



EVALUATION OF THE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS THROUGH MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Ceren Salma¹,

Abdurrahman Şahin²ⁱ

¹English Language Teacher,
Ministry of Education,
Manisa, Türkiye

orcid.org/0000-0002-1132-0072

²Assoc. Prof. Dr.,

Pamukkale University,
School of Education,
Denizli, Türkiye

orcid.org/0000-0003-4553-5220

Abstract:

Seating arrangement in classrooms plays a crucial role for the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. This multi-case pattern intertwined case study aimed to investigate the ongoing seating arrangements in language classrooms of middle schools with a focus on stakeholders (students, teachers, principals and janitors) perspectives. Two types of data were collected in this process. The data for the physical appearances of classrooms were collected through observation form and analyzed via descriptive analysis technique. The interview data gathered through semi-structured interview forms were analyzed through the content analysis technique. Findings revealed that language branch classrooms were not available and that classrooms had classic-row layout with cumbersome desks and deficient free space. Some curricular objectives and communicative activities were at odds with the ongoing seating arrangement, and therefore, skipped by teachers. Cluster and horseshoe layouts, cherished by students, were practiced to align the layout with the curricular objectives, though some reactions emerged.

Keywords: classroom seating, English language, curriculum, middle school

1. Introduction

Social, economic, cultural, political and other similar changes that occurred in recent years have forced education systems and programs to change. Hence curriculum reform initiatives have often been given place. Emerging curriculum reform movements gave

ⁱ Correspondence: email asahin@pau.edu.tr

priority to the goals reflecting the personality and social development of students (Koç, Isiksal, & Bulut, 2007), and thus, to cooperative or team-based learning (Michaelson, Davidson, & Major, 2014), to problem-based learning (Trappler, 2006), and to similar practices that are in line with constructivist philosophy (Tan, 2017). Before implementing the curriculum reforms, however, some arrangements are required to make the learning environment, in particular the placement of classroom furniture, compatible with the newly developed curriculum. Studies (e.g., Armstrong & Chang, 2007; Correa, Lara, Pino & Vera, 2017; Stapp, 2018; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008) pointing out the connection between classroom seating arrangements and student performance also point to this requirement. As Stapp (2018) emphasized, there has been a tendency to harmonize the layout of furniture in classrooms with a student-centered approach lately, but traditional outlooks have still remained untouched in many classrooms. In order for the programs to give the expected outputs, the classroom furniture layout is expected to be in line with the philosophy of the curriculum.

There is a common perception that the physical organization of a classroom must be compatible with the changing understanding of education and therefore with the curricular requirements (Bada, 2015). Several studies (e.g., Ersoy, 2005; Eyiol, 2019) provide evidence that a classroom layout conflicting with the essence of a newly developed curriculum, and constitutes an obstacle to the proper implementation of the curriculum. Critical pedagogues (e.g., Shor, 1992; Wink, 2010) also warn practitioners of a common perception that the traditional seating arrangement is the *normal* layout of a classroom. For the needs of the classrooms at Chicago Laboratory School, John Dewey once demanded from a company such things as desks, chairs, and tables that did not mirror the traditional understanding of education. Reflecting the common public perception, a company representative replied to Dewey, “*You cannot find what you are looking for in our store. You are indeed looking for desks for students to work. What we have is appropriate for students just to listen*” (Kuyumcu Vardar, 2019, p. 141). Constructivist classrooms, however, encourage cooperative group work, student-teacher communication, in-class interaction, student questions, evaluation of the process along with the product, a holistic perspective, and primary sources of information (Bada, 2015; Brooks and Brooks, 1993; Tam, 2000).

The relationship between the learning environment and curriculum outcome is understood not only through the official curriculum but also via the implemented one, called *operational curriculum*. Learning environment facilitating the realization of certain curricular objectives strengthens the harmony between the *official* and *operational* curricula. Otherwise, as shown by Aderonmu, Alagbe, Opoko, Oluwatayo, and Alagbe (2014), a gap between the two appears. The operational curriculum indeed includes two basic elements: what is taught and what is assessed. Since practitioners interpret the official curriculum based on their own perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, they might break away from the framework of the official curriculum (Posner, 2004). As shown by Toptaş (2011) teachers have perceptions that are at odds with the curriculum they implement. Physical arrangements in classrooms might also relate to and construct of

hidden and null curricula. Through the physical arrangements of classrooms, a number of implicit messages are given to students regarding their own responsibilities, expectations from them, approaches to learning, and the underlying philosophy of the process. For example, in a crowded classroom where the teacher's table is higher than the students' desks arranged in a fixed and sequential order, a hidden curriculum emerges by excluding collaborative student work and promoting the teacher as an authority figure (Yüksel, 2004). Some of these excluded or ignored elements (*e.g.*, collaborative activities, communicative processes) indeed constitute the null curriculum too.

2. Literature Review

The physical arrangement, and the layout of the desks, in particular, have often been neglected in previous studies (Stapp, 2018). In a study Simmons, Carpenter, Crenshaw, and Hinton (2015) observed that second graders who sat in sequential rows demonstrated extracurricular behaviors (*e.g.*, inappropriate talking, standing up without permission, violating instructions, starting to work late) less than those who sat in *horseshoe* or *cluster* layout did. However, studies on classes with older age groups (Smith, 2017; Wingrat & Exner, 2005) indicate that students who spend the lesson sitting still in the traditionally placed desks remain indifferent to the learning process or decrease in communication. The findings of previous studies provide evidence that alternative layouts in classrooms increase student participation while decreasing distraction (Fedewa & Erwin, 2011; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004; Stapp, 2018).

In a study conducted at the higher education level, Benoit (2017) found that students and instructors developed positive perceptions as a result of teaching activities carried out in classroom environments in line with active learning. Participants also thought that these classes provided positive first impressions, flexibility, group work, and were beneficial in terms of student-student interaction. In another study at the higher education level Henshaw, Edwards and Bagley (2011) examined face-to-face interaction among students, the movement of the instructor in the classroom, and if the transitions from one activity to another were effective in specially designed classrooms where 48 students sat in four separate groups of 12 and with a plus-shaped movement area in the middle. In those classrooms, where the chairs were fixed to the floor but swivel, students could easily form small groups and return to the center of the classroom when necessary. The study revealed positive results for three aforesaid dimensions. In another study conducted at a university (Saunders, Oradini, & Clements, 2017), the furniture in 70 classrooms was rearranged flexibly (*i.e.*, easily transportable, and shapeable) in order to ensure active participation of students and to implement programs more effectively, and instructional activities have been continued. At the end of the process, the feedback taken from the students and teaching staff about the new environment was positive and they generally spoke positively of the new conditions.

