

Enhancing speaking skills through interactionism: A classroom-based study

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ABSTRAK

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan interaksi di kelas berbicara pada mahasiswa semester dua Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menganalisis jenis-jenis interaksi yang terjadi, peran masing-masing jenis interaksi, serta interaksi mana yang paling dominan. Tiga jenis interaksi yang ditemukan adalah interaksi guru-siswa, interaksi siswa-guru, dan interaksi siswa-siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa interaksi guru-siswa merupakan jenis interaksi yang paling dominan. Guru memainkan peran penting dalam memfasilitasi diskusi, memberikan penjelasan, mengoreksi kesalahan, serta memberikan dorongan agar siswa lebih percaya diri dalam berbicara. Interaksi siswa-guru juga berperan penting dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa, di mana siswa memberi respons, mengajukan pertanyaan, dan menunjukkan kebingungannya. Selain itu, meskipun lebih jarang terjadi, interaksi siswa-siswa juga turut berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara mereka melalui diskusi kelompok. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa interaksi yang efektif antara guru dan siswa serta antar siswa itu sendiri dapat mempengaruhi keberhasilan dalam pengajaran berbicara bahasa Inggris.

Abstract: This study aims to describe the classroom interaction in a speaking class for second-semester students of the English Education Department. The research analyzes the types of interactions that occur, the roles of each type, and the dominant type of interaction. Three types of interaction were identified: teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-student interaction. The results indicate that teacher-student interaction is the most dominant. The teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating discussions, giving explanations, correcting mistakes, and providing encouragement to increase students' confidence in speaking. Student-teacher interaction also plays an important role in improving students' speaking skills, where students provide responses, ask questions, and express confusion. Additionally, although less frequent, student-student interaction contributes to their speaking skills through group discussions. These findings suggest that effective interaction between the teacher and students, as well as among students themselves, greatly influences the success of teaching speaking skills in English.

INTRODUCTION

Language is undeniably one of the most vital components in human life. It plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals express themselves and relate to others. As a tool of communication, language functions as a medium through which people convey ideas, thoughts, feelings, and intentions.

Without language, it would be difficult for humans to share information, form social bonds, build knowledge, or construct culture. Through language, individuals can express their identity, understand others, and take part in various social interactions that contribute to human development.

In daily life, language facilitates not only basic communication but also complex social interactions. It allows people to cooperate, solve problems, and achieve common goals. Whether in a family setting, social context, or educational environment, language enables the smooth flow of interaction. The ability to use language effectively is essential in almost every aspect of life, particularly in education where communication between teachers and students plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process.

Among many languages in the world, English has emerged as the dominant global language. English is widely used as a medium of communication and is recognized as the first international language, allowing individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to interact with each other across the globe (Khoiriyah, 2018). In the context of education, English often serves as a key medium of instruction and is a compulsory subject in many countries due to its global significance. The mastery of English can provide learners with greater access to global information, educational opportunities, and career advancement.

One of the central aspects of language use in education is classroom interaction. According to Lestari (2022), classroom interaction refers to the actions and exchanges that occur between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, during the teaching and learning process. This interaction is essential for achieving effective teaching because it engages students in active learning and allows them to communicate, collaborate, and construct knowledge together. Classroom interaction creates a dynamic and participatory environment where students are not merely passive recipients of information but active contributors to the learning process.

Classroom interaction can be categorized into two types: verbal interaction and non-verbal interaction. Verbal interaction involves the use of spoken or written language in communication. As stated by Meng (2011), when students engage in oral discussions or complete written assignments, they are participating in verbal interaction. This type of interaction allows students to articulate their thoughts, clarify misunderstandings, ask questions, and respond to feedback. Verbal exchanges between teachers and students help clarify learning objectives, provide explanations, and reinforce understanding.

On the other hand, non-verbal interaction refers to communication that occurs without the use of words. It includes gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, and other physical signals. In the classroom setting, non-verbal interaction is equally important as it complements verbal communication and can indicate understanding, interest, or confusion. For instance, when students nod their heads, raise their hands, or make eye contact with the teacher, they are engaging in non-verbal interaction. These non-verbal cues often serve as feedback to the teacher and contribute to the effectiveness of classroom communication.

Moreover, classroom interaction plays a significant role in promoting student learning and participation. Radford (2011) argues that through classroom interaction, students engage in the process of exchanging ideas, sharing knowledge, and learning from each other. This peer interaction fosters collaborative learning and enhances students' confidence in expressing their opinions. During class discussions or group activities, students have the opportunity to challenge each other's ideas, offer different perspectives, and build on one another's contributions. This process not only improves their communication skills but also deepens their understanding of the subject matter.

