

# Classroom Interaction Using IRF Pattern Carried Out by Lecturer in English Classrooms: A Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

The most common pattern in classroom interaction is teacher initiates the talk in the class, learners respond to teacher talk, and teacher responds by giving corrective feedback to the learners. From this pattern it explains teacher's dominance in the classroom interaction. Therefore, the significance of this study on whether the use of Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) in teaching facilitates learner-initiated communication and gives learning opportunities for learners to engage in classroom interaction. The data were taken from observation of a conversation in the classroom. The result of this study is the teaching using IRF pattern can facilitate learner-initiated communication and give opportunities for learners to engage in classroom interaction.

**Key words:** IRF Pattern, learning opportunity, engage, learner-initiated communication, classroom interaction.

## INTRODUCTION

In a language learning context, interaction has a prominent role in communicative language teaching for it is the essence of communication (Brown, 2001). Interaction in language learning is mostly done in the classroom. Classroom interaction is the interplay between teacher and students and takes place in the center of the classroom (Congmin, 2016). Classroom interactions are planned and meaningful (Sundari et al, 2017). This means that the interaction must follow the teacher's plan, the feedback, questions, and corrections should improve the student's language competence.

Successful classroom interaction determines the success of the language learning process. Levinson (1983) proposes that there are two major approaches to the study of classroom interaction: Discourse Analysis (DA) and Conversation Analysis (CA). Classroom discourse is an activity that occurs in the classroom in the learning process, especially the

language used for the learning process (Domalewska, 2017). The well-proponents of a DA approach to classroom interaction are Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). They state that the most particular character in classroom interaction is IRF structure or pattern. The organization of Initiation Respond-Feedback (IRF) is the default interactional practice which is used extensively by the researchers to investigate classroom interaction.

An IRF sequence comprises of three fundamental parts, namely initiation, response and feedback (Huq & Amir, 2015). IRF pattern starts from teacher asks question, and the learner answers the question; then the teacher provides feedback to the answer given by the learner. It is expected that the learners will be helped by this type of interaction related to their interaction with teachers (Saswati, 2018). The learners can negotiate meaning with teachers and teachers should facilitate this interaction by confirmation checks, clarification request, and comprehension checks. Negotiated meaning facilitates learning. Supposedly, it improves students' proficiency. Additionally, during the interaction, learners receive feedback on their language production. It is expected by receiving feedback, they can improve their proficiency. In a language classroom, the IRF structure is a common sort of teacher-student interaction pattern. Depending on the context in which they operate, IRF sequences do distinct interactional and educational activities. Initiation, that is only occur when the teacher allows the student to respond to them. Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) describe three categories of initiation covering a. elicitation requesting a linguistic response (ie. interrogative), b. directive - requesting a non-linguistic response (ie. imperative), and c. informative - passing on information (ie, declarative).

Further, there is an information regarding response that is dependent on the initiating move provided by the teacher (Kartini, Syakira & Aisyah, 2022). Therefore, this assign further distinctions of initiation moves with regards to the responses they elicit covering Assumed Known Information, the student is expected to supply information that the teacher has in mind, Personal Information, the student is expected to provide their feeling about a topic, and therefore the information is only known to addressed student, and the last one Negotiatory Information, the student is expected to participate in exploratory discussion, where a resolution is reached collaboratively. While feedback or follow-up is often commenced with an acceptance; whereas evaluation is commenting on the quality of the response, often the result of an appeal for assumed known information.

Regarding that, Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) Pattern is believed to facilitate learner-initiated communication and learning opportunities (Sinclair, 1975). The pattern is a

rigid structure to follow and it is applied well in 1960-1970ies in which the traditional classroom interaction is still found. Several studies have discussed about IRF pattern, including studies conducted by Li (2018), Rashidi and Rafieerad (2010), Bhatta and Butterfield (2016), Rustandi and Mubarak (2017), and also Sujariati, Rahman, and Mahmud (2016).

