

Seating Arrangement and Students' Behaviour in French Language Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study in Higher Education in Malaysia.

Exploring Seating Arrangement and Student's Behaviour in French Language Classroom

Does it Really Matter Where a Student Sits in French Language Learning Classroom? The Impact of Seating Arrangement on Students' Learning.

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ABSTRACT

Several educators believed that the seating arrangement is a critical factor for learning performance. Seating arrangement is considered as a pivotal factor in giving positive learning outcomes and learning behaviour. Most of the educational literature addresses issues such as room temperature, room lighting, and acoustics (Conners, 1983, Granstrom, 1996). Fewer studies have been conducted on the classroom seating arrangement and its effects on students' actions and learning (Haghighi and Jusan, 2012, Hoekstra et al., 2023). This paper examines the impact of seating locations on student classroom learning. Specifically, it examines the impact of seating on a) student learning behaviour b) student and teacher relationships c) attention d) student classroom participation. Active engagement and participation in the learning experience positively affects students' learning while promoting the use of higher order thinking skills (Flynn, Vermette, Mesibov and amp; Smith, 2009; McKeachie, 1990; Stronge, 2007). This study was conducted with an objective to compare two different types of seating arrangements: rows and circular in the traditional and modern classrooms of French language while observing students' learning behaviour.

BACKGROUND

In the 1920s, German psychologist, Otto Köhler presented a theory known as "Köhler Effect". He found that when two people completed a joint task, the individual performance of the weaker member was improved. Therefore, weaker students could not influence the good ones but they themselves improved their performance. According to this effect, the stronger students will inspire and motivate them. This in turn would mean that the less-able students would work harder and perform better. In the twenty first century, the idea emerged that the physical factors such as lighting, space, ventilation, and cleanliness were equally important (Matlab, 2017) for good learning outcomes and promoting teamwork (Rohani et al., 2017). In 1950, the traditional seating pattern was dominating with rows seating in the classroom where teacher used to speak, and students listened to the teacher (Tanahashi, 2007). In the following years, for active, task-oriented learning, semi-circle and cluster seating pattern were introduced (Lotfy, 2012). In the mid- 1990s, educational research focused on classroom environment from the perspective of either teacher or student (Angela, and Kathryn, 2011). The research of Kostourous and Olivier (2014) emphasized students' freedom to choose their seats by themselves for comfort and long attention span in the classroom. Later, the concept of conducive learning environment was introduced. The arrangement of seating created an environment in which students performed and interacted with each other (Richard, 2006). The physical arrangement of objects such as furniture and visual aids for students' involvement in class activities was emphasized by Wilson (2012) and Minchen (2007). Therefore, teaching and learning both were affected by seating arrangement (Lotfy, 2012). However, the configuration of furniture, space, room

dimensions could also lead to negative students' performance (Atherton, 2005 and Gifford, 2002). The classroom design might be favorable to enhance students' performance. On the other hand, seating arrangement heightened the instructor's ability to teach in the best manner. To uplift the standard of teaching and learning, teachers needed to have a variety of seating plans which would influence class environment, students' behaviour, and achievement. Teacher's class management skill also contributed to students' learning outcomes (Chingos, 2013 and Ngware et al., 2013). It was also observed that the inappropriate layout demotivated students and teacher's efficiency. However, for a variety of class activities, students required changes in the seating arrangement for a high level of motivation, engagement, and participation (Hammang, 2012).

Performance:

Alberto et al., (2010) and Juhary (2012) indicated that students' position in the classroom corresponded directly to their performance. In his observation, students who were sitting in front were more motivated than those sitting at the back. Thus, students' performance and teaching and learning methods were dependent on the physical factors. Both classroom capacity and size influenced the performance of students and teachers. It was observed that conducive learning space proves to be effective for teaching and learning process (Yelkpieri, 2012). Bonus and Riordan (1998) supported the notion that students were more attentive when the seating arrangement in the classroom was set in accordance with the instructional goals.

Confidence:

From the perspective of confidence, the studies of Peter et al., (2015) found that the physical layout improved the confidence and engagement level of students. Healthy interactions were developed among students and between students and teachers. Consequently, students scored quite good.

Class environment:

The classroom environment had a direct impact on students' grades specially interaction between students and teachers while highlighting health and enjoyable learning process (James, 2016). Idayu et al., (2016) elaborated that if students' learning needs were addressed, the space lay out of classroom was appropriate then healthy environment would facilitate collaborative learning. Mudassir and Norsuhaily (2015), emphasized that healthy and supportive learning environment enabled students to be more motivated and engaged in class activities.

