

The Role of Verbal Interaction in Developing Speaking Competence: An Analysis of Fourth-Semester English in classroom

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom by analyzing verbal interactions between a lecturer and fourth-semester students at the University of Asahan. Using the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) framework by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), data were collected through classroom observation and analyzed qualitatively. The findings reveal a predominantly teacher-centered discourse, where lecturers control most exchanges, with limited space for student participation. Although some extended IRF sequences indicated potential for dialogic engagement, overall interaction lacked spontaneity and learner agency. The study recommends adopting more student-centered discourse strategies to foster meaningful participation and promote communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *The Role of Verbal Interaction in Developing Speaking Competence Classroom, IRF Model, EFL Classroom, Teacher Talk, Student Participation, Dialogic Teaching, Interactional Patterns*

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INTRODUCTION

The role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom plays a critical role not only as a medium for instructional delivery but also as a mechanism for shaping how knowledge is constructed, negotiated, and internalized by learners. The concept of discourse itself, derived from the Latin word *discursus* meaning “running to and fro,” reflects the dynamic and interactive nature of language in educational settings (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In modern linguistics and education, discourse is widely accepted not merely as language in use, but as social practice—intertwined with ideologies, power relations, and cultural norms. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1997), frames discourse as both a product and a producer of social structures, making it particularly relevant for analyzing institutional communication such as that found in classrooms.

In classroom contexts, particularly in EFL learning environments where English is not the primary medium of communication, the language used during lessons becomes central to students’ linguistic development. The role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom refers to the structured patterns of interaction between teachers and students—including instructions, explanations, questioning, feedback, and peer-to-peer exchanges (Walsh, 2006). These interactional exchanges are more than pedagogical tools; they are also sites where student identities, agency, and learning trajectories are shaped. As Hall and Walsh (2002) observe, the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom fundamentally mediates how students engage with content and develop communicative competence in the target language.

Despite this, many EFL classrooms continue to be dominated by teacher-centered discourse, where instructors maintain control over the content, flow, and direction of talk.

Research by Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) in Bangladesh, Thornbury (2000) in the UK, and Musliadi (2016) in Indonesia reveals a common trend: EFL instructors often monopolize classroom talk, leaving limited space for student-initiated dialogue or authentic participation. This imbalance in classroom communication may hinder learners' development of speaking and interactional competence.

To examine the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom more precisely, researchers have employed various models of discourse analysis. One of the most influential is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). This model categorizes classroom interactions into a hierarchy of discourse units – lessons, transactions, exchanges, moves, and acts – with a primary focus on three-part sequences where the teacher initiates an utterance, the student responds, and the teacher provides feedback. While this structure offers a systematic approach for analyzing classroom dialogue, it has been critiqued for promoting superficial interaction and reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics. As Thornbury (2000) argues, the IRF model tends to structure classroom talk in a way that limits students' communicative autonomy and encourages short, closed-ended responses.

In traditional, lecture-based classrooms, especially in many EFL settings, the IRF model is often used rigidly, reinforcing the teacher's role as the primary authority figure and marginalizing students' voices. Teachers determine the timing, content, and nature of exchanges, reducing the scope for spontaneity or learner-driven input. Brazil (1995) notes that this level of control often extends to the use of stress and intonation, where teachers use prosodic cues to emphasize what they consider important, subtly directing students' attention and responses.

The implications of such teacher-dominated discourse are far-reaching. According to Nunan (1999), classroom interaction that lacks variety and authenticity fails to replicate natural conversational norms, making it difficult for learners to transfer classroom learning into real-life communication. In a similar vein, Ellis (2003) stresses the importance of learner-centered discourse that promotes negotiation of meaning and extended language use, key components in the internalization of grammatical structures and pragmatic skills.

Despite its limitations, the IRF model remains a valuable tool for educators and researchers to identify recurring discourse patterns, assess classroom talk, and reflect on pedagogical practices. By analyzing who initiates talk, who responds, and who evaluates, teachers can develop a greater awareness of their interactional style and its impact on learners. As Mercer and Howe (2012) emphasize, reflection on the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom should be part of a broader dialogic teaching approach, where learning is seen as co-constructed through shared talk and mutual engagement.

