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University Students' Perceptions of Classroom Climate, Peer Relations, Group Work, and Campus Life

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ABSTRACT

Learning in higher education takes place in a social setting made up of the classroom atmosphere, classmates, group assignments, messaging groups, lecturers, and campus life, yet these conditions are seldom described together from the students' own point of view. Drawing on sociocultural theory and on research on classroom climate, belonging, and soft skills, this study describes how university students perceive six social conditions of their studies and which of them they regard as most and least influential. A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted with 59 students who rated twenty statements on a five-point scale from never to always. The data were analyzed descriptively with means, standard deviations, medians, percentage distributions, and confidence intervals, and a sensitivity check excluded duplicated response patterns. Perceptions were high overall (mean 4.10), with 82 percent of responses at often or always. Lecturer communication and class rules (4.28) and peer relationships (4.22) received the highest scores, whereas classroom climate received the lowest (3.93). Students most strongly endorsed the influence of lecturers' communication on participation and the usefulness of class group chats, and least strongly the problem of information overload in group chats and the disruption caused by crowded classes. The study is novel in presenting these six conditions side by side from one instrument. Because the sample is small and the data are self-reported, the findings are descriptive and indicative.

Keywords: classroom climate; peer relationships; group work; class group chat; campus social environment; university students

INTRODUCTION

University life is lived in social settings as much as in lecture rooms. A supportive classroom social climate is consistently linked to higher student engagement and motivation, and students who perceive their classroom positively are more likely to participate actively and persist (Yang & Liang, 2025; Li et al., 2022; Ramírez Hernández et al., 2024); the question has even been raised whether engagement is possible at all without a positive classroom social climate (Liang et al., 2025). Climate is built jointly by teachers and students, since open discussion thrives where both create an environment that allows it (Siegel-Stechler, 2023), and peer support and perceived classroom justice shape academic engagement (Gao et al., 2025). The ideal is a classroom in which students feel safe, respected, and encouraged to take part, so that they stay engaged until the course is completed. Lecturers are among the most visible shapers of that climate: students' perceptions of the motivational climate created in a course

relate to their engagement and achievement (Li et al., 2022), and open discussion depends on how teachers respond to students' contributions (Siegel-Stechler, 2023).

Classmates matter beyond the classroom atmosphere. A sense of belonging built through peer relationships is regarded as pivotal for well-being and adaptation in higher education, and peer networks and mentoring support first-year adjustment, academic affiliation, and social inclusion (van Lamoen et al., 2026; Dias-Broens et al., 2026; Mauritti et al., 2026). Belonging is not equally distributed: working-class students, for example, often report lower belonging on campus (Bettencourt, 2021).

Group work is the most common structured peer encounter. It supports teamwork, communication, and engagement, particularly when trust and group composition are favorable (Poort et al., 2022; Rister & Bourdeau, 2021), but it is troubled by unequal contributions, team conflict, and logistical barriers (Hassen, 2024). Students manage conflict through collaborative communication and socioemotional regulation (Lobczowski et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2023), and structured task distribution and assigned roles are proposed as remedies for unequal participation (Nweke, 2026; Zhong et al., 2023).

Communication now also runs through class messaging groups. WhatsApp groups are used to share information, discuss coursework, and support one another, and they foster community and engagement in higher education (Prakash & Mishra, 2025; Basitere et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023; Oladokun et al., 2025), although social media can also fragment attention, so that students learn to manage their exposure to it (Su & Cao, 2026). Beyond the classroom, the wider campus environment shapes well-being and personal development: supportive campus and learning environments are associated with soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and social competence (Zhang et al., 2022; Vi, 2026; Chen & Lee, 2024; Viteri Vera, 2021), and campus settings influence emotional well-being through attachment and perceived social acceptance (Chang et al., 2025).

These strands have mostly been studied separately and often with specific populations, such as adolescents, first-year students, working-class students, or learners in particular courses and countries. What remains less visible is a single picture of how undergraduates themselves perceive the social conditions of their studies together, from classroom atmosphere to peers, group work, digital communication, lecturers, and campus life, and which of these conditions they regard as most and least influential. Without such a profile, institutions cannot tell where attention to the learning environment would matter most, nor whether concerns raised in separate studies, such as information overload in messaging groups or unequal contributions in group work, are widely felt among their own students. The present study differs from earlier work by measuring perceptions of all six conditions with one instrument and reporting them side by side.

