



Understanding Help-Seeking Avoidance among EFL Students and the Social Climate of EFL Classrooms in Thailand

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The important roles of help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of the classroom have been confirmed by research in the past two decades, yet little is known about how these two variables interact with each other. EFL students and classrooms at the university level in Asian countries have also been neglected by preceding research despite their large number and strong presence. On this premise, an investigation was conducted on 427 EFL students (76.6% females, 23.4% males) at a university in Thailand. It explored the patterns of help-seeking avoidance among EFL students and the social climate of EFL classrooms. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicated the dimensionality of help-seeking avoidance and the six underlying factors of the social climate of EFL classrooms, with the existence of gender differences. Nonetheless, a direct connection between EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of their EFL classrooms was not identified. It was in the two-model hierarchical regression that the classroom social climate emerged as a significant predictor.

Keywords: English proficiency, help-seeking avoidance, social climate of classroom, Thai EFL students

Introduction

Help-seeking and the social climate of the classroom on individual learning are two learning concepts that not many researchers pay attention to, even though these two variables have been identified as having the potential to bridge between the expected and attained learning goals among individual students (Alansari & Rubie-Davies, 2020; Anderson, 1970; Newman, 2008). While most research studies have extensively focused on students' help-seeking strategies under the framework of fostering self-regulated learning (e.g., Papamitsiou & Economides, 2019; Won et al., 2019), little is known about the conditions where students are likely to avoid seeking help; this even remains little identified within the circumstances when students need some assistance, for whatever apparent underlying factors, across academic courses at the university level. For students, especially those from Asian countries, many perceive seeking help as an act of dependency, exposing personal weaknesses. It often leads to the assumption of receiving public embarrassment as a consequence. High-performing students are normally willing to take such a consequence whilst low-performing ones tend to avoid it (Gonida et al., 2019; Waluyo, 2019a). Meanwhile, the elements of the classroom social climate, such as teacher support and



task orientation, as well as the changes in the social climate of the social classroom, can significantly determine the degree of students' help-seeking (Schenke et al., 2015). The rules and norms of classrooms have been assumed to be related to help-seeking avoidance (Ryan et al., 2001), yet the empirical evidence on this matter is still scarce.

The present study problematizes the interplay between help-seeking avoidance among EFL students and the social climate of EFL classrooms at a university in Thailand. University lecturers in Thailand often encourage students to seek help when they have problems with course materials. Sometimes, lecturers not only make themselves available for face-to-face consultation hours both inside and outside the classroom, but also allow students to contact them through emails and online conference tools to facilitate students who need help to achieve better learning outcomes. Despite these endeavors, it has been found that students are not using help facilities effectively despite their urgent needs (Aleven et al., 2003). On the one hand, this phenomenon consequently puts students at a disadvantage in learning because seeking help creates a sense of agency development and is essential for learning improvement (Fletcher, 2018). On the other hand, the phenomenon can be a starting point to understanding students' help-seeking behavior, as students' orientations towards help-seeking avoidance would predict their styles of help-seeking (Butler, 1998; Waluyo & Apridayani, 2021). In the literature, research on help-seeking avoidance has been conducted in difficult academic subjects such as Mathematics (Smalley & Hopkins, 2020). Nevertheless, as one of the difficult subjects, little exploration has been carried out in English courses, especially in academic English courses in universities in Thailand, which are commonly studied extensively by 1st and 2nd-year students. Therefore, researching how the social climate of an EFL classroom interacts with students' help-seeking avoidance would shed light on how to better help EFL students achieve better learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Help-Seeking Avoidance

The concept of help-seeking is commonly rooted in the works of Nelson-Le Gall (1981, 1985), who studied children's help-seeking behavior in learning. His works highlight the importance of help-seeking for enhancing autonomy and active learning skills. However, he also conversely argues, " ... researchers have tended to consider only the costs of seeking help for the individual's sense of competence rather than the costs of not seeking help for the acquisition and mastery of skills" (1985, p.12). Such an argument has, to some extent, prompted research investigations that have focused on the advantages and costs of help-seeking, as well as the effects on accomplishing learning objectives. Most of the previous studies focused on children and young learners, implying the need for more empirical studies on adult learners (Karabenick, 2003). Among adult learners, there is an indication that they tend to avoid asking for help even if they need it. An early study by Ryan et al. (1998), who examined the interrelationship between students' academic efficacy, teachers' social-emotional role, and classroom goal structure, discovered that students' help-seeking avoidance was closely associated with student and classroom characteristics. Recently, Seamark and Gabriel (2018) revealed that students' help-seeking avoidance could be affected by, " ... gender roles, awareness and perception of help, social and cultural expectations/norms, and risk of stigma and rejection ..." (p. 120).

