

Students and Teachers Preference About Seating Arrangement for Improving Speaking: A Case Study in 10th Grade of MAN 2 Mojokerto

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Abstract— Speaking skill has been a concerned issue for English for foreign language (EFL) learners in Indonesia. Most learners find it difficult since it requires not only accuracy but also fluency at the same time. Some researches argue that seating arrangement influence students' speaking ability. This study examines whether seating arrangement can help students of MAN2 Mojokerto to improve their speaking skill. A qualitative approach was used by interviewing English teachers and tenth- grade students in the school. The study has revealed that although it helps students in speaking, the influence is not significant. Given this uncertainty, the study argues that for improving the skill needs some strategies or methods appropriate for students. This study also offers a perspective to other instructors trying some classroom management strategies to improve speaking skill for EFL students.

Keywords: *speaking skill, seating arrangement, English achievement*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the teaching process, teachers surely need to maximize their student achievement by their teaching skills to give significant improvement. Besides, they should be managing the classroom well to make it useful. Effective classroom management plays a significant role in learning activities to make the class conducive. It is also determined by the

teacher to create the class in accordance with their expectations. The seating arrangement is one of the essential aspects that should be highlighted in classroom management, especially in speaking skills.

However, experts opinions on the significance of seating position on learning achievement vary. On the one hand, some believe that the seating position does not have a significant influence on students' performance. A study Kalinowski and Taper (2007) reports there is no disadvantageous impact of sitting further from the teacher on learning achievement. Meaksetal. (2013) add that seating location or seating type does not necessarily change students' performance. Thus, students' achievement is not only influenced by the seating position, but other aspects may also contribute.

On the other hand, other studies argue that seating position can improve student achievement, including speaking skills. Ngware etal. (2013) state that sitting in the front rows or near the board leads to more comprehension, better performance and achievement (Marxetal., 2006; Tagliacollo, etal.,2010). It is because learners can see and listen to the teacher better (Perkins and Wieman, 2005) which help them have better interaction with the teachers. (Marxetal., 2006). Besides, the teacher may have more control to students who sit in front rows related to their movements, learning activities and their behaviors. It is highly likely that students who sit in the front rows

can make the most of their learning more than they are in the back do.

Considering those previous studies, the objective of this research is to investigate the improvement of student speaking skills through seating arrangement which is designed to make the class be more conducive. This article offers a brief overview of the strategies of the teacher through seating arrangement in classroom management. It is expected that it can improve the overall quality of teacher strategies to manage the class and student achievements.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking skill tends to make the students communicate in the target language. Some students find it challenging to speak in English. Some theory said that more practice is the best manner to solve problems in speaking. According to Ur (1991) that it seems a general sense that speaking is the most essential skill in mastering a language since people will be claimed as a native of a language if they can speak the language. She (1991) also adds that speaking is a primary skill that many and many EFL learners expect to learn. Therefore, teachers are expected to create some activities which encourage students to speak up. Ur (1991,120) argues one of important language course components is any classroom experiences that result in motivating students to speak. Classroom experience involves managing the class.

Classroom management is one of the important factors which influence the teaching and learning process. Classroom atmosphere and students behaviors are influenced by effective classroom management. The management is needed as effort to achieve optimal condition, so that learning activities lead to achieve optimal conditions and that learning can be implemented as expected (Arikunto,2007). Thus, organization of the physical environment in the classroom is including of seating arrangement.

Most teachers assume that seating arrangement is not quite affecting students, and it is sometimes considered as a trivial thing. Therefore, many teachers do not change sitting position in the classroom. The seating arrangement should be flexible in order to make it facilitate the kinds of teaching activities. Dunbar (2004) states that many experienced teachers recommend that teachers assign seating for students to facilitate discipline and instruction.