Different studies (Benoit, 2017; Chen, Leger & Riel, 2016; Saunders et al., 2017; Stapp, 2018) also demonstrate that students prefer flexible classrooms. In a study

comparing five different seating styles in terms of comfort, participation, and interaction, Harvey and Kenyon (2013) found that students approved of modern mobile chairs and chairs around the hexagon formed by the combination of two trapezoidal tables the most, while they approved of tablet arm chairs and tablet arm chairs fixed to the ground the least. Pedro (2017) similarly states that teachers prefer flexible classrooms in order to implement different pedagogical activities. However, as stated by Chen et al. (2016), teachers assume traditional roles more easily in inflexible classrooms while exhibiting the facilitator role more strongly in flexible classrooms. One of the main elements that provide flexibility in classroom environments is the availability of sufficient free space. In a study, Duncanson (2014) pointed out the importance of sufficient free space in the classroom environment, expressed the factors that cause the occupation of empty spaces (e.g., course materials, being reluctant to clean unnecessary items), and reminded the measures that teachers use to create enough space (e.g., rearranging the desks, cleaning unnecessary items, etc.). Free spaces in classrooms are also necessary for the use of a number of techniques needed in language teaching.

The physical arrangements are of particular importance for the classrooms where language curricula will be implemented (Falout, 2014). In particular, seating in small groups strengthens motivation in language teaching and promotes in-class communication, as compared to sequential rows layout (Correa et al., 2017). The English Language Curriculum emphasizes the use of language in an authentic communicative environment, classroom interactions of all kinds, the use of an eclectic mix of teaching techniques, and finally the link between learning and real-life practice (NEM [National Education Ministry], 2018). A curriculum comes to life in the process of implementation in a classroom setting promoting the use of instructional techniques corresponding to its philosophy. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine, with a focus on seating layouts and the perspectives of the stakeholders involved in shaping these layouts, the classroom environments in which the middle school (5th-8th grades) English curriculum is implemented. For this purpose, answers were sought to the following specific questions:

- 1) Based on the layout of the desks, what are the major characteristics of the classrooms where English lessons are held?
- 2) What are the perspectives of the stakeholders (teachers, students, school administrators, and janitors) involved in the layout of the desks in the classrooms where English lesson is taught?

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a case study. A case study includes a detailed and holistic examination of the factors related to a situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Since different techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are included in this design, diverse perspectives and deeper explanations on the subject can be revealed (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). The case under consideration may be a large unit

such as a city, a school, a hospital; or it may be one of the smaller units such as classroom, ward, individuals, or implementations, depending on the purpose of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The “seating arrangements” in the classrooms where the middle school English curriculum is implemented have been examined as a case. This process includes two types of cases. The first one is an illustrative case study, describing the environments in which the situation typically exists (Davey, 1991). The other one is the case analysis, analyzing the views of the stakeholders (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The pattern of the study is a multiple-embedded case, since it includes student views at different grades and achievement levels, and the views of four different groups of stakeholders (teachers, administrators, students, and janitors).

3.2. Data Sources

Three different data were gathered in this study: observation records of a total of 46 classrooms where English lessons were taught at four middle schools (5th, 6th, 7th, & 8th grades); the interview data obtained from stakeholders (English teachers [n=8], school administrators [n=4], students [n=16], and school janitors [n=7]); and the Curriculum document of English Lesson. English lessons entail flexible classroom environments for reasons such as communication, interaction, active learning techniques, and material requirements. In addition, classrooms where the *Foreign Language Intense English Curriculum* is implemented are expected to contain good examples of classroom layout. This selection is expressed as *intensity sampling*, which includes the richest and best environments and examples of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). The study was carried out in a district center in Western Anatolia, with a total of four middle schools with the highest (two schools) and lowest ranks (two schools) on the basis of the *TEOG* (Transition from Basic Education to High-School Education) exam. This selection is expressed as an extreme or deviant case sample, which is expected to provide richer data than normal cases and to help the problem to be understood in multidimensional and in-depth ways (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

3.3. Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools included an observation form; interview forms for teachers, school administrators and school janitors; and a focus group interview form for students. Focus group interviews were preferred to allow students to express themselves better in a group atmosphere.

a. Observation Form

Created by the researchers, a semi-structured observation form including five basic aspects was used for data. As for constructing the form, the literature information was initially used, arrangements were made based on expert opinions, and the categories were finalized after the pilot study. The finalized form includes the categories of branch classroom, classroom furniture, equipment, seating layouts, features of the desks, and space to use.

b. Interview Forms

All the interview forms, prepared in line with the semi-structured format, included questions about personal information, processes, and practices. Interview forms for teachers and administrators additionally included questions about the context and preliminary preparation. The number of questions in the interview forms ranges from 11 to 16, each being different. A sample question from the teacher interview form and the janitor interview form, respectively, are as follows: “What kind of solutions or strategies do you come up with when the seating arrangement of the students in a classroom is not suitable for an activity that will actualize the objectives of your course?” “How does the arrangement of the desks in classrooms affect your work?” The form drafts were prepared in light of the literature and the English Language Curriculum. Views of four experts were taken on the drafts consisting of open-ended questions, and after the suggested changes were completed, a pilot study was conducted with stakeholders. After the pilot study, additional arrangements were made. Following that, the forms were presented to experts for their final feedback. Then the finalized interview forms were used at the schools within the scope of the research.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Each of the schools within the scope of the research was visited. In those visits, the school principals were initially contacted and the permission document obtained from the *National Education Ministry* was presented. After informing the principal about the purpose of the study and identifying the potential participants with his/her aid, they were contacted and their individual permissions were taken by informing them about the purpose, content, process, and potential risks of the study as well as safety measures for those risks, namely informed-consent procedures. Appropriate times and places were determined for the observation of the classrooms and the interviews with the participants. First of all, observations were made for 46 classrooms at different grade levels in four selected middle schools. During the observation, notes were taken and these notes were supported by the pictures of the classrooms. In the next process, interviews were held with the volunteer participants—teachers, administrators, janitors, and students (as a focus group)—at the places and times determined by the participants themselves. The shortest interview lasted 7 minutes and the longest one lasted 40 minutes. All interviews were recorded by a voice recorder with the permission of the participants. The collected data include 46 pages of classroom observation notes, 184 classroom pictures, 123 pages of interview data, and the English Language Curriculum consisting of 100 pages.

