & Chen, 2011; Goh et al., 1995; Khoo & Fraser, 2008; Quek, Wong & Fraser, 2005; Wong & Fraser, 1996). WIHIC was also used in Turkey (Okan, 2008), Brunei (Dhindsa & Salwana Abdul Latif, 2012), Hong Kong (Webster & Hazari, 2009), Taiwan and Australia (Aldridge et al. 2000), Korea (Kim et al. 2000), Arab countries (Khalil & Saar, 2009) and America (Shaper, 2008). Elements of psychosocial learning are (i) students’ cohesiveness, (ii) lecturer’s guidance, (iii) students’ involvement, (iv) Task orientation, (v) coorporation, and (vi) equity. In specific, this research’s objective is to identify the nature of the psychosocial learning environment in Arabic language classrooms in Malaysian public universities.
This research conducted in public universities, which offer an undergraduate degree in the Arabic language in Peninsular Malaysia. These Malaysian public universities are Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) dan Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). This research only involves feedbacks from undergraduate students of the Arabic language.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research used a quantitative method to determine the influence of the dependent variable onto the independent variable (Hopkins, 2008). This survey research employed a quantitative approach as its data collection and analysis, where a questionnaire was used as its research instrument since the method is the most effective and practical means to gather information (Fowler, 2002; Chua 2006). Collected data through the survey method is believed to be accurate, within the range of sampling error, provided that the validity factor is 0.8 and above (Kerlinger, 1986). Using a survey method has its numerous advantages because it can measure opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values and attitudes, as well as enables generalizing from a sample to population (Creswell, 2005). This survey was conducted a set of questionnaires to obtain needed data where a survey method using questionnaire allows measuring attitude or opinion with whatever number of variables and in the most natural situation (Wiersma, 1995).

A questionnaire is used as a medium to gather data because it is deemed to be more effective with a broader target that ensures cost and time-efficient (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Not only that, distributed questionnaires can be collected directly from the respondents within a short period (Chua, 2006). Hence, the researchers chose to use a quantitative method in the form of a survey, specifically questionnaire because this is deemed to be the most appropriate for this research. This research is also descriptive because the researchers will explain each collected data (Mohd Majid Konting, 2000; Wiersma, 1995) since descriptive analysis is a method that collects data for elaboration, comparison and explaining knowledge, attitude, practice and behavior (Ary, 1985). Hence, a descriptive design is most suitable for this research due to the nature of its findings that are currently taking place and can be used to solve future problems.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented in the form of descriptive statistical analysis where SPSS-20 (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used to process data filtering analysis, carry out the multivariate test and descriptive analysis. A total of 494 respondents participated in this research. The level of psychosocial environment in the learning of Arabic language in Malaysian public universities comprises of six elements, which are (i) Students’ Cohesiveness, (ii) Lecturer’s Guidance, (iii) Students’ Involvement, (iv) Task Orientation, (v) Cooperation, and (vi) Equity are based on mean score, standard deviation and mean interpretation, seen in Table 1 below.
Table 1. Mean score, standard deviation, and interpretation of the level of the psychosocial environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Mean interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coorporation</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Cohesiveness</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Orientation</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer’s Guidance</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>Least Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Involvement</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Least Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Mean</strong></td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above shows the overall mean for the psychosocial environment is very positive (M = 4.13, SD = 0.35) because the mean is at the highest level (Nunnally, 1978). This shows the psychosocial environment is very relevant and needs to be maintained. Findings show mean for four elements for psychosocial environment is at the highest level, which are Equity (M = 4.27, SD = 0.49), Coorporation (M = 4.25, SD = 0.45), Students’ Cohesiveness (M = 4.24, SD = 0.44) and Task Orientation (M = 4.20, SD = 0.44). Students’ perception of these four elements is very positive. Arabic language learners in Malaysian public universities are also satisfied and should be maintained in classrooms. Meanwhile, the mean for the remaining two elements of the psychosocial environment is at an average high level, which is Lecturer’s Guidance (M = 3.98, SD = 0.48) and Students’ Involvement (M = 3.86, SD = 0.44). Students’ perception towards these two elements are lesser positive and calls for improvement, either by the lecturers or students. In general, findings confirm that the level of psychosocial environment for Arabic language learning in Malaysian public universities is high (Nunnaly, 1978). It shows that students are very positive about their psychosocial environment. Details of this psychosocial environment will be further discussed to provide a detailed explanation about the level of psychosocial components.

**Equity (Equality)**

Equity is the sixth element in the psychosocial environment, which involves students’ opinions at understanding their equal treatment. The construct for this section contemplates students’ perception of the lecturer’s amount of attention given to them as compared to others. The overall mean for all the items in this section is 4.26 and the standard deviation is 0.49, which is the highest level indicating a positive interpretation.