Behaviour:

The studies of John (1999), Wannarka and Ruhli (2008) and Juson (2010) proved that seating arrangement improved students' behaviour in the classroom. They were more attentive and engaged in class activities. Students' social interaction was healthy, thus resulting in positive learning outcomes.

The study of educational literature highlighted the factors that influenced the physical layout (Ramli et al., 2013, Ngware et al., 2013), Mushtaq and Khan (2012). They highlighted the classroom capacity, student behaviour, course conducted, and student achievement and challenges as important factors as shown in Figure No. 1.

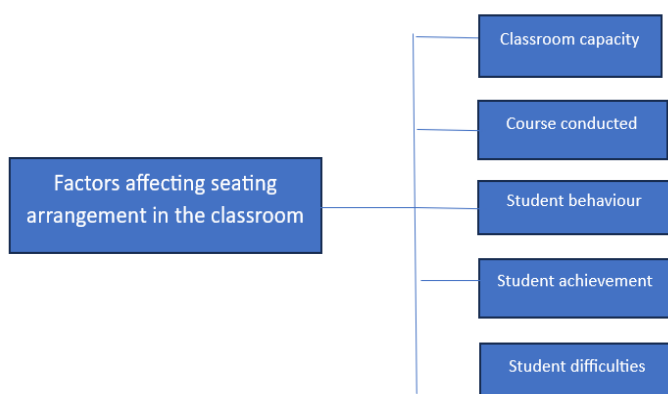


Figure 1: Influencing factors for the selection of seating arrangement in the classroom (Ramli et al., 2013, Ngware et al., 2013 and Mushtaq and Khan, 2012)

Few years later, Downer et al. (2007) and Canter and Canter (1976), Curwin and Mendler (1988), Badia-Martin (2006) studied the link between the classroom and students' performance. Physical layout in the given space was sometimes never changed by the instructors as they considered it conducive for a particular type of task or class activity (Anderson, 2007). Another factor was highlighted by Richard (2006) and Black (2007). They explored that poor seating arrangement weakened student's performance by almost 50%, if they stood or had distance of 6 meters from the visual aids within the classroom. Therefore, it was essential to change the seating arrangement if it failed to enhance students' performance and resulted in disruptive behaviour. However, the traditional classroom setting was usually limited to three seating layouts: rows, horseshoe, and clusters (Weinstein, 1979).

The seating plan can be a challenging task for the teachers who decide about how to integrate students with different abilities and from different backgrounds in the classroom and to develop a sense of belonging to the class. The class management can be so complex at times that it results in teacher burnout. Steinzor (1950) and Gump (1987) emphasized the fact that students around tables established face to face direct connection easily and more happily than those seated in columns and rows. Active learning, healthy and positive interactions were observed in the circle or cluster seating arrangements. Heindselman et al., (2007) observed that seating arrangement not only influenced student performance but also their grades in the class tests. The same concept was re-inforced by Rennells and Chaudhari (1988). Pace and Price (2005) emphasized on students' behaviour and attainment owing to the seating arrangement. Sylvain (2003) discovered that students' behaviour was observed to be modified with age. It was equally important to understand the students' perspective on the seating arrangement with an objective to create suitability of layout for an amicable learning environment, especially in multicultural context. However, the U-shaped arrangement encouraged and improved social interaction among students and developed a sense of collaboration and community. Because not only they confronted the teacher but also each other (Hurt et al., 1978). Students' engagement and participation also enhanced in U shaped layout (Sommer, 1969). Also, students were asked more questions while sitting in a semicircular arrangement than rows and columns. Atherton (2005) indicated that row arrangements supported a top-down (teacher-student) approach to learning and students were passive and inattentive in this arrangement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of Chieu and Cheng (2016) and Reinke (2019) emphasized on keeping the students actively engaged in the classrooms in order to achieve learning outcomes. In the language learning classroom, organizing activities were an effective way to enhance students' motivation (Reinke, 2019) noticeably in the blended classrooms in higher education (Evians et al., 2020 and Serrano et al., 2019). The physical classroom environment specially seating arrangements (Cornell, 2002, Haghighi and Jusan, 2012) was found to be a crucial factor to boost students' attention, engagement, and participation in the language learning process in the blended learning environment (Clinton and Wilson, 2019; Evian et al., 2020; Ochola and Achrazoglou, 2015 and Serrano et al., 2019). The physical classroom layout represented the instructional paradigm and linked with students' attitudes, behaviour, communication, engagement (Bolden et al., 2019; Ochola and Achrazoglou, 2015, Park and Choi, 2014), students' social connections inside the classroom (Vercellotti, 2017, Wilburn et al., 2019) and academic performance (Lewinski, 2015). Baron (1992) and Lotfy (2012) highlighted that the priority should be given to the classroom seating arrangement in the creation of classroom environment with an objective to maximize students' participation in the activities. Lewinski (2015) also pointed out that the most powerful tool to improve students' high performance is the seating when effectively arranged in the blended learning setting (Evian et al., 2020 and Serrano et al., 2019).