According to Wiyani (2013) cited from Silberman (2005) explain that seating arrangement may take several different forms:

Orderly Rows/Traditional Seat Position

This position is commonly found in Indonesian schools and almost in school world wide. In general, the position has four rows desk in the classroom and students sit in pair in one desk. This seat position has some advantages. The teachers have good view of all the students and maintain eye contact with students talking. The students can see the teacher movement and learn more comfortably. It commonly has aisles between the rows which benefits the teacher to walk up, watch what the students are doing and make personal contact with individual students.

U-Shaped

In this seating arrangement, teachers sit in the middle and see all the students, and the students do so. It is one of the adequate seating arrangements which prevents the students from distracting each other since the teacher is in the middle of the class. Since students sit closer to one another, they can still help their neighbors without distracting the learning activities. Even though the teacher can keep distraction off in the middle of the class, this seating also has a weakness if the teachers turn their back toward students, the teacher may not see the problem when it occurs.

Chevron

This seating arrangement is similar to a tradition seat position and U-shaped position. It is a combination which has benefits of both seating layouts as mentioned earlier.

Group Work

It is generally used by teachers when they ask the students to work in a group. Group work commonly forms in small groups consisting of four or five students sitting together. In a small group, they can work easily, share ideas and help each other. Based on this seat, it is expected that students have a chance to experience work as a team. Working in a group is especially good for students who are less confident in talking in the class. They can share and express their ideas with the member in their group without feeling insecure about being embarrassed. The teacher also can benefit from group work to save time from repeating an explanation. However, sitting in a group sometimes has some problems such as students can get distracted by the students in the group or may not be able to see the board. At such, the teacher can have their weakness to the students unintentionally and it may not be aware of everything that is going on in the class.

Theatre style/Auditorium

The seating arrangement is usually used for senates or councils. This seating layouts is suitable for directing the attention to the front which speeches are given. The participants are involved in a discussion which emphasizes on personal presentation, it sometimes possibly uses media through images or texts. This seating position is ideal for critical engagement between an academic and relatively large class with some all group discussion which presentation of the images and texts are combined.

Ramsden (1999:3) also provides alternatives for seating arrangement which the teachers can use. They are:

Cluster

A cluster consists of four or five desks which are facing each other. Clusters spreads in different places in the classroom. The adequate gap between two clusters allows teachers to move from one cluster to the other and prevent the clusters from crushing each other.

Desk Rows

This seating arrangement is nearly similar to orderly rows eating position. Students sit in several rows which face forward. Enough spaces between desks are necessary for teachers' movement without moving anything.

Table Rows

This type of seating position is proposed for collaborative learning which is best suitable for group work. It consists of long tables which are positioned vertically in rows and students sit next to each other.

Semi-circle

In this seating arrangement, some tables are placed closely in semi-circle. All tables are in front of classroom which allows teacher and students to see each other.

III. METHOD

This study was qualitative since it expected to analyze current phenomena which occur in certain places. Ary, Lucy, and Chris (2014:453) state that the primary goal of qualitative studies is to unfold and comprehend the experience of another. They add that this study gives useful and rich descriptive information to understand, "*a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved*" (2010, 453).

Having conducted in MAN 2 Mojokerto, the study 40 students from 10th grade and 3 English teachers by random sampling. The teachers then interviewed using interview questions guideline to gain the answers for the research questions.

IV. RESULT

The teachers' interview result showed that most of the teacher use two until four types of seating arrangement for speaking class. They were U-shape, traditional seat position, theatre style and group work. The result also showed that the teacher did not use the other type of seating arrangement because they did not know about it. There were 9 English teachers in the school which 7 of them said that the most seating arrangement type used is U-shape. They said that U-shape arrangement helped them to monitor the students more comfortably. They also reported that U-shape layout allowed student to have the same chances to speak up and listen to teachers' explanation. However, three of the teachers said that the most seating arrangement used in the speaking class is a traditional seat position. They claimed that traditional layout was easy to arrange and adequate enough for speaking class.

In addition, the teachers also mentioned that changing seating arrangement can influence students' psychology during classroom activities. By sitting in different position, they can get rid of their bored on some. Thus, it can help with changing the mood and boost students' excitement to do the activities.

