

Analyzing Interaction Practices in a Typical EFL Classroom Setting: A Case of Indonesia

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Abstract

An interaction is the heart of language teaching and learning. Classroom interaction initially refers to conversational exchanges between teacher, as an initiator, and students, as responders. However, the dimension of interaction in the classroom is not solely on conversational adjustment among interactants. The aim of the study was to report the classroom interaction practices based on the experienced-teachers' perspectives at SMP (junior high school). Twenty experienced English teachers from eight SMP in Jakarta were taken part as research participants. The data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, completed by classroom observation/recordings. Then, the collected data were analyzed qualitatively. Major findings suggest some categories emerged as five-dimensional elucidation of classroom interaction practices for SMP in teaching English as a foreign language. Verbal interaction dimension covers the medium of instruction used in the classroom and the forms of teacher input and students' output; as well as a non-verbal dimension in bridging the communication breakdowns. Pedagogic interaction then reveals the teachers' concerns of class management for language learning environment. Furthermore, personal dimension indicates that teachers are aware of their roles to build a good rapport with the students by giving praise and humor. At last, teachers' belief system of interaction appears to affirm that what teachers perceive about language learning, students and classroom circumstances construct their selections, preferences and practices applied in the class.

Keywords: classroom interaction; interaction practices; teaching English; foreign language; Indonesia

Introduction

In general, interaction can be defined as “reciprocal face-to-face interaction through either verbal, written or spoken words, or non-verbal language” (Robinson, 2005). Classroom interaction is a reciprocal language act between teacher-students and student- teacher. In short, interaction refers to dialogue or speech used in the classroom to teach. Not too much different, Brown also stated that interaction is as “the collaboration of thought, feeling, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other” (Brown, 2007). Interaction indicates mutual act through interactive communicative in using language between two interactants. In the classroom, interactive communication made by teacher is intentional. The expected effects resulted from interaction are supposed to be learning goal-oriented. Classroom discourse, according to Walsh (Walsh, 2011), contains four characteristics that influence how both participants (teacher and students) relate each other; control, speech modification, elicitation, and repair. At first, teacher and students have asymmetrical relation in which teacher is as the knower while students have nothing as the learners. Teachers frequently modifies

speech in order that students understand them easily. Giving feedback is one of the features in classroom discourse. Teacher feedback can keep students' affective and motivation (Prabu, 1992, in Maolida, 2013) and increase accuracy and correctness. Error correction is apparent in a considerable amount of teacher talk. Classroom discourse is also dominated by question and answer routine. Another feature of discourse in the classroom is the pattern of initiation-respond-feedback (IRF) (Murray & Christison, 2011; Ur, 2009; Walsh, 2011).

In language classroom, language has dual functions; as a subject-matter to be taught and a medium of instruction. Just like what Long (1983) wrote, language used in the classroom is not only a tool in getting new knowledge, more than that, it is also the objectives of the study, "the vehicle and object of study"(Walsh, 2011). Therefore, interaction plays an essential role in the language class. Teachers use language not only to present lesson, to check comprehension, and to build rapport to the students. In addition to those, in language classroom, what teacher utters becomes language model for the students, what teacher asks is probably determined how well students improve and produce the language, and what feedback teacher gives apparently affects the student future competence and motivation in learning language. In the other words, language learning is greatly interactive process (Richards & Lockhart, 2007). Hence, it can be drawn a conclusion that interaction in the classroom lies at the heart of language teaching and learning process (Robinson, 2005; Walsh, 2011).

