The Effectiveness of Teacher-Student Interaction in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom

Merav Badash[1]

[1] Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel Aviv, Israel

Correspondence: Merav Badash, Ph.D., Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel Aviv, Israel.

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher-student interaction in promoting authentic L2 classroom discourse. Classroom discourse is a major part of instruction that promotes speaking and develops students and teachers' conversational skills. It constitutes a significant factor in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, as it promotes communicative activities (reception, production, interaction, mediation) fundamental to L2 learning. A common exchange pattern used extensively in classroom discourse is the Initiation, Response, Feedback (IRF) model in which the teacher initiates (I) an exchange through questioning the whole class or one single student, the student responds (R) to the question, and then the teacher gives feedback (F). A qualitative case study approach was adopted. Twenty-seven EFL high school classrooms in Israel were observed. Research instruments were classroom observation forms, filled by the researcher, where instances of IRF exchanges were marked; and semi-structured interviews with seven of the teachers observed to obtain information regarding their use of L1 in IRF exchanges. Findings show that teachers use the IRF exchange model to organize talk and follow basic turn taking rules. However, deviations from common exchanges result in (1) imbalance of dominance between teacher and student talk time; (2) excessive use of L1 in exchanges, minimizing students' exposure to L2; and (3) limited flow of teacher-student spoken communication and lack of student willingness to participate in the lesson. Practical implications for teacher educators will be discussed.

Keywords: EFL classrooms, discourse analysis, IRF exchanges, student-teacher interaction, Turn taking system

1. Introduction

Classroom discourse is a major part of instruction that promotes speaking and develops students and teachers' conversational skills (Seedhouse, 1996; Ministry of Education, Department of Languages, 2019). Through classroom discourse, learners are engaged in enhancing their communicative abilities and in socially constructing their identities through collaboration and negotiation as they receive input and produce output. (Brown, 2007). Classroom interaction is perceived as a social activity designed to accomplish specific tasks where users and learners of a language are viewed primarily as 'social agents', i.e. "members of society who have tasks to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9).

Classroom discourse is fundamental in EFL teaching and learning contexts because language instruction involves the productive use of language (Brown, 2007). In EFL classrooms, the subject of instruction, (English language) is also the means of instruction (English is taught in English) (Brosh, 1996), making language teaching different in essence from teaching other subject matters. The examination of classroom discourse in EFL contexts shows that interaction influences language learning through the negotiation of participation opportunities in L2, knowledge construction, and instructional scaffolding. (Swain and Watanabe, 2013). A common exchange structure used extensively in classroom discourse to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher-student is the Initiation, Response, Feedback , in which the teacher initiates (I) an exchange through questioning the whole class or one single student, the student responds (R) to the question, and then the teacher gives feedback (F). (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, 1992).

The current study reviews research on discourse analysis in educational settings, focusing on several key areas that are addressed in detail: turn taking, organization of talk, and IRF exchanges, in order to study their usefulness in promoting classroom discourse in the EFL classroom.

1.1 The Research Context

Even though English is not one of the official languages in Israel, it is significantly more prevalent than Arabic, one of the two official languages (Donitsa and Zuzovsky, 2016), and it enjoys an actively growing status and widespread popularity (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999). The phenomenal spread and recognition of English as being the international lingua franca is evident in Israel, not only in everyday life, but also in the local linguistic landscape (street signs, posters, and names of stores), media and advertisements, information and other local services. An increasing number of people want to know English and to speak English, and the demand for learning it has been steadily growing (Inbar-Luria, 2014, Aronin and Yelenevskaya, 2022). Many English teachers in Israel are non-native English speakers who themselves learned English as a foreign language in schools. Furthermore, in addition to possessing a very high level of

language proficiency in all four-language skills (reading, writing, speaking and comprehension), EFL teachers need to have full mastery of content and total command of teaching methods and content dissemination.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Challenges in EFL Classroom Discourse

Classroom interaction is a term used to analyze what goes on among participants in a classroom when language is involved. It is defined as a two-way process between the participants in the learning process Dagarin (2004). Nunan (1991) points out that, "teachers play an important role in shaping classroom discourse and in maximizing opportunities for learning […] it is important for the organization and management of classroom because it is through speech that teachers either succeed or fail to implement their teaching plan". (p. 189)

Interaction in the EFL classroom often does not run smoothly and learners commonly exhibit challenges while coping with using interactional skills successfully. Unlike speaking a native language, speaking in EFL contexts might make students feel overwhelmed by constant use of English. As learning a foreign language involves cognitive, emotional and linguistic difficulties, it could also lead to anxiety and stress leaving students frustrated with low self-efficacy in their ability to learn the new language. (Dewaele and Dewaele, 2017).

