



Teachers' Perceptions of Seating Arrangement in Grade XI of The Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the teachers' perceptions of seating arrangement in Grade XI of the Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan, as well as the challenges the teachers faced in using different seating arrangements in English learning. The research was conducted using a qualitative research method. The data were collected through interviews with two English teachers who taught in grade XI TKKR at SMKN 8 Medan. Then, to support the interview data, documentation in the form of photographs related to the condition of each class were collected. The result of this research showed that the teachers agreed that using different seating arrangements can enhance student engagement in the English learning process. However, the teachers mentioned that they faced some

challenges, such as students' comfort, students' attention, inappropriate tables, time constraints, and students' different abilities. Therefore, it can be concluded that despite facing these challenges, the English teachers in Grade XI at SMKN 8 Medan have positive perception of different seating arrangements to enhance students' engagement in English learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom management includes various elements aimed at creating an effective and purposeful learning environment, particularly the seating arrangement. A proper seating arrangement can increase students' comfort and focus, and also support interaction between students and teachers, as well as among the students themselves. In language learning

especially in vocational education that combines theory and practice, different seating arrangements can influence the learning atmosphere, engagement, and motivation.

Based on the researcher's observation in Grade XI TKKR 1 of the Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan, students tended to be passive during English lessons. There was minimal involvement in discussions or collaborative activities. The seating arrangement was rarely adjusted to suit the learning needs, remaining monotonous throughout. Moreover, the classroom furniture particularly the desks designed for beauty practice lacked flexibility and were not suitable for interactive learning. These limitations reduced opportunities for effective communication and student engagement in the learning process.

Scrivener (2012) emphasizes that different seating arrangements can enhance student engagement by creating a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment. These arrangements help prevent boredom caused by monotonous layouts and encourage active participation. In the context of English language learning, where communication and speaking activities are essential, seating arrangements that facilitate such interaction become even more necessary.

Oruikor, Ewane, Durotoye, and Akomaye (2023) point out that effective seating arrangements promote collaboration and communication in the classroom. This shows that the design of the physical learning space can directly support student interaction with teachers and peers. Similarly, Evans and Lovell (in Hue and Li, 2008) suggest that the creative use of physical space has a significant impact on learning outcomes. With appropriate seating arrangements, students are more likely to be actively involved in the learning process, especially in English classes that require frequent verbal interaction.

An important factor in the use of various seating arrangements is the teacher's perception of their effectiveness. Goldstein and Brockmole (2017) state that perception is shaped by sensory experiences, influencing how teachers evaluate whether a seating layout encourages student engagement and interaction. Irwanto (2002) classifies perception into positive and negative types. In this context, if teachers perceive a seating arrangement as effective, they are more likely to implement and adapt it to suit different learning activities. On the other hand, negative perceptions can limit the willingness to explore alternative

seating strategies. Therefore, teachers' perceptions impact how they manage classroom dynamics and respond to students' learning needs.

Nevertheless, using different seating arrangements is not without challenges. Brown (2000) identifies several issues such as limited classroom space, student comfort, and student attention. Space limitations restrict flexibility, and unfamiliar seating changes might cause discomfort or reduce students' ability to concentrate. Frequent rearrangements can also lead to distraction if not managed properly, reducing the intended benefits of varied seating arrangements.

The urgency of this study arises from the need to explore teachers' perceptions of different seating arrangements in the context of vocational English education. Teachers' perceptions influence their classroom decisions and the extent to which they adopt flexible seating to enhance engagement. Although several studies have discussed the impact of seating on learning, there is limited research specifically focused on teachers' perceptions in vocational settings. Adolo, Akhmad, and Jannatussholihah (2022) found that while teachers recognize the importance of seating arrangements, they often face challenges such as limited classroom size and student distraction during transitions. Meanwhile, Rogers (2020) showed that in a fourth-grade class, the horseshoe seating arrangement led to better engagement and improved academic outcomes.

Based on preliminary observations, theoretical insights, and previous studies, this research aims to analyze teachers' perceptions of different seating arrangements in English language learning, particularly in Grade XI of the Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan. It will also identify the challenges teachers face in using seating changes to support student engagement.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the perceptions of English teachers in grade XI TKKR at SMKN 8 Medan regarding the use of different seating arrangements in supporting English language learning. As explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research aims to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and assign meaning to them, while descriptive research systematically presents the

characteristics of a phenomenon without manipulating variables. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perceptions and the challenges they faced in using different seating arrangements.

The data were collected through interviews and documentation involving two English teachers who currently teach grade XI in the Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan. These participants were selected due to their direct experience with classroom seating arrangements. Their insights served as the primary source of qualitative data for this study, offering valuable perspectives on how seating arrangements impact student engagement and learning.

The instruments used in this study included an interview guideline and documentation. According to Berg & Lune (2016), these instruments are crucial for structuring the data collection process. The interview guideline was designed to explore the teachers' perceptions of seating arrangements and the challenges they encountered. The questions were structured to encourage open-ended responses, allowing for deeper insights. Documentation consisted of classroom photos and recorded interviews, which helped provide additional evidence to enrich the analysis.

