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## Exploring EFL Classroom Interactions in an Online Setting: A Case Study in Indonesia

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the form of interaction in the EFL classroom in Indonesia. Consequently, it is vital for Indonesian EFL teachers to analyse the current form of interaction in online settings to ensure quality teaching and learning. Even though many studies have addressed the issue, this study offers an alternative analysis by adapting FIACS (Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System) as one of the most common tools for classroom interaction analysis. This case study aimed to explore EFL classroom interaction by using FIACS as the framework. The necessary data was collected through direct and indirect observation between an EFL teacher and his lower secondary students. Based on the analysis, it appeared that the online EFL classroom interaction was dominated by the teacher. One of the causes was the passiveness of the students due to the technological glitches. The pattern and characteristics of the interaction also changed. One of the most notable changes was the difficulty to observe and manage the interaction between students. These observed features of the EFL online classroom portrayed how the class is conducted as well as ideas for other EFL teachers and practitioners to prepare and organize it.

**Keywords:** Classroom interaction, FIACS, online EFL classroom interaction

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## 1. Introduction

A vital element in determining quality learning is the quality of the interaction that happens in the class (Flanders, 1970; Vattøy & Gamlem, 2020). Many studies suggest the significance of classroom interaction on teaching quality (Bui et al., 2021; Cancino, 2015; Congmin, 2016; Islam, 2017; Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2021; Vattøy & Gamlem, 2020). This is further elaborated by Flanders (1970) and Vattøy and Gamlem (2020) who stated that the success of classroom interaction depends on how the teacher and the students interact in the class. This is still relevant even if the classroom is transformed online due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bui et al., 2021; Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2021).

Even though it is still relevant, that difference in teaching and learning mediums possibly causes various changes – positive or negative. Zeng (2018) argued that online learning has benefits to the learning namely easier access to knowledge, pedagogical richness, new and unique social interaction, better personal agency, and efficient learning cost. However, it also poses some threats to the students. Liu and Yuan (2021), Nakhriyah and Muzakky (2021), Resnik, Dewaele, & Knechtelsdorfer (2023), Yuan (2023) and Zeng (2018) reported that the student's anxiety level increases in online classroom settings. This makes them reluctant in even answering the teacher's questions (Menayni & Merabti, 2020; Rahmawati & Sujono, 2021) and even turning off their camera (Gherheş et al., 2021; Liu & Yuan, 2021; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Rajab & Soheib, 2021; Steinberger et al., 2021). These issues make the interaction in the class limited compared to the conventional interaction in the offline class.

Thus, the interacted parties involved in the class cannot be separated. Any study concerned with this issue should not separate them in the process of analysis. This aligns with Flanders's (1970) and Vattøy and Gamlem (2020) statements that declared classroom interaction consists of the teacher and the student interactions. Flander (1970) then formulated the classroom interaction patterns into an interaction framework called FIACS (Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System).

The framework is divided into three big categories namely Teacher Talk, Student Talk, and Silence/Confusion. It is divided based on the doer of the talk, except for Silence/Confusion which does not signal a doer. Further elaboration of each big category will be provided as follows:

- a. For the Teacher Talk category, it consists of Direct Influence and Indirect Influence. As it is called, Direct Influence gives an immediate effect on the students while Indirect Influence does not. Direct Influence consists of several talk categories namely Accepts Feeling, Praises or Encourages, Accepts or Uses Ideas of the

Students, and Asks Questions. As for the Indirect Influence, it consists of Lectures, Gives Direction, and Criticizes or Justifies Authority.

- b. For the Student Talk category, it consists of Initiation and Response only. There is no further categorization of the mentioned categories in the theory, unlike the Teacher Talk. This is one of the proofs that FIACS theory is likely to emphasize the teacher instead of the students.
- c. The last category – Silence or Confusion does not have a further categorization of talk. The reason is that there is no uttered communication because the parties involved may have no idea how to initiate or respond. This category may happen not only to the students but also to the teacher.

