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# THE IMPACT OF CLASSROOM DESIGN ON LEARNING: STRATEGIES FOR BETTER STUDENT OUTCOMES

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## INTRODUCTION

Classroom design has a significant impact on how well students learn. Every element, including furniture placement and lighting, affects students' focus, involvement, and understanding. The design refers to the tangible, external factors that surround individuals in specific settings. This includes the design and material of a space, as well as elements like lighting, temperature, furniture, and acoustics. In contexts like classrooms or workplaces, design can significantly influence behaviours, interactions, and overall well-being. A well-designed layout refers to the quality of the physical environment in the classroom, which includes the thoughtful arrangement of furniture (seating arrangement) and resources to promote communication, collaboration, and critical thinking among students. According to Marlow et al. (2015), the physical quality of a learning space is a crucial component for ensuring an effective educational experience. If the learning environment is lacking, it can negatively impact both student performance and behaviour. Likewise, a decline in classroom quality can also have detrimental effects on students' health, leading to issues such as discomfort, sensitive skin, and headaches. This article explores various design components that improve the learning experiences, as the effect of the classroom on students' outcomes has been extensively studied.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A student's educational experience revolves around the classroom, and elements like temperature, colour, and lighting have a substantial impact on the learning environment. The research by Barrett et al. identified seven key design factors: light, temperature, air quality, ownership, flexibility, complexity, and colour, which collectively account for 16% of the variation in students' academic progress. According to the research, light has the most significant impact on academic achievement among all design elements; however, window size alone has minimal effect on learning. Additionally, the quantity and quality of electrical lighting are positively correlated with students' learning progress. In addition to lighting, other factors that affect student learning experiences include temperature, CO<sub>2</sub> levels, and architectural design. Students perform better in rooms with temperature control, while unwanted heat from the sun has a negative impact on performance, especially in spaces without external shading. Academic achievement is also correlated with CO<sub>2</sub> levels; rooms with larger windows or higher volumes of mechanical ventilation improve students' performance. Fisher (2001) stated that thoughtfully designed furniture enhances student comfort and well-being, leading to better focus and improved academic achievement.

## **SEATING ARRANGEMENT**

Classroom seating arrangements significantly influence student interaction, collaboration, and learning outcomes, making physical layout a critical factor in optimising the learning experience (Fernandes et al., 2015). According to Babadjanova (2020), traditional row seating is effective for individual tasks as it reduces distractions and enhances student focus, particularly for those who are prone to disruptions. This arrangement reduces off-task behaviours such as inappropriate talking and movement (Simmons et al., 2015). Recent research by Byiringiro (2023) found a positive and significant correlation between classroom seating arrangements and students' academic performance in Mathematics in public day secondary schools in Musanze District. The study suggests that teachers should consider regularly rotating students, as this could improve grades and increase interaction with teachers, ultimately enhancing students' intrinsic motivation. Benedict and Hoag (2004) support this by exploring the connection between students' seating preferences and their academic success. Their finding indicates that students who choose to sit toward the front of the classroom are more likely to earn A grades, while those who favour the back tend to receive more Ds and Fs. Additionally, merely preferring sitting in the back increased the likelihood of receiving a D or F by 23 percentage points, regardless of actual seating choice.

## **ACOUSTIC**

Good acoustic conditions help minimise background noise and enhance speech clarity, allowing students to hear and understand instructions in a stress-free environment. The use of sound-absorbing materials and cheerful classroom designs further improves students' comprehension (Shield & Dockrell, 2008). High levels of background noise (air conditioning, cars, etc.) can increase cognitive load, resulting in stress and decreased concentration. Effective sound control, such as putting up sound-absorbing material on both walls and windows and regularly examining the air conditioning, can significantly reduce these distractions, enabling students to focus better (Klatte et al., 2013). An extensive review by the Acoustical Society of America indicates that improved acoustic conditions are associated with better academic performance. Students in well-designed classrooms tend to achieve higher test scores compared to those in acoustically poor environments (Benjamin et al., 2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

Classroom design involves more than just making a space comfortable for students. It plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning progress and academic achievement. A well-designed classroom can increase students' motivation and engagement. Effective strategies for classroom design, such as the physical setting, the arrangement of seats, and acoustics, support a sense of belonging and autonomy, nurture positive relationships between teachers and students, and create opportunities for collaboration and decision-making among students.

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