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# POWER AND PARTICIPATION IN EFL CLASSROOM INTERACTION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TURN-TAKING AND INITIATION-RESPONSE-FEEDBACK (IRF) PATTERNS

**[1]Mohammed Naser Hussein & [2]Nur Syuhada Mohd Radzi**
[1,2]Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

*[1]Corresponding author: alhlawymhmd519@gmail.com*

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative single-case study examines teacher-student interaction in one publicly available English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking lesson. It investigates how turn-taking is organised, how Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequences shape communication, and how classroom discourse constructs teacher authority and student participation. The data comprise a recorded lesson on special events and a transcript of classroom exchanges. Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model guided the analysis of exchange structure, while Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework informed the interpretation of authority and participation. Exchanges were coded for initiation, response, feedback, questioning, turn allocation, and student participation. The findings indicate that the teacher initiated most exchanges, selected speakers, evaluated responses, and controlled topic progression. Students generally contributed brief answers to teacher prompts, with limited opportunities for self-selection, elaboration, or topic initiation. Evaluative feedback acknowledged responses while reinforcing the teacher's authority to validate knowledge and close exchanges. These patterns supported orderly interaction but restricted opportunities for independent contributions. The study highlights how teacher nomination and evaluative closure jointly shape participation, demonstrating that frequent responses do not necessarily indicate learner agency. The findings are specific to the analysed lesson and suggest that extending exchanges through follow-up questions could provide more space for extended student contributions.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis; classroom discourse; EFL classroom; Initiation-Response-Feedback; learner participation.

## INTRODUCTION

Classroom discourse is not simply a medium through which instructional content is delivered; it is a primary site in which teaching, learning, participation, and institutional relationships are simultaneously enacted. Through questions, responses, nominations, repetitions, corrections, evaluations, and transitions between activities, classroom participants negotiate who may speak, when they may speak, what constitutes an acceptable contribution, and when an interaction should be extended or ended. In this sense, classroom talk is both pedagogical and interactional: it facilitates the transmission and negotiation of knowledge while also organising participation within the institutional setting of the classroom (Cazden, 2001; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2011). These dimensions are particularly significant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where opportunities for interaction may constitute an important source of language input, speaking practice, and feedback. The organisation of classroom interaction is therefore closely related to the ways in which teachers and students participate in classroom talk. Although students may appear highly active when they respond frequently to teacher questions, the frequency of their verbal contributions does not necessarily indicate substantial control over the direction or development of classroom discourse. A student may speak repeatedly while producing only brief responses to questions initiated, allocated, and evaluated by the teacher. Participation, consequently, needs to be considered not only in terms of how often students speak but also in terms of the length, elaboration, independence, and interactional consequences of their contributions (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2011; Sert, 2015). This distinction is particularly relevant to the analysis of teacher-led classroom interaction. The teacher occupies an institutional position that generally provides greater control over topic selection, turn allocation, questioning, evaluation, and lesson progression (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979; Walsh, 2011). Such control should not, however, be treated as inherently problematic. In EFL classrooms, particularly where learners may have limited confidence or proficiency, structured teacher participation can provide scaffolding, reduce uncertainty, support comprehension, and create opportunities for students to participate. The analytical issue is therefore not whether teacher authority exists, but how that authority is enacted through routine interactional practices and how much space these practices create for learners to initiate, elaborate, negotiate, and develop classroom talk.

The present study examines these issues through a publicly available EFL speaking lesson focusing on special events, including New Year cards, birthday invitations, birth announcements, and wedding invitations. The lesson provides a useful setting for examining classroom discourse because it contains repeated teacher–student exchanges involving questioning, nomination, student responses, feedback, repetition, and follow-up questions. For example, the teacher asks questions such as “What type of card is this?”, “Are you sure?”, and “How do you celebrate it?”, to which students provide responses such as “New Year card,” “cake,” “dance,” and “fireworks.” These responses are frequently followed by evaluative expressions such as “good,” “very good,” “excellent,” and “good job.” At a surface level, the frequency of student responses may suggest a highly interactive lesson. A closer examination, however, raises a more specific question: who controls the organisation and development of that interaction? This question is important because classroom participation can be simultaneously enabled and constrained by the same pedagogical practices. Teacher nomination, for instance, gives a student an opportunity to speak while also determining who receives the floor. Similarly, evaluative feedback can encourage participation and affirm students' contributions while positioning the teacher as the authority who determines whether an answer is acceptable. Repeated Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequences can provide a predictable structure for classroom communication, yet they may also close exchanges before students have opportunities to elaborate or initiate further interaction. Classroom discourse thus provides a productive site for examining the intersection between pedagogical organisation and institutional authority.

Previous research has established the importance of teacher talk, classroom questioning, IRF sequences, and learner participation in language classrooms. However, these dimensions are often examined through

particular analytical emphases, such as question design, response development, teacher talk, or power relations. There remains value in examining how teacher nomination, turn allocation, IRF sequencing, evaluative feedback, and opportunities for continued student contribution operate together within an actual classroom exchange**.** Such an approach makes it possible to move beyond simply identifying who speaks and instead examine how speaking rights are distributed and how interaction is developed or closed following a student's response. To address this issue, the present study combines Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) Initiation-Response-Feedback model with Fairclough's (1989, 1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The IRF framework provides a structural account of how classroom exchanges are organised through teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback, while CDA provides a critical perspective for interpreting how these interactional practices relate to authority, institutional roles, and participation. The combination therefore allows the analysis to address both the organisation of classroom interaction and its discursive implications for teacher authority and learner participation.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are turn-taking patterns organised in EFL classroom interaction?
2. How do Initiation- Response-Feedback sequences shape teacher - student communication?
3. To what extent does classroom discourse reflect teacher authority and student participation?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes a contextualised account of how ordinary classroom practices can simultaneously support instructional organisation and regulate opportunities for learner participation. Rather than treating teacher control and student participation as mutually exclusive, the study considers how both are produced through the same interactional sequences and how the balance between them may affect the development of classroom discourse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Classroom Discourse and EFL Participation