To observe and analyse classroom interaction, besides FIACS, there is also a framework called FLInt (Foreign Language Interaction) that was developed by Moskowitz in 1972 (Tsegaw, 2019). However, FIACS is more widely used by researchers due to its strong and reliable tool for analysis (Huriyah & Agustiani, 2018). It is also considered adaptable (Mwangi et al., 2021; Qassim, 2017; Tsegaw, 2019) and more practical (Khusnaini, 2019; Tsegaw, 2019) as it offers clear guidelines (Huriyah & Agustiani, 2018). Therefore, FIACS is deemed to be appropriate to explore the interaction in an online EFL classroom setting.

Many researchers have conducted similar studies on online EFL classroom interaction topics. Many of them argued that online EFL classrooms have beneficial effects on both the teacher and the students. For the teacher, Cui (2021) stated that online EFL classroom stimulates teacher's professional development. In line with the statement, Kusuma, Pahlevi, and Saefullah (2021) reported that online EFL classrooms trigger the teacher's creativity in preparing until evaluating the class. As for the students, it was reported by Cui (2021) that the students have an overall decent experience in online EFL classrooms. The reasons are that the lesson time and place are considered more flexible and efficient (Cui, 2021; Rachmah, 2020). Furthermore, it provides multimodal EFL lessons for the students (Rachmah, 2020) and allows more automated and individual learning (Cui, 2021).

In contrast, the studies of Vattøy and Gamlem (2020), Khusnaini (2019), Lopes and Nihei (2021) proved that online classroom interactions are different from offline ones due to several limitations. The limitations are starting from the medium of teaching and learning until the pattern of teacher-student interaction in the class. This makes the classroom interactions quality inferior to those in offline classroom (Ameiratrini & Kurniawan, 2021). There are difficulties reported in many studies that it tends to be difficult for the teacher to observe or control the interaction between students when the EFL class setting is online (Adaba, 2017; Menayni & Merabti, 2020). Besides that, Cui (2021) reported that even though the classroom is taught online, the class was, in a sense, still taught traditionally. Moreover, it is also found that EFL online classroom tends to be more teacher-centered as the teacher dominates the interaction in the class (Menayni & Merabti, 2020). One of the problems is due to the increase

in the students' anxiety level which makes them passive or even turn their cameras on (Gherheş et al., 2021; Liu & Yuan, 2021, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Rajab & Soheib, 2021, 2021; Shao, Kutuk, Fryer, Nicholson, & Guo, 2023; Yuan, 2023; Zeng, 2018).

Even though there are many studies have been conducted within this research area, many of them do not have a solid grounding, especially in the choice of framework of analysis. Some studies selected FIACS as a tool of analysis but were only limited to the Teacher Talk categories. Moreover, even if FIACS is selected, there were no adaptations to the theory, and the research just adhered to the guidelines.

For those reasons, this study tried to fill the research gap by exploring the complete classroom interaction by breaking it into teacher-student (teacher-initiated), student-teacher (student-initiated), and student-student interactions. By doing so, the researcher hoped to understand the phenomenon under investigation comprehensively. In the end, it is expected that the researcher can explore how classroom interactions are materialized in an online EFL classroom interaction setting by both the teachers and the students.

## **2. Method**

Due to the need to yield the necessary data to reveal the phenomenon under investigation, a certain research design must be utilized. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was preferred. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) and Cresswell (2014), this design allows the researcher to collect the data naturally from its settings. Thus, in the end, it fulfils the objective of the study fulfilled. Additionally, the utilization of this design enabled the research to gain rich data that is thick in descriptions.

To be in contact with the prospective participants, the researcher has to be granted permission from the school through its principal and the representative of the foundation. Furthermore, the information related to the research namely the number of meetings observed, the duration of each observation, information to observe, the number of observers, the confidentiality of the data observed, etc. were shared with the institutions. Upon learning them, the school decided to grant the permission, and right after the participants could decide whether to be involved in this research.

