The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) Model and Repair Strategies in Classroom Interaction

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Abstract: Effective teacher-student interaction is fundamental to language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. One prominent framework for analyzing classroom discourse is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, which highlights the structured nature of teacher-led interactions A summary of a review of foreign language learning for elementary school students regarding recognizing the names of fruits and constructing sentences with the names of these fruits is a good start to learning a foreign language, where students are given a lot of vocabulary as initial capital for them to compose sentences and speak, while the role of the teacher Here, apart from being a material provider, the teacher also becomes a judge who is able to reflect on what students do and provide feedback that builds students to learn English better.

INTRODUCTION

Effective teacher-student interaction is fundamental to language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. One prominent framework for analyzing classroom discourse is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, which highlights the structured nature of teacher-led interactions. This study examines a 23-minute English lesson for second-grade elementary students in Indonesia, focusing on introducing fruit vocabulary and constructing closed-ended questions such as “Do you like bananas?” and their corresponding responses. Given that English is not the students’ primary language, the lesson aims to build familiarity with basic vocabulary and sentence structures. By analyzing the IRF sequences and

repair strategies used, this study explores how teacher feedback can be optimized to foster greater student engagement, self-correction, and critical thinking.

The IRF model, first introduced by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), is a widely used discourse structure in classroom settings. It consists of three sequential moves: Initiation (I), where the teacher prompts student participation; Response (R), where students provide an answer; and Feedback (F), where the teacher acknowledges, corrects, or extends the response. This model is particularly beneficial in structured language learning environments, as it provides a clear framework for interaction (Walsh, 2011).

Research on IRF sequences has shown that while they facilitate classroom management and learning progression, they may also limit students' opportunities for extended discourse (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In traditional IRF exchanges, feedback is often given in the form of direct correction, which, although effective for accuracy, may hinder deeper engagement and the development of self-repair skills (Ellis, 2008). Studies suggest that alternative feedback techniques, such as elicitation and clarification requests, encourage students to reflect on their responses and improve their metalinguistic awareness (Nassaji & Swain, 2000).

Repair strategies also play a critical role in language learning. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), repair can be categorized into self-repair (student-initiated) and other-repair (teacher-initiated). While direct correction provides immediate clarity, self-repair techniques foster deeper cognitive processing and greater retention of correct language forms (Thornbury, 1999). Encouraging students to justify their answers or rephrase incorrect responses allows them to engage in higher-order thinking and develop autonomy in language use (Tomlinson, 2013).

In the observed lesson, teacher feedback primarily relied on direct correction, limiting opportunities for students to reflect and self-correct. Research suggests that a more effective approach would involve interactive feedback strategies, such as prompting students with guiding questions (e.g., "Why did you choose that answer?") or offering partial recasts to nudge them toward self-repair (Walsh, 2011). By shifting from a purely corrective approach to one that fosters student reflection and participation, teachers can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment.

Overall, applying a nuanced understanding of IRF sequences and repair strategies can significantly enhance student engagement and language acquisition. By incorporating interactive feedback techniques, teachers can empower students to take an active role in their learning, leading to more meaningful and lasting language development.

METHODOLOGY.

This study is qualitative in nature with the teacher interaction as main data. Qualitative approach is used to gain a more complete and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The objective of the researcher is to comprehend real-life behavior by gathering data for analysis. A documentation was employed to identify the frequently used interaction used by the teacher. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model and repair strategies play a significant role in shaping the interaction between the teacher and students in this lesson. The lesson, which lasts 23 minutes and is designed for second-grade elementary students, focuses on introducing fruit vocabulary and constructing closed-ended questions such as "Do you like bananas?" and their appropriate responses. Given that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, the primary objective is to familiarize students with English vocabulary and sentence structure, ensuring they can both ask and answer simple questions.

Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) Analysis

The initiation phase occurs when the teacher introduces new vocabulary and sentence structures, often through activities such as singing fruit names, guessing fruits, and sticking fruit pictures on the cupboard. For instance, the teacher may ask, "What fruit is this?" (initiation), prompting students to respond with the name of the fruit (response), followed by the teacher confirming or correcting the answer (feedback). Another key initiation is the explanation of sentence

construction, where the teacher models, “Do you like apples?”, and expects students to respond with, “Yes, I like apples” or “No, I don’t like apples”.

The response phase varies based on students’ confidence and understanding. While some students may answer correctly, others might hesitate, mispronounce words, or make grammatical errors. Here, feedback is crucial. However, in this lesson, feedback often comes in the form of direct correction, where the teacher provides the correct answer without engaging students in self-repair or justification. For example, when students complete their LKPD worksheets and present their answers, the teacher gives feedback by stating the correct answer without explanation. This limits students' critical thinking and engagement, as they are not encouraged to justify or reflect on their responses.

A more effective feedback strategy would involve elicitation, where the teacher asks, “Why did you choose that answer?” or “Can you explain your reasoning?” This would encourage students to actively engage in self-correction and critical thinking, even with limited vocabulary. Instead of merely stating the correct answer, the teacher could prompt students by saying, “That’s close! Can you think of another way to say it?”, allowing them to attempt self-repair.

Repair Strategies in the Lesson

Throughout the lesson, various repair strategies can be identified:

1. Self-initiated self-repair – Occurs when students recognize their own mistakes and correct them independently. This is not frequently observed in the lesson, as the teacher provides direct correction rather than prompting self-repair.

2. Teacher-initiated student repair – Seen when the teacher asks students to rethink their answers during speaking exercises. However, this is limited in effectiveness, as the teacher often provides direct corrections instead of guiding students to self-correct.

3. Explicit teacher correction – When a student mispronounces a fruit name or constructs an incorrect sentence, the teacher immediately provides the correct answer. For example:

- Student: "I like a banana" (incorrect article usage).
- Teacher: "We say, 'I like bananas.'"

This strategy ensures accuracy but does not encourage students to internalize the correction process.

4. Recast (implicit correction) – If a student makes an error, the teacher could restate the correct form naturally within a conversation. Example:

- Student: "I like a banana" (incorrect).
- Teacher: "Oh, you like bananas! Bananas are delicious."

This method provides indirect correction without interrupting communication, allowing students to notice and absorb the correct form naturally.

The IRF structure ensures structured interaction and clear lesson progression. The use of engaging activities like singing, clapping games, and worksheets keeps students motivated. The lesson is well-structured

for second-grade students, gradually introducing vocabulary and sentence construction.

The teacher should allow more space for student self-repair, rather than always providing direct corrections. In addition, feedback should include elicitation techniques, prompting students to explain their answers rather than passively receiving corrections. Furthermore, increased peer interaction could be encouraged, such as having students correct each other's mistakes to build collaborative learning skills.

CONCLUSION

A summary of a review of foreign language learning for elementary school students regarding recognizing the names of fruits and constructing sentences with the names of these fruits is a good start to learning a foreign language, where students are given a lot of vocabulary as initial capital for them to compose sentences and speak, while the role of the teacher Here, apart from being a material provider, the teacher also becomes a judge who is able to reflect on what students do and provide feedback that builds students to learn English better.

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