

Teacher and Student Interaction in English Language Classrooms

Review Article

Fatime Ismayilli

Lecturer, Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

Email: fatimeismayilli@ndu.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9762-7446>

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Abstract

Teacher and student interaction shapes opportunities to use English, negotiate understanding, and respond to feedback. However, visible participation alone provides an incomplete account of its educational value. This article examines how interaction can support language learning through a selective narrative review of research on instructed second language acquisition, classroom discourse, learner engagement, and online teaching. It distinguishes interaction, participation, engagement, and learning, and uses these distinctions to analyse questioning, teacher follow-up, corrective feedback, peer collaboration, and inclusive participation. The synthesis suggests that productive exchanges depend on how teachers respond to learner contributions, how tasks create a need to communicate, and whether students can influence the developing discussion. A proposed sixty-minute lesson illustrates how these principles can inform classroom planning without treating the illustration as empirical evidence. The article also presents a practical approach to reviewing interaction through brief classroom records, learner perspectives, and subsequent language use. It argues for context-sensitive decisions about teacher guidance and learner agency, with particular attention to quieter learners, multilingual resources, and the limits of participation counts as evidence of learning.

Keywords: *teacher–student interaction; English language teaching; classroom discourse; learner engagement; corrective feedback; peer interaction; classroom interactional competence*

1. Introduction

An English lesson offers learners opportunities to encounter language and to act through it. When a student explains an opinion, asks for clarification, or revises an utterance after feedback, classroom communication becomes part of the learning process. Teachers influence these opportunities through the questions they ask, the responses they recognise, and the time they allow students to develop an idea. Hall and Walsh (2002) place teacher–student interaction within the organisation of classroom learning, while Loewen and Sato (2018) examine its relationship with processes of second language development. Together, these perspectives direct attention to what participants accomplish through exchanges.

The term interactive is nevertheless used loosely in educational practice. A lesson may include frequent questions, digital polls, and group activities while leaving learners little responsibility for meaning. Students may supply isolated answers that the teacher immediately evaluates, or groups may complete a worksheet through one confident member. Conversely, a short teacher explanation may help learners resolve a difficulty and participate more independently afterwards. The educational question concerns the relationship between interaction and the purpose of a particular activity. A count of turns or minutes of student talk cannot establish that relationship by itself.

This distinction matters in English as a foreign language settings, where the classroom may provide an important space for sustained English use. Teachers must balance curriculum coverage, linguistic accuracy, and participation within limited lesson time. Learners also differ in proficiency, confidence, prior educational experience, and access to relevant vocabulary. A practice that produces extended discussion in one group may create confusion or public embarrassment in another. Research on interaction therefore needs to be interpreted through the conditions of teaching rather than converted directly into universal rules.

This article develops a pedagogical synthesis around three questions. First, which features of teacher responses make classroom exchanges useful for English learning? Second, how can task design and participation structures extend learner agency while maintaining appropriate guidance? Third, what evidence can teachers use to review the quality of interaction without mistaking activity for learning? The discussion addresses face-to-face English lessons and considers online interaction where it changes the teacher's responsibilities. Its practical illustration concerns a university class, although several principles may be adapted for other settings.

The article's contribution is an integrated account of the relationship between interactional practices and the evidence used to evaluate them. It brings language development, classroom discourse, and engagement into a common planning discussion, while preserving differences between their research traditions. It also translates the synthesis into a lesson sequence and a manageable process of teacher reflection. These are proposals for classroom use and investigation. The article does not report an intervention, claim an effect size, or present a new dataset.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Interaction and second language development

Interactionist approaches explain how communication can connect input, attention, feedback, and language production. A misunderstanding may prompt a learner to request repetition or ask what an expression means. An interlocutor may then modify an explanation, giving the learner another opportunity to understand it. Producing an answer can also expose a gap between the meaning a learner intends and the language currently available. Loewen and Sato (2018) review these relationships and show why interaction must be examined through its features, participants, and instructional conditions.