The prospective teacher was nominated by the school after his ability to communicate and interact verbally in English in online classroom settings as this research focused on verbal interaction during online class meetings. As for the class, it was selected based on the teacher's preference as the study was conducted in his active teaching hour and he was more familiar with them. Finally, upon the teacher's consent, this research involved a male EFL teacher and an online class of secondary 2 students which consisted of 20 students consisting of male and female.

Classroom observation was the sole data-collecting technique employed in this study. This technique is widely known as one of the most common techniques in collecting data from its

natural settings (Cohen et al., 2018). So, this is relevant to the approach and design selected for this study – qualitative approach and case study design. Moreover, the data from observation was presented in the form of descriptive statistics to clearly illuminate the phenomenon studied in this research.

The observations were scheduled three times via Zoom as it was limited to the remaining effective teaching and learning days within that semester. However, an extra observation was conducted beforehand to reduce the observation bias. It was also conducted to enable both the participants and the observer to be familiar with the observation settings and eventually reduce the possible bias (Cohen et al., 2018).

To record the observation data, observation matrixes adapted from Flanders (1970) was utilized. It was used in both direct and indirect observations to confirm the results. This strategy enables the recorded results to be validated. They were employed with the basic procedures recommended by Flanders (1970) which are:

- a. In doing the observation, every three seconds the observers will give a tally to the prepared table representing the interaction that happened in the class and the timestamp of the interaction.
- b. The tally will be written in a table that has been prepared, as seen in Table 1.
- c. Due to the strong reliability of this tool, it is possible to record the interaction via video recording (indirect observation).

*Table 1. The example of a FIACS observation matrix*

Category	Minute										Total
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
7											
8											
9											
10											
11											
<b>Total</b>											

Moreover, the encoding process was also conducted to the FIACS categories as a means to assist the researcher in doing the observation. The encoding of the categories is carried out in Table 2. The guidelines from FIACS theory were also followed in conducting the observation. However, there was a slight adaptation to the categories – an addition of a

category called small talk, as based on the prior observation this category was deemed to be present and could not be included in the default FIACS. The recorded data during the scheduled observations was then presented in the form of descriptive statistics and decoded accordingly.

*Table 2. The encoding of FIACS*

	<b>FIACS</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Teacher talk	Accept feeling	1
	Praise or encourage	2
	Accept or use idea of the students	3
	Ask questions	4
	Lecture	5
	Give direction	6
	Criticize or justify authority	7
	Small talk	8
Student talk	Response	9
	Initiation	10
	Silence or confusion	11

### **3. Finding and Discussion**

The researcher observed three meetings that were scheduled on March 2, 2022, March 22, 2022, and April 7, 2022. The observations were not conducted consecutively due to the limited teaching and learning schedule during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, since the school allowed the teacher to divide the lesson into two: active lessons and student-individual lessons, the observations lasted for 30-40 minutes each as it was difficult to observe the individual sessions.

The results of all of the observations using the adaptation of Flander's classroom interaction observation matrix is presented in Table 3. The adaptation made was the addition of the "Small talk" category in the Teacher talk section. The added category covers the informal talks done by the teacher to open or end the class or minor clauses used to serve the

same purpose. The addition was made because during the observation that kind of exchange did not suit the present categories.

Table 3. The result of FIACS observation

	FIACS	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher talk	1. Accepts feeling	29	1.36%
	2. Praises or encourages	96	4.51%
	3. Accept or use idea of the students	140	6.58%
	4. Asks questions	246	11.55%
	5. Lectures	691	32.46%
	6. Gives direction	418	19.63%
	7. Criticizes or justifies authority	60	2.82%
	8. Small talk	65	3.05%
Student talk	9. Response	210	9.86%
	10. Initiation	14	0.66%
	11. Silence or confusion	160	7.52%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2129</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, it can be seen that the “Teacher talk” category dominates the online EFL teaching and learning time. The frequency of “Teacher talk” is 1745 or 81.96% of the total. On the other hand, the “Student talk” category only comprises 10.52% or 224 occurrences of the total. Lastly, the “Silence or Confusion” category appears 160 times or 7.52%. From this statistical data, it can be concluded that the teacher dominated the interaction in the class. This conclusion is similar to Rohmah and Anggraini's (2021) study which shares similar results – that in Indonesian EFL online classes, the teacher dominates the interaction and makes the classroom teacher-centered.

