

Exploring Interaction in an English-Speaking Class for Working Accounting Students

Occe Luciana, Muhammad Hilmi Syauqi

¹STIE Wibawa Karta Raharja, Indonesia

²Minhajussunnah, Indonesia

Email: ¹lucianaocce@gmail.com, ²hilmi3964@gmail.com

Abstrak: This study explored classroom interaction patterns in an English-speaking class for working Accounting students at STIE Wibawa Karta Raharja. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the study examined lecturer–student and peer interaction during classroom activities. The participants consisted of three working students attending evening classes. Data were collected through classroom observation, field notes, and informal interviews and analysed using data reduction, data categorization, and qualitative interpretation. The findings showed that supportive classroom interaction helped maintain student participation despite fatigue, irregular attendance, and limited learning time. Positive lecturer responses and flexible communication strategies also contributed to a more comfortable speaking environment for the students. Therefore, lecturers teaching working students are recommended to implement contextual speaking topics and flexible interaction strategies to support classroom participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an important skill in English language learning because it enables students to communicate ideas, opinions, and information in academic and social contexts. In EFL classrooms, speaking performance is associated not only with language accuracy but also with students' confidence and willingness to participate in communication activities. Previous studies suggest that supportive classroom interaction can encourage participation and help reduce students' speaking anxiety (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2021).

Classroom interaction provides opportunities for students to practice communication and negotiate meaning during the learning process. Brown (2001) explains that interaction supports the development of communicative competence because students learn language through active participation rather than through theoretical explanation alone. Similarly, Harmer (2007) states that speaking activities become more meaningful when students are involved in interactive classroom situations that encourage them to express ideas and respond to others.

In speaking classes, interaction is also closely related to students' confidence and emotional engagement. Students who experience foreign language anxiety often hesitate to participate because they are afraid of making mistakes or receiving negative responses from others (Zhang, 2019). For this reason, supportive classroom environments, positive lecturer responses, and flexible communication strategies may help students participate more comfortably during speaking activities.

Although classroom interaction has been widely discussed in general EFL contexts, fewer studies focus specifically on working students attending evening classes. Unlike regular students, working students need to balance academic responsibilities with employment demands, which may influence their concentration, attendance, and classroom participation. Physical fatigue, limited study time, and work-related pressure may also affect their speaking performance and willingness to participate in classroom interaction.

This context reflects the challenges commonly faced by working students in evening English classes, where irregular attendance, limited learning time, and physical fatigue may influence classroom interaction and speaking participation. Such conditions may also affect how lecturers maintain communication and student engagement during learning activities. Previous studies indicate that students' fatigue, attendance patterns, and learning conditions influence classroom participation and require lecturers to adapt communication strategies and learning interactions to sustain engagement (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020).

From a sociocultural perspective, classroom interaction plays an important role in second language learning because students develop language competence through communication and social participation. Based on Vygotsky's social interaction theory, learning occurs through interaction with others in meaningful contexts, where social communication supports cognitive development and language learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

In speaking classes, interaction between lecturers and students may help learners build confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve communication skills.

Although many previous studies have discussed classroom interaction in EFL speaking classes, fewer studies have specifically explored interaction patterns in small evening classes involving working students. Most studies focus on regular classroom settings with larger numbers of students and more stable classroom participation. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a contextual understanding of classroom interaction in a small English-speaking class in which students simultaneously manage academic and professional responsibilities.

This study aims to explore classroom interaction patterns in a small English-speaking class for working Accounting students and to describe how classroom communication is maintained despite various learning limitations.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore classroom interaction patterns in an English-speaking class for working Accounting students. Qualitative research is appropriate for examining classroom situations in natural settings because it allows researchers to understand participants' experiences and interaction processes in depth (Creswell, 2014). In classroom interaction studies, qualitative approaches are frequently used to investigate communication patterns, speaking participation, and social interaction occurring during language learning activities (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

The participants of this study were three working Accounting students enrolled in an evening English-speaking class at STIE Wibawa Karta Raharja. The students attended classes after completing their daily work responsibilities. The small number of participants allowed the researcher to observe classroom interactions more closely, particularly regarding speaking participation, classroom atmosphere, and interaction patterns in the evening-class context.

The data were collected through classroom observation, field notes, and informal interviews conducted during several classroom meetings in one academic semester. Classroom observation focused on students' speaking participation, lecturer-student interaction, peer interaction, classroom atmosphere, and speaking challenges experienced during learning activities. Field notes were written during and after classroom meetings to record classroom situations and students' responses during speaking activities. Informal interviews were also conducted to support the observation data and explore students' experiences in participating in English-speaking activities after work.

The collected data were analysed qualitatively through data reduction, data categorization, and interpretation. The analysis process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves reducing data, organizing categories, displaying findings, and drawing conclusions systematically. Observation notes and interview results were reviewed repeatedly to identify recurring

interaction patterns. Similar responses were grouped into categories and interpreted to explain how classroom interaction was maintained in the context of working students attending evening classes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Classroom interaction in this English-speaking class was influenced by the condition of the students as working learners who attended evening classes after completing their daily jobs. Compared to regular classes, students in this class often appeared physically tired and less prepared to participate actively in speaking activities. These conditions affected classroom participation, interaction patterns, and students' confidence in using English during discussions.