Studies show that EFL students are often not willing to participate in L2 in the classroom because they have low English competence, mostly yield incomplete sentences, and exhibit shyness and anxiety to talk in front of the class. Other studies reveal that students tend to be passive in interaction and choose to be silent when teachers ask a question, and they are not interested in asking questions when the teacher gives them a chance to do so. (Fachrunnisa and Nuraeni, 2022) Although English is used as the medium of instruction, students' inability to communicate effectively in speaking is evident in many EFL classrooms. This study attempts to examine teacher-student talk exchanges to improve social interaction and oral proficiency in the EFL classroom.

2.2 Aspects of Classroom Discourse Analysis

2.2.1 The Turn Taking System

The turn taking system accounts for how conversations shift from one party to another and how such transformations are coordinated with regard to who currently has the floor, and who gets to speak next (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). It is a fundamental organization of **"**any speech exchange system**"** (p.696). Turn taking is one of the three basic components out of which conversations are constructed. The other two are **"**the turn constructional component**"** (p.702), which relates to the four basic units out of which turns are composed (a word, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence) and the **"**turn-allocation component**"** (p.703), which suggests a series of possibilities. Those possibilities are: a. the current speaker can select the next speaker (through a question/initiation), b. one other than the current speaker can self-select, c. the current speaker can continue talking if no other participant selects himself as the next speaker. Spontaneous conversation develops when one turn is related in predictable ways to the previous turns, such as when a question is expected to be followed by an answer, greetings by additional greetings, etc. In conversations, proper organization of turns is fundamental to the flow of conversation.

2.2.2 A Model of a Classroom Discourse Exchange

A common exchange structure, used extensively in traditional native-speaker language classroom discourse is the three-part Initiation, Response, Feedback exchange (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, 1992) known as IRF. This classic IRF cycle is a "teacher-led three-part sequence" (Hall and Walsh, 2002), consisting of three moves. The initiation (I) move refers to a teacher's directive or instruction and is usually done through the teacher's questioning the whole class or one single student. The response (R) move refers to the student(s)' reaction to show their understanding of the teacher's instruction; and the feedback (F) move refers to the teacher's comments or evaluation considering pedagogical goals (Hellermann, 2003). In the IRF exchange structure, teachers and pupils speak according to particular, fixed perceptions of their roles.

2.3 Significance of the Study

This study aims to identify occurrences of IRF exchanges, and deviations from such exchanges, and examine the reasons EFL teachers use L1 during IRF exchanges.

This investigation is important because although English is a global language, used for communication around the world, many foreign language learners are not able to communicate well in English and perceive themselves as incompetent speakers. (Crystal, 2003; Dincer, 2017). The outcomes of this study could provide useful implications for teacher educators, and principals in the field of English as a foreign language in Israel as well as in other contexts. The research questions of this study are:

1. Do teachers and students use the IRF exchange patterns effectively to promote interaction in the EFL classroom?

2. Why do EFL teachers disrupt the flow of English by turning to L1 during IRF exchanges?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Twenty-seven EFL high school classrooms were observed. Each class included 20 to 40 students and each lesson lasted 45 minutes and was led by a different EFL teacher. Observations focused on spoken interaction between the teacher and students in the classroom. In

addition to classroom observations, seven EFL teachers were randomly picked for the purpose of semi-structured interviews, regarding their reasons for using L1 in the classroom. Interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and were conducted at school. All the teachers in the study possessed academic degrees (one or more) in Education and/or EFL studies and were proficient English speakers; 57% were native speakers of Hebrew, and participants' ages ranged from 28-56. Table 1 below provides details of the seven teachers with whom the interviews were conducted. All participants gave their consent, and their anonymity was secured. The study was conducted during the years 2022-2024.

