

THE IMPACT OF CLASSROOM SPATIAL DESIGN ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH

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INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 25/07/2025 Revised: 18/08/2025 Accepted for publication: 18/8/2025 Code: TCKH-S03T08-2025-B11 ISSN: 2354 - 0788</p> <p>Keywords: Learning environment, english, physical setting, learning motivation, classroom spatial design.</p>	<p><i>This study investigates the relationship between spatial design in the classroom and students' interests, motivation and effectiveness in learning English, emphasising the role of physical classroom factors as significant determinants in the foreign language learning process. Conducted at a private university in Vietnam, the research collected 405 valid responses from students enrolled in the preparatory English courses. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and pearson correlation, revealing that students evaluated the current learning space positively ($M = 4.01$) and acknowledged the substantial impact of elements such as pictures, quotations and decorative items reflecting linguistic and cultural features ($M = 3.93$) on their learning process. The correlation analysis ($r = .727$, $p < .01$) confirmed a strong relationship between the quality of the physical learning environment and English learning outcomes. Supplementary qualitative data indicated expectations for a dynamic, creative and Gen Z-friendly space that distinctly reflects the cultures of English-speaking countries. The study proposes a classroom design model integrating cultural, visual and interactive experiences, enhancing training quality and offering practical value for higher education institutions.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Enhancing learners' foreign language proficiency constitutes a pivotal objective within Vietnam's national strategy for international integration. Decision No.2080/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2017) explicitly articulates this goal, underscoring the necessity of developing modern, engaging language learning environments that stimulate and sustain learner motivation. Complementary policies, including Decision No.1659/QĐ-TTg (2019) on improving foreign language competence among public officials and civil servants, further advocate for the creation of dynamic learning ecosystems within

educational institutions. Similarly, Article 5, Clause 2 of the Law on Education (2019) affirms the indispensable role of a positive learning environment in fostering learner development. While Circular No.32/2018/TT-BGDĐT (MOET, 2018) does not directly address foreign language learning motivation, it encourages the cultivation of constructive learning attitudes, particularly among students preparing for higher education.

In recent years, Vietnamese universities have invested considerably in facilities to support foreign language instruction. However, recent reports show that many Vietnamese universities, including both public and private

institutions, are struggling to meet the minimum infrastructure standards outlined in Circular 01/2024/TT-BGDĐT (Nam, 2024; Tra, 2025). Despite ongoing innovations aimed at constructing optimal learning environments for language learners, there remains a paucity of empirical research examining how students perceive and expect classroom spatial design to influence their motivation to learn foreign languages. This research gap is especially pronounced in the current context of rapid digital transformation and the escalating demands of global integration.

The present study was undertaken in 2025 at a branch campus of a private university in Vietnam which serves over 7,000 students across 18 academic disciplines. All students must complete six levels of English before entering their specializations. The university's English learning area, designed with visual elements emulating British cultural contexts to encourage communicative engagement, was established in 2019 through collaboration between faculty members and professional designers.

This to address three primary research questions: (1) How do students assess the current layout and visual arrangement of the English learning area? (2) To what extent does the spatial arrangement influence their English learning outcomes? (3) What design features do students expect in an English learning space to enhance their motivation? By addressing these questions, the research aims to contribute empirical evidence on the relationship between classroom spatial design and English learning motivation, while offering contextually relevant design recommendations to optimize English learning environments in Vietnamese higher education institutions.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine how physical classroom

elements within learner-centered classroom spatial design affect university students' perception of their motivation and perceived effectiveness in learning English. It focused on physical aspects of the classroom, including decorative features, spatial arrangement and language-related contextual components such as pictures, posters and architectural details.

In Vietnam, empirical research examining the role of classroom settings in foreign language learning remains limited. Most previous works have concentrated primarily on motivational aspects. For example, Le and Nguyen (2023) applied Dörnyei's second language motivational self system to examine economics students' motivation, Nguyen (2023) compared motivation between full-time and part-time students, Thao and Long (2021) investigated motivation in reading comprehension and Do (2014) identified factors driving English learning for communication purposes. Understanding how physical environments and architectural designs influence students' motivation in learning English is scarce.

In contrast, studies in other countries have shown that physical and spatial classroom factors influence learners' attention, intrinsic motivation and engagement (Brooks, 2011; Davies et al., 2012). Cultural imagery, English quotations and authentic communicative arrangements have been found to heighten interest in foreign language learning (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). Barrett et al. (2015) reported that environmental variables such as lighting, acoustics, temperature, decoration and spatial layout can account for up to 16% of classroom engagement capacity, while Gkonou and Mercer (2017) highlight that supportive physical environments reduce anxiety and increase confidence in English communication. Zandvliet and Fraser (2005) further demonstrate that both physical and psychosocial characteristics of learning environments interact to shape students' satisfaction

and achievement, underscoring the importance of spaces that enable comfort, collaboration and positive interpersonal relationships.

