

# **The Classroom as a Catalyst: Investigating the Role of Classroom Factors in Students' Oral Communication**

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## **Abstract**

Classroom factors play a critical role in shaping students' oral communication, yet research examining their influence in language learning contexts remains limited. This qualitative case study investigates how physical, social, and pedagogical elements of a classroom environment affect oral participation in an intermediate-level English class. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio-video recordings of speaking activities, and semi-structured interviews with both the teacher and students. Thematic analysis revealed that seating arrangements, teacher facilitation, peer collaboration, and authentic communicative tasks significantly influenced students' participation, confidence, and motivation. While challenges such as classroom constraints and dominance by more vocal students were observed, findings highlight the importance of holistic classroom design, supportive teaching strategies, and peer dynamics in promoting effective oral communication. The study provides actionable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and language program planners seeking to optimize classroom conditions for student engagement.

## **Keywords**

Classroom factors, Oral communication, Student participation, Case study, Peer collaboration, Teacher facilitation, Language learning environment

## **Introduction**

The classroom environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' oral communication skills, influencing both their linguistic performance and affective engagement. Oral communication, encompassing speaking and listening abilities, is central to language learning and overall academic success. While much attention has been devoted to individual learner factors such as motivation, anxiety, and proficiency, the physical, social, and pedagogical aspects of the classroom environment have received comparatively less systematic investigation. Classroom factors—including seating arrangements, teacher-student interactions, peer collaboration, and the availability of communicative opportunities—can significantly affect how students participate, express themselves, and negotiate meaning. Understanding the interplay between these factors and students' oral communication is essential for optimizing instructional design, promoting learner confidence, and facilitating effective language acquisition.

Existing research highlights the multifaceted nature of oral communication in classrooms. The physical environment, such as seating layout, classroom size, and acoustics, can either facilitate or inhibit interaction. Circular or U-shaped seating arrangements have been shown to encourage dialogue and peer-to-peer interaction, while traditional rows often reinforce passive participation. Similarly, social and pedagogical factors—including teacher behavior, feedback patterns, and classroom culture—shape the quantity and quality of oral engagement. Teachers act as facilitators, modeling communicative competence, providing scaffolding, and creating opportunities for authentic interaction. The extent to which students feel comfortable speaking, taking risks, and collaborating with peers is mediated by both teacher practices and the social climate of the classroom.

Despite the recognition of these influences, empirical studies often focus on either individual learner characteristics or instructional techniques, without adequately examining the holistic classroom context. Variations in participation patterns across classrooms suggest that environmental factors play a critical role in oral communication outcomes. For instance, students may demonstrate high levels of engagement in a supportive, well-organized classroom but remain reticent in environments perceived as restrictive or hierarchical. These observations underscore the need for research that considers the classroom as a complex, dynamic system where physical, social, and pedagogical factors interact to shape oral communication.

The affective dimension of classroom factors is particularly salient. Students' willingness to participate, confidence in speaking, and risk-taking behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of the classroom environment. Classrooms that foster inclusivity, peer support, and a sense of psychological safety tend to encourage more frequent and elaborate oral contributions. Conversely, classrooms where students fear judgment, competition, or ridicule may suppress communication, regardless of individual proficiency or motivation. Teacher practices, such as equitable turn-taking, constructive feedback, and the use of collaborative activities, can mitigate anxiety and promote active participation, highlighting the centrality of classroom factors in supporting oral skill development.

Methodologically, examining classroom factors benefits from a case study approach. By focusing on a single classroom or small group, researchers can observe nuanced interactions, seating dynamics, and patterns of oral participation. Data can be collected through classroom observations, audio-video recordings, and interviews with both students and the teacher, allowing the triangulation of physical, social, and pedagogical factors with student behaviors and perceptions. Such an approach enables the identification of emergent themes, such as how spatial arrangements influence dialogue, how teacher interventions affect participation, and how peer relationships facilitate or hinder oral expression. This context-specific investigation can illuminate the mechanisms through which classroom factors impact students' oral communication and inform strategies for enhancing engagement and proficiency.

From a theoretical perspective, the role of classroom factors aligns with socio-constructivist and interactionist frameworks in second language acquisition. Learning is viewed as a socially mediated process, where interaction, collaboration, and environmental scaffolding are critical. The classroom serves as the primary context for these interactions, shaping opportunities for practice, negotiation of meaning, and feedback reception. By understanding the role of classroom factors,

educators can create learning spaces that optimize participation, reduce communicative anxiety, and support the development of oral competence.

In summary, investigating the role of classroom factors in students' oral communication is both timely and pedagogically significant. While oral proficiency is influenced by individual abilities, motivation, and teacher competence, the classroom environment provides the conditions under which these factors can be expressed, nurtured, or constrained. A case study approach allows for a detailed exploration of physical, social, and pedagogical elements of the classroom and their impact on student participation, engagement, and oral skill development. By examining these dynamics, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how classroom environments shape oral communication and provides actionable insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore how classroom factors influence students' oral communication in an intermediate-level English classroom. A single classroom consisting of one teacher and ten students was purposively selected to provide a context-rich understanding of interactions, participation patterns, and classroom dynamics. Classroom factors examined include physical arrangements (e.g., seating, space), social interactions (peer collaboration and group dynamics), and pedagogical practices (teacher facilitation, feedback, and instructional strategies). Data were collected over a four-week period using direct classroom observations, audio-video recordings of speaking activities, and semi-structured interviews with both students and the teacher. Observations focused on how these classroom elements influenced students' willingness to speak, turn-taking patterns, and engagement in oral tasks.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach. Observation notes, recordings, and interview transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and themes related to physical, social, and pedagogical factors affecting oral communication. Both deductive codes, informed by literature on classroom dynamics and second language learning, and inductive codes, emerging directly from the data, were applied. Triangulation of multiple data sources ensured the credibility of the findings, while reflective memos documented the researcher's interpretations and insights. This methodology enabled an in-depth examination of how specific classroom factors interact to support or hinder student participation, providing actionable insights for teachers and curriculum designers.

