

Investigating Students Preference of Classroom Seating Arrangement in a Private Elementary School

A Qualitative Research in One of the Elementary Schools in Bandung

Imas Suparsih

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

imassuparsih06@gmail.com

Keywords: Seating arrangement, students' preference.

Abstract: This study is designed to find out EFL students' preference of classroom seating arrangement and defined their reason in one of the private elementary schools in Bandung. The participants were eighteen students, consisting of nine boys and nine girls. A qualitative design is chosen to collect deeper understanding. Open-ended questionnaire and interview as the instruments in this study were analyzed descriptively along the way the process of completion of the paper. The findings showed that 28% students preferred on row classroom seating arrangement while 72% preferred u-shape classroom seating arrangement. The results from interview surprisingly found that all the students selected in the interview choose u-shape seating arrangement as their most preferred in learning English. To sum up, it is suggested that the teacher should apply various seating arrangements work best for students' need.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian context English used as a foreign language that should be learned in the classroom. Therefore, the teacher should be able to handle the classroom during teaching and learning process. Classroom management is the activities that used by the teacher to produce a learning situation that helpful for successful instruction, containing positioning the physical setting, establishing rules and procedures, keeping student's attention to the lesson and involve in every single activity (Brophy, 2011). According to Harmer (2007b) classroom management can be expressed as the determination of teachers to manage or handle some classroom variables include the use of voice, the use of first language, teacher's instruction, teacher's talking, student talk and teacher talk, lesson stages, grouping and seating arrangement.

During teaching and learning, the teacher and students' position can influence all the activities in the classroom. One of the activities in the classroom is classroom arrangement. Therefore, the seating arrangement is one of the essential points in teaching and learning process. According to Wannarka and Kathy (2008) Seating arrangements are important classroom setting because they have the possibility of helping the teacher to avoid problem behaviors that

decrease student attention and reduce available instructional time. According to Meeks, Knotts, and James (2013) stated that, the student who have a preference to sit in a comfortable position in the classroom have a tendency to let their minds lose the concentration. Meanwhile, students who prefer to sit in less comfortable seating positions tend to be more responsive and on authority. Moreover, Stipek, (2006) being a kind, loyal teacher means holding students reliable while delivering the support they need to succeed. Therefore, the teacher should pay attention in the entire of classroom activities because the teacher has a responsibility to help the students' accomplishment.

Several studies found that the shapes of seating arrangement can positively affect student. Seating position can influence the learning environment by providing comfort, better view, or improved progress (Meeks, et al., 2013). Moreover, forming an atmosphere, through seating arrangement will support student's achievement in learning (Jusan & Haghghi, 2011). The seating arrangement in the classroom allowed interaction between teacher and students. Furthermore, arranging students' seating position in the classroom affected teacher's and student's communication (McCorskey & McVetta, 1978). The objective of the study is to find out the

type of classroom seating arrangement preference by students in learning English to find out the students' reason about their seating arrangement choice. Therefore, this study focused to answer the research question below:

1. What type of classroom seating arrangement preferred by student in learning English?
2. Why do students prefer such seating arrangement?

The significance of this study will be expected to give benefit in two areas, those are theoretical and pedagogical. Theoretically, the result of this study will be expected to be used to support the previous theory about seating arrangements. In the term of pedagogy, the result of this study provides a description about students' preference of seating arrangement and exploring their reason. The result also expected to help the teacher to understand their students more especially in this site.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The classroom situation should be conducive in order to produce a comfortable environment in the classroom. There are several factors that can influence the students during teaching and learning process. One influence point that influence students' learning is seating arrangement. The seating arrangement is classroom environment in which arranging desk and chairs for student to learn in the classroom. Arranging classroom seating arrangement shown several advantages. In the language classroom, the seating arrangement is important to create a positive learning environment (Zerin, 2009). According to Jusan and Haghghi (2011) modifying seating arrangements may be approached to decrease disruptive behavior that influences on the class environment. Moreover, Denton (1992) argues no matter what type of seating arrangement applies in the classroom the main point, it must be flexible to accommodate numerous activities planned by the teachers in the classroom.