Sociocultural theory, in which learning is mediated by social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), together with the climate and belonging research reviewed above, guides the study. On this view, the people and settings that students meet are not a backdrop to learning but part of how learning happens. The novelty of the study lies in giving a descriptive profile of six social conditions at once, which allows the strongest and weakest perceived influences to be identified. The topic is urgent because universities rely heavily on group assignments and messaging groups, and because engagement and persistence depend on the social conditions that students experience (Yang & Liang, 2025; Poort et al., 2022).

A descriptive survey is appropriate because the aim is to establish a baseline profile of perceptions before explanatory models are tested. Three questions guide the analysis: which dimensions students rate highest and lowest, which statements they endorse most and least strongly, and whether this pattern is stable when duplicated response patterns are excluded. Accordingly, this study aims to describe how university students perceive classroom climate,

peer relationships and adaptation, group work and conflict, class group chat and information, lecturer communication and class rules, and campus social life and personal development, and to identify the statements that students endorse most and least strongly.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design involving 59 undergraduate students enrolled in the Office Administration Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia. The study population consisted of 110 students, and participants were selected using accidental sampling, a non-probability sampling technique based on the accessibility and availability of eligible respondents. The inclusion criterion was active enrollment in the fifth semester of the study program. Data were collected between September and October 2026. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the respondents prior to their participation in the study. To maintain confidentiality, respondents' names were not included in the analysis or reported in the research findings.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements, each beginning with "I feel that," and answered on a five-point scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). The statements express perceived influences of social conditions, supportive or disruptive, so a high score indicates a stronger perception of that influence rather than a more favorable condition. According to their content and the literature reviewed above, the statements were grouped into six dimensions: classroom climate (3 statements), peer relationships and adaptation (2), group work and conflict (5), class group chat and information (3), lecturer communication and class rules (3), and campus social life and personal development (4). The statements are shown in abbreviated form in Figure 2.

The analysis was descriptive. For each statement, the mean, standard deviation, median, and the percentage of responses at often or always (4–5), sometimes (3), and rarely or never (1–2) were computed. Dimension scores were the mean of their statements, reported with 95% confidence intervals and interpreted with the conventional five-class intervals (3.41–4.20 high, 4.21–5.00 very high). Statements were ranked by their means. Internal consistency of the full scale was estimated with Cronbach's alpha (0.91). A sensitivity check repeated the analysis after excluding exact duplicate response patterns and respondents who gave the same answer to every statement. No inferential tests were applied, so differences between statements and dimensions are descriptive. Analyses were run in Python 3 (pandas and SciPy).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions were high overall: the mean across all statements was 4.10, and of 1,180 responses, 82.3% were often or always, 16.3% sometimes, and 1.4% rarely or never (4 responses of never). At the respondent level, 57 of 59 students had an overall mean in the high or very high range, and 23 in the very high range. Cronbach's alpha for the full scale was 0.91.

Table 1 and Figure 1 present the six dimensions. Lecturer communication and class rules (M = 4.28) and peer relationships and adaptation (M = 4.22) were in the very high range, with 88% and 90% of responses at often or always. Group work and conflict (M = 4.11), class group chat and information (M = 4.10), and campus social life and personal development (M = 4.02) were high. Classroom climate had the lowest mean (M = 3.93), with 75% of responses at often or always.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Six Dimensions (n = 59)

Dimension	Items	M	SD	95% CI	Category	Often/always
Classroom climate	3	3.93	0.46	[3.81, 4.05]	High	75%
Peer relationships and adaptation	2	4.22	0.57	[4.07, 4.37]	Very high	90%
Group work and conflict	5	4.11	0.53	[3.97, 4.24]	High	84%
Class group chat and information	3	4.10	0.64	[3.93, 4.27]	High	78%
Lecturer communication and class rules	3	4.28	0.65	[4.11, 4.45]	Very high	88%
Campus social life and personal development	4	4.02	0.44	[3.90, 4.13]	High	81%

Source: authors' survey data (2025). Scale 1–5; CI = confidence interval.

