



## 'I Like Group Pods': EFL Students' Preferences Towards Seating Arrangement in Advanced Speaking Class

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### Article Info

#### Article History:

Accepted 30 August 2023

Approved 8 September 2023

Published 23 December 2023

#### Keywords:

Seating Arrangements; Group Pods; EFL Students' Preferences

### Abstract

This study discussed an EFL student's preferences in using seating arrangements in advanced speaking classes. The lecturers implemented seating arrangements to motivate students and encourage participation. The researcher collected the data through a closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire consisting of two types of classes: basic and advanced speaking classes. This qualitative research used a case study (Heigham & Croker, 2009) as the research design. Data were analyzed using Kember's, theory of motivation and thematic analysis. Then, the data was processed and interpreted qualitatively through the following stages: data transcript, categorizing the codes, analyzing the data, and producing the reports. The findings of this study revealed that from the six types of seating arrangements, the students prefer group pod seating as the type of seating that can build their motivation and active participation in speaking class. Lecturers always use group pod-style seating arrangements in speaking classes. Group pods encourage students to study in class and allow them to collaborate and discuss the topic provided by the lecturer. The seating arrangements make students appear more active when looking in groups. Using this seating type, the students demonstrate their enthusiasm, interact with their classmates by being active participants, pay attention to the lecturer, and understand the lecture's material. This study highlights the necessity for lecturers, higher education institutions, and students to consider various strategies during the learning process.

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**p-ISSN 2087-0108**

**e-ISSN 2502-4566**

## INTRODUCTION

Research on classroom seating arrangements has been expanded at every educational level, and become an essential part of the classroom management strategy (Correa et al., 2017). Effective classroom management requires teachers to have positive relationships with their students (Fitriati et al., 2020). Classrooms are places where students spend a significant amount of time, and desks are usually arranged in specific patterns, with lecturers assigning individual seats (Gremmen et al., 2016).

Proper seating arrangements can influence the physical environment of the classroom, as well as the learning process and the attitudes of both the lecturers and the students towards education. Furthermore, seating arrangements are ideal for encouraging students to collaborate and interact (Norazman et al., 2019; Zhu & Argo, 2013).

Seating arrangements are responsible for encouraging student tiredness and making it harder to manage many students. Different seating configurations encourage conversational exchanges (Bicard et al., 2012; Edwards, 2016; Falout, 2014; German et al., 2020; Gremmen et al., 2016).

Besides, seating arrangements are an essential part of the teaching process for classroom management. The classroom design is a crucial component of efficient teaching approaches (Norazman et al., 2019). Teachers arrange tables, seats, and other items in the classroom to encourage active engagement, creating a flexible and customizable setting (Gremmen et al., 2016). Therefore, the lecturer must select the best atmosphere to encourage students' intellectual and social progress while boosting teacher-student engagement and limiting distractions.

Seating arrangements are significant classroom setting events because they may contribute to the prevention of problematic behaviors that reduce student attention and cut into instructional time. Besides, seating arrangement refers to the relationship between student performance and learning preferences, which depends on physical arrangement

variables, with the classroom serving as the primary learning environment in educational buildings like schools.

Changing the seating arrangement in the classroom can refresh the learning experience. Additionally, seating location positively improves students' enthusiasm to learn English. Classroom activities might lead to students needing more motivation to study English. Some people say English is a challenging and uninteresting topic. Different seating arrangements boost students' motivation to learn English in the classroom (Chen et al., 2020).

As a result, if the students participate in more activities, they can develop their language skills, mainly speaking, in class since they will be interacting with each other more fluently. Hence, learning to speak foreign languages is one of the challenging aspects of language learning. The lecturer plays an essential role in helping students improve their speaking abilities in language acquisition and motivating them to speak (Shernoff et al., 2017).

Teaching English to students is essential because it has become necessary for all humans. The purpose of teaching English is to help pupils develop communicative skills to communicate. Speaking is one of the most challenging abilities for students to develop because of factors such as pronunciation, grammar structure, a lack of vocabulary, or simply a lack of enthusiasm (German et al., 2020).

Teachers need to develop strategies to increase student participation in the classroom. There are numerous strategies for learning that learners can use to improve their students' speaking abilities (Safari & Fitriati, 2016). Therefore, speaking is one of the most crucial talents to develop and improve as a means of effective communication (Mayasari et al., 2021). Hence, building student motivation can help the lecturer or teacher to make the students participate in the class.

