



PEDAGOGIK

Jurnal Pendidikan dan Riset

E-ISSN: 3025-7719

Vol. 4, No. 3 Tahun 2026, hal. 192-198

A Discourse Analysis of Classroom Interaction Based on The Sinclair IRF Model Perspective at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan

Alfira Khairunnisa Br Nadapdap¹, Jemima Indah Andayani²,
Nia Kristin Sianturi³, Nazwa Nur Rahmi⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

Jalan Williem Iskandar Pasar V Medan Estate, Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara, 20371

Email: alfirakhairunnisa0704@gmail.com¹, jemimapinem17@gmail.com²,
niasianturi17@gamil.com³, nazwanurrahmi17@gmail.com⁴

Corresponding Author: Alfira Khairunnisa Br Nadapdap

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze classroom interaction using the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) model and to identify why the interaction tended to be short and limited. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, focusing on English classroom interaction. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, and classroom observation was used as the main data collection method. The data were analyzed based on the IRF framework proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard. The findings showed that the IRF pattern was consistently used in classroom interaction. However, its implementation was relatively simple, repetitive, and sometimes incomplete. The complete IRF pattern appeared in several interactions, while some interactions only consisted of Initiation and Response without Feedback. In addition, the interaction was characterized by short student responses, repetitive teacher questions, lack of follow-up, and strong teacher dominance. These conditions resulted in limited interaction and reduced opportunities for meaningful communication. The study concluded that although the IRF structure was present, it was not effectively used to promote active student participation and language development.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, IRF Model, Discourse Analysis, Teacher-student interaction, English classroom

INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction is an essential part of the teaching and learning process, especially in language classrooms where communication is both the goal and the tool of learning. Through interaction, students have the opportunity to practice the language, express their ideas, and build understanding actively rather than just

receiving information from the teacher. As Walsh (2011) points out, meaningful interaction in the classroom can support students' language development by engaging them in real communication.

However, in many classrooms, interaction does not always happen in a balanced way. Teachers often dominate the conversation, controlling who speaks, when they speak, and what they say. As a result, students may have limited chances to participate actively. Tsui (2001) explains that this kind of teacher-centered interaction can reduce student engagement and make learning less effective, especially in developing communicative skills.

One way to understand classroom interaction more clearly is by using the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model introduced by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). This model describes a common pattern in classroom communication: the teacher starts with a question or instruction (initiation), students respond, and then the teacher gives feedback. This pattern is widely found in many classrooms and helps researchers analyze how interaction is organized.

Even though the IRF model is useful, many studies have shown that this pattern can sometimes limit interaction. Nassaji and Wells (2000) found that students' responses in IRF sequences are often short and focused only on giving the correct answer. Similarly, Cullen (2002) argues that teachers' feedback is often limited to simple evaluation, such as saying "good" or "yes," without encouraging further discussion. Because of this, classroom interaction may become less meaningful and does not fully support deeper learning.

In addition, the frequent use of IRF patterns can reduce opportunities for more interactive and student-centered communication. When teachers mostly ask questions they already know the answers to, students are less likely to give longer or more thoughtful responses. This can limit the development of students' communication skills and critical thinking.

Based on these issues, it is important to look more closely at how classroom interaction actually happens in real situations. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze classroom interaction using the IRF model and to find out why the interaction in the classroom tended to be short and limited. This research was conducted in an English classroom at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. It is expected that the findings of this study can help improve classroom interaction and support more effective language learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted in SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan and involved one English teacher along with a group of students in the classroom. The participants were selected because they were directly involved in the teaching and learning process, which made them relevant to the focus of this research. Rather than focusing on individual characteristics of the participants, this study mainly paid attention to how interaction naturally occurred between the teacher and students during classroom activities.

The teacher played an important role in managing the classroom and guiding the interaction, while the students responded to the teacher's questions, instructions, and explanations. By observing both sides of this interaction, the researcher was able to get a clearer picture of how communication was structured and how actively students participated in the lesson. The focus, therefore, was not on evaluating the participants, but on understanding the interaction patterns that emerged during the learning process.

Instruments

This study employed classroom observation as the primary instrument for data collection. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, meaning that the researcher did not interfere with the teaching and learning process. This approach was used to ensure that the data reflected natural classroom interaction (Creswell, 2014).

To support the observation, the researcher used field notes and audio recordings. Field notes were used to document important classroom events, such as teacher questions, student responses, and classroom atmosphere. Meanwhile, audio recordings were used to capture the exact verbal interaction between teacher and students, ensuring the accuracy of the data during the transcription process.