3.5. Data Analysis

The observation notes and pictures were subjected to the *descriptive analysis* technique, by which the data were analyzed depending on the previously identified themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In order to describe the classrooms and furniture layout, the observation data were brought together in a meaningful way in 27 codes and six themes. Then an

expert's opinion was taken on the organized themes. With the expert opinion, the four codes were combined with the others, and the data were rearranged and finalized with six themes and 23 codes. This final version is presented in a table. The interview data were analyzed by the *content analysis* technique. Content analysis, as a special process that makes sense of the gathered data with codes and themes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004), allows making inferences about the messages in the texts by identifying the meanings and relations of concepts in the data (Büyüköztürk *et al.*, 2016). The interview data, transcribed as written text, were coded in the light of the concepts in the literature, and the relevant codes were grouped into sub-themes and themes. It is aimed to increase the internal validity by including different data sources in the study by observing the classrooms, taking the views of the stakeholders, and examining the curriculum. In order to support the reliability of the study, a second coding was completed by an academician in English field. For the purpose of confidentiality of the schools and participants from which data were collected, codes were given to them during reporting. Hence numbers (1, 2, 3, and 4) were added for the interview order with the participants, letters (A, B, C, and D) were used for schools. Participants were coded as *St* for student, *Te* for teacher, *Ad* for administrator, and *Ja* for janitors. The code of the first interviewed teacher working in school A was presented as *Te-A-1*, and the code of the administrator in school B was stated as *Ad-B*. The data from curriculum document were cited as "(NEM, 2018, p.x)"

4. Results

Findings were presented under two major headings. Firstly, from the observation data, the physical features of the observed classrooms along with the layout of the student desks were presented. Secondly, the findings gathered from the stakeholders (namely students, teachers, administrators and janitors) regarding their perspectives on the layouts in classrooms were given place.

4.1. Physical Features of Classrooms

The findings from the observation data were presented in six different aspects: availability of branch classrooms, classroom furniture, equipment in classrooms, seating layout, features of the desks, and space to use. The details of those aspects were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Features of the Observed Classrooms

Overview of the Classrooms		Schools											
		A (16 Classes)			B (8 Classes)			C (8 Classes)			D (14 Classes)		
E: Exist / P: Partly / A: Absent		E	P	A	E	P	A	E	P	A	E	P	A
Branch Classrooms		-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
Classroom Furniture	Class Library	7	-	9	6	-	2	2	-	6	14	-	-
	Student Lockers	1	-	15	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Teacher's Table	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Student Desks	16			8			8			14		
Equipment in Classrooms	Course Materials	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Bulletin Board	15	-	1	7	-	1	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Smart Board	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Computer	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	14	-	-
	Internet	16	-	-	-	-	8	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Printer	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	14	-	-
Seating Layout	Classic Row	15	1	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Horseshoe	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Cluster	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Station	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
Features of the Desks	Light Tables	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Flexible Tables	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Personal Chairs	-	1	15	-	-	8	7	-	1	-	-	14
	Double Desks	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14	-	-
	Fixed Desks	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
Space to Use	Event Space	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Individual Workspace	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Group Workspace	-	-	16	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	-	14
	Flexible Free Space	-	3	13	-	6	2	5	-	3	-	-	14

a. Branch Classrooms

All of the classrooms within the scope of the research were regular classrooms visited by the responsible teachers at the time of a particular lesson. A branch classroom belonged to an individual teacher who could design it for a particular branch—English in this case—was not available among the observed classrooms. Therefore, it is understood that the teachers visit classrooms holding a group of students, and teach there during their own lesson hours before turning back to the *teachers' room*. This might, however, create an obstacle to physical arrangements for the instructional activities in advance.

b. Classroom Furniture

Dual student desks and a teacher table were available in all classrooms. Though often empty, the class library was accessible in some classrooms while student lockers were not in most. Somewhat larger than student desks, the teacher's table was located aside, in front of a column of classic-row desks, so as not to obstruct the view of the board. Since the furniture is made of strong and heavy materials, the aid of a few people seems to be needed to relocate them (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Classrooms from the School A and C

c. Equipment in Classrooms

The classrooms were arranged to meet basic needs, such as bulletin board, smart boards, and the internet. Except for the classroom library, there is no additional space for storing non-digital materials supporting learning outcomes. Having a similar furniture layout, the classrooms where a *foreign language-intensive curriculum* is administered in *School A* have relatively more visual elements on their walls than the other classrooms (Figure 2). Those classrooms better reflect the curricular emphasis that “*students are continuously exposed to English through audio and visual materials*” (NEM, 2018, p.12).



Figure 2: Foreign Language Intensive classrooms at School A

d. Seating Layout

As shown in the figures above, the student desks in all classrooms were located as dual classic-row format, which offers an impression suitable for the traditional concept of teaching. The curriculum text, however, emphasizes “*the communicative nature of language,*” and thus, the use of “*an eclectic mix of instructional techniques,*” particularly, “*authentic materials, drama and role play, and hands-on activities*” (NEM, 2018, p. 3). Yet interactive and cooperative activities in those classrooms might require certain preliminary preparation before the lesson starts.

e. Features of the Desks

All student desks and chairs in the classrooms were double furniture made of strong and heavy materials, except for the *School C* where single chairs were accompanying the double desks in only one classroom. The use of heavy materials in the production of furniture is undoubtedly important in terms of durability but might hinder instant arrangements suitable for specific course objectives.

f. Space to Use

Event space, individual workspace, and group workspace were not available in all classrooms, though the curriculum emphasizes “*to sing, dance, play games, do arts and craft*”

activities" (NEM, 2018, p.4), some of which require additional classroom space. All classrooms at *Schools A* and *D* as well as some classrooms at *School B* were missing the free space needed while even rearranging the layout of desks for instructional activities (Figure 3). In short, most classrooms were not suitable for different layouts other than the classic-row due to the stuffed student desks in each. Because of the low number of desks in the classrooms of *School B* and *School C*, the presence of free spaces suitable for instructional use stood out. Despite this, however, the classic-row layout was dominant in all classrooms (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Classrooms at the Schools A, B, and D



Figure 4: Classroom at the Schools B, and C

4.2. Stakeholder Views on Seating Arrangement

Findings regarding the stakeholders' perspectives are presented in four different aspects: contextual information about classrooms, student seating arrangements used in English lessons, the process of forming the desired layout for lessons, and the preferences of stakeholders. First, contextual information was presented below.