Furthermore, teaching simply can be stated as talking on purposes. Teachers explain, suggest, persuade, and instruct the students with some educational objectives. Just like what Walsh (2011) formulated on his framework, he emphasized that interaction and pedagogic goals are inextricably linked, that the discourse is constantly changing according to the teacher's agenda (Walsh, 2011). However, the speech and interactive dialogue between teacher and students consist of not only verbal dimension. Robinson wrote that only 35% of classroom communication happens verbally; the rest estimated of communication is channeled through non-verbal communication. Eye-contact, facial expression, gesture, and touch have great contributions in build rapport and communication in the classroom. By raising eyebrows or frowning, students may give signs of confusion or disapproval. When nodding and laughter, called as paralinguistic strategy (Reigel, 2005, cited by Maolida, 2013), teachers show affirmation through non-verbal cues in language classroom. In the other words, interaction in the classroom involves two dimensions: verbal and non-verbal (Robinson, 2005). Teachers use speech and various aspects of non-verbal communication to interact with students in the classroom.

Interaction in language classroom refers to a cooperative engagement in which speakers negotiate meaning. This process is named as interactional modification using some strategies, such as comprehension checks, confirmation checks, clarification requests, and repetition (Hall, 2011). Nonetheless, classroom interaction between teacher and students, particularly in language classroom, provides not solely on dialogical interaction or conversational exchanges; interactional activities may represent interpersonal communication as social interaction and shape one's identity in society. As stated by Kumaravadivelu, in the context of classroom communication, interaction can be viewed as textual activity, interpersonal activity, and ideational activity (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Classroom is social environment involving diversity and complexity. Therefore, interaction shapes and is shaped by the participants in the classroom; who the teacher and students are and what they do in and outside the classroom. Due to the fact that learning environment are complex system built upon human relationship and located in specific, real-world context; what happens in L2 classrooms in different part of the world or

different social contexts is influenced by differing institutional policies, resources availability and societal goals and expectations (Hall, 2011).

Table 1. L2 Classroom Modes (Walsh, 2011)

Mode	Pedagogic Goals	Interactional Features
Managerial	To transmit information To organize the physical learning environment To refer learners to materials To introduce or conclude an activity To change from one mode of learning to another	A single, extended teacher turn that uses explanations and/or instructions The use of transitional markers The use of conformational checks An absence of learner contributions
Materials	To provide language practice around a piece of material To elicit responses in relation to the material To check and display answers To clarify when necessary To evaluate contributions	Predominance of IRF pattern Extensive use of display questions Form-focused feedback Corrective repair The use of scaffolding
Skills And Systems	To enable learners to produce correct forms To enable learners to manipulate the target language To provide corrective feedback To provide learners with practice in sub-skills To display correct answers	The use of direct repair The use of scaffolding Extended teacher turns Display questions Teacher echo Clarification request Form-focused feedback
Classroom Context	To enable learners to express themselves clearly To establish a context To promote oral fluency	Extended learner turns Short teacher turns Minimal repair Content feedback Referential questions Scaffolding Clarification request

The study of classroom discourse has been widely conducted in the field of language teaching (Consolo, 2006; Farahian & Rezaee, 2012; Inan, 2012; Matsumoto, 2008; Nasruloh, 2013; Pujiastuti, 2013). One of them was Steve Walsh in 2011 by recording language classes and analyzing using an applied conversation analysis. He presented the framework of Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT). It comprised four patterns of classroom modes or micro contexts and fourteen interactional features. The patterns are markedly different of managerial mode, classroom contexts mode, skills and systems mode, and materials mode (Walsh, 2011). This framework has been extensively used to promote the awareness and help to improve teacher in interactional practices in the classroom. However, the research related to classroom interaction in

English as foreign language context and based on teachers' perspectives is still limited and restricted. Therefore, this current research aims at exploring on how experienced teachers interact, communicate and build relationship to the students in English language classroom and understand why they choose to carry out them based on their perspectives.