Table 1. teachers' characteristics

Name and gender	Area of school	L1	Topic
S (F)	T.A (center)	English	Grammar
B (M)	T.A (center)	Hebrew	Parts of speech
I (F)	(central)	English	Fairy tales
I (F)	(North district)	Hebrew	Text strategies
E (F)	T.A (center)	English	Grammar
S (F)	T.A (center)	Hebrew	Grammar
H (F)	(South district)	Hebrew	Heroes within us

3.2 Research design and instruments

A qualitative research approach was employed to get a holistic view of the study and clear direction towards achieving its set objectives (Creswell, 2014). The design included 27 classroom observations, which were followed by semi-structured interviews, conducted with a sample of seven EFL teachers, in order to obtain more robust data and gain a deeper understanding of the use of L1 during IRF exchange structures.

An observation form, which was designed specifically for this study, was based on a review of empirical literature pertaining to interaction patterns in EFL classrooms. In addition to gathering general information such as gender, grade, level, and topic, the observation form included 20 statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree about classroom interaction and the use of L1 in the classroom; for example: "Most of the students' answers are limited (1-5 words)", "There is not enough teacher feedback in the lesson", "The teacher mainly asks questions in L1". Observations focused on the presence of two aspects of discourse analysis: the turn taking system and IRF exchange patterns and all instances of IRF talk exchange were documented and analyzed.

The interviews included open-ended questions eliciting responses from the teachers in their own words to complement the data in the observation forms, and to identify the main reasons EFL teachers use L1 in the classroom. The interview focused on two questions: In your opinion, is there enough social interaction in the lesson between you and your students; When would you use L1 in the lesson, and why?

3.3 Analysis

The information in the observation forms was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The focus of the analysis was to identify the presence of the turn taking system and IRF exchanges that occurred in each lesson. The data was coded and analyzed for recurring patterns. In the second stage of the study, the teacher interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were then analyzed and coded using thematic analysis, with a focus on the reasons L1 is used in IRF exchanges.

4. Results

The results from the classroom observations and teachers' interviews in this study indicate that classroom discourse unfolds in different ways. Three variations of IRF sequences used extensively by teachers and students, and key factors for using L1 in the IRF exchanges in the classroom are identified and described. All classroom interactions are examined in light of the turn taking system, and the organization in discourse.

4.1 Observations

The information from the observations reveals that teachers use the traditional IRF exchange model in the classroom to organize talk, follow basic turn taking rules, and guide students toward dialogic learning (Nassaji and Wells 2000). Findings also reveal exchange structures different from the predictable IRF exchange pattern. Extensive use of IRF showed (1) imbalance of dominance between teacher-talk time and student-talk time during the lesson; (2) excessive use of L1 in IRF exchanges minimizing students' exposure to the target language; and (3) limited flow of communication and use of authentic language due to short, basic teacher-student exchanges. The following talk exchange structures were identified and each is described and analyzed with its unique characteristics:

a. (IRF)1, (IRF)2, …(IRF)n

b. I1(R), I2(R)… In(R)… (F)

c. IR1, R2, R3, R4, Rn... (F)

a. (IRF)1, (IRF)2, …(IRF)n

In this structure, talk is directed from the teacher to the student, leaving the student with very little 'space for negotiation' and limited free production. The teacher leads the talk and decides who the next speaker will be, as can be seen in sample 1:

Sample 1:

T: Can anyone explain why the boy ran away? **(I)** (pointing to one of the students)

S: He did not stay […] **(R)**

T: nods her head in approval **(F)**

This exchange took place during a reading comprehension class. The sample shows that the teacher initiates interaction with a student (by pointing to a specific student). The teacher asks a question about the boy who ran away. The purpose of the teacher's question is to check the basic understanding of the text the students had just read. The student whom the teacher pointed to responds to this initiation, but his answer is incomplete, providing minimal information. After the student's response, the teacher provides nonverbal feedback by nodding her head in approval.

