

Classroom Interaction and Communicative Language Teaching: Challenges of Using Authentic Oral Interaction in EFL Context the Case EFL Learners of Ambo University

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Abstract: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. Language learners learn and practice the target language through the interaction with one another and the instructor by using authentic texts. The aim of this study was to develop a deep understanding of authentic interaction in English as a foreign language classroom so as to improve communicative language teaching approach. Participants in this study were seven experienced English language instructors of Ambo University whom they are selected purposively. Semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and classroom observation were used as the basic tools of data. The gathered data was analyzed according to systematic design of grounded theory analysis method. The developed model of interaction for language classroom in the light of communicative language teaching is notably to give deep descriptions on how classroom interaction substantially occurs and what factors affect it in foreign language context from different perspectives in the view of authentication. Thus, authentic classroom interaction can be more comprehended under the background of interrelated factors: interaction practices, teacher and student factors, learning objectives, content materials, classroom contexts, and outer contexts surrounding the interaction practices. Thus, in order to achieve the desired goal of communicative language teaching, the dimension of verbal interaction practices, teacher speech, questions, and feedback should be revised in the light of classroom authentication.

Keywords: Authentic, Foreign Language, Oral Interaction, Communicative Language Teaching

1. Introduction

The communicative approach in EFL education has generated a concern for the development of communication in the foreign language classroom within which the promotion of interaction is usually paramount. However, what types of interaction is sometimes not clearly understood and some of the activities that take place in the classroom seem unlikely to generate meaningful opportunities for the development of communicative language teaching.

The development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has brought with it a great variety of activities for promoting communication in the EFL classroom. I am sure that many of us are acquainted with an array of terms like tasks, role plays and simulations, project work, conversation

strategies, dialogues, presentations, and many other activities that we call communicative and that we have used in our role as to promote communicative Language Teaching Approach. The use of these activities, we assume, renders our teaching practice 'communicative' and so, when asked how we teach, we usually say we use the communicative approach, or that we develop communicative competence in our classrooms. However, have we ever wondered about what we understand by communication and its characteristics? Is it the dialogue students speak in front of their classmates based on a prepared script? Is it the oral presentation they make about a particular topic? Is it the uttering of model sentences based on patterns provided by the teacher? Are all those activities equally successful in developing communication?

Authentic classroom interaction has been a central issue in

teaching and learning English in the era of communicative language teaching. A number of articles and books related to comprehensible input, output, and interaction in foreign language learning have given great contributions for language teaching and learning. [4, 11, 12, 14, 25] Besides, the research dealt with teacher talk, students response and feedbacks, also called as a classroom discourse, has been widely published and discussed among language teachers/educators, researchers and experts [13, 15, 22, 28]. However, authentic classroom interaction in a foreign language context particularly based on oral perspectives seems to have less attention in the development of communicative language teaching.

In the field of foreign language learning, negotiation of meaning through modified input occurs in interactional conversation. Conversational negotiation and linguistic adjustment provides comprehensible input that is integrated into acquired language [16]. According to the study [4], foreign language is learned in 3 phases. The first is noticing linguistic features (input) related to short-term memory and perception; the input is then called an initial intake. To have these views in mind, the teacher in language classroom plays a critical role to provide comprehensible input as well as to give a plentiful room for students to speak and write the language by setting various interaction modes in the classroom. Taking into account the contexts where the language learners learn the language, socio cultural views of language learning defines language and social interaction between people are inextricable. The study [26] summarized, in socio cultural theoretical view, the major aspects of language are tied and formed by the strategies in which people interact with others in various communicative contexts. Comparing the old and new linguistic features is the second phase in learning the foreign language. The last is when the language learner develops new hypothesis based on the comparison of old and new input and store it as a final intake. Then, the paper [8] added that authentic interaction mediates input and intake with meaningful activities; therefore, it is prominent to

facilitate learning. Not only input, Swain wrote that comprehensible input is not sufficient enough if the language learner does not have ample opportunities to use the language [14]. By output, language learners should be aware of identifying linguistic error and reconstructing production of language.

