

# THE ROLES OF TEACHER TO PROMOTE CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN CHILDREN CLASSES

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## **Abstract**

Classroom interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other which takes place in the classroom. It is a complete action where teacher is one of the elements to assist this from happening. In the children classes, where a lot of students are having considerably minor exposure of language, need extra attention to help interaction to take place. This article aimed at contributing the teaching of English to young learners and promote the classroom interactions in children classes. The final section of this article proposes some techniques on how to initiate and promote interactions in children classes.

**Keywords:** *roles of teacher, classroom interaction, children classes*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Interaction takes place where there are two or more people exchange thoughts, feelings, or ideas resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Classroom is the place where teachers and students communicate their thoughts, feelings, or ideas to each other in the form of oral conversations to fulfill certain goals (Brown2001: 165). Effective classroom interaction has two implications. The first one concerns a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom with friendly relationships among the participants of the learning process. The second one, encourages students to become effective communicators in a foreign language. This can be achieved through various ways: by implementing different student and teacher roles, by exposing students to a varied classroom organisation, by employing a variety of activities, by helping students to express

themselves and by encouraging their use of communication strategies. If the two implications are joined, we get a pleasant classroom atmosphere in which students are trying to communicate in foreign language. In children classes, students are considerably minor in the language exposure and therefore need special treatments to promote interaction among them. Considering the age, level of proficiency, learners' characteristics, and learners' attitudes toward learning, teacher needs to have extra careful choices of initiating interaction with the learners. It is required that teachers should possess the attitude that they will appear equally to all the students. Children need to know that they please the teachers with what they act or do during the learning. Teachers need to realize that children characteristics with their short span of attention must be well-accommodated in regard to their level of proficiency as well. Some

adjustments also necessary to be made when delivering the language to the children; simplifying the language and clarifying its meaning with gestures or movements, pictures, sound/voice, and illustrations will help children to have better comprehension when interacting with the teachers or other children (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990: 9-10)

Interactions in children classes are not merely a matter of providing the learners with plenty of authentic language tasks in the classroom, but it requires specific skills and intuitions that differ from those of having it with the adults' learners (Brown 2001: 87). Teachers' Role is a crucial element in determining the success of interaction among students and between students and teacher. Teachers need to understand the characteristics of children learners in which they are different from adults in terms of their attention span, learning attitudes, and language exposure. They think and act differently from adults and therefore they interact in different ways compared to adults. In addition, teachers need to possess special attitudes regarding to the characteristics of children learners; they, for some reasons need to be able to think like child, be animated, lively and enthusiastic for young learners are positive about learning, teachers need to be humorous, patient and able to be special person for everyone, they also need to be aware of showing non-verbal language for children are positive about learning. Most teachers think conventionally, that they take the authority over the children; they rarely or even do not give chance for children to "experience" the learning

for they are physically active learners. Also they learn best by doing; when they experience the learning, children will store this experience into their memory and when needed, they will easily be recalled. This is in line with Rivers (1987: 57) that through interaction as a part of their experience in learning a foreign language, learners can increase their language store as they listen to read "authentic linguistic material", and learners can use all they process of the language – all they have learned or absorbed in real life exchanges, where expressing their real meaning making is important to them.

Other attitudes and competences needed by teachers of children learners are having excellent oral fluency, for they will be the role model for the learners, This competency, however, often neglected for teachers consider that children know only a little about the foreign language learned (English) and that children will not notice when teachers are making mistakes when using English. Also, having knowledge of child psychology, which will help the teachers coping the problems with the children learners with full understanding, and mastering various teaching techniques to help them vary the teaching to meet the students profile and classroom situation (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990 : 5, 6). In regard to the characteristics of children, they are having short attention span and therefore need a lot of variation in learning, and indeed, teachers need to have enough mastery of teaching techniques. In fact, few teachers are not aware of this, they tend to "force the children" to do what they say and act as what they told to for quite some times and only slight changes or

variations are made in doing so. Teachers of children need to be animated and lively, for children are enthusiastic and positive about learning, and therefore teachers need to have extra creativity and competence in varying the activities during the teaching and learning process. As the effective classroom interaction has two implications, teachers need to be concerned with how to create friendly atmosphere and to give support to the learners to be effective communicators of the foreign language. The role of teachers is therefore very crucial to make the interaction to take place. This article is aimed at proposing ideas to create the friendly atmosphere and encouragement to promote interaction in children classes.