Although the teacher and the student in this interaction both fulfill the requirement set by the three-stage IRF pattern, the aim of stimulating authentic talk creating ideas that lead to one another in predictable ways is not achieved. The teacher is the dominant speaker in this talk exchange, limiting the student's opportunities for self-expression and elaboration. In this example, the teacher follows the first rule of the turn taking system extensively, as current speaker (Teacher) selects next speaker (Student) through an initiation. –The student does not self-select to be the next speaker, making the teacher the leading participant in this short exchange; the teacher asks the question, selects who will answer, and gives nonverbal feedback.

Despite the sequence of turns, the talk exchange and the conversation do not develop in authentic ways; thus, the student cannot expand his answer or improve his spoken proficiency skills. This model presents an imbalance of dominance between teacher-talk time and student-talk time, and the teacher takes two turns out of three (Initiation and Feedback) leaving the student with limited opportunities to answer or expand on the answer. Additionally, the teacher does not provide proper feedback to the student's response and instead of nodding her head in approval, her feedback should have been "Yes, he does not stay; why do you think he does not stay?" –This would have concluded the first IRF interaction and opened the door to a new, better-developed IRF exchange.

b. I1(R), I2(R)… In(R)… (F)

According to this talk exchange pattern, multiple Initiations by the teacher are commonly used to engage students in conversation. Consequently, there is excessive teacher talk in the classroom and not enough time or chances for students to react. This situation does not promote active learning or adequate student participation (Walsh, 2002). In sample 2 below, the teacher asks the students personal questions about their chores at home and about their favorite food, but the conversation lacks continuity or expansions:

Sample 2:

T: Do you have any foods you like, Amir? **(I)**

S1: (Amir): [pause] ummm… **(R)**

T: [laughter] **(F)** [no pause]

T: Don't you cook yourself [=in L1]? Do you know how to cook? **(I)**
Ss: No/yes / I don't cook [=in L1) **(R)**

T: Do you help your mom? (Points to Amir again) **(I)**

S1: (Amir): Yes **(R)**

T: Good **(F)**. OK everybody; let us listen to each other **(I)**

T: (turns to another student) Naomi, what do you do at home? [no pause] **(I)**

T: How do you help your parents? What do you do? [=in L1] **(I)** [no pause]

T: Excuse me, I am waiting for quiet (does not let Naomi answer yet)

T: Ok, so Naomi...What did you say? **(I)** [no pause]

S2: (Naomi): I clean […] **(R)**

T: What? **(I)**

S2: My room **(R)**

T: You clean your room, good [=in L1] **(F)**

In this example, the teacher encourages specific students to speak by asking them questions, calling names and pointing to individuals.

Although students participate in the talk exchange, they do not say much to develop the conversation as their responses are short or incomplete. As a result, the teacher continues to be the leading participant; she is the current speaker in the talk exchange, assigning the next speaker by asking questions and pointing to individuals. Students are not self-selected and there is insufficient time for students to reply; the teacher rarely waits between initiations and a sequence of teacher-questions is created with no satisfactory time for the students to react. In other words, silence is not tolerated after asking a question that requires higher-order thinking. Moreover, the teacher does not always give feedback. Instead, new initiations often follow students' responses, minimizing the 3-stage IRF talk exchange from three parts to two without allowing students to develop the conversation

c. IR1, R2, R3, R4, Rn... (F)

According to this pattern, several students respond to the teacher's initiation simultaneously and the talk exchange includes several uses of L1 by the teacher and by students, as in sample 3:

Sample 3:

T: Good morning, everyone, how was your weekend? **(I)**

S1: Boring **(R)**

S2: I didn't do anything, mostly slept [= in L1] **(R)**

S3: [It was good teacher] **(R),** you? **(I)**

T: My weekend was ok [= in L1] **(R)**. What did you do? (Turns to the initiator) **(I)**

S3: I went to the beach [= in L1] **(R)**

T: Good **(F).** OK everybody, let's start today's lesson

T: Guy, do you remember our story about Natural Disasters? **(I)**

T: Ok, so Guy (looks at Guy)… what did you say? [= in L1] **(I)**

S4: (Guy) [silence]

The teacher asks the students a general question about their weekend: "How was your weekend". Some students respond without being given permission to do so and without reacting to each other's answers. A sequence of responses is created as students self-select to participate in the talk exchange. The teacher responds to the entire class using L1 "My weekend was ok" and then addresses the specific student who last spoke, in English: "What did you do?". The student answers in L1. Next, the teacher takes the stage and says to the entire class "Good. OK everybody, let's start today's lesson" to continue the lesson. The teacher then turns to Guy and asks him two consecutive questions. The first question ("Guy, do you remember our story about Natural Disasters?") is in English and the second one is in L1 ("Ok, so Guy (looks at Guy)… what did you say?"). Guy stays silent implying he does not understand what the teacher means, possibly because the first part of the question was in English.