Effective classroom interaction involves several key behaviors and strategies, including turn-taking, questioning and answering, negotiation of meaning, and providing feedback (Chaudron, 1998). Turn-taking ensures that all students have the opportunity to speak and be heard, promoting equal participation. The use of open-ended questions by the teacher can stimulate critical thinking and encourage students to elaborate on their responses. Negotiation of meaning, which occurs when students clarify, confirm, or modify their understanding through dialogue, helps to prevent misconceptions and enhances comprehension. Feedback, whether from teachers or peers, provides students with insights into their performance and guides them toward improvement.

A critical aspect of classroom interaction is speaking, which is a primary mode of verbal communication. Speaking involves the ability to use spoken language to convey information, express thoughts, and engage in dialogue. According to Tarigan (1984), speaking is the skill to produce sounds of words in order to express, state, or show one's ideas, emotions, and intentions. Speaking is not just

about pronouncing words correctly; it also includes organizing ideas coherently, using appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and adjusting language use according to the context and audience.

In the English language classroom, speaking is often considered one of the most challenging skills for students to master. This is because speaking requires the integration of various linguistic and cognitive skills, such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. Furthermore, speaking activities often involve real-time processing and spontaneous responses, which can be intimidating for language learners, especially in a second language context. Therefore, creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment is crucial for helping students develop their speaking abilities.

Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating effective classroom interaction and promoting speaking practice. They must create opportunities for students to speak, encourage participation, and provide constructive feedback. Group work, pair discussions, role-plays, and presentations are some strategies that can enhance student interaction and speaking proficiency. In addition, teachers should be attentive to students' non-verbal signals, as these can indicate levels of engagement, comprehension, or the need for assistance.

In conclusion, language is a powerful tool that shapes human interaction and learning. In the educational context, particularly in English language learning, classroom interaction serves as a cornerstone of effective teaching. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication and plays a vital role in engaging students, facilitating knowledge exchange, and developing essential language skills such as speaking. By fostering meaningful classroom interactions, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that empowers students to express themselves confidently, collaborate with their peers, and achieve their full potential in language learning.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how classroom interaction contributes to the development of students' speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A qualitative descriptive method is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to investigate natural classroom phenomena in depth, focusing on the real experiences of both teachers and students. As stated by Creswell (2012), qualitative research is conducted when researchers seek to understand a social or human problem based on multiple perspectives in a natural setting. In this case, the researcher aims to understand how verbal and non-verbal communication within the classroom can influence learners' ability to express themselves in English.

The study is carried out in an EFL classroom at a senior high school level. The setting is selected purposively to ensure that the participants – one experienced English teacher and a group of eleventh-grade students – are actively engaged in speaking activities. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative studies because it allows the researcher to select individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest. The teacher involved has more than five years of teaching experience and frequently applies interactive speaking activities in her classes. The students, meanwhile, are from a class known for actively participating in discussions, role-plays, and presentations.

The data collection process involves naturalistic observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, all conducted over the course of one month. Classroom observation is used to record the actual interactions between the teacher and students, as well as among the students themselves, during English speaking lessons. During the observation sessions, the researcher focuses on both verbal interactions—such as asking and answering questions, giving feedback, or negotiating meaning—and non-verbal interactions like gestures, facial expressions, hand-raising, or nodding. Meng (2011) explains that verbal interaction refers to all spoken communication, while non-verbal interaction includes physical responses that show understanding or engagement without the use of words.

In addition to observation, the researcher conducts interviews with the teacher and several students to gather deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding classroom interaction. These interviews explore the strategies used by the teacher to foster speaking, the difficulties students encounter when trying to speak English, and the role of peer interaction in motivating learners to use the target language. According to Nunan (1991), interaction in the classroom is essential for language development, as it provides learners with opportunities to practice using the language meaningfully.

Document analysis further supports the data collection process. The researcher examines lesson plans, speaking activity worksheets, and student performance records to understand how

speaking is integrated into the curriculum and how interaction is encouraged in pedagogical planning. These documents help to validate the data from observations and interviews.

After all the data are collected, the researcher uses thematic analysis to interpret them. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns and meaningful themes from qualitative data. This method is effective in uncovering how various forms of interaction facilitate or hinder the development of speaking skills in the classroom.

