



Exploring of U-Shaped Classroom Seating and Student Participation in Collaborative Learning: An IRF-Based Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of U-shaped classroom seating within collaborative learning and its influence on EFL university student participation, analyzed through the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) interaction pattern. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved six EFL students from Universitas Kuningan selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations and open-ended questionnaires, analyzed using IRF discourse coding and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that students perceived the U-shaped arrangement as improving visibility, peer interaction, and teacher-student engagement. Classroom observation revealed systematic enactment of collaborative learning syntax, while IRF analysis confirmed active student participation. Participants reported increased confidence in initiating ideas, responding actively, and engaging in natural turn-taking. However, teacher-initiated exchanges dominated classroom discourse. The study concludes that U-shaped seating effectively supports participatory engagement when integrated with collaborative instructional design and intentional teacher discourse management.



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The physical environment plays an important role in teaching strategies through classroom arrangement. It is influenced not only by curriculum and pedagogical aspects, but also by the learning environment itself. A supportive classroom environment facilitates the smooth implementation of learning and promotes collaborative learning, which encourages students to actively

participate through small-group discussions and social interaction (Alzubi et al., 2024). Collaborative Learning (CL) in language acquisition emphasizes that learners develop communicative competence most effectively through participation in collaborative tasks, negotiation of meaning with peers, and sustained engagement with the target language in interactive, dialogic settings. In this study, grounded in sociocultural theory explores the student activeness in teaching practice process. Posits that learners advance their communicative competence most effectively when they negotiate meaning, share cognitive responsibility, and produce language in coordinated peer activity (Yang, 2023; Ismail & Tahir, 2021). Furthermore, collaborative tasks in task-based frameworks based on reading skill significantly overcome fluency, complexity, and language output, in peer interaction generates the comprehensible input and pushed output necessary for L2 development (Swain, 1995; Storch, 2019). In this framework, collaborative learning is not merely a pedagogical technique but a psycholinguistic necessity: learners develop language by using it reciprocally with others.

The study aligned with the phenomenon, EFL students are still unwilling to express the English language. Language Anxiety is becoming a barrier in society. To overcome, active learning strategies facilitated by digital tools create engaging, low-pressure environments that promote language practice while minimizing performance anxiety (Huang et al 2024). Turns out, willing to communicate bonds as scaffolding to facilitate interaction (Guo et al 2023). Continuously, in CL, learners had more opportunities to practice authentic communication through cooperative tasks (Mufti et al 2025). CL creates learners do not feeling loneliness during learning process. Significantly, Traditional teaching in recent days commits to education nowadays, despite the growing emphasis on communicative approaches practices continue to dominate many EFL classrooms, where teachers control most classroom interaction while students remain passive recipients of information. (Loor et al 2024).

In addition, the teacher's role is an active figure in classroom management is not merely physical classroom organization, but also a classroom management strategy to enhances learning focus, encourage collaboration, and reduce disruptive behaviour (Hoekstra, 2025). In this phenomenon of researcher sample, almost influenced by the environmental learning involved the traditional seating which is Row seating. Therefore, innovative classrooms encouraged greater student (Woo, 2025). Consequently, Student-centered learning an approach that foregrounds learner agency, collaborative problem-solving, and meaningful communicative interaction, has become the widely endorsed paradigm for language education in the current era (Asad et al., n.d.; Gautam et al., 2023). on the other hand, teacher authority it is less and Students develop metacognitive awareness of their own linguistic development. Learning differentiation, which responds to the varied needs and learning preferences of individual students, is facilitated by the flexibility of the physical space and the diversity of collaborative task formats available within it (Ghafar, 2023). The

classroom atmosphere is characterized by shared purpose, intellectual risk-taking, and mutual respect conditions under which students feel safe to attempt communication in the target language, make errors openly, and receive constructive peer feedback. Motivation is sustained through the provision of meaningful, collaborative tasks and through a sense of belonging and relational connection within the learning community (Pekrun et al., 2023).

