

The students' perspective toward orderly rows seating arrangements in higher level education

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Abstract

The notion of setting effective seating arrangements has been reviewed in some research related to classroom management strategies. In practice, seating arrangement can be one of the most important aspects that can create a positive learning environment in the classroom. However, considering effective classroom management and setting effective seating arrangements are often neglected by the teachers in their teaching preparation. This research was conducted to investigate the students' perspectives toward orderly rows seating arrangements in higher level education. In this study, three main instruments were used to collect the data namely interview, observation, and questionnaire. Based on the results of the study, it is found that the use of orderly rows seating arrangements in the classrooms has some advantages and disadvantages. In some circumstances, orderly rows seating arrangement is best applied for doing presentation, lecture, or explanation. Unless, it is less effective for several reasons such as it tends to have teacher-centered than student-centered learning; there are less of group discussions; and it diminishes the teacher or students' movements. To review these findings, furthermore, it is suggested that the use of seating arrangements in the classrooms should vary set from orderly rows, circle, U-shape, horseshoe, to separate tables by using appropriate movable desk-chairs accustomed to the learning goals, needs, methods, and classroom situation.

Keywords: orderly rows seating arrangement; classroom management

INTRODUCTION

One of the successful indicators in the teaching and learning process is how teachers manage the classroom effectively (Harmer, 2007). In line with that notion, Harmer (2007) and Brown (2001) have proposed three major strategies in managing effective classroom environment which include the seating arrangements, the psychosocial environments, and the management of activities during the lesson. However, numerous studies have indicated that considering effective classroom management and setting effective seating arrangements are often neglected by the teachers in their teaching preparation (Cooper, 2001). Instead, the choice of physical organization for the classroom may establish a positive environment for the lesson (Zerin, 2009).

Cooper (2011) defines the term classroom management refers to the teachers' actions to create respectful, caring, and productive environment for teaching and learning. It relates to the physical settings which include the use of chairs and tables that may affect the way teachers and students feel, think, act, and behave in the class.

Moreover, the appropriate seating arrangements can thoroughly enhance the students' academic achievement, the students' socio-emotional skills, and the students' capacity of self-regulation. As students bring various expectations, different cultural backgrounds, needs, interests, attitudes and leaning styles in the classroom, the teachers must be able to overcome these diversities through considering better strategies in managing the classroom (Cooper, 2011).

There are several seating arrangements which are figured by Harmer (2007). First, orderly rows seating arrangement is described where tables and chairs are arranged in rows. The advantages of using orderly rows seating arrangement are the teacher has a clear view of all students, so that it maintains the teacher's eye contact with the students. In some extent, orderly rows seating arrangements are useful for doing presentation, explaining grammar points, lecturing, watching video, or applying a teacher-centered approach where the teacher acts as controller to give instruction or explanation in front of the classroom (Paul, 2003). The visual and auditory learners also have benefits from this seating arrangement (DePorter, 2008) as visual learners are benefited from the use of visual displays, diagrams, videos, power point slides, pictures or flashcards. However, there are some disadvantages of orderly rows that should be considered by the teachers. By this seating arrangement, the teacher should consistently monitor the students to keep involved in the learning process. In a large classroom with 40-60 students, the teacher should be able to monitor all the students in the lesson (Brown, 2001). In addition, the use of orderly rows seating arrangement cannot maximize the teacher or students' physical movements in the teaching and learning activities.

The other seating arrangements that can be used in the classrooms are horseshoe, U-shape, circle seating arrangements, and separate tables. Harmer (2007) states that horseshoe seating arrangement is very useful for both small and large classroom to maximize the teacher and students' interaction during the activities. By these seating arrangements, the class might be very flexible and dynamic where teachers can easily move around the class and check the students' work. The use of movable desk-chairs in horseshoe and circle seating arrangements might also provide a dynamic movement where teachers and students can easily change the seating arrangements depend on the methods used in the lessons (Paul, 2003). In addition, Zerlin (2009) describes that in circle or horseshoe seating arrangement, students might feel equity and minimize hierarchical learning or individualism.

Having considered that seating arrangements could contribute to the successful of teaching and learning in the classroom; furthermore, this study was conducted to investigate the students' perceptive toward the advantages and disadvantages of using orderly rows seating arrangements in higher level of education.

METHOD

This study was conducted to investigate a phenomenon, event, social activity, attitude, and perception in a certain group (Sukmadinata, 2008). To collect the primary data, there were three instruments used in this study such as interview, observation, and

questionnaire. In this study, 100 students of postgraduate studies were involved as respondents. The data collection required observation checklists, close-ended questions distributed to the respondents, and open-ended questions for the interview. The data were then classified, analyzed, and interpreted into a coherent description.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The notion to use effective seating arrangements has significant implication to the process of teaching and learning in the classroom (Harmer, 2007; Brown, 2001). Based on this notion, the researcher attempted to explore the students' perceptions on the use of orderly rows seating arrangement in the classroom. In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents as the first instrument which aimed at finding out the students' perceptions on the use of orderly rows seating arrangements. The questionnaire items used close-ended questions by means of Likert Scale which were ranged from strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. For additional data, interview and observation were used to support the findings and minimized bias in data collection and analysis (Alwasilah, 2006).