From this overall data, it can be inferred that in the “Teacher talk” category “Lectures” have the highest occurrence by covering 32.46% of the total. Besides that, the “Give direction” category falls behind it as the second-highest occurrence by covering 19.63% of the total. This shows that the online EFL class meetings were relatively passive and relied on the teacher to make the class active. Rohmah and Anggraini (2021) also mentioned this in their study – that the teacher made more efforts in online teaching to make the class remains active. It is further proven by the statistical data of the “Student talk” category that will be elaborated as follows.

For the “Student Talk” category, the most frequent is the “Response” category (9.86%). This result strengthens the data – that the students were passive – as they mostly relied on the teacher’s initiation during the teaching and learning process. This is relevant to some studies that argue online learning increases students’ anxiety levels which makes them relatively passive (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Steinberger et al., 2021; Zeng, 2018). There is also a huge gap between the student responses

and initiation. The “Response” category occurs 210 times while “Initiation” only occurs 14 times from the total of 2129 exchanges. This shows the passiveness of the students during the online EFL classes.

Since classroom interaction comprises the interaction between teacher and students, in this study, the interactions are divided into three for better and more comprehensive analysis. The classifications are teacher-student (teacher-initiated), student-teacher (student-initiated), and student-student. These interactions were divided based on the initiator of the interaction which possibly affects the kind of exchanges that happened during the interaction. This was done because FIACS does not provide more detailed explanations and tools to analyse these interactions.

For the first category, the teacher-initiated interaction, the results of the observation are delivered in Table 4 below:

*Table 4. The result of teacher-student (teacher-initiated) interactions*

	FIACS	Frequency	Percentage	
Teacher talk	1. Accept feeling	22	1.07%	82.26%
	2. Praise or encourage	95	4.62%	
	3. Accept or use idea of the students	105	5.10%	
	4. Ask questions	236	11.47%	
	5. Lecture	691	33.59%	
	6. Give direction	418	20.32%	
	7. Criticize or justify authority	60	2.92%	
	8. Small talk	65	3.16%	
Student talk	9. Response	208	10.11%	10.11%
	11. Silence or confusion	157	7.63%	7.63%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2057</b>	<b>100%</b>	
<b>Total classroom interaction</b>		<b>2129</b>		

This category covers 2057 out of 2129 exchanges that happened in the whole classroom interaction or 96.61% of the total. Moreover, within this category, 82.26% of the interactions were done by the teacher and only 10.11% were the students' parts in responding to the initiation of the teacher. In summary, most of the interactions in this category were initiated by the teacher.

From the data in Table 4, the “Lecture” category is the most frequent (32.46%) compared to other “Teacher Talk” categories. It is then followed by the “Give direction” category as the second most frequent. For the less frequent one, it is the “Accepts feeling” category. From the data, it can be inferred that the lesson relied heavily on the teacher. This again makes the classroom teacher-centered (Rohmah & Anggraini, 2021). So, the course of the lesson

depends on how the teacher carries out the class. However, this could be caused by the passiveness of the students (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Steinberger et al., 2021; Zeng, 2018) as can be seen from the high number of “Silence or confusion” categories. So, the teacher was possibly forced to talk more because there were fewer responses given by the students when they were asked by the teacher. The example is reported in the Excerpt 1 as follows:

*Excerpt 1. An example of observed teacher-student (teacher-initiated) interactions*

- Mr. Michael (pseudonym) : How about Fazza (pseudonym), Dito (pseudonym), and Ariel (pseudonym)?*
- The students : ..... (silence)*
- Mr. Michael (pseudonym) : Hello? Fazza, Dito, and Ariel, are you still with us? Check, check. Ariel?*
- The students : ..... (silence)*
- Mr. Michael (pseudonym) : Oh maybe they have connection problems ya.*

Something that might not be captured from the Table is the kind of exchanges that happened during the interaction. In this teacher-initiated interaction, the lectures were not always in the form of active explanations by the teacher. In some cases, the teacher played videos providing explanations/lectures for the students to watch and listen to. This can be done easily due to the nature of online learning which makes access to knowledge easier (Zeng, 2018).

