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Direction of Interaction in EFL Classes

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Degree of Master of Arts in English Language Teaching**

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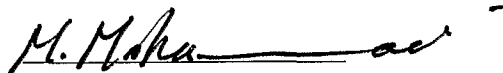
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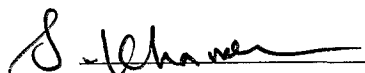
Hereby we are submitting a thesis written by Simin Nezamdoost entitled "*Direction of Interaction in EFL Classes*."

We have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

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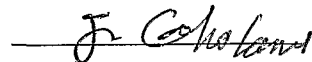


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Dedicated to

My father, for his unending encouragement and support

My mother, for her eternal love and patience

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Direction of Interaction in EFL Classes

Lack of communication in EFL classes is the main reason that prompts most curriculum developers to look for efficient ways of enhancing interaction processes in classrooms. For the most part, the direction of the interaction is from teachers to students and the classes are teacher fronted. Based on the relationship between speaking, reading and writing skills in EFL, this study applied two important post-reading activities, i.e. question-making and summary-writing on reading texts for their possible effects on the amount of student-teacher and student-student interaction. This study was carried out on 300 intermediate level students in Jihad-e-Daneshgahi language institute whose age varied between 15 and 21. Question-making and summary-writing were applied in experimental groups while control groups followed the ordinary syllabus. The observation of the classes before treatment and after it revealed that with the p-value set at 0.05, question-making and summary writing both increased student-teacher interaction, but did not increase student-student interaction. It was also found that question-making increased male students' student-teacher interaction more than females', but summary-writing affected them equally. The findings can best be used to increase students' speaking time as much as possible to achieve to communicative goals of EFL teaching and learning.

Keywords: action research, communication, interaction, reading, speaking, strategy, utterance

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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

<i>df</i>	Degree of Freedom
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ER	Extensive Reading
FCE	First Certificate in English
FL	Foreign Language
L2	Second Language
NRP	National Reading Panel
p.	Page
RH	Research Hypothesis
RQ	Research Question
RR	Repeated reading
SD	Standard Deviation
Sig.	Significance
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
STT	Student Talk-Time
TESOL	Teaching English as a Second Language
t_{obs}	Observed Value for t
t_{crit}	Critical Value for t

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

From very beginning the reason behind learning any language was being able to communicate in that language. There were cases in which man needed to communicate in more than one language, because in some important points of his life, he had to go beyond the borders of his own community and communicate with members of other communities, as well. On the other hand, it was impossible for him to learn all the languages existing in the world. Therefore, learning a language spoken internationally seemed necessary for many people.

Nowadays, with the advent of globalization and the dominance of English as an international language, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' needs compel teachers to focus on the teaching of this language mainly for communication.

As mentioned above, English is the medium of international communication and that the ultimate goal of a second language class should be to teach language for communication, i.e. to promote the development of the communicative abilities needed to deal with real-life situations satisfactorily (Garcia and Luchini, 2007).

When developing a conversation course regardless of the class size, taking the view of developing students' conversation skills through negotiated interaction is an advisable point of departure (Day and Bamford, 1998). That second Language (L2) students can develop their Second Language Acquisition (SLA) through interaction in EFL classrooms began with research in the early 1980s by Long which eventually culminated in his Interaction Hypothesis (1983; 1996). Long found that interaction in L2 learning gave rise to second language acquisition (SLA) opportunities through what he called interactional modification (1983).

The present study has favored reading comprehension along with writing and speaking skills to promote students' speaking and interaction abilities in the class.

The reason behind choosing reading comprehension as the main medium of conducting the research is that in the past decade, there has been sustained interest in promoting reading as a significant means of language development for second and foreign language (L2 and FL) learners (Day and Bamford, 1998). This is especially true in EFL setting in Iran where because of the dominance of Persian as the National language of education and mass media,

there is not enough exposure to English out of the classroom. Therefore, choosing an appropriate strategy to teach reading comprehension in a way contributive to language learning, communication and interaction is of utmost importance.