Harmer (2007b) lists some seating arrangements that can be practiced in the classroom, those are orderly row, circle and horseshoes and separate table. In line with Harmer, Brown H. D. (2001), also classifies some probabilities of seating arrangements in the classroom. Those are semi-circle, U-shape (similar with horseshoe) and circle. Moreover, Mc Corskey and McVetta (1978) also stated that there are modes of arranging a classroom: traditional similar to row, horseshoe or semi-circular, and modular. Those seating arrangements have different advantages and

disadvantage to student learning.

First, rows seating arrangement. This seating arrangement is known as the shape of traditional seating because it is the most common seating arrangement in classrooms. The desks and the chairs are arranged in well-systematized rows and columns. The advantage of orderly row is helping the teacher to view of all the students and all students can see the teacher obviously (Harmer, 2007b). Moreover, in row seating arrangement, the teacher requires to participate the whole class while working and paying full attention to the student such as moving around the class to check the students (Zerin, 2009). Research conducted by Simmons, et al., (2015) found that row seating was the paramount classroom arrangement on the student's behavior. There were some disadvantages of row seating arrangement. Row seating arrangement is difficult for the teacher to grab students' attention. Row seating arrangement doesn't support natural communication among students during teaching and learning process (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Therefore, the students can have difficulties to pay attention to focus on learning.

Second, circle and horseshoe seating arrangement. In this seating arrangement the desks and chairs are arranged in the shape of U. In this seating position allowed the teacher to interact easily with the students during teaching and learning process. According to Harmer (2007b) in a circle and horseshoe seating arrangement every student can see and interact each other. The classroom situation is more intimate, in this position also giving potential for students to share their feelings and information through talking, eye contact or communicative body movements. According to Hakonsen (2012) semi-circle allowed the students to interact more easily with their classmate. It also suited for students to engage directly or to join in every activity in the classroom. Hilal (2014) stated that the disadvantage of horseshoes or U-shape seating arrangement, the students have difficulties sit their place and the teachers have also difficulties moving easily between students during giving lecture. It occurred because of the flow of the desk too narrow.

Third, separate table seating arrangement. In this seating position the students are seated in a small group in a single desk in the classroom. Therefore, students are able to join groups work effectively. There were some advantages of the separate table seating arrangement. Zerin (2009) stated that the separate table seating arrangement allowing the teacher to move and work with the students and the students who were seated at the back of the classroom cannot hide from the teacher's attention. Moreover,

this type of seating arrangement allowing the students to talk and help each other. Harmer (2007b, p. 43), stated some disadvantages in separate table seating arrangement, firstly, students who sat in this position may not always want to sit with the similar classmates but they prefer to change their classmate anytime. Secondly, it makes the whole teaching and learning more difficult for the students are more wordy and separated. Therefore, in separate table seating arrangement with the teacher should pay full attention because it is difficult to handle the whole class when the students wanted the teacher's help at a time.

3 METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study is conducted under qualitative design. This study applied the qualitative approach because the open-ended questionnaire result arranged into percentages and described the interview's results based on the student's preference on seating arrangement. Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative is used to understand the setting in which participants in a study address a problem or an issue. According to Malik & Hamied (2014, p. 172) qualitative research is a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter, a distinctive feature of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to identify issues from the perspective of participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behavior, events or object. Qualitative research generally focuses on understanding the specific and the characteristic of the research but not in essence claim to generalize finding to other settings (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Therefore, the results of this study not to generalize to other settings.

3.2 Site and Participant

In terms of location, this research was conducted in one of a private elementary schools in Bandung. The selection was based on the accessibility. The Participant were 18 students of elementary school in pre intermediate level. Surprisingly the respondents are balanced, they were 9 boys and 9 girls. The researcher was one of the instructors from the institution of English course at this site.

3.3 Instruments

In collecting the data, open-ended questionnaire and semi structure interview were chosen as the instruments in this study. Those instruments were conducted to find out student's preference seating arrangement and exploring their reason for their choice.

The first instrument is an open-ended questionnaire. Open-ended questionnaire allows the individual to response the items freely to express their feelings and more flexible (Wiersma, 1991, p. 176). The second instrument is interview. According to Creswell (2008, p. 225), "in qualitative, ask open-ended question allowing the participants to express their voice about their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of the research finding". The interview conducted to explore the student's response related to their choice on seating arrangement type.