In this study, help-seeking avoidance is perceived as an action conducted by students, in which one action is preferred to be done rather than seeking help. Among the possible circumstances, for example, is when students do not understand the lesson, they often guess instead of asking someone for help. Studies around help-seeking are essentially driven by the assumption that students are seemingly reluctant to seek help when facing academic difficulties (Thomas & Tagler, 2019). Whether and in what circumstances students would be more likely to avoid seeking help are assumed to be tied to personal and contextual factors, thereby causing variability in the patterns of students' help-seeking avoidance across academic

courses (Zusho & Barnett, 2011). Help-seeking avoidance changes over time as students grow older. Perceived parents' goals can predict help-seeking and avoidance among school-aged children (Gonida et al., 2014), while university students are influenced by their learning motivation and strategy in learning (Schwalb & Sukemuni, 1998).

Most of the studies on students' help-seeking avoidance are conducted in the domain of mathematics (e.g., Smalley & Hopkins, 2020; Turner et al., 2002), while the findings from Zusho and Barnett's study (2011), which explored students' help-seeking patterns across course domains, indicate subject-level differences. In non-English speaking countries, such as Thailand, English is often considered as a difficult subject along with Mathematics. Therefore, exploring EFL students' help-seeking avoidance can offer meaningful insights for the improvement of EFL teaching and learning practices. Yet, only a few empirical studies are available in the literature. Hashim (2004), for instance, investigated the roles of motivational and attitudinal factors in 453 Malaysian undergraduates' help-seeking avoidance. The findings disclosed that students' help-seeking avoidance could significantly be affected by threats from peers and teachers. Students who considered themselves less cognitively able and had low task-focused goals would be inclined to avoid seeking help when facing difficulties in English learning. Self-efficacy was found to be inversely correlated with students' help-seeking avoidance. A low level of help-seeking avoidance could result in better performance in writing composition classes (Williams & Takaku, 2011).

From the findings of action research, Skinner and Madden (2010) elaborated that changes in students' help-seeking avoidance behaviors in English learning could depend on the learning environment involving teachers and peers. They underlined that EFL students would likely seek help when the class is relaxed and informal. In terms of gender, Ryan et al. (2009) recognized that help-seeking avoidance varied by ethnicity. There were no gender differences for African American students, while females had higher levels of help-seeking avoidance than males among European American students. The latest study from Brown et al. (2020) identified that reluctance to seek help from male and female students is influenced by specific gender-typical attitudes, including mastery and controlled feelings, being a fighter and a winner, and an interest in creating harmony. The present study will examine whether there are differences between female and male EFL learners' help-seeking avoidance in Thailand as the evidence is still scant in the literature.

Social Climate of Classroom

A classroom is simply where formal learning takes place. Interpersonal relationships, communications, and actions conducted among individuals, either as a teacher or a student, construct the social climate (van Compernelle & Williams, 2013). Historically, the interest in studying the social climate of the classroom started in the 1950s which initially focused on children's personal and social development growth in class involving the relationship between teacher and student (Wrightstone, 1951). It was then confirmed that studies in the area have continued to grow to students at higher levels of education as the effects of the social climate of the classroom on individual learning have increased (Anderson, 1970). At the university level, the social climate in classrooms determines the level of classroom success since understanding the organizational dynamics can help improve instruction (John, 1977). In recent studies, empirical evidence suggesting the significant influence of classroom social climate on student learning progress and outcomes has considerably grown. It has been confirmed to have a positive relationship with learning achievement (Aluri & Fraser, 2019) and affect students' motivation and level of engagement in their studies (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018).

One of the regular approaches employed in measuring classroom social climate in previous studies is by exploring how students perceive both their actions and involvements in classroom tasks and teacher support towards their learning process in class. Factors such as Student Cohesiveness, Involvement, Investigation, Task Orientation, and Cooperation underlie students' actions and involvement during the learning process in class (Smalley & Hopkins, 2020; Zedan, 2010). Female and male students possess a homogenous view of a positive classroom social climate for learning (Gillen et al., 2011). Students

recognize teachers as models of how to interact and form relationships with their peers (Hendrickx et al., 2016). The development of the classroom social climate is largely dependent on the emotional distance between teachers and students (Mainhard et al., 2011) and can determine students' learning mastery levels (Patrick et al., 2011). Supportive, rather than coercive, teacher behaviour is positively correlated with a positive classroom social climate (Mainhard et al., 2011).

Regarding the social climate of EFL classrooms, previous studies have indicated indirect effects on learning outcomes by influencing various key variables. Lim and Fraser (2018), for example, observed that the social climate of an EFL classroom was positively correlated with students' attitudes and self-efficacy in English learning. The elements of the social climate of the classroom encompassing Involvement, Task Orientation, and Teacher Support were noted to be significant predictors of students' motivation in English learning (Bi, 2015). The findings of Joe et al.'s study (2017) illustrate the indirect effect, " ... the classroom social climate would exert an effect on the satisfaction of learners' basic psychological needs, thereby positively influencing the development of more autonomous forms of motivation, which, in turn, would predict higher levels of WTC and achievement." (p.141). Nonetheless, a direct effect of the social climate of an EFL classroom, such as Task Challenge, Involvement, and Teacher Support, on students' English achievement has also been noticed (Gedamu & Siyawik, 2015). In addition, preceding research has indicated that male and female EFL students may have different perceptions of social climate elements (Bi, 2015; Lim & Fraser, 2018; Mohammadi & Aliakbari, 2018). It is also important to underline that, despite the popularity of the past five decades, the latest literature review study by Alansari and Rubie-Davies (2020) revealed the lack of classroom social climate studies at the university level. This has motivated the current study to take the initiative to contribute additional resources.