Related to language learning in various social contexts, classroom, as one of social contexts, is a small society consisting of teacher and learners with a specific cultural system in which roles, functions, and goals are different among them. According to the study [24], language classroom is a place that aspects of language are learnt and taught, method, syllabus and materials are applied, theories and practices are met, social identity and affective factors are affected, and classroom is a site where interaction and education unite. In other words, interaction practices occurring inside the classroom are apparently influenced by factors outside the classroom. Moreover, classroom interaction can be defined as institutional talks that are locally organized into conversational exchanges system cooperatively [10]. In the classroom, controls are on the teacher' hand as the knower; she/he modifies and simplifies her/his utterances to help students understand the language easily; she/he frequently gives feedbacks or correction when students make errors; then, the common interaction pattern follows the moves on teacher initiates communication, students respond and teacher gives feedback [17, 27, 28]. Then, everything in the classroom requires the use of language. The researcher [28] stated that learners access new knowledge, acquire and develop new skills, identify problems, and establish and maintain relationship through language in interaction. Particularly in language classroom, interaction is viewed as central of language learning and teaching. The language used is as both the object of study and the medium of instruction [28]. The teacher and students use the language in interaction in the classroom as the learning goal. So that it necessarily to give attention to the authenticity of the interactional materials and mode.

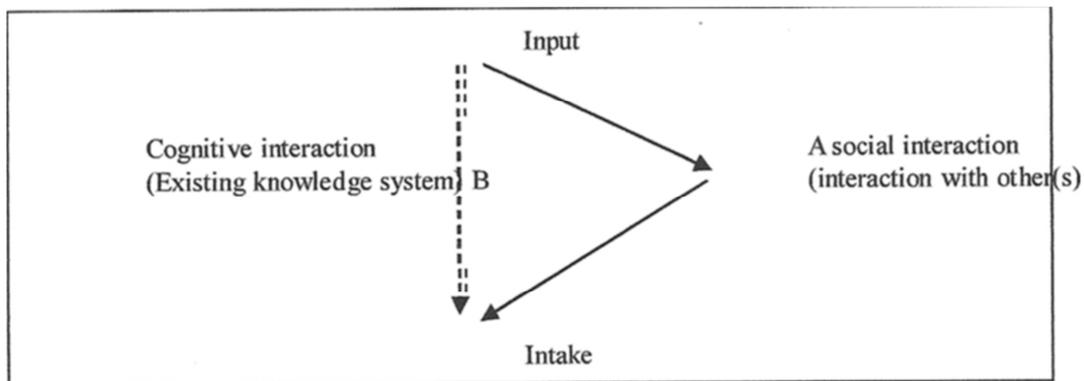


Figure 1. The Role of Interaction [8].

Moreover, authentic interaction in language classroom has been investigated and analyzed using various approaches by some researchers and language experts. The brief summary

of recent studies in classroom interaction is as following Table 1.

Table 1. Recent Studies of Classroom Interaction [28].

Writers	Contexts	Concepts
Van Lier (1988)	L2 Classroom interaction	Four types of L2 classroom interaction Less topic- orientation, less activity- orientation More topic- orientation, less activity- orientation More topic- orientation, more activity- orientation Less topic- orientation, more activity- orientation Pedagogic functions of classroom interaction Show acceptance of pupils' utterances Model language
Jarvis & Robinson (1997)	Primary-level EFL Lessons	Give clues Elaborate and build up the discourse Clarify understandings Disconfirm or reject
Kumaravadivelu (1999)	A framework of Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis (CCDA)	The framework reflects the external and internal factors of classroom discourse Four classroom contexts Form and accuracy contexts
Seedhouse (2004)	Conversation Analysis on turn- taking and sequence	Meaning and fluency contexts Task- oriented contexts Procedural contexts L2 classroom modes
Steve Walsh (2011)	L2 classroom context using conversation analysis	Managerial Materials Skills and systems Classroom context

From the above table we inferred that classroom interaction in foreign language lessons involving a scope of facts and factors. In the classroom, the relation between teacher and students is asymmetrical. When doing whole-class interaction, the students face limitations in their oral proficiency. Teacher is expected to have competence in managing classroom to encourage student participation to help their oral language development. The research also found the sociolinguistic environments, such as student need, cultural aspect, linguistic aspect, and psychological aspect may influence language development. Similarly, the other element content, motivation, comprehension, production, negotiation – might provide for conditions to foster foreign language development.