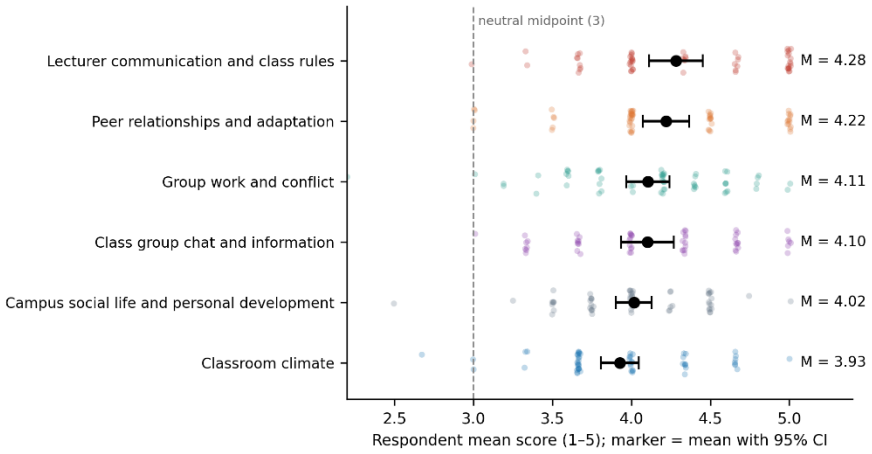


Figure 1. Dimension scores of respondents. Dots are respondents; markers are means with 95% confidence intervals.

At the statement level (Table 2; Figures 2 and 3), the highest means were for lecturers' communication affecting participation (M = 4.39; 92% often or always), the class group chat easing mutual help (M = 4.37; 90%), settling small conflicts through direct talk (M = 4.29; 90%), unequal task division harming relations (M = 4.27; 93%), and open lecturers making the class more comfortable (M = 4.24; 86%). The lowest means were for too much group-chat information hiding key items (M = 3.75; 34% sometimes), an overcrowded atmosphere disrupting lectures (M = 3.81; 39% sometimes), feeling comfortable without interacting with everyone (M = 3.88; 29% sometimes), equal chances to be member or leader of a group (M = 3.92), and the experience of college preparing for work (M = 3.92). Even the lowest statement had a mean above 3.7, and the share of responses of rarely or never did not exceed 5% for any statement.

Table 2. Highest- and Lowest-Ranked Statements (n = 59)

Rank	Statement	M	SD	Often/always (%)	Sometimes (%)
1	Lecturer communication affects participation	4.39	0.70	92	7
2	Class group chat eases mutual help	4.37	0.79	90	8
3	Small conflicts solved by direct talk	4.29	0.70	90	8
4	Unequal task division harms relations	4.27	0.64	93	5
5	Open lecturers make class comfortable	4.24	0.73	86	12
16	College experience prepares for work	3.92	0.53	81	19
17	Equal chance to be member or leader	3.92	0.84	73	24
18	Comfortable without interacting with everyone	3.88	0.74	69	29
19	Overcrowded atmosphere disrupts lectures	3.81	0.75	61	39
20	Too much chat information hides key items	3.75	0.76	64	34

Source: authors' survey data (2025). Ranks 1–5 is the highest and 16–20 the lowest of 20 statements.