Previous studies have emphasized that collaborative learning promotes students' communicative participation through social interaction and peer collaboration. Grounded in Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning occurs through interaction, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). In second language acquisition, Michael Long explained that language develops through negotiation of meaning during interaction (Long, 1983), while Merrill Swain emphasized the importance of producing comprehensible output in collaborative communication (Swain, 1985). Furthermore, Shawn Loewen and Masatoshi Sato highlighted that peer interaction provides corrective feedback and authentic communication opportunities that support language development (Loewen & Sato, 2018). In addition, classroom seating arrangement has been identified as an important element influencing participation and interaction. Edward T. Hall explained through proxemics theory that spatial organization shapes communication behaviour and social interaction (Hall, 1966). Recent studies also showed that flexible seating arrangements improve classroom engagement and collaborative participation (Seet et al., 2022). Specifically, U-shaped seating supports visibility, eye contact, and equal interaction opportunities between teachers and students (Pranena, 2022).

To examine classroom interaction patterns, this study adopts the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) framework proposed by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard (1975), which analyses how teachers initiate interaction, students respond, and feedback is provided during classroom communication. While prior studies have extensively examined collaborative learning as a driver of student participation and communicative engagement in EFL classrooms (Li, 2025; Ismail & Tahir, 2021), the majority of this research treats student activeness as an outcome variable measured through self-report surveys or speaking performance scores, without interrogating the discourse mechanisms through which physical space shapes that participation.

Collaborative learning and student engagement have been extensively researched, yet there remain few studies on the interaction between university students and the underlying mechanism through which CL produces engagement particularly when small peer groups are involved. The IRF pattern is a useful framework for managing classroom discourse and promoting student participation, and research suggests that IRF enhances learner-initiated communication by prioritizing referential questions over display questions; however, existing IRF studies tend to focus solely on teacher discourse strategies, not on how the physical arrangement of learners conditions the

quality of student responses within those exchanges. Empirical findings from EFL university settings confirm that student-centered and interactionally responsive approaches have a major positive impact on participation. Crucially, no study to date has applied IRF discourse analysis as a specific analytical indicator to examine how U-shaped seating makes EFL university students feel seen both by the teacher and by their peers and whether that spatial sense of mutual recognition translates into richer, more elaborated student participation within collaborative learning activities.

This study aims to investigate the implementation of U-shaped classroom seating within a collaborative learning framework and its influence on student participation among EFL university students, analyzed through the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) interaction pattern. Specifically, the study seeks to answer three research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of using U-shaped seating in collaborative learning? (2) How do students interact with one another during collaborative learning activities in a U-shaped seating arrangement? (3) How do students participate in collaborative reading activities as reflected through the IRF interaction pattern? By addressing these questions through classroom observation and open-ended questionnaires involving six EFL university students engaged in peer-based reading instruction, the study responds to the call for context-sensitive, discourse-analytical investigations of how spatial design and pedagogical strategy jointly shape communicative participation in EFL higher education.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of three analytical dimensions U-shaped spatial arrangement, collaborative learning instructional design, and IRF discourse analysis within a single qualitative case study framework applied to an Indonesian EFL university reading class. Previous IRF research has established that expert teachers exhibit greater flexibility by employing variant IRF patterns that create more interactive environments and enhance student participation (Tong et al 2024). Furthermore, this study aligns with the concept of classroom ecology that offers a further theoretical framework by (Doylee, 1997) for understanding the relationship between spatial arrangement and learning quality. These ecological perspectives underscore the importance of treating seating arrangement classrooms environment, social relationships, teaching practices, and communication patterns (Justice et al 2023). Thus, it significantly with this research.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine student perceptions about the effectiveness of U-shaped seating in classroom activities. The case study was chosen to allow in-depth exploration of the phenomenon within a real situation. The researcher observed the learning process, and the participants consisted of six EFL students who were selected

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using purposive sampling. The study was conducted in a reading class within an English Education major.

Participants

Participants consisted of six EFL university students in Universitas Kuningan who are conducting teaching practicing enrolled in a reading class. They were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that informants could provide rich, relevant data about their experiences with U-shaped seating and collaborative learning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The small sample size is consistent with the exploratory and in-depth nature of the qualitative case study paradigm, in which depth of insight takes precedence over statistical representativeness.

Instruments and Procedures

Instrument 1. Classroom Observation

Structured classroom observation was conducted during collaborative learning activities to capture authentic interaction patterns between the teacher and students and among peers. The researcher take a look at the syntax structure in lesson plan and recorded verbal exchanges, turn-taking sequences, and student behavioral engagement (e.g., eye contact, body orientation, responsiveness). Observation notes were organized chronologically and later coded for IRF patterns using the Initiation–Response–Feedback framework first codified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and elaborated by Yang and Jansem (2025). The observation focused specifically on the trigger question phase, the conversation between teacher and student during the learning process, the Discussion, and the group presentation session, as these stages generated the highest density of observable student–teacher interaction.

