



Original Article

Perception of the Educational Environment Among Occupational Therapy Students at University of Santo Tomas: A Study Based on the Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM)

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Abstract

Background: Students' perceptions of their educational environment have been determined to influence their educational performance, behavior, and well-being. Assessing the students' educational environment enables stakeholders to recognize limitations and opportunities for ensuring optimal learning experiences. However, no studies have yet explored the perceived educational environment of occupational therapy (OT) students in the Philippines. **Objective:** Using the Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM) instrument, this study assesses how occupational therapy students perceive their educational environment. Additionally, this study aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in the current educational environment. **Methodology:** This descriptive cross-sectional study utilized a records review of anonymized secondary responses from the Student Life Survey 2021. The DREEM questionnaire was employed to evaluate the perspectives of occupational therapy students in five domains, namely: students' perception of learning, students' perceptions of academic self-perceptions, students' perceptions of atmosphere, and students' social self-perceptions. Individual item and subscale scores were summarized as mean and standard deviation (SD). **Results:** With a total mean score of 124.12 ± 26.79 in the five domains, the OT students positively perceive their educational environment. Data analysis revealed the scores for the DREEM domains of Students' Perception of Teachers (30.50 ± 6.08), Students' Perception of Learning (31.11 ± 5.94), Students' Academic Self-Perceptions (20.37 ± 4.26), Students' Social Self-Perceptions (15.58 ± 4.00), and Students' Perceptions of Atmosphere (26.56 ± 6.51). Interpretation for each domain indicates that the educational environment is moving in the right direction, has a more positive approach, is feeling more on the positive side, is not too bad, and has a more positive atmosphere, respectively. **Conclusion:** The study revealed a positive perception of the educational environment among OT students. However, there needed improvement in the areas of authoritarian teachers, the demanding program environment, and the overemphasis on factual learning. To guarantee that OT education in the country is of high quality, these findings can be utilized to inform the institution's stakeholders regarding policy development, curriculum review, and future OT program development and implementation.

Key Words: *Perceptions, Educational Environment, DREEM, Occupational Therapy*

INTRODUCTION

Educational environments are widely acknowledged as significant for providing high-quality education, and it is crucial to consider different factors that can influence students' participation. With critical factors such as motivation and a sense of purpose influencing students' participation, these, in turn, can be influenced by various aspects, including

students' previous experiences, preferred teaching methods, and the overall context and setting in which teaching-learning occurs.¹ In addition to these factors, physical infrastructures such as classrooms for lectures and laboratory exercises, enabling and limiting variables for studying, and the atmosphere established by schoolmates and educators are also critical

components of the educational environment.²⁻⁵

At the tertiary level, students expressed different factors that affect their educational environment, including physical, mental, social, and intellectual factors, as well as external circumstances that may pose challenges and difficulties for the students in becoming active learners. Difficulties in time management, language, and cultural differences also influence their academic performance.⁵ The lack of proper guidance and the stress caused by families were also found to have a negative impact on students' performance.⁶ Furthermore, inadequate, electronically-equipped facilities to support their learning can also contribute to these challenges.²

Despite these barriers, creating a conducive educational environment is crucial for promoting significant learning. This importance is widely recognized, with accessible and well-equipped facilities playing a pivotal role in ensuring effective teaching-learning processes and facilitating academic achievement among students.⁷⁻⁸ As a result, getting frequent feedback is critical for making modifications, improvements, and maintaining progress.⁹⁻¹⁰ A widely accepted and globally validated instrument used to measure the educational environment of medical schools and other health professions is the Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM).³⁻¹¹