To ensure credibility, the study applies triangulation by comparing the results from different sources and methods. Additionally, member checking is used by sharing the initial findings with participants to confirm their accuracy and ensure the interpretations reflect their real experiences. Through this rigorous methodology, the study aims to provide a clear, grounded, and contextualized understanding of classroom interaction and its impact on students' speaking ability in English.

RESULT

The findings of this research describe the types, roles, and the dominant form of classroom interaction observed in a second-semester speaking class of the English Department. Based on classroom observations and documentation, three main types of classroom interactions were identified: teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-student interaction.

The teacher-student interaction emerged as the most dominant. In this interaction, the teacher played a central role in initiating classroom communication. The teacher gave explanations, asked questions, corrected mistakes, praised students, repeated words, used occasional L1 translations, encouraged student participation, and created a relaxed atmosphere by using humor and personal engagement. An example of this interaction occurred when the teacher corrected a student's misunderstanding about the suffixes for nationalities, providing clarification and praise in a way that encouraged further participation.

In addition to verbal engagement, the teacher also applied various teaching methods across different classroom meetings to foster students' confidence and speaking fluency. These included ice-breaking activities, discussions about favorite songs, the presence of a native speaker, and multiple speaking exercises with teacher support when students struggled to respond.

The student-teacher interaction was characterized by students' responses, question initiations, and expressions of confusion. Some students actively responded to the teacher's prompts and occasionally initiated clarification questions when confused about the content, such as asking about punctuation or the correctness of certain expressions. There were also instances where students expressed uncertainty even after the teacher's explanation, suggesting a need for deeper clarification.

The student-student interaction, though less dominant, was noted in pair or group work contexts, where students engaged in peer discussion, practiced dialogues, or helped each other complete speaking tasks.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have demonstrated that classroom interaction plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' speaking abilities, particularly in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. The findings indicate that three types of interaction occurred during the speaking class: teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-student interaction. Among these, teacher-student interaction was identified as the most dominant. This section provides a comprehensive discussion of these findings, elaborating on their implications and connecting them to established theories and prior research.

Teacher-Student Interaction as the Core of Language Learning

The teacher-student interaction emerged as the most frequent and prominent type of interaction in the speaking class. The teacher consistently initiated communication by asking questions, giving feedback, correcting errors, providing explanations, and using various forms of encouragement. These findings support Brown's (2001) assertion that classroom interaction is a collaborative process that involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the active engagement of learners in the construction of meaning.

In particular, the teacher demonstrated an awareness of students' needs by adjusting speech speed, using visual aids, simplifying instructions, and providing real-life examples to make abstract concepts more understandable. These practices reflect the principles of interactive language teaching, which emphasize the importance of input that is both comprehensible and engaging. Krashen (1982)

supports this idea through his Input Hypothesis, which states that learners acquire language most effectively when they are exposed to input slightly above their current level of competence (i+1) in a low-anxiety environment.

Moreover, the teacher often employed scaffolding strategies, such as offering hints or models when students struggled to respond. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978), which suggests that learners can achieve higher levels of performance with the guidance of a more knowledgeable individual. In this study, the teacher's role in guiding students through speaking activities, correcting their pronunciation, and suggesting appropriate expressions clearly illustrates this scaffolding function.

Another noteworthy aspect of teacher-student interaction was the use of affective strategies. The teacher used positive reinforcement, such as praise and encouragement, to motivate students and build their confidence. Phrases like "Great job!", "Excellent!", and "You're improving!" were frequently used. These strategies are vital in promoting students' willingness to communicate (WTC), a key factor in successful language acquisition. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation and self-confidence significantly influence language learners' communicative behavior. By creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere, the teacher in this study fostered a safe space for students to take risks and practice speaking.

The incorporation of ice-breaking activities, music-based discussions, and even the presence of a native speaker also contributed to the interactive and engaging nature of the class. These varied teaching methods kept the students interested and active. As highlighted by Harmer (2007), using diverse techniques and materials can stimulate student interest and promote meaningful communication. Through such methods, the teacher not only provided comprehensible input but also facilitated opportunities for output, which is essential for language development.

Student-Teacher Interaction and Learner Autonomy

While less frequent than teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction played a crucial role in promoting learner autonomy. In this study, several students initiated communication by asking for clarification, responding to prompts with elaboration, or expressing confusion when the input was unclear. These instances are significant because they demonstrate students' engagement and investment in their own learning.