Table 1 Main Activities of Syntax

Syntax Stage	Observed Classroom Activity
Syntax 1 (Stimulation)	The teacher provided trigger questions related to the procedure text refer to various types of food to activate students' prior knowledge and critical thinking.
Syntax 2 (Problem Statement)	Students were organized into small groups and assigned three different food menus to work on.
Syntax 3 (Data Collection)	Students were asked to identify the ingredients required to complete the assigned dish.
Syntax 4 (Data Processing)	Students discussed and arranged the procedural steps of the text, while the teacher monitored and clarified misunderstandings.
Syntax 5 (Verification)	Each group presented their completed task to the class.
Syntax 6 (Generalization)	Feedback was provided by both the teacher and students to reinforce understanding of the procedural text.

Instrument 2. Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to the six participants after the observed class session. The questionnaires consist of a total of 12 questions, refer to the how the effectiveness of collaborative learning in their experience and reflect on their experiences with the U-shaped seating arrangement, specifically regarding visibility, peer interaction, and overall participation. Open-ended items were selected to allow participants to articulate nuanced perceptions rather than responding to predetermined categories, which is consistent with the interpretive epistemological stance of the study (Dörnyei, 2007). Responses were collected in written form immediately following the classroom session.

Observation Procedures

The classroom observation was conducted over a two-week period and consisted of two meetings involving classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with the participants. In this study, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer to examine the classroom atmosphere, student participation, and interaction patterns during the learning process. During the observation sessions, video recordings were used to capture teacher–student interactions, particularly the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) structure, including teacher questions, students’ responses, and teacher feedback. After the data were collected, the recorded interactions were transcribed and analyzed focusing on the syntactic patterns and interactional sequences within classroom discourse. To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, data triangulation was conducted through classroom observations, interview responses, and classroom documentation.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings organized around three dimensions: (1) students' perceptions of the U-shaped seating arrangement, (2) the effectiveness of collaborative learning as observed through the instructional syntax, and (3) student participation as analyzed through the IRF classroom interaction pattern. Together, these three dimensions address each of the study's research questions.

Finding 1: Students’ Perceptions of U-Shaped Seating

Questionnaire data revealed that students held consistently positive perceptions of the U-shaped seating arrangement. Three dominant themes emerged from the responses: (a) improved visibility and classroom attention, and (b) increased student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction (c) Effectiveness with collaborative learning. These aspects are presented in Table 1 with representative student’s Excerpts.

Table 1 Students’ Perceptions of U-Shaped Seating Arrangement

Aspects	Excerpts
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Improved quality of learning	[S1] "Seating arrangement can be more effective for the environment [that] need[s] high interactive, collaborative and central attention." [S4]"The U-shaped seating arrangement is very helpful, particularly in enabling students to see and pay attention to their classmates, as it creates a more open interactive learning environment than traditional row seating." [S3]"With a U-shaped seating arrangement, students can clearly observe peer interactions during presentations or front-facing activities, which increases attention and supports more effective learning."
Increased Peer and Teacher–Student Interaction	[S6]"Teacher can easily see students all without excuse, encourage visual interaction through (eye contact), and built willingness in participate because they feel seen and engaged." [S5]"Visual engagement, particularly eye contact, builds trust and encourages participants to take a more active role because they feel 'seen' and included."
Effectiveness with collaborative learning	[S1, S3,S4] “Collaborative learning methods are particularly effective in classroom contexts requiring intensive interaction, such as Reading sessions or Peer Teaching activities” "Collaborative learning works best with paired or group seating arrangements for instance, discussing with a partner sitting to your right or left." "Collaborative learning methods play an effective role during presentations and open discussions."

Finding 2: Implementation of Collaborative Learning Observed Syntax

Classroom observation revealed that the teacher implemented collaborative learning using a six-stage instructional syntax during a reading lesson on procedural texts. Each stage generated distinct forms of student interaction, indicating that collaborative learning was implemented systematically and that the U-shaped arrangement supported group coordination at each phase. Table 2 presents the observed activities and the corresponding interaction patterns across all six syntactic stages.