Classroom interaction involves teacher and students as interactants in using target language. In the classroom, communication is mostly initiated and maintained by the teachers. They, as a key holder of classroom communication, play prominent roles to manage the classroom participation and stimulate student language production. Their perspectives related to language classroom practices need to be discovered to comprehend what actually happens in the classroom. Most research has been taken place in Western cultural settings. Meanwhile, classroom discourse in the particular area to fully understand how socio-cultural aspect and societal belief outside the classroom shape classroom interaction inside at foreign language contexts is fewer and needed [26]. The majority studies in classroom discourse have conducted exclusively for first language (L1) learners as participants; whereas only a few research explores classroom communication to foreign language context and teacher engagement in foreign language [26]. Therefore, this current research aims to address the following research objectives: 1)

to identify the role that classroom interaction plays in the improvement of communicative language teaching in English as foreign language context; 2) to dig out factors that extensively affect authentic classroom interaction in English as foreign language classroom; 3) to suggest possible strategies in order to cope these factors.

2. Research Method

This particular research was designed to explore authentic classroom interaction that plays in the improvement of communicative language teaching in English as foreign language context. The method used to accommodate this study is known as grounded theory. The grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop grounded theory about a phenomenon. Its primary objective is to categorize the relationships of those elements to the given context. It explains high complexity of the phenomenon for specific population where the existing theories perhaps do not address the problem clearly.

Participants in this study were seven experienced instructors of Ambo University whom they are selected purposively as the source of data. The instructors have been teaching around five to twenty years in universities. With lots of experiences, the participants could be assumed to have knowledge, capability and feasibility to provide information, experiences and opinions about interaction in their classrooms.

To collect data, semi- structured interview, focus group discussion and classroom observation were used. The methods used for this study were, therefore, designed according to the needs and purposes of the research.

While choosing the methods, its applicability and adaptability were considered by the researcher. Like data collection, data analysis and interpretation of results were made carefully by ground theory analysis method. Accordingly the researcher conducted classroom observation in the first phase as preliminary study to narrow research focus. These classroom observations were then followed by interviews and focus group discussions. The latter was held due to the participants' restricted time to conduct one-by-one interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and respectively analyzed; at the same time, memos/journals were carefully noted at any time the data gathered until the researcher got sufficient information.

From three types of grounded theory designs, systematic design by Strauss and Corbin was chosen since this structured approach of three-phase coding is more ideal for this study [3]. In the first phase, called open coding, the data were identified, labeled and named line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, sentence-by-sentence or expression into codes to represent the participants' opinions, attitude, action, thought, feeling, beliefs and patterns. Then, the codes were formulated into categories and sub-categories. The third phase, selective coding, consisted of combining the categories together into a model and conceptualizing the interrelated categories into an abstract explanation of classroom interaction. Instead of sequential steps, the collecting and analyzing data was a zigzag process, taking back and forth to constantly reexamine the old and new data, categories and developed model.

3. Finding

In this section, the findings of oral classroom interaction which are founded through interview, focused-group discussion and classroom observation are clearly stated. The classroom interaction occurs in directives. Then, teacher and student factors, learning objectives and content materials, classroom context and outer context are discussed as factors that influence the usage of authentic oral interaction in the teaching –learning process of English as a foreign Language.

3.1. Teacher and Student Factors

The way teachers manage the class and communicate with the students and the way students respond it are determined by some factors.

The teacher's language proficiency may influence how she/he interacts with the students and the student response. First, teachers think that the students are low proficient; therefore, she/he decides to use local language in the middle of the session. At the same time, the students find the teacher never speaks English, so they then feel why I should try to use it. It becomes an endless circle. In addition to language proficiency, the teachers revealed that pedagogical competence, experience and personality may also influence interaction practices. At my first year of teaching, I gave lots of lectures because I was still confused what to do during the lessons. But now, I always find ways how to treat them if the teachers are lack in giving materials, lack of experiences and

lack of knowledge, it (the teaching process) will be offhanded (T-3).

Moreover, teachers realized that teaching experience in various classes will enhance their skill of managing classroom and building communication and interaction with the students. They also perceived that each class, likewise each person, is unique, so is the interaction practice, even with the same teacher. The teachers described that student response in interaction is influenced by various factors, such as level of proficiency, characters, intelligence, confidence, and motivation. Some teachers agreed that the students' language proficiency in their classes is very low. It becomes constraint in communication and interaction. On the other side, other teachers reported that confidence and intelligence are related to student response. They have confidence because they are smart, because they know (the materials); If not, they will be silent and anxious.

