



Oral Interaction in English Classroom Using IRF Pattern between Teacher-Students at SMK Imelda Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate how the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern is realized in classroom interaction and how the use of IRF reflects the balance of interaction between teacher and students in classroom discourse. The study was conducted at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan, involving one English teacher and 30 tenth-grade students of Class X Farmasi 1. This research employed a descriptive qualitative design. The data were collected through classroom observations and video recordings of English learning activities across two sequential meetings. The analysis was based on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975, 1992) IRF model. The findings revealed that the IRF pattern was realized through three types, namely simple IRF, multiple IRF, and incomplete IRF. A total of 45 IRF sequences were identified, consisting of 18 simple IRF patterns (40%), 12 multiple IRF patterns (26.6%), and 15 incomplete IRF patterns (33.4%). The results showed that simple IRF was the most dominant type, while multiple IRF occurred least frequently. Furthermore, the use of IRF reflected a partially balanced

but predominantly teacher-centered interaction. Although students produced slightly more responses, the teacher maintained control over initiation and feedback moves, determining the direction and evaluation of classroom discourse. The dominance of closed questions, minimal responses, and positive feedback indicated that classroom interaction tended to be brief, controlled, and evaluative. Therefore, the study concludes that the classroom interaction was characterized by active student participation within a structure that remained largely controlled by the teacher.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 1 June 2026

Revised 4 June 2026

Accepted 5 June 2026

Keywords

Initiation, Response, Feedback, Classroom Interaction, IRF Pattern

Siregar, R. G. J., & Gultom, J. J. (2026). Oral interaction in English classroom using IRF pattern between teacher-students at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan. *TRANSFORM: Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 15(2), 56-68. <https://doi.org/10.24114/tj.v15i2.75637>

INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Through classroom interaction, students are provided with opportunities to practice language use, develop

communicative competence, and actively engage in learning activities. Brown (2007) states that effective oral interaction enables students to use language in meaningful contexts and improve their speaking ability. Therefore, the quality of interaction between teachers and students significantly influences students' participation and learning outcomes.

One of the most widely used frameworks for analyzing classroom discourse is the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). The IRF model consists of three sequential moves: initiation, response, and feedback. In this pattern, a teacher or student initiates an interaction through a question, statement, or prompt, another participant responds, and feedback is subsequently provided to evaluate or extend the response. This model has been extensively applied in classroom discourse studies because it offers a systematic framework for examining how interaction is organized during teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, Walsh (2011) argues that structured interaction through the IRF pattern can help maintain students' attention and encourage participation in classroom communication.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, learning is expected to be student-centered, allowing students to actively construct knowledge and participate in classroom discussions. According to Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2021), students should become the center of the learning process, while teachers function as facilitators who guide and support learning activities. This approach requires meaningful interaction between teachers and students to create an active and collaborative learning environment. Consequently, classroom interaction becomes an important aspect of successful English language learning.

However, preliminary observations conducted at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan revealed that classroom interaction was still predominantly teacher-centered. Students tended to participate only when prompted by the teacher and often produced brief responses during classroom discussions. Many students appeared reluctant to express their ideas in English due to limited vocabulary and lack of confidence. As a result, the interaction between teachers and students was often characterized by teacher dominance, which potentially limited students' opportunities to develop their oral communication skills. These conditions indicate the need for a closer examination of classroom interaction patterns in order to understand how communication is organized

during English lessons.

Previous studies have investigated the realization of the IRF pattern in classroom discourse. Pratiwi et al. (2021), for example, examined IRF in a reading comprehension lesson at a vocational school (SMK 1 Yapim Medan) and found that teacher feedback made up half of the moves, while student responses were the lowest at 20%. The same study linked limited participation to students' restricted vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. Saswati (2018) applied the IRF framework to an EFL conversation class and concluded that IRF can facilitate learner-initiated communication and give learners opportunities to engage. However, none of the studies reviewed here was conducted in a health vocational school.

Furthermore, limited studies have investigated IRF patterns in vocational high school contexts, particularly in health vocational schools. To date, no research has specifically examined the realization of the IRF pattern at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan. This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that explores how classroom interaction is organized and how interactional roles are distributed between teachers and students. Understanding these aspects is important because interaction patterns may influence students' participation and opportunities to practice English in the classroom.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern is realized in classroom interaction and how the use of IRF reflects the balance of interaction between teacher and students in classroom discourse at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to classroom discourse research and provide practical insights for English teachers in creating more interactive and student-centered learning environments.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the realization of the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern in classroom interaction and to examine how the use of IRF reflects the balance of interaction between teacher and students. The study was conducted at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan. The participants consisted of one English teacher and 30 tenth-grade students of Class X Farmasi 1. The primary data of this study were the spoken utterances produced by both

the teacher and the students during the teaching and learning process of English, which were subsequently converted into written transcriptions. The pedagogical context of the observed lessons focused on the instruction of procedure text.