Classroom discourse encompasses the language and interaction through which teaching and learning are accomplished. It includes teacher questions, student responses, repair, repetition, feedback, silence, turn allocation, and the movement between activities. Unlike ordinary conversation, classroom interaction is institutionally organised, with participants occupying different roles and possessing unequal interactional rights. Teachers generally have greater authority to manage topics, allocate turns, evaluate responses, and determine the progression of classroom activities, whereas students typically participate within interactional spaces established by the teacher (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979).

This institutional organisation does not necessarily reduce the educational value of classroom interaction. On the contrary, teacher - student interaction provides important opportunities for learners to receive language input, produce language, and obtain feedback. Hall and Walsh (2002) emphasise the centrality of teacher–student interaction to language learning, while Walsh (2011) highlights the relationship between teachers' interactional choices and opportunities for learning. From this perspective, classroom participation needs to be understood as more than the simple presence of student talk. What matters is how classroom structures enable learners to contribute, develop their responses, negotiate meaning, and participate in shaping the direction of interaction. Recent research further supports this distinction. A meta-analysis by Tao and Chen (2024) identified a positive relationship between dialogic teacher talk and students' academic achievement, highlighting the potential educational value of interaction that moves beyond narrowly controlled teacher talk. At the same time, Balaki and Mohammed (2025), based on observations of nine EFL classes at Soran University and questionnaire responses from 64 students, found

that teacher questions frequently elicited factual answers and that feedback was predominantly corrective. Their findings suggest that the presence of teacher - student exchanges does not necessarily translate into opportunities for students to initiate or sustain extended discussion.

These findings point to an important distinction between participation as response and participation as contribution to the development of discourse**.** Students may respond frequently without necessarily having opportunities to ask questions, elaborate on their answers, introduce topics, clarify meaning, or influence the trajectory of an exchange. Such dimensions are consistent with interactional perspectives on language learning, which view classroom interaction as an important site for the development of communicative competence and learner participation (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Sert, 2015). Accordingly, analysing classroom participation requires attention to the interactional conditions under which student talk occurs, rather than relying solely on the amount of student speech. For the present study, this perspective provides a basis for examining how teacher questioning, turn allocation, and feedback shape the opportunities available to students. In particular, it raises the question of whether students' responses remain confined to the immediate demands of teacher prompts or develop into more extended and independently initiated contributions.

**Initiation-Response-Feedback and Turn Allocation**

One of the most established frameworks for examining classroom interaction is Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) Initiation-Response-Feedback model. The model describes a recurrent pattern in which the teacher initiates an exchange, commonly through a question or instruction; a student responds; and the teacher subsequently provides feedback, evaluation, or follow-up. The model has been influential because it makes visible the sequential organisation of classroom discourse and the distinctive interactional roles occupied by teachers and students. The IRF sequence is closely connected to the distribution of speaking turns. Mehan (1979) demonstrates how classroom interaction is shaped by institutional procedures through which teachers select speakers, elicit responses, and evaluate contributions. Teacher nomination is therefore not simply a practical mechanism for managing a classroom; it also regulates access to the floor. Walsh (2011) similarly emphasises that teachers' interactional decisions can either create or constrain opportunities for learning. The allocation of a response turn consequently becomes an important point of analysis because it reveals how participation is institutionally organised.

Question design is particularly significant because the form of an initiation can influence what follows. In two Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms, Alghamdi (2025) found that open-ended and referential questions were associated with more developed second-turn responses, while follow-up questions could extend initially closed interactions. This finding highlights the importance of considering not only whether teachers ask questions but also how particular questions shape the subsequent development of classroom talk. A related perspective is offered by Uştuk et al. (2025), who propose a four-tier analytical procedure for examining teacher questioning in English-medium instruction classrooms. Their approach distinguishes the cognitive challenge of questions from their orientation towards authoritative or dialogic interaction. This distinction is useful because a question may require students to produce an answer without necessarily creating an interactional environment in which that answer can be elaborated or negotiated.

The development of classroom exchanges beyond the conventional IRF sequence is also illustrated by Waring (2009). In a single-case analysis of an adult ESL classroom, Waring demonstrates how a learner and teacher can move beyond recurring Initiation-Response-Feedback cycles towards student-initiated negotiation. The study is significant for the present research because it draws attention to what happens after an initial response. An exchange does not necessarily end with teacher evaluation; it may instead develop through clarification, negotiation, further questioning, or learner initiation. More recent research further demonstrates the importance of subsequent teacher moves. Badem-Korkmaz and Balaman (2024)

examine teacher response-pursuit practices in video-mediated EFL classroom interactions and show how teachers may produce additional interactional moves when an initial question does not elicit a response. Their findings highlight the role of teacher follow-up in determining whether an exchange is sustained or brought towards closure. Taken together, these studies indicate that IRF should not be treated simply as a fixed three-part sequence. Its pedagogical and interactional consequences depend on the design of the initiation, the nature of the student response, and what the teacher does afterwards. A teacher's feedback may close an exchange by confirming an expected answer, or it may function as a bridge to further interaction. The present study therefore treats IRF as a dynamic interactional structure in which questioning, turn allocation, response development, and feedback jointly shape the opportunities available for participation.

