

Students' Perspectives on Supportive Classroom Environments: A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Universities

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Abstract

A positive classroom learning environment is critical to increasing student engagement, academic success, and general well-being. The main objective of this research was to compare the public and private university students' perceptions about a classroom learning environment. The researcher used a quantitative methodology to compare the public and private university students' perceptions about a supportive classroom learning environment. The study population comprised all public and private university students in Punjab province. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to select two public universities (University of Okara and University of Sahiwal) and two private universities (Superior University, Lahore, and University of Lahore). Data were collected using a survey based on the Positive Classroom Learning Environment Scale from a sample of 407 university students (234 males and 173 females), including 199 from private and 208 from public sector universities. The study suggests that there was a significant difference between the perceptions of public and private university students about a positive classroom learning environment, and it was concluded that private universities are playing a better role than public universities in the development of a positive classroom physical environment. Teachers at all levels of education should consider a model of a positive classroom learning environment.

Keywords: Students' Perspectives, Comparison, Classroom Learning Environment, Public and Private Universities

Introduction

A positive classroom learning environment is critical to increasing student engagement, academic success, and general well-being (Wong et al., 2024). It consists of several components, including supportive teacher-student interactions, collaborative learning opportunities, a safe and inclusive environment, and access to necessary resources (Lakkala et al., 2021). The classroom learning environment has a significant impact on the academic experience and overall achievement of university students. Given the vast disparities between public and private institutions in terms of assets, class sizes, faculty-to-student ratios, and modes of instruction, an instructor's influence on student evaluations, if any, may be obscured (Liu, 2012). The environment for learning in post-secondary education is influenced by several

factors such as institutional characteristics, teaching practices, classroom discipline, and student-teacher interaction (Waldeck, 2024). Private colleges and universities are often seen as offering a more ideal learning environment due to their typically lower student-to-faculty ratios, personalized attention, and closer interaction with instructors (Claiborne, 2022). These factors are believed to enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. Conversely, public colleges, where classrooms are larger, student populations more diverse, and resources less plentiful, could have difficulty creating a class climate as nurturing (Howard, 2019). Studying the students' view of their learning environment is essential in making decisions about methods of teaching and course regulations. Attitude about the Classroom Environment Students with a positive attitude about their classroom have a higher likelihood of being interested, motivated, or academically interested (Kpolovie et al., 2014). Therefore, looking at differences in students' evaluations of the learning environment in private and public colleges may provide important clues about what factors contribute to a good classroom climate. This thesis is a study of student perceptions of a positive learning environment in public and private schools.

Rationale of the Study

A supportive classroom environment plays a crucial role in fostering student engagement, academic success, and overall well-being (Song, 2024). Despite an affluence of literature available on the nature of supportive classroom environments in education, however, there is still a dearth of research that investigates public vs. private university students' perceptions of supportive classroom environments as a whole. Much of the existing writing on this topic tends to take the overall structure of this two-tier system for granted, often overlooking a detailed comparison between the educational experiences offered by each sector. In other words, there is relatively little clear discussion or analysis that directly contrasts what students typically encounter in terms of teaching quality, resources, and learning environment within each type of institution. This lack of explicit comparison means that the unique strengths and challenges of each sector are not fully explored or understood. By addressing this underexplored area, the study contributes to a more profound understanding of how institutional context may shape students' academic experiences and highlights areas for improvement in both sectors. Given this gap, the current study investigated and compared public and private university students' perceptions of supportive classroom environments.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perceptions of students from public and private universities regarding a positive classroom learning environment. Specifically, it was intended to investigate differences in students' views across key dimensions of the classroom environment, including physical, psychological, social, and pedagogical factors, as well as institutional support and resources. The study also sought to determine whether demographic variables, particularly gender, influenced these perceptions. To do this, a set of assumptions was created, suggesting that there were no major differences between students at public and private universities in how they viewed (1) the overall positive classroom learning environment, (2) the physical environment, (3) the psychological environment, (4) the social environment, (5) teaching methods, and (6) support and resources from the institution. Additionally, it was hypothesized that no significant gender-based differences existed in perceptions of the classroom learning environment. These hypotheses guided the comparative analysis, aiming to provide a more nuanced view of how institutional type and student demographics may influence perceptions of classroom supportiveness.

