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LUCY PUJASARI SUPRATMAN

Telkom University, Bandung

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A CASE STUDY OF CLASSROOM SEATING ARRANGEMENT TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTIVITY IN TELKOM UNIVERSITY

LUCY PUJASARI SUPRATMAN*

Telkom University, Bandung

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Abstract. Telkom University has many facilities to support teaching and learning activities in the class. The facilities are spacious classes, projectors with its screen in every class, air conditioners, writing pads, chairs, CCTV and Wi-Fi internet connection. Beyond the complete facility, the number of students in each Communication Department class is forty. So, it needs the strategy for the lecturer to make the material he/she delivers effective for the students. I found that the seating arrangement is an effective strategy to make the students get involved into teaching and learning processes. I took my own class to adapt this seating arrangement for doing this research. I used descriptive case study to analyze a class of Communication Management at Second Semester in Communication Department, Telkom University. The observations were run weekly for Two Months (January 2015-February 2015) during Three Hours of Semester Credit. The results found that students were very active in delivering their ideas. They could see their friends' expressions about a topic under discussion. The lecturer could also directly see students' responses while giving feedback for the lecture. Seating arrangement was made into three cycles: Big Circle Seating Arrangement, Small Circle Seating Arrangement and Army Row Seating Arrangement.

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INTRODUCTION

Seating arrangement at university level is sometimes seen as an unnecessary thing. The lecturer thinks that having proper seating arrangement in the class is a waste of time. Seating arrangement is responsible for not only increasing the laziness among students, but also the number of students which is usually large becomes difficult to manage. But the atmosphere is different in Telkom University class. The number of students is around 35 to 38 students. It will be easier for the lecturer to master the entire class. Telkom university is one of the best private universities in Indonesia. It was officially founded in 2013. Telkom University is striving to reach the status of world class university by improving human resource capacity and quality in terms of the number of lecturers to improve academic functional position.

I did my research on Communication Department class, Telkom University. I explored the classroom with a circular seating arrangement for one semester. The students mentioned that it was very helpful to catch the material from me. Rather than doing the seating in the classical style like rowed seating arrangement, circle style is more interesting for the students. Rowed seating arrangement locates the teacher at the front, and makes the interaction less among the students. This is why I am so interested to do a research about seating arrangement in the class with the

purpose of giving the alternative solution to motivate students' communication and interactivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researches have been done previously on seating arrangement styles. Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) have done a research about seating arrangement entitled "Seating arrangements that Promote positive academic and behavioural outcomes: a review of empirical research". Results of this synthesis suggest that the nature of the academic task and type of behaviour desired should dictate the seating arrangement used. Generally, teachers who want to maximize the task-oriented behaviour of their students during independent work should consider utilizing rows rather than groups as their primary seating arrangement and move desks into other positions to facilitate interaction when it is desired. Researchers have pointed out the logical inconsistency of seating arrangements that seem to run counter to the nature of the academic task (Bennett & Blundell, 1983; Hastings & Schweiso, 1995). When teachers consider behaviours such as hand-raising and writing to be on-task and talking to peers and being out of seat without permission to be off-task, rows appear to be the superior arrangement. If students are working on individual assign-

*Corresponding author: Lucy Pujasari Supratman

E-mail: me_gutschullerin@yahoo.com

ments, they should be seated in an arrangement that makes interacting with their peers inconvenient and apparent to teachers for example, in rows students are not directly facing each other and they may not be close enough to touch each other inconspicuously. When the desired behaviour is interactive, however, like brainstorming (Rosenfeld, Lambert & Black, 1985) or questioning the teacher (Marx, Furher & Hartig, 1999) seating arrangements that facilitate interactions by proximity and position, such as clustered desks or semi-circles, should be utilized.

Consideration of the nature of the academic task at hand highlights the fact that how one defines on-task behaviour and indicates that the research of (Rosenfield et al., 1985) does not, in fact, contradict with the findings of the other articles. These researchers found rows to be the least conducive to on-task behaviour because students performed better in both groups and circles, while all the other studies determined rows to be the most conducive. A critical difference of this study is that the task the students were most frequently engaged in during observations was a brainstorming activity that required talking and collaboration. There is no single classroom seating arrangement that promotes positive behavioural and academic outcomes for all tasks, because the available research clearly indicates that the nature (i.e., interactive versus independent) of the task should dictate the arrangement.