The Study

The present study seeks to examine the interplay between EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms at the university level. Research on this topic in the English course domain is still scant. Therefore, findings from other course domains should be used as directives (Lim & Fraser, 2018). In the domain of mathematics, it has been uncovered that students' help-seeking avoidance can significantly vary across classrooms, which may depend on the levels of students' mastery goals. More competitive class students may display lower reports of help-seeking avoidance (Turner et al., 2002). The patterns of students' help-seeking avoidance are influenced by the changes in the classroom social climate (Schenke et al., 2015). Most recently, among the elements of classroom social climate, Smalley and Hopkins (2020), who investigated the relationship between social climate and help-seeking avoidance in secondary mathematics classes, disclosed, " ... Task Orientation and Cooperation had a negative effect on help-seeking avoidance, while Investigation had a positive effect. Teacher Support was not associated with help-seeking avoidance." (p. 1).

The small amount of research about EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the effects of the social climate of EFL classroom has probably caused us to miss some essential points. To date, it is not clear yet in what situations EFL students would commonly avoid seeking help as well as what actions are preferred by EFL students when they avoid seeking help. Another important question is, what are the causes of EFL students' help-seeking avoidance? How EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms affect students' proficiency levels also remains unexplored. Answers to these questions would illuminate the path of how educational institutions, such as universities, can create a better EFL learning environment and how EFL teachers can provide better teaching and learning instructions that address help-seeking avoidance and improve the social climate of EFL classrooms, which may potentially lead to better English proficiency levels. Driven by these rationales, this study was conducted to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that underlie EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms at a university in Thailand?
2. What are the profiles of help-seeking avoidance among EFL students and the social climate of EFL classrooms at a university in Thailand?
3. How does EFL students' help-seeking avoidance correlate with the elements of the social climate of EFL classrooms at a university in Thailand?
4. How influential is EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms on levels of English proficiency?

Methodology

Research Design

The design of this study was quantitative. It explored descriptive profiles of EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and social climate of EFL classrooms and examines the underlying factors and interplay of these two variables. EFL students' proficiency levels were also included in the design. The research design is illustrated below.

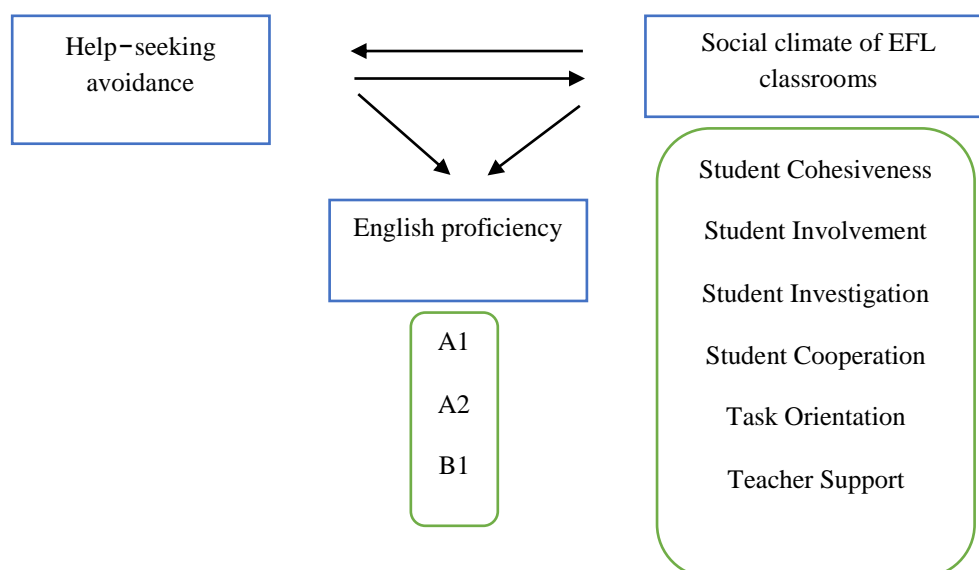


Figure 1. The research model.

Context and Participants

At the time of the study, the participants were studying General English (GE) courses focusing on English for academic skills and specific purposes. The data was collected at the end of the term when all the students were finishing their GE courses. The participants consisted of 427 students (76.6 % females, 23.4 % males) in the age bracket of 18-22 years old, with a mean age of 19.8 ($SD = 0.72$). The students majored in Medicine, Nursing, Management, Liberal Arts, Public Health, and Engineering. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), most of the students' English proficiency levels were A2 (54.6 %), followed by A1 (39.3 %) and B1 (6.1 %).

