

COMMON FACTORS AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES: INSIGHTS FROM EFL STUDENTS AT QUANG BINH UNIVERSITY

NHỮNG YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN HIỆU QUẢ TƯƠNG TÁC TRONG LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH: QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH - TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢNG BÌNH

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ABSTRACT: Understanding students' perceptions of the factors influencing classroom interaction is crucial for improving language proficiency and supporting their academic and professional development. By employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as the main instruments, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of 80 English-majored students at Quang Binh University toward the factors affecting the effectiveness of classroom interaction in English language classes, identify Teacher-related factors, Student-related factors, Language-related factors and Classroom environment as the key elements that facilitate or hinder effective classroom interaction in EFL settings, and provide recommendations for improving classroom interaction and enhancing English language learning at Quang Binh University.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, Factors, Students' attitude, English language teaching and learning, EFL context.

TÓM TẮT: Việc nghiên cứu quan điểm của sinh viên về tác động của những yếu tố này đến kết quả học Tiếng Anh có ý nghĩa quan trọng không chỉ trong việc nâng cao năng lực ngôn ngữ mà còn xây dựng nền tảng vững chắc cho sự phát triển học thuật và nghề nghiệp tương lai. Sử dụng kết hợp phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính và định lượng thông qua bảng hỏi và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc làm công cụ chính, nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát nhận thức của 80 sinh viên chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Quảng Bình về các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến hiệu quả tương tác trong lớp học tiếng Anh. Đồng thời, nghiên cứu cũng xác định các yếu tố liên quan đến người dạy, người học, môi trường học và nền tảng ngôn ngữ như là các yếu tố then chốt thúc đẩy hoặc cản trở sự tương tác hiệu quả trong bối cảnh học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, và đưa ra các khuyến nghị nhằm cải thiện sự tương tác trong lớp học, từ đó nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Quảng Bình.

Từ khóa: Tương tác lớp học, yếu tố, thái độ của sinh viên, dạy và học tiếng Anh, bối cảnh học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ.

1. INTRODUCTION

For students majoring in English, the ability to use English effectively depends not only on theoretical learning but also on the quality of practice through interactive activities in the classroom. Interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students

themselves within the learning environment, is considered the key factor in developing the students' language skills since learning takes place effectively through the interactions.

However, in reality, the effectiveness of classroom interaction does not always meet the teachers and learners' expectations. Various

factors can influence the quality of classroom interaction such as teacher-related elements, student attitudes, student motivation, classroom environment, instructional methods, and cultural aspects, and cultural diversity. Studying these factors is of great significance in enhancing classroom interaction, thereby improving language proficiency and establishing a solid foundation for students' academic and professional development. More significantly, understanding students' attitudes toward these factors is essential for improving classroom interaction and enhancing the overall effectiveness of English language instruction.

This article aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the effectiveness of classroom interaction. Additionally, it seeks to propose practical solutions to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for English Language majors at Quang Binh University, helping them comprehensively develop essential skills for better career opportunities in the future.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. How classroom interaction can be defined.

Classroom interaction, as emphasized by Vygotsky (1978), Mercer (2000), and Brown (2007), plays a pivotal role in cognitive and linguistic development by fostering engagement, negotiating meaning, and shaping classroom dynamics. These authors highlight the importance of social interactions in cognitive development which helps to foster students' engagement and participation in classroom activities, leading to improved learning outcomes. Brown (2007) views interaction as the reciprocal process in which learners negotiate meaning, develop linguistic skills, and enhance their cognitive abilities. He also views classroom interaction as a factor in classroom dynamics and an essential element of classroom management and student-teacher

relationships, influencing motivation, discipline, and the overall learning environment. All of these definitions mainly focus on the communication and exchange of information that occurs between teachers and students, as well as among students, within a learning environment as the primary nature of classroom interaction. Heavily grounding on the above definitions, in this study, "classroom interaction" can be defined as a specific type of interaction that occurs in a learning environment between students and teachers or among students themselves. It encompasses various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication that facilitate learning, such as asking and answering questions, group discussions, feedback sessions, and collaborative activities.