A. Contextual Information

Interview data revealed that the class sizes in four different schools were different (Table 2). The main reason for this difference is that schools attract students based on the achievement rank in the standardized exam called *TEOG*, namely high-achieving schools attract more students than others do. The administrators stated that, towards the end of the summer, arrangements were made taking into account age groups ($n=3$) and class sizes ($n=4$). After the renovation of the damaged desks, as many desks as needed are requested by the related authority of the minister ($n=4$). The standard layouts were formed for all courses due to the lack of enough classrooms and resources. "We cannot think differently for different lessons and take separate measures. So, we have to create standard classrooms." (Ad-A)

Table 2: Average Classroom Sizes at Schools

Grade	Teacher / Classroom Sizes							
	Te-A-1	Te-A-2	Te-A-3	Te-B-1	Te-C-1	Te-C-2	Te-D-1	Te-D-2
5		40		20		22	30	
5-FLIC			30	-	-	-		30
6			43		20			30
6-FLIC	30			-	-	-	30	
7		30		20		13	27	28
8	30			20	20		30	30

FLIC = Foreign Language Intense Curriculum

The administrator *Ad-A* stated that student desks do not have separate costs for schools and that *the Directorate of National Education* sends student desks to schools free of charge. *Ad-A* specified that only the *number* and *height* information was given during the request and that the relevant unit also sent them standard desks. *Ad-A* also clarified that single desks were requested for the special education class and this class was arranged in single rows too. All of the school administrators, while preparing the classrooms before the beginning of the academic year, placed the desks in a classic-row seating arrangement. They further emphasized that they made the arrangements on the basis that all students could see the board. “*We place the desks as normal [meaning the classic-row order] before schools open. All of the students are facing the board.*” (*Ad-A*) “*When arranging the desks, we pay attention to the lighting of the environment and the clear view of the board.*” (*Ad-B*).

B. Seating Arrangements in English Lessons

English teachers mainly used the classic-row order designed by the school administration at the beginning of the academic year. Additionally, the teachers also employed the *cluster* and the *horseshoe* orders.

a. Classic-Row Order

Except for the janitors, the data from the other stakeholders revealed similar points regarding the classic-row layout. A summary of these experiences is presented in Figure 5 as a whole.

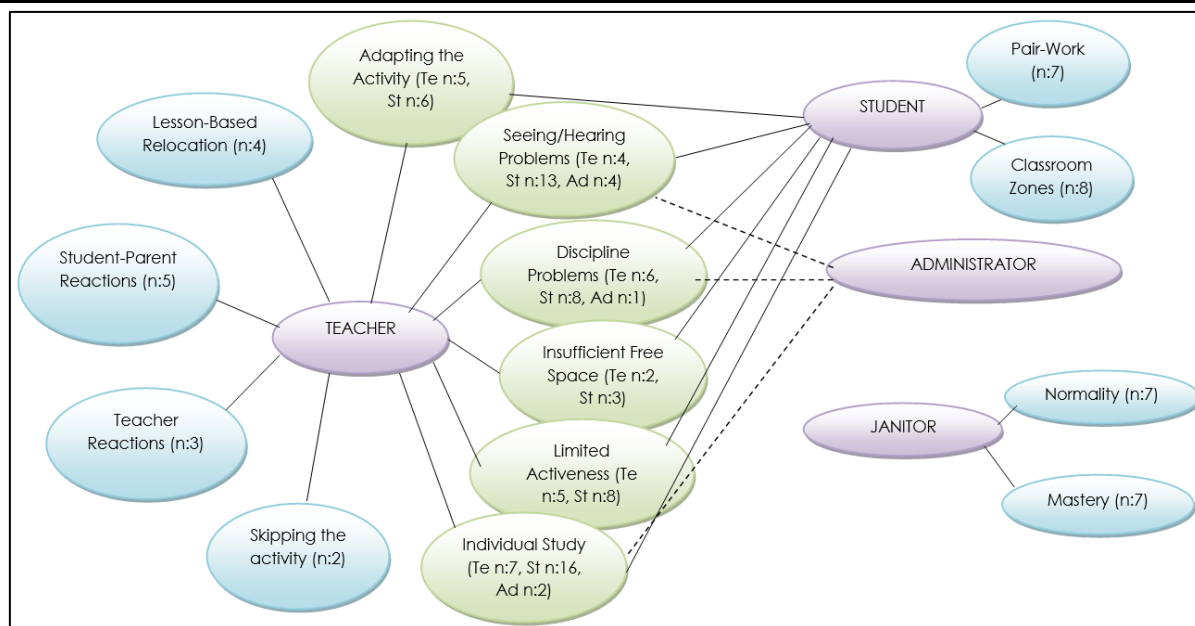


Figure 5: Classic-Row Layout as Implementing the Curriculum

Teachers (n=7) and school administrators (n=2) described the classic-row order as an advantage in terms of individual work. The students also stated that they usually do individual (n=16) and sometimes pair work (n=7) in this arrangement, but the arrangement provides limited activeness for students (n=8). The teachers stated that the classic-row order limited the interaction between students (n=5), did not provide enough free space for activities (n=2), prepared the ground for disciplinary problems because it negatively affected the teachers' classroom management (n=6), and caused students to have seeing and hearing problems (n=4). By mentioning the same points, the students stated that the order causes disciplinary problems (n=8), that it causes weakness in communication (n=2), and that they experience problems with seeing/hearing (n=13) and participation in the lesson (n=11). The teachers made lesson-based relocation of students in the classic-row order in order to respond to the complaints (n=4). Upon those changes, however, teachers received reactions from other students and parents (n=5), and even from other teachers (n=3) who taught in those classrooms. Teachers also stated that they made an effort to adapt the activity to the ongoing layout when they could not successfully implement the curricular requirements in the classic-row layout (n=5). Some also gave up the activity if it was not compatible with the classic-row order (n=2). School administrators also stated the complaints they encountered in the aforementioned layout under the headings of seeing/hearing problems (n=4), disciplinary issues based on poor classroom control (n=1), and limited student-student communication (n=2). According to the janitors, who regarded the order as "normal" and "as it is everywhere", cleaning was easier due to mastery (n=7). They stated that they finished the work faster because they developed mastery over time for the classic-row order.

