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Perceptions of MBA students towards learning climate for managerial knowledge

A study of business school in Lahore

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore different cultural dimensions of the learning climate at a business school located at Lahore, Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper reports the result of an empirical study of the learning climate for managerial knowledge at a business school, located in Lahore, Pakistan. A sample of 150 MBA students were asked to respond to a self-designed learning climate scale, in order to assess their perceptions of the learning climate. The study has attempted to measure five dimensions of learning climate, which include culture, learning styles, resources, methodology and environment. In addition to that, we intend to describe the patterns of effective learning climate for business knowledge by the students of the school amid dynamic challenges of globalization and diversity.

Findings – The study revealed that students highly regarded school culture and trust of stakeholders in defining learning climate.

Research limitations/implications – First, this paper reports the results of a business school located in a developing country. Second, the results presented in this paper have important implications for those engaged in the strategic management of business education in Pakistan and other developing countries of South Asia and Africa due similar socio-economic contexts.

Originality/value – The study is first of its kind conducted on a Pakistani business school. It brings forth significant cultural dimensions of learning climate in a developing country.

Keywords Learning, Culture, Business schools, Pakistan

Paper type Research paper

> Intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself (Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology*).
>
> Passion comes from what you contribute rather than what you get (Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*).

Introduction

Learning, when seen in a human perspective is essentially a socio-cultural experience. The individuals construct knowledge from social interactions around them and then create meanings and express them in different ways. By employing "constructivist" paradigm (Forrester and Jantzie, 2005; Jonassen, 1991; Elizabeth, 1997), an attempt has been made in the current study to test empirically the learning climate for managerial knowledge amongst the students of Master of Business Administration (MBA) studying at a private business school, located at Lahore, Pakistan.

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Literature review

Jennings (2000), Ping (1994), Ezell *et al.* (2004), Marshall (2001), Ghokhale (2005), Johnson and Jhonson (1986), Totten *et al.* (1991) and Tinzmann *et al.* (1990) have conducted studies to assess the learning climate in different cultural contexts. Despite their emphasis on different factors which contribute towards effective learning climate, they converge on one theme, which is the social construction of learning by the learners shaping outcome of the learning climate.

Several researchers have discussed students learn best when the learning activities are shared collaborative, cooperative, critical, self-determined and dialogue based (Totten *et al.*, 1991; Johnson and Jhonson, 1986; Ghokhale, 2005; Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Black and Deci, 2000). Both teachers and students socially construct the learning experience in and out of the classrooms. It is not a "stimulus-response phenomenon", as commented by Von Glasersfeld (1995), but a "social construction" of learning experience by a community of learners in a cultural setting of a school. They are engaged in:

> [...] constructing knowledge at various levels of expertise as participant, but also taking stand on the culture of ones' own community in an effort to take up and overcome the estrangement and division that are consequences of participation (Packer and Giocoechea, 2000; Marshall, 2001).

Argyris and Schon (1978) have suggested that learning constitute an act of "detection and correction of error", in human behavior. After detection of error, learning must effect socio-cultural changes in norms, values and objectives of the individuals and organizations alike. It can be argued along with Senge (1990) that learning should not merely, be "adaptive", but also "generative" one, enacting necessary changes in learners' perceptions of the cultural context of the school. It can be suggested that the learning climate which generate conditions of social trust for the learners, based on a culture of sharing, collaboration and care can significantly motivate them not only in understanding some of the critical and abstract concepts of business studies but also help them acquire skills to apply them in real-time management challenges.

Objectives of the study

The study has been designed to achieve the following objectives. It is hoped to show that learning climate for managerial knowledge is most effective, when:

H1. School culture encourages sharing, innovation, participation and group learning.

H2. Responsive learning resources (of textbooks, multimedia, internet, etc.) are established.

H3. Environment of trust is constructed by all involved in the learning activity (students, teachers, parents, administration and support services).

Methodology

Target population

The study has been carried out amongst the students of MBA, at the School of Business and Economics, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Further, the sampling frame consists of Masters' level students at the university. Only one business school has been selected at this stage to control biases related to location

and intellectual level. It is expected that students in a single business school belong to same location and educational cohorts.

Sample design

The sample design is based on systematic sampling technique, using a learning climate survey (LCS), assessing responses of the students on a one-five-Likert rating scale. All students at the Masters' level are grouped with respect to different programs, like MBA (professional), MBA (executive), MSBF (Master of Science in Banking Finance), etc. It is believed that there exists an order with respect to intellect among these groups. Within each of such group, 50 students are selected randomly. Following paragraphs are detailing different characteristics of the design.

Sample size

The sample size turn out to be $n = 150$. This is based upon a pilot survey conducted on a very limited scale just to have an idea about the variation present in the data. The inherent dispersion of the population for an issue like learning climate is controlled by the homogeneity of locale and intellect.