Besides that, motivating students to participate in the learning process is essential for increasing their engagement (Megawati & Hartono, 2020). Motivation is a

multidimensional, dynamic, and context-dependent phenomenon (Kember, 2016). The form of instruction, curriculum design, and interactions between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, all impact the type and level of motivation. Each continua's positions change and may differ between courses or subjects.

In other words, motivation drives students, regardless of whether they want or need to learn English. Teachers are accountable for the success of classroom management (Fitriati et al., 2020). As a result, motivated students perform better since they are interested in learning English and have something pushing them to do so. In other words, motivation drives students, regardless of whether they want or need to learn English. As a result, motivated students perform better since they are interested in learning English and have something pushing them to do so.

Beyond that, using seating patterns might increase motivation to study English. The seating arrangement may inspire and motivate students to actively participate in class. Motivation aligns with learning outcomes. High motivation during the learning process leads to positive outcomes (Radish Charica Dewi & Wahyuni, 2016).

Furthermore, motivation is one of the most important predictors of success when learning English as a foreign language (EFL). According to Haghghi and Jusan (2012), seating patterns can impact student performance, either positively or negatively. However, if the lecturers can adequately design the procedure, it can be more effective (Rickard et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, studying English in a spoken class has always been difficult, both in terms of teaching tactics and the subject covered. Furthermore, when planning the classroom setting, it is essential to prioritize classroom seating arrangements. It can make the class more interactive and motivate students to learn more than previously. The most effective strategy for encouraging good performance among students was their seating arrangements, which could be adjusted in various ways (Bugis, 2018).

Seating arrangement studies have been conducted in Indonesia on several issues (Anggriani & Humaera, 2021; Bugis, 2018; Jannah & Nurfaidah, 2021; Nurfaidah et al., 2021; Septiorini et al., 2022; Supratman, 2015; Syafnan et al., 2022; Syaifullah et al., 2022). This earlier research on seating configurations has been discussed in various research papers. Their emphasis is on seating arrangements, the role and beliefs of the instructor or lecturer on the seating arrangement, students' perceptions of the innovative and traditional classrooms, teachers' perspectives on the seating arrangement, and many other factors.

These articles focus on the use of seating arrangements in various professions. These researchers discovered that implementing seating arrangements in the classroom can cause students to shift their behavior when learning English, allowing them to engage and collaborate effectively with their groups and pairs.

The research from (Anggriani & Humaera, 2021) focused on how seating arrangements made the students brave enough to talk with their classmates in speaking class. The result showed that each student shared the same opinion about how to express themselves in class, whether by looking at or depending on the manner utilized by the teacher. The teacher's strategy in the classroom includes seating arrangements for discussion groups.

Meanwhile, in this research, the researcher wants to know what types of seating students prefer their lecturer use when learning in speaking class. The seating can motivate them to learn and make them active in the class. Besides, the research from (Nurfaidah et al., 2021) focused on the use of each seating arrangement.

The result showed that the teacher suggests using traditional seating to convey the subject and engage pupils who may not be ready to study. He uses the U-shaped seating to engage pupils in activities that encourage active engagement. When the teacher wishes to encourage shy students to speak up, he opts for pair seating. The teacher believes that group seating boosts students' confidence in speaking.

Furthermore, the research from (Syaifullah et al., 2022) focused on seating arrangement that can engage students learning attention. The result showed that the U-shaped seating arrangement is more effective in the classroom than the Row shape. Effective communication in the classroom involves exchanging information with classmates. Giving attention enabled the sharing of information. Eye contact, whether with the teacher or among students, enhances learning engagement by focusing attention on external elements. A U-shaped design is ideal for making eye contact.

Furthermore, in several previous studies about motivation, some researchers believe studying English with varied vibes can enhance motivation (Ali et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Garhani & Supriyono, 2021; Glas et al., 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019; Purmama et al., 2019; Soltanian & Ghapanchi, 2021; Wong et al., 2018; Xuejun, 2020; Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Motivational factors determine how students react to the classroom environment and learn fundamental academic abilities (Wong et al., 2018).