The students also perceive the classroom in three distinct parts the *front*, *middle* and *back* in the classic-row order. They indeed perceive all three parts as different in terms of the teacher's dominance in the classroom, the student's level of interest in the lesson,

and disciplinary problems. *“Sometimes when I’m feeling bad, if I’m sick or something, I go to the back. Also, the teacher puts noise makers back of the class so that they don’t interrupt the lesson. Because those sitting in the back don’t study much either.”* (St-D-6) *“When we do not do our homework, we go to the back so that the teacher does not notice us. We don’t attend the class because we don’t do homework, so we sit in the back.”* (St-D-8) Students’ interest in the lesson seems to be in relation to where they sit in the classroom. It is also understood that in-class seating arrangements are related to students’ viewing, hearing, and communicating.

b. Clusters

English teachers stated that the classic-row seating arrangement does not match the methods and techniques that will support some of the learning outcomes in the English curriculum. The English curriculum focuses on language *“in terms of communication, such as conveying needs and wishes, expressing opinions and beliefs, and establishing relationships”* (NEM, 2018, p.4). For this reason, the teachers tried to make the activities serve the same purpose as the sitting arrangement by reorganizing the places of the desks in the classroom. Hence cluster order was often preferred for their lessons because it was found useful in cooperative learning (n=5). Students similarly stated that they worked in a cluster order in their English lessons. They emphasized that the cluster arrangement was lesson-based (n=6) and that they enjoyed cooperating with their friends as well as being active throughout the process (n=6). The administrators *Ad-C* and *Ad-D* stated that the use of student desks in a cluster order in the classroom was beneficial for group work. On the other hand, a janitor found that the cleaning process was difficult in the cluster order (n=1) and that it takes time to reorganize the desks for the classic-row order (n=1). Some of the janitors stated that the cluster layout had no effect on their work (n=2).

c. Horseshoe

Another classroom layout used in English lessons was horseshoe. Views of the teachers reveal that the horseshoe arrangement provides free space for activities (n=4), helps students seeing the board clearly (n=1), facilitates the teacher’s classroom management (n=6), increases communication between students (n=8), and strengthens student motivation (n=3). The English curriculum similarly touched upon engaging in *“activities which require actual communication between peers or between students and their teacher, such as creating a game as a group and then playing it with classmates”* (NEM, 2018, p.4). Even though some teachers state that the horseshoe arrangement initially distracts students’ attention (n=4), things go normal after an adaptation period for students (n=4). The reasons for preferring the horseshoe arrangement in their lessons are that it provides sufficient free space, that all students can see the board easily, that it facilitates teachers’ management of the classroom, that it allows students to interact with each other, and that it increases student motivation. In order for the instructional techniques required in English lessons (e.g., dramatization, role-playing, competition, demonstration) to be applied comfortably, there is a need for enough free space in the classroom. The horseshoe layout provides the required free space for employing various alternative instructional techniques.

The views of school administrators also overlap with the views of teachers in that horseshoe design assists teachers to have strong control of the class. It has been stated that the teacher's control in the classroom has increased due to the fact that the students can see each other and that the teacher can easily see all students. It was stated that disciplinary problems decreased when the degree of teachers' control of students increased. Janitors stated that the horseshoe layout facilitates the cleaning of the middle area (n=3), yet cleaning behind the desks becomes difficult (n=1) and it takes time to reorganize the desks in classic-row order (n=2). There were also janitors who stated that the horseshoe had no effect (n=3) in fulfilling their duties.

B. Adapting Classroom Layout to Instructional Activities

In order to change the classic-row order to a different layout required by the learning outcomes, some preliminary preparations are needed. The findings from the participants' experiences regarding this process were presented in Figure 6.

