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## Original Article

# Use of Interaction for Enhanced Communication in English as a Second Language Classroom

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## Abstract

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**Introduction:** The acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL) is in demand due to globalization. Although educators apply different techniques in teaching the English language effectively; acquiring a second language should incorporate interaction to facilitate both educators and learners to communicate effectively.

**Objective:** This review aims to empower educators to incorporate interaction into active learning within the ESL classroom by exploring valuable insights from scholarly perspectives, encompassing various types of interaction, interaction principles, the pivotal roles of teachers, and a diverse range of activities to enhance communication in ESL classrooms.

**Methodology:** A standardized methodology was deployed in this review. The literature review was carried out using keywords related to ESL classrooms and interaction to search for scholarly articles and books from 1978 to 2023. Non-peer-reviewed sources and non-English language studies were excluded. The extracted data were thematically analyzed.

**Results:** The review identified student interaction as a fundamental element in the acquisition of English as a second language. Further, it was found that various interaction types, peer interaction, interactive principles, the teacher's role, and classroom activities are conducive to enhanced communication in ESL classrooms.

**Conclusion:** Interaction stands as an indispensable foundation for achieving success in the acquisition of English as a second language. The factors discussed in this review empower educators to seamlessly integrate interaction into second language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Activities, ESL classrooms, Interaction, Second Language Acquisition, Teacher's role

## **Introduction**

English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms are characterized by students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, interaction among those students is an essential component of second language acquisition, exposing the learner to real-life communication (Allwright, 1984).

The significance of interaction in second language acquisition has been widely acknowledged from scholarly perspectives. Several studies have been conducted to determine the interaction between teacher-student and the whole class in second language learning (Duff, 2000). Within this context, Vygotsky's theory emphasizes that the process of language acquisition is not an innate skill, but a skill tailored through social interaction. Adaba (2017) argues that interaction is the heart of communication in an era of communicative language teaching. In addition, Allwright (1984) states that classroom interaction has received rigorous attention from interactionist researchers. Further, Hall and Verplaetse (2000) emphasizes the significance of classroom interactions as a means of promoting language development. Given these insights, it is apparent that interaction is a crucial component in second language acquisition.

In 1988, Van Lier introduced a framework comprising four distinct types of interaction in language learning environments. These types include less topic-oriented and less activity-oriented interaction, more topic-oriented and less activity-oriented interaction, more topic-oriented and more activity-oriented interaction, and less topic-oriented and more activity-oriented interaction. Understanding and harmonizing these varieties of interactions empower educators to establish a comprehensive language-learning atmosphere (Soler & Pitarch, 1992).

Therefore, this review seeks to analyse the existing literature on interactions in ESL classrooms with a focus on understanding the types of interaction, interaction principles, the

role of teachers, and classroom activities that increase interaction in ESL classrooms. The theories explored in this review encourage educators to incorporate interaction, thereby promoting active learning. As a result, fostering interaction benefits educators and empowers learners to communicate effectively in real-world scenarios by mastering the target language.

## **Methodology**

This comprehensive review uses a standardized methodology to search and extract literature. Initially, a set of keywords related to ESL classroom interaction and language learning were established, such as "English as a second language", "ESL classroom interaction", "language learning interaction", "target language interaction", "language acquisition", and "effective language teaching". These keywords and phrases were used in various combinations to capture a comprehensive range of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, conferences, and books. The search involved Google Scholar, PubMed and JSTOR. Non-peer-reviewed sources and non-English language studies were excluded. Four books and fifteen articles published from 1978 to 2017 were considered to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The extracted data were thematically analyzed and organized based on the key subjects of this review.

## **Discussion**

### *Perspectives of various researchers on interaction in ESL*

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language and thought development (1978) shows that social interaction plays a decisive role in developing students' ability to use language, thereby leading towards intellectual development. Given Vygotsky's view, mental functions are not innate nor shaped, rather, influenced by social and cultural contexts. Further, his theory emphasizes that intellectual development is a social process that occurs through interaction with others.

Through this interaction, individuals engage in external speech, which enables them to organize their thoughts and regulate their behavior. Additionally, he contends that intellectual adaptation occurs when individuals move from their current level of development to a higher level and these transitions are facilitated through social interactions. Overall, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language and thought development highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, emphasizing that the relationships formed between individuals in cultural and societal contexts are fundamental determinants of intellectual growth.

