

## **Teachers' Perceptions Towards Teacher-Student Interaction In EFL Classes**

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**Abstract:** *Teacher-student interactions play an important role in deciding the success of a foreign language lesson. Students are able to acquire the target language through different forms of interactions such as the interaction between the teacher and the whole class, between the teacher and groups of students, and between the teacher and individuals. The current study was conducted to measure the perceptions of EFL teachers towards teacher-student interaction and figure out the most common type of interaction between the teacher and students in non-majored English classrooms in different universities in Vietnam. Sixty-five teacher participants took part in the study by answering a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The findings indicated that EFL teachers in the study were well-aware of the benefits of teacher-student interaction. In addition, they claimed to have various difficulties, practices and interests in teacher-student interaction. The study also revealed that the most common type of interaction in non-majored English classrooms in Vietnam is the one between the teacher and the whole class. From these findings, pedagogical implications are proposed to optimize the learning condition in non-majored English classrooms for undergraduate students.*

**Key words:** *teacher-student interaction, teachers' perception, English language teaching, non-majored English classes*

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### **I. Introduction**

Teaching involves communication and interaction between students and teachers [1,2]. English is almost considered as a second language in Vietnam in which the learners have opportunities to internalize the language through classroom interaction contexts especially in interaction between teacher and student. Therefore, the role of teacher-student interaction is extremely significant to learners' English development in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms [3, 4, 5, 6]. Moreover, interaction which occurs in the classroom can create and enhance a friendly and caring relationship between student and teacher [7]. In the context of teaching English for undergraduates in Vietnam, learners are supposed to be given opportunities to use the language naturally other than only memorizing dialogues and pattern practices because in interaction contexts, students could exchange and share what they do not understand to construct knowledge naturally for second language acquisition.

According to Malamah-Thomas as cited in Mingzhi [8], types of interaction that can take place between the teacher and students include the teacher vs the individual student, the teacher vs the group of students and the teacher vs the whole class. These types of interaction are employed in the classroom to help learners develop their language skills as well as their communicative competence. However, few studies about these interactions have been conducted in the tertiary context of Vietnam. Therefore, the current study was conducted to examine how teachers in Vietnam perceive the teacher – student interaction in EFL language classrooms and seek for the most popular type of teacher-student interaction taking place there.

Two research questions are employed in the current study:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions toward teacher-student interaction in non-majored English classes at the university?
2. What types of teacher-student interaction are commonly used in non-majored English classes at the university?

### **II. Literature Review**

#### **1. Classroom interaction**

Classroom is described as a place where various elements interact with each other relating to participants as the teacher and students. In particular, classroom interaction is a cooperative effort among these participants including their educational and social background, experience and knowledge as claimed by Tsui [9]. Moreover, classroom interaction is a two-way process which involves acting reciprocally or acting upon each other of the participants in the classroom to make communication take place for specific purpose of learning according to the view of Malamah-Thomas [10].

In addition, according to Scarino & Liddicoat [11], classroom interaction is concerned with the process of meaning-making and interpreting with learning and it connects closely to communicative purposes. This social process engages learners in the discussion of “ideas, insights and interpretations” with others. The present study investigates classroom interaction in terms of the teacher-student interaction in non-majored English classes in EFL context with exploring common types of teacher-student interaction, together with teachers' contribution in developing communicative competence for non-majored English students.

## **2. Teacher-student interaction**

Teacher-student (T-S) interaction is a model of classroom interaction in which the teacher and students can cooperate together to make the learning and teaching process become better and produce good outcomes. Teacher-student interaction can take place between the teacher and the whole class, the teacher and the group of students and the teacher and an individual student [10]. Interaction between the teacher and student is very crucial to promote students' communicative activities and also create good classroom atmosphere during the learning process as stated by Harmer [12] and Kundu [13].