**Teamwork**

Coorporation is the fifth element in the psychosocial environment which observes the extent of students’ coorporation with others, working together, sharing materials and books as well as ideas or information at striving for the same goal. The overall mean for all the items in this section is 4.25 and the standard deviation is 0.45, which is the highest level indicating a very positive interpretation.
The highest mean for the element of Coorporation is item *Working together with other students when finishing the class assignment*, which is mean 4.35 and a standard deviation of 0.56. Findings show a total of 96.0% (N = 474) agreed and agree which provides an interpretation that students’ perception is very positive on the item of *Working together with other students when finishing class assignment* and this item ought to be retained, as compared to only 4.0% (N = 20) for those who are uncertain.

All items in the element of Coorporation is at the highest level, such as *working together to complete assignment with other classmates* (M = 4.31, SD = 0.58), *group work in classrooms* (M = 4.28, SD = 0.61), *learning from other students in the classroom* (M = 4.26, SD = 0.64), *working with other students on project in the classroom* (M = 4.26, SD = 0.61), to a point that the last item is sharing books with other students when finishing assignment (M = 4.13, SD = 0.73). It provides an interpretation that students’ perception of all the items under the element of Coorporation is very positive and needs to be retained.

**Students’ Cohesiveness**

The first element in the psychosocial environment is Students’ Cohesiveness. Students’ cohesiveness involves the relationship between students in the classrooms such as mutual acquaintanceship, friendliness and rendering help to one another. The overall mean for all the items in this section is 4.24 and standard deviation 0.52, which is at the highest level indicating positive interpretation of students’ perception in Malaysian public universities on the element of Students’ Cohesiveness. The highest mean for the element of Students’ Cohesiveness is *Students in this classroom are my friends* (M = 4.42, SD = 0.61). Findings show that 94.8% (N=468) agree and strongly agree that they are classmates. Meanwhile, 4.9% (N=24) are not certain that they are classmates and only 0.4% (N=2) do not perceive friendship among their classmates. It shows that students’ relationship in an Arabic language classroom is extremely good. Similarly, the item on assistance from other students also received the second-highest mean score (M = 4.36, SD = 0.58), which shows that most students are very much independent of their classmates.

Item related to getting acquainted with other students to receive the third-highest score (M = 4.31, SD = 0.65). It shows a close relationship between the students. The lowest mean for students’ cohesiveness is helping other students who are with assignment problems (M = 4.09, SD = 0.59), which shows that most students rarely contributed among themselves in the classroom. Nonetheless, such an item remains the highest score, which gives a very positive interpretation.

**Task Orientation**

Students’ Task Orientation is the fourth element in the psychosocial environment, which is related to well-organized and clear individual tasks. This construct observes the extent of students’ active involvement in classroom activities, which is appropriate with students’ capacity. The overall mean for all items in this section is 4.20 and the standard deviation 0.44, which is high level and giving a very positive interpretation. The highest mean for the element of Task Orientation is solving task which needs to be performed that is mean 4.39 and standard deviation 0.53. Meanwhile, the percentage of uncertain students is tiny, which is 2.0% (N = 0).

All items for the element of Task Orientation are at the highest level which are *informed about the required task* (M = 4.32, SD = 0.57), *attempting to understand the classroom task* (M = 4.28, SD = 0.52), *students are aware of classroom goals* (M = 4.25, SD = 0.63), *informed about the targets that need to be achieved in classrooms* (M = 4.18, SD = 0.60), *performing as many tasks that have been
assigned (M = 4.13, SD = 0.59), providing full attention during classrooms (M = 4.05, SD = 0.62) and finally, consistently ready to follow classes on time (M = 4.03, SD = 0.70). It provided an interpretation that students’ perception of all the items for the element of Task Orientation is very positive and needs to be maintained.

**Lecturer’s Guidance**

Lecturer’s Guidance is the second element in the psychosocial environment, which involves the attention on students’ every need during the process of teaching and learning. Lecturers continuously enrich their technique during the process of teaching and learning and are aware of students’ problems by increasing discussion sessions so that students’ interest in the Arabic language is developed.

Overall mean for all the items in this section is 3.98 and standard deviation 0.48, which is at the average high, gives an interpretation that Malaysian public university students’ perception is lesser positive on the element of Lecturer’s Guidance. The highest score for the element of Lecturer’s Guidance is the lecturer’s inquiry that shapes students’ understanding, which is mean 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.58. Findings show as much as 92.5% (N = 457) agree and strongly agree with the lecturer’s technique of posing questions or inquiries in teaching and learning. Meanwhile, 7.1% (N = 35) is not certain with the effectiveness of the lecturer’s use of the questioning technique in teaching and learning. The percentage of students who did not agree is too small, which is 0.4% (N = 2). There are two more items under the element of Lecturer’s Guidance, which scored the highest mean that our lecturer’s guidance when students encountered with learning problems (M = 4.18, SD = 0.62) with the percentage of respondents agree and strongly agree to amount 88.9% (N = 439) and lecturer’s interaction with students (M = 4.15, SD = 0.61) with the percentage of respondents’ agree and strongly agree totaling 89.7% (n = 443).