Method

Participants and Setting

Initial purposive sampling focused on recruiting English language teacher whose year of teaching is more than three years. Then, twenty experienced English teachers from eight SMP (junior high schools) in Jakarta were taken part as research participants. They have experienced from three to thirty-three years of teaching English; therefore, they are considered proper and appropriate in providing experiences, opinion, beliefs, and information related to interactions happens in their classrooms. Besides, most of the participant teachers (65%) is certified teachers with the ages ranged between twenty-two to sixty-five years old. Participants who have teaching experience less than three years were excluded.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered through twelve interviews almost 11 hours 45 minutes and two focus group discussions, completed by thirteen classroom observation/recordings around 10.5 hours, during three months of 2016 and three months of 2017. The data collection relies heavily on interview as major instrument and best way to capture experiences in participants' own words (Creswell, 2012). Class observation based on FLINT analysis (Moskowitz in Brown, 2007) was conducted as a preliminary study to gain deep insight and formulate questions for interview.

In analyzing data, three-phase coding of Strauss and Corbin was applied. More than thousand codes as initial codes were constructed at the first phase of open coding helped by NVivo qualitative data analysis ver. 8.

Findings

After analyzing the gathered data, it can be seemingly concluded that interaction and communication in the classroom between teachers and students are complex and diverse. Single interaction practice taken by the teacher may represent more than one dimension. One speech the teacher utters might contain both verbal and pedagogical dimensions. Consequently, classroom interaction is multidimensional practices in language class. As a result, the classroom interaction practices based on teacher's perspectives can be separated into at least four dimensions: verbal, non-verbal, pedagogical and personal. Moreover, those practices applied by the teachers are underpinned by their set of belief system about language, learning and teaching they adopt. The four dimensions of classroom practices are as follow:

Verbal Interaction Practices

In the classroom, teachers mostly initiate the interaction by greeting, directing or asking questions. Presenting materials and discussing texts and exercises are talks by the teachers with slow pace, loud and clear voice and repetitive expressions. Classroom communication is dominated by teacher talks, even though the teachers still try to decrease their dominancy.

Let me count, I think I talk much more than the students. I push them talk in the first 20 minutes of the lesson in literacy session. Then, question-answer session takes around 15 minutes. The rest session of 90 minutes will be mine to talk. (TW-12).

The first language as medium of instruction is used by the teachers. They think it will reduce stress, avoid frustration and solve communication breakdowns. However, some teachers prefer to mostly use English; others choose to combine first and target language with some considerations.

In the class, the most part of teacher talk is in English as medium of instruction; meanwhile, Indonesia is used for specific purposes. (CW-02).

We use Indonesian. If we apply English as medium language in the class, it will be effortful and time-consuming. (CW-03).

Questions delivered by the teachers are generally type of displayed questions based on topics and themes discussed in the class. Some teachers giving questions with considerations of grades, proficiency, and intelligence.

Questions are based on the topic taught. For example, we discuss text, the questions are related to the text, such as when, where, why. So, the questions are based on the text. (TW-12).

If I enter excellent class, the questions will be longer and higher; the lower the excellency of the class is the shorter and the simpler the questions are. (TW-02).

Handling errors or giving corrective feedback to the students is one of features in language classroom. Teachers have various strategy in handling errors, such as spontaneous direct repair, end session repair and recording errors. However, not all errors made by are directly corrected, some teachers prefer to leave them because of duration and excessive amount of errors.

Once they said I go to Bali, I give correction I went. I don't say you are wrong; else, I just restated O you went to Bali as repair. (TW-08).

When one student made error, Mr. Am directly said that's wrong, correct it (salah, itu salah, perbaiki) with loud voice. In another moment, Mr. Am gave the corrected form. (CO-10).

Handling errors is needed with positive purposes and proper techniques. As a consequence, correcting errors is, instead of humiliating and degrading the students, to improve their language. (CW-02).

According to the teachers, in classroom interaction, students may find difficult to respond verbally in English; however, they understand enough what the teacher say. This sounds normal and natural as beginning language learners. Teasing from classmates and low risk taking and motivation are some causes of student silence.

If their levels are good, they can speak in English. (TW-02).

