Seating Position in English Language Learning: Does it really matter?

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ABSTRACT

Seating arrangements may take several different forms. Public schools in Indonesia usually use traditional arrangement where the students’ seating are arranged into perfect straight rows. At the beginning of the academic year, students usually may get to choose where they want to sit. On the other hand, sometimes students’ seating positions are decided by the class teacher. Seating arrangements has long been believed as one factor contributing to students’ achievement. Thus, the objective of this research was to analyze the correlation between students’ seating position and their English achievement. This research involved students of SMPN 2 Kota Bengkulu grade VIII E academic year 2015/2016 who sat for the same seat for almost a year. The total of the sample was 36 students. The data of the research was collected by using two instruments: observation notes and collection of the students’ English scores. The result of this research shows that there is no correlation between students’ seating position and their English achievement. It means that students' seating position in the classroom is not the important factor that influences students’ achievement.

Key Words: seating position, correlation, English achievement
INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that in a teaching process, a teacher needs to maximize her/his teaching skills in order to give significant improvement on students' achievement. Beside teaching skills, a teacher should also be able to manage the classroom well. A good classroom management is believed to contribute in making learning activities more conducive, thus creating good atmosphere in a learning process. One important thing that should be managed in a classroom is students' seating arrangement.

Available previous studies have shown that students' seating arrangement plays a very crucial role in students' learning improvement. It is widely proven that students' seating position affects their achievement. Those who sit in the front (near the chalk/whiteboard) tend to be more active and have higher achievement (Marx et.al, 2006; Tagliacollo, et.al., 2010). Another study by Ngware et.al. (2013) also reveals that seating in the front row in a classroom led to higher learnings gains.

The impact of seating position toward students' achievement is due to the assumption that the learners who sit in front rows may have better interactions with the teachers and gain more from lessons than those who sit far away from the whiteboard (Marx et.al., 2006). Besides, teachers may have more control to students sitting in front rows regarding their movement, behavior, as well as their learning activities. In addition, the results of a study conducted by Perkins and Wieman (2005) show that front row seats encourage participation in the class, which lead to higher performance, and sitting closer to the instructor makes it easier for students to see and hear the instructor as well.

However, the effect of seating position on learning is quite complicated as there are some experts have found different results in different situations. A study by Meeks et.al. (2013) suggests that students' performance was not significantly altered by seating location or seating type. Kalinowski & Taper (2007) also state that the findings of their research show that there is no detrimental effects of sitting at the back on learning achievement.

An experience got from teaching practice at Junior high School No. 2 Bengkulu City has made the researchers think again about the correlation between students' sitting positions and their achievement. During the teaching practice, it is found that
there were some variations of English scores between each student regardless their sitting positions. Students sitting in the first and second rows were quite active and often asked questions to the teacher. However, that did not necessarily make their grade higher than those who sit at the back rows. Hence, the researchers felt intrigued to conduct a study examining whether or not sitting position affect students' achievement especially in English subject. The research question raised in this study is "Is there any correlation between students' seating position and their English achievement?".

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom management is one of important factors involved in a teaching and learning process. Classroom atmosphere and students' behavior are influenced by how the teacher manages the classroom. A thorough classroom management plan consists of the organization of the physical environment, routines and procedures, the rules or codes of conduct to which students will be expected to comply, and the selected interventions that will motivate and discipline students (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 2000). Classroom management is needed as an effort to achieve optimal conditions, so that learning activities lead to achieve optimal conditions and that learning can be implemented as expected (Arikunto, 2007).

Organization of the physical environment in the classroom includes seating arrangements. Seating arrangements should be flexible in order to be able to accommodate a variety of teaching activities. In many situations, students are free to choose where they want to sit. However, many experienced teachers recommend teachers to assign seating for students to facilitate discipline and instruction (Dunbar, 2004). It is because they believe that if students are free to choose, they will always choose a seat that places the teacher at the greatest disadvantage.

Seating arrangements may take several different forms (Wiyani, 2013; Silberman, 2005):

a. Orderly Rows/ Traditional Seat Position

This seating position is the old form that has been used widely in Indonesia. Every schools use this seat position in the classroom. Students will seat in pair with their friend in one desk. Usually, in the traditional model seat position is having four rows desk in the classroom. Having the students sit in
rows can appear somewhat restrictive, but there are advantages to this arrangement. The teacher has a clear view of all the students and the students can all see the teacher in whose direction they are facing. It makes learning easier, enabling the teacher to maintain eye contact with the people he or she talking. If the there are aisles in the classroom, the teacher can easily walk up and down making more personal contact with individual students and watching what they are doing.

Orderly Rows

b. **U shaped**

In this seating arrangement allows the teacher sits in the middle and see all the students as well as have all the students see him/her. This is an affective seating arrangement because it prevents the students from getting distracted each other since the teacher is in the middle of the class. The U-shape seating arrangement is also good for the fact that students can still help one another because they sit close enough and yet not distract the whole class during a lesson. The problem with this arrangement is that although the teacher sits in the middle of the room to keep distractions off, at times her/his back could be turned towards the student thus she/he may not be able to see problems if and when they occur.