The focus of the observation was on identifying interaction patterns based on the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). This model was used as an analytical framework to examine how classroom discourse was structured and how interaction occurred during the lesson.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to describe and interpret phenomena based on observed data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analysis was conducted in several systematic steps.

First, the audio recordings from classroom observation were transcribed into written form. This transcription process aimed to convert spoken interaction into analyzable textual data. Second, the transcribed data were coded using the IRF framework proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), which consists of three main components: Initiation (I), Response (R), and Feedback (F).

After coding, the researcher classified the interaction patterns into complete IRF sequences (I–R–F) and incomplete sequences (e.g., I–R only). This classification was important to identify how consistently the IRF model was implemented in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the results of the data analysis on classroom interaction based on the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model. The data were obtained from classroom observation and analyzed to identify the patterns of interaction between the teacher and students.

The analysis showed that the IRF pattern was frequently used during the teaching and learning process. However, the implementation varied between complete and incomplete interaction sequences. Some interactions followed the complete IRF structure (Initiation–Response–Feedback), while others consisted only of Initiation and Response without Feedback.

Table: 1 Classroom Interaction Pattern Based on IRF Model

Interaction Type	Description	Characteristics
Initiation (I)	Teacher asks questions or gives prompts	Very frequent; dominates classroom discourse

Response	Students answer teacher's questions	Short, limited, and mostly factual responses
Feedback	Teacher evaluates or reacts to responses	Inconsistent and generally minimal
IRF Complete	Full cycle of Initiation–Response–Feedback	Occurs occasionally, not dominant pattern
IR Only	Interaction without feedback stage	Frequently observed in classroom

1. Dominance of Initiation in Classroom Talk

The Findings show that Initiation was the most dominant component of classroom interaction. The teacher continuously controlled the flow of communication by asking questions and directing students' attention throughout the lesson. This pattern suggests that classroom discourse was largely teacher-centered, where the teacher functioned as the main controller of interaction.

While questioning is an important teaching strategy, the dominance of Initiation limited the possibility of students taking a more active role in shaping the interaction. Students were mainly positioned as responders rather than co-constructors of dialogue.

2. Limited Student Responses

Another key finding is that students' responses were generally short and highly constrained. Most answers consisted of single words or brief phrases, often focused on providing the "correct" answer rather than expressing ideas or opinions.

This pattern suggests that students were not encouraged to extend their responses or elaborate their thinking. As a result, their participation remained at a surface level. This condition reflects what Nassaji and Wells (2000) describe as restricted learner output in traditional IRF-based classrooms, where interaction tends to prioritize correctness over communicative development.

3. Incomplete IFR Cycles

A significant finding of this study is that many interaction sequences did not follow the complete IRF cycle. In several cases, interaction ended after the Response stage, without any Feedback from the teacher.

This incomplete cycle reduces the pedagogical value of interaction. Feedback is not only a form of evaluation but also an opportunity to extend learning, clarify meaning, and encourage deeper engagement. When Feedback is absent, classroom interaction becomes transactional rather than developmental, limiting its potential to support language learning.

4. Repetitive Questioning Patterns

The study also found that the teacher frequently used repetitive types of questions throughout the lesson. Most questions were display questions, where answers were already known by the teacher.

While this type of questioning can help maintain classroom control, it tends to restrict cognitive engagement. Students are not challenged to think critically or produce extended language. Consequently, interaction becomes predictable and less dynamic, reducing opportunities for meaningful communication.

5. Minimal and Non-Expansive Feedback

Even when Feedback was provided, it was generally brief and non-expansive. The teacher often used short evaluative responses such as “good,” “correct,” or “yes,” without further explanation or follow-up questions.

Such limited feedback does not contribute significantly to interaction development. As Walsh (2011) emphasizes, effective classroom feedback should not only evaluate but also extend students’ contributions. In this study, the lack of elaborative feedback contributed to the stagnation of classroom discourse.

6. Strong Teacher Control over Interaction

Overall, the classroom interaction was strongly dominated by the teacher. The teacher controlled not only the initiation of interaction but also its direction and closure. Students rarely initiated communication voluntarily and mostly waited for teacher prompts.