Questionnaire

The current study is focusing on five dimensions believed to be the most important differentials for learning climate, as have been stated earlier. These dimensions are including school culture, learning style, learning resources, learning methodology and learning environment. Being highly subjective, these differentials are monitored by a number of models and theories as have been discussed earlier in the first section. Such a synergy leads us to an instrument seeking information on a wide range of features and characteristics. Table II (column 1) is showing 41 different features that have been used in the questionnaire. Following paragraphs are showing how these features are classified for the five dimensions of the study.

School culture

School culture has been measured through statements 1-16. The culture which effectively coaches managerial knowledge, encourages learners to share and participate, culturally sensitive and socially responsible and help them become effective practitioners of business skills is considered to be most significant dimension of the learning climate.

Learning styles

The learning styles of the learners have been rated through statements 17-18. Autonomy versus group learning has been analyzed in these responses. Group learning and collaboration in learning context seems to be another important dimension of learning climate for effective learning and transmission of managerial knowledge to the learners.

Learning resources

Learning resources have been assessed through statements 19-26. Learner's responses to traditional versus modern learning resources have been analyzed. These features assess relevancy of the managerial knowledge to contemporary learning needs. Multimedia, internet and other audiovisual learning resources for the learners are all part of this dimension of learning climate.

Learning methodology
Learning methodology has been rated through statements 27-35. The pedagogical skills of the teachers such as care for learners, respect for cultural differences during instructional work, diversity, objectivity and originality in the instructional work and how it shapes in the construction of general learning climate for the managerial knowledge.

Learning environment
The environment happens to be another important dimension of the learning climate. It has been measured through statements 36-41. The learners' motivation, satisfaction of stakeholders and trust constitutes important features of this dimension of the learning climate.

Table I is explaining this classification.

Data analysis
The data analysis has been done by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The type and nature of the already mentioned objectives and subsequent hypotheses is asking for a multivariate factor analysis which would convert all the questionnaire variables into sorted clusters which then may be ascribed to hypothesized characteristics. Fortunately, the factor analysis is not asking for many assumptions to be satisfied for an apt application. The most important question is the selection of extracted factors which would directly affect the contents of information in the subsequent analysis. The reliability of the data used may be ascertained by Cornbach α.

Research findings

Research findings have been categorized in accordance with the hypotheses. However, the data should be tested for internal consistency and reliability. Cornbach α value turns out to be 0.9332 which is signifying acceptable internal consistency and reliability in the data. A multivariate factor analysis is carried out using principal component extraction applied on a covariance matrix. In total, 41 different characteristics have been studied in the questionnaire. Following is a scree plot showing the relative importance of the extracted factors (Figure 1).

The scree plot is suggesting a four- or five-factor solution. The numeric for this analysis are revealing that a four-factor solution is accounted for 64 percent of the total information contained in the data while a five-factor solution goes up to 73 percent. Linearity of the line after five factors is suggesting the non-importance for the rest of factors. The next step is the sorted clustering of all the available characteristics within these extracted five factors. This would be done with the help of factor loadings available in Table II.

Table III is an attempt for sorted clustering. First column is showing extracted factors in decreasing order of importance; factor 1 is the most important, factor 2 is the second

Table I.
Five dimensions of LCS

1-16	School culture
17-18	Learning style
19-26	Learning resources
27-35	Learning methodologies
36-41	Learning environment