To advance beyond the constraints of traditional discourse patterns, several scholars advocate for dialogic and student-centered pedagogies. Walsh (2011), for instance, proposes an “interactional awareness” model where teachers consciously adjust their use of language to create space for student contributions. This includes replacing evaluation with prompts that encourage elaboration, using referential rather than display questions, and incorporating more open-ended tasks that simulate real-life communication. Such practices can help shift the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom from monologic delivery to dialogic exploration, aligning more closely with the communicative goals of EFL instruction.

In light of these concerns, this study aims to explore the nature of the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom in an EFL context, particularly focusing on English Education students at the University of Asahan. The choice of this setting was guided by several considerations. As a key educational institution in North Sumatra, the University of Asahan embodies a typical EFL learning environment where English is taught as a foreign language using predominantly traditional, lecture-based methods. Its regional context and mid-sized institutional profile make it representative of broader pedagogical practices found across Indonesia, particularly in non-metropolitan settings.

Moreover, the English Education Department explicitly prioritizes communicative competence in its curriculum, yet preliminary classroom observations suggest that students often struggle to develop speaking fluency, pointing to a possible disconnect between curricular intentions and instructional realities. By selecting fourth-semester students – those who have received foundational instruction yet are still developing autonomy in communication – the study gains a meaningful lens through which to assess the impact of the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom at a critical stage of language acquisition.

Ethically and practically, the researcher's rapport with faculty members facilitated authentic access to classroom settings, ensuring reliable data collection while respecting participant confidentiality. Additionally, the university's active engagement in improving teaching quality provides an opportunity for the findings to inform professional development and encourage the adoption of more dialogic teaching strategies.

By applying the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model to this context, the research examines how teacher-student interactions unfold and what implications these patterns have for language teaching and learning. Specifically, it investigates whether the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom fosters meaningful participation or reinforces passive learning roles, and how such dynamics influence language development.

The study also draws upon insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to frame classroom interaction as a reflection of institutional power relations. In this view, the ways in which teachers control turn-taking, topic shifts, and feedback are not neutral pedagogical choices, but mechanisms that either open or close spaces for learner identity, autonomy, and agency. As Van Dijk (1998) notes, discourse practices in educational institutions can either reproduce existing inequalities or challenge them by fostering more participatory learning environments. Hence, the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom is not only a site for language learning but also for negotiating roles, power, and participation in the educational process.

By analyzing authentic classroom data – specifically recordings and transcriptions of verbal exchanges – this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on student-centered language pedagogy and the role of interaction in second language acquisition. In doing so, it responds to the call for more reflective and responsive teaching practices that recognize learners as active participants in their own language development. Ultimately, the study aims to offer both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for enhancing discourse practices in EFL settings, particularly within Indonesian higher education institutions.

Theoretical Perspectives on the IRF Model

The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, first conceptualized by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), has become a widely adopted framework in the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom analysis. Its triadic structure – where the teacher initiates (I), the student responds (R), and the teacher gives feedback (F) – offers a clear lens to observe participation patterns, power distribution, and the scaffolding of learning through interaction.

Structurally, IRF provides predictability and coherence in classroom communication, particularly valuable in large or monologic instructional settings. However, its limitations have been extensively critiqued. Wells (1993), for instance, argues that when the IRF cycle is applied too rigidly, it promotes surface-level engagement and discourages genuine exploration. Rather than fostering dialogic meaning-making, it risks reducing learners to responders of known-answer questions – a concern echoed by Thornbury (2000).

Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) similarly challenge the static nature of IRF, advocating for dialogic spells – moments in which students assume epistemic authority and contribute ideas spontaneously. These moments, they argue, are key indicators of deep engagement and predictor variables of learning achievement. In such interactions, IRF sequences may be expanded or reconfigured to include student-initiated turns, uptake questions, or collaborative meaning construction.

From a sociocultural standpoint, IRF has the potential to serve as scaffolding – as long as teachers consciously adapt it. Mercer and Howe (2012) emphasize the importance of dialogic space, where students are given room to reason, ask questions, and shape the direction of discourse. In this light, IRF can be modified through revoicing strategies, reflective feedback, or peer interactions that redistribute interactional power.