All the previous articles address student motivation in learning. They highlighted how driven pupils may believe learning English is exciting, relevant, and effective. In mastering the English language, the learners must be motivated and have a skilled teacher to support them. According to their findings, motivation is an essential aspect of effective learning. However, pupils continue to struggle with speaking or are afraid to talk.

As stated by Mayasari et al. (2021), the students felt unmotivated to learn to talk because they needed to speak competently, which was not examined on the final exam. As a result, motivating kids while they know English is necessary. Motivation is one of the most critical parts of the learning process. Learning goals are only possible to achieve if you are motivated.

When students use it during the learning process, they will know the materials better, especially English. Students who are very motivated to study English can meet the objectives of the learning activity. As a result,

the articles above clearly explain how students might increase their drive to learn, particularly in English. When discussing the motivation of these pupils, what distinguishes it from what the researcher was examining is whether students are motivated to learn English after using seating arrangements in class.

Besides, there were several previous studies about speaking. Research suggests that using a seating arrangement can enhance students' speaking abilities in the classroom (Anggriani & Humaera, 2021; Bugis, 2018; Jannah & Nurfaidah, 2021; Sholihah et al., 2020; Supratman, 2015; Susanti, 2017). All the previous researchers emphasize how to improve students' skills, lecturers should employ appropriate strategies or methods.

According to multiple sources, seating arrangements do not significantly improve pupils' speaking skills in class. Furthermore, teaching in the classroom with seating arrangements can help pupils develop their speaking skills. Based on their findings, students can increase their speaking correctness, fluency, and comprehension (Bugis, 2018).

Furthermore, another researcher's findings showed that seating arrangements and teacher roles in the teaching process might be used to improve students' speaking skills when learning English. To determine whether the lecturer was effective after implementing the seating arrangement based on the student's responses and active engagement in the speaking learning activity. The articles listed above provide transparent information about seating arrangements, which might be valuable in speaking classes.

Unlike previous investigations, this study used a seating arrangement method that produces many bench arrangement models. This research refers to numerous bench setups. The researcher observed students' enthusiasm and active participation in class after changing the seating plan based on the bench arrangement.

some concerns dealing with these problems include that many students still need to be more energized with speaking lessons in the classroom with the old-fashioned seating

style. So, to address this issue, a new teaching approach should be implemented. The next issue is that the kid appears uninterested and inactive in speaking class.

Students typically prefer a specific learning style (Mkonto, 2015). Students may switch between multiple learning styles yet still prefer a specific one. The student argues that learning English in speaking class is challenging because the students should speak and discuss something with their classmates. Besides, there are various teaching strategies used by their lecturer. So, it makes them prefer learning to study English.

In addition, this research hopes to contribute positively as a source of knowledge for the lecturer or researcher to find references about seating arrangements that can build students' motivation. The research would assist students in learning English in simple ways; students would not be bored while studying but would be motivated to learn to speak in the classroom. The researcher hopes the students will feel confident and at ease if the teacher asks them to participate in a group activity with their classmates.

Regarding that, previous studies have explored the impact of seating arrangements, but they have yet to specifically address the crucial issue of stimulating active classroom participation and motivating students in the speaking class. This research aims to fill the gap by investigating the potential of innovative seating arrangements to address these challenges. The current traditional seating style in the classroom often leads to student disengagement, particularly in speaking lessons. This study wants to know the students' preferences about seating arrangements that can motivate and improve their active participation in the classroom.

As a result, this study focuses on "EFL students' preferences towards seating arrangement in advanced speaking class."

## METHOD

This study used a case study (Woodsie, 2010). to interpret the preferences of 26 third-semester English Language Department

students consisting of 4 males and 22 females. The study was conducted at one of the institutions in Kendari, Indonesia, and focused on using seating arrangements in advanced speaking classes. The lecturer often employed various seating arrangements in the class, not only one type for each meeting but sometimes three to four. These participants were chosen because they were already familiar with the various seating arrangements utilized by their lecturers.

This research will provide information on which types of seating can motivate and engage students in the advanced speaking class. Then, the participants were categorized as S1, S2, S3 until S26, respectively. Data were collected using closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires to address the research problems in this study (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The participants completed the questionnaire in this study according to the directions provided by the researcher. Students were instructed to complete closed questionnaires by checking the areas they agreed with.