2.2. Factors influencing the effectiveness of classroom interaction in EFL contexts

Teacher-Related Factors: The teacher's role is pivotal in fostering classroom interaction. Studies by Tsui (1995) and Walsh (2011) indicate that teachers' questioning techniques, feedback strategies, and classroom management styles significantly impact student participation. Effective teachers use open-ended questions, encourage discussion, and provide constructive feedback to create an interactive learning environment.

Student-Related Factors: Students' motivation, confidence, and language proficiency levels are key determinants of their participation in classroom interaction. Students with high anxiety and low self-esteem may avoid interaction, peer pressure or fear of negative evaluation may also be seen as part of influences. Furthermore, individual differences such as learning styles and cultural background also affect students' willingness to communicate since motivated learners tend to engage more actively (Wen & Clément, 2003).

Classroom Environment: The physical and psychological classroom environment can

either enhance or hinder interaction. A supportive and inclusive atmosphere, where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas, encourages greater participation (Harmer, 2007). Class size and seating arrangement also play a role; smaller class sizes and flexible seating arrangements often lead to increased student engagement (Johnson, 2009). In addition, psychological safety can be seen as a component to affect classroom interaction, since a psychologically safe classroom where students feel free to take risks without fear of judgment has been shown to encourage more active participation (Dörnyei, 2001).

Instructional Methods: Teaching methods and instructional strategies influence classroom interaction levels. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have been shown to promote higher interaction levels than traditional teacher-centered approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks provide opportunities for meaningful interaction (Littlewood, 2004).

2.3. Previous studies on factors influencing the effectiveness of classroom Interaction in EFL Contexts

In the global range, Nunan (1999), Joan Kelly Hall & Meghan Walsh (2002) investigated the relationship between classroom interaction and students' language development. Their study showed that through interaction with teachers, students not only develop knowledge but also become socialized into classroom norms and expectations. The role of interaction in creating an effective learning environment, which strongly influences students' language development, was emphasized in their research. Regarding cultural factors influencing classroom interaction, studies by Liu & Littlewood (1997) emphasized that students' hesitation to speak in

class stemmed from cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority and fear of making mistakes. Liu and Littlewood (1997) explored Asian students' participation in EFL classrooms and concluded that cultural factors, such as respect for authority and reluctance to speak in public, influenced interaction patterns. Thomas B.W (2021) highlighted the importance of cultural factors in classroom interaction. His study focused on creating a classroom environment that embraces cultural diversity, asserting that respect and understanding of different cultural backgrounds improve interaction quality and create better learning conditions for students.

Emily R.M. (2023) examined the impact of classroom design on teacher-student interaction. This researcher found that open and flexible learning spaces promote student engagement, enhance communication, and foster a more student-friendly learning environment, especially for students who struggle in traditional classroom settings. Shaheena Choudhury (2005) pointed out that interactive activities such as group work or pair work not only improve communication skills but also create a more positive learning environment. She stressed that teachers need to be mindful of students' cultural diversity when organizing interactive activities to help maximize their learning potential.

In Vietnamese context, Nguyen and Pham (2018) examined the effectiveness of interactive teaching techniques in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Their study found that students who engaged in group discussions, role-playing, and peer feedback exhibited higher levels of engagement and improved communication skills. A study by Tran (2020) focused on teachers' perspectives on classroom interaction in Vietnamese high schools. The research revealed that while many educators recognize the importance of interaction, traditional teaching methods and large class

sizes often hinder meaningful student participation. Le (2019) conducted a case study on university students' attitudes toward classroom interaction. The findings suggested that students preferred interactive learning activities but faced challenges such as fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence in speaking English. Dang (2021) explored the impact of technology-enhanced interaction in EFL classrooms in Vietnam. The study found that integrating digital tools, such as online discussion forums and language learning apps, significantly increased student participation and motivation. Nguyen (2021) examined teachers' strategies for enhancing interaction and found that interactive activities, scaffolding, and encouragement significantly improved student engagement. More recently, Nguyễn Thị Minh Hiếu and colleagues (2022) studied students' attitudes and interactions in online English classes in Ho Chi Minh City, revealing that interaction with teachers and peers positively influenced students' attitudes and academic performance. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Thị Thu Hà (2024) conducted research on interaction in English-medium instruction (EMI) classes, affirming that teacher-student interaction not only enhances subject-specific skills but also improves students' English

proficiency.