In my opinion, they know and understand of what I say, but they feel difficult to respond. That is the constraints (in interaction). (TW-06).

Non-verbal Interaction Practices

Facial expression, eye contact and gestures help teacher in build communication to the students. In addition, according to the teacher, students also give signs through non-verbal communication by confused, puzzled faces and frowning.

In my opinions, chemistry is necessary in relationship. Eye-contact is important. Do not talk to them without looking at their eyes to show our respects. (TW-11).

We come to the class with bright, happy and cheerful faces, even though we have lots of problems... (TW-10).

Pedagogical Interaction Practices

Teachers are educators at the same time. To react of some situations, the teachers give inspirational stories, motivational expression, advices and solutions to the students during the lessons.

So, I motivate them to be more confident in learning English; oh, yes, it was easy, sir, they said. (TW-FGD-02).

When their mid-test (UTS) scores are bad, I come to them and ask what's the matter? How were your assignments? Look at your book, are they complete? I am trying to open their minds to not blame their teachers, mates or others. (TW-12).

Not only giving suggestions, when class becomes messy, noisy, and uncontrolled, teachers stand for taking control. Warning, threats, and punishments are spontaneous acts to manage the classroom.

I do not punish them. They have to understand and do the homework, if not, the heaviest thing is they stand in the front of the class. (TW-06).

I threaten them no sleeping in the class, you must do it and finish it right now. (TW-09).

To manage and discipline the classroom, some teacher also set classroom rules.

Day 1 is a day to make agreement, making class rules. We make agreement that we have a password to do something. Once they want to do something, they have to say the password, and to practice politeness at the same time. For example, they want to sharpen the pencil, they should say may I sharpen the pencil, please? It implicitly brings them to the materials. (TW-02).

Moreover, instructions and directions become the majority in overall teacher talk. According to the teachers, they try to make language short and simple. After that, students may not respond it verbally; some of them immediately carry out the required activities, yet others just feel confused or do nothing.

We do not use complex language. What we express is also stated on the textbooks. We do not want they get confused and say what does the teacher talk about? (apa sih, miss nya ngomong apa) (TW-11).

Teachers ask the students to read silently, memorize the text, take note the questions related to references. (CO-11).

Translating texts, making conclusion from the text as vocabulary exercises. (TW-04).

Personal Interaction Practices

Teacher-student relation is interpersonal. Some teachers feel that they are substitute-parents at schools and have strong relationship to some students.

Chemistry between teacher and student plays important roles. It means that teachers need to know how their lives as teenagers, what they are interested in, such as movies, songs. (CW-FGD-01).

Once at the lesson, one student comes closer to me and tell his problems at home. They do not hesitate to ask. It shows that we are close enough. (TW-FGD-02).

Praise is one of teachers' utterances in the class as feedback. They believe praise is effective tool to raise confidence, boost mood and appreciate student' performance. In teachers' opinions, teenagers love to be praised verbally or any other forms of praise. Giving praise has to be directly and instantaneous.

I like giving praise. Sometimes I give them rewards, such as a bar of chocolate/snack food or small stuffs when playing games. It is just for fun, I think. And it motivates them. (TW-08).
Yes, I sometimes express good, good job. (TW-04).
Praise is usually given both verbally and non-verbal through gesture, such as give a thumb up. (CW-10).

Some teachers believe that teachers are entertainer. Consequently, they need to entertain the audiences. Humor is one of the ways in bring comfort and relax in the class in order to not get bored. Humor is spontaneous and situational depending on what happens in the classroom.

I deliver humor or something funny when I think the class seems getting bored. Their moods begin to decline... (TW-02).
Funny story, jokes, and humor are necessary as insertion during the lessons to build personal relationship to the students. I do not want to be the dreaded teacher. (TW-FGD-02).



Figure 1. EFL Classroom Interaction Practices

Moreover, A set of beliefs or perceptions drives the teachers' preferences and selection in the classroom. They believe that language is skill and learning language needs repetition and practices.