A study conducted by Li (2018), “An Analysis of IRF (Initiation-Response Feedback) on Classroom Interaction in EFL Speaking Class” resulted that IRF had a potential to increase language learning opportunities. IRF model is categorized by IRF form-focused and meaning-focused model. It was found out that both teachers use L1 to engage in classroom interaction while in meaning-focused model, L1 was used by teachers to scaffold students’ learning. A study conducted by Rashidi and Rafieerad (2010), found that the interaction in the class varied; however, teacher still dominated the talk. Regarding discourse talk, the distribution of talk was fair. The use of rigid IRF pattern was found out and there was no difference in IRF pattern both female teachers and male teachers. Bhatta and Butterfield (2016), conducted research by examining the use of IRF patterns used in the context of team teaching. The IRF was found in one of the teachers' classrooms. When used in team teaching, the IRF pattern is used collaboratively.

Rustandi and Mubarak (2017), in a study entitled “Analyzing Pattern of Classroom Interaction in EFL Classroom in Iran” found that student response has become the dominant IRF sequence. Furthermore, teachers should maintain the efficacy of classroom interaction and provide ample opportunities for students to participate in classroom verbal interaction by incorporating the IRF pattern into the teaching learning process, particularly in the speaking classroom. Other studies by Sujariati, Rahman, and Mahmud (2016), “Reconsidering IRF Sequences: A Focus on Team-Teaching Classrooms”, the results of the study revealed that the employment of questioning tactics by teachers in EFL classrooms had a beneficial impact. Most of the students agreed, as can be seen in their comments. In addition, the observation also indicated that both the teacher and the students engaged in effective questioning tactics.

All the previous studies used formal classroom and the skills were integrated. However, this study uses the data taken from conversation class in which students are supposedly more active in classroom interaction. Teachers act as facilitator and are not supposedly to dominate in classroom interaction. Therefore, this study sheds lights on whether the use of Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) in teaching facilitates learner-initiated communication and gives learning opportunity for learners to engage in classroom interaction. This study aimed to see how IRF patterns happened in higher education taught by a lecturer with years of teaching experiences.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method used is a descriptive qualitative method that emphasized discourse analysis. Creswell, (1991) stated that qualitative research is an exploration that is also related to the individual understanding of these social problems. This study explain and evaluate IRF classroom interaction patterns whether or not a pattern that can make it easier for students to start communicating and learning opportunities for English classes. In language classroom, it is noted that investigating classroom discourses and the ways they affect students and the learning process can be considered crucial (Ong, 2017). The data taken from conversation and interaction between lecturer-students in a course in the English class at Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. This research is applied which classroom interactions in the English class were observed.

After all the data were obtained, they were analyzed descriptively. The researcher analyzed the data based on several steps stated by Miles and Huberman (1984), as follows: (1) Transcribing the data; (2) reading through all the data; (3) coding the data; (4) organizing categorization and generating themes; and (5) analyzing and interpreting the data based on certain criteria. Data analysis begins from identifying IRF pattern classroom interactions, categorizing interactional and pedagogical features goals to be achieved by teacher, analyzing the teacher's conversation and students to find out whether classroom interaction patterns can facilitate a good class communication and evaluating IRF pattern as a tool for analysis classroom interaction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that the IRF pattern was utilized by teachers and students differ depending on the goal of classroom engagement. In terms of IRF patterns in the teaching and learning process, requestives, directions, elicitation, and informative were the four subclasses of initiation utilized by the lecturer in the classroom interaction.

This segment presents five extracts as data whose format of data transcription is not to refer to any reference. There is L for lecturer, S for student, and Ss for students.