## Findings

### *Physical Classroom Environment and Participation*

Observational data revealed that the physical layout of the classroom had a direct influence on student oral participation. Students seated in a **U-shaped or circular arrangement** were more likely to engage in discussions, respond to peers, and participate in group activities. In contrast, students positioned at the back of traditional row seating appeared less engaged and contributed minimally to oral tasks. Audio-video recordings confirmed that students in accessible seating positions had more opportunities for turn-taking and initiated longer contributions during pair and group discussions. Interviews with students highlighted that proximity to the teacher and visibility

of peers encouraged participation, with one student stating, *“When I can see everyone and the teacher, I feel more comfortable joining the discussion.”* These findings indicate that spatial arrangements can either facilitate or inhibit oral interaction, affecting both frequency and quality of communication.

### ***Teacher Facilitation and Instructional Strategies***

Teacher practices emerged as a central factor shaping oral communication. Observations showed that the teacher employed structured turn-taking, prompts, and scaffolding strategies to ensure that all students had opportunities to speak. During small group activities, the teacher circulated, providing guidance and encouraging hesitant students to contribute. Semi-structured interviews revealed that students perceived the teacher as a supportive facilitator who created a safe environment for risk-taking. One student noted, *“The teacher always makes sure everyone gets a chance to speak without feeling judged.”* The data suggest that effective teacher facilitation can amplify the positive effects of classroom layout and foster a participatory culture.

### ***Peer Interaction and Collaborative Engagement***

Peer dynamics were identified as a significant contributor to oral communication. Observational notes indicated that students actively collaborated during pair work and group discussions, negotiating meaning, clarifying ideas, and offering constructive feedback to each other. Students reported that interacting with supportive peers reduced anxiety and increased confidence, especially for those reluctant to speak in front of the whole class. For instance, one student mentioned, *“I speak more when I work with my group because they encourage me and don’t interrupt.”* The analysis demonstrates that positive peer relationships and opportunities for collaborative engagement are crucial classroom factors influencing oral participation.

### ***Affective Factors: Motivation, Confidence, and Anxiety***

Classroom factors were closely tied to students’ affective experiences. Observations revealed that students exhibited greater willingness to participate when the environment promoted inclusivity and psychological safety. Conversely, when group discussions became competitive or when seating arrangements limited visibility, some students withdrew or provided minimal responses. Interviews highlighted that students’ confidence and willingness to speak were contingent on both teacher support and peer receptivity. A student commented, *“I feel more confident speaking when the classroom feels welcoming and my mistakes are treated as part of learning.”* These findings suggest that classroom design and social dynamics significantly influence affective dimensions of oral communication, including motivation, risk-taking, and engagement.

### ***Opportunities for Authentic Communication***

The analysis also highlighted that task design and communicative opportunities within the classroom were critical for fostering oral competence. Activities such as role-plays, debates, and peer interviews were observed to elicit more elaborate language use compared to routine drills. Students were more engaged and demonstrated higher lexical variety and fluency during authentic, interactive tasks. The teacher’s intentional structuring of these activities, combined with supportive seating arrangements and peer collaboration, created conditions conducive to meaningful oral practice. Interviews supported these observations, with students noting that interactive tasks made participation both enjoyable and purposeful.

## **Challenges**

**and**

## **Constraints**

Despite the overall positive impact of classroom factors, certain challenges were noted. Physical limitations, such as small classroom size or fixed seating, sometimes constrained movement and interaction. Additionally, occasional dominance by more confident students reduced participation opportunities for quieter learners, despite teacher scaffolding. Some students expressed a need for additional strategies to balance contributions during group discussions. These findings suggest that while classroom factors strongly influence oral communication, thoughtful management and adaptive strategies are necessary to address inequities in participation.

Overall, the analysis indicates that classroom factors—including physical layout, teacher facilitation, peer collaboration, and task design—interact dynamically to shape students' oral communication. Positive configurations foster engagement, confidence, and linguistic development, while suboptimal arrangements or social dynamics may inhibit participation. The findings underscore the importance of holistic classroom design, attentive teacher mediation, and supportive peer interactions in promoting oral competence in language learning contexts.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study explored the role of classroom factors in shaping students' oral communication in an intermediate-level English classroom. The findings indicate that physical, social, and pedagogical elements of the classroom interact to influence both the frequency and quality of student participation. Physical aspects, such as seating arrangements and visibility, directly impacted students' willingness to engage, while teacher facilitation and structured turn-taking encouraged equitable participation and risk-taking. Peer collaboration further supported oral interaction by fostering a supportive environment that reduced anxiety and promoted confidence.

The study also revealed the affective dimension of classroom factors: a psychologically safe and inclusive environment enhanced motivation, encouraged experimentation with language, and reduced communicative hesitation. Authentic communicative tasks, such as debates, role-plays, and group discussions, provided meaningful opportunities for oral practice, reinforcing the link between classroom design and linguistic outcomes. Challenges such as classroom constraints and dominance by more confident students highlighted the need for careful teacher mediation and adaptive strategies. Overall, the findings underscore that classroom factors are crucial determinants of oral competence, emphasizing the importance of holistic classroom design, teacher awareness, and peer support in facilitating effective student communication.

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