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educational delivery, particularly in Occupational Therapy (OT), has drastically changed as educational institutions offering OT degrees have shifted entirely to virtual platforms for online classes.¹² As a result, the Philippine Academy of Occupational Therapists (PAOT) has issued interim guidelines¹³ that highlight the significance of OT students' and faculty members' safety and well-being. The guidelines also suggest alternative teaching and learning strategies that comply with the quarantine policies of the country.¹² In response to the guidelines on safety and security measures, the University of Santo Tomas, a higher-education Philippine institution, implemented an online learning educational delivery where virtual classes are being conducted. This approach transitioned OT students and faculty members from attending traditional face-to-face

laboratory and lecture classes inside classrooms to a dynamic integration of synchronous and asynchronous enriched virtual learning strategies, which also directed a self-paced learning experience. However, a study revealed that UST students, specifically medical technology interns, faced challenges as they were prone to experience fatigue and distraction when studying for extended periods during online learning.¹⁴ In spite of encountering challenges during the emergency remote teaching, the expectations of UST students aligned with their actual experiences with online learning.¹⁵

With every other program, evaluating the perceptions of the OT students in their current learning environment is crucial as it provides information on modifications to be made in the educational setting to meet their needs better. Identifying possible changes in the students' academic performance within their learning environment could also assist stakeholders in reflecting and implementing necessary adjustments to ensure high-quality education.^{3,16} However, to develop and implement a comprehensive and high-quality curriculum, it is critical first to understand and assess the students' perspectives of their educational environment.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Multiple studies globally have utilized the DREEM tool to evaluate the educational environment of their respective programs and institutions. A research study in Egypt delved into nursing students' perceptions of educational environments and provided insights into the factors influencing their overall learning experience in a traditional setting.² Another cross-sectional study utilizing the DREEM instrument aimed to evaluate the perspectives of dentistry students on their learning environment, revealing an overall positive perception.¹⁹ Utilizing the aforementioned tool, an Indian university examined students' perceptions across five programs: dentistry, medicine, nursing, public health, and physical therapy, resulting in an overall positive perception.¹ While the majority of research studies have focused on students' perceptions of their educational environment in allied health professions, there remains a gap in understanding the perceptions of Filipino OT students with their educational environment. In

the Philippines, the DREEM tool is not commonly used to determine students' perceptions of their learning environment. An available local study conducted in Baguio compared the perception of academic learning environments between medical science laboratory students and nursing students. It concluded that they perceive their educational environment as 'more positive than negative' and identified the relationship between the nursing instructors and students as the factor that needs improvement.¹⁶ On the other hand, findings from a study conducted in a Philippine university focused on the perception of dental students wherein it was concluded that the respondents strongly agreed that they are provided with a conducive learning environment.²⁰ Provided with these local studies regarding the educational environment of other allied health students in the Philippines, it can be implied that studies on OT students and their educational environment have been limited, especially in the local context aligned with the current situation of the pandemic.

Using the Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM) instrument, this study seeks to assess how occupational therapy students perceive their educational environment. Additionally, this study aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in the current educational environment.

METHODS

Ethical Consideration. The study complied with the University of Santo Tomas' data privacy policies, the Ethical Guidelines on Health-Related Social Research of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board,²¹ and the Data Privacy Act of 2012.²² The University of Santo Tomas-College of Rehabilitation Sciences Ethical Review Committee (UST-CRS ERC), with Protocol Number SI-2022-010, provided approval for the study prior to its execution.

Study Design. In this study, a descriptive cross-sectional design was employed in the responses obtained from the anonymized secondary data. This research design is undertaken for various purposes, including resource allocation and identifying areas for future analyses or development. The selection of a descriptive

cross-sectional design proves optimal for this study, as it provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the perception of students of their learning environment.^{1-4,10,16}