In a similar fashion, Allwright (1984, p.158) claims that interaction is “inherent in the very notion of classroom pedagogy itself”. He proposes that interaction is the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy because everything in the classroom happens through a process of live person-to-person interaction. In his work, he emphasizes the importance of interaction in language learning and proposes ideas that challenge traditional teaching methods where teacher talk is dominant. He believed that language learners should be engaged in meaningful, real-life communication rather than simply memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules.

According to the study of Hall and Verplaetse (2000), interaction combines the latest theoretical insights in reconceptualizing how second and foreign languages are learned through a sociocultural lens with the practical considerations involved in teaching these languages effectively. It presents how particular practices constructed in classroom interaction promote learning of the target language. The authors claim that learning an additional language is accomplished in the interaction of a variety of classrooms and a variety of languages. This study helps to lay a foundation for the development of a more expansive, sociocultural model of second and foreign language learning with sustaining classroom interactional practices that foster additional language development.

Moreover, Adaba (2017) conducted a study in Tullu Sangota Primary School to assess teachers' application of classroom interaction on developing the students' speaking skills. The results revealed that “the findings of the study revealed that teachers rarely played their role to develop the students' speaking skills in the classroom due to lack of awareness, lack of simple materials to practice classroom interaction, low participation of the students in the class, and lack of access of teaching aids inhibits the teachers to apply classroom interaction” (Adaba, 2017, p.158). With these findings, authorities recommended deploying more classroom interactions to develop students' speaking skills in the target language. Further, it was recommended that teachers should facilitate appropriate classroom interaction by giving equal opportunities to the students to actively participate in these sessions. This study reaffirms the fact that interaction is essential to foster communication in the target language.

#### *Types of interaction in ESL classrooms*

When attention is paid to learning to communicate through interaction in ESL classrooms, it is essential to examine the various types of interaction employed. According to Van Lier (1988), there are four types of interaction.

- Type one is less topic-oriented and less activity-oriented. In this type, students are free to express their opinions freely and abide by the usual social norms. For example, small talk and private conversations in pairs.
- Type two interaction is primarily focused on topics rather than activities. In this context, participants engage in discussions to address tasks or subjects presented by the teacher in any possible way.

- Type three is more topic-oriented and more activity-oriented. Here, interaction is formed when students try to do the task with the teacher's guidelines. For example, communicative grammar lessons where students are allowed to practice the target grammar item through specific communicative tasks and activities.
- Type four is less topic-oriented and more activity-oriented. Learners may interact with authentic materials, cultural practices, or real-life situations that require language use.

These four types of interaction take place in the classroom and are determined by the roles of the participants, the tasks accomplished, and the type of knowledge they exchange (Kramsch, 1985). Recognizing and balancing these interaction types allows educators to create a well-rounded language learning environment that addresses fluency, vocabulary, critical thinking, and language accuracy, catering to the diverse needs of ESL learners.

#### *Factors affecting the interaction types*

It is crucial to pay attention to the factors affecting the above interaction types in ESL classrooms. According to Soler & Pitarch (1992), participant roles and task design can be considered factors affecting interaction types defined by Van Lier (1988).

In ESL classrooms, participant roles vary from traditional teacher and student roles to more flexible roles which are similar to natural conversation. However, Soler & Pitarch (1992) claim that the structured environment of the classroom constrains the ability of participants to engage in spontaneous and informal conversation, thereby impeding full interaction between them.

Task design is considered another factor affecting interaction types in ESL classrooms. Some tasks focus on giving and getting information, while others involve sharing ideas and negotiating meanings. Soler & Pitarch (1992) emphasize that it is essential to combine individual activities like providing information or correcting errors with group tasks such as solving problems or discussing texts as it facilitates learning through interaction. This approach helps students to communicate better with each other, making the learning experience more comprehensive and effective.

