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THE IMPORTANCE OF FACILITATING INTERACTION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Interaction plays a central role in effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, as it provides learners with meaningful opportunities to practice language skills and negotiate meaning. This article examines the importance of facilitating classroom interaction in EFL contexts, with a particular focus on pedagogical practices that promote active student participation. The study aims to explore how encouraging students to speak, reducing unnecessary teacher talk, and withholding immediate validation of students' responses contribute to more interactive and learner-centred classrooms.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. It focuses on classroom observations and reflective teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Data for qualitative research were collected through systematic observation of classroom interaction patterns and analysis of teacher-student discourse. Data for quantitative research were collected using questions designed to examine students' perceptions of teacher talking time and withholding validation, and their impact on learning and classroom interaction.

The findings show that when teachers create space for student talk, limit excessive explanations, and allow learners time to reflect on and self-correct their answers, students become more confident and engaged in classroom interaction. Furthermore, these practices foster greater autonomy, improve communicative competence, and enhance learners' willingness to participate.

The study concludes that facilitating interaction through these strategies is essential for creating effective EFL learning environments and recommends that teachers adopt interaction-focused approaches to maximize student involvement and language development.

KEYWORDS

EFL Classroom, STT, TTT, Withholding Validation.

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Introduction

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, the transition from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered frameworks remains a primary goal for educators seeking to foster communicative competence. In a truly interactive classroom, language is not merely an academic subject to be analyzed; it is a dynamic tool for communication, mastered through active use. Central to this transformation is the nature of classroom interaction, specifically the verbal exchanges that occur between teachers and students. While communicative methodologies support maximized student participation, actual classroom practices frequently tend to be rigid, teacher-dominated structures that unintentionally restrict language acquisition.

A primary barrier to genuine interaction is the disproportionate volume of Teacher Talking Time (TTT) relative to Student Talk Time (STT). When instructors dominate the acoustic space of the classroom, students are given to passive roles, receiving minimal opportunities to produce authentic output or negotiate meaning. This imbalance is often worsened by what Azhar et al. (2019) identify as an excessive reliance on TTT, which directly restricts learners' opportunities to practice speaking and limits their communicative autonomy.

Furthermore, traditional classroom talk heavily depends on the standard Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) cycle originally conceptualized by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). In a typical IRF sequence, the teacher initiates a turn with a question, a student provides a brief response, and the teacher immediately validates that response with praise or correction (e.g., "Good," "Right," or "No"). While this framework provides predictability and structural coherence in large classrooms, relying on it too rigidly can reduce language learning to a series of closed-ended exchanges (Hasibuan, 2026). As Thornbury (2000) argues, immediate validation by the instructor effectively closes the communication loop, preventing students from self-correcting, limiting peer-to-peer discussion, and fostering a psychological dependency on the teacher as the sole source of validation.

To make these constraints less stressful, contemporary EFL research emphasizes the strategic management of teacher discourse. Walsh (2011) proposes an "interactional awareness" model, in which educators consciously adjust their spoken language to create space for genuine student involvement and dialogic meaning-making. This shift requires two critical pedagogical adjustments: intentionally reducing unnecessary TTT to maximize student verbal autonomy, and purposefully withholding immediate validation of student responses. By delaying praise or correction, the teacher introduces a productive silence or an open prompt. This delay encourages the initial speaker to elaborate, prompts peers to evaluate the response, and transforms a closed three-part exchange into an extended, multi-layered classroom dialogue.

Despite the theoretical consensus supporting these practices, there is a distinct gap in understanding how structural changes in teacher discourse align with the subjective experiences of learners. Many studies evaluate interaction patterns purely through quantitative time-tracking or qualitative discourse analysis, often omitting the learners' own psychological and cognitive responses to these teaching strategies. For instance, while withholding validation may structurally increase student speech, it could potentially cause anxiety or, the other way round, stimulate critical thinking, depending on student perceptions.

This article aims to explore how reducing unnecessary teacher talk and withholding immediate validation contribute to more interactive, learner-centered EFL environments. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide practical, data-driven insights for educators looking to move from restrictive discourse habits and create resilient, communicative classrooms.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that combines objective classroom observations with subjective student feedback. By analyzing actual teacher-student discourse alongside a systematic examination of students' perceptions.

Data for quantitative research were collected using questions designed to examine students' perceptions of teacher talking time and withholding validation, and their impact on learning and classroom interaction.

Results and Discussion

The mixed-methods approach yielded both quantitative data from the student surveys and qualitative insights from classroom observations. Below are the key findings regarding student perceptions of Teacher Talking Time (TTT), withholding immediate validation, and their impact on classroom interaction.