**Critical Discourse Analysis and Classroom Authority**

While interactional frameworks provide an account of how classroom exchanges are organised, Critical Discourse Analysis offers a complementary perspective for examining what such organisation means in relation to power and institutional roles. Fairclough (1989, 1992) conceptualises discourse as socially constitutive: language not only reflects existing social relations but also participates in their production and reproduction. From this perspective, apparently routine classroom practices can be examined as forms of discourse through which institutional relationships are enacted. Classroom questioning, nomination, correction, repetition, and evaluation are pedagogically ordinary practices. Nevertheless, these practices also establish particular relations between teachers and students. Through questioning, teachers determine what is to be discussed and what type of response is expected. Through nomination, they regulate access to speaking turns. Through evaluation, they establish whether a contribution is accepted, corrected, or developed. Through topic management, they determine when an exchange continues and when the class moves to another activity. These practices consequently provide important sites for examining how classroom authority is enacted through discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1992). Importantly, authority in classroom discourse does not necessarily appear through explicit commands or overt displays of dominance. It can instead be reproduced through routine interactional practices that are accepted as normal features of teaching. In this respect, CDA provides a useful analytical lens for examining how institutional authority can become embedded in everyday classroom communication. The teacher's authority may be visible not only in what the teacher says but also in who is selected to speak, which responses are validated, and who determines whether an exchange has reached its endpoint.

Recent empirical research illustrates the value of this approach. Tamersit and Mouas (2025), using CDA to examine EFL teachers and students at Batna 2 University, considered linguistic and paralinguistic resources including modality, personal pronouns, teacher speaking time, and body language. Their findings indicate that teacher discourse and classroom presence can function as resources through which authority is constructed and classroom relationships are shaped. Similarly, Zulfah et al. (2025) examined two online ESL conversation lessons through Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis and IRF analysis. Their study connected turn allocation, topic control, and feedback with teacher dominance and learner agency, while also identifying instances in which students redirected interaction through questions and clarification requests. This work is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how IRF sequences can be examined not only as structural patterns but also as sites in which power and participation are negotiated. The relationship between teacher authority and participation, however, should not be conceptualised as inherently oppositional. Teacher authority may provide structure, scaffolding, and direction, particularly in language classrooms where learners require interactional support. Tao, Ren, and Chen (2025), for example, show that authoritative teaching practices can coexist with discourse practices that support teacher -student relationships and participation in a Chinese EFL classroom. This suggests that the analytical question is not simply whether teacher authority restricts students, but how particular forms of authority organise the conditions under which students are able to participate. Such a perspective

is important for the present study because the selected lesson contains considerable student participation alongside strong teacher control. The students are not silent; they respond to questions, provide examples, and participate in group activities. Yet much of this participation is elicited, brief, and subject to teacher evaluation. CDA therefore allows the analysis to move beyond a simple distinction between "active" and "passive" learners and instead examine how participation itself is structured by institutional discourse.

**Research Gap**

The literature demonstrates that classroom interaction has been examined from several complementary perspectives. Research on classroom discourse has established the institutional organisation of teacher–student interaction and the importance of participation for language learning (Cazden, 2001; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2011). Research on IRF and questioning has shown that the design of teacher initiations and subsequent interactional moves can influence the extent to which students develop their responses (Alghamdi, 2025; Badem-Korkmaz & Balaman, 2024; Uştuk et al., 2025). Waring (2009) further demonstrates that classroom interaction can move beyond recurring IRF cycles when learners are provided with opportunities for student-initiated negotiation. At the same time, CDA-oriented studies have illustrated how classroom authority is enacted through linguistic, interactional, and paralinguistic resources (Tamersit & Mouas, 2025; Zulfah et al., 2025). These strands of research collectively establish the importance of examining both participation and authority. However, there remains a need for contextualised analysis of how several interactional resources operate together within the same classroom exchange. In particular, less attention has been given to the relationship between teacher nomination, access to response turns, evaluative feedback, and the opportunity for students to continue or develop their contributions. Examining these features together is important because access to a speaking turn does not necessarily equate to interactional agency. A student may be given the opportunity to respond but have little opportunity to determine what happens after that response.

Zulfah et al. (2025) provide a particularly relevant precedent by bringing IRF analysis and critical examination of classroom power into the same analytical framework. Building on this line of inquiry, the present study focuses more specifically on the sequential relationship between teacher nomination, student response, evaluative feedback, and subsequent interaction within a single EFL speaking lesson. The concern is not simply whether students are allowed to speak, but whether the interaction that follows their responses provides opportunities for elaboration, negotiation, learner initiation, or further contribution. The contribution of the present study therefore lies in its contextualised examination of participation as interactionally organised. Rather than treating student participation as a matter of response frequency alone, the study examines the conditions under which responses are elicited, evaluated, extended, or closed. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) IRF framework provides the analytical structure for identifying these sequential patterns, while Fairclough's (1989, 1992) CDA framework enables their interpretation in relation to institutional authority and participation. Accordingly, the study examines one publicly available EFL speaking lesson as a bounded case. It traces teacher nomination, questioning, student responses, evaluative feedback, and subsequent turns as interconnected components of classroom discourse. Through this approach, the study seeks to show how the same pedagogical practices can simultaneously facilitate participation and regulate it. The analysis therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of classroom interaction by distinguishing the opportunity to speak from the opportunity to shape the development of classroom discourse**.**