The questions in the closed-ended questionnaire inquiry include five answer options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Besides that, the closed-ended questionnaire is separated into three sections: preferred form of sitting, seating that motivates, and seating that keeps the students engaged.

Meanwhile, the open-ended questionnaire was utilized to gather more specific information on students' preferences towards seating arrangements. Five types of seating arrangements elicited information about their enthusiasm, attention to the lecturer, active or passive participation in class, ease of learning the material, and preferred seating at each meeting.

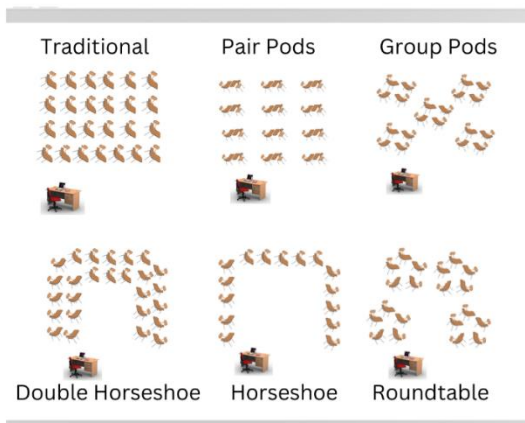
To analyze data from transcribed closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires (Heigham & Croker, 2009) researchers must categorize participant data transcripts by highlighting the words that are easiest to analyze. Data that has been coded will be compiled, analyzed, and interpreted based on indicators from motivation theory to identify the type of seating that can build student

motivation and active participation in advanced speaking classes.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This section will follow the statement of research objectives. This section explains the results of the data analysis used to answer the study questions. The goal of data analysis is to determine students' preferences for seating arrangements in speaking classes.

There are six different seating arrangements utilized by lecturers in advanced speaking classes. Based on figure 1. below, six types of seating arrangements consists of; traditional seating, pair pods, group pods, double horseshoe, horseshoe and roundtable (Rajagopal, 2022). However, according to the results of the closed-ended questionnaire, students prefer or agree with the group pod option.



**Figure 1.** Types of Seating Arrangements

**The result from Closed-ended Questionnaire**

There were 40 students from advanced speaking classes who participated in this study. However, the closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire data collected were for only 26 students, because some of them did not attend the class. There are six statements in closed-ended questionnaire, whereas five questions in open-ended questionnaire.

A closed-ended questionnaire is given to students so they can choose types of seating arrangements that can motivate and make them active in speaking class. Meanwhile, open-

ended questionnaire given to students and the answers to these questions use Indonesian to make it easier for students to write their own opinions (Anggriani & Humaera, 2021). In this case, the researcher found that most of students had the same thoughts, but how they expressed them in different words.

The current study addressed students' preferences regarding seating arrangements in speaking classes. The findings of the closed-ended questionnaires revealed that they liked the majority of sitting options, particularly group pods. The following are the findings of students' responses to a closed-ended questionnaire about their preferred seating arrangements.

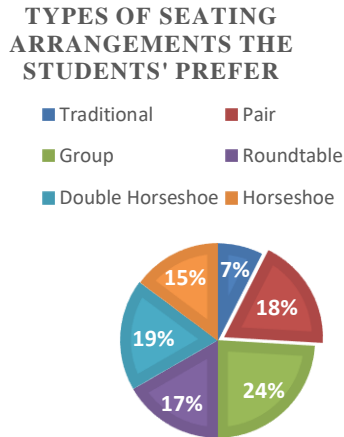


**Figure 2.** Group Pods Seating Model

Based on figure 2. above presents the result of students' answers in a closed-ended questionnaire from the advanced speaking class. The group pods (24%) or the total number of students selected was 13; the seating type was the most agreed upon answer among participants. Then, double horseshoe (19%) around ten students, pair (18%) around 10, roundtable (17%) around 9, Horseshoe (15%) around 8, and traditional (7%) around four students.

Aside from that, in this advanced speaking class, lecturers frequently use pair, group, and double horseshoe seating arrangements. However, students prefer group pods for seating, which can excite them and

improve their active engagement in speaking lessons (Nurfaidah et al., 2021). The figure 3 below demonstrates the seating arrangement group pods Adapted from (Rajagopal, 2022).