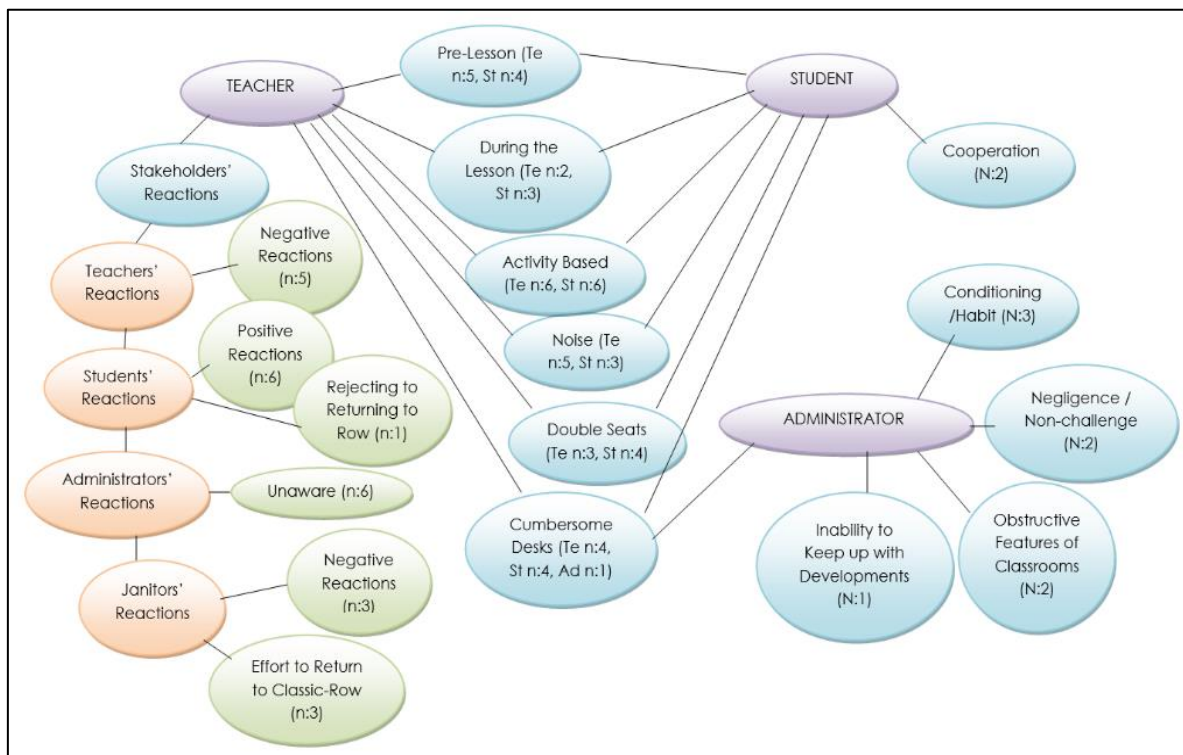


Figure 6: Adapting the Layout to the Instructional Activities

As seen in the figure, the teachers set the layout they need before or during the lesson hours (n=2). The students similarly stated that these changes are made before the lesson (n=4) and during the lesson (n=3). Both the teachers (n=5) and the students (n=3) stated that noise appears and that cooperation was needed (n=2) during the change. The layouts created were often activity-based (Te, n=6; St, n= 6). Desks were double (Te, n=3; St, n=4) and cumbersome (Te, n=4; St, n=4; Ja, Ad, n=1). When the classic-row layout is changed to a different one, reactions are received from other stakeholders. For example, some teachers gave negative reactions to different layouts (n=5) while the students

reacted positively (n=6) and refused to return to the classic-row order (n=1). School administrators were not aware of the changes made (n=6). The Janitors demonstrated negative reactions (n=3) and were in an effort to return the desks to classic-row order (n=3). The janitors stated that they discussed this situation with the teachers and the school administration when they found the student desks in the classrooms arranged in a different way from the classic-row order. The statements of the janitors are as follows: “After returning the layout to the sequential order, I talk to the teacher. Then the teacher continues to leave the desks that way [in the classic-row order].” (Ja-A-2) “When I come across a different order, I say it to the principal, I say it to the teacher. I ask them to leave the desks neat, as usual. I tell the teachers at the beginning so that my job will be easier.” (Ja-B-1)

The administrators attribute the stability of the classic-row layout to several obstacles. Those are the cumbersome state of desks (n=1), conditioning to the current layout (n = 3), negligence and non-challenge (n = 2), obstructive features of the classrooms (n = 2), and inability to keep up with developments in education (n = 1). Teachers overall viewed the ongoing classroom layouts as in conflict with the curricular objectives. In line with this, Table 4 includes metaphors developed by teachers to represent their effort to meet the curriculum standards with the current seating arrangement of classrooms. The metaphors mainly emphasize the difficulty of the process and the passivity of the students.

Table 3: Metaphors about Ongoing Classroom Layouts

Teacher	Metaphor	Reason
Te-A-1	Swimming Against the Current	Difficulty
Te-A-2	-	-
Te-A-3	Going Downhill in Reverse	Difficulty
Te-B-1	Theatre/Television/Radio	Student Passivity
Te-C-1	Theatre	Student Passivity
Te-C-2	Prisoner in a Prison	Trapped- Cannot Move Adequately
Te-D-1	Partial Prison Life/Guard Books on the Shelves in Library	Restrictions on Students Student Passivity and Inability to Express
Te-D-2	Theatre	Student Passivity

C. Stakeholders’ Seating Preferences

Except for the janitors, the participants prefer the layouts that allow the activity, interaction and cooperation of the students. Findings revealed the following specific points: emphasis were given to the layouts of horseshoe and clusters, layouts that allow cooperative learning were highlighted, the need for free space in the classroom was pointed out, and the necessity of lightweight and flexible furniture suitable for practical arrangements was addressed. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 7.

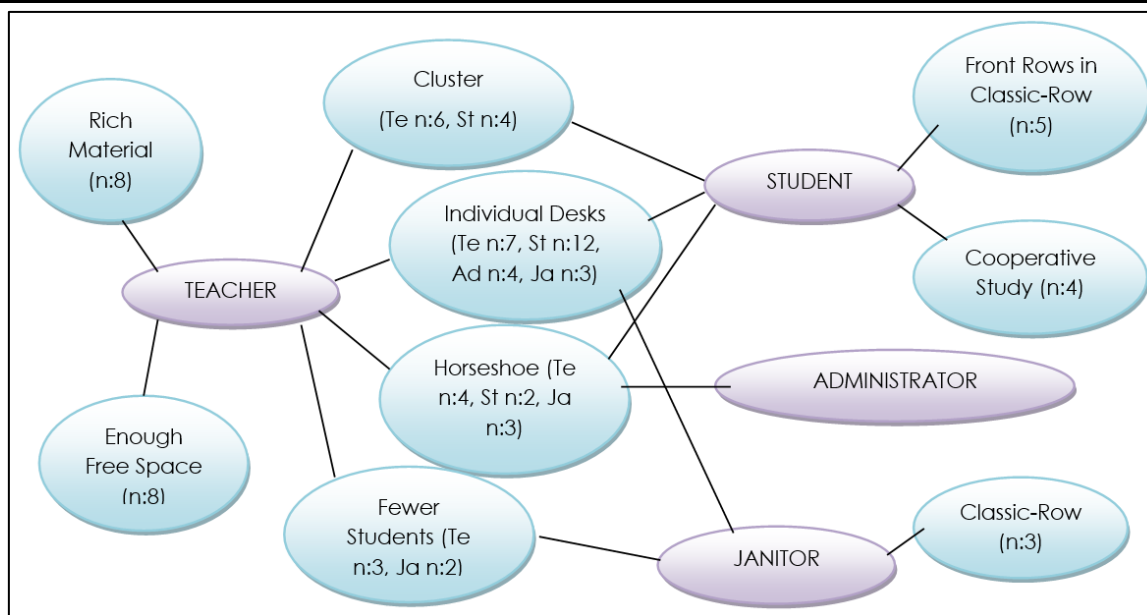


Figure 7: Stakeholders' Preferences Regarding Classroom Layout

The participants prefer student desks to be single ones that can easily be rearranged, as in line with the requirements of the curriculum, and that are light enough to facilitate cleaning (Te, n=7; St, n=12; Ad, n=4; Ja, n=3). Teachers prefer classroom environments to have rich and organized materials for the target language (n=8) and to have sufficient free space for activities (n=8). In addition, it was stated that the number of students in a class should be low (Te, n=3; Ja, n=2) and that the horseshoe design provides convenience to teachers (n=4), students (n=2), and janitors (n=3). Unlike the teachers (n=6) and students (n=4) who prefer the cluster layout, some students prefer sitting at the front desks in the classic-row layout (n=5) because they do not want any obstacle between themselves and the teacher, between themselves and the board. It is also understood that students (n=4) wanted to work with their friends in cooperative studies. The janitors (n=3) prefer the classic-row order, because in this order, they “*know what to do*” and “*do not have to bring the classroom back to the previous order*”.