The open-ended questionnaire was distributed to the students every Saturday at the end of the lesson about student's preference on seating arrangement. The questionnaire covered student's preference on seating arrangement. The questionnaire as a whole should be easily read and should be not so long that makes participants boring (Wiersma, 1991, p. 179). The participants were elementary students. Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding the questionnaire translated into students' first language. The students asked to choose the type of seating arrangement applied in the classroom. Then, the result arranged in the percentage.

The interview conducted after distributing the questionnaire. The interview aimed to explore the student's reason towards seating arrangement preferred by students. The purpose of the interview is to explore the respondents' experiences, opinions, or feeling (Richards, 2009). The data from interviews which have been recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed descriptively.

4 FINDINGS

These findings are based on the questionnaire complemented by the interview. The result of open-ended questionnaire presented in the chart. The chart showed every student has different preference of classroom arrangement used in this study, namely rows and u-shape seating arrangement. Student 1, 11, and 16 preferred both row and u-shape seating arrangement. Two out of eighteen students preferred row classroom seating arrangement rather than u-shape arrangement, they are student number 3 and 8.

Moreover, student number 6 the only one who preferred row classroom seating arrangement. Furthermore, 12 participants preferred on u-shape classroom seating arrangement rather than rows seating arrangement, they are student 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18.

The result of questionnaire also showed that every student, respond differently on classroom seating arrangement. The questionnaire showed 28% the students at this site preferred on row classroom seating arrangement while 72% preferred u-shape classroom seating arrangement.

The interview results generally provided the answers to the research questions about students reason of the preference seating arrangement. The results begin with a brief summary of the interviewee's responses toward seating arrangement during teaching and learning process. Then it is followed by their reason for choosing that type of seating arrangement.

There are two types of seating arrangement used in this study those are row and u-shape seating arrangement. Before asking students preference seating arrangement, the researcher makes some conversation, such as asking the student's name to make the situation more comfortable and relax during interview session. Then, the researcher showed the picture of seating arrangement used during teaching and learning process and asked them to choose which one of seating arrangement the most preference by the students.

Surprisingly, all the students selected in the interview choose u-shape seating arrangement as their most preferred in learning English. Even though, all the students favor u-shape seating arrangement as their preference seating type in learning English but they have different reasons for their statement.

The first student preferred u-shape seating arrangement. The student mentioned u-shape seating arrangement allowed her to see the whiteboard clearly that help easily in learning. She argued this seating position allowed the teacher act wisely in the classroom. This student believes that the teacher position in the classroom simply helps more focus in learning. The student also mentioned in row seating arrangement preferred to sit on the front line of the class.

The second student argued, u-shape seating arrangement made her more comfortable in the classroom. This student supposed that the sense of comfort has a tendency to help her in learning. She reasoned that u-shape seating arrangement allowed her to interact with classmates. This seating position that is closer to her friends also have a big

encouragement to understand the teacher's explanation. In this case, she rationalizes when she misses the point of the teacher's explanation allowed her to ask the friends who are next to her. It means her preference in seating arrangement affected by her friend. The second student expresses the opinion about row seating arrangement. In this seating position, the students preferred seating in front line of the class. She considered when she sat in the front line that close to the whiteboard will help him to recognize the information easily.

Moreover, the third student said he preferred u-shape seating arrangement. This student point of view in learning process u-shape seating arrangement allowed him to look around the classroom. Moreover, the interview showed this student does not like formal environment in learning. Therefore, he preferred seating at the side of his best friends. In this setting, the student has a potential to chit chat with the other students, which is made him enjoyed an informal environment that he considered it helps easily in understanding the materials.

Furthermore, the fourth respondent mentioned English is a subject that he likes. He preferred u-shape seating arrangement rather than row seating arrangement. The student considered that he learned better when he heard and wrote the teacher's explanation. Therefore, in u-shape seating arrangement most of the time the student favored to sit in the middle of the line that nothing is blocking his view to see what the teacher wrote on the board.