The three talk exchanges above show the power-dynamics and relationship between teacher and students in the EFL classroom. Although talk exchange patterns are broadly used, teacher initiations do not necessarily improve students' quality or quantity of talk in English and many students' responses are incomplete with insufficient teacher-student or student-student interaction.

4.2 Interviews with Teachers

The topic that underpinned the interviews was the reasons EFL teachers use L1 during IRF speech exchanges in the specific lessons the researcher observed. Four main themes that emerged from the interviews regarding the use of L1 include a. teaching grammar topics and classroom procedures; b. balancing time management in the lesson; c. establishing positive relationships with students; d. and teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. Below are excerpts that exemplify these findings.

4.2.1 Teaching Grammar or Teaching Classroom Procedures

Respondents mentioned that teaching grammar topics and dealing with technicalities and classroom procedures increased teachers' use of L1 in the lesson, as exemplified by the following examples.

One teacher commented on the recurrent use of L1 when she teaches a grammatical topic, explaining that grammar could be particularly challenging for her students, especially when it involves rules and exceptions. The teacher added that the use of L1 helps in reducing confusion and in the application of grammatical rules:

> "*I use more Hebrew when I want to explain the rule for something, for example, if I ask the students to find the difference between different aspects of perfect tenses".*

Four other teachers talked about the need to use L1 when addressing technical issues that are not directly related the subject matter. They explained that when dealing with issues such as online teaching and learning, field trips, safety or emergency procedures, it is convenient to use L1 to ensure all students understand the instructions and regulations, as this teacher shared:

> *"When I want to make sure everyone understood and that everyone is with me, or when I talk about topics not related to English or technical issues, then I turn to L1, and then I get back to the material when we finish with this".*

In contrast, a teacher shared her views about how it is easier to teach topics like literature or reading comprehension in L2 (English):

> "*The lessons in this specific class are mostly in English, especially if it is a literature lesson or unseen [...] students can speak about their personal examples and take more part in English when ideas connect to their lives".*

4.2.2 Time Management

The notion of time management was prominent in the teacher interviews, affecting the language of instruction in the classroom. Most teachers claimed that using L1 in their classroom significantly helped them save time in various instructional contexts, as the following excerpt shows:

> *"Quick and clear communication in L1 can help me get more done in a lesson because I know more students understand what needs to be done".*

Another teacher noted,

> *"It takes time if I want the majority to speak English, so I sometimes use L1 to check they are all "with me" so I can finish the lesson on time, making sure they participate and are engaged".*

An additional teacher commented on using L1 when asking questions in her classroom to elicit more information from her students in less time:

> *"I often ask questions in Hebrew in my lesson, so that it's easier for me to elicit answers faster and that way I know that students understand the material".*

In conclusion, teachers voiced their concerns about time constraints and emphasized the challenges of fitting all required materials into the limited time available. As a potential solution, they used L1 to accelerate the teaching process and ensure that all essential content was covered within the allotted time.

4.2.3 Fostering a Positive Atmosphere in the Classroom

Some teachers felt that by strategically using L1 in the EFL classroom, they could create a more supportive and engaging learning environment and reduce students' anxiety of learning and using a foreign language. One teacher said that for her, making students feel calm and confident is a priority, even if it means using L1 to achieve that:

> *"I do not mind if students ask me questions in Hebrew if it gives them the feeling that I am always there and that they can express themselves freely".*

Along similar lines, several teachers said that it was ok for them to use L1 or let their students do so to prevent or reduce discipline problems during the lesson. One teacher said,

> *"If students answer in Hebrew, it is ok, as long as they are not interrupting or talking to each other all the time, and the feeling in class is calm and positive".*

The excerpts show the importance teachers attribute to their role as educators who care about providing a nurturing atmosphere in their EFL classrooms, where students can feel self-assured and confident to participate more during the lesson.