Oblinger (2006) and Temple (2008) argue that learning spaces should be designed around learners' needs, behaviors and socio-psychological traits, while fostering interaction, creativity and active participation. Elements such as lighting, color schemes, furniture arrangement, decorative imagery and openness can influence mood and disposition toward learning. Fleming (2001) adds that learning effectiveness improves when content is delivered through multiple sensory channels, a principle highly relevant to foreign language education through the integration of visual imagery, cultural symbols, sound and architectural design. Jamieson (2003) advances this view by advocating for participatory approaches in which students are involved in shaping the design of learning spaces, ensuring they reflect evolving pedagogical needs and learner identities.

Guided by these perspectives, this study employed a structured questionnaire comprising 15 items, including 14 multiple-choice questions

rated on a five-point Likert scale and one open-ended question. The survey was distributed via Microsoft forms to first-year students enrolled in preparatory English courses in 2025. Over a two-month data collection period, 405 valid responses were obtained. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic coding. The questionnaire was checked for its internal consistency with the obtained Cronbach's alpha of .964, indicating that the instrument was reliable and the data can be further analyzed. The items in the questionnaire were organized into three thematic areas: (1) visual evaluation, (2) spatial arrangement and (3) perceived effectiveness of the current spatial design. The analysis of the data allowed for a nuanced understanding of how physical classroom environments contribute to English learning motivation in a higher education context.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Research results

Students' evaluation of the decorative and spatial arrangement area



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1-2. Entrances to the “English Zone” at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, are decorated with themes inspired by British culture, including the iconic King’s Cross Station and traditional British guards.

The decorative area encompasses the hallway of one floor in the academic building, which houses 20 classrooms (each accommodating approximately 30 seats, except for two larger rooms with a capacity of over 70 seats) as well as the interior spaces of individual classrooms. The decorative elements, designed in 2019, include photographs taken by a faculty member who had studied in the United Kingdom, along with images sourced from the Internet, as well as characteristic models and objects such as wall-

mounted lamps, sofas, fireplaces, telephone booths, the Buckingham Palace gate, guard statues, signboards, Platform 9¾ from the Harry Potter series and a model of a double-decker bus. The images and objects are organized according to the four regions of the United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The displayed content includes portraits of notable figures, national flags, natural landscapes, sports activities, iconic architecture, symbolic flowers, festivals and famous English quotations.



Figure 3. British-style red telephone box installed in the “English Zone” at FPT University, Can Tho Campus.

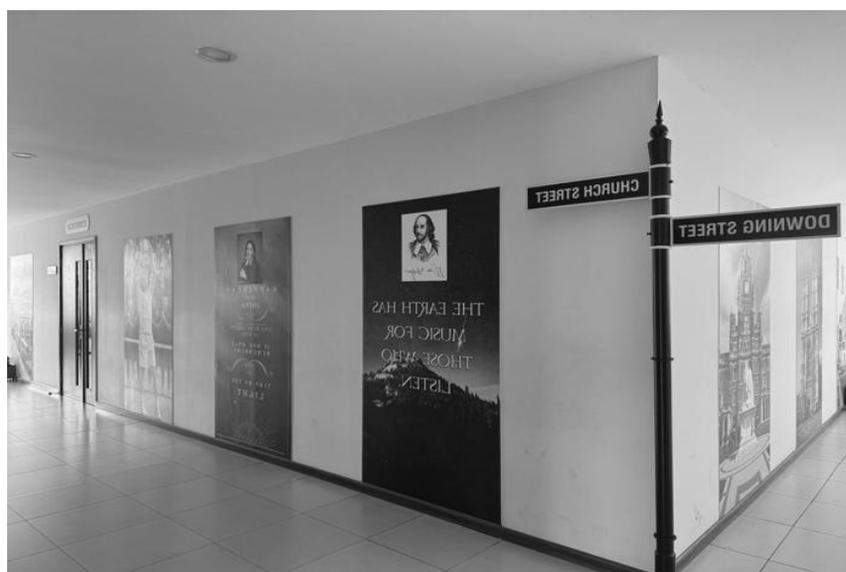


Figure 4. Wall murals and decorative street signs in the “English Zone” at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, featuring portraits of famous figures, their notable quotes and iconic British architectural landmarks

The survey results indicated that students evaluated the physical setting positively, particularly concerning the arrangement and decoration of the English learning area. The mean

scores across various aspects ranged from 3.95 to 4.08, with the highest rating given to the relevance and appropriateness of the arrangement and decoration in supporting English language learning.