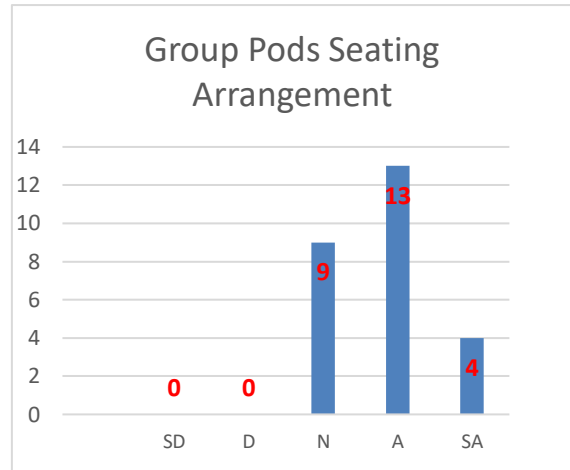


**Figure 3.** Types of seating arrangements that students preferred

The use of seating arrangements in advanced speaking classes demonstrated that the seating arrangement strategy might provide students with a positive response (Septiorini et al., 2022). Most students showed an active role in the classroom, particularly in speaking classes and at advanced levels. Furthermore, it may increase pupils' motivation to learn to talk in class.

Therefore, group pod seating can help them become active in the classroom and build their motivation to learn in speaking class. Aside from that, the group pod-sitting arrangement allows them to talk or practice speaking. Because there are so few individuals, pupils are embarrassed to talk in front of a large group.

Based on the student's answers seen in the findings above, in the closed-ended questionnaire, students chose the answers strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Then, the researcher counted the students' answers to each choice. The results found are in the figure below. The following are the findings of a closed-ended questionnaire to see how many students agree with or favor group pods for seating.



**Figure 4.** The result of a closed- ended questionnaire about group pod seating

Figure 4. above shows the answers to a closed-ended questionnaire from advanced classes about group pod seating type. Most participants chose an agreed (A) answer about group pod seating arrangements. 13 students from the advanced class decided. Besides, nine students from this class opted for neutral (N) answers.

Furthermore, four students chose strongly agreed (SA). Then, no participants in the advanced class chose this option for disagreed (D) and strongly disagreed (SD). Related to the finding, students preferred group seating as the seating that they like in the speaking class.

According to student K's response in advanced speaking class, mentioned that

"I prefer group pods because not much and not a few people felt, it was easier to discuss by using group seating."

This is in line with the research by (Nurfaidah et al., 2021) who argued that group seating is appropriate in student relationships, especially when working together. Besides, subsequent responses from other advanced speaking students Q said that,

"Group pods make me more comfortable studying and receiving material from the lecturer."

This is in line with the research by (Muluk et al., 2021) who argues that group seating is appropriate for effective student connections, particularly when working jointly.

**The result of Open-Ended Questionnaire**

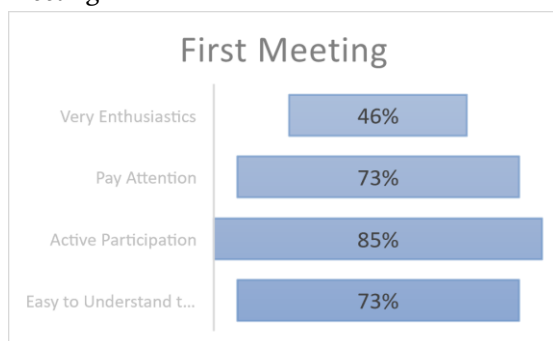
The figure below depicts the findings of open-ended questionnaires that asked students about their impressions of seating arrangements in advanced speaking classes. There were 40 students in the advanced speaking class, but only 26 consistently responded to and completed the questionnaire from the first to the last meeting.

Then, the researcher found the results in the open-ended questionnaire. To find the results of this questionnaire, researchers conducted classroom observations. After that, the researcher gave and asked students to answer several questions in this open-ended questionnaire at the first meeting.

Furthermore, the open-ended questionnaire results were divided into four themes:

- 1) enthusiasm, 2) paying attention, 3) active participation, and 4) more accessible to understand the information. The figure 2. below showed the findings of the advanced speaking class's closed-ended questionnaire.