For example, when students asked questions about punctuation or the structure of certain expressions, they were actively negotiating meaning and seeking to construct accurate language forms. This type of interaction aligns with Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996), which emphasizes the importance of negotiation of meaning in language learning. According to Long, interaction that involves clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks facilitates second language development by making input more comprehensible and pushing learners to modify their output.

The students' willingness to ask questions and express confusion also indicates a growing sense of linguistic awareness and critical thinking. As noted by Nunan (1991), effective communicative classrooms encourage learners to question, reflect, and co-construct knowledge rather than passively receive information. The students in this study, though still developing their confidence, showed signs of becoming more autonomous learners who take initiative in their language development.

It is also important to highlight the teacher's responsiveness to students' inquiries. Instead of dismissing or ignoring students' confusion, the teacher provided further explanation, repeated the relevant material, or offered alternative examples. This responsiveness not only clarified the content but also validated the students' efforts to understand, thereby reinforcing their sense of agency and competence.

Student-Student Interaction: Limited but Valuable

Although the student-student interaction was not as prominent in the observed classes, its presence during pair and group activities should not be overlooked. During these sessions, students had opportunities to practice speaking with peers, share ideas, correct each other, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Such interactions are crucial in communicative language teaching (CLT), which views learners as active participants in the learning process.

According to Swain (1985), opportunities for output—where learners are required to produce language—are just as important as input. When students work together, they are pushed to use language for real purposes, which can lead to deeper processing and internalization of linguistic forms.

Furthermore, peer interaction allows for collaborative learning, where students can learn from each other's strengths and support each other's weaknesses.

Even though student-student interaction was limited in this context, its potential for enhancing language acquisition remains significant. Future classes may benefit from more structured peer-based tasks, such as role-plays, debates, and collaborative projects, to encourage more balanced interaction patterns.

Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study suggest several implications for classroom practice. First, teachers should recognize the power of interaction as both a teaching tool and a means of fostering language development. While teacher-led interaction is necessary for modeling and guiding, opportunities for student-initiated interaction and peer interaction should be expanded to promote communicative competence.

Second, the use of affective strategies such as praise, humor, and personal engagement should be continued and strengthened. These strategies help reduce anxiety and increase students' willingness to speak. Creating a classroom culture that values mistakes as part of learning is essential for building learners' confidence.

Third, incorporating a variety of topics and materials, especially those that relate to students' lives and interests, can enhance engagement. Activities such as discussions about favorite songs, daily routines, or personal experiences not only make learning more enjoyable but also provide authentic contexts for communication.

Lastly, teachers should strive to develop students' autonomy by encouraging them to ask questions, seek clarification, and reflect on their learning. This can be supported by metacognitive strategies and formative feedback that guide learners in setting goals and evaluating their progress.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, classroom interaction plays a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking skills, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The study identifies three main types of interaction occurring in the speaking class of second-semester English department students: teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-student interaction. Among these, teacher-student interaction was found to be the most dominant.

Teacher-student interaction involves various instructional and affective strategies such as giving explanations, asking questions, praising, correcting mistakes, encouraging, and creating engaging activities. The teacher's role as a facilitator was central in building a comfortable classroom atmosphere that motivates students to speak. Through methods such as using relevant examples, conducting ice-breaking activities, and even inviting native speakers, the teacher created a learning environment that boosted students' confidence. Verbal appreciation like "great" or "excellent" positively impacted students' willingness to communicate, which is a key factor in improving speaking proficiency.

Student-teacher interaction also contributed significantly to the learning process. Students responded to the teacher's questions, initiated inquiries when they encountered confusion, and expressed their understanding or uncertainty. These actions demonstrated active engagement and helped the teacher adjust explanations according to students' needs. Encouraging this form of interaction helps build a supportive classroom climate where students feel safe to express themselves and seek clarification.

Although less frequent, student-student interaction was also observed and contributed to students' speaking development. When students engage in peer discussions, they practice communication in a more collaborative and less intimidating environment. This aligns with communicative language teaching principles, where learners actively construct knowledge through interaction.

Overall, this study reinforces the idea that effective classroom interaction is essential in developing speaking skills. Teachers should continue to adopt diverse and interactive strategies to maintain student interest and foster a dynamic classroom. Furthermore, students need to be encouraged to actively participate, ask questions, and collaborate with peers to maximize their learning experience. A classroom that supports open, respectful, and constructive communication will greatly benefit students' confidence and proficiency in speaking English.

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