Database Description. The study was conducted from August 2022 to May 2023 and utilized the records of the Student Life Survey 2021 database from the University of Santo Tomas, College of Rehabilitation Sciences, Department of Occupational Therapy, to assess the students' perspectives on various factors on students' performance during the pandemic, specifically with the online course delivery of the program. The study participants consisted of OT students who had taken the said survey conducted last December 1-7, 2021. This study utilized the census method as the eligible participants are enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy of the University of Santo Tomas in the first term of AY 2021-2022. According to the correspondence with the OT department chair, 304 students were enrolled in the program and were anticipated to complete the survey. However, 99 students who were able to answer the Student Life Survey of 2021²³ but were not able to complete the DREEM component of the questionnaire were excluded. The online survey, administered via Google Forms, included records from undergraduate students enrolled during the first term, representing the different year levels (1st-5th year) across age groups, sexes, curriculum (4-year and 5-year), academic load (full and partial), and cohort (regular and irregular). The survey was divided into several sections covering participant demographics and specific tools, including the DREEM, which is the main interest of this research study. Prior to providing personal information, the survey includes a description and disclaimer about the survey and the use of the data that will be gathered from it. Accomplishing the form indicates that the student consented to use their anonymized data for the department's use.

Instrumentation. DREEM is a globally recognized inventory with ideal and acceptable psychometric properties that offers health and professional medical educators a diagnostic tool for assessing the learning and teaching atmosphere.²⁴ It enables comparisons of quality assurance between courses and their

components. DREEM has an overall excellent internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 0.91$ (Cronbach's Alpha). Although only the subscales of academic self-perception and social self-perception subscales had values less than 0.70^{3,24}, DREEM is generally the most appropriate instrument for assessing the learning environment in health-allied college institutions^{11,16,25} globally^{10,25-31}, with two studies utilizing this instrument in the Philippines.^{16,20} With references to the past studies^{3,20,32,33}, the researchers also conducted their own analysis using Cronbach's alpha and got a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.939$, indicating excellent data reliability. Respondents were asked to rate 50 statements on a five-point Likert scale (4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for uncertain, 1 for

disagree, and 0 for strongly disagree). Negative statements, on the other hand, are scored in reverse. A higher score on this scale reflects a more positive evaluation. The 50-item DREEM questionnaire has a maximum score of 200, indicating the optimal learning environment, with the five subscales: students' perceptions of learning, students' perceptions of teachers, students' academic self-perceptions, students' perceptions of atmosphere, and students' social self-perceptions. DREEM employs a standard method for scoring, encompassing the computation of both overall and individual mean scores for each subscale or domain. Table 1 shows the guided interpretation of both individual and overall DREEM scores developed by McAleer and Roff.²⁴

Table 1. Interpretation of DREEM Scores

Scores per Domain	Interpretation
Total DREEM Scores	
0-50	Very poor
51-100	Plenty of problems
101-150	More positive than negative
151-200	Excellent
SPL	
0-12	Very poor
13-24	Teaching is viewed negatively
25-36	A more positive approach
37-48	Teaching highly thought of
SPT	
0-11	Abysmal
12-22	In need of some retraining
23-33	Moving in the right direction
34-44	Model teachers
SAP	
0-8	Feeling of total failure
9-16	Many negative aspects
17-24	Feeling more on the positive side
25-32	Confident
SPA	
0-12	A terrible environment
13-24	There are many issues that need to be changed
25-36	A more positive atmosphere
37-48	A good feeling overall
SSSP	
0-7	Miserable
8-14	Not a nice place
15-21	Not very bad
22-28	Very good socially
Score per DREEM Item	Interpretation
Mean score of 3.5 or greater	Particularly strong areas
Mean score between 2 and 3	Could be improved
Mean score of 2 or less	Needs particular attention

Data Gathering Procedure. Prior to the initiation of the study, the University of Santo Tomas College of Rehabilitation Sciences Ethics Review Committee (UST-CRS ERC) granted approval to the researchers. A formal request was forwarded to the OT department chair to acquire anonymized and disaggregated information from the records. The researchers secured authorization to utilize records from the Student Life Survey 2021. The program’s data officer utilized a secure, encrypted, and password-protected method to transmit the requested information to the researchers, with only the primary author obtaining access. The generated spreadsheet was fortified with advanced security measures, notably data cell protection, to establish a defense against potential unauthorized data tampering within the department’s database. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were systematically implemented using the sort functions on the encrypted electronic database. A systematic analysis of the highest and lowest scores obtained from each item in the questionnaire utilized the functions of the resulting spreadsheet to identify strengths and weaknesses in each domain or subscale. This methodical application not only safeguarded the integrity of the data but also facilitated the extraction of specific information aligning precisely with the parameters of the study. Confidentiality of the collected data was to be maintained throughout the study.