Table 3.1. Students’ Evaluation of the Physical setting

Items	Mean
The arrangement and decoration simulate an English-speaking environment	3.95
The arrangement of objects (e.g., telephone booths, wall-mounted lamps) or structures (e.g., entrance gates, signboards) is meaningful	3.98
The decorative items are visually appealing and easily attract attention	4.03
The decorative items are of high quality	4.02
The pictures and images used for decoration are all related to English and are interesting	4.00
The quotations displayed in various locations around the school inspire learners	4.01
The arrangement and layout are relevant and highly appropriate for the English learning environment	4.08
Overall Evaluation	4.01

Students’ evaluation of the effectiveness of the spatial arrangement for English language learning

Survey results indicated that the arrangement, decoration and use of items containing information, content or values relevant to learning have a positive impact on students’ English language learning. Specifically, students reported that the displayed content, images and spatial arrangement helped them perceive the cultural values associated

with the language (M = 4.03). The use of famous English quotations was also rated as stimulating curiosity, encouraging further exploration and thereby facilitating the acquisition of additional English vocabulary (M = 3.95).

Overall, the influence of existing spatial, decorative and layout elements in the English learning area on students’ learning and use of the language was evaluated at a relatively favorable level (M = 3.93).

Table 3.2. Students’ evaluation of the effectiveness of the physical setting for English language learning

Items	Mean
The arrangement of objects (e.g., telephone booths, wall-mounted lamps) or structures (e.g., entrance gates, signboards) enhances my motivation to learn English	3.89
The decorations I see on the walls make me feel more engaged in learning English	3.88
When I see posters or other printed materials containing information in English, I become curious and motivated to learn more about them	3.95
I often pay attention to posters or other printed materials containing information about English department classes and events at the university	3.88
I feel motivated to learn and use English when I see posters or printed materials containing information related to the culture of English-speaking countries	3.95
In the English learning area, the physical setting makes me feel engaged and interested in using English to communicate with others	3.93
With the arranged setting, I can perceive and understand certain cultural aspects of English-speaking countries	4.03
Overall Evaluation	3.93

Correlation between the physical setting and its impact on students' English language learning

The Pearson correlation test results indicate that

the existing physical settings, decorations and arrangements have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of students' English language learning ($r = .727, p < .005$).

Table 3.3. Correlation test

Correlation			
		SV_evaluation	Effectiveness
SV_evaluation	Pearson correlation	1	.727**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	405	405
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Students' perceptions of an effective English learning environment with ideal spatial arrangements

For the open-ended question in the survey, students were asked to present their personal views on an ideal English learning environment, including specific elements of spatial arrangement, setting and decoration. Responses from the open-ended question revealed that responses clustered into two main categories: students' feedback on the current design and suggestions for improvement.

Regarding spatial arrangement style, students frequently used positive and vivid descriptors such as "dynamic," "creative," "open," "learner-friendly," "Gen Z-oriented," "friendly to both students and lecturers," "clearly reflecting British culture" and "close to real-life situations and authentic communication." These words suggest that the space not only met functional needs but also resonated with students' aesthetic preferences and generational identity. Thirty-five students remarked that the design layout, objects and pictures were "interesting" and "different" from those in their high schools and English centers, where they had previously studied. This contrast enhanced their sense that the environment was "the right place for learning English" offering a unique and immersive experience. Fifty-five respondents expressed enthusiasm for the

quotations by British figures, describing them as inspirational, thought-provoking and relevant to their lessons. Some also noted that seeing these quotations daily helped them remember "important words." However, a few students criticized certain elements, such as oversized, blurry pictures and the decorative telephone booth, which they felt lacked practical functionality, suggesting room for improvement in balancing aesthetic and utilitarian considerations.

Regarding suggestions, several students emphasized that incorporating decorative elements aligned with Gen Z preferences would be more effective in capturing learners' attention and sustaining interest. They highlighted specific aspects such as engaging sound features, visually striking imagery, contemporary posters, appealing books and captivating stories. The spatial structure itself was frequently mentioned as a key factor in shaping the learning atmosphere. Many proposed establishing dedicated areas to display publications and products that feature linguistic and cultural elements, such as mini-libraries, thematic shelves or on-site reading corners. To deepen learning, they recommended adding explanatory captions to posters, pictures and quotations, enabling students to connect visual materials with cultural and linguistic meanings. Furthermore, some suggested providing opportunities for students to participate directly

in classroom decoration by showcasing their creative products or co-designing displays, as well as organizing interactive activities and events that meaningfully integrate culture, language and authentic learning experiences.