Having conducted an action research, question-making and summary-writing were selected to be applied in classroom settings by the researcher to check their real effect on the direction of interaction in EFL classes. An action research is a research carried out by a teacher to check the effectiveness of a strategy (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). The next part attempts to explain why the two above-mentioned post-reading activities were selected to increase interaction in classes.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite the need for communication which is an interactional relationship between two or more people, nowadays some English teaching centers fail to develop English proficiency for communication. Therefore, the curriculum developers must find efficient ways of implementing communication and interaction-increasing strategies to achieve the internationally defined pedagogical objectives.

There are two major reasons to start this research:

In a periodic news settler for TESOL members written by Mamadou Mountagha Diop (2008), the following illustration was provided indicating the type of classes found in some EFL contexts which the author disagreed with:

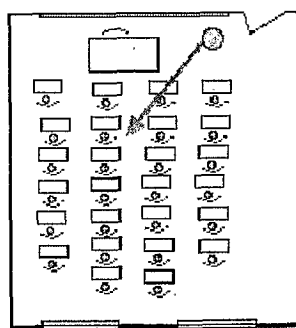


Figure 1.2 Arrangement of Seats in Teacher-fronted Classes

In his book entitled "How to Teach English" Jeremy Harmer (2000, p.19) called this type of arrangement "orderly rows". But at the bottom of the same page, he added that it is best to use circular or horseshoe forms or even the most informal type, i.e. separate tables, because the teacher's role would be less dominating.

In this periodic, it was mentioned that this type of class is the one which is not conducive to student-teacher interaction. The result was that teachers view themselves as sole information-givers; students expect teachers to do all talking and giving explanations while they themselves keep silent, i.e. they believe that the teacher is the only speaker in the class. They view themselves as listeners and note-takers. Similarly, school administrations and parents share the same views. Thus, students are isolated learners; they compete against each other to reach personal goals. Students do not work toward a common goal for the class.

Having observed the educational centers in Urmia (schools, language institutes and universities) for the arrangement of the seats in the classes, it was seen that they all favored the same arrangement as shown in the picture above. Since it was impossible to change this type of arrangement because of the special design of classes and the great number of students in each class, there was an attempt to find a way to increase student to teacher and student to student interactions in classes without distorting the arrangement of the seats. It is worth mentioning that the classes in Medical School and Part Time Education Center of Urmia University were exceptions i.e. they had semi-circle seat arrangement.

Also, observation of several classes in the institutes in which the researcher used to teach revealed that students had difficulty to express themselves freely. They did not respond voluntarily to teachers' questions and did not participate in classroom discussions. They rarely asked questions from teachers. Accordingly, teachers received little oral feedback.

The researcher realized that most of the students sat looking to teachers' mouth using minimal facial expressions, gestures or verbal utterances. It was not an ideal case because the favorite types of students are those who ask lots of questions, make comments, and respond to teachers' questions with long utterances rather than a single utterance, a nod, or by shaking head. To confirm the above-mentioned claims, there was an attempt to count the number of utterances and mark their directions to find out what percentage of interactions was conducted from teachers to students, what percentage from students to teachers and finally what percentage from students to their classmates. Unfortunately, this informal research revealed that approximately 91.67% of the utterances were directed from teachers to students. This was quite enough to try to find a practical way to enhance students' abilities to communicate with more confidence in classes and increase students' talk-time through increasing student-teacher and student-student interactions.

Finally, to sum up this part, it is worth mentioning that having teacher-fronted classes, longer speaking time for teachers and little chances of self-expression for students, passive students

with little or no motivation to take part in class activities were the main problems observed in EFL classes. The seriousness of the existing problems necessitated implementing appropriate strategies to solve them.

1.3 Significance of the study

In the previous section, it was mentioned that most EFL classes lack adequate interaction. In other words, the classes are teacher-fronted and most of the speaking is done by teachers and students have little chance of expressing themselves, and only 8.33% of the class time is devoted to students' speaking activity. This means that a great proportion of class time is dedicated to teacher to student interaction, i.e. 91%67, and little time is given to student to teacher and/or student to student interaction.

Is interaction really important? What effects it might have on learning environments?

Creating an interactive classroom environment is very important to the success of EFL students. Just as it would be difficult to become a good piano player just by listening to someone play with no opportunity of your own to practice, EFL students would find it difficult to learn the language communicatively if they have little chance of expressing themselves in the class let alone in the outside world. It is worth mentioning that Fulford and Zhang (1993) stated that interaction has long been a key to success in traditional classrooms and students experiencing higher level of interaction have been shown to have more positive attitudes and higher levels of achievements.