Data Analysis. The study designates the participants' perceptions of their educational environment as the dependent variable, employing the DREEM scores as an independent variable to measure diverse aspects of the educational environment. Incorporating demographic data, including sex, age, year level, and student status, in addition to the components of DREEM, the study integrates descriptive statistics, such as standard deviation and mean, computed through Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile. A total of 205 Occupational Therapy students at the University of Santo Tomas responded to the survey

(*n*=205). Respondents were identified as ages 18-25, both males and females. It was then subdivided into year level as well as student status.

The sample size consisted of 30.24% third-year students, 25.37% fourth-year, 22.44% second-year, 13.17% fifth-year students, and 8.78% first-year students. The majority were female (81.46%), aged 21-31.71%, and predominantly regular students who are enrolled with the standard full-time number of units (93.17%) as opposed to irregular students who take up fewer units per semester (6.83%). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.939 indicates excellent data reliability.

Table 2. Profile of Participants

Characteristics of Demographic Profile	n	%
Sex		
Male	38	18.54%
Female	167	81.46%
Age		
18	13	6.34%
19	29	14.15%
20	48	23.41%
21	65	31.71%
22	40	19.51%
23	5	2.44%
24	2	0.98%
25	3	1.46%
Year Level		
1	18	8.78%
2	46	22.44%
3	62	30.24%
4	52	25.37%
5	27	13.17%
Students Status		
Regular Student	191	93.17%
Irregular Student	14	6.83%

Overall Perception of Students based on DREEM Global and Subscale. The 205 participants in the study found that the majority of students expressed a positive perception of their learning environment. Students held favorable views concerning learning, teachers, academic atmosphere, social self-perceptions, and overall atmosphere. The highest percentages were observed in the teachers' domain, while the atmosphere domain had the lowest.

Table 3. Summary of DREEM Score by Domain

DREEM Domain	Number of Questions	Highest Possible Score	Mean ± SD	Percent of Perception	Interpretation ²⁰
<i>Domain 1:</i> Students' Perceptions of Learning	12	48	31.11 ± 5.94	64.81%	A more positive approach
<i>Domain 2:</i> Students' Perceptions of Teachers	11	44	30.50 ± 6.08	69.32%	Moving in the right direction
<i>Domain 3:</i> Students' Academic Self-Perceptions	8	32	20.37 ± 4.26	63.66%	Feeling more on the positive side
<i>Domain 4:</i> Students' Perceptions of Atmosphere	12	48	26.56 ± 6.51	55.33%	A more positive atmosphere
<i>Domain 5:</i> Students' Social Self-Perceptions	7	28	15.58 ± 4.00	55.64%	Not too bad
Total DREEM Score	50	200	124.12 ± 26.79	62.06%	More positive than negative

Note: The percent of perception indicates the percentage of students that contributed to the highest possible score for each domain. The percentage was computed by dividing the mean by the highest possible score per domain.

Perception of Students according to DREEM Subscale and Statement. Table 4 displays the average scores of the items in each domain, classifying them as strong areas, areas that could be improved, or areas that need particular attention. Higher mean scores signify a positive perception of the learning environment.³⁴

The Students' Perception of Learning (SPL) domain comprises twelve items, with scores ranging from 1.37 ± 0.86 to 3.00 ± 0.76 . Notably, item 24 is commendable for its effective use of teaching time, while attention is warranted for item 25, stating the overemphasis of teaching to factual learning.

In the Students' Perception of Teacher (SPT) domain, consisting of eleven items, scores range from 2.24 ± 1.11 to 3.58 ± 0.58 , except for items 40 and 2. Remarkably, item 2 attains the highest score, denoting that teachers are knowledgeable, while item 40 indicates the teachers' preparedness for their lessons.