The study of educational literature indicated three dimensional effects of the seating arrangement on student engagement and commitment. Firstly, the relationship between seating arrangement and students' level of communication and social interaction with classmates was observed (Harmer, 2007; Wannarka and Ruhl, 2008) as mentioned in Figure 2.

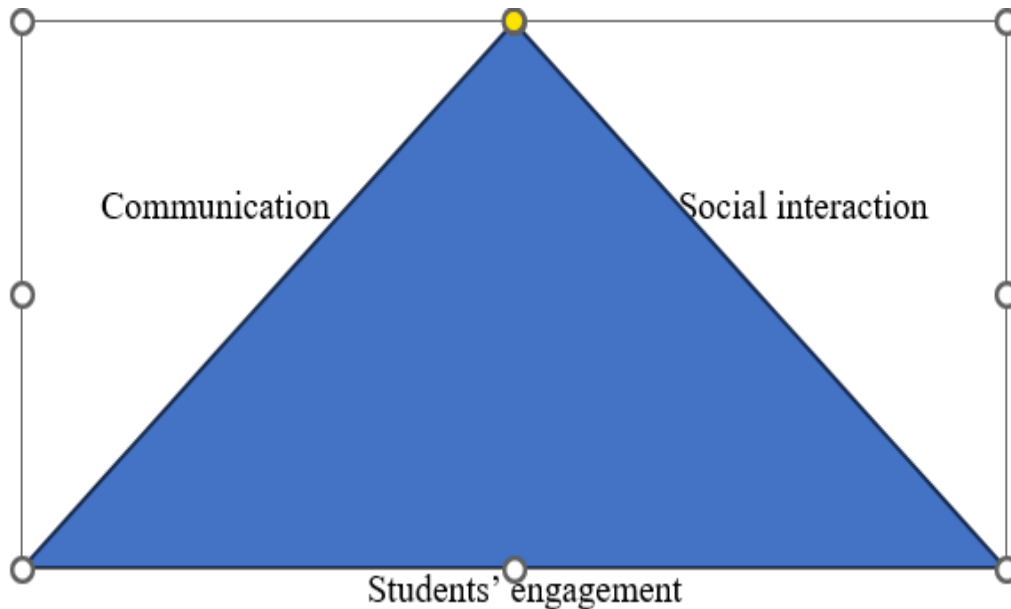


Figure 2: Three dimensional effects of the seating plan

Considering the **rows** and columns arrangement, the whole classroom space was used. It is convenient from teachers' perspective for students' monitoring and at the same time students' view the teacher and interacted easily. This arrangement was beneficial for lecturing and watching the videos (Harmer, 2007, Ochola and Achrazoglou, 2015). However, students could not see other students and those at the back could not be viewed clearly. However, rows were considered unfavorable for peer communication and interaction within the classrooms. In addition to this, students in front could not see other students, students at the back had poor visibility of the instructors and screen which lessened their engagement in activities (Shernoff et al., 2017 and Wei et al., 2018). On the contrary, semicircular or circular arrangements were found to be more suitable and avoided positional discrimination in the blended learning (Park and Choi, 2014). Therefore, teachers were found to move, provide quick feedback, facilitate students' discussions, and group work than in the rows and columns (Kinahan, 2017). From students' perspective, they sit closer and maintained direct eye contact (Harmer, 2007). Students in group seating enjoyed social interaction with peers, they asked more questions than rows and columns seating arrangement (Gremmen et al., 2016 and Lotfy, 2012). The seating plans are shown in the Figure 3