Significance of the Study

Higher education plays a critical role in a country's educational system. A sound, positive classroom learning environment can enhance the effectiveness of higher education. Comparing

the perceptions of students from public and private universities regarding a positive classroom learning environment is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the study would compare public and private university students' perceptions of a positive classroom learning environment. Secondly, this study fills a gap in the literature. Thirdly, the study would also provide resource data for policymakers, master trainers, teachers, educationists, educational planners, administrators, and others involved in various aspects of the education sector. Lastly, this study acts as a foundation for future studies at both the international and national levels.

Review Literature

Good teaching is about creating a good classroom learning environment in which it is easy to learn and in which students feel welcomed, respected, and at ease; they are also provoked and kept on their toes (Calp, 2020). Friendly teacher-student relations, a sense of community and belonging, effective classroom management, stimulating teaching strategies, and access to adequate resources are common characteristics of a healthy learning environment (Burden, 2025). This cocktail of ingredients together serves to reduce anxiety, enhance motivation and ultimately promote learning and growth. This perspective is supported by two key theoretical frameworks: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which highlights the importance of addressing students' basic needs for safety and belonging, and constructivist theory, which suggests that the most effective way to promote active, engaged learning is through positive social environments.

Effectiveness of a Positive Classroom Learning Environment at the Higher Level

In higher education, the positive classroom learning environment was strongly associated with students' academic performance, excellent mental health, and satisfaction with educational experience (Brink et al., 2021). It facilitated active learning, development of critical thinking and in-depth cognizing of the subject matter, and, in this way, students' academic achievements increased (Li et al., 2024). Students who felt supported were more likely to be actively engaged, cooperated with peers and remembered well. These settings also had a positive effect on students' mental health, either due to reduced anxiety or the creation of an emotionally safe and connected environment that helped students in coping with academic or personal stress (Shean & Mander, 2020). They also fostered intrinsic motivation and learning interest by valuing students' input and enhancing autonomy, both of which phrases are vital for success in university (Merdiaty & Sulistiasih, 2024). Furthermore, a positive classroom environment facilitated the formation of critical soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and empathy, and promoted deep social bonds with peers (Le Thi, 2023). It also increased inclusiveness by fostering cultural understanding and appreciation of diversity that enriched learning and better prepared students for life in a globalized world. They also have contributed to increased retention and graduation rates by enhancing students' sense of belonging and institutional loyalty (Al Hassani & Wilkins, 2022). It also prepared students for real-world problems through the practice of professional dynamics, teamwork and respectful discourse and training graduates for success in the diverse and complex workplace (Sykes et al., 2014).

Student's Perception towards Positive Classroom Learning Environment

Student experiences of a positive classroom learning environment have been found to correspond with achievement and gain personal development and well-being (Stanton et al., 2016). A supportive and interactive environment which made learners feel secure, respected and motivated resulted in more fun and more effective learning (Zajda & Zajda, 2021). A key determinant of these perceptions was involvement and belonging. For students who felt they belonged despite their backgrounds and were treated fairly and supported by peers were emotionally secure and motivated (Kiefer et al., 2015). Positive teacher-student relationships also had an important impact. Students valued instructors with a caring, supportive, and

responsive approach who offered constructive feedback and generated a climate of respect and trust, where they felt comfortable to speak forth freely and perform well academically (Guzzardo et al., 2021). Further, inclusive teaching approaches that included diverse teaching methods for instance, group work, multimedia teaching aids and systematic lessons were also reported to cater to various learning styles and increase students' participation (Westwood, 2018).

Students also appreciated communities that fostered personal development and independence. Self-expression, independence, and responsibility-promoting environments lead to the development of creativity, critical thinking, and growth mindset classrooms (Swargiary, 2024). Access to academic resources and support services, such as tutoring as well as direct instruction and enrichment, also contributes to positive perceptions of classroom quality by mitigating academic anxiety as well as deepening learning (Namaziandost et al., 2024). Friends working together added to a sense of togetherness and support. In the classroom that fostered shared goals, teamwork, and constructive conflict resolution, students developed social skills and trust. A clean, organized classroom that is not overcrowded in terms of where students sit or the quantity of visible people aids in attending to the teacher, participation, and concentration. (Dominic, 2023). These correlated factors combined to influence students' perceptions and assessments of their higher education classroom environments.