Students' Academic Self-Perception (SASP) domain scores range from 1.48 ± 0.89 to 3.33 ± 0.76 , with items 31 and 45 scoring the highest. Item 27 requires attention for memorization, while item 31 reflects students acquiring

substantial knowledge about empathy in their profession. On the other hand, item 45 indicates that what they have learned is relevant to their careers in the healthcare field.

The fourth domain, Students' Perception of Atmosphere (SPA), encompasses twelve items with scores between 1.72 ± 1.07 and 2.85 ± 0.78 . Areas with scores below 2 suggest an intensified atmosphere during laboratory sessions, where students find it challenging to concentrate effectively, and their enjoyment does not outweigh the stress associated with the course.

The seven items in the Students' Social Self-Perceptions (SSSP) domain range in score from 1.24 ± 0.97 to 3.30 ± 0.86 . Notably, items 4 and 28 record the lowest scores, indicating feelings of tiredness and loneliness from students. Conversely, item 15, obtaining the highest score, suggests the presence of positive friendships within the program.

Overall, 7 items need particular attention, specifically items 4, 11, 25, 27, 28, 36, and 42, indicating weaknesses in the educational environment. Only 1 item, specifically item 2, is considered as a particularly strong area. Together with this are 5 items that are positively

perceived by the students, specifically items 15, 21, 31, 40, and 45, that indicate strengths of the educational environment. The remaining 37 items are areas that could be improved.

DISCUSSION

With an overall mean score of 124.12 out of 200 (62.06%), the findings of the study fall within the range of 101-150, indicating that there are more positive than negative perceptions of UST OT students regarding their educational environment, particularly in the areas of learning, teachers, atmosphere, academic perceptions, and social self-perceptions. Comparable findings were evident in local and global studies, where overall scores revealed within the range of 126 to 135.61.^{27,29} A study conducted at Saint Louis University in Baguio City demonstrated parallel results, reporting an overall mean score of 120.38 out of 200 for medical laboratory science students and 123.41 out of 200 for nursing students.¹⁶ Furthermore, a study conducted in Slovenia during the peak of the pandemic, utilizing the DREEM inventory tool to assess the perception of nursing students, revealed an overall mean score of 122.2, consistent with the findings of the present study.³⁵

Of the 50 items, 6 were more positively perceived by the students, as indicated by having scores greater than 3.0. Item number 15 obtained a score of 3.30, indicating that the students managed to foster good relationships with peers. It is essential to have positive peer relationships as this involves companionship, validation, and support, which make students comfortable and motivated to resolve problems they may encounter in school.³⁶ Items 31, scoring 3.33, and 45, achieving a score of 3.20, indicate that students have acquired a substantial understanding of empathy within their profession. Moreover, these findings imply that a significant portion of the knowledge acquired is relevant to their career in healthcare.^{27,29-30}

In addition to the aforementioned items, students also expressed a positive perception regarding the effective utilization of teaching time, as reflected in item number 21, with a

score of 3.00. This suggests that instructors ensure that their time for teaching is maximized, which has a beneficial effect on students' achievement.³⁷ Furthermore, the instructors exhibit a commitment to thorough preparation for their teaching sessions, as indicated by item number 40, with a positive score of 3.25, as perceived by the students. The domain of students' perception of teaching (SPT) attained the highest score among all domains, with no item registering a score below 2.0. Notably, out of the 50 items, item number 2, stating that teachers are knowledgeable, earned a significant score of 3.58 within this domain. A comparable outcome was observed in the study conducted at the private school of Nursing in Southwest Dallas, where the same item achieved the highest score of 3.50.³⁰