These studies highlight the ongoing efforts to enhance classroom interaction in English classes in Vietnam and underscore the need for innovative teaching strategies to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. A survey-based design is used to examine EFL students' attitudes toward common factors affecting classroom interaction in English language classes at Quang Binh University. A structured questionnaire is administered to students to assess their attitudes toward classroom interaction and the factors influencing their participation. It consists of Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses. The study also includes semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives and behaviors in interactive settings. In-depth interviews were conducted with four selected students to further explore their perceptions of the factors influencing classroom interaction and to gather suggestions for improvement.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

<i>Course</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>66</i>
No. of participants (80)	8/8	22/22	25/25	25/35
%	100	100	100	87.5
<i>Years of learning English</i>				
<i>Years</i>	<i>No.</i>		<i>%</i>	
1 - 5 years	21		26.3	
6 - 10 years	31		38.8	
11 - 15 years	22		27.5	
> 15 years	6		7.5	
<i>Ss' self-evaluation of English Proficiency</i>				
Beginners	21		26.3	
Pre-intermediate	27		33.8	
Intermediate	27		33.8	
Advanced	5		6.3	

The participants included 80 undergraduate English majors from Quang Binh University, representing all four academic years. Table 1 provides an overview of their demographic characteristics. The majority of participants reported studying English for 6-10 years (38.8%), while 27.5% had 11-15 years of experience. Only 7.5% had over 15 years of study. Regarding self-perceived proficiency, most students identified as pre-intermediate or intermediate (both 33.8%), while fewer saw

themselves as beginners (26.3%) or advanced learners (6.3%). These responses suggest a student population with moderate experience and confidence in English use.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. The importance of classroom interaction in English classes

Classroom interaction has long been recognized as a critical component of effective English language learning.

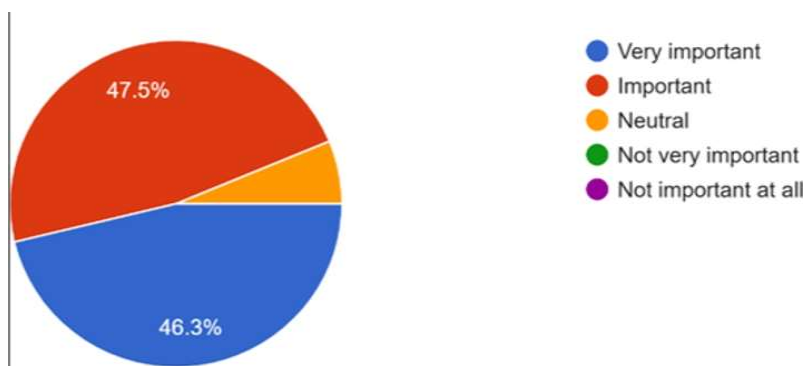


Figure 1. Students' responses to the importance of classroom interaction to improve their English skills

The pie chart (Figure 1) categorizes responses into five levels of perceived importance. The finding suggests that nearly half of the respondents perceive classroom interaction as a fundamental element of their language-learning process. Additionally, a substantial proportion with 46.3% of participants highlights the recognition of classroom interaction as an indispensable factor in improving English proficiency. The combination of “Important” and “Very important” responses accounts for 93.8% of the total, indicating a strong consensus among students that classroom interaction is critical for language development. A very small proportion of respondents (6.3%) remained “Neutral”, “Not very important” or “Not important at all” underscores the universal acknowledgment of the significance of

interaction, even among those who may not actively prefer it. This finding reinforces the theoretical claim that interaction is an integral component of effective language instruction.

The results from this data analysis align with various studies in applied linguistics and educational psychology. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in a way that classroom interaction provides a dynamic space for students to engage in dialogic exchanges, scaffolding their learning through collaborative practices. Moreover, studies have consistently shown that learners who actively participate in classroom interactions tend to demonstrate greater proficiency in language use, as interaction supports the internalization of linguistic structures and promotes long-term retention.

This finding, in brief, underscores the

need for teachers to prioritize interaction through learner-centered teaching strategies, such as role-playing, group discussions, and collaborative tasks which not only enhance language proficiency but also promote confidence, teamwork, and critical thinking.