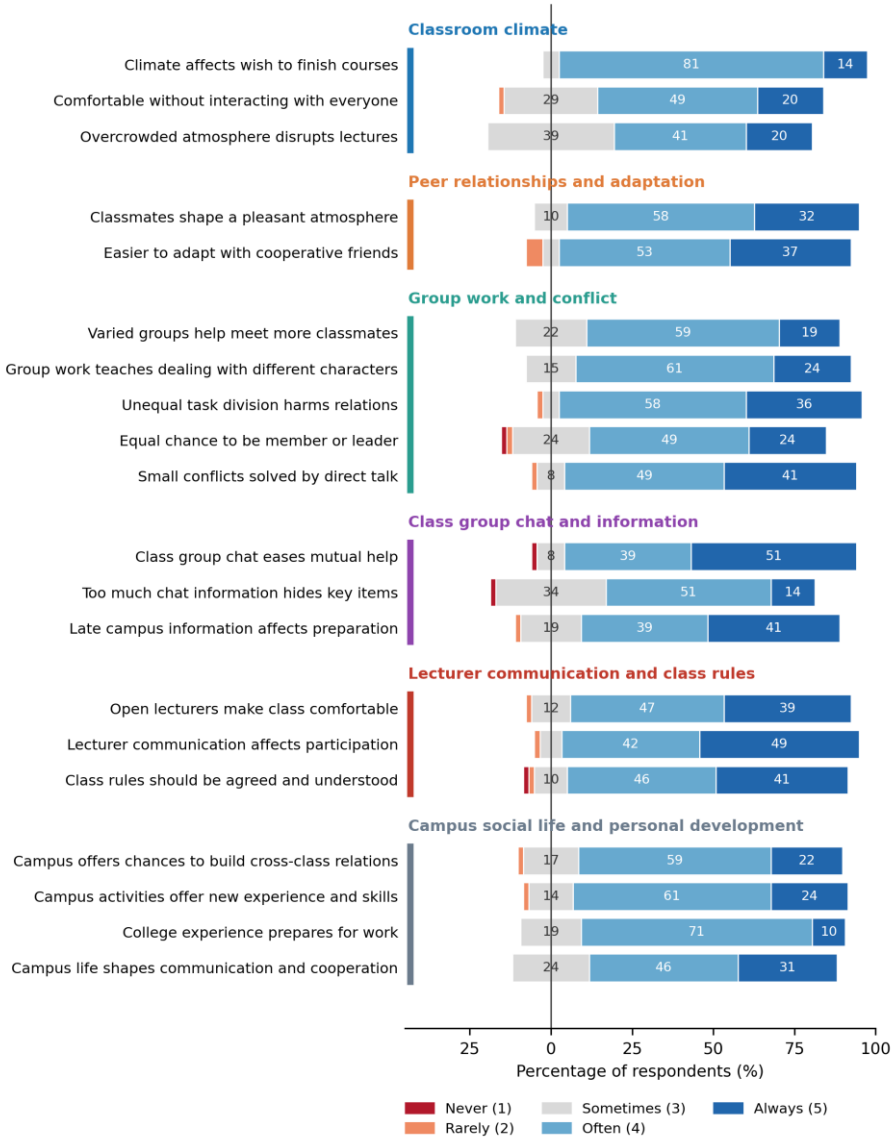


Figure 2. Distribution of responses by statement. Bars are centered on the sometimes category; numbers are percentages (shown when 7% or more).

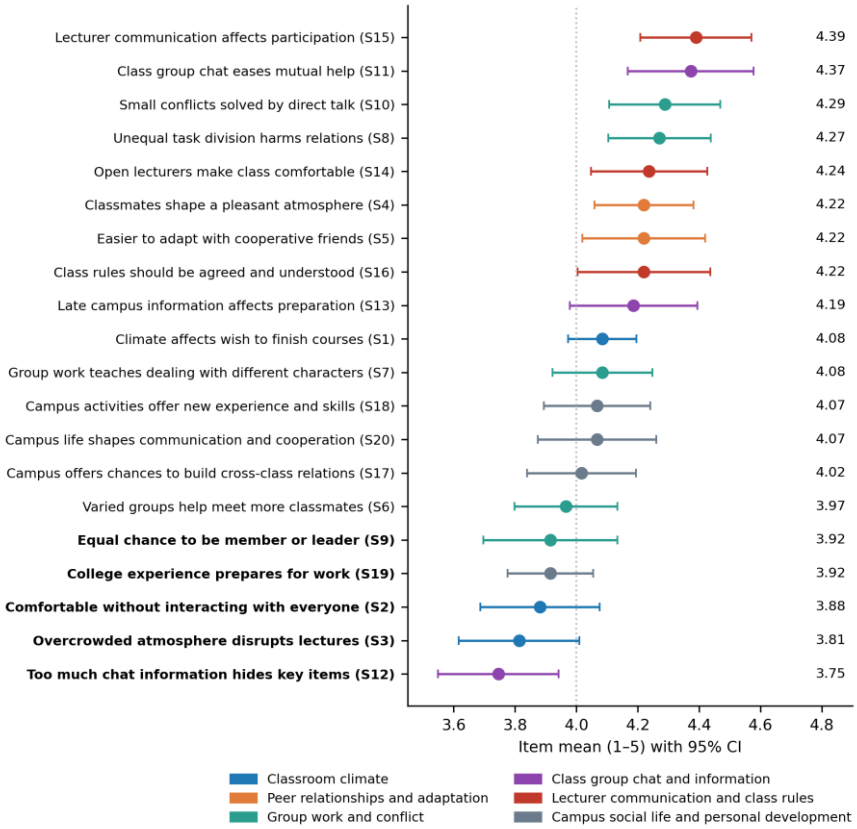


Figure 3. Statements ranked by mean. Markers are means with 95% confidence intervals; the five lowest statements are in bold.