Conversely, the findings of this study show that seven items scored less than 2.0 out of 4 points, indicating areas of the educational environment that need particular attention. Item number 4 had the lowest mean score of 1.24, stating that students felt too tired to enjoy the course. Various studies³⁸⁻⁴⁰ show different factors that may contribute to this exhaustion, specifically internal (e.g., student anxiety, lack of self-efficacy, and self-regulation of learning) and external factors (e.g., student participation in extracurricular activities, students' social and environmental contexts, as well as their educational environment), suggesting the need to gather more data for future studies. Another area of concern was item number 25 (The teachers emphasize too much on factual learning), which scored 1.37. In a study conducted among first-year Malaysian medical students, this item also acquired the lowest score in the questionnaire, indicating that students are having difficulties learning the medical concepts of their profession, which requires learning numerous facts.⁴¹ Furthermore, students expressed a sense of difficulty in memorizing all the necessary information, as indicated by item number 27, with a score of 1.48.^{29,42} In a study comparing the perceptions of traditional and accelerated second-degree nursing students in the Southwest, this item also scored the lowest with 1.16 and 1.25, respectively. Item number 28, stating loneliness of students, which scored

Table 4. Mean (SD) Item Scores According to DREEM Subscale and Statement

Domain	Question # and Statement	Mean ± SD
SPL	1 I am encouraged to participate in class.	2.61 ± 0.91
	7 The teaching is often stimulating.	2.58 ± 0.87
	13 The teaching is student-centered.	2.53 ± 0.88
	16 The teaching helps to develop my competence.	2.99 ± 0.77
	20 The teaching is well-focused.	2.92 ± 0.84
	21 The teaching helps to develop my confidence.	2.46 ± 0.93
	24 The teaching time is put to good use.	3.00 ± 0.76
	<i>25 The teaching overemphasizes factual learning.</i>	<i>1.37 ± 0.86</i>
	38 I am clear about the learning objectives of this course.	2.87 ± 0.78
	44 The teaching encourages me to be an active learner	2.55 ± 0.88
	47 Long-term learning is emphasized over the short-term learning.	2.87 ± 0.87
	48 The teaching is too teacher-centered.	2.38 ± 0.91
	SPT	2 The teachers are knowledgeable.
6 The teachers adopt a patient-centered approach to consulting.		2.75 ± 0.83
8 The teachers ridicule the students.		2.54 ± 1.17
9 The teachers are authoritarian.		2.24 ± 1.11
18 The teachers have good communication skills with patients.		2.99 ± 0.81
29 The teachers are good at providing feedback to students.		2.64 ± 0.87
32 The teachers provide constructive criticism here.		2.99 ± 0.80
37 The teachers give clear examples.		2.73 ± 0.88
39 The teachers get angry in teaching.		2.35 ± 1.18
40 The teachers are well-prepared for their teaching sessions.		3.25 ± 0.71
50 The students irritate the teachers.		2.45 ± 1.00
SASP	5 Learning strategies that worked for me before continue to work for me now.	2.12 ± 0.99
	10 I am confident about passing this year.	2.28 ± 0.92
	22 I feel I am being well prepared for my profession	2.52 ± 1.04
	26 Last year's work has been a good preparation for this year's work.	2.47 ± 0.95
	27 <i>I am able to memorize all I need.</i>	<i>1.48 ± 0.89</i>
	31 I have learned a lot about empathy in my profession.	3.33 ± 0.76
	41 My problem-solving skills are being well developed here.	2.96 ± 0.73
	45 Much of what I have to learn seems relevant to a career in healthcare.	3.20 ± 0.73
SPA	<i>11 The atmosphere is relaxed during the laboratory teaching.</i>	<i>1.72 ± 1.07</i>
	12 This school is well time-tabled.	2.40 ± 1.05
	17 Cheating is a problem in this school.	2.42 ± 0.99
	23 The atmosphere is relaxed during lectures.	2.36 ± 1.03
	30 There are opportunities for me to develop my interpersonal skills.	2.85 ± 0.78
	33 I feel comfortable in class socially.	2.26 ± 0.98
	34 The atmosphere is relaxed during class.	2.29 ± 0.89
	35 I find the experience disappointing.	2.40 ± 0.96
	36 <i>I am able to concentrate well.</i>	<i>1.76 ± 0.99</i>
	42 <i>The enjoyment outweighs the stress of the course.</i>	<i>1.75 ± 0.96</i>
	43 The atmosphere motivates me as a learner.	2.10 ± 0.92
49 I feel able to ask the questions I want.	2.25 ± 1.03	
SSSP	3 There is a good support system for students who get stressed.	2.11 ± 1.09
	4 <i>I am too tired to enjoy this course.</i>	<i>1.24 ± 0.97</i>
	14 I am rarely bored on this course.	2.29 ± 0.95
	15 I have good friends in this course.	3.30 ± 0.86
	19 My social life is good.	2.32 ± 1.07
	28 <i>I seldom feel lonely.</i>	<i>1.69 ± 1.06</i>
	46 My accommodation is pleasant.	2.62 ± 0.88