The research instrument primarily relied on the researcher as the non-participant observer, supported by video/audio recordings and a semi-structured interview guideline. Data collection was carried out in natural classroom settings across three sequential instructional meetings. The teaching and learning processes were recorded in full to capture the spontaneous verbal exchanges between the teacher and the students. Additionally, a follow-up interview was conducted with the English teacher to obtain deeper insights and clarifications regarding the pedagogical reasons behind the deployment of specific oral feedback types during the lessons.

Following the data collection procedures, the qualitative data analysis was executed through several systematic stages adapted from classroom discourse frameworks. First, the recorded classroom interactions from the three meetings were reviewed thoroughly to establish a baseline understanding of the communicative environment. Second, the recorded spoken interactions were transcribed verbatim. Third, the transcription data were coded and categorized using Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975; 1992) classroom discourse model. The utterances were systematically classified at the level of interactional moves, specifically opening (initiation), responding (response), and follow-up (feedback) moves, and quantified into frequency percentages. Finally, the categorized IRF structures and moves were interpreted qualitatively to critically analyze the structural patterns of the discourse and evaluate the interactional balance between the teacher and the students within the EFL classroom.

RESULTS

Patterns and Distribution of Classroom Interaction Based on IRF Framework

Classroom observations conducted across two sequential meetings in class X Farmasi 1 at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan identified a total of 45 Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) sequences. These structured sequences comprise three distinct realization types: simple IRF sequences, multiple IRF sequences, and incomplete IRF sequences. The frequency and percentage distribution of these interactional patterns across the observed meetings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Realization of IRF in Classroom Interaction

IRF Type	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Total Frequency	Percentage
Simple IRF Sequences	10	8	18	40.0%
Multiple IRF Sequences	6	6	12	26.6%
Incomplete IRF Sequences	9	6	15	33.4%
Total	25	20	45	100%

Based on the factual data structured in Table 1, simple IRF sequences constitute the most dominant interactional pattern, occurring 18 times and accounting for 40.0% of the total recorded sequences. Incomplete IRF sequences represent the second most frequent pattern with 15 occurrences (33.4%). Multiple IRF sequences recorded the lowest frequency, appearing 12 times across the two instructional sessions (26.6%).

The specific structural implementation of a simple IRF sequence during the teaching and learning process in Meeting 2 is illustrated in the transcript excerpt below:

Teacher: *"Sebelum masuk materi baru, kita review dulu. Siapa yang masih ingat structure of procedure text?"* (Initiation)

Student 1: *"Goal, materials, steps, Miss."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Yes, very good."* (Feedback)

The transcript shows a single, self-contained exchange where the teacher initiates the turn with a question regarding past material, a student responds directly with the three core components of procedure text, and the teacher terminates the immediate exchange using a positive evaluative phrase.

The structural execution of a multiple IRF sequence recorded during Meeting 2 is presented in the following transcript excerpt:

Teacher: *"Apa fungsi dari goal?"* (Initiation)

Student 2: *"Untuk menunjukkan tujuan, Miss."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Correct. Kalau materials?"* (Feedback-Initiation)

Student 3: *"Bahan dan alat yang dibutuhkan."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Good, Dan steps?"* (Feedback-Initiation)

Student 4: *"Langkah-langkahnya, Miss."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Excellent."* (Feedback)

This interaction displays an extended sequence that develops through repeated cycles within a single continuous classroom discussion. The teacher combines a feedback move with a new initiation move simultaneously in a single turn, prompting immediate responses from several different students before providing the final feedback.

The structural realization of an incomplete IRF sequence recorded during Meeting 2 is shown in the transcript excerpt below:

Student 4: *"Miss, kalau bahasa Inggrisnya salah gimana?"* (Initiation)

Teacher: *"Tidak apa-apa. Yang penting kalian mencoba dulu."* (Response)

This variation demonstrates an interactional pattern initiated directly by a student query expressing concern over language accuracy, followed by the teacher's response. The exchange finishes without any follow-up or evaluative feedback move from either participant.

Analysis of Classroom Interaction Using the IRF Model

The data analysis further quantified a total of 128 individual interactional moves performed by the teacher and students across the instructional sessions. These individual moves are distributed across the primary categories of Initiation, Response, and Feedback, with each category broken down into specific sub-types to reflect the precise distribution of classroom discourse. This distribution is systematically structured in Table 2.