After excluding 12 duplicated response patterns and 1 respondent who answered identically throughout (n = 46), the overall mean was 4.07 and the dimension means ranged from 3.91 (classroom climate) to 4.22 (lecturer communication and class rules). The same statements ranked highest (S15, S11, S10) and lowest (S12, S3, S2) as in the full sample, so the descriptive picture does not depend on the duplicated patterns.

Students perceived the social conditions of their studies as strongly influential, with a mean of 4.10 and most responses at often or always. Because the statements describe influences, this pattern indicates that students attribute considerable weight to classroom atmosphere, peers, lecturers, and campus life, which agrees with research linking classroom social climate to engagement, motivation, and persistence (Yang & Liang, 2025; Liang et al., 2025; Li et al., 2022). The uniformly high endorsement also means that the differences between statements, rather than their absolute levels, are the more informative result.

Lecturer communication and class rules received the highest dimension score, led by the statement that lecturers' communication affects students' courage to participate (M = 4.39). This is consistent with evidence that open discussion thrives where teachers and students jointly create the environment for it (Siegel-Stechler, 2023) and that students' perceptions of the motivational climate relate to their engagement (Li et al., 2022). For lecturers, the practical message is that how they respond to questions and opinions is something students notice and say matters. Peer relationships and adaptation were also very high, in line with the view that peers and a sense of belonging are central to adaptation in higher education (van Lamoen et al., 2026; Mauritti et al., 2026; Dias-Broens et al., 2026).

Within group work, students strongly endorsed that unequal task division harms relations (M = 4.27) and that small conflicts are best settled by direct communication (M = 4.29), echoing

reports of unequal contributions and conflict as typical difficulties (Hassen, 2024) and of communication and regulation as the usual ways of managing them (Lobczowski et al., 2021). The lower score for equal chances to be member or leader (M = 3.92) suggests that fairness in group composition and roles is less settled in students' minds, which supports calls for structured task distribution and defined roles (Nweke, 2026; Zhong et al., 2023). Class group chats were seen as useful for mutual help (M = 4.37), as reported for WhatsApp groups elsewhere (Lee et al., 2023; Basitere et al., 2025), while information overload was the lowest-ranked statement (M = 3.75), with about a third of respondents answering only sometimes. This agrees with the observation that social media can fragment attention (Su & Cao, 2026), and it suggests that the benefit of group chats is widely recognized whereas overload is a more occasional experience.

Classroom climate was the lowest dimension, driven by the statements on crowded classes disrupting lectures and on comfort without interacting with everyone, for which many students answered sometimes. Campus social life and personal development were high, but the statement that college experience prepares students for work was among the lowest (M = 3.92). Research on soft skills ties supportive campus and learning environments to communication and teamwork (Zhang et al., 2022; Vi, 2026; Chen & Lee, 2024), and the present results suggest that students recognize this for communication and cooperation (M = 4.07) more readily than for work readiness.

Several implications follow for managers of learning environments: attention to how lecturers communicate and invite participation, structured roles and fair rotation in group assignments, a clearer organization of class group chats, for example through pinned announcements, and links between campus activities and work readiness. The study has limitations. The sample is small and its profile and sampling are not described; the data are self-reported; the statements are worded as perceived influences and are answered on a frequency scale, so scores indicate strength of perception rather than the favorability of conditions; responses are concentrated at the top of the scale and many respondents gave identical answer patterns, although a sensitivity check showed the same ranking; the grouping of statements into dimensions rests on content; and the analysis is purely descriptive. Future research should add inferential analyses, respondent characteristics, and validated scales.

CONCLUSION

This study described how 59 university students perceive six social conditions of their studies. Perceptions were high overall, with lecturer communication and class rules and peer relationships rated highest and classroom climate lowest. Students most strongly endorsed the influence of lecturers' communication on participation, the usefulness of class group chats, and direct communication for settling conflicts, and least strongly the problem of information overload in group chats, the disruption of crowded classes, and comfort without interacting with everyone.

The findings suggest that universities can improve the learning environment by supporting open and clear lecturer communication, structuring group assignments for fairness, organizing class group chats, and linking campus activities to work readiness. Because the sample is small, the data are self-reported and concentrated at the top of the scale, and the analysis is descriptive, the results are indicative. Replication with larger samples, respondent characteristics, and inferential analysis is recommended.

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