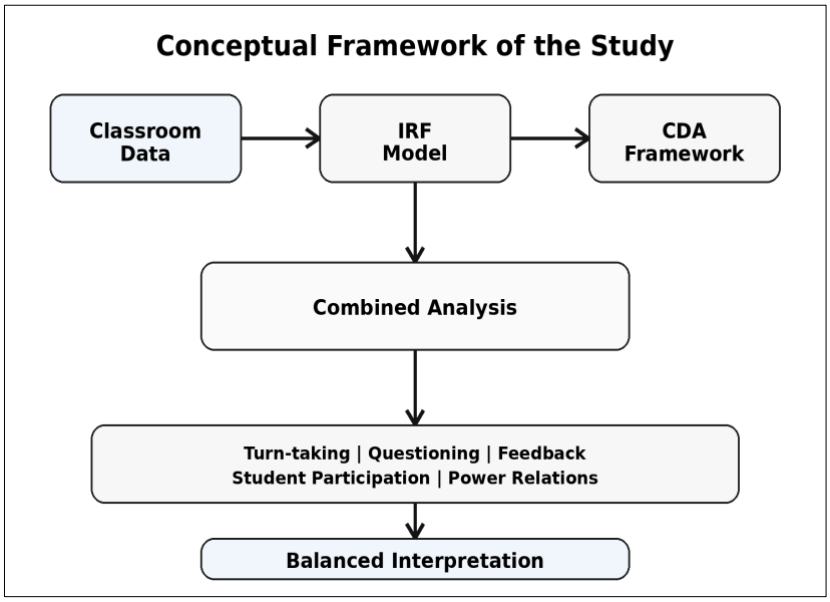
## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by two complementary approaches: Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation-Response-Feedback model and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. The Initiation-Response-Feedback model

provides the structural lens. It helps identify who initiates an exchange, how students respond, and how the teacher evaluates or follows up. CDA provides the critical lens. It helps explain how these exchange patterns reflect authority, control, and participation in an institutional classroom setting. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is relevant to the study. The textual dimension focuses on features such as questions, feedback, repetition, correction, and turn-taking. The discursive practice dimension examines how classroom talk is produced and interpreted during the lesson. The social practice dimension considers how these routines reflect wider institutional relations between teacher authority and student participation. Figure 1 shows how these approaches are combined in the present study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework Integrating Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation-Response-Feedback Model with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis*




The framework shows that the lesson data are first described through exchange structure and then interpreted critically. In simple terms, the analysis asks two connected questions: What is happening in the classroom talk? and What does this pattern show about authority and participation? This design keeps the analysis clear for the reader because it links each finding to both a visible classroom feature and a wider social meaning.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative single-case design informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how authority and participation are constructed through classroom interaction. The data source is one publicly available recording of an EFL speaking lesson, lasting 18 minutes and 50 seconds. According to the video title and the uploader's description, the lesson involved fourth-year secondary students in the scientific stream at Al-Mutafawiqeen Secondary School in Kut, Iraq. The lesson concerns special events, including New Year cards, birthday invitations, birth announcements, and wedding invitations. The recording was published on YouTube on 12 May 2022. The recording was selected purposively because it contains teacher questions, student responses, feedback, and turn allocation within a speaking activity, making it relevant to the three research questions. These features provide a basis for examining how access to speaking turns is organised and how students' contributions are subsequently developed or brought to a

close. The recording constitutes the primary data source, while a transcript of classroom exchanges provides the textual basis for analysis. The recorded interaction is treated as a bounded case, and the study aims to provide a contextualised interpretation of this interaction rather than statistically generalisable findings about EFL classrooms.

The recording was publicly accessible and had been posted prior to the current study; thus, the researcher was neither part of the classroom interaction, nor intervened in it. In terms of presenting the data, excerpts from the transcript are provided using roles, for example, "Teacher" and "Student," instead of naming the participants involved, and no photographs of participants are included in the paper. Even though the recording is publicly available, being publicly available does not mean being completely anonymous, since the original source of the recording can be found out through the video. Therefore, the paper does not make any claims regarding anonymity of participants.

**Analytical Framework**

The analysis combines the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) framework with CDA. IRF was used as an interactional framework to identify the sequential organisation of classroom exchanges, while CDA provided the interpretive framework for examining how these interactional practices relate to authority and participation. This distinction enables the analysis to move from identifying observable interactional patterns to interpreting their broader discursive significance. The coding focused on six interactional features: (1) initiation, referring to teacher questions, prompts, or instructions that open an exchange; (2) response, referring to student responses to teacher initiations; (3) feedback, referring to teacher evaluation, correction, confirmation, or elaboration; (4) questioning, referring to the type and function of teacher questions; (5) turn allocation, referring to how speaking rights are distributed; and (6) student participation, referring to the length, frequency, and elaboration of student turns. These interactional features were subsequently interpreted through CDA to examine how control over topics, speaking rights, evaluation, and participation contributed to the construction of classroom authority.

Fairclough's (1992) three dimensions guide the interpretation of the coded features. At the textual dimension, attention is given to the wording and form of questions, nominations, evaluations, and reformulations. At the discursive-practice dimension, analysis considers how classroom questioning routines organise the production and uptake of talk: how prompts establish expected responses and how student answers are repeated, reformulated, accepted, or pursued in subsequent turns. At the social-practice dimension, these patterns are interpreted in relation to the teacher's institutional role in allocating speaking opportunities, determining acceptable answers, and managing lesson progression. Interpretation remains grounded in the relations displayed in the recorded lesson. Evaluative feedback is considered alongside subsequent turns to establish whether it contributes to continuing or closing an exchange. Student participation is interpreted in terms of contribution development and learner initiative. Restricted participation refers to exchanges in which responses remain confined to the teacher's immediate prompt and subsequent teacher moves close or redirect the interaction without developing the student's contribution. Extended contributions develop an answer through explanations, reasons, examples, or additional relevant details. Independent contributions involve learner-initiated questions, clarification requests, or relevant additions that are not specifically elicited by the teacher. These distinctions are assessed in relation to the preceding prompt and subsequent turns. An extended response may still be teacher-elicited, while a brief learner-initiated question may demonstrate independent participation. Self-selection to answer a teacher's question does not, by itself, establish independent initiation.