This finding reflects a traditional teacher-centered classroom structure, where interaction is asymmetrical. According to Tsui (2001), such dominance can reduce students’ opportunities for active participation and limit their development as independent language users. In this study, the same condition was clearly observed, where student agency in interaction was minimal.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that although the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern was consistently present in the classroom interaction at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, its implementation was not fully effective in promoting meaningful classroom discourse. The IRF structure appeared frequently throughout the lesson; however, it tended to be surface-level, highly teacher-controlled, and not optimally used to extend interaction.

One of the most prominent issues is the dominance of teacher initiation in classroom talk. The teacher continuously controlled the flow of interaction by asking questions and directing students’ responses. This finding indicates that the classroom interaction was strongly teacher-centered. While teacher questioning is an essential instructional strategy, its excessive use positioned students mainly as responders rather than active participants in the construction of dialogue. This condition aligns with Tsui (2001), who argues that teacher-dominated interaction often reduces student agency and limits opportunities for active engagement in classroom discourse.

Another important finding is the limited nature of student responses. Students mostly provided short, factual, and constrained answers, often limited to single words or brief phrases. Instead of encouraging elaboration or opinion expression, the interaction focused on producing correct answers. This supports the view of Nassaji and Wells (2000), who found that IRF-based interaction in many classrooms tends to restrict learner output and prioritize accuracy over communicative development. In this study, the same pattern was evident, where students’ participation remained at a surface level.

The findings also show that many interaction sequences did not follow the complete IRF cycle. In several cases, the interaction ended after the Response stage without any feedback from the teacher. This incomplete cycle reduces the instructional value of classroom interaction. Feedback, as an essential component of IRF, functions not only as evaluation but also as a tool to extend learning and promote deeper understanding. The absence of feedback indicates that interaction was often

transactional rather than developmental, which limits its contribution to language learning.

In addition, the teacher frequently used repetitive and display questions throughout the lesson. These types of questions already had predetermined answers, which reduced the level of cognitive challenge for students. As a result, students were not encouraged to think critically or produce extended responses. This finding is consistent with Cullen (2002), who states that display questions, when overused, can restrict the communicative potential of classroom interaction and lead to predictable discourse patterns.

Furthermore, even when feedback was provided, it was generally minimal and non-expansive. The teacher mostly used short evaluative responses such as “good,” “correct,” or “yes,” without further explanation or follow-up. According to Walsh (2011), effective classroom feedback should serve to extend student contributions and stimulate further interaction. However, in this study, the limited nature of feedback contributed to the stagnation of classroom discourse and reduced opportunities for deeper engagement.

Finally, the overall classroom interaction reflected strong teacher control, where the teacher managed the initiation, direction, and closure of interaction. Students rarely initiated communication independently and remained dependent on teacher prompts. This reflects a traditional teacher-centered classroom structure in which interaction is asymmetrical. As highlighted by Tsui (2001), such conditions can limit learners’ opportunities to develop autonomy and meaningful communicative competence. The findings of this study strongly support this argument, as student agency was found to be minimal.

Overall, when compared to previous studies, the results of this research confirm that although the IRF model remains a common structure in classroom interaction, its effectiveness depends on how it is implemented. Similar to the findings of Nassaji and Wells (2000) and Walsh (2011), this study shows that IRF often becomes restricted when teacher talk dominates and feedback is limited. However, this study adds context-specific evidence from SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, showing that these patterns are still strongly present in real classroom practice and continue to shape interaction in a teacher-centered direction.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze classroom interaction based on the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) model in an English classroom at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. The findings show that the IRF pattern was consistently present in the classroom interaction; however, its implementation was generally surface-level, teacher-dominated, and not fully developed into meaningful communicative interaction.

The interaction was mainly controlled by the teacher through frequent initiation, while students mostly provided short and limited responses. In many cases, the feedback stage was either minimal or absent, resulting in incomplete IRF cycles. In addition, the use of repetitive display questions and brief evaluative feedback contributed to a predictable and less interactive classroom discourse. Overall, although the IRF structure existed in the classroom, it did not function optimally to promote active student participation or meaningful language development.

REFERENCES

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

- Cullen, R. (2002). Supportive teacher talk: The importance of the F-move. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/56.2.117>
- Nassaji, H., & Wells, G. (2000). What's the use of "triadic dialogue"? An investigation of teacher–student interaction. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(3), 376–406. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/21.3.376>
- Sinclair, J. M., & Coulthard, R. M. (1975). *Towards an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils*. Oxford University Press.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2001). Classroom interaction. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 120–125). Cambridge University Press.
- Walsh, S. (2011). *Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action*. Routledge.