Data collection was carried out using two primary techniques: in-depth interviews and documentation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to gather primary data. This approach allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while providing flexibility for follow-up questions. The interviews focused on understanding the teachers' perspectives on seating arrangements and the challenges they faced. Additionally, documentation included photographs of the classroom and recordings of the interviews. These helped capture the classroom environment, including the room layout, student numbers, and existing seating arrangements, contributing to a clear understanding of the context and challenges faced by the teachers.

In this research, the data were analysed using the Interactive Model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

1. Data reduction

Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying the information collected from interviews and documentation. From the beginning of the data collection process, the researcher focused on identifying data that were relevant to the research objectives while removing unnecessary or repetitive details. Important data were coded and organized to highlight patterns and make the analysis more manageable.

2. Data display

Once reduced, the data were arranged in tables to help present the findings more clearly. This step made it easier to spot connections and patterns within the data. In this study, the display centered on teachers' perceptions of seating arrangements in English learning and the challenges they faced in using them in the classroom.

3. Conclusion drawing and verification

The researcher developed conclusions based on the key findings related to the teachers' perceptions and the obstacles they faced. These conclusions were gradually refined as more data were examined and compared with relevant theories. To ensure accuracy and validity, the researcher continuously reviewed the data and verified the findings before finalizing the results.

RESULTS

Teachers' Perceptions of Seating Arrangements

The findings indicate that both teachers agreed that the use of different seating arrangements can enhance student engagement during English lessons. They noted that such arrangements can encourage interaction, improve communication, and help maintain student focus. While open to implementing expert-recommended setups, they emphasized the importance of adjusting these arrangements to fit the specific classroom conditions. Furthermore, they suggested that changing the seating layout could create a more engaging classroom atmosphere and potentially increase student interest and participation.

Challenges in Using Different Seating Arrangements

Implementing different seating arrangements in Grade XI TKKR posed several challenges. Time constraints were an issue, as rearranging seats reduced valuable lesson time. Grouping students was difficult due to varying ability levels, and uncooperative students often disrupted the learning flow. Maintaining student attention during these transitions was also challenging, as changes in layout led to distraction. The physical setup of the classroom further limited flexibility, fixed dressing tables designed for beauty practice could not be rearranged, and the attached mirrors distracted students. Additionally, unfamiliar seating positions affected student comfort and lowered their focus and engagement.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of seating arrangements and the challenges they face in applying them in Grade XI of the Beauty and Hairdressing Department at SMKN 8 Medan. Based on interviews and documentation, both teachers demonstrated a positive perception, recognizing that different seating arrangements can enhance student engagement by encouraging interaction, maintaining focus, and reducing boredom. This is in line with Irwanto (2002), who states that positive perception involves a supportive and favorable view toward information or knowledge, and is also supported by Scrivener (2012), who emphasized how different seating arrangement can encourage communication, collaboration, and active participation.

The teachers also expressed a willingness to implement alternative seating strategies, recognizing the value these changes could bring to the classroom, despite some practical challenges. They showed flexibility in adapting seating arrangements to fit the condition of the classroom. Their emotional responses were similarly positive, as they linked the use of different seating arrangements to an increase in student motivation and a more dynamic classroom atmosphere. Both teachers acknowledged that creating different seating arrangements could make the learning environment more engaging, thus fostering a better connection between students and the material being taught.

However, several practical challenges emerged. These included time constraints, difficulty grouping students due to varying abilities, and uncooperative student behavior, all

of which disrupted lesson flow. Student attention and comfort were also affected, particularly when students were placed in unfamiliar seating. The most significant limitation was the physical classroom setup, fixed dressing tables with mirrors limited flexibility and distracted students. While classroom space was sufficient, the immovable furniture hindered the application of interactive seating arrangements.

These findings are aligned with Brown (2000), who identified student comfort, attention, and classroom space as common challenges in implementing different seating arrangements. However, this study presents a slightly different context. While previous research emphasized limited space as a major challenge, both teachers in this study reported that space was not a concern, a point also confirmed through documentation. Instead, the main challenge was the classroom furniture, particularly the dressing tables, which limited flexibility despite the classroom's size.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the study, it was found that the teachers held positive perceptions toward the use of different seating arrangements to enhance student engagement. They believed that, when adapted appropriately to classroom conditions, such arrangements could foster better interaction, reduce boredom, and support a more active and focused learning environment. Nevertheless, several challenges were also identified, including time constraints, variations in student ability, student behavior, and limited flexibility of classroom furniture. Furthermore, issues related to student comfort and the difficulty of sustaining student attention posed additional obstacles to the effective implementation of different seating arrangements during English lessons. This study was limited by its small sample and specific school context. Future research should involve more diverse settings and employ varied data collection methods to further examine the effectiveness of seating arrangements in promoting student engagement.

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