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, comparative descriptive research design to investigate differences in students' perceptions of positive classroom learning environments in public and private universities. This design was suitable for comparing two distinct groups and enabled the collection of detailed data through a structured questionnaire. The quantitative approach facilitated statistical analysis and allowed the presentation of findings using forms, tables, and graphs, thereby enhancing the clarity and depth of the results (Bergin, 2018).

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size

The population of the study comprised all male and female students enrolled in public and private universities across Due to time and resource constraints, we employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique to reach the entire population. We selected two public universities, University of Okara and University of Sahiwal, and two private universities, Superior University, Lahore and University of Lahore. A total sample of 407 students was drawn, including 208 from public and 199 from private universities.

Research Instrument

The study employed a self-developed questionnaire as the research instrument, specifically a 5-point Likert-scale Classroom Learning Environment Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to compare students' perceptions in public and private universities. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by the research supervisor, academic experts, and subject specialists, leading to revisions and the removal of several items based on their feedback (Bergin, 2018).

To check how reliable the questionnaire was, a pilot study was done with 50 students who were not part of the main study (25 from each university), and using SPSS for analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.873, which means the questions were very consistent with each other.

Findings

Table. 1 *Mean of Positive Classroom Learning Environment (Factors) of Public Sector Universities*

Factors	N	Mean	SD
Physical Environment	208	3.21	.628
Psychological Environment	208	3.80	.634
Social Environment	208	3.46	.635
Pedagogical Approaches	208	3.94	.637
Institutional Support and Resources	208	3.67	.641

Table 1 describes the descriptive statistics for positive classroom learning environments (factors) of public sector universities. The analysis shows the average scores for positive classroom learning environments (factors) as follows: physical environment (average = 3.21), psychological environment (average = 3.80), social environment (average = 3.46), pedagogical approaches (average = 3.94), and institutional support and resources (average = 3.67).

Table. 2 *Mean of Positive Classroom Learning Environment (Factors) of Private Sector Universities*

Factors	N	Mean	SD
Physical Environment	199	4.60	.630
Psychological Environment	199	4.20	.644
Social Environment	199	4.46	.612
Pedagogical Approaches	199	4.44	.625
Institutional Support and Resources	199	4.70	.634

Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics for positive classroom learning environments (factors) of private sector universities. The analysis shows the average scores for positive classroom learning environments (factors) as follows: physical environment (average = 4.60), psychological environment (average = 4.20), social environment (average = 4.46), pedagogical approaches (average = 4.44), and institutional support and resources (average = 4.70).

Table. 3 *Comparison between the Perceptions of Public and Private University Students about a Positive Classroom Learning Environment*

Type of University	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	Sig.
Public Sector	3.61	.620	5.375	405	.000
Private Sector	4.48	.623			

The difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We performed a t-test for an independent sample to compare the perceptions of public and private university students about a positive classroom learning environment. The null hypothesis H01 was rejected because Table 3 showed that the $t(405) = 5.375$ was significant at $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. As a result, it was determined that there was a significant difference between public and private university students' perceptions of a positive classroom learning

environment. The findings indicated that private universities were outperforming public universities in fostering a positive physical classroom environment.