**Analytical Procedure and Rigour**

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the complete classroom recording was transcribed and reviewed repeatedly to establish an overview of the lesson and its interactional structure. Second, all interactional episodes relevant to the research questions were identified and coded according to the analytical framework. Particular attention was given to sequences containing teacher initiation, student response, teacher feedback, questioning, correction, turn allocation, and extended or restricted student participation. Third, recurring interactional patterns were compared across episodes within the lesson. Finally, selected representative extracts were subjected to CDA to interpret how the identified practices constructed and negotiated authority and participation.

The coding process was iterative. The transcript was repeatedly checked against the recording to verify speaker identification and the sequence of turns. Previously coded extracts were revisited as further patterns emerged, helping to maintain consistency in the application of the coding categories. Representative extracts are presented alongside their interpretations, allowing readers to assess the textual and interactional basis of the claims about authority and participation. Given the single-case nature of the dataset, the analysis prioritises depth, contextual interpretation, and analytical transparency rather than frequency-based generalisation.

**Table 1**

*Analytical Coding Framework*

| Analytical level | Coding category | Focus of analysis | Illustrative evidence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interactional | Initiation | Teacher questions, prompts, or instructions that open an interactional exchange and establish the immediate topic or task. | T: “What type of card is this?” |
| Interactional | Response | Student verbal response to a teacher initiation. Attention is given to the content and length of the response. | S: “Birthday announcement.” |
| Interactional | Feedback/ Evaluation | Teacher confirmation, evaluation, approval, or assessment following a student response. Feedback also includes correction, elaboration, and reformulation/modelling, such as repetition or the provision of an alternative linguistic form. | T: “All right, good. Very good.” Reformulation/modelling: T: “Very good. Singing with the music. Very good.” |
| Interactional | Questioning | Type and function of teacher questions, including display questions, confirmation questions, and follow-up questions that guide student responses. | T: “How do you celebrate an event like this?” |
| Interactional | Turn Allocation | Distribution and control of speaking opportunities, particularly the extent to which the teacher initiates and manages the sequence of turns. | T: “Group one” |
| Interactional | Student Participation | Extent and form of student verbal participation, including response length, elaboration, and independence of contribution. | S: “Dancing, singing with the music.” |

(continued)

| Analytical level | Coding category | Focus of analysis | Illustrative evidence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interpretive | Authority and Interactional Control | How authority is constructed through control of questioning, evaluation, validation, topic progression, and acceptable responses. | T: "Are you sure? Okay, so it is a birthday announcement." |
| Interpretive | Participation | How classroom practices enable or constrain student participation. | Student responses considered together with the preceding teacher prompt and subsequent turns to examine opportunities for further contribution. |

*Notes.* The six main interactional categories draw on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) IRF framework and classroom discourse analysis. Reformulation/modelling is included as a form of feedback. The interpretive categories are informed by Fairclough's (1989, 1992) CDA. Illustrative utterances are interpreted within their surrounding exchanges.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are presented together to avoid repetition and to make the analysis easier to follow. The section answers the three research questions by moving from general patterns to close interpretation. In simple terms, the analysis shows who speaks most, how the exchange is organised, and what this organisation means for classroom authority and learner participation.

### Overview of Coded Interactional Patterns

The frequencies of selected interactional features in Table 2 are coded based on the full lesson transcript. Both the transcript and the coded data were constantly compared with the video to ensure the accuracy of the identification of the speakers and the turn sequence, as well as the coding itself. Teacher questions, student answers, and feedback were coded in terms of individual interactional moves, while Initiation-Response-Feeback (IRF) sequences were identified as sequences. Questioning and reformulation of the same question within the elicitation episode were considered as one move of questioning, and evaluative comments within one teacher turn were considered as one move of feedback. As IRF sequences can include questioning, response, and feedback moves, the categories overlap analytically but do not exclude each other. Thus, frequencies are reported separately.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of Selected Interactional Features*

| Interactional feature | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Teacher questions | 69 |
| Student responses | 73 |
| Evaluative feedback | 51 |
| Initiation-Response-Feedback sequences | 53 |

*Notes.* Frequencies represent coded occurrences identified through systematic analysis of the complete lesson transcript and repeated checking against the video recording. The categories operate at partly overlapping levels of analysis; therefore, no combined total or percentage is calculated.

These patterns match with the theoretical model of Initiation-Response-Follow-Up presented by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975). According to the theory, classroom interaction tends to be organized in terms of teacher's initiations, students' responses, and teacher's follow-up. The relatively high frequency of teacher questions and student responses implies the fact that the majority of interaction was organized with the

help of teacher-led elicitations. Furthermore, the frequency of evaluative feedback also indicates the fact that teacher played the role of either accepting, confirming, correcting or evaluating students' responses. It seems that these patterns coincide with the institutional models of classroom interaction suggested by Mehan (1979) and Cazden (2001). Even though student responses were frequent enough, frequency of the responses does not guarantee the learners' control and independence. It is possible to say that the qualitative analysis has revealed that the majority of student responses were made in response to teacher questions and nominations followed by teacher confirmation and evaluation. This further supports the idea that classroom participation is worth looking at not just from the perspective of the frequency of learners' talking but also from the perspective of its quality, duration, and independence (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2011; Sert, 2015).