Meanwhile the following five items are at an average high, which are lecturer’s interest to solve students’ problem (M = 3.99, SD = 0.74), lecturer approaches students when speaking to students (M = 3.99, SD = 0.73), lecturer uses an exceptionally different way to help students (M = 3.79, SD = 0.74), lecturer is concerned about students’ feelings (M = 3.79, SD = 0.75) and finally, the lowest recorded mean for the item lecturer provides specific attention on students’ welfare (M = 3.73, SD = 0.70). It shows that students’ perception of the five items for the element of Lecturer’s Guidance is lesser positive and needs to be reassessed.

**Students’ Involvement**

Students’ involvement is the third element in the psychosocial environment that leads their active involvement in the learning environment in classrooms. Students are directly involved in discussing ideas in classes, providing input, answering the lecturer’s posed questions and explaining their answers to others. The overall mean for all the items in this section is 3.86 and the standard deviation is 0.44, which is interpreted to be at an average high. It shows that students’ active involvement in Arabic language classrooms is least satisfactory, indicating students’ least positive perception.

The highest mean for the element of Students’ Involvement is the lecturer asking questions during teaching, which is mean 4.17 and the standard deviation is 0.59. Research findings show a total of 90.5% (N = 447) agree and strongly agree with the lecturer’s technique to pose a question during the process of teaching and learning. Meanwhile, 9.3% (N = 46) is not certain about the effectiveness of lecturers’ using inquiry techniques during teaching and learning. Another item that scored the
highest is the item on students' discussion among themselves to solve problems related to the topic (M = 4.00, SD = 0.57). Only two items in the element of Students’ Involvement is at the highest level.

Meanwhile, the seven following items are the level of average high, which is discussing numerous ideas in relation to the topic taught (M = 3.93, SD = 0.62), asking questions to the lecturers during activities (M = 3.88, SD = 0.68), giving opinions during classroom discussions (M = 3.86, SD = 0.64), explaining ideas to classmates during discussions (M = 3.85, SD = 0.64), lecturer’s request to explain on solving problem related to the topic taught (M = 3.72, SD = 0.70), ideas used in the discussion (M = 3.68, SD = 0.64) and finally, suggestions used in the discussion (M = 3.67, SD = 0.67). This shows lesser active students during teaching and learning and their lesser positive perception on most items in the element of Students’ Involvement.

Data analysis shows Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities are extremely satisfied with their psychosocial environment. Results from the analysis also indicate the perception of Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities is extremely satisfactory, which is equity (equality), followed by the aspect of cooperation, students’ cohesiveness and finally, task orientation. It shows that Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities feel that lecturers provide attention to them in the classrooms. Meanwhile, for the aspect of Lecturer’s Guidance and Students’ Involvement, results from data analysis shows that the perception of Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities is at a satisfactory level (average high).

This research also found out that Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities organize group studies to share information on Arabic language learning among themselves for their Arabic language classrooms. Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities posses a’ high spirit of sense of belonging, strong sense of cohesiveness with their classmates. They are also capable of performing given tasks. They strive hard to complete the task at their level best and feel confident with their ability to speak Arabic, which also leads to the increase of their learning achievement. Hence, the results of this research are in line with those that were conducted by Schaper (2008).

In the context of this research, it can be explained how the psychosocial environment in public universities is unique to be discussed. As found in research by Chua, Wong and Chen (2011) in a study on the nature of classroom environment for Chinese language classrooms in Singaporean secondary schools, teachers and students observe positively of their learning environment for Chinese language learning in classrooms. Teachers and students also feel a need to further improve on the available six dimensions of classroom learning environment, which are students’ cohesiveness, teachers’ guidance, involvement, cooperation, teamwork, task orientation and equity. In contrast, Okan (2008) noticed students have a negative impression on their psychosocial environment as a whole.

Okan (2008) found out that Teacher’s Guidance, Investigation, and Cooperation receive the lowest score, as compared to other scales. It is as if students do not accept any sufficient support from the teachers, feeling that the latter do not provide enough time to be available for the students during the process of teaching and learning. The cooperation between teachers and students reduced due to the use of the computer. Although Okan (2008) researched on psychosocial learning environment within the context of the English language in Turkey, its findings reveal students’ competitiveness among each other in several cases, despite an increase in peer interaction when computers are used. Besides that, details to the psychosocial learning are further discussed in great length to provide a clearer
understanding. Attitude is a behavior formed from experience, while perception is one has on a specific object or phenomenon, which is then translated to an action that is created by one individual through a thinking drive. Results from the data analysis show that Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities generally have a positive attitude (high) towards the teaching and learning of Arabic language classrooms.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusions, the students’ perception that the Arabic language is important in the life of a student is very high, followed by an item on students’ proficiency of the Arabic language is good, item on mastery of Arabic language builds confidence at understanding religious knowledge, item on lack of disinterest whenever teacher teaches Arabic language in classroom, item on feeling excited to learn Arabic language, item on striving to master Arabic language well and item on being actively involved during the learning of Arabic language in classroom. It shows that Arabic language students in Malaysian public universities are positive and high confidence that they have a bright future by learning the Arabic language, either in this world or Hereafter. It is supported by the second-highest item (mastering Arabic language builds confidence to understand religious knowledge further) because students are certain that the mastery of the Arabic language will allow them to understand basic Islamic texts better.

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