Evidence of development requires particular care. Mackey's (1999) study of adult English learners linked participation in task-based interaction with development in question formation, using a pretest–posttest design. Such research supports examining what learners do during interaction and what they can do subsequently. It does not establish that every conversational exchange produces durable development. Understanding a message, repeating a correction, and independently using an unfamiliar structure represent different outcomes.

This article therefore treats classroom exchanges as opportunities whose consequences require further evidence.

The distinction has practical implications for teaching. A clarification request may help a learner recover the intended message without drawing attention to its grammatical form. Alternatively, a brief focus on an expression may interrupt the task but enable more accurate later use. Teachers need to consider the lesson objective when deciding whether to sustain meaning-focused communication or temporarily direct attention to language. Interaction becomes pedagogically purposeful when these decisions respond to the difficulty learners display.

2.2. Classroom discourse and contingent support

Classroom discourse research examines how participants organise learning in the unfolding exchange. A teacher's utterance gains its function through the activity and the response that follows. The same question can check recall, invite an explanation, or help a learner continue speaking. Walsh (2011) describes classroom interactional competence as a way of understanding how teachers and learners use interaction to support learning. This perspective makes the fit between language use and pedagogical purpose central to classroom analysis.

Many lessons include an initiation–response–follow-up sequence. The teacher asks a question, a learner responds, and the teacher supplies a third turn. Nassaji and Wells (2000) show that this structure can serve different educational functions depending especially on the follow-up. Their study concerns classroom dialogue more broadly, so it should not be treated as direct evidence for every English teaching context. It nevertheless provides a useful analytical point: a third turn can close an exchange through evaluation or extend it by asking for reasons and connecting contributions.

Contingent support means assistance adjusted to the learner's current contribution. A teacher may offer a keyword when a student struggles, then return the turn so the student can complete the explanation. Supplying the entire answer can remove that opportunity. Walsh's (2002) analysis of EFL teacher talk identifies how teachers can facilitate or obstruct learner involvement through such moment-by-moment choices. The relevant judgement concerns whether assistance enables the student's next action and whether responsibility gradually returns to the learner.

2.3. Participation and engagement

Participation describes observable involvement, including speaking, writing, responding, and contributing to a shared task. Engagement concerns the quality of learners' involvement and includes cognitive, affective, behavioural, and social dimensions. Philp and Duchesne (2016) discuss these dimensions in language tasks, while Hiver et al. (2024) document variation in how language learning research defines and measures engagement. These accounts make it difficult to justify a single behavioural indicator as a complete measure.

A learner who speaks briefly may be listening closely, comparing alternatives, and preparing a response. Another may speak frequently while repeating familiar language without attending to partners. Teachers therefore need evidence beyond volume and fluency. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) discuss the classroom conditions that help initiate and sustain engagement, including relationships and task experiences. For the present article, engagement offers a way to ask whether students invest effort and respond to one another, while participation records show how opportunities are distributed.

3. Methodology

This article uses a selective narrative review to develop a conceptual and pedagogical synthesis. It draws on twenty-two publications dated between 1999 and 2025, combining journal research and reviews with three scholarly books. The selection gives priority to work directly addressing teacher–student discourse, interaction in instructed language learning, corrective feedback, engagement, and the mediation of online lessons. Earlier publications provide concepts still used in analysing classroom exchanges; recent publications extend the discussion to engagement measurement, digital interaction, and teacher reflection.

Source discovery used targeted searches of publisher websites and institutional repositories, followed by checks of publication records and available abstracts or full texts. Search expressions included teacher–student interaction, classroom interactional competence, oral corrective feedback, task engagement, and synchronous online language teaching. References were also followed across relevant publications. These procedures were intended to establish relevance and bibliographic accuracy. They did not constitute a comprehensive search of Scopus or Web of Science, and no claim of complete coverage is made.