Table 2 Collaborative Learning Syntax: Observed Activities and Student Interactions

Syntax Stage	Observed Classroom Activity	Result: Student Activity
Syntax 1 (Stimulation)	The teacher provided trigger questions related to various types of food to activate students' prior knowledge and critical thinking.	Students responded to questions individually and collectively, showing initial engagement and attention to the topic.

Syntax 2 (Problem Statement)	Students were organized into small groups and assigned three different food menus to work on.	Students began negotiating roles and responsibilities within their groups.
Syntax 3 (Data Collection)	Students were asked to identify the ingredients required to complete the assigned dish.	Group members exchanged ideas and shared information related to ingredients and procedural steps.
Syntax 4 (Data Processing)	Students discussed and arranged the procedural steps of the text, while the teacher monitored and clarified misunderstandings.	Active group discussions occurred, with students collaborating, questioning, and refining ideas together. Some groups reorganized chairs into a circular (O-shaped) formation to facilitate side-to-side communication.
Syntax 5 (Verification)	Each group presented their completed task to the class.	Students interacted through presenting, listening, and responding to peers' explanations.
Syntax 6 (Generalization)	Feedback was provided by both the teacher and students to reinforce understanding of the procedural text.	Student-student and teacher-student interactions supported reflection and consolidation of learning.

Table 2 demonstrates that all six stages of the collaborative learning syntax were enacted during the observed session, and that each stage elicited distinct interactive behaviors from students. Notably, during Syntax 4 (Data Processing), a subset of students spontaneously reorganized their chairs into a compact circular (O-shaped) configuration. This adaptation suggests that while the U-shaped arrangement facilitated whole-class visibility and teacher-student interaction effectively, students perceived a circular cluster as more conducive to the intensive side-to-side dialogue required during small-group data processing tasks. This finding is consistent with Yang's (2023) observation that collaborative problem-solving remains effective even when minor adjustments to spatial configuration occur, provided the collaborative intent is maintained. It also indicates that student agency in spatial adaptation is itself an indicator of participatory engagement.

Finding 3: Student Participation Through the IRF Interaction Pattern

The IRF analysis focused on two segments of the observed lesson: the trigger question phase (the opening stimulation stage) and the presentation session (Syntax 5). These segments were selected because they generated the highest density and most analytically distinct interaction exchanges. Table 3 presents the full sequence of coded IRF turns observed during these two phases.

Table 3 IRF Interaction Pattern During Classroom Observation

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Turn	Utterance	Type of Question
I	<i>"Do you ever make food? So, can you mention Indonesian food please?"</i>	Display Question (DQ)
R	<i>"Getuk, Onde-Onde, Klepon, "Nasi padang, Nasi lengko"</i>	Response
F	<i>"All great answers."</i>	Positive Feedback (PF)
I	<i>"Next, now, do you know various types of fast food? Mention some!"</i>	DQ
R	<i>"Kebab, Pizza, Burger"</i>	R
F	<i>"Great!"</i>	PF
I	<i>"What is fast food?"</i>	Referential Question (RQ)
R	<i>"Makanan cepat saji"</i>	
F	<i>"Excellent."</i>	PF
I	<i>"Now, I want to know what kinds of healthy food you know."</i>	DQ
R	<i>"Vegetables salad, fruits salad."</i>	R
F	<i>"Nice!"</i>	PF
Discussion Part		
I	<i>What the topic do you want to discuss?</i>	RQ
R	<i>We want to choose traditional food of Indonesia</i>	R
F	<i>Alright, each group has different topic so please read and rearrange the step of text.</i>	Directive Feedback
I	<i>"Miss, should the ingredients list match the assigned topic?"</i>	CQ
R	<i>"Hey, your group's ingredients are in our group."</i>	R
F	<i>"Let's exchange with us"</i>	Interactional feedback
I	<i>"How about group one?"</i>	RQ
R	<i>"One person arranged the ingredients, while the other two organized the text to match the goal."</i>	R
F	<i>Great, nice team!</i>	PF
Presentation Session		
I	<i>"Did you arrange the text well?"</i>	DQ
R	<i>"Yes, our group marked each text with a sequencing word in every step."</i>	R
F	<i>"Alright then. Thank you."</i>	Acceptive Feedback
I	<i>Is there missing in your tools</i>	RQ
R	<i>It can used in this menu</i>	R
F	<i>But, be careful not every people like it.</i>	Corrective Feedback