## **3. The importance of teacher-student interaction in second language classroom**

### **3.1 The relationship between teacher-student interaction and second language acquisition**

According to Krashen's theory as cited in Wong [14], the acquisition is referred to the subconscious process of constructing the system of a second language which is similar to the process employed by children to internalize their first language in relation to the responsibility for learners' linguistic development. Moreover, acquisition definitely occurs naturally when learners are supplied with comprehensible input which is compatible with their level of linguistic ability. Teacher-student interaction actually provides learners with comprehensible input and output which are concerned with communicative opportunities and language production for second language acquisition (SLA) [15, 16]. The present research focuses mainly on how teachers as experts to get their learners to participate more in social discourses with the teacher for second language development through different types of teacher-student interaction operating in non-majored English classes.

### **3.2 The importance of learners' participation in teacher-student interaction for second language development**

With regard to the context of second language development, interaction is complemented by the teacher and students through particular activities that promote learners to use the target language in communication. Furthermore, it is important that language environment should be created for teaching and learning context where learners can expose their language production as well as many interactive opportunities in accordance with their communicative competence development. Hall & Verplaetse [17] claims that “It is in their interactions with each other that teachers and students work together to create the intellectual and practical activities that shape both the form and the content of the target language as well as the processes and outcomes of individual development.” In addition, Mackey [18] and Ellis [19] suggested that “interaction is beneficial to language development”.

## **4. Related studies**

Many studies investigate teacher-student interaction in second language acquisition with various aspects. First and foremost, patterns of teacher-student interaction are explored to gain insights in teaching process [20, 21, 22 and 23]. Some studies reveal that teacher-student interaction creates more opportunities for students to negotiate meaning through communicative activities [5, 20 and 24]. Moreover, the teacher implements interaction regularly in the classroom to encourage students to participate in the negotiation of meaning for second language acquisition [25, 26]. In addition, research of teacher-student interaction refers to the teacher's use of questions as a means to promote learning in different content and language integrated learning contexts and to enhance students' participation [27].

## **III. Research Methodology**

### **1. Participants**

The participants of the present study included sixty-five EFL teachers (42 females and 23 males), also called non-majored English teachers with various levels of experience, who were teaching at twelve colleges and universities in Vietnam.

### **2. Research instruments**

A questionnaire was employed to investigate the perception of Vietnamese EFL lecturers toward teacher-student interaction and their evaluation of the common types of interaction between the teacher and students. There were five sections with 43 items in this 5-point Likert scale questionnaire.

**3. Research procedure**

An online survey link was created with the forty three items in the questionnaire. The link then was sent to lecturers of different colleges and universities in Vietnam via emails. The participants were invited to give their responses to the forty six items in that online survey basing on their own perceptions and practices of teacher-student interactions in their non-majored English classes. Data gained from the participants' responses were then analysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program.

**IV. Findings**

**1. EFL teachers' perceptions toward teacher-student interaction in non-majored English classes at the university**

Different aspects of EFL teachers' perceptions toward teacher-student interaction were explored including (1) teachers' perceptions towards the benefits of T-S interaction, (2) teachers' perceptions towards the difficulties of T-S interaction, (3) teachers' perceptions towards practices of T-S interaction, and (4) teachers' interests in T-S interaction. Regarding teachers' perception towards the benefits of T-S interaction, most teachers agreed with ten items in the questionnaire (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Teachers' perceptions towards the benefits of T-S interaction (N = 65)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No idea (%)
My interaction with students makes the class become active.	93.9	1.5	4.6
Interaction between the teacher and students creates friendliness in the classroom.	92.4	3.0	4.6
I interact with students to motivate them in speaking process.	90.8	1.5	7.7
I interact with students to motivate their participation in the lesson.	89.3	1.5	9.2
Teacher-student interaction helps me consolidate the relationship with my students in the classroom.	84.6	1.5	13.9
My students' participation is significant in teacher-student interaction in the classroom.	83.1	0.0	16.9
Teacher-student interaction makes students have positive attitudes toward learning.	83.1	4.6	12.3
Interaction between teacher and students makes students develop communicative competence.	80.0	1.5	18.5
Through learning activities, my students have a lot of chances to interact with me.	78.5	3.0	18.5
My students have learning motivation when I interact with them in the classroom.	63.1	3.1	33.8