The synthesis organised the selected work around four analytical concerns: opportunities to develop a contribution, assistance with language and understanding, access to participation, and evidence of subsequent learning. Empirical findings were interpreted with attention to their setting and design. Perception studies were used to discuss reported experience, classroom analyses to examine interactional practices, and reviews to locate wider conceptual issues. These forms of evidence were not combined into a quantitative estimate of effectiveness.

The review is interpretive and has no independently replicated screening or coding procedure. Its English-language focus and selective sourcing may omit relevant studies and perspectives. The proposed lesson and dialogue below were constructed for this article; neither is a classroom observation. They demonstrate possible applications of the synthesis and require contextual adaptation and empirical evaluation.

4. Analysis of Interactional Practices

4.1. *Questions and teacher follow-up*

Questions shape what counts as an acceptable contribution. A question with one expected answer can help check vocabulary or establish a shared understanding before discussion. An open question can invite reasoning, but its grammatical form does not guarantee an open exchange. If the teacher accepts only one preferred opinion or immediately supplies the conclusion, students may learn that elaboration is unnecessary. Classroom analysis should therefore examine the response space created by the question and what the teacher does after an answer.

A useful planning distinction concerns the immediate purpose of the exchange. When checking the past tense of an unfamiliar verb, a concise answer may be appropriate. When discussing a character's decision or a proposed solution to a problem, reasons and alternative interpretations become relevant. Teachers can support the latter through follow-ups that refer directly to student ideas: asking what evidence supports a claim, inviting a comparison, or requesting an example. These moves make students' contributions consequential to the developing lesson rather than interchangeable answers.

Time also affects participation. After a demanding question, learners may need to identify an idea and formulate it in English. A brief preparation interval, written note, or pair rehearsal can make that process more manageable. Teachers should judge waiting time through the task and learners' responses rather than apply a fixed duration as a guarantee of quality. Rephrasing repeatedly or answering one's own question too quickly may prevent students from attempting an answer. Waiting without clarifying an inaccessible task can be equally unproductive.

The following constructed exchange illustrates a possible extension of a student contribution. It is an instructional example, not research data.

Teacher: Which change would improve the university library?

Student: Longer opening hours.

Teacher: What problem would that solve for students like you?

Student: Some students work in the afternoon. They need somewhere quiet in the evening.

Teacher: Who has a different need, and how could we compare the two proposals?

Here the follow-up gives the student a reason to explain and invites classmates to work with the explanation. An observer would still need to examine who responds, whether disagreement is possible, and how the teacher handles competing proposals. The exchange alone cannot demonstrate engagement or language development. It identifies an interactional opportunity that subsequent turns may develop or close.

4.2. Corrective feedback within communication

Corrective feedback can provide information about language while maintaining a connection to a learner's intended meaning. Lyster et al. (2013) review oral feedback in second language classrooms, including differences among feedback types and the conditions affecting their use. A recast reformulates an utterance, whereas a prompt can encourage the learner to attempt a revision. The instructional decision depends on what the student is trying to do, the target difficulty, and the learner's ability to respond.

For example, a student discussing a past event might say, "Yesterday she go to the library." A teacher could briefly reformulate the sentence, invite self-correction through "Yesterday she...?", or return to the expression after the discussion. These are possible choices rather than an effectiveness ranking. During a discussion focused on maintaining a claim, delayed attention to recurring forms may preserve continuity. During practice of past-tense narration, an immediate prompt may fit the stated goal. Learners should understand why attention shifts between meaning and form.

Feedback also needs an opportunity for use. A teacher's explanation followed immediately by a new topic leaves little evidence of the student's understanding. A short revision, another example, or a later task can show whether the learner can act on the information. Immediate successful repair should be recorded as an immediate response. Claims about learning require evidence of more independent or sustained use, ideally beyond the original exchange. Teachers can make this distinction without turning every lesson into a formal experiment.