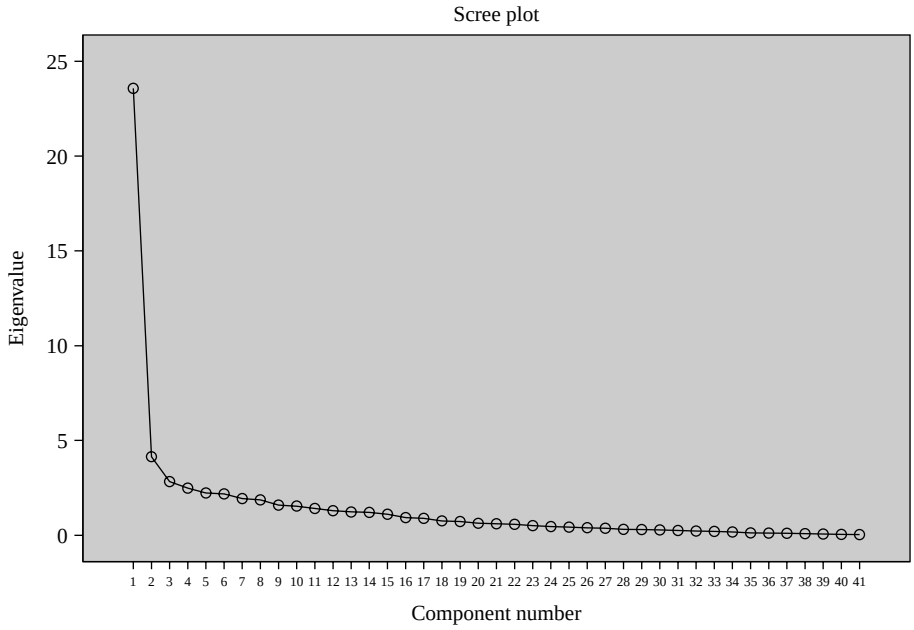

Figure 1.
Five-factor linearity of learning climate

most important, and so on. Second column is showing what these factors are representatives of. So feature no. 16, 36 and 40 are considered to be the most important in factor 1. As factor 1 is the most important factor among all factors, these three are the feature, that can be considered the most important features amongst all. Third column is showing the internal attachment of these features with respect to their cluster membership. By using correlation to measure this strength, the very first is the first canonical correlation (contributing 71 percent of the contents) while the remaining are Pearson correlation coefficient. The asterisks besides these coefficients are showing the statistical significance of these coefficients; three asterisks are indicating the highest while a lower number of asterisks are showing lesser.

Reading Table III in connection with Table I gives the statistical veracity of the hypotheses defined in section on objectives of study. Column 4, of Table, is an attempt to designate proper nouns for extracted sorted clusters. Feature nos. 16 is showing the supreme importance of school culture measured here in this study of learning climate for managerial knowledge. This importance may be generalized for other domains in other types of schools. However, such generalization should be tested through a separate instrument. Feature no. 36 and 40, the second and third most important features, showing the importance of learning environment. Subsequent rows are ordering other dimensions. It is quite interesting to note a complete absence of the dimension, named learning methodologies, and repeated presence of school culture and environment. The school culture is viewed through a 16-edges polygon but the most important edges are the class participation and professional knowledge (and not general knowledge). The learning environment is also a six-edges polygon but the most important edges are related to class participation and professional knowledge.

	Raw Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Participate in positive learning experience in the classroom	0.339	0.037	0.644	−0.006	0.032
2. Become self-aware	0.762	0.204	0.238	0.011	0.253
3. Exhibit their personal talents	0.671	0.487	−0.038	0.204	0.166
4. Unleash their creativity	0.547	0.345	0.143	−0.002	0.377
5. Share knowledge and information frankly in the classrooms	0.736	0.513	0.475	−0.008	0.026
6. Broaden their vision by knowledge of social science, humanities and arts	0.628	0.659	0.421	−0.109	0.127
7. Cultivate effective communication skills, e.g. (spoken, written, etc.)	0.588	0.435	−0.388	0.042	0.183
8. Present innovative ideas in the classroom without fear	0.654	0.546	0.046	−0.226	0.109
9. Rid themselves of cultural stereotypes about gender, language and ethnicity	0.493	0.408	0.002	−0.411	−0.064
10. Know the ethical implications of modern business practices	0.590	0.164	−0.013	−0.245	−0.237
11. Take responsible decisions about their classrooms, projects/assignments	0.794	0.091	0.395	−0.659	−0.147
12. Simulate and reproduce solutions to real-time business problems in the classrooms	0.760	0.230	−0.188	0.079	−0.220
13. Develop social responsibility towards the community/ peoples in which they live	0.583	0.047	−0.357	0.028	0.211
14. Enhance cultural sensitivity to the values and norms of different cultures in handling business affair	0.664	0.401	0.009	0.154	0.227
15. Know the Islamic basis of trade, finance and business in modern world	0.723	0.261	−0.227	0.453	−0.128
16. Acquire effective business and managerial knowledge	0.944	0.323	0.127	0.147	−0.068
17. Perform their task alone	0.743	0.304	−0.187	0.074	−0.431
18. Perform/learn their task in groups	0.824	0.137	−0.040	0.289	−0.483
19. Multimedia and audiovisual interaction of lesson plans in the classroom	0.654	−0.505	0.169	0.200	−0.093
20. Traditional and personal way of imparting classroom instruction	0.703	−0.198	0.124	0.006	0.115
21. Relevant text books on management disciplines	0.768	−0.191	−0.029	0.080	−0.046
22. Information about cross-cultural interactions in business management	0.671	−0.233	−0.031	−0.214	−0.433
23. Insight into global interdependence in business and trade through curricula and text books	0.817	−0.182	−0.097	0.295	0.260
24. Knowledge on environmental issues in business	0.722	0.067	0.244	0.133	−0.040
25. Awareness about universal dignity of human agent in business market place through written and visual materials	0.875	−0.066	−0.079	0.163	0.145
26. Access to modern sources of knowledge such as internet, multimedia, etc.	0.922	0.019	−0.221	0.165	−0.358
27. Open and frank discussions on problems faced by the business community	0.901	−0.019	−0.018	−0.149	−0.373
28. Exposure to diverse management philosophies in the classroom	0.711	−0.038	−0.225	0.442	0.136

