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U-Shape Design in Teaching: Engaging Non-English Speaking Country Students in Learning English

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Abstract- This qualitative study aims to present how U-model seating arrangement affects the process of teaching and learning positively. This study also aims to uncover several activities which could be established when U-model seating arrangement is applied. This study was conducted at IAIN Kendari in 2016. To attain the result of the study, observation and interview were used as the instruments. The result of the study revealed that U-model that the lecturer applies could establish a good relation with the students in the classroom. In addition, the lecturer also could manage all the students and make appropriate eye contact with them. Students responded that, using U-model seating arrangement, they enjoyed the learning process, experienced good communication with the lecturer, and had better confidence and motivation. The result of the study revealed that U-shape design could facilitate the following: lecturer mobility, eye contact, pupil attention, communication, game playing, and lecturer control. The implication of this study is that harnessing the progress of the students throughout the teaching and learning process is important and essential in establishing a warm and engaging class.

Keywords: ***Lecturer activity, students responds, U model seating arrangement.***

1. INTRODUCTION

Low input will strongly affect the quality of the output. Students of English Education Department of Islamic State Institute of Kendari mostly have poor English language background. This condition should not be neglected; rather it is taken as a great opportunity to devise many different simple learning activities which could engage the students to learn step by step. One way to do this is designing the students seating arrangement in U-shape design with many different communicative activities to enable the class to achieve effective communication. Effective communication in the classroom, in fact, is essential to teaching and learning process. The kind of communication, as well as the amount of communication that occurs in the classroom, has long been thought to be partially a function of the seating arrangement of students. Research shows that classroom seating arrangement could affect students' behavior. Seating arrangements are important because they have the potential to help to prevent problem behaviors that decrease student attention and diminish available instructional time (Kaya & Burgess, 2007). Kaya and Burges (2007) believed that spatial arrangements in classrooms where students have enough space to move and work on their activities positively affect students' on-task behavior and social interaction. Baron (1992) believed that seating arrangements should be treated as a priority when thinking of a classroom with maximum on-task behavior. This is due to the notion that physical arrangement of the classroom has the potential to encourage desirable behavior or contribute to students' misbehavior (Daniels, 2001).With regard to the presented case, this study wants to investigate how the lecturer treated the students throughout the application of U-shape design Model and the students' responses to the treatment given by the lecturer in the class. Surprisingly, the benefits of U-shape design seating arrangement facilitate lecturer mobility, eye contact, pupil attention, communication, game playing, and lecturer control (Papalia, 1994). It also raises both language skills and confidence of the students even if not in great details.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Importance of seating arrangement

Seating arrangement for students and lecturers is vital because it determines flexibility in learning and teaching in the classroom. In their study on the effect of classroom seating arrangement on students' behavior, Rosenfield et al. (1985) observed three experimental classrooms of fifth and sixth grades during class discussions in rows, clusters, and circles. They observed certain behaviors like hand-raising, listening, discussion comments, on-task out-of-order comments, oral responses, as well as withdrawal and off-task behaviors. Major results of their research showed that there were no significant differences in listening, discussion comments and disruptive behaviors as related to the different seating arrangements. However, Rosenfield et al. (1985) have shown that the circle desk arrangement resulted in a greater number of on-task, out-of-order response and on task behaviors than did the rows and columns.

At the same time, clusters led to a great number of on-task behaviors and more hand-raising than did the rows. The number of withdrawals and off-task behaviors was found much greater in the rows and columns setting than those resulted in the circle when examining U-shape seating arrangement and its effect on students' interaction. Wengel (1992) found that this arrangement enables lecturers to have a more active and collaborative class where students can interact with the lecturer as well as with each other. Wengel (1992) added that this could be considered evidence that U-shape arrangement contributed to students' on-task behavior which, in turn, enhanced their learning since, in this arrangement,

students get the opportunity to share information and exchange ideas, thus, maximizing their learning space. Similarly, the cluster arrangement was reported to be suitable for self-instructional material and grouping of students according to their needs and interests (Papalia, 1994). Papalia (1994) maintains that the rows and columns setting best suit individual activities, testing and introducing new material to the students.

2.2 Physical Characteristics of Classrooms

The physical design of classrooms should be deemed as a sub-system in the process of producing effective, efficient, and predictable learning. The range of desired activities should be determined before the design is implemented (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Through the study of environmental psychology and research on classroom ecology associated with seating arrangement, designers and planners can understand how the classroom environments affect the users and how their relationships with other people are influenced by the physical environment (McAndrew, 1993).

Flexibility is also critical for an efficient classroom design. Although Neuman (2003) suggests that there are basically two types of classrooms, "those with flat floors and those with sloped or stepped floors" (p 95), he believes that there is a variety of classrooms, or subcategories, of the two broad types of classrooms. Therefore, classrooms should accommodate multiple uses and technological advancements. The adjustable classrooms could allow for a variety of lecturer-centered as well as the student-centered approach within the space (Jamieson, 2000). Blackett and Stanfield (1994) believe "flexibility is vital so that a college does not get locked into one technology, and so that the classrooms can be reconfigured as new technologies are developed" (p 26). A flexible classroom environment that consists of a variety of ways to present information promotes interchanges among the lecturer, students, and information (Harmer, 2007).