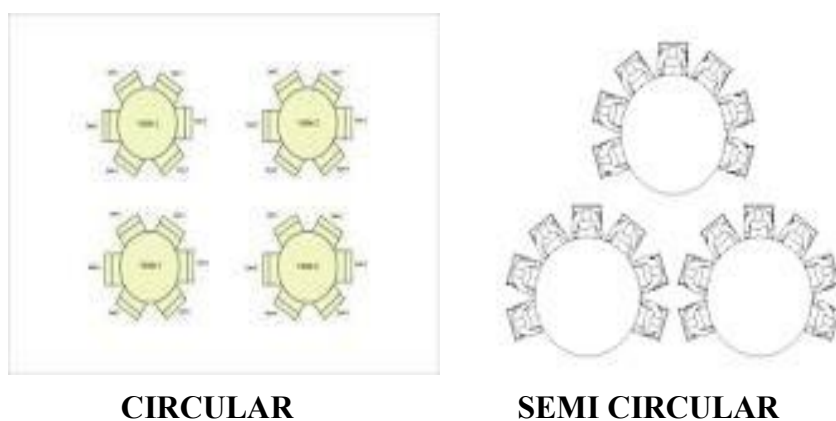


Figure 3: Seating patterns in the classroom.

Research Design:

This research is a qualitative study. A case study approach was used “to study the characters in real life situation” (Yin, 2009). The research instruments such as semi structured interviews and class observations suited the best for this study. By using the case study approach, this research explored the impact of seating arrangement on students' behaviour in the classroom in higher education. The interview protocol was designed with fourteen questions. The interview time was fixed as per interviewees' convenience.

Two groups of twenty students were selected through probability sampling. From group 1 students A, B, C, D, E were interviewed. They used to sit in the modern classroom equipped with the latest facilities and the layout was cluster seating with round tables and chairs. From group B, students X, Y, Z who learned in a traditional classroom with linear seating arrangement, were interviewed for this study. They were given freedom to choose the seats of their choice as well as peers. They were given different tasks and activities to perform within the classroom. Same interview protocol was used for both groups. Using the research instrument of class observations, data was collected by observing the students from both groups. Author (2014) explained an observation process in which he used a “teaching attribute instrument; qualitative notes of behaviors.” (P.6)

Throughout the semester, students were observed in the classroom with special focus on their communication, attention, engagement, interaction, and environment. The data was analyzed through codes and themes (Saldana, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed through codes and themes as shown in the table 1 below:

Table 1: Data analysis through codes and themes.

THEMES	CODES
Seating arrangement	relevant, feasible, flexible, circular arrangement, social interaction, satisfied, change, positions, helpful, rows, perfect, fine, enjoy, prefer, sitting alone, focusing myself, like, only class with circular arrangement, sit, want, move easily, facilitates, not far from teacher, classmates, move around, last row,
	big space, learning easier, close to class fellows, convenient, traditional classroom, rows and columns, big circle, circular seating, better, round tables, better, easy, facilitates, learning, lecture halls, big classrooms, talk louder, discomfort
Attention & engagement	easier, focus, actively engaged, learning, language, do things, alone, complicated, see each other, enjoy, groups, sit, around the table, work in groups, ask friends, no blocking from person, trying best, see each other easily, pay attention to each other, teacher in front, attention span, class activities, easy for discussions and activities, physical layout, helps, a lot of French activities, easy to handle problems, mutual group work, sitting closer, task-based learning
Class environment	Comfortable, flexible, enjoy, groups, language, closer, bonding, attentive, attention, move around, learning more interesting, more friends, choose our seats, helpful, feel closer to friends and teacher, freedom to choose, sit anywhere, learn together, connect better
Communication	Easy, see each other, face, circular, activities, together, friends, around the table, effective, enjoy, work, groups, easy, teacher, classmates, helps, understand, refer to friend and teacher, expressions, problem, talk to each other, see students better, easy for teacher, easy interaction, just raise our hands, asking questions
Confidence	Seating, good, confident, ask questions, shy person, less confident, friends, motivation, working together, friend, sitting, next to me, feeling, secured, feel left behind, last row, love the classroom, love French language, enjoy, working with friends, physical layout, important role

1. Seating arrangement

The data analysis revealed that the students were satisfied with their seating arrangement. They preferred circular seating for learning French as a foreign language. The interviewees highlighted multiple advantages of round

tables seating such as comfort, peer support, quick learning, easy to focus, easy access to teacher and engagement in group work.