In addition, the last students argued both row and u-shape seating arrangement are the same. Both seating arrangement did not really affect him to understand what the teacher was talking about. In this case, he explained the teacher's position is further influenced rather than seating arrangement. Although he argued the two seating arrangement did not affect the way he learned English. The interview showed he preferred u-shape seating arrangement of delivering idea that this arrangement make the teacher closer to the students' position. It is also easier for the teacher to reprimand the students' behavior that created noisy classroom. Moreover, the student response this seating arrangement more comfortable to interact with the classmates. The student preferred to sit on the front line in u-shape seating arrangement by arguing that he can hear the teacher's voice clearly that help him understand the lesson. He also maintained u-shape seating arrangement allowed the teacher to see student's behavior.

5 CONCLUSION

This study is designed to find out the EFL student's preference of classroom seating arrangement and described their reason. The foundation that inspired this investigation was the importance of classroom seating arrangement in teaching and learning. The finding from the questionnaire showed that 28% the students at this site preferred on row classroom seating arrangement while 72% preferred u-shape classroom seating arrangement. Moreover, the results from interview surprisingly found that all the students selected in the interview choose u-shape seating arrangement as their most preferred in learning English.

Additionally, this study suggests the recommendation. First, teachers should pay full attention to the classroom seating arrangement, because it is one of significant points can affect students' learning. Second, the teacher should apply various seating arrangements that fit to student need. Moreover, as the present study only focused on the small number of participants, this study recommends the further researchers can be conducted the same area with extra participants.

REFERENCES

- Brophy, J., 2011. History of Research on Classroom Management. Dalam: *Handbook of Classroom Management Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*. New Jersey: Routledge, p. 17.
- Brown, H. D., 2001. *Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. s.l.:Longman.
- Creswell, 2008. *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative*. Third Edition ed. New Jersey: Pearson International Edition.
- Creswell, J. W., 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed ed. California: Sage Publications.
- Denton, P., 1992. Seating Arrangement for Better Classroom Management. *Adventist Education*.
- Hakonsen, H., 2012. The Effects of Rows vs. Semicircular Seating Arrangements on Students' Participation. 02 May.
- Hamied, F. A. & Malik, 2014. *Research Method: a Guide for First Time Researchers*. Bandung: UPI Press.
- Harmer, J., 2007b. *How to Teach English*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Harmer, J., 2007b. *How to Teach English*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Heigham, J. & Croker, R. A., 2009. *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics A Practical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hilal, Ü. S., 2014. *Effects of Different Seating Arrangements on Learning Experience*. Ankara: s.n.
- Jusan, M. H. & Haghghi, M. M., 2011. Exploring Students Behavior on Seating Arrangements in Learning Environment. *ELSEVIER*.
- Lofty, N., 2012. *Seating Arrangement and Cooperative Learning Activities: Student's On-task/off-task Participation in EFL Classrooms*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo.
- McCorskey, J. C. & McVetta, R. W., 1978. Classroom Seating Arrangement: Instructional Communication Theory Versus Student Preferences. *Communication Education*, March. Volume 27.
- McCorskey, J. C. & McVetta, R. W., 1978. Classroom Seating Arrangement: Instructional Communication Theory Versus Student Preferences. *Communication Education*, March. Volume 27.
- Meeks, M. D., Knotts, T. L. & James, K. D., 2013. The Impact of Seating Location and Seating Type on Student's Performance. *Education Science*, 15 October.
- Richards, K., 2009. Interviews. In: *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 182.
- Scott, W. A. & Ytreberg, L. H., 1990. *Teaching English to Children*. London New York: Longman.
- Simmons, K., Carpenter, L., Crenshaw, S. & Hinton, V. M., 2015. *Exploration of Classroom Seating Arrangement and Student's Behaviour in A Second Grade Classroom*. Montgomery, AL: Georgia Educational Researcher.
- Stipek, D., 2006. Relationship Matter. *Educational Leadership*, September.
- Wannarka, R. & Kathy, R., 2008. Seating Arrangements that Promote Positive Academic and Behavioral Outcome. *Blackwell Publishing*.
- Wiersma, W., 1991. *Research Methods In Education: An Introduction*. Fifth Edition ed. United State of America: The University of Taledo.
- Zerin, S., 2009. *Classroom Management: Seating arrangement in ESL Classroom*, Dhaka: BRAC University.