Sommer (1967) compared the relationship between seating arrangement and the amount of student participation in a traditional classroom with a seminar-style arrangement and a classroom with straight rows. In the seminar-style classroom, students across from the instructor participated more than students at the sides of the instructor. The study of the straight row arrangement found that students near the front and center of the straight row classroom participated more than students in the rear and at the sides. However, Sommer (1967) maintains that seating position is more closely related to personality variables of the students

McAndrew (1993) argued that college and university students deserve functional classrooms that facilitate learning experiences. Babey (1991) monitored campus classroom environments at the University of California, Davis and conducted a survey on the faculty and students to determine classroom quality. Some of the questions asked related to the aesthetic quality of the classroom, user preference, and ratings of the design features. Thirty percent of the faculty reported that classrooms were "ill-suited for their teaching purposes" (p 1). However, the students' ratings were higher. However, the students made comments like "the room is ugly and the windows do not open" and "this room is uninspiring for learning." A question addressed in Babey's (1991) survey was seating arrangement preference. The results showed that half of the faculty preferred fixed seating, which can be repetitive and unexciting, and the other half preferred movable seating, which can occasionally be changed to promote different activities. The students' primary concern with seating addressed issues such as the size of the writing surface, crowding, storage space, and the spacing between desks. However, the only variable within the surveyed classrooms was lecturing halls with either fixed seating or movable seating.

It is believed that positive and/or negative physical environmental stimuli exist in each classroom. McAndrew (1993) also suggests that a good predictor of lecturer and student satisfaction is the fit between teaching styles. According to Babey (1991), the number one problem area in higher education classrooms was the lack of appealing aesthetic qualities. In the teaching/learning process, there is a "need to create environments that are suitable for living and working" (p 3). Babey (1991) also believes the levels of communication and user productivity are influenced by the characteristics of the instructional space. To conclude these findings, students and lecturers prefer comfortable classrooms that functionally support and promote faculty-student exchanges.

The possibilities of classroom seating arrangements are, as Douglas and Gifford (2001) argue, always relative to the physical environment itself. Not only is this an important means of understanding the classroom as a physical space, but it puts forth the idea that, when lecturers select a classroom seating arrangement, they do so as "place makers" (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2002). Lecturers' decision of implementing a particular seating arrangement is based on their ability to choose the most efficient "place maker" in relation to the physical features of the classroom. In effect, because a classroom's physical elements cannot be changed, modified, or altered for the purposes of formatting a specific classroom seating arrangement, Whiteside and Fitzgerald (2010) argue that these immovable elements have an impact on the active learning environment regardless of the seating arrangement selected.

3. METHOD

This study employs descriptive qualitative as its design. The subjects of the research were the lecturer who applied U-shape design in organizing the class and the second-semester students of English Major of Islamic State Institute of Kendari. To attain the objective of the research, the following instruments were used: observation and interview. Videotaping was used in the observation process to record the teaching and learning process from the beginning to the end of the class, and a semi-structured interview was used to dig more information from the student regarding their stated perception. After the data had been tabulated, they were triangulated by using Miles and Huberman (1994). Firstly, the

data were reduced by summarizing, choosing subject matter, focusing on the important things, looking for theme and patterns, as well as throwing unnecessary elements. Secondly, the data were displayed. At this stage, the gathered data were compiled. This was done by showing the relationship between the occurrences of the data. Then interpretations of what is happening and what needs to be followed to achieve the research objectives were made. Finally, the last stage is conclusion drawing. In this stage, all displayed data were synthesized to be presented as a final data.

4. RESULTS

4.1 How Lecturer Treated the Students in the U-Shape Design Class

The followings present how lecturer treated the students in the class: showing a good relationship with the students; showing empathy, respect, and honesty in teaching the class; showing how to use verbal and non-verbal language; instructing the students on their chair one by one and making efficient use of time. The study also reveals that the lecturer demonstrated high interest and enthusiasm in teaching, provided the material, showed ample examples of how to do the discussion activities, and encouraged the students to share their ideas with their pair or group. In addition, the lecturer helped the students with their needs throughout the teaching and learning process, helped the students to improve their vocabulary and pronunciation, motivated the students not to be shy, encouraged the students to ask questions if they do not understand things, and gave the students' freedom to explore their mind. In the process of teaching, the lecture explored the local tradition of the students and provided appropriate oral and written feedback to the students' language production.