During several classroom meetings, students tended to remain silent when the lecturer asked questions in English. Some students needed additional prompts before responding, while others appeared hesitant because they were afraid of making mistakes. In some situations, students smiled, looked at their classmates, or paused for a long time before answering simple questions. This situation showed that speaking anxiety and low confidence were still experienced by the students, particularly at the beginning of the course.

Classroom interaction may also influence students' willingness to communicate during speaking activities (Zhou, 2022). The interaction pattern in the classroom was mostly dominated by lecturer–student interaction. Since the class only consisted of three students, classroom communication depended heavily on the lecturer's questions, explanations, and encouragement. Peer interaction was still limited because students rarely initiated longer conversations with one another. In several meetings, students only gave short answers unless the lecturer continued the discussion through follow-up questions.

However, students became more active when classroom discussions were related to their personal experiences and workplace situations. Topics connected to accounting, jobs, and daily activities helped students speak more naturally because the discussions were familiar to them. During one classroom discussion about jobs in accounting, one student became noticeably more enthusiastic because the topic was closely related to his work experience. This finding indicates that contextual speaking materials may help working students participate more comfortably in classroom interaction. This situation also suggests that familiarity with discussion topics may reduce students' speaking anxiety during classroom interaction. When students discussed topics related to their own experiences, they appeared more willing to express ideas and respond to questions. In this classroom context, communication became more natural because students were already familiar with the content being discussed.

Work responsibilities also influenced students' attendance and classroom participation. In several situations, students arrived late or could not attend the class because of professional responsibilities. This condition became more visible during online learning sessions. In one online learning session, for example, none of the students joined the class at the beginning of the session because they were still working. The students only responded after the lecturer contacted them through the class group. Such situations show that working students often experience difficulties in balancing academic responsibilities and professional obligations.

To maintain classroom interaction, the lecturer sought to create a more relaxed, supportive learning environment. Rather than focusing too much on grammatical accuracy, the classroom activities emphasized communication and students' willingness to speak. The lecturer also frequently connected speaking topics to students' daily experiences to reduce tension during classroom discussions. This approach appeared to help students become more confident in expressing their ideas, even though their English was still limited.

Flexibility also became important during the teaching process. Because attendance was sometimes inconsistent, the lecturer occasionally adjusted the

classroom activities based on the number of students attending the class. When only one student attended, the speaking activity was changed into a more informal conversation session. Although this situation reduced peer interaction, it still provided opportunities for students to practice speaking directly with the lecturer.

The findings of this study indicate that classroom interaction in small evening classes for working students is closely related to students' physical condition, work responsibilities, and confidence in speaking English. Even though participation was still limited in several situations, supportive classroom interaction and contextual speaking topics gradually helped students feel more comfortable participating in English-speaking activities.

Table 1 below summarizes several classroom conditions observed during the study. Overall, classroom interaction in this evening class was influenced not only by students' language ability but also by work responsibilities, physical fatigue, and confidence in speaking English.

Table 1. Summary of Classroom Interaction Findings

Aspect Observed	Classroom Situation	Influence on Speaking Participation
Lecturer-student interaction	The lecturer guided discussions using follow-up questions	Helped students continue speaking
Peer interaction	Limited because of the small class size	Reduced extended peer discussion
Students' confidence	Students were afraid of making mistakes	Participation became cautious
Workplace-related topics	Topics connected to students' experiences	Students participated more naturally
Physical fatigue	Students attended class after work	Reduced concentration and energy

Table 2 below shows that classroom interaction in this evening class was influenced by several practical challenges experienced by working students. Physical fatigue, irregular attendance, low confidence, and limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom affected students' participation during speaking activities. To respond to these conditions, the lecturer applied more flexible and supportive interaction strategies in order to maintain communication and encourage students to participate more comfortably in classroom discussions.

Table 2. Challenges and Interaction Responses

Challenges	Classroom Impact	Lecturer's Response
Physical fatigue	Students became less active during evening classes	The lecturer used casual conversation and flexible interaction
Irregular attendance	Some meetings had only one or two students	The interaction format was adjusted to a personal discussion
Low confidence	Students hesitated to speak English	The lecturer emphasized communication rather than grammatical accuracy
Limited English exposure at work	Students lacked speaking practice outside of class	Workplace-related topics were used during the discussion

CONCLUSION

Classroom interaction in this small evening speaking class was closely connected to the realities faced by working students. Work responsibilities, physical

fatigue, inconsistent attendance, and limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom influenced how students participated during speaking activities.

However, the classroom interaction gradually became more comfortable when discussions were related to students' daily experiences and workplace situations. Supportive lecturer responses, flexible communication, and a relaxed classroom atmosphere helped students participate more actively, even though their English was still limited.

The findings of this study indicate that teaching speaking to working students in small evening classes requires flexibility and patience. Rather than focusing mainly on grammatical accuracy, maintaining communication and encouraging participation appeared to be more important in helping students become willing to speak.

This study was limited to a very small classroom involving only three working students in one institution; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL classroom contexts. The findings also suggest that speaking instruction for working students should prioritize meaningful communication, flexibility, and emotionally supportive classroom interaction.

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