Ultimately, the IRF model should be seen not as a fixed script, but as a diagnostic and reflective tool. Its effectiveness depends on how flexibly it is implemented and how attuned the teacher is to creating opportunities for learner agency. Especially in EFL classrooms where participation norms may be shaped by cultural hierarchies, critical engagement with the IRF framework enables educators to move from control-oriented talk to a more collaborative and empowering discourse environment.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the structure and dynamics of the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching context. Conducted at the English Education Department of the University of Asahan, the research focused on fourth-semester undergraduate students. A qualitative approach was chosen due to its strength in examining real-life language use within naturally occurring classroom interactions (Creswell, 2014). This method enabled the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how discourse is constructed, controlled, and distributed in the classroom.

Data were collected through non-participant classroom observation, allowing the researcher to observe and record naturally occurring interactions without intervening in the teaching process. One classroom was selected at random to represent the general discourse practices in the department. Audio recordings of the class sessions were made after obtaining informed consent from both the lecturer and the students, in accordance with ethical research principles.

The recorded classroom interactions were transcribed in detail following Walsh's (2006) transcription conventions, which capture linguistic features such as pauses, overlaps, and intonation. These elements are important for discourse analysis as they reveal how speakers manage turn-taking, signal transitions, and emphasize key points during interaction.

The core analytical framework for this study was the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). This model provides a systematic approach to analyzing classroom talk by segmenting discourse into exchanges, moves, and acts. The researcher coded each turn of talk according to this hierarchy to identify patterns of initiation, student responses, and teacher feedback. Special attention was given to the frequency of teacher versus student talk, the nature of questions asked, and the opportunities provided for student-initiated discourse.

To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, the researcher applied methodological triangulation. Several class sessions were recorded and analyzed to validate the consistency of observed patterns. Coding reliability was enhanced through repeated reviews and comparison of transcribed data. Furthermore, all identifiable participant information was anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

This analytical process enabled the researcher to uncover recurring discourse patterns, particularly the predominance of teacher talk and the limited scope for student interaction. By using the IRF model as both a descriptive and evaluative tool, the study offered insight into the pedagogical structure of the EFL classroom and its implications for language acquisition. The findings from this method serve as a basis for critical reflection on teaching strategies and inform the development of more dialogic and student-centered language learning environments.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined interactional patterns in an Indonesian EFL classroom through Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) framework. The data revealed a highly structured discourse dominated by the lecturer, with minimal evidence of student-initiated exchanges. While the IRF model provided instructional clarity and organizational control, its rigid and repetitive use appeared to limit dialogic potential and student participation.

Across all observed sessions, the lecturer controlled the initiation, content, and closure of most interactions. Students functioned primarily as responders, offering brief, formulaic replies to display questions designed to elicit known information rather than invite authentic contributions. The following excerpt demonstrates this typical IRF pattern:

Table 1. Example of Standard IRF Pattern with Evaluative Feedback

Speaker	Utterance
Lecturer	What is the function of Present Continuous?
Student	For actions happening now.
Lecturer	Good. And the form?
Student	Subject plus to be plus verb-ing.
Lecturer	Excellent. Can you give me an example?
Student	I am writing now.
Lecturer	Very good. Let's continue.

Although the student responses were accurate, the interaction moved quickly from one sequence to the next, leaving little space for elaboration or exploration. Such structure aligns with Thornbury's (2000) concerns about IRF being reduced to recall routines, where language is confirmed rather than co-constructed.

Notably, spontaneous student contributions were absent. No learner initiated a question or clarification, even when prompted with open invitations such as "Do you have any questions?". This silence could reflect cultural norms around teacher authority (Nuraini, 2016) or discomfort in publicly risking error. In either case, it reflects a discourse environment where student voice was heavily regulated. Interestingly, one segment of classroom talk revealed a more extended IRF sequence, demonstrating chained prompts and embedded follow-ups:

Table 2. IRF Chaining with Embedded Teacher Feedback

Move	Speaker	Utterance	Function
I1	Lecturer	What is the past form of "go"?	Initiation (I)
R1	Student	Went.	Response (R)
F1/I2	Lecturer	Correct. Now can you use it in a sentence?	Feedback → new I
R2	Student	I went to school.	Response (R)
F2/I3	Lecturer	Good. What time did you go?	Feedback → new I
R3	Student	At seven o'clock.	Response (R)
F3/I4	Lecturer	Excellent – very clear. Did you go by yourself?	Feedback → new I
R4	Student	No, with my sister.	Response (R)
F4/I5	Lecturer	That's nice. Now class, what tense is this?	Feedback → classwide I
R5	Students	Past tense.	Response (R)
F5	Lecturer	Good. Always remember: past tense for completed actions.	Final Feedback (F)

This example illustrates that IRF can be extended and elaborated through chaining, where a single exchange leads into another via embedded follow-up questions. The lecturer's prompts in this case encouraged student engagement beyond one-word answers, indicating potential for more meaningful interaction. However, the dialogue remained teacher-driven, as students did not initiate turns or steer the conversation themselves.

In most other interactions, opportunities for student agency were closed early. Immediate teacher corrections, such as in the following case, preempted learner self-monitoring:

Table 3. IRF Sequence with Direct Grammatical Correction

Speaker	Utterance
Student	She don't study at home.
Lecturer	She <i>doesn't</i> study at home. Use "doesn't" for she.
Student	Yes, Miss.

Original Interaction

L: What is the pattern of Simple Present Tense?

S2 : Subject + verb 1 + object.

L: Correct.

Dialogic Version (IRF Enriched)

L: What is the pattern of the Simple Present Tense?

S2 : Subject + verb 1 + object.

L : Right. That's the basic formula. Now, can you think of a sentence that uses that pattern in your daily routine?

S2 : I brush my teeth every morning.

L: Nice! Why do you think we use the simple present tense here?

S2 : Because it's a regular activity.

L : Exactly. It describes something habitual. Anyone else want to add an example? Maybe something unique to your mornings?

Table 4. IRF Coding Breakdown with Expanded Feedback Loop

Move Type	Speaker	Utterance	Notes
Initiation (I)	Lecturer	"What is the pattern of the Simple Present Tense?"	Starts the exchange with a factual question.
Response (R)	Student	"Subject + verb 1 + object."	Direct answer.
Feedback (F1)	Lecturer	"Right. That's the basic formula."	Evaluative and informative.
Initiation (I2)	Lecturer	"Can you think of a sentence that uses that pattern?"	Encourages elaboration and personal connection.
Response (R2)	Student	"I brush my teeth every morning."	Applies the pattern.
Feedback (F2)	Lecturer	"Nice! Why do you think we use the simple present tense?"	Scaffolds deeper thinking and reflection.
Response (R3)	Student	"Because it's a regular activity."	Demonstrates conceptual grasp.
Feedback (F3)	Lecturer	"Exactly. It describes something habitual."	Reinforces and extends understanding.
Initiation (I3)	Lecturer	"Anyone else want to add an example?"	Opens the floor for wider participation.

This excerpt illustrates an IRF pattern in which the teacher delivers immediate corrective feedback following a student's grammatical error, thereby restricting the learner's opportunity for self-repair. While such intervention supports grammatical accuracy, it prioritizes form over learner reflection. As Ellis (2003) emphasizes, interlanguage development thrives when learners are given the space to notice, test, and refine their linguistic output – not merely receive correction.

From a discourse standpoint, the classroom appeared organized, linguistically focused, and responsive. However, its interactional structure reflected a top-down dynamic,

with the teacher positioned as the primary knowledge authority and students performing correctness rather than co-constructing meaning. As Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1997) observe, such asymmetries in communicative roles—if left unchallenged—can reinforce institutional hierarchies that diminish learner voice and agency.

Even so, the emergence of extended IRF sequences—though infrequent—demonstrates that teacher discourse has the potential to evolve toward a more dialogic mode, especially when supported by intentional scaffolding. As Alexander (2008) argues, dialogic teaching requires a balance between structure and responsiveness, allowing space for learners to think, inquire, and contribute meaningfully. To that end, EFL instructors might consider increasing their use of referential questions, encouraging uptake of student ideas, and reframing feedback as an invitation to elaborate rather than a signal of closure.

In sum, although the IRF framework remains pedagogically valuable for organizing interaction and maintaining classroom flow, its uncritical or rigid implementation can limit learners' opportunities for active engagement and linguistic growth. By recognizing and leveraging moments of interactional expansion—such as chained IRF sequences—teachers can foster more inclusive, student-centered discourse practices within EFL contexts.