The findings reveal that most of the teachers have strong perceptions towards teacher-student interaction. A majority of the teachers agree with the items relating to the benefits of T-S interaction. More specifically, three items that received the highest percentages of agreement include "Interaction between the teacher and students creates friendliness in the classroom", "I interact with students to motivate them in speaking process", "My interaction with students makes the class become active" with 92.4%, 90.8% and 93.9% respectively). In addition, a large number of teachers agreed that T-S interaction motivates students to participate in the lesson (89.3%), helps consolidate the relationship between teacher and students (84.6%), makes students have positive attitude toward learning (83.1%) and helps students develop their communicative competence (80%). These findings indicate that teachers are aware of advantages of teacher-student interaction. Most of them believe that interaction between the teacher and students creates many benefits for students in the classroom. Regarding the difficulties of T-S interaction, Table 2 shows that most teachers acknowledged existing difficulties of T-S interaction in the classroom. First and foremost, many teachers claimed that it took them a lot of time to prepare for communicative tasks so that students would interact with them (73.8%). In addition, students' different levels of proficiency also make it difficult for T-S interaction in non-majored English classrooms (70.8%). The three difficulties claimed by about half of the respondents include students' lack of confidence (53.8%), their nervousness when interacting with teacher (52.4%) and their lack of language use skills (52.3%).

**Table 2:** Teachers' perceptions towards difficulties of T-S interaction (N = 65)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No idea (%)
I spend much preparation time for communicative tasks for students to interact with me.	73.8	9.2	16.9
I encounter some difficulties in interacting with students because my students have different English proficiency.	70.8	10.7	18.5
My students aren't confident when they interact with me.	53.8	7.7	38.5
My students feel nervous when they interact with me.	52.4	21.5	26.2
My students aren't keen on engaging interaction with me because they lack language use skill.	52.3	15.4	32.3
Low-proficient students are not able to interact with me well.	32.3	43.1	24.6

With regard to the practices of T-S interaction, many participants showed their agreement to most items in the questionnaire (see Table 3). In general, the respondents showed that they practiced T-S interaction quite often in the non-majored English classroom. More specifically, three items with the highest agreement rates were “I created a relaxing atmosphere in interaction between the teacher and student.”; “My clear instructions help students interact with me well in the learning and teaching process.”; and “I always offer opportunities for students to interact with me.” with 96.9%, 93.9% and 93.9% respectively. In addition, teacher participants claimed that they created many communicative situations (84.6%) and offered familiar speaking topics (83.1%) as ways to enhance T-S interaction in their classroom. The four items agreed by the same number of participants (69.2%) included “I usually interact with students in order not to distract their learning.”; “My students’ ability has an impact on the interaction between me and them in the classroom.”; “I always control interaction between me and students to improve their communicative competence.”; and “My students can communicate English more when they interact with me.” In short, the majority of participants agreed with the practices of T-S interaction stated in the questionnaire.

**Table 3:** Teachers’ perceptions towards the practices of T-S interaction (N = 65)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No idea (%)
I created a relaxing atmosphere in interaction between the teacher and student.	96.9	0.0	3.1
My clear instructions help students interact with me well in the learning and teaching process.	93.9	0.0	6.2
I always offer opportunities for students to interact with me.	93.9	1.5	4.6
I create many communicative situations for students to use the language in teacher-student interaction.	84.6	1.5	13.8
My speaking topics are always familiar to students to promote them interact with me.	83.1	3.1	13.8
I usually interact with students in order not to distract their learning.	69.2	9.2	21.5
My students’ ability has an impact on the interaction between me and them in the classroom.	69.2	6.2	24.6
I always control interaction between me and students to improve their communicative competence.	69.2	9.3	21.5
My students can communicate English more when they interact with me.	69.2	4.6	26.2
My students can use the language effectively to communicate after teacher-student interaction.	50.8	6.2	43.1

Table 4 showed the participants’ interests in T-S interaction in the classroom. Firstly, the participants showed their interests in implementing T-S interaction in the classroom via two items “I prefer implementing teacher-student interaction in the classroom” and “I think interactive activities in the classroom are enjoyable to my students” with 89.3% and 84.6% of agreement respectively. Especially, daily activities were highly appreciated among communicative activities and agreed by 90.8% of participants in the item “My students like interacting with me when I give activities which are close to their daily life such as shopping, food, drinks, sports, music, etc.” Many participants were also satisfied with T-S interaction with 67.7% of agreement from the item “I am satisfied with teacher-student interaction in the classroom.” Generally, the findings revealed that most participants enjoyed T-S interaction with the percent of items illustrated.