"I can see that students who are low keep in silence. Usually, the students who yell out loud (to answer teacher's question) are good (smart) even though their speaking is disorder and messy. I still appreciate it" (T-7)

Some teachers described that their students are highly-motivated, and it makes the process of communication and interaction in teaching learning process easier. Meanwhile, some teachers reported that their students are not interested in learning English and do not provide expected responses. This situation brings problems to communication and interaction.

Authentic Interaction in the classroom is mostly initiated by teacher through oral communication. Combining first and target language, teacher gives directions, presents materials, asks questions, delivers grammatical items, and corrects student error. It is called as verbal interaction practice. Not only verbal dimension, interaction also involves eye-contact, facial expression, and gesture as non-verbal dimension To manage unpredictable situation and disruptive behavior, teachers sometimes warn and motivate the students as pedagogical practices in classroom interaction. Giving compliment and humors in the classroom is the sign of personal interaction practices in building rapport. Most teachers believe that the students, as foreign language learners, still need time and context to improve their language proficiency, particularly production. They think their main goals of learning are giving first positive impression to learn English and preparing the students for examination. They are certain the students comprehend what the teachers teach though they are not enough sufficient to produce the language orally. The set of belief system perceived by the teacher might influence their preferences in classroom interaction practices. Classroom interaction is categorized into verbal practices, non-verbal practices, pedagogical practices and personal practices. The majority of teachers said that they combine first and target language. Other teachers prefer to use mostly in first or target language.

For easiness and quickness, generally I use Amharic as medium of instruction. Once I try to use English, yet they do not understand what I am saying. Then, I think I rather

choose to use Amharic than keep consistent in English (T-5).

Other dimensions in verbal practices are related to teacher talk, teacher questions, error correction, and student response and student question. Teacher talk is dominated over classroom communication. Slow, clear and loud pace with simple expression is the characteristic of teacher talk. Teachers also deliver questions mostly in the form of displayed questions. Regarding to error correction, some teachers prefer to repair error made the students; meanwhile, others choose to ignore it. The teachers described differently about the student response. Most of them stated that student response particularly oral language in English is still limited in the form of short expression.

Yes, the students are asked to produce correct product in English. However, in the process of making the product, they use Amharic, it does matter for us. That is Amharic is not the medium of communication in English majoring students (FGD-2)

Teachers also yielded that some students ask questions when necessary. As the students do not understand what they should do and they find problems of vocabulary, they come to the teachers for help. The teachers reported that what they communicate with the students not only about materials or subject. Moreover, giving advices, suggestions, warning as well as compliment is also part of interaction practices. It is so important. The student feels that their teacher appreciates them by giving compliment. For next, she/he will learn more and more.

3.2. Learning Objectives and Content Materials

The teachers revealed that each level has specific objectives of language skill based on mandated curriculum and syllabus. The desired objectives and specific skill can determine the classroom activity and communication set by the teachers.

For first year, it will focus on, so reading section is major activity. Speaking and listening activity are neglected. It is not for communication. We think the goal is much more to reading comprehension. It helps them to continue to the next level of education (FGD-1).

The teachers said that the content materials discussed in each class and the level of difficulty might influence how the students interact in the classroom. It depends on the materials. "It may be individual work or group... This (pointing out the course-book) is just a piece of cake for first year..." (T-4). Most of the teachers also believe that authentic interaction between teacher and students will get highest on content materials for speaking skills where oral communication is most required.

3.3. Classroom Contexts

Classroom context in oral interaction, as category emerged from data, refers to overall elements dealt with classroom. Teachers described several contexts affect the way they interact with students. They are levels, class size, class composition, duration, classroom climate, and learning

facility. Several teachers reported that they treat each class and level differently. Types of questions, compliment, treatment and classroom activity are dissimilar across the levels. It is different for first year English major students; they were already accomplished high school grades, so they could understand short, simple expressions. Gradually they get higher levels; the language expressions are more complex. Most of the teachers and students also revealed that class size has influenced interaction in the classroom. Large classes make them to choose whole-class interaction since they do not enough time to interact with students one by one. "When we test several students orally, then what about the others...? Even though I had assigned them to do something, it was still so much noise. They could not be controlled" (T-6). Even not all participants agree. class composition seemingly affects the way student interact in the classroom. Some participants said that mixed-heterogenous class, such as high students and low students, fairly determines interaction as well as gender composition.