#### *Importance of peer interaction*

Many scholars support the idea that peer interaction is more effective than student-teacher interaction in acquiring a target language. Soler & Pitarch (1992) suggest peer interaction is more beneficial than student-teacher interactions in the process. Doughty & Pica (1986) and Porter (1983) also state that peer interaction is useful for understanding meaning and correcting errors in the target language. Seliger (1983) suggests learners receive more comprehensive input through peer interaction. However, fostering effective peer interaction is not always simple as "teachers often put students in a circle, give them a topic for discussion that they think is particularly stimulating and then watch the students just sit and look at one another in an embarrassing silence, constrained, and tense.

Then the teachers end up doing all the talking" (Bassano & Christison, 1987, p.201). This highlights the challenge: peer interaction in the target language is not always spontaneous, as students' language competence varies, and some may feel hesitant to communicate in another language. However, several studies (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Varonis & Gass, 1983) emphasize the importance of peer conversation in language classrooms.

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### *Interactive principles in ESL classrooms*

Brown (2001, pp.54-70) outlines important interactive principles used in language learning classrooms: automaticity, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment, risk-taking, the language-culture connection, and communicative competence. Automaticity means that interaction in the target language becomes automatic and effortless. Intrinsic motivation occurs when learner gains self-actualization through interacting in the target language and start to appreciate their competence through self-reward. Risk-taking involves the possibility of not producing the intended meaning, not interpreting the intended meaning, and facing ridicule or rejection. Brown (2001) argues that lifelong rewards come with taking these interaction risks.

The language-culture connection means that the cultural knowledge required for communication can be developed through interaction. Communicative competence, the ability to communicate in a socially appropriate manner, can also be achieved through increased language interaction. These principles serve as guiding pillars for a comprehensive and successful language-learning journey through interaction.

### *Teacher's role in interaction*

The teacher's role in fostering second language acquisition is crucial, as students need proper guidance to initiate their interactions. Brown (2001, pp.165-168) describes the teacher's roles as a controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resource in language acquisition. As a controller, the teacher manages student interactions, determining when students should speak and interact. However, the teacher should ensure that students are at ease to make interactions more spontaneous. As a director, the teacher orchestrates structured interactive sessions, ensuring smooth and effective classroom interaction. As a manager, the teacher plans lessons, modules, courses, structures, and components, yet allows students the freedom to interact creatively. As a facilitator, the teacher

leverages intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover the language through pragmatic use. As a resource, the teacher plays the least directive role, providing help and instruction when necessary, and guiding students to self-explore the language through interactions. Brown (2001, p.168) states, "The key to interactive teaching strives toward the upper non-directive end of the continuum, gradually enabling your students to move from their role of total independence (upon you, the class activities, the textbooks etc.) to relatively total independence". A skilled teacher should identify the learner's proficiency level and other contextual factors such as learning environment and socio-cultural background, with the goal of gradually enabling students to explore the language themselves through interactions.

### *Classroom activities to enhance interaction*

Selecting or designing proper classroom activities to achieve the expected interaction level in the target language is as important as selecting the teacher's role appropriately. In modern classrooms, group work is popular to supplement student interaction. Group work involves two or more students collaborating on a task. Brown (2001) mentions several benefits of group work: it provides students with a sense of security, motivates them through group interactions, and fosters a sense of responsibility for the group's actions and progress.

When planning group work, the right activity should be selected. Brown (2001) mentions several types of activities suitable for group work in classrooms. Games, as Harmer (2001) proposes, are important for incorporating fun into lessons along with targeted interaction. Roleplays allow students to practice real-world scenarios by assigning roles to each member.

Drama is a more formal version of roleplay, with higher student interaction as they engage in writing scripts, rehearsing, and performing. Interviews are another effective method for enhancing interactions. Additionally, Brown

(2001) mentions projects, brainstorming, information gaps, jigsaw activities, problem-solving, decision-making, and opinion exchange as effective group work activities. Adaba (2017) suggests more activities such as discussion activities, where students discuss a problem to enhance interaction, presentations to build self-confidence, and acting out written dialogues in front of the class.

## Conclusion

This comprehensive review of the literature on fostering students' interaction in ESL classrooms highlights the fundamental role of interaction in second language acquisition. The synthesis of insights from various sources and viewpoints underscores the importance of peer interaction, interactive principles, the teacher's role, and appropriate classroom activities in enhancing communication in ESL classrooms. Educators are encouraged to prioritize interactive approaches in their teaching methodologies, recognizing the profound impact of interaction on facilitating successful second language acquisition.

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