Many suggestions centered on extending learning spaces beyond the traditional classroom, integrating them with dedicated study corners designed around engaging and relevant program content to encourage self-directed learning. Students also emphasized the importance of fostering environments that promote informal and frequent interaction between lecturers and students, thereby creating more authentic opportunities for English communication. Sound was highlighted as an engaging element with proposals to install speakers at building entrances to play Western music or use automated greeting systems in English to set a welcoming tone. Visually, respondents called for more vibrant, youthful color schemes and the incorporation of greenery to create a fresh, inspiring atmosphere. Several students recommended expanding cultural representation through images that depict the cultures of Europe, the United States and other English-speaking countries, thereby enriching the diversity of cultural exposure and making the learning space more globally oriented and visually stimulating.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study affirm that classroom spatial design significantly contributes to university students' English learning motivation, aligning with a growing body of scholarship that frames physical learning environments as active agents in the pedagogical process rather than neutral backdrops (Oblinger, 2006; Temple, 2008). Students expressed positive evaluations of the current English learning space, particularly regarding the relevance of visual elements, decorative items and learning content. The overall mean score was 4.01, with the highest rating given to "The arrangement is appropriate for the

English learning environment" ($M = 4.08$). Visual components such as pictures, English quotations and cultural artifacts were perceived as motivating and as stimulating linguistic curiosity ($M = 3.93$). The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .727, p < .01$) between physical setting evaluations and learning effectiveness indicates a substantial influence of the physical environment design.

Qualitative data reinforced the quantitative findings, revealing that students desire a dynamic, creative and Gen Z-friendly learning space designed to foster connections and enhance interaction between lecturers and students, while reflecting the cultures of English-speaking countries through books, images and audio. In particular, students expressed an interest in participating in the design process or displaying their work, linking learning spaces with extracurricular and cultural-linguistic events. Suggestions such as incorporating film themes, creating book and publication display areas, playing English music at entrances or allocating areas for student-led decoration reflect the demand for personalized learning environments. The students' proposed ideas for Gen Z-oriented spaces with interactive cultural features and student-led decorations indicated a shift towards what Davies et al. (2012) term "creative learning environments" (p. 88), where learners' identities and interests are embedded in the physical and cultural fabric of the classroom. Their preference for participating in co-design processes, displaying their creative outputs and engaging in thematic cultural activities resonates with the participatory design principles advocated by Jamieson (2003), who argues that higher education learning spaces should be co-constructed with learners to reflect evolving pedagogical priorities. These findings have broader implications for foreign language education policy in Vietnam. In alignment with Decision No.2080/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2017); Decision No.1659/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2019),

which highlight the importance of modern, engaging learning environments as strategic levers for improving language competence, universities should treat classroom spatial design as a deliberate pedagogical investment rather than an optional aesthetic enhancement. Such an approach positions classroom design as a critical element of curriculum implementation, capable of influencing not only the delivery of content but also learner motivation, emotional engagement and communicative confidence. By integrating spatial design into long-term academic planning, institutions can create environments that actively support learning objectives, foster sustained participation and ultimately enhance the overall quality of foreign language education in higher education settings across Vietnam.

This study's findings also align with earlier research by Oblinger (2006) and Temple (2008), which emphasized that physical classroom environments can either encourage or limit learner engagement and creativity. However, the present study expands this understanding by demonstrating that, in the context of English language learning, particularly for Generation Z, elements such as flexible layouts, imagery, color schemes, audio and cultural symbols not only support concentration but also generate positive emotions, foster intrinsic motivation and promote active participation. This finding is consistent with Brooks (2011), who noted that flexible, sensory-rich spaces can enhance collaboration, interaction and learner engagement.

The students' feedback from the open-ended question also supports Fleming's (2001) argument regarding the role of multisensory experiences (visual, auditory and tactile) in foreign language learning. In this study, the posters, quotations, background music and architectural models simulating British and American culture created immersive experiences that promote