This excerpt illustrates an IRF sequence in which the teacher provides immediate corrective feedback following a student's grammatical error, thereby limiting the opportunity for self-repair. While the intervention ensures linguistic accuracy, it prioritizes correctness over student reflection. As Ellis (2003) emphasizes, interlanguage development depends on learners' ability to notice, test, and revise their output—processes that are hindered when correction is immediate and unelaborated.

From a discourse perspective, the classroom appeared orderly, linguistically focused, and responsive. However, its interactional structure reflected asymmetrical power relations, where the teacher retained sole control over turn-taking, topic direction, and feedback. Students' roles were largely passive and reactive, affirming the teacher's authority rather than co-constructing meaning. Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1997) argue that such institutional discourse patterns, if unexamined, perpetuate educational hierarchies that limit learner agency.

Nonetheless, the presence of extended IRF sequences—even if limited—highlights the latent potential for more dialogic engagement when teaching intentions and scaffolding strategies are aligned. As Alexander (2008) contends, dialogic teaching is not about abandoning structure, but about inviting learner voice within it. Encouraging referential questions, adopting flexible feedback practices, and giving students space to elaborate are small but meaningful shifts that can transform the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom from monologic control toward shared understanding.

These findings underscore the need for intentional pedagogical reflection. While the IRF model offers a practical framework for managing classroom flow, its rigid application may inhibit learners' communicative development. Recognizing and leveraging moments of interactional expansion—such as chaining or embedded feedback—can empower teachers to foster more inclusive and student-centered discourse in EFL contexts.

Expanded IRF Chains and Dialogic Potential

Although the majority of the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom observed adhered strictly to the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, deeper analysis revealed several moments where teachers engaged in extended IRF chains. These interactions consisted of embedded prompts, encouraging students to elaborate beyond single-word answers. For example, follow-up questions such as "Why do you think so?" or "Can you add more?" allowed students to momentarily take an active role in shaping the exchange.

This pattern mirrors what Mercer and Howe (2012) describe as a shift toward dialogic space—where student responses are not merely evaluated, but expanded. Such chains also align with Alexander's (2008) vision of dialogic teaching, which emphasizes cumulative and exploratory talk. Although brief and often prompted, these moments indicate the teacher's potential to scaffold interaction toward more authentic communication.

In interpreting classroom silence, particularly the lack of spontaneous student-initiated questions or challenges, it is crucial to consider sociocultural norms embedded in Indonesian classrooms. As Nuraini (2016) asserts, EFL learners in Indonesia often perceive teachers as authoritative figures, and this perception influences turn-taking behavior and willingness to engage.

Rather than attributing silence solely to passivity, it may reflect students' effort to be respectful or avoid public error. From a discourse standpoint, this reinforces Fairclough's (1995) argument that educational talk is shaped by institutional and ideological forces. Teachers therefore bear a dual responsibility – not only to manage interactional flow, but also to normalize dialogic exchange through trust-building, modeling risk-taking, and legitimizing learner voice.

Pedagogical Reflections and Adaptive Classroom Strategies

The classroom interactions analyzed in this study highlight not only a linguistic pattern but also a pedagogical mindset that prioritizes order and control over exploratory learning. While the IRF model ensures structure and efficient classroom management, its excessive use can suppress spontaneity and student voice – elements critical in communicative language teaching. The predominance of display questions, immediate feedback, and teacher-led turn-taking collectively construct a learning environment that favors correctness over communicative risk-taking.

To address this tension, Walsh (2011) encourages the development of teachers' "interactional awareness" – a reflective capacity to notice, interpret, and adapt language use in real time. This involves monitoring not just what is being said, but how talk unfolds, who initiates, and whose voice carries pedagogical weight. For instance, replacing rapid evaluative feedback with prompts such as "Tell me more", "Why do you think that?", or even simple re-voicing techniques can shift interactional dynamics. These small discursive shifts invite students to take ownership of their learning while still operating within a structured framework.