However, in relation to the lesson under consideration, the role of the teacher did not consist merely in restricting learners' participation. The processes of nomination, repetition, confirmation, and positive feedback gave learners chances to participate in an organised EFL class. On the other hand, the constant use of teacher-controlled interaction sequences restricted opportunities for self-selected and longer participant contributions. In this regard, it can be said that the results of the present research coincide with Walsh's (2011) interpretation of the educational importance of structured classroom interaction but also confirm Waring's (2009) idea that non-expanded IRF sequences may prevent learners from participating actively. Overall, the results of the study show the coexistence of pedagogical and institutional control in the classroom under consideration. Learners were given many chances to participate, but many of those chances were created by teachers.

**Teacher-Controlled Turn-Taking**

The first research question asks how turn-taking patterns are organised in EFL classroom interaction. The analysis shows that turn-taking is mainly teacher-controlled. Unlike everyday conversation, where speakers may self-select, the selected classroom lesson is organised by teacher nomination and group allocation. The teacher decides who speaks, when a student speaks, and when the answer is complete. This reflects the institutional nature of classroom discourse, where the teacher has greater interactional rights than the students (Mehan, 1979; Walsh, 2011). A clear example appears when the teacher addresses Abbas by name and asks, "So, you tell me, Abbas: How do you celebrate an event like this, a birth announcement?" Abbas responds, "Dancing, singing with the music," and the teacher closes the exchange with "All right. Good. Very good." The sequence illustrates teacher-controlled turn allocation: the teacher selects the respondent, the student provides a brief answer, and the teacher evaluates and closes the exchange. This pattern provides students with structured opportunities to participate. However, it also shows that students generally participate following teacher nomination, questioning, or other forms of turn allocation, although occasional self-selected contributions also occur. This finding shows that turn-taking is not just a technical classroom procedure. It is also a way of distributing speaking rights. When the teacher selects a student, the teacher gives that learner a chance to speak. At the same time, the teacher also controls who does not speak at that moment. Therefore, nomination functions as both inclusion and control. It includes selected learners in the lesson, but it limits self-selection and spontaneous learner talk. Teacher nomination, when considered from the interactional point of view, allows for reducing uncertainty and sustaining continuity in the class through maintaining an ordered participation pattern. In the case of critical analysis, teacher nomination becomes another means of reinforcing the teacher's institutional power because access to participation is controlled mainly by the teacher and not the learners themselves.

**How Initiation-Response-Feedback Shapes Communication**

The second research question asks how Initiation-Response-Feedback sequences shape teacher-student communication. The lesson is strongly organised around repeated Initiation-Response-Feedback

exchanges. For example, when discussing New Year celebrations, the teacher asks, 'How do we celebrate the New Year?' The student answers, 'By making a party and inviting friends and relatives,' and the teacher responds, 'Very good. Making a party, inviting relatives and friends.' The pattern is clear: the teacher initiates, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates. This pattern has pedagogical value. It helps the teacher check understanding, keep the lesson moving, and provide immediate encouragement. In EFL classrooms, this kind of structure can provide learners with explicit interactional support. At the same time, it can also bring exchanges to a close quickly. After the student gives the expected answer, the teacher's 'Very good' confirms correctness and ends the exchange. This can also be analysed with regard to the research on the practices of teacher response pursuit. As Badem-Korkmaz and Balaman (2024) explain, teachers will make more moves in order to get a response from students if their question does not result in a student's reaction. It is important to understand that the teacher's response is not only an evaluation of what the student says, but also a factor that determines how long the interaction continues or comes to an end. Often in such interactions, the teacher signals the end of the sequence when a satisfactory answer is provided, even though some sequences continue due to follow-up questions or response pursuit. The interaction is therefore successful for lesson management but limited for communicative expansion.

Similar sequences appear throughout the lesson through questions such as 'How do you celebrate it?', 'Are you sure?', and 'Do you exchange gifts?' Students answer with short items such as 'yes', 'dance', 'cake', and 'fireworks'. The teacher then responds with 'good', 'very good', 'excellent', or 'good job'. This repeated rhythm makes the lesson lively, but it also keeps the teacher in charge of the direction and value of classroom talk. Initiation-Response-Feedback therefore functions as both a resource and a constraint. The same pattern has been identified recently among other studies done in EFL classrooms. According to Kibret, Among, and Maru (2026), teacher discourse in speaking classes relied on direct moves of initiation, and at times, certain question practices did not result in long responses from students and thus led to incomplete IRF sequences. Such results are congruent with the current study, where the fact that teachers ask questions does not guarantee prolonged student engagement. Instead, the interactional role of the question and its follow-up feedback seem to be crucial in this matter. It supports classroom order, but it can reduce opportunities for extended student talk. This shows that the effectiveness of IRF cannot be measured on the basis of its frequency only, but it should also be analysed, keeping in view the use of feedback for expanding and closing the interaction between teachers and students in the class. In the current lesson, it is found that feedback often serves to confirm or end the interaction, although some feedback turns are followed by another elicitation turn.