4.2. Factors that influence classroom interaction in EFL settings

Teacher-Related Factors

Teachers are essential in fostering a positive learning environment and promoting student participation in EFL classrooms. Their

teaching styles, pedagogical approaches, and ability to engage students significantly enhance language proficiency while also boosting motivation and active involvement in learning activities. The charts below display survey data highlighting how various teacher-related factors influence classroom interaction. These factors include the frequency with which teachers encourage participation, the impact of teaching styles on students' willingness to engage, and the effectiveness of specific teaching methods in promoting interaction.

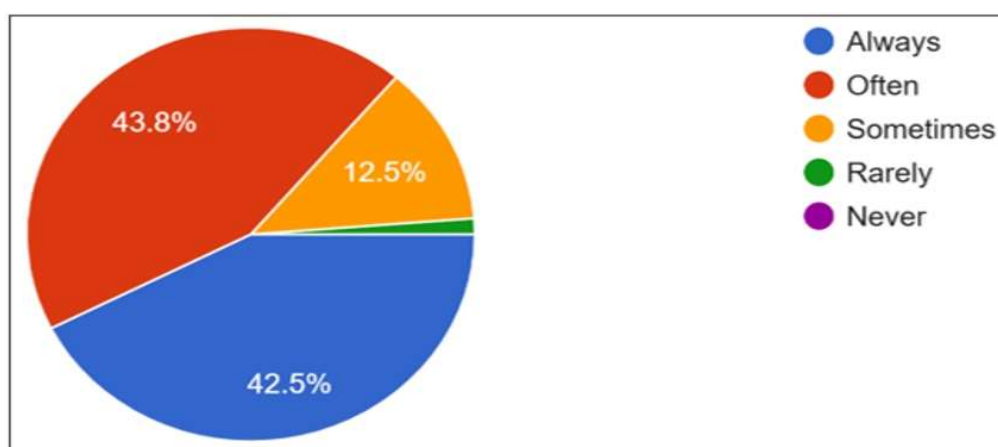


Figure 2. Students' responses to the frequency of teachers' encouragement to SS' participation

Data in Figure 2 illustrates the frequency with which teachers promote student participation. The results suggest that a majority of teachers actively promote participation, contributing to a more interactive and engaging learning environment. However, a significant (43.8%) of students believe that teachers “sometimes” encourage participation, highlighting inconsistencies in the frequency of such encouragement. This inconsistency may arise from varying teaching styles, lesson content, or individual teacher preferences, which could lead to unequal levels of engagement among students. With 1.3% of respondents indicating that teachers “rarely”

encourage participation, it is suggested that while some teachers may benefit from training in motivational strategies to foster more consistent student engagement, some others may lack the strategies or effort necessary to motivate their students effectively. Thus, teacher should be more consistent and deliberate to encourage participation, as this can significantly influence overall classroom interaction and students' sense of involvement. By addressing these inconsistencies, teachers can ensure that all students feel equally motivated and supported in contributing to class discussions and activities.

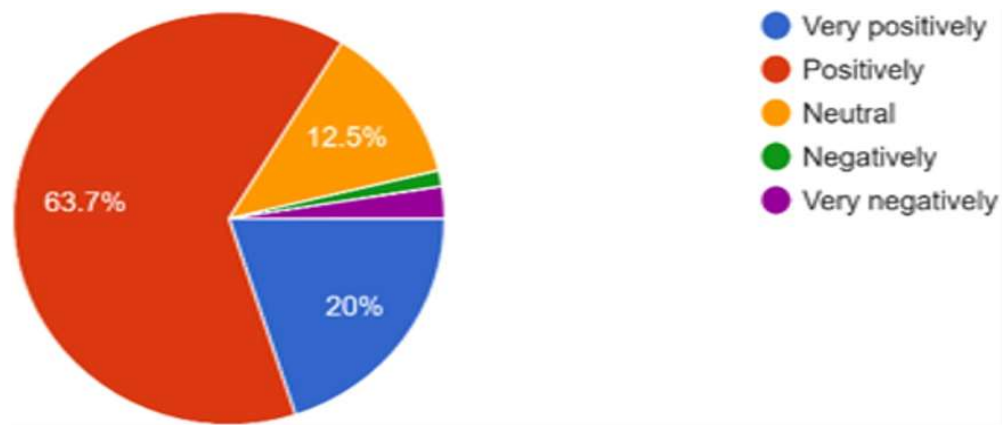


Figure 3. The effect of teachers' teaching styles on the SS' willingness of participation