5. Discussion

It is possible to discuss the findings under two main headings: the main issues regarding the general condition of the classrooms and the topics emerging from the experiences of the stakeholders (the seating arrangements they use, adapting the ongoing layout to a new activity, and seating arrangement preferences). Below, firstly, the physical features of the classrooms will be discussed in connection with seating arrangements.

A plain appearance in terms of material equipment attracts attention in the examined classrooms, though basic elements such as desk, teacher’s table, smart board, bulletin board, class library were in their place. The main reason for the plain appearance is that all were shared classrooms, shared by teachers of all branches, not branch classes particularly designed for English teaching. In practice, there are some negative

consequences of shared classrooms (*e.g.*, lost items, disabled technology, rearranged student desks, insufficient materials, and conflict with other teachers) in organizing the classroom context suitable for a particular branch. Therefore, in those classrooms, a teacher does not prefer making long-term arrangements specific to a lesson. However, as emphasized by Falout (2014), physical arrangements are crucial for the classes where language programs will be implemented. The settled classic-row order gives the image of an obstacle to communicative processes. The fact that traditionally settled classrooms hinder the communicative processes (Smith, 2017; Wingrat & Exner, 2005), and more importantly, create an obstacle for the activities resulting from the implemented curriculum (Ersoy, 2005; Eyiol, 2019) obviously constitute an itinerary for the direction of physical arrangements in classrooms. Such results might also be a stepping stone to changing the mindset of perceiving the traditional layout as normal, which critical pedagogues (*e.g.*, Shor, 1992; Wink, 2010) voiced years ago. Additionally, the lack of enough free space in some classrooms indicates a need to develop and follow certain standards in designing classrooms. The empty space is also one of the basic elements that provide flexibility to reorganize the desks, as Duncanson (2014) points out.

The data gathered from the participants include details on the general outlook, experiences with the existing classroom layout, the process of adapting the existing order to the new events, and the preferences of the stakeholders. First of all, some traditional-order based concerns (*e.g.*, the student's being able to see the blackboard or to hear the teacher) played a role as the classrooms were being arranged at the beginning of the academic year by the school administrations. This reminds Toptaş's (2011) findings regarding the teachers' conflicting views with the administered curriculum and draws attention to the extensions of similar views held by administrators, students, and other stakeholders. Due to the operational curriculum shaped by these views, as Posner (2004) states, shifts from the official program emerge. It must also be noted that most alternative layouts (*e.g.*, cluster, horseshoe, circle) do not pose a significant obstacle in terms of traditional concerns of seeing the board or hearing the teacher. The achievement rate of a school in TEOG exam causes an influx of students, resulting in crowded classes hindering flexible mobility in classrooms. Therefore, preventing the accumulation of students in certain schools might be accomplished through measures such as keeping test records undisclosed or avoiding the use of test achievement rates as an advertorial opportunity for schools.

Secondly, the findings reveal that classic-row layout is settled in all classrooms, though different layouts, namely horseshoe and cluster are practiced at times. Classic-row order, as also demonstrated by Simmons et al. (2015), is appropriate for individual studies, pair work, and effective classroom control. However, in a sequentially ordered classroom, teachers often faced a series of problems such as disciplinary problems, limited student engagement, students' viewing-hearing complaints, abandonment of a planned instructional activity, and division of the class into presumed zones in terms of student engagement. Some of these problems are consistent with such issues as the distraction of students from the lesson and the decrease in communication, as pointed by

similar studies (e.g., Smith, 2017; Wingrat & Exner, 2005). These problems, viewing-seeing issues, in particular, seem to be inconsistent with the school administrators' consideration for the classic-row that everyone must be able to see the board from their desks. Additionally, the teachers either choose to make lesson-based changes to the desks or adapt the activity to the existing layout, if they do not give up the planned activity. When course-based changes are made in order to carry out activities in line with the program, cluster and horseshoe layouts are often preferred. Findings also point out that these layouts provide a number of advantages such as student motivation, enabling proper activities, creating free space, participation, and allowing effective classroom management. Those points are in line with the studies emphasizing the contribution of group seating to motivation and in-class communication in language teaching (Correa et al., 2017) and the increase of class participation in classrooms with alternative layouts (Fedewa & Erwin, 2011; Schilling & Schwartz 2004; Stapp, 2018).

Third, the findings regarding the process of adapting the existing layout to the planned instructional activities reveal a series of supportive and inhibitory elements. Such behaviors of students as welcoming this process with enthusiasm, refusing to return to the classic-row order, and contributing to the relocation of the desks correspond to the findings of previous studies displaying students' preferences for flexible classrooms (Benoit, 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2017; Stapp, 2018). However, there are several issues in this process, such as teacher reactions, noise, cumbersome desks, and janitors returning the classroom to the normal of their perception. Some of these problems might be eliminated by persuasive processes (i.e., changing perceptions of the janitors, teachers), while the others require institutional decisions (i.e., diversifying desk standards, developing classroom standards for student desks and empty spaces). It is necessary to eliminate any element that obstructs flexibility in classrooms because, as identified by Chen et al. (2016), teachers assume their traditional roles more easily in inflexible classrooms as they display their facilitator roles more strongly in flexible classrooms.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results point out that the classroom layouts are at odds with some curricular objectives and activities. Therefore, the Education Ministry must inform the school administrators about the link between curricular requirements and seating layout, so that their initial layout at the beginning of the schooling year corresponds to the implemented curricula. Educational administrators must attempt to allocate particular language classroom where the teachers could pre-form the appropriate seating placement to the course objectives and organize the linguistic materials of all kinds. Education Ministry might also develop certain classroom standards regarding layouts, desks (e.g., light, modular, moveable, etc.), activity spaces, and the minimum proportion of free space. Particularly new school buildings might be constructed with these considerations. Now that most teachers and students welcome alternative seating layouts, school

administrators might attempt to challenge those who reflect the perception that the classic-row is the normal layout of a classroom. Hence, they might inform janitors about those different seating layouts and settle on alternative seating layouts at the beginning of the schooling year. Otherwise, the classroom conditions will continue to hinder the curricula to give the actual outputs.