long-term retention and deepen students' connection with the language. This corresponds with the conclusions of Barrett et al. (2015) and Gkonou and Mercer (2017), who found that culturally rich, learner-friendly environments can enhance feelings of safety and confidence in foreign language communication. Physical and psychosocial dimensions of the learning environment are known to interact to influence student satisfaction and achievement (Zandvliet & Fraser, 2005). Likewise, in this study, the physical arrangement fostered opportunities for informal interaction between students and lecturers, strengthening the social dimension of the learning space. This interplay is crucial in language learning, where communicative practice thrives in spaces that encourage spontaneous, low-stakes exchanges. Therefore, classroom spatial design should be regarded as a strategic factor in foreign language teaching. A learning space is not merely a venue for instructional activities but a setting that inspires, motivates and reflects educational values. In contemporary education, where experiential elements are central to sustaining learner interest and commitment, transforming learning spaces into multidimensional experiences, integrating emotions, social interaction and cultural symbolism, emerges as a critical direction.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations that must be taken into account when considering its implications. First, it did not carry out an in-depth, component-specific analysis of the effects of individual design elements, such as lighting, acoustics, seating arrangements, color schemes, decorative imagery or cultural artefacts, on students' English learning motivation and outcomes. Without this level of granularity, it is difficult to determine which features have the most decisive or consistent impact. Second, the research was conducted at a single private university in Vietnam, meaning that the findings may not be

fully generalizable to other higher education contexts, including public institutions, rural campuses or universities in different cultural and socio-economic settings. Not limited to such contexts, similar attempts can be made to understand diverse student groups across all educational levels. Third, the study lacked longitudinal data, preventing an assessment of whether enhancements to classroom spatial design lead to sustained improvements in academic performance, learner engagement and long-term motivation beyond the immediate or short-term effects observed.

Overall, this study underscores that for Generation Z learners, language classrooms should be conceived as multi-sensory, culturally immersive and socially interactive ecosystems. By integrating principles from creative learning environments (Davies et al., 2012), participatory design (Jamieson, 2003) and socio-emotional safety (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017), educational institutions can transform classrooms into motivational catalysts for language learning, thereby advancing both pedagogical and policy goals. In the current learning context, particularly for Generation Z, experiential factors in education are considered crucial for enhancing learner engagement and commitment. Learning spaces should be designed as multidimensional experiences that integrate emotions, social interaction and cultural symbolism. Thus, such spaces are not merely aesthetically pleasing but also pedagogically meaningful, contributing to students' holistic skills development.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The study reaffirms the critical role of the physical learning environment in supporting English language learning at the university level. Classroom space design should incorporate aesthetic appeal, opportunities for interaction, integration with linguistic and cultural contexts and alignment with the characteristics of Generation Z. Students not only valued physical

elements associated with English learning but also expressed a desire to participate in designing the learning environment, displaying personal work and engaging in open spaces. These preferences reflect a need for autonomy and connectedness, consistent with the core principles of Self-Determination theory.

From these findings and limitations, several policy implications are proposed: (1) Higher education institutions should prioritize investment in culturally enriched, interactive and experiential learning space design, especially for courses with high communicative demands such as foreign languages; (2) Establish participatory design and renovation processes involving both students and lecturers to ensure relevance and sustainability; (3) Develop evidence-based design guidelines for learning spaces that can be flexibly adapted to different contexts. Implementing these measures will help enhance learning effectiveness, increase participation and create a friendly, creative educational environment that aligns with the needs and characteristics of the new generation of students. To advance the implications of the current study, educational institutions at all levels should further explore how to design physical learning environments that better fit the characteristics and preferences of diverse student groups.

Educational administrators and instructional designers should embed spatial considerations into teaching and learning strategies, particularly for courses with high communicative demands such as English. Learning spaces act as catalysts for activating intrinsic motivation by providing inspiration, enabling choice, fostering psychological safety and encouraging personal exploration. For instance, when students encounter English quotations or culturally themed posters, they become curious, seek a more profound understanding and consequently engage in self-directed learning as part of an intrinsically motivated process.

The survey results further indicate that spatial design is associated with positive emotions, which in turn promote self-driven motivation in English learning. Designs should integrate elements such as visuals, audio, reading and writing corners, music or welcome messages, decorative items, architectural models and physical interactions (e.g., touch, arrangement or hands-on experiences). Academic departments could also organize themed “cultural experience stations” representing English-speaking countries, combining decorations, books, quotations and interactive activities.

Universities are encouraged to involve students in the co-design of learning spaces and to integrate cultural and linguistic activities to

enhance immersion, thereby improving the quality of foreign language education in the current context. Institutions should establish long-term policies for investing in, maintaining, and updating foreign language learning spaces to ensure relevance, attractiveness and alignment with the aesthetic preferences of Generation Z. Specialized units should also develop periodic evaluation criteria for English learning spaces from both student and lecturer perspectives, incorporating feedback for semester-based improvements. Furthermore, universities should collaborate with international organizations to update materials, imagery and publications or to host workshops on cross-cultural learning space design.

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