Student A indicated:

"Yes, I am satisfied with the circular arrangement. I communicate easily with teacher...I enjoy working in groups. I really prefer circular arrangement because I can everyone and I can get to know everyone as we are closer, and it creates closer bonding among us".

Student B stated that she gained confidence to ask questions as the physical layout is comfortable and stress free:

"Seating arrangement is circular and quite good because I have become more confident to ask questions and I am no more a shy person to ask questions to my teacher."

Student C expressed his views and expressed his joy to have freedom to sit and work with his peers:

"I am satisfied with seating arrangement because I can sit anywhere, I want and move easily... the circular seating arrangement makes learning easier because your attention and focus is there than the traditional classroom with rows and columns."

Student D Shared her opinion about her attention span due to cluster arrangement:

Seating arrangement makes easier to pay attention to teacher because we aren't far from teacher, so she can see us, so we just need to focus on our work.

Student E showed her satisfaction with the seating arrangement:

"Yes I am satisfied with circular seating arrangement in French classroom."

Student X expressed his discomfort for the rows seating which hindered visibility and learning from the slides while sitting at the back row:

"In rows it's quite difficult to interact with the classmates in group work. Also, it makes difficult to watch the slides.....i prefer round tables seating arrangement because I don't have to turn my back to see the slides. Around the tables, communication is easy and helpful."

Student Z shared his problem of visibility from the back rows:

"Sometimes it becomes difficult to have a clear vision of teacher which makes interaction difficult as well."

2. Attention & Engagement

The cluster arrangement was discovered to facilitate attention, motivation, engagement, bonding among students and students and teacher. The rows arrangement created problems for students sitting at the back as the students in front blocked the view specially for students with weak eyesight. Also it was found time consuming to move back and forth. Engaging in class activities with the peers was also challenging in rows.

Student A highlighted bonding and connection developed due to seating arrangement:

"This kind of arrangement creates bonding between us, and we can pay more attention to teacher and activities...yes, I am attentive in class. Yes, the seating arrangement makes it easier to pay attention to the teacher. Because whenever we sit around the table, all students can pay attention, can focus on what teacher is teaching and helps us to focus. I am actively engaged in class activities for learning French language".

Student B explained her views that she feels motivated to work with classmates around the tables:

"Yes, I am attentive in class, the circular seating is helpful to pay attention in class. Because when I see my friends working in class, I feel motivated, they give me motivation, rather than I sit alone, and focus alone and don't participate in class and don't say anything".

Student C shared his experience. She highlighted that unlike rows, its much easier to pay attention to the teacher:

“Seating arrangement really helped me because the teacher is in front of me so I have to be more focused and engaged in class activities.... Its easier to pay attention with this seating, there is no blocking from the person in front of you so you can easily see and pay attention to teacher. One of the things that make students pay more attention.”

Student D praised the modern language learning classroom:

“Yes, I am attentive in French classroom. I love French so much, I love the classroom.”

Student E shared his opinion that he is engaged in activities:

“Yes I am attentive in French classroom... with circular seating arrangement, it is definitely easier to pay attention to teacher....i am attentive and engaged in class activities.”

Student X shared her unpleasant experience of sitting in rows arrangement that blocked her view of the PowerPoint slides and serve as an obstacle in learning:

“I have bad eyesight. So it makes it difficult to answer the questions. I cannot read the slides.... for individual work rows are fine but for group work in rows seating, it becomes time consuming. Sometimes students have to turn their backs for group work.”

Student Y shared his experience of learning in rows:

“In rows seating, it is easy to pay attention to teacher but it's difficult to engage in class activities with classmates.....to do activities in a traditional classroom is a bit hard. Group members have to move from their places. It involves movement which creates disturbance at times.”

3. Class environment

Data analysis indicated that the round tables seating created pleasant and healthy class environment as students were facing each other. The seating arrangement encouraged good communication and interaction. Students found easier to move in the classroom. Learning was fun based but in traditional classroom it was not very comfortable and helpful in interaction.

Student A highlighted:

“Yes, ofcourse, seating arrangement makes environment comfortable and flexible. In traditional classroom with rows, you cannot communicate easily with your classmates but in circular, we can engage ourselves easily in activities together”.

