

Chapter 10

English and Arabic Language Learning Environments: Islamic Universities Undergraduates' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The learning environment is defined as “external stimulants” that is exposed or reinforced in learners as a means to challenge their learning experiences. These reinforcements may include physical settings, teaching and learning endeavours, and even cultural and social determiners. This empirical study focuses on the perceived experiences that undergraduates from Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia experienced in their Arabic and English language learning environments. This qualitative study employed in-depth interviews with 60 informants that were selected through criterion sampling, snowballing technique. The analysis utilised template analysis. Emerging themes were compared and contrasted, to find similarities and differences. This chapter does not aim to seek the superiority of one learning environment over another but to appreciate the diversity and concord of these institutions. The findings illustrated overlapping, differentiated themes, which included the abovementioned.

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INTRODUCTION

Bakhshialiabad, Bakshi, and Hassanshahi (2015) provide a comprehensive definition of the learning environment, which encompasses elements such as physical location and facilities, learning situation, and the ethos in which learning takes place for a learner. The overall educational setting, which also includes teaching approach, the way teachers interact with learners, and even the way the school is run or governed constitutes learning environment which can be enriching or detrimental to learner learning. Over the past two decades, researches done on learning environments has revealed that positive learning environments are significantly associated with positive outcomes. This, in turn, has created significant interest in understanding what motivates learners to learn and to engage in the learning process so educators can provide better learning experiences for them which will lead to successful learning outcomes.

Research on the learning environment and its consequent impact on learner learning has been primarily studied from a quantitative point of view (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002). These focus on studies that include the impact of technology on learners' learning environment (e.g. Huang, Chen, & Chou, 2016; Huda, Haron, Ripin, Hehsan, & Yaacob, 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Tang & Chaw, 2016). Recent studies, however, have seen the value of integrating a qualitative approach to investigating learner's perceptions on the learning environment and how they elements such as the classroom, learning resources and teaching approaches lead to better educational attainment. The relationship in which these elements occur helps to facilitate learning as it is imperative that learners' are deeply involved in learning (Hanrahan, 1998). Incorporating a qualitative view of understanding learners' perception and subsequently, their behaviour allows for more nuanced data to emerge and provides a "voice" for learners to share valuable insights with researchers. Thus this study takes a qualitative approach to understand how learning environments across three countries differ, and how learners perceive their learning environment and respond to it. This understanding coincides with social constructionism that believes that one's world or point of view is a mass of life puzzles that they have collected throughout their lifetime, which may rebuild, reconstruct or add on to their past experiences (Andrews, 2012; Boghossian, 2001; Cunliffe, 2008). It is a myriad of interactive events, which becomes a lifelong process, shaping one's way of thinking, their behaviour and outlook towards life. The study also seeks to identify the similarities or differences of Islamic Pedagogy in language teaching across the institutions in three countries. As highlighted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, there is an appreciation of universal Islamic Pedagogy characteristics, and still, an even more acknowledgement in its diversity, in accordance to the social-cultural context of the learners' settings (Nasr, 2016).

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