In this light, the teacher's role evolves from sole transmitter of knowledge to facilitator of exploratory dialogue. As Alexander (2008) asserts, this does not mean abandoning control, but redistributing it to include learners as co-constructors of meaning. Particularly in contexts where learner agency has traditionally been minimized, such as Indonesian EFL classrooms, even subtle adjustments in discourse strategy can foster more inclusive and empowering participation.

Cultural norms play a significant role in shaping teacher-student interactions, particularly in relation to authority, politeness, and classroom participation. In high power distance cultures like Indonesia, students tend to adopt a more passive role, often refraining from questioning or challenging teachers, which reinforces teacher-dominated Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) patterns. Additionally, communication styles that emphasize indirectness and face-saving may result in minimal verbal responses or silence during feedback moments, as students seek to avoid embarrassment or confrontation. In collectivist societies, the emphasis on group harmony over individual expression further limits spontaneous student talk, as speaking out may be seen as disruptive or self-promoting. For instance, in the Tambusai study, students frequently remained silent even when encouraged to ask questions, a behavior likely rooted in cultural respect for authority and a preference for maintaining social harmony.

Institutional Factors

The structure and expectations of the educational system significantly influence classroom discourse, often shaping it toward teacher-centered interactions. Curriculum designs that emphasize rote learning and standardized testing tend to encourage the use of Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) patterns, as teachers prioritize content coverage and efficiency. Furthermore, teacher training programs that focus predominantly on lecture-based instruction may leave educators unequipped to implement dialogic or student-centered approaches. High-stakes assessment environments also contribute to this dynamic, as the

pressure to achieve exam success discourages open-ended discussions that may be perceived as time-consuming or divergent from tested material. In the Tambusai classroom, this was evident in the emphasis on grammatical accuracy and pattern recall, reflecting an educational system geared more toward correctness than communicative competence.

Pedagogical Factors

Teachers' beliefs, training, and classroom management approaches play a crucial role in shaping classroom discourse. Educators who see themselves primarily as knowledge transmitters often dominate classroom talk and rely heavily on rigid Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) patterns, limiting student interaction. In large or mixed-ability classrooms, IRF can also serve as a practical tool to maintain order and ensure content delivery within time constraints. Additionally, resource limitations—such as inadequate access to teaching materials or technology—further hinder the implementation of interactive or multimodal discourse strategies. For example, in the observed class, even during group activities, interactions were tightly structured and time-restricted, reflecting a pedagogical focus on control and efficiency over open-ended exploration.

Bringing It Together

The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern is more than a linguistic routine—it mirrors underlying cultural, social, and institutional dynamics that shape classroom interactions. Moving toward more dialogic, student-centered discourse requires challenging deep-seated cultural assumptions about authority and participation, especially in contexts where deference to teachers and group harmony discourage open expression. Institutional reforms are also essential, including curriculum and assessment policies that prioritize interaction, critical thinking, and communication over rote memorization. Equally important is the need to support teachers through professional development that encourages pedagogical innovation, reflective practice, and the adoption of discourse strategies that empower student voice and engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the discourse patterns of an Indonesian EFL classroom by applying Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) IRF model to naturally occurring classroom talk. The analysis revealed a dominant reliance on teacher-led Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) cycles, where the lecturer initiated, directed, and evaluated nearly all verbal exchanges. Student talk was minimal, often confined to brief and accurate responses, with limited opportunities for elaboration, negotiation of meaning, or peer interaction.

While the IRF model offered a systematic lens to understand the structure and flow of the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom, its rigid and repetitive application—particularly in the form of display questioning and swift evaluative feedback—suggested a pedagogical orientation that emphasized correctness and control over communicative development. The lack of student-initiated turns, spontaneous questions, or extended utterances revealed an interactional imbalance, where talk was used more as a means of checking knowledge than co-constructing it.

Nonetheless, the emergence of more complex IRF sequences—characterized by chaining and embedded feedback—demonstrated moments of dialogic potential. In these episodes, the lecturer temporarily sustained a chain of prompts, encouraging learners to apply target language forms in context and elaborate on their responses. Although such interactions remained teacher-initiated and controlled, they signified opportunities for evolving toward a more student-responsive discourse style. These findings resonate with the work of Alexander (2008), who highlights that dialogic teaching does not require abandoning structure, but rather adapting it to allow learners to engage with content through reflective talk and meaningful exchange.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, it highlights the need for increased awareness among language educators regarding the implications of their discourse moves. Seemingly minor choices—such as the types of questions asked, the wait time given, or the

nature of feedback—carry significant consequences for student participation and learning. Teachers may benefit from professional development that focuses on discourse-sensitive pedagogy, where the goal is not just to cover content but to cultivate student agency through interaction.