Another point to ponder is that the students did not always respond verbally. Many times, the students sent written responses to the teacher as an alternative to verbal responses. This phenomenon was allowed by the teacher because, unlike conventional teaching and learning, online learning medium allows the students to respond freely with multiple forms of responses provided by the platform (Zeng, 2018). Besides that, the students sometimes responded by giving reactions, emojis, or stickers. These are the forms of freedom in communication the online offers because the ultimate goal is to make others understand the

conveyed meaning (Zeng, 2018). Moreover, the student sometimes did not respond verbally but quickly did the things asked by the teacher. The example is in the Excerpt 2 as follows:

*Excerpt 2. An example of observed teacher-student (teacher-initiated) interactions*

*Mr. Michael (pseudonym) : Dito, could you please turn on your camera?*

*Dito (pseudonym) : (Quickly turning on the camera).*

The results for the next category, student-initiated interaction, are reported in Table 4 as follows:

*Table 5. The result of teacher-student (student-initiated) interactions*

	FIACS		Frequency	Percentage	
	1. Accept feeling	7		10.29%	
	2. Praise or encourage	1		1.47%	
	3. Accept or use idea of the students	15		22.06%	
Teacher talk	4. Ask questions	10	53	14.71%	79.94%
	5. Lecture	4		5.88%	
	6. Give direction	16		25.53%	
	7. Criticize or justify authority	0		0%	
Student talk	9. Response	0	12	0%	17.65%
	10. Initiation	12		17.65%	
	11. Silence or confusion	3	3	4.41%	4.41%
<b>Total</b>			<b>68</b>		<b>100%</b>
<b>Total classroom interaction</b>			<b>2129</b>		

Table 5 shows that the student-initiated classroom interaction category comprises only 3.19% of the total classroom interaction that happened during the meetings. This low percentage means the students were relatively passive and only mostly waited to be called by the teacher to be actively engaged in the classroom activities. However, it could also be seen that the students seemed to make the interaction short while the teacher seemed to respond to the initiation longer. This might be caused by their preference for not showing off or being in the spotlight (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Steinberger et al., 2021; Zeng, 2018). It is proven by the number of occurrences of the initiation which is only 12 but the responses from the teacher hit 53.

Similar to the teacher-initiated interactions, sometimes the students initiated the interaction through written text. Specifically for private and sensitive topics, they sent the text privately to the teacher and not to the whole class. The reason might be because they just wanted to use the feature provided by the platform or they wanted to avoid becoming the center of attention of the class (Liu & Yuan, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Steinberger

et al., 2021; Zeng, 2018) especially when they turned their camera on during the lesson (Gherheş et al., 2021; Liu & Yuan, 2021; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021; Rajab & Soheib, 2021; Steinberger et al., 2021). The example is provided in Excerpt 3 below:

*Excerpt 3. An example of observed student-teacher (student-initiated) interactions*

*Hassa (pseudonym) : (written) Sir, can I go to the toilet?*

*Mr. Michael (pseudonym) : Oh yes, yes, please.*

Lastly, for the student-student online EFL classroom interaction, the results are shown in Table 6 below:

*Table 6. The result of student-student interactions*

	FIACS	Frequency		Percentage	
Student talk	9. Response	2	4	50%	100%
	10. Initiation	2		50%	
	11. Silence or confusion	0	0	0%	0%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>100%</b>
	<b>Total classroom interaction</b>		<b>2129</b>		