TABLE 1
Overview of the Participants (N = 427)

Gender	Age	Proficiency
Female (327/76.6%)	Mean = 19.8 (SD = .72)	A1 (168/39.3%)
Male (100/23.4%)		A2 (233/54.6%)
		B1 (26/6.1%)

Instrument and Measure

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data on the students' help-seeking avoidance and social climate of EFL classrooms, while a standardized test was utilized to measure the students' proficiency levels.

Survey questionnaire

Students completed an online survey questionnaire administered by using Google Form that consisted of three parts. The first part collected the background information, including Student ID, Gender, and Age. Then, the second and third parts gathered data on students' help-seeking avoidance and their perceptions of the social climate of their EFL classrooms. The survey items were adapted from the recently published research article by Smalley and Hopkins (2020). The help-seeking avoidance section was comprised of five items. These items included statements such as, "When I don't understand the lesson, I often guess instead of asking someone for help" and "I don't ask questions during the class, even if I don't understand the lesson". Meanwhile, the section for measuring the social climate of the EFL classroom involved seven subscales, namely: Student Cohesiveness, Involvement, Investigation, Cooperation, Equity, Task Orientation, and Teacher Support. There were five items within each subscale. The responses from these two parts ranged from "0" for "Never" to "4" for "Always". The details are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Sample Items and Cronbach's Alpha

	Sample Item (all start with "In my GE classes,")	α
Help-seeking avoidance	If my English work is too hard for me, I just do not do it rather than ask for help	.864
Social Climate of EFL classrooms	I work well with other class members.	.945
Sub-scale 1: Student Cohesiveness	I am friendly to members of my class	.837
Sub-scale 2: Involvement	I give my opinions during class discussions	.858
Sub-scale 3: Investigation	I do some research to test my ideas (online exercises etc.)	.907
Sub-scale 4: Cooperation	I cooperate with other students when doing assignment work	.843
Sub-scale 5: Equity	The teacher gives equal attention to my questions and other students' questions	.890
Sub-scale 6: Task Orientation	I try to understand the task in my English class	.804
Sub-scale 7: Teacher Support	The teacher personally knows that I need help.	.798

English proficiency test

To measure students' English proficiency levels, a standardized test named Walailak University Test of English Proficiency was administered to all the participants. The test assessed the four main English skills. The listening and reading tests contained multiple-choice questions ranging from A1 to C1 levels. There were 100 questions in total. For writing, students were asked to write a prompted essay of about 150 words, while a 5-minute interview was the speaking test. The interviewers involved 1 Thai lecturer, 3 native lecturers, and 23 non-native lecturers who came from foreign countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Ghana, Vietnam, and China. WUTEP scores have been mapped to other international

standardized tests, e.g., IELTS, TOEFL IBT, and TOEIC. The highest score for each skill was 25, which made up 100 for the total score. Table 1 displays the students' proficiency levels based on the test. The descriptive results of the proficiency test are presented in the following table.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Results of the Proficiency Tests

	Mean		Std. Deviation		Variance		Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Stat.	SE	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	SE	Stat.	SE	Stat.	SE
Listening	10.01	.133	2.748	7.552	.894	.118	1.830	.236		
Reading	10.08	.141	2.921	8.535	.984	.118	1.278	.236		
Speaking	8.27	.200	4.131	17.066	-.743	.118	.228	.236		
Writing	8.58	.167	3.457	11.953	.141	.118	.039	.236		
Total Score	36.94	.49	10.18	103.82	.302	.118	.008	.236		

Data Analysis

The normality of the collected data was first checked by using the rule of Skewness and Kurtosis between -2 and +2 (George & Mallery, 2003). The results fell into the normal range, so the data were, further, examined by using parametric tests. First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to explore the underlying factors of EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms. The procedures involved the use of Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) as the extraction method, the Kaiser criterion eigenvalue to determine the number of factors to be retained, KMO and Bartlett's test to identify whether the factors were extractable with a threshold of .50 for sampling adequacy, and orthogonal rotation (Varimax) with the cutoff point set at a threshold of .30 (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). Second, means and SDs were explored to describe the profiles of the students towards the variables of interests. The interpretations of the means use three levels: 0 - 1.5 (Low), 1.6 - 2.9 (Moderate), and 3 - 4 (High). Afterwards, bivariate correlations were run to see how EFL students' EFL help-seeking avoidance interacts with the elements of the social climate of EFL classrooms. The last analysis examined the influences of help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms on English proficiency levels in two-model hierarchical regression. The data analysis was carried out by using IBM SPSS Statistics 23. The following section presents the analysis results.