Finding 4: Students' Perception of IRF Exchange

The interview findings revealed that students perceived the U-shape seating arrangement as supportive of classroom interaction during the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) exchange. Most participants reported that the seating arrangement encouraged them to initiate ideas, respond more actively, receive clearer feedback, and participate more naturally in turn-taking during collaborative learning activities. Students' Perception toward Initiation Q1 "Does the U-shape seating arrangement make you feel more confident to initiate questions or opinions during discussions?". Several students stated that the U-

shape seating increased their confidence to initiate questions and opinions during discussions.

- **S1:**
"Because I can directly see my friends' reactions. My initiation feels more alive, not like speaking to the back of people."
- **S2:**
"I feel braver, although not drastically. The difference is that the lecturer stands in the middle, so the questions feel conversational rather than formal."
- **S3:**
"Yes, especially during group discussions. We face each other, so starting an opinion does not feel like asking for permission first."

These responses indicate that the physical arrangement supported students' willingness to initiate interaction and reduced the formal atmosphere during classroom discussions. Continuously, **Students' Perception toward Response Q2** "Did you become more active in answering questions when using U-shape seating? Why?" Students explained that the seating arrangement encouraged them to respond more actively during classroom interaction.

- **S5:**
"I answered more often. The U-shape removes the 'safe zone' at the back. In regular rows, students at the back can hide, but here they cannot."
- **S4:**
"Yes, because the lecturer can see my expression. When I look confused, the lecturer notices immediately and helps me. My responses become more directed, not random answers."

The findings suggest that the U-shape seating increased students' visibility and engagement, leading to more active responses during the learning process. Then, **Students' Perception toward Feedback**, the Q3 refers "Do you think the teacher can provide feedback or responses more easily in a U-shape seating arrangement?". Most participants believed that teachers could provide feedback more effectively in the U-shape arrangement.

- **S2:**
"It is clearly easier. The lecturer can walk to the center and observe our work. The feedback becomes more specific, not just general comments for the whole class."
- **S4:**
"I think so, but not always evenly. Students sitting at the edge of the U are sometimes overlooked when the lecturer focuses too much on the center."

These responses show that students generally perceived teacher feedback as more direct and specific, although some participants noticed unequal attention during classroom interaction. **Students' Perception toward Turn-taking**, the Q4 refers to "How does the U-shape arrangement influence students' opportunities to speak during group discussions?"

- **S1:**
"Turn-taking happens naturally. We can see each other, so we know when someone has finished speaking. We do not even need a moderator."
- **S6:**
"Turn-taking becomes more organized. Since everyone is visible, nobody can hide. The lecturer can also easily notice who has not spoken yet."

The data indicate that the seating arrangement facilitated smoother interaction among students and created more balanced opportunities for participation during collaborative learning activities.

DISCUSSION

Spatial Ecology and Learner Visibility: The U-Shape as Interactional Architecture

The first finding, derived from open-ended questionnaire data, reveals that students perceived the U-shaped arrangement as qualitatively transformative in terms of visibility, attentiveness, and interactional confidence. These perceptions are theoretically coherent within Hall's (1966) proxemics framework, which posits that the spatial organization of human bodies in a shared environment is not incidental but constitutive of social behavior. The U-shape, by contrast, creates what Hall termed "sociopetal space" an arrangement that actively draws participants together and orients them toward shared communicative purpose. The student responses in this study, particularly those emphasizing mutual eye contact and the sense of being "seen," confirm that spatial orientation has direct affective and interactional consequences. This is pedagogically significant: the arrangement appeared to reduce the anxiety-related barriers to participation that the Introduction identified as a persistent challenge in Indonesian EFL university contexts (Huang et al., 2024). The U-shaped seating, in this reading, functions not merely as a physical convenience but as an architectural affordance for reduced communicative anxiety.