Heterogeneous class in which high and low students, or disruptive and obedient students, are together causes difficulty for teacher to manage the class and select authentic activity" Moreover, most teachers described interaction in English in the classroom takes a lot of time. In fact, the duration is quite limited for each session. For example, they act out dialogue. If we focus on accuracy, it needs more than one session... We need to revise their vocabulary and pronunciation. It will take a lot of time because they are more than fifty students each class, just three hours in a week (FGD-1).

Some teachers also said that learning facility in the classroom is very helpful in learning process in general, and specifically for interaction with the students. Video, film, picture, music and photos are not only facilitating learning language but also stimulating students to give more responses.

3.4. Outer Context

The teachers and students described that the way they interact and communicate with the students is not only determined by classroom context but other factors may intervene and shaped the face of relation, communication and interaction between teacher and students. "The previous curriculum which I first taught English did not require communication competence" (T-4). Even though the students are expected to comprehend fluently and accurately and particularly the curriculum requires them to be able to communicate and interact well, the participants reported that curriculum, school system, parent role, and exposure are some factors that influence to build interactional and authentic communicative environment.

4. Discussion

From the emerged data, interaction in EFL classroom is not only verbal practices and non-verbal practices. Other dimensions, such as personal and pedagogical practices, are

also apparent as one of characteristics of classroom communication. Teachers frequently use language to manage the class as well as building rapport between teacher and students. Managerial mode is one of classroom interaction features whose function is to organize the physical learning environment. Moreover, the medium of instruction is differently described. The majority of the teachers and students prefer to combine first and target language with various proportions. The first language used in foreign language class is also reported by [19]. Other teachers choose to use mostly in first for easiness and practicality. For foreign language learners, first language can be used to explain materials, discuss method of learning, and announce information that will be difficult to understand in target language [7]. The study [1] also added that, for foreign language learners, the main objectives of language learning are to comprehend and produce language in the controlled repertoire of language.

With regard to teacher talk, it is characterized by slow, clear and loud pace with simple expression in large quantities. This result support the findings by researches [28, 21]. Teacher's speech is typically slower, louder, more deliberate, and makes greater use of pausing and emphasis. Then, classroom communication is dominated by teacher speech to give instruction, explain activity, and check comprehension. In addition to speech, teachers also deliver questions, mainly displayed questions. This finding support that mostly teachers' questions are in the form of displayed, close questions, rather than referential questions [5, 19, 20]. Concerning to handling errors, some teachers correct the errors made the students; meanwhile, other teachers feel that at some point errors need to be neglected. This finding supports the view by the study [1] that as foreign language learners, the students need to have plenty of time to produce language with no fear of being corrected. However, the teachers have to give feedback related to grammatical and phonological errors in order that the students do not always feel right. Discussing student response, the teachers said that it is still limited in the form of short expression. Some of the students seem reluctant to use target language. These also consistent with the result of the researches [18, 23]. Nasrulloh wrote that the students have a great opportunity to produce language, yet their production is still little and limited. Meanwhile, the study [23] revealed that the students do not high willingness and desire to respond teacher's questions and rarely involve in conversation with teacher and other students. However, from this current research finding, the teachers believe that at this present the students, as a foreign language learner, provide limited language production; it is normal and natural. By the time, they gradually develop their language proficiency. Moreover, that the students are in silence does not indicate that they are not learning language. It seems that language learner needs authentic context time to comprehend and process what they listen and hear. And they provide responses when they feel they are ready. Just like what the study [29] stated, the students actually learn language even though they keep silent. To build interaction

with the students in foreign language context, teacher has to be proficient enough. Language proficiency is one of the requirements as language teacher. At one side, it influences how the teacher interacts with the students. As the finding by the research [9], the more teachers use English in the classroom, the more students imitate and use it. Being proficient, the teacher can also stimulate the students to participate in oral interaction in the classroom [2]. On the other hand, student factor may play prominent role in classroom interaction. Student's level of proficiency, character, intelligence, confidence and motivation are elements that may influence how students communicate and interact with others in the class. This finding support the views of some experts related to foreign language learning in general. The researcher [7] Viewed that language learner has his/her own preferences. One student probably likes to creative writing and speaking activity, while others more enjoy structural activity. In addition to preferences, student confidence can be one of issues in language learning. The paper [23] found that feelings, such as less confident and afraid to made errors, are causes of the students are reluctant to participate in classroom communication.