Results

Factors Underlying EFL Students' Help-Seeking Avoidance and Social Climate of EFL Classroom

EFL students' help-seeking avoidance appeared to be a single construct from the EFA. With the sampling adequacy at .847 and the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(10) = 1004.27, p < .001$), the latent construct could explain 66% of the total variance (*Eigenvalue* = 3.275). All the items within this construct had factor loadings above .40 and displayed a high level of international consistency ($\alpha = .864$). Therefore, all of them satisfied the criteria and were retained. In contrast, the social climate of EFL classrooms emerged to be different from the original structures. Six underlying factors were identified by the EFA. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .942, verified by a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(595) = 9011.44, p < .001$. In total, these six factors could explain 64% of the total variance. The only change that occurred in the new structures was that Involvement and Investigation were considered the same factor. Thus, this factor was named Student Involvement, while the other factor names remained the same as they were in the original structures. Two items were removed due to factor loadings of less than .40, as seen in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Factor Analysis and Reliability for Social Climate Questionnaire

Items	Factor loadings					
	Student Cohesiveness	Teacher Support	Student Involvement	Task Orientation	Cooperation	Equity
1	.597					
2	.687					
3	.606					
4	.673					
5	.489					
6		.435				
7		.707				
8		.730				
9			.514			
10		Deleted				
11			.620			
12			.548			
13			.690			
14			.689			
15			.677			
16			.778			
17			.841			
18			.794			
19			.776			
20			.710			
21				Deleted		
22				.591		
23				.733		
24				.619		
25				.455		
26					.708	
27					.564	
28					.597	
29					.540	
30					.639	
31						.654
32						.681
33						.687
34						.661
35						.694
% Variance	4.77	3.04	36.22	3.49	4.79	11.65
Eigenvalue	1.67	1.07	12.68	1.22	1.68	4.08
A	.837	.816	.925	.833	.843	.890

Profiles of EFL Students' Help-Seeking Avoidance and Social Climate of EFL Classrooms

The descriptive data showed that students' help-seeking avoidance was at a moderate level ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .860$). The independent t-test results indicated that male students were more likely to avoid seeking help than female students ($t(425) = 2.23$, $p = .03$) with a small effect size ($Cohen's d = (1.79 - 2.01) / .855 = 0.26$). Since the number of B1 level students was much lower than A1 and A2 students, independent t-test was conducted among the low-level students (A1 and A2). No significant difference was observed in help-seeking avoidance ($t(399) = .24$, $p = .81$). Furthermore, students perceived the social climate of their EFL classrooms at a high level ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .488$), in which female students had more positive perceptions than their counterparts ($t(425) = -2.24$, $p = .03$) with a small effect size ($Cohen's d = (2.99 - 2.86) / .512 = .25$). A1 and A2 students reported no significant difference on their perceptions ($t(399) = 1.13$, $p = .26$).

For the elements of social climate of an EFL classroom, students perceived Cohesiveness, Cooperation, Equity, Task Orientation, and Teacher Support at high levels, whereas Student Involvement was informed

at a moderate level. Female students had significantly higher levels of perceptions of Student Cohesiveness ($t(425) = -2.62, p = .01$), Cooperation ($t(425) = -3.34, p = .001$), and Task Orientation ($t(425) = -4.10, p < .001$), whilst they showed significant differences in other elements. A2 level students had more positive perceptions of Equity ($t(399) = 2.88, p = .004$) and Cooperation ($t(399) = 2.35, p < .019$), yet they exhibited no differences for other elements.

TABLE 5
Descriptive Data

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic		Statistic	
Help-seeking avoidance	1.84	.860	.426	.118	-.014	.236
Social climate	2.96	.489	-.158	.118	.012	.236
Student Cohesiveness	2.98	.642	-.628	.118	.574	.236
Teacher Support	3.03	.692	-.677	.118	.950	.236
Student Involvement	2.14	.754	.259	.118	.063	.236
Task Orientation	3.37	.562	-.668	.118	-.178	.236
Cooperation	3.18	.587	-.498	.118	-.145	.236
Equity	3.06	.627	-.187	.118	-.801	.236

TABLE 6
Independent T-test by Gender (Only Significant Results)

	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Effect Size
Help-seeking avoidance	2.23	.03	0.22	0.098	.26
Social climate	-2.24	.03	0.22	0.056	.25
Student Cohesiveness	-2.62	.01	-0.19	0.073	.27
Cooperation	-3.34	.001	-0.22	0.066	.36
Task Orientation	-5.00	.000	-0.26	0.063	.44

Help-Seeking Avoidance and Social Climate of EFL Classrooms

As seen in Table 7, EFL students' help-seeking avoidance was not correlated with the social climate of their EFL classrooms. Students' help-seeking avoidance could not explain the variability in the social climate of their classrooms and vice versa. Their help-seeking avoidance was weakly, positively related to their involvement in class ($r = .252, p < .001$), yet weakly, negatively related to their task orientation ($r = -.123, p = .011$). On the other hand, all the elements of the social climate were strongly, positively correlated with the students' perceptions of the social climate of their EFL classes. This indicated that the higher the levels of Student Cohesiveness, Cooperation, Student Involvement, Task Orientation, Equity, and Teacher Support in the learning process in the classroom, the more positive students perceive the social climate of the classroom.