This study presents an analysis of classroom interaction patterns based on observations of teacher–student discourse and subjective student feedback. The findings indicate that Teacher Talking Time (TTT) consistently dominated classroom communication, often limiting students’ opportunities to actively participate, initiate ideas, and engage in extended interaction. Teacher talk was primarily characterized by explanations, instructions, and frequent evaluative feedback, which reduced the space for student-led discourse.

In addition, the analysis revealed a strong tendency toward immediate validation of students’ answers. Teachers frequently confirmed or corrected responses right after they were given, which appeared to constrain students’ willingness to elaborate, self-correct, or engage in peer discussion. This pattern of instant evaluation limited opportunities for deeper cognitive processing and collaborative meaning-making.

Meanwhile, the survey was completed anonymously via Google Forms by 45 undergraduate students enrolled in English philology courses during the spring semester. Descriptive statistics (percentages) were calculated to evaluate the students’ attitudes toward classroom discourse patterns.

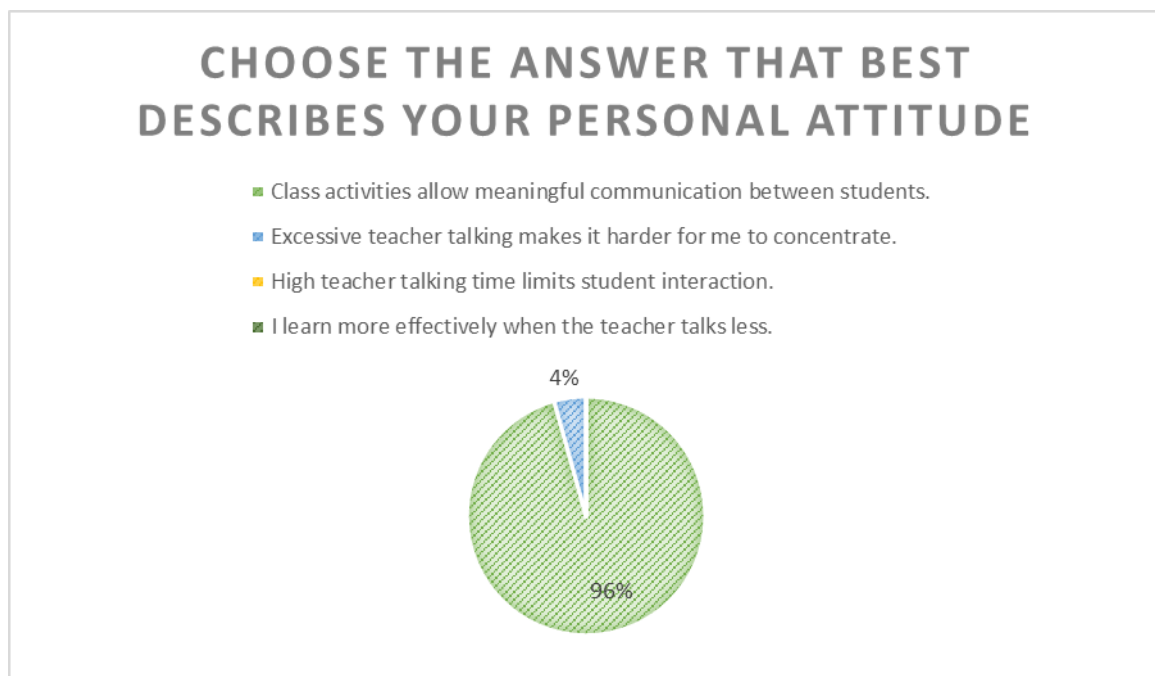
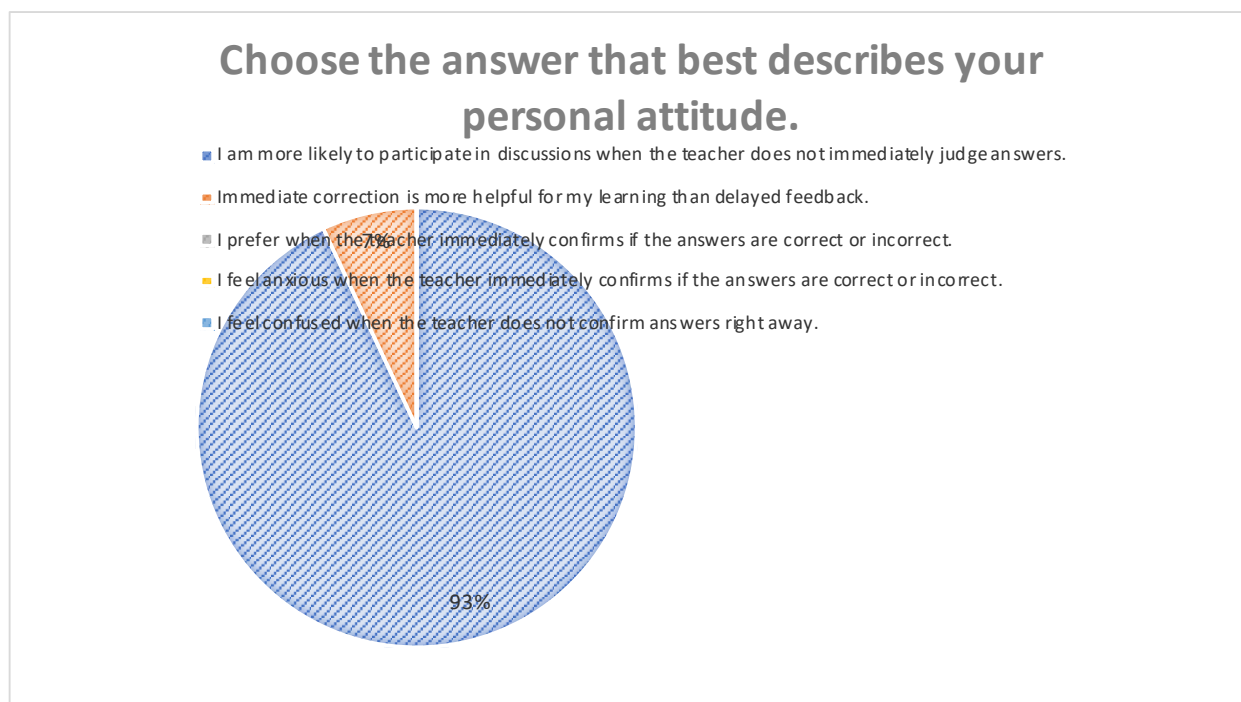


