

Exploring Indonesian EFL Classroom Interactions in an Online Setting

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes in the education field including how teachers and students interact in the classroom. As a result, it is considered essential for Indonesian EFL teachers to explore and address this issue to familiarize them with the current interaction pattern in the online classroom. With that knowledge, making effective online teaching and learning is achievable. Even though many studies have been conducted on a similar topic, this study proposes a further analysis by adapting the overall framework Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS) – into more focused categories for better understanding. This case study aimed to explore the interaction in an online EFL classroom by utilizing FIACS as the main framework. The necessary data was collected through non-participant observation, with an English teacher and her seven-grade students as the participants. The results of this study show that the teacher dominated the online EFL classroom interaction. It was caused by several reasons, namely the students' passiveness, which led to more talking from the teacher and technological glitches. It caused the online meetings to be teacher-centered. As the teaching and learning medium changed, the pattern and characteristics of the interaction became unique. One notable uniqueness was the difficulty of overseeing the online interactions between students.

Keywords: classroom interaction, FIACS, online EFL classroom interaction.

Introduction

Classroom interaction is one of the critical factors in achieving quality learning (Flanders, 1970; Vattøy & Gamlem, 2020). Consequently, many experts mentioned that the teaching and learning quality is dependable on the interactions between the parties in the class (Bui et al., 2021; Cancino, 2015; Congmin, 2016; Islam, 2017;

Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2021; Vattøy & Gamlem, 2020). Furthermore, Flanders (1970) and Vattøy & Gamlem (2020) stated that the success of classroom interaction is determined by how the teacher and the students interact. Therefore, even if the environment of the teaching and learning process is transformed into online settings due to the Covid-19 pandemic, classroom interaction is still deemed a significant aspect of realizing quality learning (Bui et al., 2021; Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2021).

The difference in the medium of learning causes many changes. According to Zeng (2018), online learning has many benefits, such as more accessible access to knowledge, pedagogical richness, new and unique social interaction, better personal agency, and effective and efficient learning costs. However, besides the benefits, it is also reported that online learning also poses some drawbacks. Liu & Yuan (2021), Nakhriyah and Muzakky (2021), and Zeng (2018) argued that online learning possibly increases the students' anxiety. Many students feel anxious about expressing themselves or even showing off their faces in online meetings as they refuse to be in the spotlight. As a result, this creates the phenomenon of turning off their camera during online sessions (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021). Besides that, Musonef et al. (2020) reported that it is difficult for the teacher to supervise the interactions between students as the limited access the teacher has in the online settings. These issues cause the interactions in the online learning settings to be limited when it is compared to the conventional learning settings (Rahmawati & Sujono, 2021).

Because the involvement between the parties in the class is essential, the studies that focus on this topic should not only separate the interactions into the teacher-student interaction or Student-Student interaction. In line with the statement, Flanders (1970) stated that classroom interaction consists of the exchange of meaning between the teacher and the students, which can be categorized into three big categories: teacher talk, student talk, and silence or confusion. These categories are further explained in a framework called FIACS (Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System), which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System (FIACS) (Flanders, 1970)

FIACS (Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System)		
Teacher Talk	Direct Influence	1. Accepts feeling: Accepts and clarifies the feeling of the students in non-threatening manner. Feelings may be positive or negative. Prediction and recalling are included.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Praises or encourage: Praises or encourages student's action or behavior. Jokes are included. Nodding head or phrase such as "Go on" are included. 3. Accepts or uses ideas of the students: Clarifies, develops or builds the student's idea or suggestion. 4. Asks questions: Asks questions related to content or procedure to students
Indirect Influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Lectures: Gives facts, opinions, or perspectives about content or procedures. Expresses his/her ideas. Asks rhetorical questions. 6. Gives Direction: Gives commands or direction for the students to follow. 7. Criticize or justify authority: Gives statement intended to change the student behaviors from unacceptable to acceptable. Stating the reason behind the teacher's action.
Student Talk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Response; Gives reactions or responses to the teacher's initiation. 9. Initiation: Express his/her own ideas freely. Initiates a topic is included.
Silence or Confusion: Pauses, short periods of silence, or confusion which make the communication is not understandable by the observer.	

In the classroom interaction research field, there are at least two theories and frameworks that the researchers widely use. The first framework is named FIACS – the one utilized in this research – which Ned Flanders developed in 1970 (Flanders, 1970; Tsegaw, 2019). The second one is called FLInt (Foreign Language Interaction), which Moskowitz developed in 1972 (Foreign Language Interaction) which Moskowitz developed in 1972 (Tsegaw, 2019). However, FIACS is considered more prevalent because it offers more advantages to the researcher, especially in its analysis. Huriyah and Agustiani (2018) stated that FIACS offers a robust and reliable tool to record classroom interaction. Moreover, it is proved to be more practical and simple to utilize (Khusnaini, 2019; Tsegaw, 2019) because it has clear guidelines (Huriyah & Agustiani, 2018) and has flexible nature which makes it open for adaptation and modification (Mwangi et al., 2021; Qassim, 2017; Tsegaw, 2019).