TABLE 7
Results of the Bivariate Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Help-seeking avoidance	1.00	0.05	0.05	-0.04	-0.05	0.05	.252**	-.123*
2. Social climate		1.00	.772**	.771**	.791**	.786**	.695**	.745**
3. Student cohesiveness			1.00	.525**	.484**	.541**	.487**	.474**
4. Cooperation				1.00	.607**	.443**	.378**	.647**
5. Equity					1.00	.586**	.386**	.581**
6. Teacher support						1.00	.479**	.491**
7. Student involvement							1.00	.308**
8. Task orientation								1.00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Influences on English Proficiency

In hierarchical regression analyses, two models were created. In Model 1, help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of classrooms were entered, but the ANOVA results were not significant ($F(424) = 2.11, p = .123$). Nonetheless, when Student Cohesiveness, Teacher Support, Task Orientation, Cooperation, Equity, and Student Involvement were entered into Model 2, significant ANOVA results were attained ($F(419) = 2.16, p = .37$), which could explain 4% of the variance in the students' English proficiency ($R^2 = .04$) with the effect size 50% below the means (*Cohen's* $f^2 = .042$). In detail, the social climate of the EFL classroom significantly predicted the students' English proficiency levels ($\beta = .669, p = .039$). Among the elements of social climate, Teacher Support ($\beta = -.282, p = .016$) and Student Involvement ($\beta = -.209, p < .049$) were the predictors of students' proficiency levels.

TABLE 8
ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	435.886	2	217.943	2.110	.123 ^b
	Residual	43793.841	424	103.287		
	Total	44229.727	426			
2	Regression	1537.293	7	219.613	2.155	.037 ^c
	Residual	42692.434	419	101.891		
	Total	44229.727	426			

TABLE 9
Hierarchical Regression Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	33.76	3.159		10.69	.000
	Help-seeking avoidance	-.806	.573	-.068	-1.41	.161
	Social Climate	1.58	1.010	.076	1.56	.119
2	(Constant)	31.86	3.52		9.05	.000
	Help-seeking avoidance	-.53	.603	-.044	-.87	.384
	Social Climate	13.97	6.76	.67	2.07	.039
	Student Cohesiveness	-1.83	1.55	-.12	-1.18	.241
	Cooperation	-.43	1.89	-.03	-.23	.820
	Teacher Support	-4.16	1.72	-.28	-2.42	.016
	Student Involvement	-2.82	1.43	-.21	-1.98	.049
Task Orientation	-2.92	1.83	-.16	-1.59	.112	

a. Dependent Variable: Total WUTEF Scores

Discussion

This study seeks to expand our understanding, first, concerning EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and their perceptions of the social climate of their EFL classrooms at the university level in Thailand. The findings highlight the underlying factors, profiles, and differences identified within both variables. In the context of EFL students at university in Thailand, the underlying help-seeking avoidance was one-dimensional, while the classroom social climate was underlined by six factors, including Student Cohesiveness, Teacher Support, Student Involvement, Task Orientation, Cooperation, and Equity. In previous studies, help-seeking was often included as a sub-scale under the framework of self-regulated learning (Papamitsiou & Economides, 2019; Won et al., 2019). At this point, this study shall encourage the inclusion of help-seeking avoidance as a single construct in research as it has been found to be one-dimensional. Regarding the underlying factors of classroom social climate, the findings of this study continue to sustain the previous findings (Smalley & Hopkins, 2020; Zedan, 2010).

The first key findings also provide the details of which action is preferred to be taken rather than going for help-seeking. It was found that the students often and always preferred “guessing” to asking someone for help when they did not understand the lesson. When they were asked to provide answers, they would rather write random answers than ask for help. Male students strongly indicated that they often did not ask for help with their English work, even if the work was too difficult to do on their own. They sometimes chose not to do it instead of seeking help. Thomas and Tagler (2019) conducted a study on the determinants of students’ intentions to use university-based sources of academic support. They concluded that students’ avoidance of using help support was caused by their normative beliefs and behaviors in relation to the utilization of academic support at the university. Additionally, university students’ help-seeking patterns are argued to be affected by their learning motivation and strategy in learning (Schwalb & Sukemuni, 1998). The findings of this study were based on self-report survey results, which likely reflected the students’ beliefs and behaviors regarding using academic support as well as motivation and strategy and learning. Nevertheless, variability may exist across academic courses (Zusho & Barnett, 2011). Figure 2 below displays the descriptive comparison of the students’ responses across the items of help-seeking avoidance.