Learning is repetitive process. (TW-01).
In language classroom, it is impossible when language learning takes place with no interaction. (TW-03).

Learning English in SMP is a first base of long process. As English language teachers in SMP, they have roles to build first good impression of learning English upon students.

Teaching English in SMP for teachers is as base or foundation so that the students are interested in learning English. (TW-FDG-01).
The phenomenon "they learn, they forget" happens all the time. Some students learn English as a compulsory subject. (CW-04).

They think they should be good teacher and bring fun learning into the class. They teach, educate, instruct and direct the students to learn English at this present. Even though the results or outcomes of the learning process are not achieved yet, they believe it can be seen in the future.

Discussion

From the findings of the present research, interaction, particularly teachers' utterances, in language classroom is multidimensional practices. One utterance may represent as personal as well as verbal practices. The four dimensions are verbal, non-verbal, pedagogical and personal. Personal and pedagogical dimensions of interaction practices cover not only for the sake of language learning but for building relationship between students (teenager) and teachers (older person) in the classroom as well. This finding is seemingly quite different from the classroom modes formulated by Walsh. He wrote that interaction and pedagogic goals are inextricably linked within four modes, namely managerial, materials, skills and systems, and classroom context (Walsh, 2011).

In verbal interaction practices, teachers say that their talks dominated over all teaching session. Even though they attempt to decline their dominancy by giving opportunities and activities for students. This result is consistent to other studies which yielded that classroom talk was hold by teacher in presenting grammar items, giving instructions, checking comprehension, and giving comments (Pujiastuti, 2013; Rashidi & Rafieerad, 2010; Rezaee & Farahian, 2012). Moreover, the features of teacher talk are clear, loud with slow pace and repetitive, short expressions. This is similar to Brown's view that for beginning language learners, teacher voice should be loud and natural with clear articulation (Brown, 2007) . These are also consistent to what Walsh (2011) and Murray and Christison (2011) stated that teacher talk are characterized by short and simple sentences and stressing in important words. Moreover, Mackey, Abbuhl, & Gass (2012) wrote that interaction and language learning occurs when a learner find difficulty understanding his/her interlocutor (a native speaker/more proficient learner), the learner may receive input that have been modified using some discourse strategies, such as clarification, confirmation, repetition, and recast. The teachers, as more competent interactants, demonstrate these sort of practices as an effort to make the input more comprehensible for the learners.

Then, the teachers use first language (Indonesian) as medium of instruction in teaching English for reducing stress, avoiding frustration and solving communication breakdowns. This agrees with Harmer's view that the use of first language can probably be used for low level students (Harmer, 2005). Nonetheless, some of them use mostly English; others combine first and target language with some considerations. Combination of first and target languages in the classroom is also found in study by Petek (2013). Then, teacher stated that students understand what the teacher says even though their responses are still limited in interaction. The same results are also found in research by Nasruloh (2013) and Savaşçı (2014) in which revealed that the students hesitate to produce target language and do not involve much in classroom conversation. Moreover, according to the teachers, the students use first language to communicate in the classroom, target language applied for required tasks. Brown also wrote the similar point that for beginning language learners, the learning objectives is to comprehend and produce controlled repertoire of language (Brown, 2007).

Another verbal practice is teacher questions that are commonly in the form of displayed questions based on topics and themes. Then, this finding support studies by Farahian & Rezaee (2012), Petek (2013) and Pujiastuti (2013). Related to errors correction, teachers apply various

strategy in handling errors, such as spontaneous direct repair, end session repair and recording errors. However, not all errors made by are directly corrected, some teachers prefer to leave them because of duration and excessive amount of errors. The finding supports arguments by Brown (2007) that teachers have to give room of using language with no worries of being corrected. Walsh (2011) also stated that too many corrections will not help language learning.