Table. 4 Comparison Between the Perceptions of Public and Private University Students About all Dimensions of Positive Classroom Learning Environment

Dimension	Type of University	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.	Decision
Classroom Physical Environment	Public	3.21	0.628	2.407	405	0.017	Significant
	Private	4.60	0.630				
Classroom Psychological Environment	Public	3.80	0.634	2.253	405	0.005	Significant
	Private	4.20	0.644				
Classroom Social Environment	Public	3.46	0.635	2.268	405	0.014	Significant
	Private	4.46	0.612				
Pedagogical Approaches	Public	3.94	0.637	1.967	405	0.004	Significant
	Private	4.44	0.625				
Institutional Support and Resources	Public	3.67	0.641	2.173	405	0.010	Significant
	Private	4.70	0.634				

Independent sample t-tests were performed to examine public and private university students' perceptions of a positive classroom learning environment in different dimensions. The findings were statistically different ($p < 0.05$) across all dimensions: physical, psychological, and social; pedagogical approach; and faculty support and resources. In each comparison, the mean scores for students from private universities were higher than those for students from public universities, suggesting that private university students had more positive perceptions. The findings suggested that private universities were seen as providing better and more supportive classroom environments in all areas tested, based on the results that showed all six null hypotheses (H01 to H06) were rejected.

Table. 5 Comparison of Public and Private University Students' Perceptions of a Positive Classroom Learning Environment Based on Gender and Locality

Type of University	Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.	Decision
Public Sector	Gender	Male	3.56	0.631	3.345	405	0.001	Significant
		Female	3.67	0.655				
Private Sector	Gender	Male	4.50	0.772				
		Female	4.46	0.532				
Public Sector	Locality	Rural	3.40	0.420	2.466	405	0.011	Significant
		Urban	3.83	0.773				
Private Sector	Locality	Rural	4.45	0.568				
		Urban	4.51	0.703				

The effects of gender and location were examined for the perception of a positive classroom learning environment between students in public and private universities using a t-test for independent samples. Statistical differences ($p < 0.05$) were detected for perceptions according to the gender and area of residence. In public universities, female students had more positive perceptions of the classroom climate compared to their male peers, but the gap was slighter and statistically insignificant in private universities. In both sectors, urban students had more favorable perceptions compared to rural students. These results supported the rejection of the null hypotheses H07 and H08 to suggest that gender and locality had a significant effect on students' perceptions of CLE.

Conclusions

The findings of the data analysis indicated that there were meaningful differences between public and private university students in terms of having a positive classroom learning environment and perceptions regarding its dimensions. Both physical and social environment subcomponents, teaching and resources and support subcomponents were perceived to be more favorable in private universities in each individual survey of both private and public sector students, which reflects that in general private institutions offer a more positive learning environment. Gender and locality were also observed to be statistically significant in affecting students' attitudes in that female and urban students had overall more favorable attitudes than male and rural students, respectively.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare students' perceptions of a positive classroom learning environment in public versus private universities in terms of physical, psychological and social dimensions, pedagogical approaches, and institutional support. Differences are statistically significant for each group of students, and private university students display consistently higher scores than public university students. As a result, the null hypothesis (H01) was rejected, which states that students' perceptions of classroom environments are independent of the type of educational institution attended. These results agree with the studies by Tian and Li (2020), Kaplan and Patrick (2016), and Terenzini et al. (2010), which showed that having a well-maintained physical environment is essential for students and greatly affects their satisfaction and engagement. The research found differences that went beyond the physical environment to encompass psychological and social climates, teaching practices, and the amount of institutional support. These results mirror the observations by Collaço (2017) and Harland and Wald (2018), pointing to the benefit of presenting a supportive and enhanced learning environment to students by adapting a holistic approach. Moreover, gender and place of residence proved to be significant determinants of students' attitudes, with females and urban students reporting more favorable attitudes. This is consistent with Baik & Larcombe, (2023). Finding that background plays into the way education is experienced. Overall, the study provides further evidence for the value of context-specific, inclusive, and well-resourced environments in higher education and emphasizes the need for public institutions to improve classroom contexts to support student outcomes.

Recommendations

The study's findings suggest several recommendations. Future research should consider students' demographic and personal characteristics to find out more about their perceptions of the classroom environment. Expanding the study beyond Punjab to a national level would enhance the generalizability of the results. Similar comparative studies at school and college levels, including teachers' perspectives, could provide broader insights. To improve classroom environments, institutions might consider introducing incentives for teachers, such as awards, certificates, or financial rewards. Additionally, qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups are recommended for more in-depth exploration. Future studies should also examine the influence of socio-economic background and family education, as well as the impact of classroom environments on student achievement.

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