4.2.4 Teaching in Heterogeneous Classrooms

Heterogeneous classrooms, where students have varying levels of proficiency, backgrounds, and learning needs, present unique challenges for teachers. In classrooms with diverse proficiency levels, lower-level students, particularly those from disadvantaged populations or those living in peripheral areas, might struggle to keep up with their more advanced peers. Some teachers claim L1 can help bridge these gaps by providing explanations and support that all students can understand, as one teacher explained:

> *"I make a formidable effort to run the lesson in English. However, all my classes are mainly composed of students with learning problems who are at different levels that require me to facilitate the questions by combining L1 and L2 to motivate them to answer".*

Another teacher expressed her concern regarding weak students who do not understand the language of instruction well enough. She claimed that incorporating L1 in her classroom talk promotes a sense of unity between all students:

> *"I try to use more Hebrew with weaker students, so I am sure they understand the subject and it helps them feel they are part of what is going on in the lesson".*

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine EFL classroom discourse according to the traditional IRF exchange pattern and deviations from it. The study also identified four main themes where teachers changed to L1 within IRF exchanges. The results of this study have echoed the findings of other studies, as well as revealed additional data that call for discussion. Two main topics emerged from the data analyses: the issue of power dynamics in EFL classroom discourse, as well as practical implications regarding how teachers could better shape their interactions with students and create a supportive, inclusive, and engaging learning environment through effective classroom discourse. Possible implications for teacher education and professional development will be discussed below.

5.1 Power Dynamics in EFL Classroom Discourse

Findings from this study indicate that high-quality participation, where students are engaged in meaningful conversations, develop topics and use English, is an essential factor in the EFL classroom. The degree of control that students have over the discourse depends on how controlled or free participation is, and whether there are sufficient opportunities for the learner to take an active part in talk exchanges. Aligned with Walsh (2006, 2013), this study shows that when the teacher had control over the talk and dominated exchanges without permitting students to elaborate, or interact with each other, students produced single word utterances, incomplete sentences and short phrases. It also shows that adjacency between teachers' initiations and speakers' responses does not automatically create topic continuity, as short incomplete answers did not essentially develop the conversation or because explanations or teacher-questions were not understood. Additionally, multiple teacher-initiations that sometimes also included calling on specific students did not achieve the goal of increasing students' talk-time, as expected. The results of this study also show that it is not enough to follow the IRF exchange structure, even when the teacher mixes L1 and L2, if the L1 is not used effectively as a backup to ensure that students understand enough to be able to answer the Initiation questions.

Consequently, to communicate successfully, each interlocutor in every conversation needs to follow certain conversational rules. Grice (1989) developed a model of interaction for successful communication to increase the degree of reciprocity between participants in the conversation.

The model is based on four principles (Maxims) of cooperation: quality (be truthful), quantity (be informative), relation (be relevant), and manner (be clear). When speakers adhere to Grice's maxims, they make informative contributions in the exchange without telling the hearer what he or she does not need to know. Violating one or more principles of conversational cooperation disrupts the mutual flow between participants (Herawati, 2013). For example, when students provide too little information, as seen in this study, short and basic speech exchanges are created and when the teacher asks multiple questions, the result does not necessarily lead to more student talk-time in the lesson.

According to Harmer (2000), the best EFL lessons are ones where student-talk-time is maximized so getting students to speak and to use the language they are learning is a vital part of a teacher's job. When using IRF exchanges in the classroom, it is critical, therefore, that the teacher provides speaking opportunities within such exchanges. Dagarin (2004) observes that classroom interaction is a two-way process between the participants in the learning process. This process may involve not just the teacher and the pupil, but also interaction among pupils. The findings in this study showed insufficient student-student exchange of ideas, leaving the teacher the dominant speaker in the lesson. The dominant role of the teacher in IRF exchanges is yet a key factor leading to decreased student-talk-time and minimal involvement in the lesson, which could easily lead to disengagement and a lack of interest in the subject matter as students are more engaged and motivated when they feel their contribution to the lesson is valued. According to Kostadinovska and Popovikj (2019), learners exchange information to 'boost' their communicative potential, construct their social identity, and develop fluency and confidence; limited student talk time can hinder language acquisition and proficiency.