Teachers, especially those who have students with special educational needs that impact their behaviour in inclusive or homogeneous settings, should be able to eliminate many disruptions that are due to inappropriate student interactions by utilizing a rowed arrangement for individual tasks and moving desks together when interaction is desirable. Other researcher who has conducted a similar research is Lotfy (2012) in her thesis at The Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the university of Zambia (2012). Her research is entitled as "Seating Arrangement and Cooperative Learning Activities: Students' On-task/Off-task Participation in EFL Classrooms". The research talks about Literature concerning cooperative learning that stresses the concept that students interacting together while working on group activities show more learning as well as develop social skills rapidly that will help students in an out-of-the-class context.

Findings of this literature about seating arrangements show that when students sit facing each other, they have a better opportunity to talk to each other which helps them develop on-task behavior (Rosenfield et al., 1985; Sommer, 1967). However, other findings show that there is not much difference in the quality of student learning (Adams, 2009) or the students' and teacher's roles (Lam & Lawrence, 2002). This is in addition to the findings that both gender and personality differences highly affect student participation in class. In addition, none of the studies reviewed in

this chapter offered a sample of the activity done in class while trying different seating arrangements which could be counted as one major variable that could affect students' participation. Accordingly, the rationale for this study lies in a number of reasons highlighted in this literature review. The first reason is concerned with the idea that limited research has been done on this area of seating arrangement and students' participation patterns while working on CL activities in EFL classrooms and almost nothing has been done in Egypt. This is particularly important because despite of what teacher training and classroom management materials mention about the importance of changing classroom seating arrangements according to the activities being used, the furniture arrangements adopted by most educational institutions in Egypt are considered, to some extent, a major challenge to the cooperative learning strategies they are trying to foster.

Teachers tend to take the idea of seating arrangements for granted. In other words, they believe that when working on group activities, students should automatically be seated in circles or clusters and that sitting in rows and columns will not help students interact with each other. However, there is no proof that these arrangements actually assist students to be on-task while doing a group activity. This study aims to explore this area of seating arrangements and students' participation while working on CL activities in EFL classes within the Egyptian context. In addition, there is a gap in research where the area of student preferences in relation to seating arrangements has not been examined while monitoring students' actual participation rate in CL activities. For this reason, a focus on student participation in relation to seating arrangement as well as to their personal preferences is needed.

METHOD

This study uses case study qualitative research. The case study is referred to as a subjective perspective. The findings are obtained through picture identification of phenomena that occur in the field. The approach explains the meaning of the action. This interpretive paradigm seeks to create interpretation. The interpretive approach sees the informants in a subjective way and analyzes the truth from participant point of view. I acted as the participant too. There is no limit between me as the researcher and the informant as the research subject. It was viewed in subjective way because the purpose of the study was to find out how people actively interpret their meaning constructed. I gained the research data through depth interviews, observation and rapport.

DATA ANALYSIS

At first, I explained the goal to the students about this research. On the first day, I did the observation of how the circle style

sitting arrangement worked from students' expressions. Then, at the end of semester, I made some focus group discussion with

them. The total students were 38 and they were very enthusiastic to follow my class for the entire semester.

FIGURE 1

I Led the Teaching by using Circle Seating Arrangement at Class



FIGURE 2

The Behavior of Student While Rearranging the Seating Arrangement



DISCUSSION

The students in communication department class had their own reasons to be actively involved in circular seating arrangement. They said that seating arrangement should be proper for better communication and eye-contact among other students. Mostly all students said that the circular seating arrangement had enabled them to communicate with the lecturer. They were available to maintain concentration on the material and focus on the easiness of sharing ideas. They felt comfortable and closer to their friends.

Cornell (2002) said that "For decades, the term "classroom" was characterized as a rectangular room where the "focus was directed at the front where the instructor exercised complete control of the pace, content, and sequence of activities" by using a blackboard and overhead projector. But now, everything has changed. The lecturer has variative ideas for making the class alive. Seating arrangement in circle style is the best alternative to be applied in modern classroom.

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