### Data 1

(1)	L	After last week we learned about the concept of curriculum, today we continue with the material curriculum changes in Indonesia. Does anyone know what curriculum has been used in Indonesia?
(2)	Ss	<i>Merdeka, Kurtilas, KTSP.</i>
(3)	L	Okay, is there anything else?
(4)	Ss	(no answer)
(5)	L	Okay, so you know the three curricula, what curriculum was used when you were in elementary school?
(6)	S1	<i>KTSP</i> ma'am.
(7)	L	When you were in junior high school, what curriculum did you use?
(8)	S2	<i>Kurtilas</i> ma'am.
(9)	L	How was it in senior high school?
(10)	S2	Still <i>kurtilas</i>
(11)	L	Are your other friends the same?
(12)	Ss	Yes ma'am, same.

*Table 1 Initiation process carried out by the lecturer*

Based on data in table 1.1, at the beginning of the lesson the teacher initiates by asking several questions. Initiations of classroom talk, such as revoicing and strategic reformulation, initiating with a negotiatory question, contrast or clarify, and follow-up that encounters learners to explain, can produce the more beneficial and facilitative learning condition (Mousavi & Vahedi, 2021). The lecturer introduces new lessons to students through displays questions

about the various types of curriculum that have been used in Indonesia. The questions asked were varied from referential to display questions. That Referential questions arise more than displaying that and that to promote actual communication in class. However, there is a display question in it (3) which was not answered by students they were confused about what to say. However, they don't ask the teacher. The teacher moves on to another reference question. Response given by students are their actual answers and that promote communicative classrooms interaction. Student-initiated conversations occurs in (10) “still *kurtilas*” to ensure that the curriculum is used when students are still in senior high school. The lecturer does not provide feedback on students' responses, so the type of interaction is only response initiation because there is no feedback. The feedback phase does not occur, and the types are Initiation and Response only (Saswati, 2018).

#### Data 2

(1)	L	Okay, now let's look at the slide, what curriculum has been used in Indonesia. Actually there are several curricula, but we will discuss only those 1994 curriculum, 2004 curriculum (KBK), 2006 curriculum (KTSP), 2013 curriculum (K 13) dan 2022 curriculum (curriculum Merdeka). Your task is to find out more about these curricula, starting from the components, usage time, differences and similarities with others. Please look for it with your group.
(2)	Ss	(The students discuss the assignment given by the lecturer for 15 minutes. The lecturer checks with each group to ensure that they understand the instructions). After sometime.....
(3)	L	Riri, can you describe about 1994 curriculum?
(4)	S3	Oriented to subject matter, uses a quarterly system, and is populist
(5)	L	Okay oriented to subject matter, uses a quarterly system, and populist
(6)	L	How about you Iska, can you describe about 1994 curriculum?
(7)	S4	Oriented to subject matter, populist, and teaching from concrete to abstract.
(8)	L	So, oriented to subject matter, populist, and teaching from concrete to abstract.

*Table 2 Practical process: the lecturer provides a brief overview of the material*

In practice stage, the lecturer initiates the conversation by provide a brief overview of the material to be studied (1). Lecturer paraphrases the directions in the slide. At this stage there is no response from the class. She dominates the class interaction. Safriani (2017) argues that eliciting students' prior knowledge commonly appears in students'-teacher interaction during reading lesson, particularly in pre-reading session. In this context, the teacher plays a role in facilitating reading learning, and this interaction becomes an opportunity to explore and build students' initial knowledge regarding reading material. Thus, a focus on pre-reading sessions can contribute significantly to students' understanding and their knowledge acquisition process in the reading context. Since it is a conversation class, the lecturer can form the IRF pattern to talk about direction to students. She can use display questions to know whether the students understand it or not. Amin (2015) affirms that in teacher-students' interaction, the occurrence of K2 initiated pattern indicates that teacher check students' understanding related to the given task. The K2 pattern refers to the teacher's action of initiating questions or interactions to check student understanding regarding the assignment that has been given. In other words, through the K2 pattern, the teacher aims to evaluate the extent to which students understand the material or assignment being discussed. These checks can help teachers understand students' level of understanding and provide additional guidance or clarification if needed. Therefore, the K2 pattern in teacher-student interactions is an important strategy to ensure students' understanding of learning material. Questions can get more responses than statements (Saswati, 2018). With questions students can carry out thinking activities about the lesson material. There is no interaction. The lecturer does not create IRF pattern by asking question. After accomplishing the task, the answers are discussed starting from lecturer initiates by asking referential questions. Sofyan & Mahmud (2014) stated that this pattern commonly occurs in order to ensure whether the pupils understand or finish their particular learning exercises or not. The respond students and lecturer give feedback by echoing the learners' answers for the class benefits in (5 and 8). The teacher can vary the scaffolding techniques to give feedback. She can use negative evaluation to clarify the response. She can use speech modification, hesitation, or rephrasing to gear communicative classroom interaction. The interaction is from non-communicative stage to communicative one.