Note: Items in bold are those with a mean score of ≥ 3.00. Italicized items are those with a mean score of <2.00

1.69, necessitates additional exploration to understand its underlying causes despite considering the positive perceptions of a good support system and peer relationships highlighted in the study results.³⁰

Moreover, three out of these seven items pertaining to the area of Student's Perception of Atmosphere (SPA) received the lowest overall score among all domains, which revealed that students did not feel relaxed during laboratory sessions, as specified in item number 11, with a

score 1.72 and found difficulties with concentration, as indicated in item number 36, obtaining a score of 1.76. Similar findings have been reported in a study among Nursing students in Slovenia.³⁵ In a study conducted in Pakistan, the data varied between nursing and medical school because there is a difference between their ways of conducting clinical training, lectures, and skills laboratories. Item 42, which scored 1.75, states that stress over the course can be further studied to understand the causes of students' stress and how the courses can be more enjoyable. It is essential to conduct more studies and evaluations before instituting a corrective intervention since students' behavior, academic development, and sense of well-being are influenced by their perception of the atmosphere.

These weaknesses suggest examining the educational environment with areas for future improvement, suggesting that curriculum reforms may be needed to address this issue.⁴¹ On the other hand, the predominantly positive perspectives of OT students suggest that strengths within the educational environment at UST should be actively maintained. Improving such weaknesses while maintaining the strengths of the educational environment can collectively contribute to fostering an optimistic mindset, boosting students' confidence in completing their courses, and preparing them effectively for future career roles as competent occupational therapists.⁴²

Overall, 37 items had scores between 2.0 and 3.0, suggesting that these items are aspects of the educational environment that could still be improved. Throughout the result of this study, only one item scored above 3.50. Items with this range of scores are regarded as especially strong areas. However, with further studies, planning, and implementation of corrective measures, it is expected that subsequent evaluations will identify more items with scores exceeding 3.5, resulting in the emergence of stronger areas in the educational environment of the institution.

Limitations and Recommendations. Several limitations have been identified in this study. Due to the limitations and biases associated with self-report questionnaires such as DREEM, the validity of the students' perspectives may be

questioned. The study did not investigate the risk factors and contributing variables for students' perspectives on each item of the DREEM questionnaire. The study proposes incorporating a qualitative study design to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives on their learning environment. Additionally, the study took place solely in the Department of Occupational Therapy of the University of Santo Tomas. As such, extending and applying the study's findings to all OT students in the Philippines may not be probable. In further research, the sample population should be increased to make the findings generalized to the population of Filipino OT students.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the general perceptions of UST OT students regarding their educational environment. While the overall findings are perceived to be positive, several areas needing attention or improvement were identified. This study serves as an initial step in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the current educational environment. Future studies may broaden the scope of objectives to determine the positive and negative correlations between each subscale and the demographic data gathered. The implications of this study would primarily aid in course redesign and curriculum review by the faculty and institutional policy development by the administration of UST-CRS to ensure students' success in the program. Furthermore, the findings from this study could serve as a foundational resource for various stakeholders interested in elevating the standards of occupational therapy education on a national scale.

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Individual author's contributions

All authors contributed equally.

Disclosure statement

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest for the current study.

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