For non-verbal interaction practices, teachers mention that they use non-verbal language, such as facial expression, eye contact and gestures to help building communication to the students, so do the students. The study by Rido, Ibrahim, & Nambiar (2014) stated the similar result that teachers maintain eye-contact when communication, completed by gestures, nodding, and touching on shoulder to show attention.

In managing classroom, some teachers set classroom rules. The same argument comes from Evrim, Gökçe, & Enisa (2009) on their finding that teacher think classroom management is significant part of learning and teaching process and closely related to teaching practices applied by the teachers. Furthermore, teacher talk mostly contains instruction and directions to the students to do many activities. Just like what Robinson (2005) wrote, teacher use speech to direct, guide, instruct, suggest and persuade the students to do different things as well as to silence the students, keep them locked in silence.

According to the participant teachers, some of them give advices and solutions to the students during the lessons as well as warning and threats as spontaneous act to maintain conducive environment in the classroom. Not only solution and warning, some teacher deliver praise as positive feedback to the students. Giving verbal praise was also revealed by Wachyudi, Srisudarso, & Miftakh's (2015) research. Besides, Brown (2007) argues that praise is part of building rapport between teacher and students. Meanwhile, some teachers state that spontaneous humor is one way to bring comfortable, relax and fun atmosphere. This finding supports the studies by Petraki & Pham Nguyen (2016) and Rido et al. (2014) that humor in first language can be a tool to build relationship, get students' attention, and create good environment for learning; meanwhile, humor in target language makes the materials easily to understand. At this phase, teachers play not only comprehensible input providers but classroom environment creators as well. Based on Krashen's view, comprehensible input with low level of affective filters, such as anxiety, would promote acquisition of the target language (Mackey et al., 2012).

In teachers' point of views, language is a kind of skill and learning language needs repetition and practices. As SMP students, teachers call them beginning language learners. Learning English in SMP is an initial phase of learning process. Consequently, they may not accomplish their successful in learning language at this time. The teachers believe their roles are to teach and educate them with good impression so that the students have desire and motivation to keep learning English for the next levels. These beliefs may influence what the teachers prefer and select for the class, how they treat and behaves to the students, and in what way they interact with the students. Some teachers believe that exposure and repetition are essential in language learning; therefore, they keep using English all over the session, despite the fact that no student gives expected response. Meanwhile, others think grammar competence is key in language learning; they apparently emphasize more on grammar presentation, exercises and correction. Beliefs system about language, language learning, and teaching are determined teacher practices in the classroom; likewise, students' perceptions (learner belief system) govern their motivation, expectation, and perceptions about difficulty and easiness in language learning (Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored classroom interaction practices in English as foreign language at SMP in Jakarta based on experienced teachers' perspectives. From the data, it can be summed up that interaction is central in language learning. In the other words, interaction is what language learning is all about. Language learning takes place in and through interaction. Reciprocity is not always clearly seen in the form of verbal practices in English (target language). Yet, it is clearly identified that comprehension comes first before production. Through interaction with teachers/classmates, both comprehension and production can be increased. Classroom interaction is complex and diverse; then the practices are multidimensional and inextricable. Classroom interaction practices cover dimensions of verbal, non-verbal, pedagogical and personal. Teacher talk, error correction and questions represent verbal practices; meanwhile, instruction, suggestion, and rules are pedagogical dimension in managing classroom. Giving praise and humor can be labelled personal practices with specific personal purposes in building rapport. Those practices are frequently integrated by non-verbal language from both teachers and students, such as facial expression and gesture. Teachers interact with the students in the classroom not only to teach them English as compulsory subject, to instruct them use and practice the language, to get their verbal responses and to help them pass the English test. More than those instructional objectives, teachers get into the classroom and communicate to them to give good impression on learning English, to provide the first base of knowledge and skill, to guide them to be ready as successful language learners in the future. Despite the fact that they are responsible as teachers only for one to three years, they believe on the expression of what you plant now, you will harvest later.

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