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Applying Flexible Seating in the Classroom to Enhance Learning

Amani Alzahrani

Abstract

This article explores the advantages of applying flexible seating in the classroom to enhance learning. A review of the literature found flexible seating gives students an opportunity to choose their workspace from different kinds of chairs within the classroom and this develops skills needed for the 21st century, such as critical thinking and decision-making skills. The author found that there are several ways to implement flexible seating. One successful method is when the teacher is able to give the students more choices in their learning by having this type of seating available. In conclusion, to increase achievement and motivation in learning, the author will work with one to two small groups of students, each day, in two classes and implement flexible seating. The student will have the opportunity to choose where and how they want to sit. Achievement data will be compared between treatment and control groups.

Applying Flexible Seating in the Classroom to Enhance the Learning

I have an active five-year-old daughter Elham who inspires me. Elham loves to jump, play, and run, and she is also very intelligent. She is always learning, thinking, and solving problems. For example, even from a young age she has always asked questions and enjoyed learning. While doing every day activities or playing around the house she practices counting, spelling, and other skills. I have often wondered about what she is like at school. Likewise, I recognize qualities in

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my students that are very similar to Elham's personality and approach to learning. Every single class I teach, I say in my mind Elham looks like Shikhah or Norah or Arwa or Munirah—any student who is moving a lot reminds me of my daughter. I don't know which one my daughter will grow up to be like, but I believe all children need freedom of movement to learn. In 2016, I started to search for how we can help children learn without stress, control their freedom, and incorporate differentiation in my teaching. In my search, I found Takaharu Tezuka's open plan school on *YouTube*. I was impressed as I saw flexibility in teaching and learning. This openness and flexibility in the classroom are practices I agree with, and I think can be an important aspect of the KSA Vision 2030 policy initiative.

To build the best future for our country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has built our Vision 2030 as a strategic framework to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and develop public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud has said: "In line with his [King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud] instructions, we will work tirelessly from today to build a better tomorrow for you, your children, and your children's children."

The overwhelming majority of young people are positive about the future of Saudi Arabia's education, as many have seen and experienced several valuable programs, such as successive years of the Khebrat program in the United States, that encourage improvement of education by immersion in many countries. Education plays a significant role in this policy initiative. Specifically, we want to improve certain teaching methods that focus on the learner and not on the teacher, and concentrate on instilling important skills, character development, improving confidence, and promoting the spirit of creativeness in both teaching and learning. Moreover, we need to develop an attractive, preferred, and stimulating school environment, along with connecting it to supportive and integrated services systems.

My topic of Applying Flexible Seating in the Classroom to Enhance Learning will play an important role in the Saudi 2030 policy initiative. For example, exercising choice helps develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, both of which are vital for the 21st century. Also, most studies confirm that all students can be successful in their academic achievement. Furthermore, Applying flexible seating in the classroom to enhance the learning will impact the social, economic, and political situation in KSA. If there is freedom in simple decisions, such as choosing a desk or seat, a healthy community will potentially be created with less stress. Specifically related to gender equity, my topic will support independent skills that will build for students to succeed in their future lives. Boys and girls need to self-support while continuing their success. Flexible seating is an opportunity for students to choose their work space from different options within the classroom to help them attain 21st century skills. Travis (2017) explains the research on student choice and advantages of freedom in learning not only in school, but also in all future aspects. She wrote that students receive positive

results if the teacher allows them to discover their interests in their own spaces. Traditional methods of seating, such as desks organized in rows, do not help students to develop the ability to make independent decisions because it does not give students choices. Current research supports my position.

The current generation needs more active methods for effective classroom management. Allen (2018) proved that academic achievement increased and behavior improved by allowing students to have flexible seating. The study found that teachers had to give less behavioral guidance. In addition, Gaines (2012) confirms the benefits of flexible seating for students who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Seifert and Metz (2016) suggest that teachers wanting to change to flexible seating should talk with school occupational therapists to create options. To conclude, while some may prefer desks and chairs, most students love modern seats such as balls, mats, and moving chairs.

In the technological age, education needs to encourage students to be more creative. Jaspal (2019) found many positive results of flexible seating in elementary schools, including that students liked the options, it had a positive effect on learning, and students remained focused longer. One point of view is that flexible seating is a good method of managing classrooms because many studies confirm how it affects the educational process. Klebosky, Klebosky, Farrand, and Weinberg (2019) found that there was a strong relationship between student attitudes and how they sit in the classroom.

In 2019, I visited a school in the U.S. for the first time. I saw the differences in the use of flexible seating with many kinds of chairs in each classroom. The teacher was able to give the students more choices in their learning by having this type of seating available. I wondered how students engaged in a math lesson even though one was standing up on a skateboard and another was sitting on the floor. They both were giving the teacher the same attention that was required.

KSA developed a partnership with Arizona State University to improve the Saudi education system by having educators participate in immersion in American schools. My school placement in the immersion program was in the physical education department. I observed many classes in a middle school. I was impressed at how the school helps to control students' emotions at this age by having extra physical education classes. In Saudi schools, sport classes for girls are a new implementation that only began a few years ago. In addition to my immersion placement, I have had several opportunities to visit U.S. classrooms applying flexible seating. As a result, I have learned that flexible seating and its practices involve more than just the furniture. During these experiences, I noticed and became aware that it is the teacher's style that plays an important role. For example, the teacher in the class was willing to accept students' choices in seating arrangements. Furthermore, I was able to see how students could be engaged in a math lesson even though one was standing up on a skateboard and another was sitting on the floor. They both were giving the teacher the same attention that was

required. In contrast, it has been my experience that most teachers who are still using traditional seating believe that the students are engaged when often they are not. Some students may be engaged, but sitting in the same spot will not help them to apply the 21st century skills that they will need because they are not developing independence and decision making skills.

Based upon the information presented, I will apply flexible seating in the elementary classroom. First, the largest challenge will be to collect different types of chairs such as balls, mats, movement chairs, skateboards, sofas, and regular desks. Secondly, I will put rules in place in the classroom to help organize the student's choices of flexible seating. For example, a student might love one type of chair but that student needs to remember that some other student might love it, too. Also, they are free to choose how they want to sit. During this time, I will be sharing on social media with fellow educators, both new and experienced, and allow these educators to discuss this method with me. My concern is the teachers' acceptance of this new method. In the process of sharing this idea with some Saudi teachers, most of them did not want to even imagine how a child could be standing or moving while engaging with the lesson at the same time. This is why I will start to collect websites, podcasts, and resources about differentiation with links and the advantages of flexible seating. In addition, I will collaborate with my colleagues who agree with the idea in my school to help improve the overall education in a positive way.

Also, here in the U.S. not all schools apply flexible seating. Some educators do not agree with the idea and some add a variety of chairs in their classrooms but do not allow students to choose their seat. Mostly, educators in the U.S. care about students' academic achievement. In my research, I found a relationship between applying flexible seating and enhancing learning. For example, Melissa is an elementary teacher in Northern Virginia. She is applying flexible seating in a reading resource room. She had more students pass the state standardized test at the end of the year than she did the previous year. In my plan, I will measure student knowledge through summative and formative assignments. For example, I will give a pretest at the beginning of the school year and a posttest at the end of the year. Throughout the year I will check that my students are learning and developing the 21st century skills by observing them during class time and reviewing their work. I will assess their behavior and skill development with activities and worksheets. At the end of the school year, achievement data will be compared between the treatment group and the control group. Some of my plans will need to be changed because of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

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