During the observations, this category was the most difficult to observe. This is due to the limitations of online EFL learning (Ameiratrini & Kurniawan, 2021). Only four occurrences were recorded or 0.001 % of the total interactions and they were equally distributed. This phenomenon could not be seen directly as the students did not show any interaction between them during the research. However, it can be assumed that the students were interacting during the online meeting because there was a communication that involved two students. One of the students forgot to turn off the mic and one of them warned the other to pay attention to the teacher's calling. So, it seemed that they stayed in the same place because they could inform each other. For example:

*Excerpt 4. An example of observed student-student interactions*

*Dito (pseudonym) : Hey, [cursing], you are being called by sir Michael!*

*Dato (pseudonym) : Yes, I know.*

That was the only student-student interaction that could be observed during the research. However, reflecting on this phenomenon, the students might interact inside or outside the online learning platform unobserved by the teachers. This is one of the limitations and also

the unique characteristics of online learning – the difficulty of observing the student-student interactions during the lesson (Musonef et al., 2020).

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the elaboration of the results above, it can be concluded that all categories of the interactions in the EFL online classroom – teacher-student (teacher-initiated), student-teacher (student-initiated), and student-student – could be observed. Overall, the EFL teacher dominated all of the interactions in this study. This domination occurred not only in the interactions initiated by the teacher but also those initiated by the students. The results in the teacher-initiated interactions were as predicted as the teacher is the one who initiated the interaction in this category. However, it was quite unpredictable in the student-initiated interactions as it was the students who initiated the interaction in this category. Thus, this implies the EFL teacher utterances are extensive in initiating or responding to an interaction.

The dominance occurred because of a certain reason. According to the data from the observation recordings, it was confirmed that the dominance was caused by the passiveness of the students during the online learning sessions. Because of that, the teacher had to repeat or rearrange the initiation to make the students respond. Moreover, from the student-initiated interaction data, the interaction initiated by the students was extremely low compared to the responses they gave during the meetings. This further proves the passiveness of the students in the online EFL classroom.

As for student-student interactions, something different from the common offline EFL classroom could be observed. In online EFL settings, it turned out to be difficult to observe the interaction between students especially those done outside the medium of learning used. It can be assumed that there are interactions between them because the data captured this kind of interaction. However, the interactions that can be observed are limited to those who are shown by them as the teacher and researcher do not have access to their personal spaces. This is one of the drawbacks of observing online EFL classroom interaction.

Moreover, from the observations, it can also be perceived that there are some unique characteristics in online classroom interaction that cannot be found in conventional EFL teaching and learning. For example, because online learning enables both the teacher and the students to utilize the provided resources, the interaction is not always verbal. In some cases, the students send stickers, reactions, emojis, or written messages as a replacement for verbal responses. Thus, online learning supports multimodal communication that enriches teaching and learning activities.

Findings from this study provide insights into how EFL online classroom interaction is depicted from an actual classroom. Thus, there are several implications for the body knowledge of this topic, other EFL teachers and practitioners, and relevant institutions and policymakers. For the body knowledge of this field, this study further enriches the data and

information of how online EFL classroom interaction happened in the class, especially in the Indonesian EFL context. As for the teacher or other practitioners of EFL, the findings of this study serve as a portrayal of how online EFL classroom is conducted and how the distinctive interactions in that class happen. Thus, it allows them to enhance their preparations and organization of their online EFL class in the future. Lastly, any relevant institutions or policymakers will also benefit from the findings of this study. By studying it, they can prepare and arrange relevant policies and regulations to improve the quality of the online EFL classroom in their institutions.

However, due to the limitations of this study, further research related to this topic is suggested to involve a larger number of participants so a comparison can be made related to the results. Moreover, as this study was limited in time, it is suggested that other researchers prolong the research time to make the phenomenon understood comprehensively. Furthermore, since this study only employed observation as the data collecting technique, it is encouraged for further studies to employ more techniques to holistically understand the phenomenon, especially the events that are concealed during the online class.

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