*Data 3*

(1)	L	You all find oriented to subject matters characters, what does that mean?
(2)	S3	<i>Lebih menekankan pada materi pembelajaran yang padat.</i>

*Table 3 Practical stage: the lecturer gives display questions*

It is still in the practice stage. Lecturer initiates the talk by display questions to promote negotiated meaning. According to Selvaraj et al. (2021), providing a positive evaluation is an effort to provide recognition or appreciation for student performance or efforts. Providing positive feedback, whether in the form of praise or appreciation, can help motivate students, strengthen self-confidence, and create a positive learning environment. Thus, the use of positive evaluation is considered an effective strategy to motivate and improve students' learning experiences. She uses clarification request in (1). The student gives a good response in (2). The negotiation goes on when lecturer gives feedback by repeating the word as a comprehension check.

*Data 4*

(1)	L	Oriented to subject matters, what does that mean?
(2)	S1	<i>Berfokus pada materi.</i>
(3)	L	<i>Berfokus pada materi.</i> Learning at school places more emphasis on fairly dense subject matter.
(4)	L	How about populist, what is populist?
(5)	Ss	<i>Satu sistem kurikulum</i>
(6)	L	Yes right

*Table 4 Lecturer did scaffolding with provide instructions*

The lecturer starts the conversation with a display of questions in (1 and 4). She did scaffolding with provide instructions for providing bait back to students. She describes subject matters by providing context to them students. The follow-up was useful for the lecturer to motivate the students to initiate the interaction. Jaeger's (2019) stated that follow-up questions are the most effective third-turn move, because these questions prompted students to carefully think more about their initial responses. By using follow-up questions, teachers can broaden students' understanding, dig deeper, and encourage reflective thinking processes. Therefore, follow-up questions are considered a powerful strategy in increasing students' depth of

understanding and stimulating critical thinking. Student responses show their understanding and also the interactions that occur in this process.

#### *Data 5*

(1)	L	Now it's time to practice to check your understanding. I have prepared some questions. I think you are familiar with the characters from the 1994 curriculum. I want your group representatives to come forward to carry out this activity.
(2)	S	(Group representatives come forward). Interaction occurs between Lecturer and students.

*Table 5 Interaction between lecturer and students*

In data 5, students are expected to be able to answer questions based on the characteristics of the curriculum they are studying. Interaction also occurs between lecturers and students.

Based on these results, hence, we may witness that teacher uses initiative phase in the beginning of the stage to introduce a new lesson to learners. Display and referential questions are used to know learners' background knowledge about curriculum. Learners respond to the teacher's questions and there is no feedback as correction. Commonly performed the IRF sequences by producing questions and evaluating answers in classroom interaction (Butterfield & Bhatta, 2015). In this context, the teacher usually starts the interaction by giving an initiation or question to the student (I), then the student provides a response (R) to the question, and finally the teacher provides feedback or evaluation (F) to the student's answer. This IRF series is an approach commonly used in the learning process to facilitate dialogue and assess student understanding. Thus, the use of IRF can help teachers guide class discussions and ensure students' understanding of learning material. Ideally, teacher should give feedback to the learners' responses to appreciate their engagement in the learning process even though it is in preteaching stage.