**Table 1.** The result of students preferences about seating arrangements first and last meeting

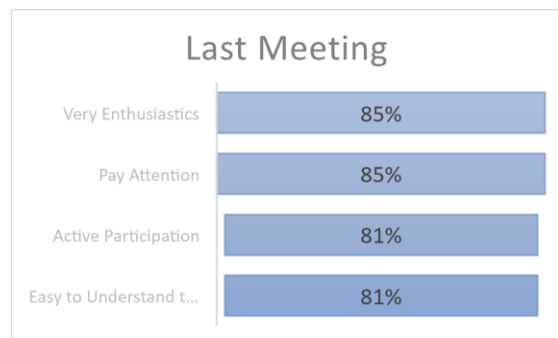


The first question concerns whether the students feel enthusiastic when lecturers teach them using the seating arrangement method in the class. Then, students answered with different answers. Some students think eager, very excited, and even not excited. Most students said they felt enthusiastic in class.

Apart from that, researchers also asked about their concerns. After the lecture, will they still pay attention to the lecturer if they adjust their sitting position to a new one?

Some students said they still paid attention to the lecturer even though their sitting position changed. Next, there were questions related to student activity during class. Lecturers use a seating arrangement to make the class active and not monotonous. The results of students' answers to this question were that they answered actively and passively.

However, most of them choose to be active. If we look at the students' answers at the initial and final meetings, there is a significant percentage change where students show interest in this seating arrangement method.



Based on table 1. above, the results of the open-ended questionnaire show that since the lecturer used the seating arrangement, there was a change in the percentage of students' answers from the beginning of the meeting. When the lecturer implemented seating arrangements in the advanced speaking class, students seemed enthusiastic during the lesson.

In addition, when the lecturer changes their seating position, students still pay attention to the lecturer. Next, students actively participate in class by interacting with their new seatmates. When the lecturer explains the material, if one of the students does not understand, they can ask their group friends so that they can understand the material (Halim & Mustar, 2017).

The closed-ended questionnaire above of advanced-speaking students revealed a change in response percentages between the first and



last visits. The first was for enthusiastic responses; at the beginning of the meeting, students stated that they were very excited about the set-up of seating arrangements in the speaking class, with a total percentage of 46%. However, at the last meeting, more students said they were enthusiastic (85%) rather than very excited.

Furthermore, pay attention to the lecturer for answers, even if their seating posture has been modified. At the first meeting, 73% of the pupils said that. Meanwhile, in the last meeting, it had risen to 81%. Then, students provide statements about their active or passive participation. During the preliminary conference, 85% of students reported feeling engaged when the lecturer used the seating arrangement method in speaking class. However, at the end of the meeting, just 81% of students reported feeling active in class.

The final statement then focuses on making the material easier to understand while applying seating arrangements in class. At the initial meeting, 73% of students said they agreed. Compared to the beginning, at the last meeting, the percentage of students who stated it was easy to understand the topic increased to 81%.

In line with the previous finding, this study found that seating arrangements could increase students' contact with their peers, causing them to be more engaged and pay attention to the lecturer. Students' answers may be seen in the transcripts of students m's open-ended questions from the advanced speaking class. someone said,

"with the new seating arrangement, i found myself interacting with my classmates more immediately."

This is in line with the idea of (Nehyba et al., 2023) that seating arrangement influences the quantity of interaction; a circle configuration with moveable desks results in greater social interaction than rows.

Creating a seating arrangement might encourage students to continue paying attention to the lecturer even after they change seats. The students' answers were demonstrated

by the responses of student D to an open-ended questionnaire in introductory speaking class, who indicated that,

"If we don't pay attention, we won't understand the material explained by the lecturer."

This follows research conducted by (Yang et al., 2021), which indicated that a sitting plan could help students focus on the issue at hand and learn more successfully. Based on the findings above, what differentiates this research from previous research is that seating arrangements can make students look active and motivated to learn in speaking classes, especially in group pod seating types.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to demonstrate EFL students' preferences towards seating arrangements in advanced speaking classes that could build students' motivation and improve active participation. Closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. The findings concluded that the EFL students preferred the group pod seating arrangement as the type they liked. The EFL students also said that after the lecturer applied the seating arrangement in the class, they were enthusiastic during the lesson, always paid attention to the lecturer, became active participants in the classroom, and easily understood the material from the lecturer.

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