Chart 3 underscores the critical role that effective teaching methods play in promoting student engagement. When the teachers employ engagement as a thoughtful strategy, they not only create a comfortable atmosphere but also foster an environment that encourages active participation in classroom discussions and activities. These methods highlight the significance of a student-centered approach, in which teachers adapt their styles to inspire

confidence and facilitate interaction among students. 12.5% of students reported a “neutral” viewpoint highlighting that not all teaching styles are equally effective for every individual. That no respondents with “negative” or “very negative” answers indicates that teachers are generally successful in employing methods that engage and motivate students.

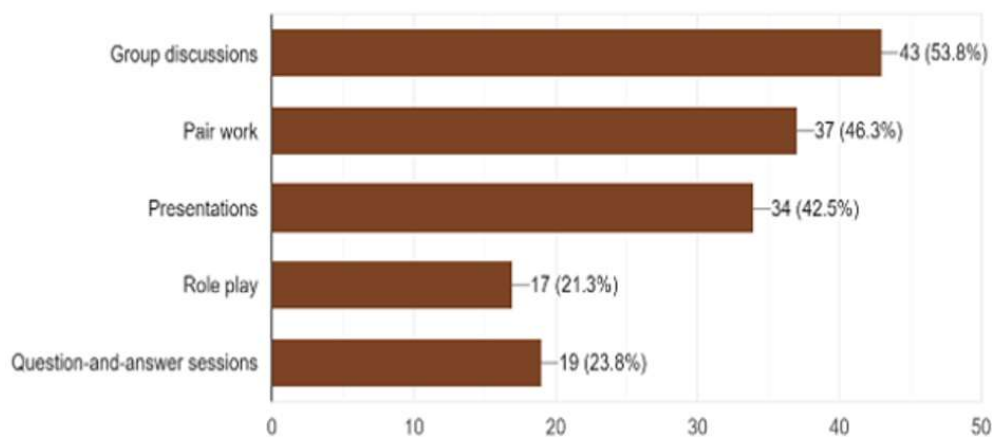


Figure 4. SS' responses to effective methods to promote classroom interaction

Figure 4 provides valuable insights into the teaching methods that students believe are most effective for promoting classroom interaction. Among the 80 respondents, 53.8% identified “group discussions” as the most

effective method for encouraging classroom participation. This significant majority highlights the role of group discussions in fostering collaborative learning, allowing students to share ideas, engage in critical

thinking, and benefit from peer interaction. Additionally, 46.3% of students selected “pair work” as a preferred method, further emphasizing the value of collaborative activities. Pair work creates a more intimate interaction format, helping students build confidence while practicing their language skills with their peers. 42.5% of students identified “presentations” as an effective method for encouraging participation. While presentations are less interactive than group discussions or pair work, they provide an opportunity for students to enhance their public

speaking and organizational skills. In contrast, “role-play” and “question-and-answer” sessions were less frequently chosen, with 21.3% and 23.8% of the respondents respectively. The lower preference for role play may stem from the spontaneity and creativity it demands, which can be daunting for students with limited language proficiency or low self-confidence.

○ Student-Related Factors

Together with teacher-related factors, Student-related factors greatly impact classroom interaction in EFL settings.

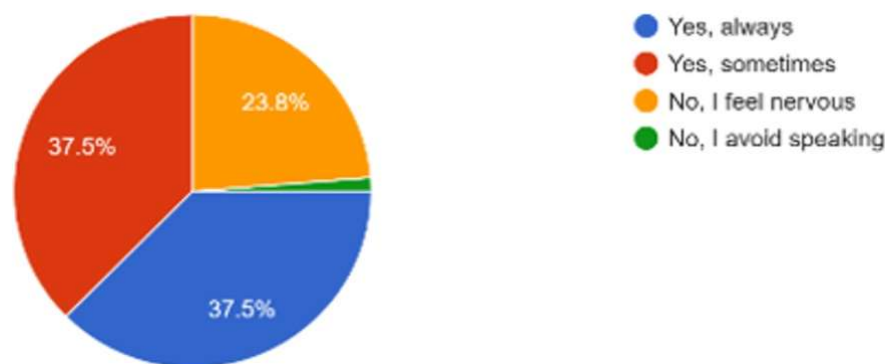


Figure 5. SS' responses to their confidence in EFL classes

Data in Figure 5 indicates that most students (75%) have some confidence in speaking English, though only half of them feel consistently confident. A considerable percentage (23.8%) feel nervous, highlighting a potential need for more supportive learning environments or confidence-building activities. This nervousness can arise from