Student B shared her opinion on easy communication:

“Yes seating arrangement makes environment comfortable and flexible because when we sit circular arrangement, we can see each other and we can communicate easily without the need to move around. In circular seating, we can see our classmates and their expressions, how they react to our answers or how they motivate us to answer or support us whenever we work in groups.”

Student C highlighted his sentiments:

“Yes, I enjoy working in groups. Circular makes learning more interesting, you sit around the tables, interesting, you sit around the tables, you can have more friends, it makes us feel bonding there compared to just rows.”

Student D expressed her opinion:

“The physical layout keeps us attentive and engaged. It's helpful and we don't need to move around, we choose our seats and work in groups and helpful in group discussions..., it makes environment flexible and comfortable.”

We did a lot of activities in French class. So, it's easy for us to sit around the tables and work and we discuss a lot."

Student E praised the flexible class environment:

"Comfortable, yes, seating arrangement makes class environment flexible and comfortable, and we have freedom to choose where we choose to sit anywhere in class."

Student X highlighted: "yes I am comfortable in class."

Student Y shared his experience of learning a foreign language in rows was hard:

"I prefer round tables for learning French as a foreign language as learning a new language is quite hard.

You need fun environment and modern equipment. "

4. Interaction & Communication:

It was found that the cluster seating proved to be useful in establishing effective communication and healthy social interaction among students and between students and teacher. The close seating encouraged effective communication.

Student A expressed her positive opinion:

"When me and my friends are around the table, we can communicate easily since we can see each other's face easily and communicate easily as we are close to each other. So, communication becomes more effective".

Student B expressed her view that sitting next to her friends around the table gave her a sense of belonging:

"When I sit near my friends, I feel connected with each other rather than far from them or sitting alone.... When I don't understand anything, I can refer to my friend or we can refer to our lecturer easily. This is how physical layout helps in effective communication.

Student C expressed his views on easy communication due to lay out in the room:

"Yes, I communicate easily, it really facilitates social interaction, it does feel too far in the room, you feel close to your friends."

Student D expressed his joy for sitting with classmates that enhanced his motivation and engagement:

"Yes I am satisfied with this seating arrangement because its close to our class fellows, so we communicate easily during class activities.... Its quite easy for us to interact and work in groups with this arrangement..... seating arrangement makes easier to pay attention to teacher because we aren't far from teacher, so she can see us, so we just need to focus on our work."

Student E shared his opinion about easy interaction in groups:

"Yes I communicate easily with the teacher...it facilitates social interaction with my classmates in groups.... I enjoy working in groups.... We sit in groups, it eases group activities, I ask my friends and we do group mutually, so it eases for class work and activities. This is how physical layout plays an important role."

According to student X:

"Yes, it is easy to communicate with teacher because we can easily catch teachers' attention and it is easy to communicate."

Student Y expressed the difficulty in communication with peers due to rows:

"Sitting in rows is kind of not easy because we are sitting side by side, we have to move to communicate with peers, its time consuming...."

Confidence:

It was found that the physical layout in cluster form helped the students to gain confidence as they used to sit with their friends, discussions with peers in group work and peer correction also played an important role to uplift the level of confidence. They preferred the circular seating to rows as rows were found to be less facilitating.

Student A gave his opinion:

"Everything is perfect and fine. I really like this type of arrangement and I enjoy French class very much."
Student B remarked positively about her high level of confidence:

"I have become more confident to ask questions and I am no more a shy person to ask questions to my teacher.....absolutely, I enjoy working in groups. I am less confident when I sit and work alone but around the round tables, I ask my friends is it right or wrong, so that they can help me with that."

Student C appreciated the freedom of movement:

"We can move around, if I don't see the screen, talk to each other and that enhanced my confidence."

Student D compared the two seating arrangements:

Circular seating is better than traditional for learning of French language. I enjoy working with my friends in groups. I prefer circular arrangement because I gained confidence. Round tables are better and easy for groups work and communication with teacher."

Student E spoke highly about easy learning in the clusters:

"Definitely, seating arrangement makes learning easier than traditional rows or columns. I would prefer sitting closer to my friends for task-based learning, it doesn't matter which shape but important thing is that we sit closer to each other, we learn together, where we connect better with friends and teacher."

Student Y shared his opinion:

"To participate in activities with classmates in a traditional classroom is a bit hard. Group members have to move from their places to make a group. It involves movement which loses interest and motivation."