Teachers also said about the weakness of using traditional seat position. One of the most that the teacher cannot monitor the students' behavior. Besides, it affects the teachers' movement from one place to one place to watch the students' performance during the lesson. Then, for the U-shape they said that sometimes they got loose contact with the students when teachers get the one side. The teachers do not know what the students do in his/her back.

In line with the teachers, the students' interview result also showed that the teachers use two to four kinds of seating positions. On the interview section, the researchers also question to the students about the seating arrangement that most comfortable and effective for them. The answer showed that 30 students out of 40 participants said that the most comfortable and effective seating arrangement is U-shape. They said that U-shape seating arrangement such a trial for improving their self-confidence because they feel that the teachers' eyes contact their eyes directly. They cannot hide their face behind their friends' background do something else out of the lesson and they can stay focus on the lesson. Besides, they also said that the teachers often arrange them to U-shape seating arrangement then, they enjoy it.

However, although the teachers have applied various seating arrangements for different classroom activities to help students improve their speaking skill, students still have difficulties in speaking mainly to express their ideas. The problem is mostly

caused by the influence of their mother tongue or first language, lack of speaking practice and lack of vocabulary. Another factor is pronunciation. Pronunciation is considered as one of crucial factor to be able to communicate effectively. Poor pronunciation may result incomprehension. The students, unfortunately, frequently make errors in pronouncing some English words. They said that their first language gives in their way to pronounce the English word correctly.

V. DISCUSSION

The result shows that the teachers have used particular seating arrangements according to the learning goals and objectives. In fact, there is one type of seating position, U-shape, which becomes their favourite. It shows that they are well-aware of the importance of seating position in learning process. The U-shape seating arrangement helps the teacher obtaining the goal or objectives of the learning activities, such as monitoring students' performance so they do the works based on the instructions, managing the discipline issues, and maintaining eye contact with students. Student also gain more confidence to contribute in classroom discussion and activities.

However, managing the seating arrangement seems only work for running the classroom activities well. In other words, changing seating position only serves as technical support which allows classroom activities to run and reach its goals. Seating arrangement unfortunately does not have a significant impact on improving students speaking ability. This confirms Meak, et.al (2013) argument that sitting in the front or in the back does not have any influence on learning achievement. Changing seating position may help students to increase their motivation to speak, but not the quality of their speaking. It can be shown from the result that most students remain to have difficulty in speaking regardless of their seating position. It shows that seating arrangement works for increase students' engagement and classroom management, but unable to improve students' speaking ability. Thus, teachers should employ variety of teaching methods instead of merely relying on arranging students' seat to help the learners' speaking skill.

The problem of speaking is beyond seating arrangement. As the result shows, the students speaking problem are mostly related to the influence of first language, lack of vocabulary, lack exposure to the target language and practice it, and lack of pronunciation. Burn and Joyce (1997) argues that meaning construction includes producing, receiving and processing information. It means that students difficult to express their idea during communication cause probably because there is a gap between the ability to process information and produce utterances, and their collective experiences.

Therefore, Ur (1996) suggest the teacher use various learning experiences such as monologue, dialogue, question and answer, and speaking game. Managing physical environment during the classroom process is very advantageous because an appropriate atmosphere and well-managed environment will result in effective interaction of both students and teachers.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the result and finding of the research, it can be concluded that seating arrangement mostly used by the teacher in speaking class is also the seating arrangement mostly like by the students. They prefer to U-shape seating arrangement for speaking class. The applicant of seating arrangement has many impacts to the students. They get good impact toward their learning process in speaking class such as self-confidence, good monitoring from their teacher, and a new physical atmosphere of their class which can make them have a better mood to learn.

The study also suggests the teachers apply other methods and enrich classroom activities and experiences to help students elevate their speaking skill since altering seating position does not impact significantly to level up students' speaking proficiency

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