Fig. 1.

**Fig. 2.**

Impact of Teacher Talking Time (TTT): Fig. 1: A stark **98% of participants** agreed that high teacher talking time actively limits student interaction, while simultaneously noting that existing class activities do allow for meaningful communication between students when space is provided. Additionally, a strong consensus emerged regarding cognitive load, with a majority indicating that excessive teacher talk makes it more difficult to concentrate and that they learn more effectively when the teacher talks less.

Perceptions of Withholding Validation: Fig. 2: Regarding teacher feedback styles, **93% of the students** agreed that they are more likely to participate in discussions when the teacher does not immediately judge or validate answers. In contrast, a distinct minority of **7% of students** maintained that immediate correction is more helpful for their learning than delayed feedback, expressing confusion when the teacher does not confirm answers immediately.

A subsequent correlation analysis confirmed a strong, negative relationship between elevated TTT and student interaction rates, while showing a positive correlation between withholding immediate validation and increased student willingness to participate.

The results of this study underscore a critical reality in the EFL classroom: the management of teacher discourse directly dictates the depth and quality of student interaction. By reducing Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and strategically withholding immediate validation, educators can move away from restrictive, teacher-dominated patterns and move toward the highly interactive, learner-centered environment promoted by contemporary pedagogy.

The quantitative finding that 98% of students view high TTT as a barrier to interaction aligns perfectly with Scrivener's (2012) fundamental premise that "the more the teacher talks, the less space there is for students to talk" (p. 212). When teachers dominate the acoustic space, they unintentionally limit student verbal autonomy. To counter this, the qualitative observations from this study highlight the necessity of increasing the physical and communicative space available to learners by intentionally stepping back.

However, reducing TTT is not merely about teacher silence; as Scrivener (2012) notes, it requires "creating the conditions for speaking" and "building an atmosphere where people want to say things" (p. 210). In a whole-class discussion, keeping the mood relaxed, engaged, and lively transforms speaking from a high-stakes interrogation into a genuine opportunity for students to share their ideas. To establish these conditions, teachers must provide concrete "reasons to speak" through the use of rich stimuli like pictures or interactive web tools, paired with pre-task vocabulary and brainstorming to equip students with the linguistic tools they need to express themselves.

The survey data revealed that 93% of students are more likely to participate when a teacher does not immediately judge their answers. In traditional discourse, the standard Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) cycle (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) compels the teacher to immediately jump in with a "yes," "good," or "no." As Scrivener (2012) warns, while immediate validation lets students know where they stand, it simultaneously "closes down many possible ways that the discussion could expand to involve more of the class" (p. 225).