In practice stage, teacher initiates the conversation by asking using display questions and referential questions and statement to elaborate the direction. Learners respond to teachers' questions but not for the statement. The learners are given the opportunities to talk in the form of answering the teacher's questions. Rustandi and Mubarak (2017) stated that students'

response was dominantly occurred in dassroom lesson which caused by teacher's effort to keep students' participation. The data reveal that the learners do not give any responses to teacher's elaboration on the material and direction. For this, teacher can construct IRF pattern to lead the communicative interaction.

The feedback phase occurs in the practice stage. Positive feedback has advantages in increasing students' motivation, confidence, self-efficacy and academic skills (Arsyan, 2019). Teacher uses negotiated meaning to confirm the learners' responses, clarify the request and to verify the learners' responses. The negotiated meaning occurs in the short sequence. The teacher should extend the sequence of the conversation to give the opportunities for learners to express their opinion and to talk. Hu et al. (2021) mentions that idea expansion used by the teacher does not simply affirm or correct the students' answer, rather he/she provides further information related to students' answer. The expansion of ideas carried out by the teacher is not only strict or corrective to students' answers. In contrast, effective expansion of ideas involves providing additional relevant information or further explanation related to the student's answer. In this way, teachers not only improve students' understanding, but also involve them in a deeper and more comprehensive learning process. Informative expansion of ideas can help students understand concepts better and stimulate their critical thinking. Therefore, this approach aims to make a positive contribution to the teaching and learning process.

The learner-initiated occurs in the class; however, it should be extended in terms of time to promote actual communication. Additionally, the teacher scaffolds the feedback by repeating the learner's response. Teachers' lengthy and ongoing instructional behaviors during feedback moves can promote students' knowledge and skills of broader range of subject (Clements et al., 2017). Supposedly, the teacher can vary the feedback techniques to give more learning opportunities and facilitate learner-initiated talk.

## CONCLUSION

IRF is the pattern that occurs mostly in classroom interaction can be used to analyze the classroom interaction. In addition, IRF pattern can promote learning opportunities and create communicative and actual communication in the classroom. Teacher starts the conversation by using more referential questions instead of display questions. Teacher can use statement to give content feedback but not for giving direction for teacher cannot spoon feed the learners. She can create the IRF pattern for giving direction when it is a practice stage. Moreover, feedback

is to promote negotiated meaning which is believed can give learning opportunities for learners. Other scaffolding techniques can be applied in order to benefit the class regarding the improvement. Even though IRF pattern is not new and comes from the 1970ies era, it can still be used in Indonesian classes for learners still depend on the teachers very much. They need teacher initiates the talk first by asking them questions and they will answer and feedback is provided. The initiated talk by learners is in response phase and feedback phase. However, in initiated phase in IRF pattern, teacher plays the important role.

The IRF pattern can facilitate the learner-initiated communication and can facilitate learning opportunities for them. The teacher is expected to vary the techniques of initiating and giving feedback. The teacher should promote negotiated meaning and use referential questions more than display ones to gear communicative classroom interaction and genuine communication. Based on the data, the teacher is recommended not to use statement to elicit learners' response. It is to use questions. The reason is there is culture constraint that they do not want to talk is they are not asked. It seems they feel reluctant to cut the conversation which is considered impolite. They pretend to understand the teacher's explanation.

To attain a better outcome in conducting classroom interaction especially in English class, the student must participate more actively in class. So that they may effectively engage and contribute during classroom instruction, they should create their own opportunities and devise their own tactics for language use and practice. Additionally, they should improve their interest in learning English by studying and practicing the language. Furthermore, for the suggestion, the next researcher should investigate not only the IRF pattern in classroom interaction, but also other patterns, such as the scaffolding and private speech patterns. In addition, future researchers are expected to discover interaction patterns not only between teachers and students, but also among students.

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