4.3. Peer interaction and teacher guidance

Pair and group work can increase simultaneous opportunities to communicate, but the organisation of collaboration matters. Sato (2017) investigated interaction mindsets,

behaviours, and development in two Chilean secondary EFL classes. The study connects learners' orientations towards interaction with what they do during peer tasks and their learning. Its contextual evidence supports attending to how students understand collaboration, rather than assuming that a seating arrangement produces productive exchanges.

Tasks should give learners a reason to attend to a partner. An information gap, a decision requiring justification, or a comparison of different interpretations can create such a reason. Ellis et al. (2020) situate tasks within a broader approach that considers design, classroom methodology, and assessment. A classroom application might distribute different information to partners, require a shared decision, and ask students to explain the evidence behind it. If every learner can complete the activity without listening, the communicative purpose needs reconsideration.

Teacher guidance remains necessary. Before the task, learners may need a model of clarification, a manageable vocabulary resource, and an explicit outcome. During interaction, the teacher can monitor selected groups and offer assistance when communication breaks down. Repeated interruption may turn peer work into a succession of teacher-controlled exchanges, while complete withdrawal may leave exclusion unnoticed. After the task, the teacher can bring useful expressions and unresolved questions into whole-class discussion without naming students as examples of failure.

Roles should support access without becoming permanent identities. A recorder may contribute little orally, and a recurring spokesperson may receive most public recognition. Rotating responsibilities and asking different members to explain the group's reasoning can reveal whose ideas have entered the product. Teachers can also invite students to report a partner's contribution before giving their own. These are proposed participation structures; their value must be checked against what actually happens in the group.

4.4. Relationships and inclusive participation

Students' willingness to speak depends partly on how they expect others to respond. Zarrinabadi's (2014) qualitative study examined learners' descriptions of situations in which teachers influenced their willingness to communicate. Dewaele and Li (2021), using mixed methods with university EFL learners in China, reported relationships among perceived teacher enthusiasm, enjoyment, boredom, and social-behavioural engagement. These studies justify considering learners' experiences of classroom interaction. They do not establish that a particular teacher manner causes the same response in every setting.

Inclusive participation requires predictable opportunities and respectful treatment of contributions. Teachers can explain that clarification and revision are ordinary parts of communication, model disagreement with an idea, and acknowledge the substance of an answer before addressing its language. Offering time to rehearse or an initial written response can reduce the immediate demands of public speaking. Such options should help learners enter spoken interaction progressively rather than assign quieter students a permanently silent role.

Multilingual resources also deserve deliberate attention. Li (2018) presents translanguaging as a theoretical account of multilingual and multimodal meaning-making. This perspective challenges the assumption that every use of another language signals disengagement. In an English lesson, brief comparison of meanings or planning through a familiar language may help learners prepare an English contribution. That pedagogical suggestion is an inference from the framework, not an experimentally established outcome of the present review. Teachers still need to protect meaningful opportunities to use English and ensure that shared-language practices do not exclude classmates.

4.5. Digital mediation

Online interaction changes how teachers identify understanding and allocate turns. Moorhouse et al. (2023) discuss e-classroom interactional competencies, recognising that synchronous teaching requires skills beyond those used in a physical classroom. In a separate study of five university English teachers in Hong Kong, Moorhouse et al. (2022) examined professional practices across a semester of synchronous online lessons. Both publications place mediation within the specific affordances and constraints of online communication.

Chat, shared documents, and breakout rooms can create additional routes into an exchange, but participation needs coordination. A teacher may invite written preparation in chat and then ask students to compare two responses orally. A shared document can make group reasoning visible when each member contributes a reason. Instructions should specify the outcome and how help can be requested. A poll response or an open microphone is insufficient evidence of meaningful engagement, and connectivity difficulties should be considered when interpreting silence or delayed responses.