Table II.
Factor loadings of learning climate

(*continued*)

	Raw Component 1	2	3	4	5
29. Care towards student's concern in/out of classrooms	0.627	−0.661	0.674	0.023	0.001
30. Discipline during instructional sessions	0.570	−0.340	0.348	0.197	−0.111
31. Discrimination due to cultural differences such as gender, color, language and ethnicity, etc.	0.754	−0.129	−0.388	−0.488	0.295
32. An ability to bring in the knowledge and wisdom of other cultures for the benefit of students during their instructional activity	0.761	−0.296	−0.273	0.113	−0.081
33. Engage their students morally and intellectually	0.933	−0.160	0.123	0.247	0.101
34. Fair play, impartiality and justice in assessing the performance of students	0.930	−0.280	−0.023	−0.186	0.053
35. Apply narratives, stories, jokes and games to make classroom activity interesting	0.938	−0.145	−0.282	−0.034	−0.034
36. Respect for cultural difference in classroom	0.978	0.017	0.141	0.176	−0.122
37. Trust and reliability	0.867	−0.477	0.218	0.019	0.186
38. Regular interaction of faculty, support staff and facilities department with students	0.743	−0.541	−0.081	0.012	0.152
39. Satisfaction to its stake holders (participants and parents)	0.819	−0.245	−0.170	−0.278	0.539
40. Motivate students to learn effectively	0.981	−0.157	−0.269	−0.208	0.300
41. Competitive and engaging *vis-à-vis* other business school in the area/city	0.858	−0.202	−0.269	−0.599	−0.326

Table II.

Factors	Important features	Internal correlations among features	Dimensions
1	16, 36 and 40	0.8332***	School culture and environment
2	19 and 26	0.772*	Learning resources
3	1	–	School culture
4	11 and 41	0.811**	School culture and environment
5	39	–	Learning environment

Table III.
Sorted clustering of factors significant in learning climate

A non-sorted hierarchical clustering based on variable clustering employing between group linkages of squared Euclidian distance gives an illusionary picture. A two-cluster solution is completely different from a three cluster's which is different from a four cluster's. Table IV is showing the cluster membership for different features investigated through the questionnaire, available in Table II. Explicitly, the solution is not providing any meaningful and reliable information regarding the clustering. It is always difficult to justify any particular solution. Furthermore, the interpretability of such a solution is also difficult, complex and unreliable. This would dissuade us using this un-sorted hierarchical clustering.

Results and implications of research

The current research is a positive study of the learning climate for managerial knowledge at a private sector business school located in Lahore, Pakistan. The "constructivist" paradigm as discussed in the introduction, was employed and

Table IV.
Cluster membership of factors of learning climate

Cluster no.	Two-cluster solution	Features for Three-cluster solution	Four-cluster solution
1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41	1, 19, 29, 30
2	31	9	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41
3	–	31	9
4	–	–	31

then tested by developing a learners' responses to the five dimensions of the learning climate, designed on Likert rating scale. Each dimension of the learning climate has been then clustered together by grouping features/factors that best suit to them. Interesting corroborations of the propositions of the study were found as outlined in the section on objectives of the study.

In the research results, it has been observed that culture and environment are the most important dimensions of the learning climate for managerial knowledge at the business school. This partially demonstrates that efficacy of the learning climate, is closely linked to the different socio-cultural dimensions interacting with each other. The most important result of the study shows that the learning climate must look into the needs of its stakeholders such as satisfaction and motivation of the learners (Table III). The practicality and effectiveness of the business and managerial knowledge have been considered a highly desirable feature of the learning climate as is evident in the responses of the learners. The school culture which encourages learning of effective managerial knowledge is thought to be most relevant in creating appropriate learning climate for acquiring business and managerial knowledge. Moreover, learning climate, which incorporate values of cultural diversity (in this case described as respect for cultural differences) as responded to in feature 36 (Table III) is also thought to be very effective for learning at the business school. The concept of innovation has also been responded by the learners of the business school very appreciably, as reflected in the use of multimedia, internet and audiovisual aids, etc. thus corroborating the proposition on learning resources fully as hypothesized in the objectives of the study. The learning climate for managerial knowledge is most effective in case of innovative application of modern learning tools available in contrast to traditional instructional techniques.

In the future study can be diversified to ascertain the gender differences reflected in learning climate for managerial knowledge. It would also be interesting to diversify and explore the relationships of the income levels and change of locale (both being important cultural and environmental determinants), such as another business school in Pakistan or some corporate sector organization and find out as to how far five dimensions of the learning climate can be generalized to explain the learning characteristics of these sectors.

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