Based on the results of the study, it is found that most of the students were familiar with the term seating arrangements and its different types such as orderly rows, circle, U-shape, or separate tables. In relation to this, there were some views toward the use of orderly rows seating arrangements in the classrooms. 64% of respondents or more than a half of students agreed with the notion that orderly rows seating arrangements are effective for doing presentation, lecture, or explanation; 33% or nearly half of students were in uncertain; while, the rest of other students disagreed with the notion. To support this finding, the result form students' interview revealed that orderly rows seating arrangement give some advantages for teaching and learning process in a higher level education. One of the student's views can be quoted as follows:

"Probably, orderly rows seating arrangement is perfect for lecture and/or presentation" (Student's view).

In addition, based on the observation, it can be noted that most of the classrooms have been well-supported by appropriate teaching tools such as representative's in-focus transparencies as well as other teaching tools i.e. stop contact provider for the use of laptop or other teaching media which is very useful for preparing a presentation. Therefore, it can be said that orderly rows seating arrangements is appropriate for the purpose of doing presentation, lecture, or explanation. This notion is in line with Harmer (2007) who stated that orderly rows seating arrangements are best applied for having lecture and presentation.

However, the result of the research also revealed some drawbacks of using orderly rows seating arrangement. It was found that orderly rows seating arrangements might set hierarchical learning where teachers act as controller rather than facilitator for students. It means that there is a gap between teacher and students' interaction in the

class. This finding is also supported by student's interview who stated this following perception:

"In orderly rows seating arrangement, it tends to have teacher-centered approach as the teacher only stands in front of the class to deliver the materials" (Student's view).

When teachers act as controller, they will usually give instruction from the front and let the students only receive the materials given by the teachers. In other words, teachers tend to take on the role of 'leading from the front' to tell the students things, organize drills, and read aloud that all involve the teacher-centered approach in the teaching and learning process (Harmer, 2007). Thus this practice sets hierarchical learning environment between the teacher and the students.

Another finding also revealed from this study. An effective seating arrangement should actually help the teachers in organizing the students in a discussion; however, in practice, the use of orderly rows seating arrangements was not really effective for supporting students' discussion. 50% or half of students agreed that in orderly rows seating arrangements, there were less of group discussions. This seating arrangement tends to create teacher-centered than student-centered learning. To have in depth perception on this notion, the data from questionnaire showed that 50% or a half of students agreed with the statement that in orderly rows seating arrangements, the students became more passive. In other words, when the class is arranged by orderly rows seating arrangement, teacher tends to set a more passive learning environment for students. To deal with this notion, 41% or nearly half of students agreed that they would prefer sit on movable desk-chairs to sit on the chair with its desk or table. They argued that by using movable desk-chairs, the students could arrange their own seating arrangements suited to the needs of the lessons and maximize physical movements in the classrooms. This finding was also supported from questionnaire in which 44% students or nearly half of students agreed that in orderly rows seating arrangements, the students could not maximize their physical movements since they should stay on the chair for a long period of time during the lessons. Furthermore, if they were given a choice, 49% or nearly half of students preferred to change their seating arrangements in the class often i.e. from orderly rows to circle or separate tables. Unless, 40% or nearly half of students were in uncertain toward this notion because the orderly rows seating arrangements have been set permanently in the classrooms.

At last, the students then gave several suggestions to the use of orderly rows seating arrangements in the classrooms. First, the use of seating arrangements should be accustomed to the learning situations as well as the learning activities, needs, methods, materials, and goals of the lessons. To have a better teaching and learning atmosphere, the use of circle, U-shape, and separate table seating arrangements should become other options in supporting active learning, students' discussion, interaction, sharing ideas, and communication among members of the class. By these seating arrangements, the students can be more involved in the learning activities and can be closer to others. For

kinesthetic learners who cannot stay in one particular position too long, circle or separate table may give them opportunity to use more physical movements (Handayani, 2008). As a result, the students can explore the classroom as a comfortable learning environment. Moreover, because orderly rows seating arrangements tend to set hierarchal learning and create a boring learning situation; furthermore, it is expected that the teacher should be able to manage and overcome the students' learning needs through various teaching strategies in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, based on the results of the study, it can be noted that most of students are familiar with the term seating arrangements and its different types such as orderly rows, circle, U-shape, and/or separate tables. Based on the data gained from questionnaire, interview, and observation, it can be identified that there are some advantages and disadvantages of orderly rows seating arrangements used in the classrooms. One of the advantages to use orderly rows seating arrangement is this kind of seating arrangement can be best applied for doing presentation, lecturing, or explanation where the teachers take on the role as transmitter of knowledge or as controller who lead the class from the front (Harmer, 2007). However, there are several disadvantages of orderly rows seating arrangement that should be considered by the teachers particularly when they are managing the classrooms. Based on the findings, orderly rows seating arrangement is not really appropriate for group discussions. In some extent, it distracts the teacher or students' movements in the lessons. Besides, orderly rows seating arrangement may create teacher-centered than student-centered learning. Thus, to sum up, it can be suggested that the use of seating arrangements in the classrooms should vary set from orderly rows, circle, U-shape, horseshoe, to separate tables seating arrangements by using appropriate movable desk-chairs accustomed to the learning goals, needs, methods, and classroom situation (Harmer, 2007).

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