Some of the recommended guidelines for utilizing FIACS mentioned previously will be provided. The guidelines include 1) In conducting the observation, every three seconds, the observers will give a tally to the observation matrix as the representation of the interaction that happened in the class; 2) The tally will be written accordingly in the observation matrix unique to FIACS; 3) Due to the strong reliability of this tool, it is possible to observe the interaction through video recording (indirect observation) (Flanders, 1970).

Many studies have been conducted related to the online EFL classroom interaction topic. Ameiratrini and Kurniawan (2021), Nakhriyah and Muzakky, 2021), and Rahmawati and Sujono (2021) argued that there is some uniqueness in the interactions happened during online classes, which are mainly caused by the limitations in performing them. These limitations cause the interactions in the classroom not to be as rich as conventional classroom interactions (Ameiratrini & Kurniawan, 2021). Moreover, Rohmah and Anggraini (2021) argued that in online Indonesian EFL classrooms, the teachers dominate the interaction, which results in a teacher-centered situation.

Even though many studies have utilized the classroom interaction theory and framework, they did not have a solid grounding. For example, the interaction categories used are not based on a widely-used theory. Some studies utilized FIACS as the framework. However, the focus is not on the whole interaction but only on the teacher talk categories. Besides, some studies directly employ FIACS but only rely on the guidelines recommended by the theory.

For those reasons, this study tried to fill the gap by exploring the complete classroom interaction by categorizing it into teacher-student (teacher-initiated), student-teacher (student-initiated), and student-student interactions. By analyzing it based on these categories, the phenomenon under investigation could be understood accordingly. Thus, it was expected that the researcher could explore how the whole EFL classroom interactions are performed in an online setting by both the teachers and the students.

Research Methodology

An appropriate research method and design are required to gain the necessary data. Consequently, a quantitative content analysis design was selected. The reason is that this design is relevant to the kind of data desired to gain from this research – comprehensive data gained from recorded observation (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014). Moreover, with this design, the data will be classified and tabulated

This study involved a female teacher and a seventh-grade class from a private international school in Indonesia. They were involved upon the granted permission from the school and their consent. The teacher and the students were selected based on their ability to communicate verbally in the online classroom.

The observation was employed in this study as the data collecting method. According to Cohen et al. (2018), observation can be understood as the technique to collect data from its primary source. This method is relevant to the quantitative content analysis design as it concerns attaining data from its natural settings.

The observation lasted three meetings from late March until the beginning of May via Zoom because of the time limitation in the Indonesian EFL online classroom schedule. An extra observation was conducted prior to the three observation schedules to reduce the bias and make the research effective. This strategy can reduce the risk of bias because both the researcher and the participants are familiarized with the factual observation circumstances (Cohen et al., 2018).

Moreover, an observation matrix adapted from Flanders (1970) to observe the interaction through FIACS was utilized in conducting the observations. Because of the strong reliability of this tool, besides direct observations, indirect observations are possible to conduct. Cohen et al. (2018) argued that using both kinds of observation enable the researcher to cross-validate the collected data. So, besides being present in the class to observe, the researcher also recorded the meetings.

Before the observations began, the researcher encoded the categories included in FIACS to assist the researcher in observing the meetings. In conducting the observations, the observers followed the recommended steps in recording the data by employing FIACS – giving tallies to appropriate categories per three seconds. Then, the data are presented as descriptive statistics followed by an explanation. To reduce the observer bias and increase the validity and reliability of the observation result (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014),

Findings and Discussion,

The researcher observed three meetings scheduled on March 22, 2022, April 11, 2022, and May 12, 2022. Unfortunately, the observations could not be conducted consecutively due to the limited schedule for the EFL online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data are recorded in an observation matrix adapted from FIACS. The adaptation was the addition of the 'Small talk' category during the observation. Unidentified interactions are a kind of small talk done by the teacher. An example of this type of interaction is minor clauses to open or end the online class. The overall results of the observations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The overall observation results of FIACS in an online EFL classroom