Second, this study underscores the importance of promoting a culture of participation in EFL classrooms—especially within contexts where traditional norms often place the teacher as the sole authority. By integrating referential questions, encouraging peer-to-peer exchanges, and providing scaffolding that supports student elaboration and clarification, teachers can gradually reorient the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom toward more equitable and empowering practices. Technologies such as discussion forums, collaborative writing platforms, or dialogic apps may also support students in experimenting with language use in less pressurized environments, bridging in-class instruction and out-of-class practice.

From a research perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature examining how micro-level discourse features reflect macro-level ideologies in educational settings. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1997), the findings reaffirm that interaction patterns are not neutral; they embody pedagogical values, institutional expectations, and cultural assumptions about authority and learning. Further studies might investigate how teacher beliefs, textbook design, or institutional policies shape discourse moves, and how these can be disrupted or reimagined to support dialogic engagement.

In conclusion, while the IRF model remains a valuable tool for structuring language instruction and maintaining pedagogical clarity, its overreliance may hinder students' communicative competence if not applied flexibly. By critically examining and expanding the IRF framework to incorporate more inclusive, student-centered strategies, EFL educators can move closer toward discourse practices that are not only structured and effective, but also participatory, empowering, and responsive to the dynamic needs of language learners.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the role of verbal interaction in developing speaking competence classroom in the observed Indonesian EFL context continues to be dominated by teacher-controlled IRF patterns. While such structure provides organization and clarity, it often limits student agency, reduces opportunities for authentic interaction, and reinforces hierarchical communication. Instances of IRF chaining and embedded prompts suggest potential for dialogic engagement, yet these moments remain infrequent and largely teacher-directed. To support more equitable and communicative classroom environments, teachers are encouraged to adopt adaptive discourse strategies. These include the use of referential questions, delaying immediate correction to promote self-repair, and incorporating prompts that invite elaboration rather than closure. In addition, cultivating interactional awareness can help teachers monitor and adjust their talk to be more responsive, inclusive, and learner-centered. Institutions may also support pedagogical reflection by providing training on discourse-sensitive teaching, promoting peer collaboration among educators, and encouraging classroom inquiry as a form of continuous professional development. As dialogic pedagogy increasingly becomes a goal in language education, this study underscores the importance of recognizing classroom talk not merely as instructional delivery, but as a co-constructed social practice that shapes learners' identities, confidence, and communicative competence. The study revealed several key findings regarding classroom discourse patterns. First, teacher-student interaction was dominated by rigid Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) structures, with the teacher controlling the flow of dialogue and students contributing only brief, formulaic responses. Second, spontaneous student participation was minimal; even when prompted, many students remained silent—likely due to cultural norms and a strong respect for authority. However, there were instances of extended IRF chains where teachers asked follow-up questions, offering glimpses of dialogic potential and deeper engagement,

although these exchanges remained largely teacher-led. Lastly, the classroom focus was heavily skewed toward linguistic accuracy, as teachers corrected errors immediately, which reinforced surface-level correctness but restricted opportunities for reflection, self-correction, and more exploratory language use. To foster more meaningful and student-centered classroom discourse, several practical strategies are recommended. Teachers should use referential, open-ended questions – such as “Why do you think we use this form?” – to prompt critical thinking and elicit richer student responses. Rather than correcting mistakes immediately, allowing students time to self-repair encourages reflection and deeper language awareness. Enhancing teachers’ interactional awareness is also crucial, helping them to adapt their talk in ways that are more inclusive and responsive to student input. Creating a safe and supportive classroom environment is essential to encourage student initiative, where learners feel comfortable asking questions, expressing ideas, and making mistakes without fear of judgment. Additionally, integrating technology – such as online forums, dialogic apps, or collaborative digital platforms – can extend opportunities for dialogue beyond the classroom and help students build confidence in using the language in more flexible, interactive contexts.

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