So considering the undeniable role of interaction in educational environments, especially in foreign language learning classes, it would be wise to implement it in EFL classes to:

- Increase student-teacher interaction
- Increase student-student interaction
- Increase class participation of the students in general
- Remove the teacher from being the center of attention
- Give equal chance to students to express themselves through chain activities
- Avoid being afraid of saying a wrong sentence or making a wrong expression because of avoiding on the spot correction on the side of the teacher
- And finally, in the long term, have a lively and dynamic class with active students who try to hunt the time of the class

Based on the importance of generating questions in cognitive learning and the way it helps students to question everything without blindly accepting it (Rosenshine, 1996) and Lynn Streeter's, president of the Knowledge Technologies group of Pearson, statement on the application of summarization as a reinforcing factor for students' learning (cited in Boulder, C. and Glenview, I., 2007), these two strategies were selected from among lots of other reading activities to be applied in EFL classes by the researcher.

In order to check the effectiveness of and the way these two post-reading strategies, i.e. question-making and summary-writing, affect interaction processes in Teaching English as a Foreign Language context, the following questions were posed:

1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

1.4.1 Research Questions

1. What is the possible effect of question-making as a post-reading activity on the amount of student-teacher interaction?
2. What is the possible effect of question-making as a post-reading activity on the amount of student-student interaction?
3. What is the possible effect of summary-writing as a post-reading activity on the amount of student-teacher interaction?
4. What is the possible effect of summary-writing as a post-reading activity on the amount of student-student interaction?
5. Is question-making strategy more effective than summary writing on the amount of student-teacher interaction in the classroom?
6. Is question-making strategy more effective than summary writing on the amount of student-student interaction in the classroom?
7. Does question-making affect male students' student-teacher interaction more than female students?
8. Does question-making affect male students' student-student interaction more than female students?
9. Does summary-writing affect male students' student-teacher interaction more than female students?

10. Does summary-writing affect male students' student-student interaction more than female students?

Based on the questions mentioned above, the following hypotheses were made before carrying out the research. After the research was over, some were confirmed and some were rejected.

1.4.2 Research Hypotheses

Based on the questions posed above, the following hypotheses were formed:

H_0 1. Question-making as a post-reading activity does not have any significant effect on the amount of student-teacher interaction.

H_0 2. Question-making as a post-reading activity does not have any significant effect on the amount of student-student interaction.

H_0 3. Summary-writing as a post-reading activity does not have any significant effect on the amount of student-teacher interaction.

H_0 4. Summary-writing as a post-reading activity does not have any significant effect on the amount of student-student interaction.

H_0 5. Question-making strategy is not more effective than summary-writing on the amount of student-teacher interaction.

H_0 6. Question-making strategy is not more effective than summary-writing on the amount of student-student interaction in the classroom.

H_0 7. Question-making as a post-reading activity does not affect male students' student-teacher interaction more than females'.

H_0 8. Question-making as a post-reading activity does not affect male students' student-student interaction more than females'.

H_0 9. Summary-writing as a post-reading activity does not affect male students' student-teacher interaction more than females'.

H_0 10. Summary-writing as a post-reading activity does not affect male students' student-student interaction more than females'.

After making the hypotheses, it is time to go on to the next step and present the definition of the key terms which would be used frequently in different parts of the research.

1.5 Definition of key terms

Key Terms

- Communication
- Speaking
- Reading
- Strategy
- Post-reading activities
- Interaction
- Utterance
- Action Research

1.5.1 Communication

As Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) mentioned, communication refers to the exchange of ideas, between two or more persons. In the act of communication, there is a process of give and take. As Chastain (1988) pointed out, it means creating and recreating meaning for some purposes. She also adds that communication in the oral form needs the integration of speaking and listening.

Therefore, three factors are involved in communication: a) at least a person who is the sender, b) a message to be transmitted and finally, c) a person or persons to whom the message is transmitted or the receiver of the message. Communication can be done verbally or nonverbally, but here the focus is on the verbal language mainly the spoken form which is measured in the form of utterances produced by the speakers.

So, the spoken form or speaking is the center of attention. Below, a brief explanation of speaking as a skill is mentioned and as it is considered a basic component of the communication, these two words are used interchangeably in some parts of the research.