5.2 Ways to Better Shape Classroom Interaction

The benefits of this research should be translated into practice in EFL classrooms. Studies have shown that effective interaction between the teacher and the student as a pedagogical tool plays a significant role in the language acquisition process (Sert, 2019) as it encourages pupils to get involved in the teaching and learning process. (Goronga, 2013).

There are several operative ways to improve students and teachers' communicative abilities and effective discourse in the EFL classroom. First, establishing designated professional communities for EFL teachers, which focus on speaking proficiency in the classroom, would contribute immensely to the quality of the interaction in EFL settings. By exploring strategies for better teacher-student and student-student interaction, teachers can improve students' achievements and increase their motivation and willingness to participate. In other words, teachers should focus on authentic, communicative activities and the integration of technology and media (for example digital games and music clips) which inherently include social interaction and require students' active involvement in the learning process. (Badash et al. 2020) As a result, teachers can learn how to better navigate between promoting English proficiency and supporting comprehension to maintain an effective balance in the EFL classroom and promote effective mediated IRF exchanges in all topics taught. Furthermore, by making more use of the second rule of the turn taking system, (next speaker can self-select) and the third rule (current speaker may continue talking), students could get more opportunities to speak, elaborate on ideas and share information.

Additionally, implementing wait-time (Smith and King, 2017) techniques in the classroom, namely, the practice of waiting for several seconds after asking a question to allow students to think before they respond, enables students to increase participation and enhances the quality of their responses. Students will therefore be better able to contribute to classroom talk (Cazden et al., 1972) and establish productive interactional formats. Finally, it should be noted that initiation-response-feedback (IRF) cycles used in the classroom do not occur in isolated, but in interconnected and larger sequences so it would be beneficial to expose students to contexts wider than those found in a specific and limited exchange for more flow of communication.

5.3 Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Development

Implications from the findings in this study can be drawn for teacher education and development. Existing practices may not meet the needs and expectations of EFL teachers, who feel that they are not always adequately prepared for the complexity of classroom dynamics and discourse (Kang, 2013). The significance ascribed to social interaction in EFL classrooms highlights the need to develop a clear continuum

between preservice training for EFL teachers, and professional development of language learning processes focusing on speaking (Darling-Hammond, 2003) so that teachers can fulfill the requirement of promoting classroom communication set by the Ministry of Education.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the effectiveness of EFL classroom discourse in developing authentic L2 classroom discourse. The research included a thematic analysis of all occurrences of IRF patterns collected from classroom observations and seven semi-structures interviews with some of the teachers who were observed to better understand the reasons teachers disrupt the flow of English by turning to L1 during IRF exchanges.

The strength of this study is that it could shed light on teachers and students' use of speech patterns and turn-taking devices to promote speaking and communication in the EFL classroom. Nevertheless, since the nature of EFL classroom discourse is complex, it demands additional studies on similar matters in different national and international contexts, and in different grade levels. Additionally, in qualitative study, rich, descriptive data is purposely gathered with the understanding that results are more interpretive than generalizable to a larger population (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) and it is, therefore, advisable to conduct similar studies with more classrooms and more teachers, whose L1 is other than English or Hebrew. Future research should continue to explore what triggers limited or broken conversation in classroom discourse as there could be additional factors besides those mentioned in this study. Namely, it is often unclear whether speakers' hesitancy to participate in L2 classroom discourse reflects deficits in language proficiency itself or in areas related to classroom heterogeneity, or social and personal factors. It is recommended that the results of this study should also be compared to English speaking classrooms where English is the speakers' mother tongue, to establish the criteria for general talk exchange patterns.

Abbreviations:

T: Teacher

S: Student

Ss: few students talk simultaneously

I: Initiation

R: Response

F: Feedback

[…]: deleted parts in the talk

L1: native language (Hebrew)

L2: foreign language (English)

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