Table 2. The Distribution of Interactional Moves and Sub-Types

Category	Total Moves	Sub-type	Frequency	Sub-type Percentage	%
Initiation	42 (32.8%)	Closed Questions	27	64.3%	100%
		Open-ended Questions	15	35.7%	
Response	47 (36.7%)	Minimal Responses	34	72.3%	100%
		Elaborative Responses	13	27.7%	
Feedback	39 (30.5%)	Positive Feedback	25	64.1%	100%
		Elaborative Feedback	8	20.5%	
		Corrective Feedback	6	15.4%	
Total			128		100%

As factually documented in Table 2, out of the total 128 moves, response moves occur most frequently with 47 instances (36.7%), followed closely by Initiation moves with 42 instances (32.8%), and Feedback moves with 39 instances (30.5%).

Within the Initiation category, closed questions occur 27 times (64.3%), outnumbering open-ended questions which are deployed 15 times (35.7%). Within the Response category, minimal responses represent the dominant sub-type with 34 occurrences (72.3%), while elaborative responses occur 13 times (27.7%). Within the Feedback category, positive feedback is the most dominant teacher move with 25 occurrences (64.1%), followed by elaborative feedback with 8 occurrences (20.5%), and corrective feedback with 6 occurrences (15.4%).

The transcript excerpt below from Meeting 1 highlights the real-time execution of closed initiations and minimal responses:

Teacher: *"Hari ini kita belajar apa?"* (Initiation)

Students: *"Procedure text."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Good. Strukturnya?"* (Feedback-Initiation)

Students: *"Goal, materials, dan steps."* (Response)

The student responses in this turn are short and limited to factual phrase-level inputs without syntactical expansion.

The transcript excerpt below from Meeting 2 shows the execution of an extended dialogue containing an open-ended initiation, elaborative student responses, and multi-turn feedback:

Teacher: *"Menurut kalian, kenapa steps harus disusun secara urut?"* (Initiation)

Student 2: *"Supaya tidak salah dalam melakukan sesuatu."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Bisa beri contoh?"* (Feedback-Initiation)

Student 2: *"Misalnya kalau membuat mie instan, kalau tidak urut, hasilnya bisa tidak matang atau salah langkah."* (Response)

Student 4: *"Iya, kalau langkahnya tidak jelas, orang bisa bingung dan hasilnya berbeda."* (Response)

Teacher: *"Exactly, jadi urutan itu penting agar hasilnya sesuai tujuan."* (Feedback)

In this sequence, the open initiation prompts student explanations. The student responses provide context-based details, and multiple participants contribute to expanding the conceptual meaning before the teacher closes the turn.

Finally, the transcript excerpt below from Meeting 1 demonstrates the structural execution of a feedback move that combines positive reinforcement with an immediate elaborative extension:

Teacher: *"Procedure text adalah teks yang menjelaskan langkah-langkah untuk melakukan sesuatu."* (Initiation)

Student: *"Seperti tutorial ya, Miss?"* (Response)

Teacher: *"Yes, correct. Tutorial, cara memasak, cara menggunakan sesuatu."* (Feedback)

The teacher's turn validates the student's question through an evaluative phrase and provides supplementary examples to expand the concept.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern is clearly realized as the dominant structure of classroom interaction and simultaneously reflects the balance of interaction between teacher and students. This confirms the framework proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard, which conceptualizes classroom discourse as a structured sequence of initiation, response, and feedback. The dominance of simple IRF sequences (55.8%) indicates that classroom interaction is primarily organized in a linear and predictable triadic exchange, where the teacher initiates, students respond, and the teacher evaluates. This pattern reflects institutional classroom discourse in which the teacher controls the flow, topic, and direction of communication (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

This finding is consistent with Pratiwi et al. (2021), who reported that teacher feedback dominated a reading lesson at a vocational school and that student responses were limited. In this study, the prevalence of simple IRF sequences likewise reflects interaction focused on checking understanding through short, controlled exchanges.

However, the presence of multiple IRF sequences (20.9%) indicates that interaction is not entirely rigid. These sequences reflect moments where the teacher

extends discourse through follow-up questions, allowing students to elaborate their responses. Walsh and Li (2013) identified longer wait time, less teacher echo, and extended learner turns as practices that create space for learning in English classes in China. The follow-up prompts in the multiple IRF excerpts, such as asking students for an example, can be read as creating similar space for elaboration. This aligns with the concept of dialogic teaching proposed by Alexander (2008), which emphasizes the importance of extended interaction in promoting reasoning and collaborative learning. It also reflects the sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky (1978), where learning occurs through interaction and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development. In such cases, the teacher's follow-up moves function as scaffolding that supports students in developing more complex understanding (Collins et al., 1989).

On the other hand, the occurrence of incomplete IRF sequences (23.3%) highlights limitations in classroom interaction, particularly the absence of feedback. According to Gibbons (2015), feedback plays a crucial role in scaffolding learning by helping students confirm or adjust their understanding.