When an instructor purposely delays this validation, it disrupts the predictable, teacher-mediated chain and opens the floor to peer-to-peer (S-S) interaction. Instead of looking to the teacher as the sole arbiter of truth, students are forced to look to one another, evaluate responses, and negotiate meaning independently.

To prevent this delayed validation from turning into a stressful or confusing "losing face" moment for the student, observations revealed the importance of the teacher using subtle, supportive scaffolding techniques (Scrivener, 2012). Rather than jumping on mistakes, which suppresses the desire to speak, the teacher can positively acknowledge the courageous act of giving an answer. Educators can scaffold the dialogue by showing active interest, echoing key words to prompt elaboration, asking open-ended tracking questions, or gently suggesting a word when a speaker gets stuck. This conversational support keeps the student safe while pushing the boundaries of their linguistic output.

While the overwhelming majority favored a decentralized classroom, the 7% of students who preferred immediate correction cannot be ignored. This minority reported feeling confused when answers were not validated right away, viewing immediate feedback as more effective for their learning. This finding highlights a natural pedagogical tension: while withholding validation increases the quantity of student talk, it can temporarily increase the cognitive friction or anxiety felt by learners accustomed to traditional, highly structured feedback.

To bridge this gap and support anxious learners, teachers should utilize thinking time and structured peer collaboration. Allowing students a few moments to make notes or organize their thoughts before speaking drastically reduces performance anxiety. Furthermore, shifting the interaction from a whole-class format into pairs and small groups provides a low-stakes environment where students can test their ideas before sharing them publicly. Finally, educators must explicitly train students to listen to each other. When students realize that learning happens through peer interaction, and not just from the teacher's mouth, the confusion surrounding delayed validation fades, paving the way for a resilient, communicative, and truly learner-centered classroom.

Conclusions

The transition toward a student-oriented learning environment in EFL pedagogy requires a fundamental reassessment of how classroom discourse is structured and managed. This study investigated the critical relationship between Teacher Talking Time (TTT), the immediacy of evaluative feedback, and the overall quality of learner participation through a mixed-methods approach. By contrasting objective classroom observations with the subjective perceptions of 45 undergraduate English philology students, several vital insights emerge regarding the realities and possibilities of the modern communicative classroom.

A significant divergence exists between what students explicitly need for language acquisition and the historical habits that still dominate actual classroom practices. The observations conducted in this study reveal that TTT consistently dominates the acoustic and communicative space of the classroom, with teacher discourse heavily characterized by monologic explanations, instructions, and instant evaluations. This traditional setup leaves minimal room for student-led initiatives. Critically, the survey results show that students are acutely aware of this imbalance; an overwhelming 98% of participants explicitly identified high TTT as a direct constraint on their interaction, noting that excessive teacher talk actively hampers their concentration and limits meaningful practice.

The study highlights that immediate validation is a major obstacle to deeper communication. Observations showed a strong tendency for instructors to instantly confirm or correct an answer the moment it was uttered, operating within a rigid Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) cycle. While this practice is often intended to provide clarity, both the qualitative and quantitative data prove it achieves the opposite effect. Instant evaluation closes the communicative loop, signaling to the rest of the class that the interaction is finished. It strips learners of the chance to negotiate meaning, self-correct, or engage in peer-to-peer dialogue. On the other hand, 93% of the students surveyed stated they are significantly more likely to participate when the teacher purposefully withholds immediate judgment. Delaying validation creates a productive silence that

shifts the cognitive burden back onto the learners, prompting deeper linguistic processing and collaborative meaning-making.

However, moving to a fully decentralized, learner-centered environment is not without its challenges. The 7% minority of students who expressed confusion or anxiety when feedback was delayed reminds us that language learners are not uniform. A sudden lack of immediate teacher validation can feel destabilizing to students accustomed to traditional instruction. Therefore, the successful facilitator cannot simply remain silent; they must strategically manage the classroom environment using the techniques provided by Scrivener (2012). To bridge the gap for anxious learners, educators must actively "create the conditions for speaking" by providing clear reasons to talk, allowing sufficient thinking time, utilizing pairs and group work, and offering conversational scaffolding, such as echoing and open-ended prompting, rather than jumping on linguistic errors.

In conclusion, achieving a truly interactive, student-oriented EFL environment is not a matter of removing the teacher, but of redefining the teacher's presence. To foster genuine communicative competence, educators must create high interactional awareness. They must intentionally reduce unnecessary talk, treat the act of answering as a valuable learning opportunity rather than a performance to be instantly graded, and consciously withhold validation to let student-led discourse develop. Ultimately, by shifting from a figure of absolute authority to a deliberate facilitator of dialogue, the teacher transforms the EFL classroom from a space of passive reception into a dynamic, resilient, and collaborative community of speakers.

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