**Feedback, Questioning and Teacher Authority**

The third research question asks to what extent classroom discourse reflects teacher authority and student participation. The analysis shows that authority is constructed through feedback, questioning, correction, repetition, and topic control. In one exchange, the teacher asks, 'What type of card is this?' A student answers, 'New Year card,' and the teacher replies, 'New Year card. Okay.' The repetition confirms the student's answer, while 'Okay' marks acceptance and closure. In simple terms, the teacher's response tells the class: this answer is now accepted. Evaluative feedback is one of the most important discourse practices in the lesson. The repeated use of 'good', 'very good', 'excellent', and 'good job' creates a positive classroom atmosphere. Positive feedback, when used repeatedly, allows giving explicit praise and showing acceptance of student's contributions. However, feedback is also linked to the role of the teacher as the evaluator who determines what responses will be accepted in classroom interaction. The teacher either repeats, confirms or evaluates the response of the student and the contribution gets explicit recognition before moving on to the next turn of the interaction. Questioning patterns show the same relationship between learning and power. Display questions such as 'What type of card is this?' guide learners toward expected answers. Confirmation questions such as 'Are you sure?' help students reconsider their responses, but they also signal that the teacher controls correctness. The teacher decides the question, the expected

answer, and the moment when the class moves to the next topic. From a CDA perspective, these are not neutral moves. They are ordinary teaching practices, but they organise knowledge and authority in the classroom (Fairclough, 1989, 1992).

CDA studies in EFL classrooms that have been carried out recently also illustrate how teacher authority can be accomplished by means of linguistic as well as paralinguistic means. Tamersit and Mouas (2025), using Fairclough's framework for CDA, focused on the analysis of such elements as modality, use of personal pronouns, amount of teacher talk, and body language. It turns out that the teacher's discourse and classroom presence can help build up teacher authority and impact the development of teacher-student relationships. From this perspective, the present study will interpret questioning, evaluation, and turn-taking as routine practices of constructing authority. This finding supports Fairclough's view that institutional authority is reproduced through routine discursive practices rather than through explicit displays of power. In the present lesson, authority emerges through ordinary pedagogical interaction, demonstrating how everyday classroom discourse simultaneously performs instructional and institutional functions.

**Student Participation and Learner Agency**

Student participation in the lesson should be understood as active but constrained. Students are not silent or passive. They answer questions, give examples, participate in groups, and respond to teacher prompts. Their answers refer to cakes, gifts, fireworks, dancing, singing, rings, wedding ceremonies, and family celebrations. These responses show that learners are involved in the topic and can connect classroom content with familiar social events. Nevertheless, most responses are short, reactive, and dependent on the teacher's questions. Student-initiated contributions occur less frequently than teacher-elicited responses, ask questions, or produce extended explanations. This is why participation must be analysed qualitatively, not only quantitatively. A classroom may look interactive because many students speak, but the quality of participation may still be limited if students mainly produce brief answers to teacher prompts. The lesson therefore shows a difference between speaking often and speaking freely.

A balanced interpretation is necessary. The teacher in the selected lesson appears supportive and organised. Teacher nomination, repetition, and positive feedback help learners participate and prevent silence. However, CDA helps reveal that even supportive discourse can regulate participation. The most recent findings have revealed that there is no reason to consider the authority of teachers and the participation of learners as mutually exclusive factors. The authoritative teacher in a Chinese EFL class observed by Tao, et. al. (2025) proved that authoritative teaching practices can co-exist with discourse practices fostering teacher-student relationships and participation. This finding can serve as a good point of comparison for the current study since the authority of teachers can guide the communication process without limiting participation; however, the discourse of teachers affects this type of participation. The main issue is not whether teacher authority exists, but how much space this authority leaves for learner agency. A more dialogic classroom pattern would keep the teacher's scaffolding role while giving students more opportunities to elaborate, self-select, and negotiate meaning. Such findings indicate that rather than seeing learner agency as the chance to speak, it is important to see it as the chance to have an impact on the development and trajectory of the classroom dialogue. Increased chances of responding, asking questions, and having discussions could improve not only communicative competence but also interactional autonomy without decreasing the teacher's role.

**Institutional and Policy Implications**

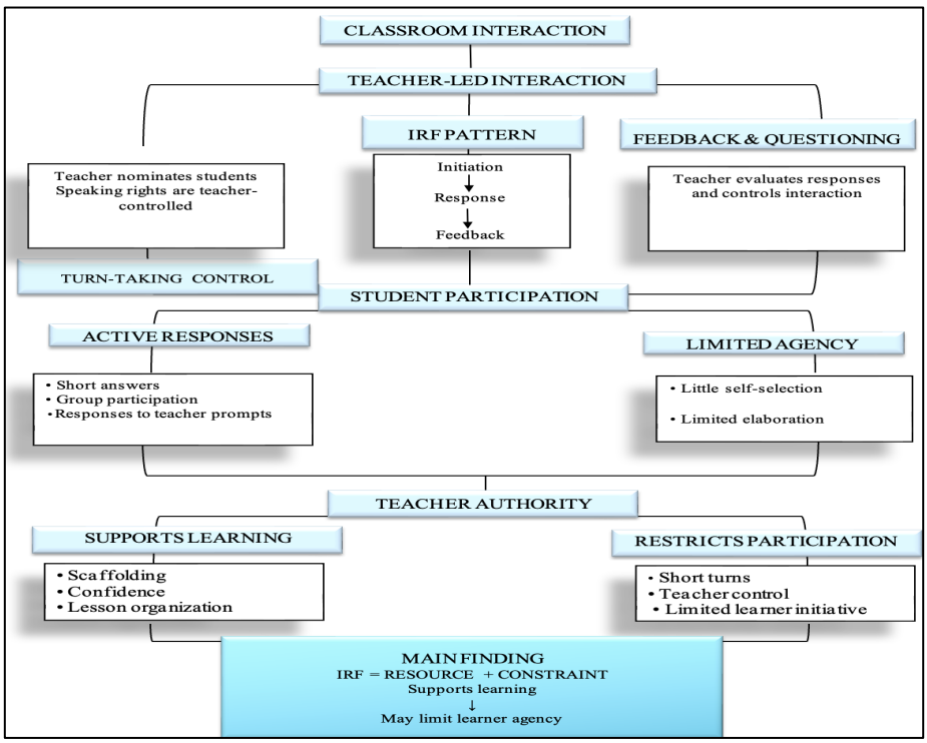
These results have broader implications not only for the specific practice of individual teachers but also suggest that institutions need to take into account how classroom interaction is facilitated via policies on