U-SHAPE

c. **Chevron**

In this kind of seating arrangement is like a traditional seat position, but this position also like u-shaped position.
d. **Group Work**

In this kind of seating arrangement is also commonly used by many teachers. In the small groups, the teacher could have four or five students sitting together. With this small group arrangement, the students are able to work in group easily and share ideas among themselves as well as help each other. Students are expected to use teamwork which gives them chance to experience what it means to work as a team. Each individual student is able to see what the others are doing and when he/she talks to one person in the group the rest can still hear it. This arrangement is especially good if there are students who are very quiet and are too shy to ask questions because they are afraid of being embarrassed. With this seating arrangement, if students have the some questions, their questions will be answered and teacher saves time from having to repeat an explanation. Yet, having students sit in small groups can come with some problems. For example, at times the students can get distracted by the other students in the group or they may not be able to see the board as clearly. Also, at times, the teacher can have their back to the students unintentionally and thus may not be aware of everything that's going on in the classroom.

e. **Theatre style/Auditorium**

This is typical arrangement for senates or councils, with a focus at the front where speeches are given, but the other participants are engaged in the discussion, and the emphasis is on personal presentation, not mediation through images and text, though this is possible. Ideal for critical
engagement between an academic and a relatively large class, with some all-
group discussion, but presentation of text and images is compromised.

Theatre style/Auditorium

METHODS

For the purpose of answering the research question, correlational research
design was employed, with Null Hypothesis H0: There is no significant correlation
between students' seating position and their English achievement. The two
variables were students' seating position and the students' English achievement. A
total of 36 students from second grade of Junior High School No. 2 were involved in
this study. They were in E Class which was selected randomly out of six classes of
second grade taught by the same teacher. The students have been sitting for the
same seat for almost a year. They were arranged in orderly rows in which the
nearest row to the whiteboard was considered as the first row, the farthest row
from the whiteboard was the fifth row.

To collect the data, two kinds of instruments were used: an observation
sheet and an English test. The observation sheet was used to take the data about the
students seating position, while the test was administered to get the data about
students' English scores. The data of students' English scores was also gathered
from the recorded scores taken by the teacher previously. All the collected scores
were then combined to get more comprehensive data.

To find out whether or not there is a correlation between students' seating
position and their English achievement, the formula of correlation coefficient by
Pearson was used:
After that, to determine the probability that the observed correlation is the real one instead of a chance occurrence, a hypothesis testing was conducted. It was done by comparing the correlation coefficient with the critical value. If the observed coefficient is smaller than the critical value, it means that Null Hypothesis is accepted.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prior to calculating the correlation, the data was tested for its normality and the result shows that the data is normal, thus it can be continued to find out the correlation. From the observation and four sets of students’ English scores, it was found that the scores of the students varied in each row.

Students’ Seating position and English Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ seating position</th>
<th>Average of the students’ scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row 1</td>
<td>69,31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row 2</td>
<td>73,46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row 3</td>
<td>67,18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row 4</td>
<td>69,84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row 5</td>
<td>72,12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After analyzing the data by using the given formula, it was found that the coefficient correlation $r=0.008$. By looking at the table of correlation coefficient interpretation (Sugiyono, 2014), the result means that the correlation is very weak.

Correlation Coefficient Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient Interval</th>
<th>Correlation Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.00 – 0.199</td>
<td>Very weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.20 – 0.399</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 – 0.599</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.60 – 0.799</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.80 – 1.000</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test the hypothesis, the significance level of alpha 0.05 was used. The correlation coefficient $r$ is 0.008 while the critical value is 0.878 ($r$ count < $r$ table). It means that the Null Hypothesis is accepted: there is no linear significant correlation between students’ seating position and their English achievement.
These research findings failed to support previous studies which argue that seating position plays a very important role in improving students' achievement. On the contrary, the seating positions apparently do not contribute to the students' English achievement. Students sitting in the front row did not merely get higher scores compared to those sitting at the far back of the classroom. This research share similar results to the research conducted by Meeks et.al. (2013) and Kalinowski & Taper (2007) which claim that students' performance was not significantly altered by seating location or seating type.

Many previous research have shown that students sitting in the front more likely achieve better scores and participates actively during the teaching and learning process (Marx et.al, 2006; Tagliacollo, et.al., 2010; Ngage et.al. 2013). It is believed that in traditional setting/orderly rows, the teacher usually stands in front of the class, thus make the students in the front row get clearer vision and audio which leads to more understanding of the materials being discussed. In addition, there is the tendency of the teacher to point at students sitting in the front to do some tasks as well as to answer some question. This make students sitting in the front feel obliged to be well prepared.

However, orderly rows form does not necessarily force the teacher to be always in front of the classroom. With the wide use of collaborative learning method, the teacher may ask students to do activities independently in a small group without being needed to move their seating position. This type of learning may contribute to the English achievement greater than just seating position in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the result of the research, it can be concluded that sitting in the front row does not guarantee that the students will get better results in English learning compared to those sitting at the back. The number of sample involved in this research may contribute to the result. Hence, it is needed to take more samples for further research to get more comprehensive result.

REFERENCES


Self Introduction


Certificate

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