

CLASSROOM INTERACTION PATTERNS IN ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING AT MAN 2 MODEL MEDAN

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Abstract

This study investigates the classroom interaction patterns in English teaching and learning at MAN 2 Model Medan. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through classroom observation and audio recording of two English learning sessions involving a 10th-grade class. The verbal interactions were transcribed and analyzed using two complementary frameworks: the four interaction pattern categories proposed by Dagarin (2004) Teacher-Students (T-Ss), Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S), Student-Student (S-S), and Students-Students (Ss-Ss) and Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), which classifies classroom verbal behavior into ten categories across Teacher Talk, Student Talk, and Silence or Confusion. The findings reveal that three out of four interaction patterns were present. The Teacher-Students (T-Ss) pattern was overwhelmingly dominant, occurring 37 times out of 44 total interactions, indicating a strongly teacher-centered instructional approach. The Students-Students (Ss-Ss) pattern occurred 5 times, the Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S) pattern 2 times, and the Student-Student (S-S) pattern was entirely absent. In terms of implementation through FIAC, the T-Ss pattern encompassed all seven teacher-talk categories, with Praises or Encourages (22 instances), Asking Questions (18), and Lecturing (12) being the most frequent. These findings suggest the need to incorporate greater interactional variety, particularly structured peer-based tasks, to foster more authentic communicative competence among students.

Keywords: Classroom Interaction, Interaction Patterns, Teacher-Student Interaction, EFL Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is fundamentally a communicative process, and interaction plays a pivotal role in facilitating the acquisition of a second or foreign language. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, interaction is not merely a pedagogical tool but a crucial medium through which learners develop their linguistic competence. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, learning occurs through social interaction, and language development is deeply embedded in communicative activities between individuals. This underscores that classroom

interaction serves as a scaffold for learners to internalize new language patterns, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge.

In EFL settings, where English is not the primary language of the community, the classroom often becomes the most significant environment where learners are exposed to meaningful English communication. Research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of student participation and more varied interaction patterns are associated with greater language gains (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1991). Classroom interaction involves the verbal and non-verbal exchanges between teachers and students, and among students themselves. Dagarin (2004) proposed a taxonomy of four primary classroom interaction patterns: Teacher-Students (T-Ss), Teacher-Student/Group (T-S), Students-Students (Ss-Ss), and Student-Student (S-S). Each pattern offers distinct advantages and limitations in terms of promoting language learning.

To analyze the implementation of these interaction patterns in greater detail, the present study employs Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC). Developed by Ned Flanders (1970), FIAC is a systematic observation instrument that categorizes classroom verbal behavior into ten categories: seven for Teacher Talk, two for Student Talk, and one for Silence or Confusion, providing both quantitative and qualitative insight into classroom discourse dynamics.

Preliminary observation at MAN 2 Model Medan, a prestigious Islamic senior high school in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, revealed that English classroom interactions were predominantly teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for student-initiated interaction or peer interaction. This raises important questions about the extent to which diverse interaction patterns are being utilized to maximize students' English learning opportunities. This study therefore aims to identify the classroom interaction patterns used at MAN 2 Model Medan and to describe how these patterns are implemented through FIAC categories during the teaching and learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom Interaction

Classroom interaction refers to the reciprocal communication that takes place between teachers and students, or among students themselves, within a formal learning environment. Brown (2001) describes interaction as the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Rivers (1987) highlights that through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material or engage in discussions and problem-solving tasks. Ellis (1990) further emphasizes that classroom interaction is not simply a conduit for the transmission of information; it is the very context in which language is learned.

From a Second Language Acquisition perspective, Long (1983) proposed the Interaction Hypothesis, arguing that when learners negotiate meaning, the resulting modified interaction makes input more comprehensible and facilitates acquisition. Swain (1985) complemented this with the Output Hypothesis, arguing that producing the target language pushes learners to notice gaps in their competence. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) highlights that learning is fundamentally a social activity occurring within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where interaction with more knowledgeable others mediates cognitive and linguistic development.

Classroom Interaction Patterns

Classroom interaction patterns refer to the recurring, structured forms of communicative exchange that characterize classroom discourse. Dagarin (2004) identifies four main types of interaction patterns. The Teacher-Students (T-Ss) pattern is the most traditional, in which the teacher serves as the central communicative figure and students collectively form the audience and respondents. The Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S) pattern involves targeted communicative attention directed at a specific individual or small group, allowing for more personalized and dialogic interaction. The Student-Student (S-S) pattern places two students as equal communicative partners in a bilateral exchange without teacher mediation. The Students-Students (Ss-Ss) pattern involves three or more students communicating simultaneously, with communicative responsibility distributed across all group members.

Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC)

FIAC is a systematic observation instrument developed by Ned A. Flanders (1970) to analyze verbal interaction in classroom settings. FIAC classifies all verbal behaviors into ten mutually exclusive categories grouped into three domains: Teacher Talk (Categories 1–7), Student Talk (Categories 8–9), and Silence or Confusion (Category 10). Teacher Talk is further divided into Indirect Influence (Accepts Feelings, Praises or Encourages, Accepts or Uses Students' Ideas, Asking Questions) and Direct Influence (Lecturing, Giving Directions, Criticizing or Justifying Authority). Student Talk comprises Student Response (Category 8) and Student Initiation (Category 9). FIAC provides both quantitative frequency data and qualitative insight into who is speaking and the communicative function of each utterance.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which is suitable for exploring naturally occurring communication in the classroom context. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding social situations from the participants' perspective and observing behavior in its natural setting. The qualitative approach is appropriate because classroom interaction is a complex, context-dependent phenomenon that cannot be fully captured by numerical measurements alone. The use of FIAC introduces a semi-quantitative element by providing frequency counts of interaction categories that complement the qualitative descriptions.

The study was conducted at MAN 2 Model Medan, an Islamic senior high school in Medan, Indonesia. The participants consisted of one English teacher and the students of one 10th-grade class. Data were collected over two English learning sessions through classroom observation and audio recording. The researcher transcribed all recorded verbal interactions into written form to serve as the primary data source. Data were analyzed using Dagarin's (2004) four interaction pattern categories and FIAC (Flanders, 1970). Analysis followed a qualitative approach involving data reduction, data display, classification of interaction patterns, interpretation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS

Classroom Interaction Patterns Used at MAN 2 Model Medan

Based on the transcription and analysis of classroom interactions from both observed sessions, three out of four interaction patterns proposed by Dagarin (2004) were identified. Table 1 presents the frequency of each interaction pattern found across both sessions.

Table 1. Frequency of Interaction Patterns

No.	Interaction Pattern	Frequency
1	Teacher-Students (T-Ss)	37
2	Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S)	2
3	Student-Student (S-S)	0
4	Students-Students (Ss-Ss)	5
Total		44

The Teacher-Students (T-Ss) pattern was the most dominant, occurring 37 times out of 44 total interactions (84.1%). The Students-Students (Ss-Ss) pattern was second with 5 occurrences. The Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S) pattern was found only twice, while the Student-Student (S-S) pattern was not observed in either session.

Teacher-Students Interaction (T-Ss)

The T-Ss pattern is characterized by the teacher communicating with all students as a single group. The following interaction illustrates this pattern:

Teacher: "Sekarang kita bahas soal nomor 1 sampai 4. Number one: Why did she walk through the forest?"

Students: "Untuk mengantar kue ke rumah neneknya di seberang hutan, Mam."

Teacher: "Good. Number two: What did the wolf ask Little Red Riding Hood?"

The teacher directs comprehension questions to the entire class without addressing any individual student. This illustrates the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), in which all communicative control remains with the teacher.

Teacher-Student/A Group of Students Interaction (T-S)

The T-S pattern occurred when the teacher directed communicative attention to a specific individual student or group. The teacher called on a student named Deni to read aloud:

Teacher: "Supaya lebih lancar, Ma'am minta satu orang baca lagi yang keras. Deni, coba kamu baca."

Teacher: "Good, Deni. Bagus sekali cara bacanya."

This reflects the T-S pattern in which the teacher's communicative attention is focused on one individual learner, providing scaffolding within the student's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Student-Student Interaction (S-S)

The Student-Student (S-S) pattern was not observed in either classroom session. No instance of direct bilateral peer interaction was identified in the transcripts. This absence is attributable to the predominantly teacher-centered instructional approach in which the teacher consistently controlled the communicative floor and did not explicitly assign pair-based speaking tasks during the observed period.

Students-Students Interaction (Ss-Ss)

The Ss-Ss pattern appeared in moments when multiple students called out answers collectively or in rapid succession:

Teacher: "Apa itu adjective? Ada yang bisa sebutkan contohnya?"

Students: "Beautiful! Handsome! Pretty! Cute! Lazy!" (calling out simultaneously and in turns)

Multiple students spontaneously contributed different examples simultaneously. Communication was distributed across multiple students rather than channeled through a single speaker, reflecting the Ss-Ss pattern (Dagarin, 2004).

Implementation of Interaction Patterns Through FIAC Categories

The second research problem examines how interaction patterns are implemented during the teaching and learning process. Table 2 presents the distribution of FIAC categories across each identified interaction pattern.