6. Proximity:

The data revealed that students from the modern classroom were satisfied with the learning environment and highlighted proximity with teacher in cluster seating arrangement. The direct contact proved to be beneficial in establishing healthy interaction with teacher, reading the power point slides, asking questioning to teacher, It was also convenient for both students and teachers. In rows setting, the last rows created inconvenience to communicate with teacher, to remain attentive and focused. Also students talk at the back rows and distract others. Sometimes teacher fails to satisfy students' questions.

Student C shared his views about his learning experience in rows:

"In rows setting, the second row is fine but the last row, you feel so left behind, my attention span will be very short and I will be easily distracted. In circular arrangement, the space is big, you can move around, the lecturer can see students better and students can see lecturer better."

Student D emphasized on the benefits of the circular seating plan:

"The circular arrangement is quite convenient because its not far from my teacher, so its close to teacher and my class fellows, so when we talk to each other. Even its easy for teacher to hear us and see what we are doing."

Student E explained the discomfort of rows:

"Because in lecture halls, the class is very big so when we sit sometime, we have to talk louder with discomfort but when we sit closer, we feel that we are close to teacher and its easy to ask questions, we just raise our hands, easy if any problem."

Student X shared her experience of rows seating:

"When we sit at the back, it depends on who is sitting in front of you. If the person is taller than its quite difficult because you have to move here and there. It is also difficult to watch the slides."

Student Y explained the discomfort in rows:

"We have to move and change our places to form a group with the members and that's time consuming and requires movement."

Class Observations:

The two groups A and B were observed throughout the semester. Students from group A were observed in modern classroom equipped with modern facilities for French language learning. The students from group B were taught French language in the traditional classroom. The observations of group A indicated that students were much more enthusiastic and motivated than group B. In group A, improved interpersonal communication was observed in students' learning behaviour. It was found that the circular layout of the modern classroom was quite convenient and comfortable for the students. Students picked the seats of their choice and sat with their friends, enjoyed friendships while productively working in groups. Their class fellows were constantly assisting each other in discussions to accomplish the given language tasks around the tables. Excitement, enthusiasm, and motivation was observed among students as soon as they entered the classroom. Some of them entered the classroom about 20 min before class. They sat and read French books together, while turning the pages of colorful French picture books with great zeal and exchanged views with their friends. They also enjoyed collaborative learning while exploring French as a foreign language.

Creativity was encouraged in French language classroom through thought-provoking videos to express one's point of view. Students' attendance, motivation and confidence were observed to be heightened and fear of teachers and learning a foreign language was diminished. Creativity was observed in groups as well. The weak students were supported by the brighter ones. Mutual learning developed a culture of caring and sharing. Students were found attentive and disciplined. Even when the lecture was over, it seemed that students did not feel like leaving the classroom and remained thrilled and excited in the room with their classmates. Learning with peers and peer correction of errors in oral production around the tables was noticed. While correcting the pronunciation, peers giggled and teased each other. The act of asking questions both to the teacher and their classmates indicated a positive sign of curiosity for learning and attentive behaviour in class. Change in students' thinking, attitude and behaviour were noticed. Students were found to be more responsive in groups in the circular seating arrangement than rows.

The social constructivist elements of learning were facilitated by the grouped seating by making the teacher more accessible as the distance between students and teacher was less and the content was comprehensible. Students' engagement dominated their classroom activities that led to the positive ambiance. Students were found to be highly engaged in language related tasks such as watching videos on You tube, exercises, worksheets, and dialogue writing. Each member concentrated on the activity, participated with vigour and enjoyed the process of learning by doing with their classmates sitting around the table. It was found that learning in groups in circular seating arrangement sharpened students thinking process and cooperation through interaction with peers for the completion of tasks. High energy level, enthusiasm, and dynamism was found among groups. Even the quiet and timid students' performance in class improved as well. All the group members gave their input in mutual discussions and did research work together with high motivation. Each group member was found focused and absorbed in the tasks. The element of collectivity was discovered to be stronger such as collective thinking process and collective research for vocabulary and synonyms etc. The creative group presentations uplifted the