Interaction in language classroom between teacher and students is primarily related to how teacher use language to check student comprehension. However, the teachers, mostly as initiators of interaction and communication, have several considerations underpinned their preferences in the classroom. Learning objectives and materials discussed in the classroom may bring the different modes of interaction. Moreover, contexts in the classroom, school and neighbor can probably give indirect effect to how teachers build communication and interaction. Teaching in large heterogeneous class with low-motivated students and lack of facility is, at some points, different to the one of small class with high-achievers completed by internet access and multimedia. To those classes, teachers select different language practice and activity, level of quantity and difficulty of materials, and learning objectives. Moreover, they differently use the type of questions, feedback, and error repair. Not only those elements, humors and compliment are carefully selected by the teachers; otherwise, they will bring disadvantageous and disruptive.

Furthermore, curriculum, exposure, parent role and social background seemingly become indirect factors that influence of how teacher and students communicate and interact each other. Not too specific on interaction in language classroom, this research finding may support what has been extensively explained by the study [6] about contextual factors in language teaching. Stern noted that the school, institutional or educational system provides the immediate environment for the language class, affecting classroom practice by providing or instituting, for instance, the language learning curriculum and wider educational policies and values. Stern also added that the regional, national and international contexts for English language teaching and learning that may influence attitudes and policy, thereby affecting, both directly and in directly, what happens within educational institutions

and the language class itself. In addition, the findings of this current research are also consistent to the studies's views of factors influencing classroom discourse [24, 26]. Interactions that take place inside the classroom, several variables outside of the classroom could affect discourse occur in the classroom. Then, the study [24] clarified by giving more explanation that classroom interaction might be inhibited or affected by policy from school, region or country, and it is also related to learner variables, linguistic or cultural background.

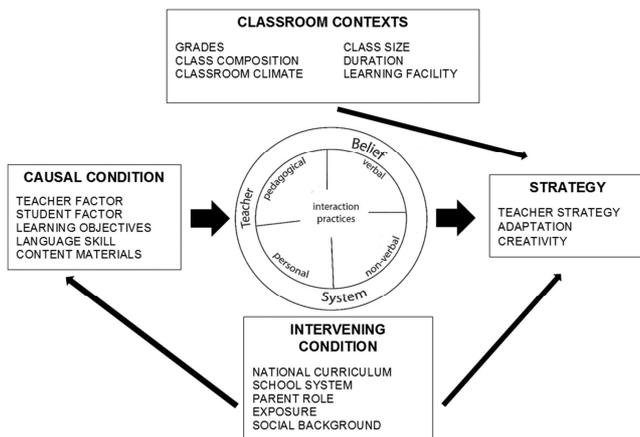


Figure 2. The Model of Classroom Interaction in EFL Classes.

5. Conclusion

This present study investigated classroom interaction and several factors affecting it in foreign language classrooms at universities based different perspectives. Classroom interaction is highly complex, yet it is central in language teaching learning process. The students learn language through and in interaction with others, teacher and students. This current study aims at exploring authentic interaction in language classroom in English as foreign language context at universities from teachers' perspective. From dimension of verbal and non-verbal of interaction practices, teacher speech, questions, and feedback are emerged as dominance in overall classroom communication. In addition to verbal and non-verbal dimensions, pedagogical and personal dimensions arise the head to control and manage the classroom and to build rapport between teacher and students.

Furthermore, several factors, in and outside the classroom, may affect the way the teachers interact with the learners and the strategy they select in the classrooms. Learners and teacher variables, learning objectives, and targeted language skills are initial factors influencing classroom interaction. Secondly, classroom contexts can be specified as levels, composition, class size, duration and learning facility. Not only those factors, several external factors, as socio-cultural background, arise out, such as adopted national curriculum, parent role, language exposure and other social economic variables. In the other words, in general, classroom, institutional, and national contexts which are related to language teaching learning

policy may influence, directly or indirectly, the language practices and activities in the class. In conclusion, they may bring implication to the teacher preferences when building interaction with the students and the classroom discourse itself.

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