**Table 4:** Teachers’ perceptions towards interests of T-S interaction (N = 65)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No idea (%)
My students like interacting with me when I give activities which are close to their daily life such as shopping, food, drinks, sports, music, etc.	90.8	4.6	4.6
I prefer implementing teacher-student interaction in the classroom.	89.3	1.5	9.2
I think interactive activities in the classroom are enjoyable to my students.	84.6	0.0	15.4
I am satisfied with teacher-student interaction in the classroom.	67.7	4.6	27.7
My students talk enthusiastically when conducting about my communicative activities in the classroom.	49.3	10.7	40.0
My students are eager to speaking when I use English language to interact with them.	43.1	9.2	47.7
My students are often passive in the process of teacher-student interaction.	32.3	29.2	38.5
My students think that teacher-student interaction is boring.	9.2	56.9	33.9
I don’t prefer interaction between me and students because they make me disappointed with their language skill.	6.1	80.1	13.8

The results of the current study indicated that the teachers had positive perceptions toward the benefits, difficulties, practices and interests of T-S interaction in the context of English language teaching at the university in Vietnam. These findings were in line with those in the previous studies by Mackey [18], Ellis [19], Fisher & Rickards [28] and Choudhury[26].

**2. Common types of teacher-student interaction in non-majored English classes at the university**

Table 5 shows the frequencies of T-S interactions perceived by the participants. The result indicated that teacher versus whole class interaction accounted for the highest rate of frequency (with 92.3% for *often* and *always*). Many participants frequently interact with the group of students in the classroom with 81.6% of frequency levels of *always* and *often*. It can be concluded that most teacher participants often employed the interaction type with the whole class when they implement English language teaching in the classroom as compared to the two remaining types of teacher-group interactions and teacher-individual interaction.

**Table 5:** Teachers' frequency of using T-S interaction (N = 65)

Item	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I prepare speaking activities before I enter the classroom to enhance the interactions between me and my students.	0.0	1.5	15.4	36.9	46.2
I interact with students to instruct activities in the classroom.	0.0	1.5	7.7	52.3	38.5
I interact with the whole class in the classroom.	0.0	1.5	6.2	53.8	38.5
To develop students' communicative competence, I implement much interaction with students in the classroom.	0.0	0.0	7.7	61.5	30.8
My students are encouraged to interact with me in speaking activities.	0.0	3.1	16.9	53.8	26.2
I interact with the group of students in the classroom.	0.0	1.5	16.9	61.5	20.0
My communicative activities meet students' needs and interests in interaction between me and students.	0.0	3.1	24.6	56.9	15.4
I interact with each individual in the classroom.	0.0	9.2	36.9	47.7	6.2

In short, teacher versus whole class interaction was the most commonly applied in non-majored English classes. This finding is consistent with the literature review of the types of interaction by Malamah-Thomas, as cited in Mingzhi [8]. The teachers often used “teacher vs the whole class” interaction for different reasons but mostly for its convenience in non-majored English classes.

**V. Conclusion**

The study revealed that the majority of participants had positive perceptions towards teacher-student interaction taking place in non-majored English language classrooms in colleges and universities in Vietnam. Moreover, the study figured out that teacher vs the whole class is the most common type of teacher-student interaction in the classroom. These findings suggest that more teacher-student interactions should be applied in non-majored English classrooms to help students improve their English proficiency as well as communicative competence. In addition, EFL teachers should increase their interactions with students in the two forms of teacher versus a group of students and teacher versus individual students so that students will have more opportunities to receive feedback from the teacher. Further studies can be conducted to explore students' perception toward T-S interaction so that the issue can be observed in a different angle.

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