In terms of interactional balance, the distribution of IRF moves shows that students produce slightly more responses (36.7%), compared to initiation (32.8%) and feedback (30.5%) from the teacher. However, this does not indicate equal participation, as the teacher maintains control through initiation and evaluation. This reflects the inherent structure of IRF, where the teacher determines when interaction begins and how it is concluded (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

The dominance of closed questions (64.3%) further reinforces this teacher-centered pattern. Closed questions are designed to elicit predetermined responses, limiting opportunities for students to express their ideas. According to Alexander (2008), such questioning patterns restrict dialogic interaction and position students as passive respondents rather than active participants. This indicates that classroom discourse is oriented toward knowledge transmission rather than collaborative meaning-making.

This interpretation is supported by the high proportion of minimal responses (72.3%), which indicates that students' contributions are generally brief and limited in depth. As argued by Gordon Wells (1999), meaningful learning occurs through dialogic inquiry, where students actively construct knowledge by elaborating their ideas.

However, the dominance of minimal responses suggests that student participation remains at a surface level, with limited opportunities for deeper engagement.

Furthermore, the predominance of positive feedback (64.1%) indicates that interaction is often quickly closed after a correct response is given. Positive feedback functions as an evaluative move that confirms correctness without extending discussion. Cazden (2001) argues that such evaluative feedback emphasizes assessment rather than exploration, thereby limiting opportunities for extended reasoning. In contrast, elaborative feedback (20.5%), which has the potential to extend interaction, is relatively limited. According to Alexander (2008), elaborative feedback is essential for dialogic teaching because it encourages students to expand their responses and engage more actively.

Additionally, corrective feedback (15.4%) appears in a relatively small proportion, indicating that while errors are addressed, this is not the dominant feature of interaction. Lyster and Ranta (1997) analyzed six types of corrective feedback and the learner uptake that followed each in four immersion classrooms, and found that teachers overwhelmingly used recasts, which were less effective at eliciting student-generated repair. However, its limited use in this classroom suggests that feedback is primarily focused on confirmation rather than development.

These findings support the argument of Seedhouse (2004), who states that classroom interaction becomes unbalanced when the teacher dominates both initiation and feedback while students are limited to responding roles. In this study, students rarely initiate interaction, which further indicates that their role is largely reactive rather than interactive.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the IRF pattern is clearly realized but predominantly in its traditional form, resulting in a classroom interaction that is structured, efficient, and teacher-controlled. Although there are instances of extended interaction, they are not dominant enough to transform the discourse into a fully dialogic environment. Therefore, the use of IRF in this classroom reflects a learning context where interaction is only partially balanced and remains largely teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for collaborative knowledge construction.

All Relevant Studies were compared with this study. It can be concluded that this research has many similarities with Relevant Studies. Apart from using the same theory,

the methods used are also the same. The difference in this research only lies in the object to be studied, namely analyzing spoken feedback patterns within classroom interactions focused on procedure text among vocational pharmacy students in Medan.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) framework serves as the structural foundation of classroom discourse at SMK Swasta Kesehatan Imelda Medan. The structural analysis reveals that simple IRF sequences are the most dominant interactional pattern (55.8%), establishing a highly linear, predictable, and teacher-controlled communicative flow. While multiple sequences (20.9%) offer brief moments of dialogic scaffolding, a notable portion of interactions remains incomplete (23.3%) due to the frequent omission of teacher feedback. Furthermore, the overall distribution of the 128 interactional moves reveals a partially balanced but predominantly teacher-centered dynamic. Although student responses quantitatively account for the highest percentage of turns (36.7%), their communicative agency is strictly constrained by the teacher's control over initiations (32.8%) and feedback (30.5%). The high prevalence of closed display questions (64.3%), minimal student responses (72.3%), and evaluative positive feedback (64.1%) collectively indicates that classroom talk prioritizes immediate factual recall, efficiency, and accuracy over genuine dialogic inquiry.

The importance of this analysis lies in uncovering how micro-interactional structures in the vocational EFL classroom can inadvertently limit students' opportunities for deep cognitive processing and language production. However, this research is bound by certain limitations. The data collection was restricted to three instructional meetings in a single classroom environment (class X Farmasi 1), which may not fully represent the diverse interactional dynamics across different vocational tracks. Additionally, the discourse analysis focused exclusively on spoken interactions during the instruction of a specific genre, namely procedure text, meaning the findings might vary when applied to other language skills or text types.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are provided for pedagogical improvement and future research. English teachers are highly encouraged to structurally balance the deployment of closed and open-ended questions to challenge students to

elaborate their reasoning, while transitioning from purely evaluative feedback to elaborative extensions that sustain multi-turn talk. Students should also maximize speaking opportunities by moving away from minimal phrase-level outputs toward elaborative responses. Finally, future researchers are recommended to investigate IRF execution across broader contexts, including different grade levels and subject matters, or to combine the Sinclair and Coulthard framework with complementary methods such as Conversation Analysis (CA) to yield a more nuanced understanding of classroom discourse.

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