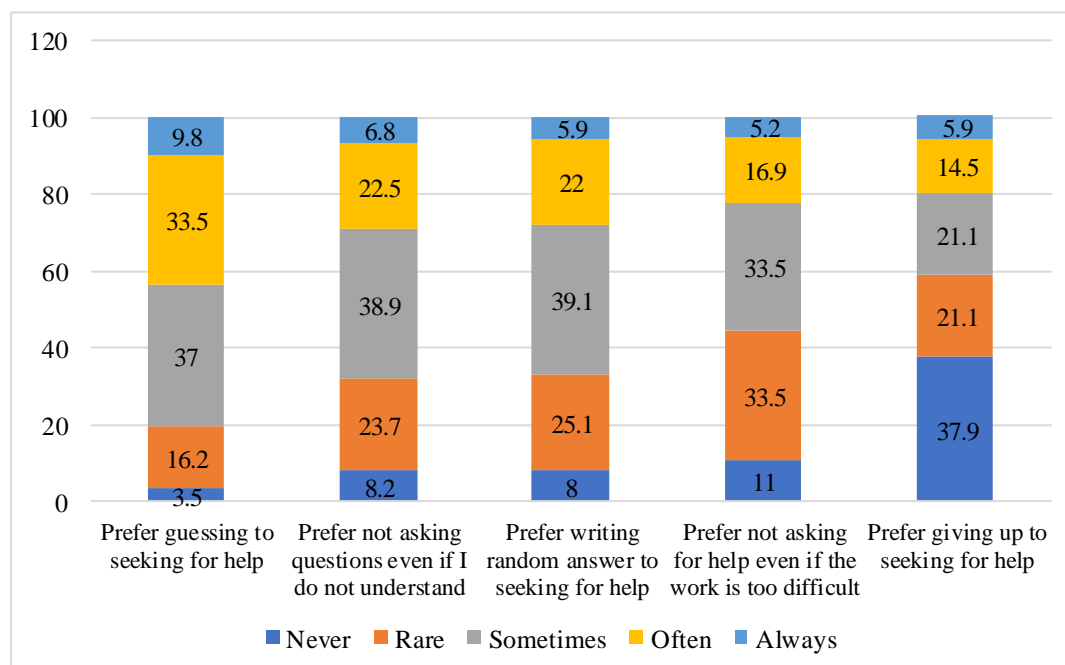


Figure 2. Descriptive comparison of the responses across the items under help-seeking avoidance.

As seen in Table 5, students viewed themselves as supportive of one another and had higher levels of willingness to cooperate with one another to complete learning tasks. They also testified that they received an adequate amount of teacher support and were treated equally in class. The results presented in Table 7 confirmed positive correlations among these subscales of classroom social climate. Regardless, their self-reported practiced involvement in class was only at a moderate level. Earlier studies have only pointed out teachers as being role models of interactions and relationship building for students (Hendrickx et al., 2016), where the positiveness of the classroom may depend on the emotional distance between the teacher and students (Mainhard et al., 2011), potentially affecting students’ learning at mastery levels (Patrick et al., 2011). To put it simply, the more supportive the teacher is, the more positive the classroom will be (Mainhard et al., 2011). In this case, the findings of the present study are incongruent with these points; however, it is important to underline the lower level of student involvement than their views on being supportive, cooperative, and task-oriented, despite admitting enough teacher support and being treated equally in class.

The first key findings also disclosed the existence of gender differences within both variables of interest. Male EFL students were more unlikely to seek help when facing difficulties in learning than their counterparts. Such a finding is different from Ryan et al.'s study (2009) who noted that females had higher levels of help-seeking avoidance than males, yet the context was among European American students. Hence, the finding supports the argument that help-seeking avoidance may vary across ethnicity and region. In addition, males were also found to have a tendency to perceive the social climate of their classrooms as less positive. It was reported that males were less supportive of one another, less cooperative on learning tasks, and less oriented in task completion in class. There have been different findings regarding how male and female students perceive the social climate of classrooms. On the one hand, regardless of gender, it has been suggested that students would have homogenous views of the social climate of their classrooms (Gillen et al., 2011). However, different perceptions were observed by gender in several studies (Bi, 2015; Lim & Fraser, 2018; Mohammadi & Aliakbari, 2018). The position of this study noticeably exhibits that gender plays a role in the way students perceive the classroom social climate among Thai EFL students at the university level. Figure 3 illustrates the significant differences in means by gender.

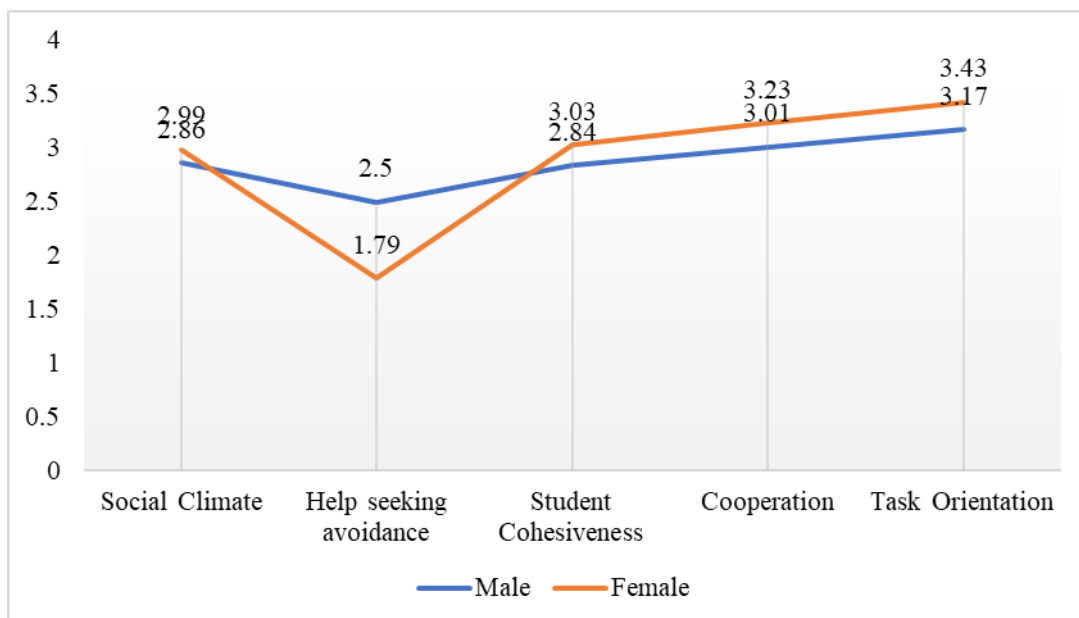


Figure 3. Significant differences in means by gender.