teaching and teacher development. The emphasis on classroom participation as the amount of time students respond to teachers' questions and on how much content of the lesson is covered during the lesson means that there might be few incentives for teachers to provide opportunities for extended learner talk. At the institutional level, teacher development programs can help provide advice on how to balance teacher control of classroom activities with a more dialogic approach to interactions in class. Teacher professional development might be focused on techniques aimed at prolonging IRF sequences by means of follow-up questions, seeking clarification, student interaction, and learner self-selection. These actions would not entail teachers' abandoning the structure of classroom interaction management. On the contrary, they would allow teachers to take the existing interaction sequences as a basis for prolonged interactions. This corresponds to the idea that classroom discourse is able to serve learning purposes and create possibilities for active learners' participation in classroom meaning-making (Alexander, 2008; Walsh, 2011).

The quality of classroom interactions might also be taken into account in terms of classroom observation and evaluation practices. Classroom observation schemes could be expanded not only to observations of whether teachers control classrooms or fulfil their instructional goals but also to observations of such things as the number of speaking turns, length of student participation, and so forth. Such indicators would help us to gain a wider perspective on classroom effectiveness and reflect the difference between the frequency of participation and true agency of the learners observed in the current research (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Sert, 2015). These implications are especially pertinent to EFL schools where classroom interaction could become the most important chance for learners to practice using English communicatively. Any institutional support for dialogic instruction should be coupled with realistic assumptions about teachers' teaching duties, the number of students in classes, the level of their competence, and the needs of the curriculum. It should not be the purpose of any institution to remove teacher's authority; rather, the goal is to develop a more flexible balance of interactional power where teachers act as facilitators of communication, while learners have chances to elaborate on topics, generate new topics and negotiate meaning.

**Figure 2**

*Summary of the Main Findings*



## CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher - student interaction in a publicly available EFL speaking lesson through the combined use of Critical Discourse Analysis and Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) framework. The analysis focused on turn-taking, IRF sequences, evaluative feedback, questioning, student participation, and teacher authority. The findings indicate that classroom interaction in the selected lesson is interactive but predominantly teacher led. The teacher initiates most exchanges, allocates speaking turns, evaluates responses, and controls topic progression, while students generally contribute brief responses that are closely shaped by teacher prompts. Beyond addressing the research questions, the study contributes both theoretically and methodologically by demonstrating the value of integrating the IRF framework with Critical Discourse Analysis. While the IRF model explains how classroom interaction is organised through recurring exchange patterns, CDA provides a critical perspective for interpreting how these interactional routines construct authority, regulate participation, and reproduce institutional roles. Combining these complementary perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding of classroom discourse than either framework alone by explaining both the organisation and the social meaning of teacher–student interaction.

The findings also provide a balanced interpretation of teacher authority in EFL classrooms. Rather than portraying teacher control as inherently restrictive, the analysis suggests that teacher-led interaction performs important pedagogical functions by maintaining classroom organisation, providing scaffolding, and creating a supportive learning environment. At the same time, routine practices such as teacher nomination, evaluative feedback, and tightly structured IRF sequences may reduce opportunities for learner self-selection, extended responses, and interactional autonomy. The study therefore argues that the IRF pattern is best understood as a dual-function classroom resource that simultaneously facilitates effective instruction while potentially limiting learner agency when interaction is consistently closed rather than extended. The study has several limitations that define the scope of its findings. First, the analysis is based on a single publicly available EFL classroom video and therefore cannot be generalised to all instructional contexts. Second, the study concentrates primarily on verbal interaction and does not examine multimodal aspects of communication, such as gaze, gesture, body movement, classroom space, or visual resources. Finally, although a systematic coding framework and iterative analytical procedures were employed to enhance trustworthiness, the interpretation remains qualitative and is necessarily shaped by the researcher's analytical perspective. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that effective classroom management and meaningful learner participation should be viewed as complementary rather than competing objectives. Teachers may continue to use nomination, repetition, and positive evaluative feedback, when learners require additional interactional support, while simultaneously creating greater opportunities for learner elaboration through follow-up questions, open-ended prompts, and learner-initiated contributions. For example, after a learner answers "cake," the teacher might ask, "Why is cake important in a birthday celebration?" or "Can you describe how your family celebrates birthdays?" Such interactional moves maintain instructional structure while encouraging richer classroom discourse and greater learner agency.

Building on the findings of the present study, future research could investigate a larger sample of EFL classrooms across different proficiency levels, educational contexts, and instructional settings to determine whether similar interactional patterns emerge in different learning environments. Future studies may also combine Critical Discourse Analysis with multimodal discourse analysis to examine how verbal interaction works together with gaze, gesture, body movement, classroom space, and visual resources in constructing authority and participation. Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of classroom discourse by accounting for both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of interaction. In addition, intervention-based research could investigate whether increasing the use of follow-up questions, open-ended prompts, and opportunities for learner self-selection promotes greater learner agency, encourages extended classroom discourse, and supports more meaningful language production in EFL classrooms.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data analysed in this study were derived from a publicly available EFL classroom video. The transcript analysed in the study was prepared from the publicly accessible recording and was used solely for academic research purposes. Selected transcript extracts are presented in the manuscript to support the analysis, while the complete transcript is retained by the researcher for academic reference and can be made available upon reasonable request.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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