Acknowledgements

This study was based on a master's thesis with the same title and orally presented at 7th International Congress of Curriculum and Instruction at Ankara University.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Ceren Salma is an English teacher employed by National Education Ministry. She has worked at middle and high schools in various parts of the country since 2006. She currently works in Alaşehir School District in Manisa, Türkiye. E-mail: cerenct@hotmail.com

Dr. Abdurrahman Şahin is an Associate Prof. in Curriculum and Instruction Program, Educational Sciences Department, School of Education at Pamukkale University, Denizli, Türkiye. Member of Turkish Association of Curriculum and Instruction. E-mail: asahin@pau.edu.tr

References

- Aderonmu, P., Alagbe, O., Opoko, A., Oluwatayo, A. & Alagbe, T. (2014). *Curriculum in architectural education: Implication for professional practice*. Proceedings of EDULEARN14 Conference. 7th-9th July 2014, Barcelona, Spain.
- Armstrong, N. & Chang, S. (2007). Location, location, location. Does seat location affect performance in large classes? *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 37(2), 54-58.
- Bada, S. O. (2015). Constructivism learning theory: A paradigm for teaching and learning. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 5(6), 66-70.
- Benoit, A. (2017). Monitoring implementation of active learning classrooms at Lethbridge College. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 6(1), 14-25.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2006). *Qualitative research for education. An introduction to the theory and methods*. (5. Edition). USA: Pearson.
- Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1993). *In search of understanding the case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş., Çakmak, E. K., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş. ve Demirel, F. (2016). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri* (22. baskı). Ankara: Pegem Akademi.

- Chen, V., Leger, A. & Riel, A. (2016). Standing to preach, moving to teach: What has learned from teaching in flexible and less-flexible spaces. *CELT*, 9, 187-198.
- Correa, R., Lara, E., Pino, P. & Vera, T. (2017). Relationship between group seating arrangement in the classroom and student participation in speaking activities in EFL classes at a secondary school in Chile. *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Facultad de Humanidades Folios*, 45, 145-158.
- Davey, L. (1991). The application of case study evaluations (ED338706). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED338706.pdf>
- Duncanson, E. (2014). Lasting effects of creating classroom space: A study of teacher behavior. *Educational Planning*, 21(3), 29-40.
- Ersoy, A. (2005). Evaluation of classroom setting and teacher's role in computer course in elementary education in terms of constructivist learning principles. *TOJET*, 4(4), 170-180.
- Eyiol, K. Ö. (2019). *Evaluation of Elementary School Mathematics Applications Curriculum Based on Eisner's Educational Criticism Model*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Pamukkale University, Institute of Educational Sciences.
- Falout, J. (2014). Circular seating arrangements: Approaching the social crux in language classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 275-300.
- Fedewa, A. L., & Erqin, H. E. (2011). Stability balls and students with attention and Hyperactivity concerns: Implications for on-task and in-seat behavior. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 65(4), 393-399.
- Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R. & Worthen, B. R. (2004). *Program Evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines*. New York: Pearson.
- Harvey, E. J. & Kenyon, M. C. (2013). Classroom seating considerations for 21st century students and faculty. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Henshaw, R. G., Edwards, P. M. & Bagley, E. J. (2011). Use of swivel desks and aisle space to promote interaction in mid-sized college classrooms. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Koç, Y., Isiksal, M. & Bulut, S. (2007). Elementary school curriculum reform in Turkey. *International Education Journal*, 8(1), 30-39.
- Kuyumcu Vardar, A. (2019). Temel felsefi akımlar ve eğitim VII: Pragmatizm ve eğitim. B. Biçer ve B. Zabun (Ed.), *Eğitim Felsefesi* (s. 131-146). İstanbul: Lisans Yayıncılık.
- Michaelsen, L. K., Davidson, N., & Major, C. H. (2014). Team-based learning practices and principles in comparison with cooperative learning and problem-based learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25(3-4), 57-84.
- NEM (National Education Ministry). (2018). *İngilizce dersi öğretim programı*. Ankara: MEB Yayınları.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Pedro, N. (2017). Redesigning learning spaces: What do teachers want for future classrooms? *International Conference Educational Technologies*, 51-58.
- Posner, G. J. (2004). *Analyzing the curriculum*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

- Saunders, G., Oradini, F. & Clements, M. (2017). SMART teaching in new and old classrooms. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 5(1), 85-109.
- Schilling, D. L. & Schwartz, I. S. (2004). Alternative seating for young children with autism spectrum disorder: Effects on classroom behaviors. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders*, 34(4), 423-432. doi:10.1023/B:JADD.0000037418.48587.f4
- Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Simmons, K., Carpenter, L. Crenshaw, S. & Hinton, V. M. (2015) Exploration of classroom seating arrangement and student behavior in a second-grade classroom. *Georgia Educational Researcher*, 12(1), 50-68. DOI: 10.20429/ger.2015.120103
- Smith, C. (2017). The influence of hierarchy and layout geometry in the design of learning spaces. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 6(3), 59-67.
- Stapp, A. (2018). Alternative seating and students' perceptions: Implications for the learning environment. *Georgia Educational Researcher*, 14(2), 34-50. DOI: 10.20429/ger.2018.140204.
- Tam, M. (2000). Constructivism, instructional design, and technology: Implications for transforming distance learning. *Educational Technology and Society*, 3(2), 50-60.
- Tan, C. (2017). Constructivism and pedagogical reform in China: issues and challenges. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 15(2), 238-247, DOI: 10.1080/14767724.2015.1105737
- Toptaş, V. (2011). Classroom teachers' perceptions about the use of alternative assessment and evaluation methods in mathematics courses. *Education and Science*, 36(159), 205-219.
- Trappler, B. (2006). Integrated problem-based learning in the neuroscience curriculum – the SUNY Downstate experience. *BMC Medical Education*, 6, 1-7.
- Wannarka, R. & Ruhl, K. (2008). Classroom seating and achievement: Seating arrangements that promote positive academic behavioral outcomes: a review of empirical research. *Support for Learning*, 23(2), 89-93.
- Wink, J. (2011). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle, NJ: Pearson.
- Wingrat, J. and Exner, C. (2005). The impact of school furniture on fourth-grade children's on-task and sitting behavior in the classroom: A pilot study. *Work*, 25, 263-272.
- Yıldırım, A. & Şimşek, H. (2016). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin.
- Yüksel, S. (2004). *Örtük program: Eğitimde saklı uygulamalar*. Ankara: Nobel.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).