4.2 Students' Response towards the Use of U-Shape Design in Teaching and Learning

The followings are the students' responses towards the use of U-shape design in teaching and learning:

1. Based on the interaction indicator, U-shape design could help students to enjoy the learning process, be active in oral communication, have creative ideas, and ask questions if they do not understand. The students responded, for examples, "I have a good relationship with my lecturer and friends", "The lecturer always told us to tell stories with friends next to us about anything and raise our hand if there is a word that we do not know", "The lecturer invites us to sing some traditional Indonesian songs when we feel bored", and "We were instructed by the lecturer nicely and the lecturer always help us when we experience difficulties in learning English".
2. Based on the atmosphere indicator, the organization of the class could assist the students' motivation, improve their English skills and help the students to engage with the class. For example, the students responded "We feel more comfortable and more focus on the learned topic," "I do not feel bored in class, and I'm not afraid of making mistakes," and "I feel lecturer could understand the progress of my learning'.
3. Based on the behavior indicator, the use of U-shape design in teaching could facilitate students to improve their self-confidence, be more active in speaking, and do not feel embarrassed about making mistakes in front of the lecturers. The students responded, for example, "I can concentrate more in the classroom," I'm not shy when speaking in front of friends," "I feel a bit more active in the classroom," and "The lecturer can see who has or has not understood the learned topic."
4. Based on the strategy indicator, the use of U-shape design could help students' to establish good relationships with other students, and increase good cooperation in a pair, group work, and whole class. For example, the students responded"I can understand the lecturer's explanation in the classroom" and "I could understand the lesson better."

5. DISCUSSION

In response to the research questions of this study, U-shape design can help the lecturer to show a good relationship with students in the class. It encourages the students to have good communication, not feel annoyed, and not afraid to ask the lecturer. Students tend to ask the lecturer if they are confused about the material, and they tend to be happy in the class. According to Harmer (2007), good teaching is loaded with various communicative activities and positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having correct competencies, or learning all the right techniques. Good lecturers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students, and they feel their work and classes with pleasure and creativity.

When the lecturer has a good relationship with students in class, the lecturer will show empathy, respect, and honesty in the class. Wengel (1992) states that empathy is revealed as a highly complex phenomenon closely associated with moral development. It develops over time and with the frequency of interaction and is highly dependent on the actors and the context of the interaction. Moreover, students will automatically feel cared of by lecturers; they learn eagerly and do not feel shy in class. One of the examples is when students pay attention to the lecturer presentation in class and are enthusiastic to study English. Wengel (1992) suggests that this kind of class could elevate the intensity of students' speaking and make them more engaged to the learned topic. Students tend to be responsible for doing their assignment. They become more comfortable to listen to their peers in group or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the lecturer for a model. In this study, students with very low English proficiency tried hard without hesitation to speak with their peers and lecturer.

U-shape design can also help students to understand the material thoroughly and establish a good eye contact. The lecturer can give an example more effectively because all students can have good eye contact with the lecturer. In addition, it also helps the lecturer to give an instruction such as telling the students to work in pair. It will make students cooperate well and establish a good relationship with other students in various situations, in the case of this study, for instance, was when a student asked their friends and told about

their assignment or the topic in class. At that time, they did not hesitate to talk to their friends. According to Macpherson (2007, p.1), cooperative learning "is a very formal way of structuring activities in a learning environment that includes specific elements intended to increase the potential for rich and deep learning by the participants."

The U-shape design allows the lecturer to get closer to students. They enable the lecturer to touch students' shoulder, help a student to take a chair, and take the dropped property on the floor. According to McVeity (1997, p.1), a touch could become a powerful form of communication. Appropriate touch, in fact, can enrich human interaction, while inappropriate touch can destroy it. A touch on students' shoulders is very helpful to approach students who are shy in class. Being given such treatment, students would feel cared, valued, and loved. When students feel loved by their lecturer, the students are more inclined to speak actively in class and feel intimate with their lecturer.

Another interesting activity was that the lecturer gave the students freedom to explore students' ways of thinking. According to Greene (1995, p. 178), the youths should be allowed to identify alternative possibilities and choose what they think is possible. This might help them to learn on their own initiative and investigate the world. "Freedom is an achievement in the midst of life and with other human beings. People achieve whatever freedom they can achieve through increasing consciousness and mind full transaction with what surrounds and impinges, not simply by breaking out of context and acting in response to an impulse or desire. U-shape design leads the students to be more active to ask or give an opinion.

Finally, U-shape design can help the lecturer to provide student feedback carefully. Feedback is very important for a lecturer because by giving feedback, a lecturer can identify whether or not students understand the lesson. Feedback also enables students to find and fix the error by themselves, and help them to determine the extent of their understanding of the material. The giving feedback in teaching class also enriches students' vocabulary and improve their speaking ability. According to Biggs & Tang (2007, p. 97) feedback "tops the list of factors leading to good learning." Students should receive individual feedback on their work addressing how good the work is, and how the work can be improved.

6. Conclusion

U-shape design seating arrangement influences and engages students' language learning in many ways. The objectives were achieved as the lecturers show a good relationship, empathy, respect and honesty to the students in teaching the class; demonstrate how to use verbal and non-verbal language; manage the students on their chair one by one and make efficient use of time, and demonstrate high interest and enthusiasm in teaching. To sum up, the conclusion that can be drawn is that to facilitate successful and effective teaching and learning process, a lecturer should sound and have a wide range of teaching methodologies, as well as good classroom management as it has been suggested by this study.

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