	FIACS	Frequency	%	
Teacher talk	Accept feeling	48	1,43%	73,57%
	Praise or encourage	181	5,41%	
	Accept or use idea of the students	214	6,40%	
	Ask questions	327	9,78%	
	Lecture	905	27,06%	
	Giving direction	516	15,43%	
	Criticize or justify authority	167	4,99%	
	Small talk	103	3,08%	
Student talk	Initiation	43	1,29%	18,59%
	Response	579	17,31%	
	Silence	262	7,83%	7,83%
	Total	3345	100,00%	

The table shows that the 'Teacher talk' categories dominated the online EFL teaching and learning interactions. It covers 73.57% of the total interaction. On the other hand, the 'Student talk' categories only comprise 18.59% of the total. Lastly, the 'Silence' category occurs 7.83% of the total. From these results, it can be perceived that the teacher dominated the interactions in the class. This finding is relevant to Rohmah and Anggraini's (2021) study – that in Indonesian EFL online classrooms, the teacher dominates the whole interactions, which makes the class teacher-centered.

Moreover, from the table, it can also be observed that the 'Lecture' category from the 'Teacher talk' overshadows other categories. This category comprises 27.06% of the total. No other category surpasses at least 20% of the total interaction. Again, this proves the teacher's domination in the online EFL classroom. This also means that the online classes were relatively passive and relied heavily on the teacher to make the online classroom situation alive. Rohmah and Anggraini (2021) mentioned this phenomenon in their study. They stated that the teacher has to make more effort to prepare the class and keep it alive. This finding is relevant to the data found in the 'Student talk' that will be elaborated on further in the next section.

The most frequent category for the 'Student talk' is 'Response.' As seen in Table 2, this category covers 18.59% of the total interaction. This result strengthens

the previous findings; that the teacher has to put more effort into making the class alive. The reason is that this further proves the passiveness of the students. They only responded to the teacher's initiations. Some studies argue that online learning increases students' anxiety levels (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Zeng, 2018). This is possibly one of the reasons why the students become passive in the EFL online class.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the analysis done in this study is divided into three: teacher-initiated, student-initiated, and student-student interactions. This classification was generated based on the initiator of the interactions as it may affect the kind of exchanges in the online classroom because FIACS theory did not provide more detailed explanations of the analysis of the category that occurred in the interactions.

For the first category – the teacher-initiated interactions, the results can be observed in Table 3 as follows.

Table 3. The results of teacher-initiated interactions

Teacher-initiated Interaction				
	FIACS	Frequency	%	
	Accept feeling	26	0,81%	
	Praise or encourage	167	5,19%	
	Accept or use idea of the students	183	5,68%	
Teacher talk	Ask questions	319	9,91%	74,12%
	Lecture	905	28,11%	
	Give direction	516	16,03%	
	Criticize or justify authority	167	5,19%	
	Small talk	103	3,20%	
Student talk	Response	571	17,74%	25,88%
	Silence	262	8,14%	8,14%
	Total	3219	100,00%	

As seen from the table, teacher-initiated interaction categories cover 3219 out of 3345 exchanges in the whole classroom interaction, or 98.36% of the total. Moreover, 74.12% of the interactions that happened in the classroom were done by the teacher, and the students did only 25.88%. Furthermore, 8.14% were 'Silence'

category. In summary, the teacher dominated the interactions in this group since the teacher was the one who initiated the interactions, and the students could only respond to it.

Moreover, the 'Lecture' category is the most frequent (28.11%) compared to other 'Teacher talk' categories. Meanwhile, the "Accepts feeling" category is the less frequent one. From these results, it could be perceived that the online classroom relied heavily on the teacher (Rohmah & Anggraini, 2021) Moreover, based on the observation, the students' passiveness caused it. The result of the research is relevant to the studies conducted by Liu and Yuan (2021), Nakhriyah and Muzakky (2021) and Zeng (2018). The high number of "Silence or confusion" categories proves the students' passiveness. So, the teacher had to talk more in the online meetings because the students gave fewer responses when the teacher asked them. For example:

Ms. Honey : Choose someone and then give ask one question. Choose one sentence.
 Oscar : I think I will choose Razor.
 Ms. Honey : Razor?
 [Silence]
 Ms. Honey : Razor, can you actively participate?
 [Silence]
 Ms. Honey : Uh Oscar, uh...if uh... I mean like Razor didn't answer before. So I think Razor needs a little bit longer yeah for the preparation. That's fine. I'll ask him later in the end. You may choose someone else because the girls is fine. You may you may put those who have the camera on in priority yeah.
 Oscar : I choose Nebula.

Besides that, another point to consider in online interaction is that the response does not always in the form of verbal expression. On many occasions during the observation, the students responded in written expressions through Zoom chat. The teacher allowed this phenomenon because she realized that online learning allows the students and teacher to interact in multiple forms provided by the learning platform(Zeng, 2018). Because of that, the students also sometimes responded by sending reactions, emojis, or stickers available. According to Zeng (2018), these are the form of freedom in communication offered in online learning. The medium is not the problem as long as the meaning can be conveyed perfectly. Moreover, the kind of response the students gives is sometimes in the form of action and not verbal. The example of this unique response can be seen in the example below.