Collaborative Learning Syntax and Sociocultural Mediation

The collaborative instructional syntax observed in this study instantiates precisely the conditions that Vygotskian pedagogy prescribes learners are positioned as active co-constructors of knowledge, the teacher functions as a

more knowledgeable other who scaffolds rather than transmits, and group tasks create the interpersonal dialogue through which internalization of language and concepts becomes possible. Students' agency in modifying the spatial arrangement to meet their interactional needs is itself an indicator of high participatory engagement and metacognitive awareness of learning conditions a finding that the existing literature on flexible learning environments has identified as a marker of student-centered pedagogical success (Kariippanon et al., 2022). The finding that effective collaborative interaction required active teacher management particularly during Syntax 4, when the teacher monitored group progress and clarified procedural misunderstandings indicates that the spatial arrangement operates as a necessary but not sufficient condition for productive collaboration. This qualification is theoretically significant: it suggests that the U-shape creates affordances for interaction that teachers must actively capitalize upon through intentional discourse management. Without such management, the open visibility of the U-shape may produce performative rather than substantive engagement, as students who feel observed may simulate rather than genuinely enact collaborative behavior. This finding partially contradicts studies that attribute collaborative participation gains primarily to spatial redesign alone (Seet et al., 2022) and instead supports Justice et al.'s (2023) ecological perspective, which positions instructional quality and spatial design as co-determinants of learning outcomes.

IRF Discourse Structure: Between Transmission and Dialogic Participation

The findings in Table 3 show that classroom interaction was dominated by the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) structure. Display questions such as “Can you mention Indonesian food?” generated short and predictable responses, while referential questions such as “What topic do you want to discuss?” encouraged longer and more meaningful interaction. This indicates that referential questions promoted deeper student participation during collaborative learning. The findings support Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which explains that language develops through negotiation of meaning during interaction. Students not only answered teacher questions but also negotiated ideas and collaborated with peers during discussion activities. In addition, the U-shaped seating arrangement increased visibility and eye contact, making students more confident to participate. This aligns with Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, where learning develops through social interaction and collaborative support. Teacher feedback such as “Great” and “Excellent” also encouraged students to continue participating actively.

However, teacher authority still dominated most classroom exchanges because almost all initiations came from the teacher. Therefore, although the U-shaped arrangement supported participation, dialogic interaction still depended on the teacher's questioning strategy and classroom management.

Student Perceptions of IRF and Interactional Agency

Students' interview responses regarding IRF interaction in the U-shaped seating arrangement reinforced the classroom observation data by showing how learners experienced participation during collaborative learning activities. The arrangement made classroom interaction feel more open and conversational rather than formal and teacher-dominated. This supports Hall's proxemics theory, which explains that spatial organization influences communication behavior and social interaction. Because students could clearly see both the teacher and their peers, they felt more confident sharing ideas and participating in discussion. This interactional environment also reflects Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, where learning develops through supportive social engagement and collaborative communication. The interview data also indicated that turn-taking became more natural within the U-shaped arrangement. Students explained that they could recognize conversational cues more easily and participate without depending entirely on teacher nomination. Compared to traditional row seating, interaction became more student-centered and collaborative. This supports Egitim's (2025) concept of "leaderful" classrooms, where learners actively contribute to managing classroom communication and discussion together.

In addition, the seating arrangement appeared to improve the quality of teacher feedback. Students perceived feedback as more immediate, personal, and responsive because the teacher could observe students' facial expressions and reactions directly.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that arranging classroom seating in a U-shaped formation contributes to increased learner involvement, reciprocal communication, and meaningful engagement during collaborative activities in an EFL reading context. Observational and perceptual data reveal that the spatial orientation facilitated clearer visual access among all participants and encouraged both peer interaction and teacher-student exchange. IRF analysis confirmed that students participated actively during trigger question and presentation phases, with evidence of extended, dialogic responses in the presentation session that exceed the minimal participation typically associated with traditional IRF sequences. These findings indicate that classroom layout

functions as a supportive pedagogical element when aligned with collaborative instructional practices and effective classroom management.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample consisted of six students in a single reading class at one institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The observation captured a single instructional session, meaning that longer-term effects of U-shaped seating on participation patterns remain unexplored. Future research should examine U-shaped seating across multiple sessions, subject areas, and student cohorts to establish more robust evidence of its effects. Studies incorporating audio or video recording of classroom discourse would enable finer-grained IRF analysis and allow the identification of extended multi-turn sequences that written field notes may not fully capture. Comparative studies contrasting U-shaped, cluster, and row seating within the same class would further clarify the specific contribution of spatial arrangement to collaborative interaction outcomes in Indonesian EFL university contexts.

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