Table 2. FIAC Categories by Interaction Pattern

Interaction Pattern	FIAC Category	Category Label	Frequency
T-Ss	1	Accepts Feeling	1
T-Ss	2	Praises or Encourages	22
T-Ss	3	Accepts or Uses Students' Ideas	5
T-Ss	4	Asking Questions	18
T-Ss	5	Lecturing	12
T-Ss	6	Giving Directions	8
T-Ss	7	Criticizing or Justifying Authority	3
T-S	4	Asking Questions	1

T-S	6	Giving Directions	1
Ss-Ss	8	Student Response	4
Ss-Ss	9	Student Initiation	1
S-S	—	—	0

The T-Ss pattern, as the dominant pattern (37 instances), encompassed all seven Teacher Talk FIAC categories. Category 2 (Praises or Encourages) was the most frequent at 22 instances, appearing consistently as evaluative feedback following student responses. Category 4 (Asking Questions) occurred 18 times, serving as the primary engine of whole-class interaction and ranging across factual, comprehension, inferential, and open-ended question types. Category 5 (Lecturing) was recorded 12 times, reflecting the teacher's role as the primary transmitter of content knowledge. Category 6 (Giving Directions) appeared 8 times through procedural instructions addressed to the whole class. Categories 3 (Accepts or Uses Students' Ideas, 5 instances), 7 (Criticizing or Justifying Authority, 3 instances), and 1 (Accepts Feeling, 1 instance) played supporting roles in content development, behavioral regulation, and affective climate respectively.

The T-S pattern was realized through Categories 4 and 6 (task allocation and directions to a named student) and Category 2 (individualized praise). The Ss-Ss pattern was implemented primarily through Category 8 (Student Response, 4 instances), in which multiple students responded collectively to open-ended teacher prompts, and one instance of Category 9 (Student Initiation), where a student spontaneously extended a collective response with new content. The complete absence of the S-S pattern means Categories 8 and 9 never operated in a purely peer-to-peer context.

DISCUSSION

The dominance of the T-Ss pattern, accounting for 37 of all 44 classroom interactions, is consistent with Dagarin (2004), who identifies this as the most traditional and widely observed pattern in the language classroom. This finding aligns with prior studies documenting teacher dominance in Indonesian EFL contexts: Suherdi (2009) found that teacher-fronted instruction dominated secondary school classrooms, Cahyani, Cahyono, and Prayogo (2018) reported that Teacher Talk occupied approximately 65–70% of classroom discourse, and Murni and Bram (2019) similarly identified T-Ss as the most frequently occurring pattern in university-level EFL classes.

The FIAC analysis reveals that the T-Ss pattern was implemented primarily through a combination of Asking Questions (Category 4) and Lecturing (Category 5), interspersed with frequent Praises or Encourages (Category 2). This structure closely corresponds to the IRF sequence described by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), in which teacher questions initiate exchanges, student responses fulfill them, and teacher praise closes each cycle. While this pattern ensures efficient content delivery and maintains classroom structure, Nunan (1989) argues that it inherently limits students' opportunities to engage in genuine communicative exchange and develop authentic communicative competence.

The Ss-Ss pattern, though occurring only 5 times, demonstrates that students were capable of generating enthusiastic, multi-voice participation when given the opportunity through open-ended questions. The T-S pattern, though rare at 2 occurrences, served important scaffolding functions aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. The complete absence of the S-S pattern represents a significant missed opportunity for peer-mediated language learning. As Dagarin (2004) emphasizes, a balanced use of different interaction patterns is important because each pattern contributes differently to language development, and pair work activities have been consistently associated with authentic communicative practice.

The high frequency of Category 2 (Praises or Encourages, 22 instances) reflects a deliberate pedagogical strategy to maintain student motivation and sustain participation. However, the predominance of Student Response (Category 8) over Student Initiation (Category 9), with only one instance of the latter, suggests that students largely assumed passive roles in classroom discourse. Cultural and educational traditions in Indonesian classrooms that position teachers as primary authority figures may contribute to this pattern. Limited instructional time, lesson content focused on comprehension rather than communicative production, and students' limited confidence in using English independently are also likely contributing factors.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the classroom interaction patterns in English teaching and learning at MAN 2 Model Medan and how these patterns are implemented through FIAC categories. The findings reveal that three of four interaction patterns proposed by Dagarin (2004) were identified. The Teacher-Students (T-Ss) pattern was overwhelmingly dominant (37 out of 44 interactions), confirming a strongly teacher-centered instructional approach. The Students-Students (Ss-Ss) pattern occurred 5 times, the Teacher-Student/A Group of Students (T-S) pattern twice, and the Student-Student (S-S) pattern was entirely absent.

Regarding implementation through FIAC, the T-Ss pattern was realized predominantly through Praises or Encourages (22), Asking Questions (18), and Lecturing (12), following the classic IRF sequence. Student Talk was largely confined to responding to teacher prompts, with student initiation occurring only once throughout both observed sessions. These findings indicate that while the teacher-centered approach supported orderly content delivery and lesson management, it restricted students' opportunities to develop genuine communicative competence through peer interaction.

English teachers are encouraged to incorporate a greater variety of interaction patterns, particularly structured S-S and Ss-Ss activities such as pair work, group discussions, and role plays, to provide students with more opportunities for authentic communicative practice. Students should be encouraged to take more active roles by initiating questions and sharing ideas independently. Future researchers are advised to extend the data collection period, include triangulating instruments such as teacher interviews and video recordings, and investigate the relationship between specific interaction patterns and measurable language learning outcomes.

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