Table 1 summarises the four processes. Its indicators are observation prompts, not a validated assessment instrument.

Table 1. Distinguishing classroom processes and learning evidence

Focus	Possible evidence	Limit of the inference
Interaction	Linked contributions, clarification, response to another idea	Frequent exchanges may remain repetitive
Participation	Distribution of turns and contributions across learners	Equal turn counts do not establish equal involvement
Engagement	Sustained reasoning, attention to partners, learner accounts	Behaviour alone cannot reveal every dimension
Learning	More independent language use in a later task	Immediate repair alone does not show durable development

5. An Illustrative Lesson Sequence

The following proposal translates the analysis into a sixty-minute English lesson for a hypothetical university group working around B1 level. The communicative goal is to recommend an improvement to a campus study space and justify the recommendation against alternatives. Language resources include giving reasons, comparing options, asking for clarification, and expressing qualified agreement. The topic can be replaced with another locally relevant problem. The lesson assumes access to paper materials and therefore does not depend on personal digital devices.

The teacher prepares short information cards about three possible improvements: longer opening hours, additional quiet areas, and more power sockets. Each option has an indicative cost and a limitation. All figures on these cards would be fictional teaching materials, clearly identified as such. Partners receive partly different information and must exchange it before choosing a proposal. The aim is to create a reason to listen and compare constraints, rather than simply announce a preference. Table 2 sets out the proposed sequence.

Table 2. Proposed sixty-minute lesson on improving a campus study space

Phase	Min.	Interaction design	Evidence to notice
Initial response	7	Individual notes followed by a brief class poll	Range of initial preferences
Preparation	8	Pair rehearsal with optional language support	Questions and explanations attempted

Phase	Min.	Interaction design	Evidence to notice
Information exchange	15	Partners combine different cards and choose an option	Clarification and use of partner information
Comparison	10	Two pairs compare decisions and challenge one reason	Responses to competing arguments
Class discussion	12	Selected reports, linked contributions, focused feedback	Distribution and development of ideas
Revision and reflection	8	Individual revised recommendation and exit response	Use of feedback and remaining difficulty

Preparation makes the outcome and the participation expectations clear. The teacher models one request for clarification and one respectful challenge, then invites students to adapt them. Optional sentence beginnings can support learners who need them, while others formulate their own expressions. Students are told that a convincing recommendation needs information from their partner and a response to another option. This criterion helps connect listening with the final product. It also gives the teacher a basis for checking collaboration beyond the appearance of busy pairs.

During the information exchange, the teacher samples a small number of groups instead of attempting to record every utterance. Notes might capture whether students ask about unfamiliar information, whether one partner repeatedly completes the other's turn, and whether each student contributes a reason. When assistance is needed, the teacher can provide a word or a clarification and then return responsibility to the pair. The teacher also records selected language for later discussion, including effective expressions as well as recurring difficulties.

Whole-class reporting begins with the group's reasoning. A follow-up can ask another group whether the same evidence supports its choice. This creates a link between reports and gives students a reason to listen beyond their own presentation. The teacher then addresses a limited number of language points related to the lesson goal and invites learners to revise their recommendations. The final individual response includes a choice, a reason drawn from the exchange, and a response to an alternative. An exit question asks which contribution changed or strengthened the student's thinking.

The proposed sequence needs adjustment for class size, proficiency, and available time. Beginners may require fewer options, visual prompts, and shorter exchanges. More advanced learners may analyse the reliability of the information or negotiate a compromise. In a large class, the teacher can sample different groups over successive lessons and use brief written reports to identify overlooked contributions. These adaptations retain the relationship between a communicative need, accessible support, and evidence of individual understanding. The sequence remains a design proposal until it is implemented and evaluated.