Ms. Honey : Do you have any questions? Uh Verrel, do you understand Verrel? Noreen?
Lovely? Do you understand?
[Students give various reactions]
Ms. Honey : Well well. Yeah.

For the next group – the student-initiated interactions, the results can be observed in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4. The results of student-initiated interactions

Student-initiated interaction				
	FIACS	Frequency	%	
	Accept feeling	22	17,46%	
	Praise or encourage	14	11,11%	
	Accept or use idea of the students	31	24,60%	
Teacher talk	Ask questions	8	6,35%	59,52%
	Lecture	0	0,00%	
	Give direction	0	0,00%	
	Criticize or justify authority	0	0,00%	
Student talk	Initiation	43	34,13%	40,48%
	Response	8	6,35%	
	Silence	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Total	126	100,00%	

Suppose the data in Table 4 is compared to Table 2. In that case, the student-initiated classroom interaction categories comprise only 126 of 3345 interactions in the online EFL classroom or only about 3.77% of the total. This result proves the possibility of the student's passiveness in the class since they were hesitant to initiate the interactions. If we compare this to the Table 3 results, the results prove the passiveness further since it has a high 'Response' category. So, the students were hesitant to initiate the interactions in the online EFL classroom and only waited for the teacher to initiate so they could respond. Some studies suggest that this phenomenon is caused by the student's preference not to show off or be in the spotlight (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Zeng, 2018). This is also possibly caused by the high level of anxiety the students experience when learning in online settings (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Zeng, 2018).

Moreover, the results of this group show similar results with the teacher-initiated interactions – the students sometimes interact by written expressions. It is because the students just wanted to use the feature provided, or they did not want to be in the spotlight if they spoke (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Zeng, 2018) especially when there was a rule in the online class to always keep the camera on during the online sessions (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021). For example:

May : *[Written chat] Miss do we have to write down the words?*
 Ms. Honey : *Well, not necessary but I want you to make the grid just like usual and then you're gonna have to put five shapes in uh wherever you want. Yeah I mean like as long as it is in the squares.*

Lastly, Table 4 below presents the results of the student-student online EFL classroom interaction.

Table 4. The results of student-student interactions

Student-student			
	FIACS	Frequency	%
Student talk	Initiation	0	0.00%
	Response	0	0.00%
	Silence	0	0.00%
	Total	0	0.00%

During the data collection stage, this group of categories was the most difficult to observe. As seen from the table, no interactions can be categorized in this group. The reason was that the researcher did not have access to the student's personal screen in the online lesson. Moreover, the students did not show any hints if they communicated with their peers during the online meetings. Ameiratrini and Kurniawan (2021) reported a similar finding, which shows the limitations and unique characteristics of online EFL teaching and learning process – the difficulty in observing the student-student interactions (Musonef et al., 2020).

Conclusion and Suggestion

From the data discussed above, the teacher dominated the online Indonesian EFL classroom interactions. It could be seen from the high frequency of the 'Teacher talk' category. The researcher crosschecked the data with the 'Student talk' categories. After the crosscheck, the data shows that the student's passiveness caused the dominance of the teacher in the online classroom during the lesson. Consequently, the teacher had to repeat or re-explain the lesson.

Moreover, the initiation done by the students is low. They seemed to prefer responding to initiating, as the 'Response' category results say otherwise. This finding further proves the students' passiveness in the online EFL classroom.

Besides that, as the learning mode is online, the pattern of the interactions that happened in the online class does not follow the offline ones. In offline teaching and learning activities, all interactions happening in the class can be observed accordingly. However, this is not the case for online learning. There are difficulties for teachers and observers to observe the interactions in the online classroom, especially the student-student interactions. This case will be more complicated if the students interact outside the unobserved medium, as the teacher and researcher do not have access to their screens.

Moreover, unique characteristics found in online Indonesian EFL classroom interaction cannot be found in conventional EFL teaching and learning. The kind of responses the students express is not always verbal. They can be in the form of written expressions, actions, non-verbal reactions, or even emojis. So, online learning makes multimodal communication possible, enriching teaching and learning activities.

Due to the limitations of this study, future research on this topic should involve more participants, so the conclusion drawn can be more valid. Moreover, this study was conducted in minimal time. Thus, further research should prolong the research time to better understand the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, as this study only employed one data collecting method – observation- more data collection methods are encouraged for further research.

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