various factors, including the fear of making mistakes, insufficient preparation, or concerns about peer judgment. If their anxiety is not addressed, these students may become disengaged. That very few students (1.2%) completely avoid speaking suggests that English-speaking opportunities exist, but some students may need more encouragement.

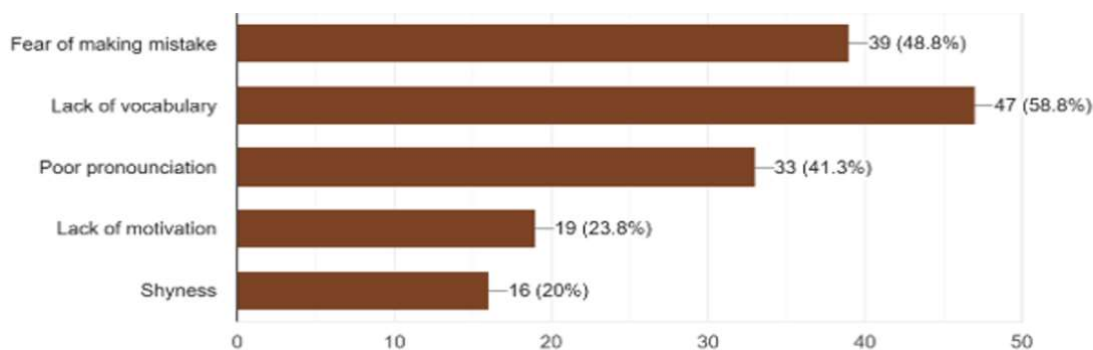


Figure 6. SS's responses to difficulties they might face when interacting in English classes

The most significant challenge, noted by 58.8% of respondents, is a “lack of vocabulary”. It is obvious that when students have inadequate vocabulary, they may struggle to articulate their thoughts clearly, leading to frustration and decreased participation. The “fear of making mistakes,” reported by 48.8% of students, constitutes a significant barrier to interaction. In fact, mistakes like grammatical errors, mispronunciations, or improper word usage, etc. can inhibit students and deter them from participating in classroom activities. Together with “poor pronunciation” occupying 41.3%, “lack of motivation” and “shyness” were seen as potential difficulties faced by EFL students in joining in collaborative and/or interactive work.

These findings indicate that in English classes, various challenges hinder the students' full engagement. These challenges may concern with limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and difficulties with pronunciation or shyness. This creates a cycle in which students' perceived shortcomings diminish their willingness to speak, thereby limiting their opportunities for improvement.

○ Classroom Environment Factors

Physical layout, class size, overall atmosphere, and dynamics of peer interaction are seen as classroom environment factors significantly influencing students' willingness to communicate and engage in learning activities. When interviewed, a student from English class, course 66 said:

“I feel more confident and comfortable to speak when teachers create an enjoyable atmosphere for me to share ideas”, [...] and “smaller class sizes are more conducive to effective group interaction because students have more opportunities to speak”.

External factors such as seating arrangements, classrooms with lighting and electric fans, learning facilities can positively or negatively influence engagement and interaction among students. When asked whether classroom environment affected the willingness to their participating in collaborative work or not, the interviewed students said that a non-threatening classroom environment can significantly enhance their confidence and participation. Conversely, without a psychologically safe and inclusive environment, students may feel reluctant to participate in interactive activities. The classroom environment plays a significant role in shaping students' attitude towards interactions. Therefore, in order to improve the effectiveness of EFL classrooms, teachers should prioritize collaborative activities, foster a safe and inclusive atmosphere, and adjust the physical layout to facilitate communication among students.