6. Discussion

6.1. *Reviewing the quality of interaction*

The synthesis suggests that productive interaction involves a relationship between the task, teacher responses, learner contributions, and subsequent opportunities to use language. No single feature is sufficient. An open question needs an accessible topic and a follow-up that allows elaboration. Peer work needs a communicative purpose and participation structures that make partners' ideas relevant. Feedback needs a response opportunity. These connections explain why a lesson can contain recognised interactive techniques while providing uneven access to learning.

A manageable review can begin with one local question, such as whether teacher follow-up extends students' explanations or whether pair preparation broadens participation. The teacher can examine a short lesson segment and record who initiates a contribution, how the next speaker responds, and what happens after a difficulty. Student work and a brief learner reflection can then add perspectives that an interaction record cannot supply. Table 1 helps keep observations about participation separate from interpretations of engagement and claims about learning.

Video can support this process where recording is appropriate and consent and institutional procedures are followed. Sert (2024) reports perspectives on video-enhanced reflection in Swedish teacher education. Sert et al. (2025) analyse a student-teacher's development through reflection on negative evaluation in classroom interaction. These studies provide context-specific grounds for using records of actual teaching in professional learning. Their implications concern careful examination of practice; they do not make recording itself a sufficient cause of improvement.

Where recording is impractical, teachers can use an observer's notes, a seating-plan tally, selected student products, or a brief post-lesson account of a difficult exchange. Each source has limits. A tally shows distribution but loses the content of turns. A teacher's recollection may overlook less visible students. Learner comments reveal experience but cannot independently establish acquisition. Comparing two or more modest sources can make a local judgement more credible without requiring elaborate measurement in every lesson.

6.2. Context and limits of transfer

Evidence should be transferred cautiously across educational settings. Şimşek and Çapar's (2022) review of English classroom interaction research in Turkey identifies contextual and methodological concentrations within that literature. Yao and Shao (2024) examine factors shaping teacher–student interaction from a language socialisation perspective in a Chinese foreign language teaching context. Such work draws attention to classroom expectations and social relationships. It does not justify describing all learners within a country as having one participation style.

For English teaching in Azerbaijan, these considerations suggest investigating local expectations about teacher authority, error correction, language choice, and public speaking before importing a particular routine. This article includes no classroom data from Azerbaijan and makes no claim about the prevalence of these expectations there. Teachers can begin by asking students how they experience different participation arrangements and by comparing those accounts with classroom events. Local adaptation should remain open to differences within the same class.

The relationship between research and practice also requires dialogue. Sato and Loewen (2019) examine teachers' engagement with research and the research–pedagogy relationship. For the present synthesis, a useful application is to treat research as a basis for informed classroom questions. A teacher can try a more specific follow-up, observe who develops an answer, and revise the approach. This modest process makes the reasoning behind a decision reviewable and keeps contextual experience relevant to professional knowledge.

The review's selective design limits its conclusions. It does not compare all available interventions, estimate relative effect sizes, or establish which practice works best for a specified population. Its conceptual distinctions and lesson proposal need further investigation. Future studies could examine how changes in teacher follow-up affect opportunities across proficiency groups, using interaction records alongside learner perspectives and delayed

language tasks. Such designs would connect classroom processes with outcomes while allowing for alternative explanations, including task familiarity and differences in initial proficiency.

7. Conclusion

Teacher and student interaction supports English learning when classroom exchanges give learners opportunities to develop meaning, resolve difficulty, and use assistance more independently. The reviewed literature directs attention to the organisation and consequences of participation. Questions, feedback, collaboration, and digital tools acquire educational value through the ways teachers and students use them within particular activities.

The article has proposed a distinction between interaction, participation, engagement, and learning to guide planning and reflection. Its illustrative lesson shows how a communicative purpose can be linked to preparation, peer exchange, whole-class discussion, and individual revision. These proposals need adaptation and evaluation in actual classrooms. Teachers can begin with a focused question about their own interactional choices and use brief classroom evidence to judge whether more learners can contribute and what they can subsequently do in English.

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