Furthermore, the second key findings emphasize the interplay between EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of their EFL classrooms. There has been an assumption that the social climate of the classroom influences students' help-seeking patterns (Ryan et al., 2001). Findings from Schenke et al.'s study (2015) also suggest that the changes in the social climate of the social classroom can significantly determine the degree of students' help-seeking. In this instance, this study did not find convincing evidence to support these assumptions and suggestions. EFL students' help-seeking avoidance was not closely associated with the social climate of their EFL classrooms. Their help-seeking avoidance could not be predicted by the classroom social climate. Nonetheless, a negative relationship emerged between the students' help-seeking avoidance and Task Orientation, implying that those who avoid seeking help would likely be less oriented towards completing tasks in class. In relation to English proficiency, help-seeking avoidance was not a significant predictor; in contrast, the social climate of the EFL classroom could contribute significantly to students' English proficiency, especially in the aspects of Teacher Support and Student Involvement.

To date, there is no study that examines the direct connection between help-seeking avoidance and the classroom social climate among EFL learners at the university level. Therefore, this study can only refer

to those found in another course domain, i.e., mathematics. The findings in the domain of Mathematics have been directed at the positive relationships between help-seeking and the classroom social climate (Schenke et al., 2015). In addition, Smalley and Hopkins (2020) examined the paths between help-seeking avoidance and the elements of classroom social climate and elaborated on the negative effects of Task Orientation and Cooperation on help-seeking avoidance and the non-association of Teacher Support with help-seeking avoidance. Unfortunately, they did not examine the classroom social climate as a whole construct, so no knowledge was offered on this matter. The second findings of this study addressed such research gaps.

Pedagogical Implication and Conclusion

It is not uncommon that English is perceived as one of the difficult subjects by students in Thailand. The trends of low-level proficiency among students have been consistently uncovered by reports from international standardized tests and empirical studies (Waluyo, 2019b). Based on the results of this study, the social climate of an EFL classroom plays a significant role in students' proficiency levels. Two key elements have been confirmed: Teacher Support and Student Involvement. Hence, the practice of English teaching and learning at the university level should put some priority on enforcing better teacher support and enhancing student involvement level in classrooms (Nambiar et al., 2011). The class-hour of general English courses is often limited to two-hour per week in Thailand. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to adjust course instructions in a way that allows them to have brief time talking with students individually and asking frequent understanding-checking questions. Teachers should make it visible to students that they personally know which students need help. As indicated in this study, EFL male students are more reluctant to express their need for help. Thus, teachers should give special attention to boys in their class. When teacher support has been consistently practiced, students will likely become more involved, oriented, cooperative, and supportive in their classroom learning.

Help-seeking avoidance does not have a direct connection to English proficiency. Yet, it can influence the classroom social climate through task orientation, which will indirectly affect English proficiency. In this instance, teachers can identify those who avoid seeking help by looking at how oriented the students are towards task completion. Teachers can use the record of task achievement of each student and conduct a quick analysis. Teachers can also rely on their class observations to recognize such students. It has been established that, despite the availability of academic support, students have not made the most use of them (Aleven et al., 2003; Thomas, & Tagler, 2019). In other words, this simply implies that merely providing support is not adequate. Teachers must creatively find a way to make students use their support effectively and maximally. Teachers should attempt to instil normative beliefs and behaviors among students that seeking help is an essential part of progress in learning (Fletcher, 2018). It is, indeed, rather unfair to put everything on teachers' shoulders, yet it is also common that, most of the time, students need some help in recognizing what they need and lack (Samad, 2005).

This study has elaborated on both the descriptive pictures of EFL students' help-seeking avoidance and the social climate of EFL classrooms at a university level in Thailand and the interplay between these two variables. It seems that male and female students have differences in help-seeking avoidance patterns and in perceiving their classroom social climate. Help-seeking avoidance is not directly associated with the classroom social climate, yet it affects the elements. It is probably not something new to say that having a positive classroom social climate can substantially affect learning outcomes. However, this study has specifically confirmed that a positive classroom social climate can predict students' English proficiency levels as research in this area is still limited. Despite all the insightful findings and discussions, it is acknowledged that this study is limited to the examination of quantitative data. If qualitative data were included, the findings might have remained the same or become different. This study did not specifically address EFL students' help-seeking avoidance based on the four main English skills, which could be another area of exploration in the future.

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