○ Language-Related Factors

The English language significantly influences interaction in EFL classrooms, either fostering or limiting it. Factors such as lesson difficulty and essential skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing directly affect students' participation and confidence. When students perceive lessons as too challenging or struggle with a particular skill, they are more likely to hesitate in engaging with activities. Interviewed students from courses 64 and 65 reckoned respectively that “participating in classroom interaction helps improve both speaking and listening skills, as well as the ability to respond quickly in conversations”, and “when my peers speak more fluently than I do, I often feel pressured and fail to keep up with the discussion.”

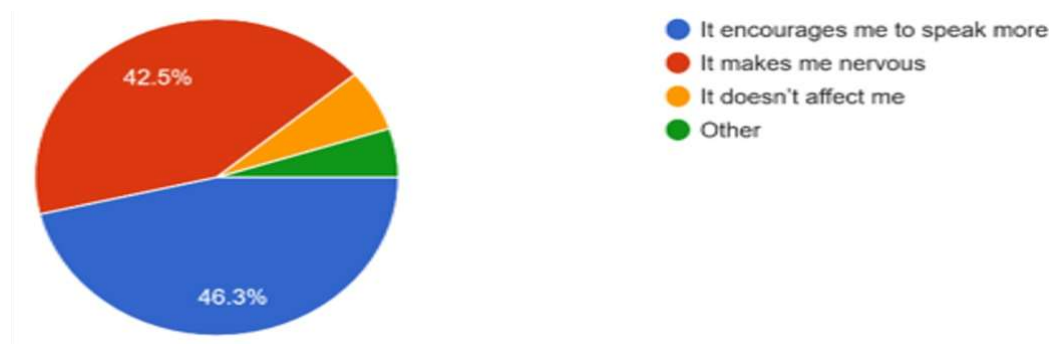


Figure 7. Students' opinions on the impact of lesson difficulty on their participation in classroom interaction

Figure 7 indicated that among 80 respondents, 36.3% reported that the difficulty of English lessons significantly impacts their participation, while 31.3% confessed that it affects them to some extent. Collectively, 67.6% of students acknowledged being influenced by the complexity of the lessons to varying degrees, suggesting that challenging content can act as a barrier to active engagement. Conversely, 18.8% of students stated that lesson difficulty has minimal influence on their participation, and the remaining 13.8% reported no impact at all. These findings highlight that while not universally experienced, the majority of students are affected by the difficulty level of English lessons, particularly in contexts with varying proficiency levels among learners.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This study was conducted with the aim of examining how English-major students at Quang Binh University perceived the factors influencing classroom interaction in English language classes. The data analysis revealed that language-related factors were one of the most prominent concerns for students in English classrooms. While vocabulary limitations are normally seen as the most significant barrier to classroom interaction, students expressed deeper anxieties about grammatical structures, language limitation,

and pronunciation. Cognitive and affective factors were also found to play a crucial role in determining the level and quality of classroom interaction. Many students reported a lack of confidence in their collaborating abilities, which was exacerbated by feelings of anxiety, fear of negative feedback and evaluation, and a perceived lack of independence in managing language tasks. The impact of affective filters such as anxiety and fear supports the view that emotional readiness is a prerequisite for meaningful classroom engagement. These psychological barriers serve as internal constraints that significantly hinder students from taking risks and participating actively in classroom discussions. The findings of the study highlight the importance of targeted pedagogical interventions and institutional support systems that should be taken into account by both teachers and students.

5.2. Implications

This study holds several important implications for various stakeholders. First, EFL teachers must acknowledge the psychological and linguistic challenges faced by students in interactive settings. It is recommended that teachers adopt more student-centered and communicative approaches to language instruction. Activities that provide opportunities for collaborative learning, such as group discussions, role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks, should

be integrated into the curriculum to foster engagement and active participation. In addition, teachers should develop classroom environments that are psychologically safe and inclusive. Teachers can also provide positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, both of which are essential in building self-confidence and fostering a growth mindset among learners. Second, for educational administrators and policymakers, the findings suggest the need to reconsider institutional policies and classroom structures that may

limit student interaction. Furthermore, curriculum designers should ensure that instructional materials are interactive, culturally appropriate, and aligned with students' real-life communication needs. Finally, students should also be encouraged to take a proactive role in their learning. While it is essential to address external barriers, students also need to take ownership of their development by setting personal goals, seeking out practice opportunities, and cultivating resilience in the face of challenges.

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