excitement of the class. And made the class environment interesting. Weaker and less confident students were found to learn from the active students. Open communication, healthy interaction, sense of competition, motivation to perform better than others were manifested by the students. It was noticed that students' creativity was at its peak in working with peers in groups. Cross questioning and comments among the groups, peer correction of French pronunciation and repetition exercises with peers. Mime session, theatrical presentations, freedom of expression and movement in the classroom, noise, laughter, friendly environment, freedom of performance, fun based learning were the noticeable elements in the modern classroom with the circular seating. A variety of styles of group performances and presentations also created humor in class. On the other hand, group B in the traditional classroom with rows was found to be passive. Students who were sitting in front were more motivated and attentive than those sitting at the back. The level of engagement also varied among students. The ones having less proximity with teachers were more productive than others. From the perspective of behaviour, students sitting in the back rows were found chatting, playing with their cell phones and distracting others. Teacher had to point them out and make effort to keep them engaged in class activity. The level of attention and engagement was less. In the rows seating, teachers had to work harder on the group formation, movement was difficult and some of the students preferred to stand near their classmates to participate in group work. It was found to be more time-consuming and less convenient for the students.

This enquiry was made to study students' learning behaviour in a traditional and a modern classroom designed for the learning of French as a foreign language. The study probed into the relationship of seating arrangement with students' learning behaviour while focusing on students' engagement in class activities, confidence, communication, social interaction with teacher and students. Both modern and traditional classrooms had their positive and negative aspects. Circular classrooms created strong communication, bonding, and a sense of belonging among the students. They learned more quickly with their peers sitting around them at round tables and were more motivated, engaged and learning. The physical layout of the classroom represented the instructional paradigm and linked with students' attitudes, behaviour, communication, engagement as highlighted by Bolden et al., (2019), Ochola and Achrazoglou (2015), Park and Choi (2014), students' social connections inside the classroom as mentioned by Vercellotti (2017), Wilburn et al., (2019) and academic performance (Lewinski, 2015). The data indicated the fact that students around tables established face to face direct contact joyfully than those seated in columns and rows as mentioned by Steinzor (1950) and Gump (1987). Considering the rows and columns arrangement, it was convenient from teachers' perspective for students' monitoring and students could view the teacher and interact easily. Those from the back rows found it difficult to interact with teacher and visibility was less clear. However, this arrangement was beneficial for watching the videos as mentioned by Harmer (2007), Ochola and Achrazoglou (2015). At the same time students could not see other students and those at the back could not be viewed clearly. Hence, rows were considered unfavorable for peer communication which created inconvenience for engagement in activities as mentioned by Shernoff et al., (2017) and Wei et al., (2018).

CONCLUSION

This research was Qualitative in nature and was conducted at higher education institution in Malaysia. The Case study approach was used to study the key actors; the students from the Undergraduate programme who were studying French as a foreign language and as an optional subject. The research instruments were semi-structured interviews of the students and the class observations throughout the semester in both traditional and modern language learning classrooms. The type of seating arrangement and its effects on students' learning behaviour in the classroom was closely studied. Two different seating arrangements circular and rows were chosen through purposive sampling. Two groups of students who were learning in two different classrooms with different layouts were closely observed and interviewed.

The findings revealed that rows were good for the individual work. The students in the front rows are more attentive as they face the teacher than those who sit at the back. Group work becomes challenging in the rows as students are bound to move and change their places and physically adjust themselves to engage in group activities. This consumes time and becomes time wasting strategy. On the other hand, students in the back rows face problems such as focus, attention, asking questions becomes difficult and reading the content from

PowerPoint slides is also a hustle due to lack of visibility. Collaborative learning becomes exhaustive in this seating arrangement. On the contrary, semicircular, or circular arrangements are proved to be more suitable and avoid positional discrimination in the blended learning. Considering the rows and columns arrangement, the whole classroom space was used. It is convenient from teachers' perspective for students' monitoring and at the same time students viewed the teacher and interacted easily. This arrangement was beneficial for lecturing or watching the videos but not for group work.

Therefore, teachers were found to move, facilitate students' discussions, and group work than in the rows and columns. From students' perspective, they sit closer and maintained direct eye contact. Students in group seating enjoyed social interaction with peers, they asked more questions than rows and columns seating arrangement.

Three dimensional effects of the seating arrangement on students' engagement and commitment were proven. Firstly, the relationship between seating arrangement and students' level of convenience of communication and social interaction with classmates and teacher was stronger in circular seating. Students' performance, creativity, confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning were prominent features as well as peer support, peer correction and a culture of collaborative learning dominate the classroom. The weaker ones also show their involvement and good performance after sitting with the bright students. A culture of caring and sharing and a sense of belonging was instilled within classroom community with overall positive effects on learning, emotions, and well-being owing to circular seating arrangement.

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