### **Interactive Principles**

Interaction is the crucial part of the communicative competence through the use of language in various contexts to negotiate meaning. Through interaction also, learners are able to increase their language store as they listen to read or read authentic linguistic materials or even the output from the other learners during discussions, skits, joint problem-solving activities. Interactions can promote the language learning even at the elementary level through the activities of listening to or reading the authentic linguistic materials, getting the output from the other students through discussion or problem-solving tasks. They can also activate their background knowledge related to their life experience they get informally outside the school. It shows that interaction indeed, promote the language learning at any levels and any circumstances or settings, including classroom.

In the classroom, teachers play important roles for maintain the interactions among the students. Teachers set or design, and also plan a lesson before having the lessons with the students. They need to make sure that there will be a conducive atmosphere in the classroom to conduct an interactive lesson in the teaching and learning process. In addition teachers need also to provide encouragement to learners to be effective communicator of foreign language (Brown, 2001; Rivers, 1987)

Brown (2001: 166) mentioned seven principles of effective interactions; first, *automaticity*, interactions focus more on meanings and messages rather than grammar or other linguistic forms for it will impede the learners to use the language more automatically; instead, they will think over the rules rather than using the language to continue to automatic modes of processing. In children classes, automaticity needs time for their exposure is not enough; children must not be forced to have interaction; one of Krashen's (1982) philosophy features mentioned that learners should not be forced to speak in the target language – that they would speak when they are ready and that the learners, rather that teachers should make decision. In this phase, teacher can provide children with help and/or assistance to make the feel secure, like providing them with a warm welcome such as initiating the introduction by greeting the children warmly by their name; “Hey, hello Erika, how are you today?” and telling name; “Hello, my name is Jane, what's your name?”. By doing so, children can feel welcomed and accepted, at least by the teacher.

Other ways can be through spelling in form of songs or chants presented in the activities to introduce alphabet and also to strengthen children mastery on spelling the correct letters on English words. Songs and chants provide tone which is easy listening this can make the children feel happier and more engaged in the activities. While singing or chanting, children can enjoy and start to interact by singing the song, as in “Bingo” song, teacher can modify the name of the animal the sing it together with the children. Later, children can have their own version of the song by changing the animal's name into another two syllables word and try to spell it with the “Bingo” tone. We may find some children are reluctant to sing, this then will be a sign for teachers that , learners need to be constantly reminded to speak in the target language they are striving to acquire by encouraging and constantly support them to take part in the activities.

It is related to the second principle of interaction proposed by Brown (2001: 166) that is *intrinsic motivation*; it means that when everything comes from within the learners' needs, wants, and desire, they will behave accordingly. When learners intrinsically have their own willingness and motivation to learn to use the language, no reward is needed to make them proceed to have a better improvement for they are able to appreciate their own competence to use the language. Having intrinsic motivation for children, however, is not a simple thing to have, to promote this, teacher s, as what have been aforementioned, needs to constantly remind the children to speak in the target

language they are learning to acquire. Creating a situation which allows children to feel free and enjoy the learning will help teachers to make the children motivated. We can start with the classroom setting and decoration, having an interesting and well-arranged classroom can help children to feel comfortable in the classroom; having a warm-welcomed from the teachers and the other children will also add children motivation, at least to love being in the classroom. These can be the initial ways of creating atmosphere to help them interacting with the classroom members: teachers and other children.

Third, *strategic investment*, it refers to a series of adaptations or adjustments learners have to make during the interactions in order to maintain the interaction to keep running. It means that learners need to possess certain strategies to overcome the problems of comprehending and producing the language so that the interactions will proceed. Teachers can help by aiding children with more help and assistance when they are facing problems with the meaning making. Teachers can then have simpler language use modified with gestures, movements, pictures, and illustrations when conveying the language. Gradually, teachers can reduce their role in assisting the children whenever they are ready. By doing so, children will then discover their own strategies of learning to be more capable of solving their learning problems. Gradually, children will also be able to adjust and adapt with the interaction in learning.

Fourth, *risk taking*, it takes courage to be

able to have trials and errors during the interactions. Learners may face numbers of failures and rejections when communicating with the other learners in terms of misinterpreting ideas, having incorrect understanding of others' intention, or being laughed at when saying things. These situations will lead learners to a more challenging circumstances in which the more they are able to cope with all those things, the more experience they get in dealing with meaning making in the interactions and therefore is able to make them better users of the language. To make this principle work with the children, teachers can give encouragement to the children whenever they need helps, teachers can be there to support them by giving them assistance and motivation to try again and again. The fifth is *the language-culture connection*; it means learning a language also leaning its culture. Language is a part of a culture, when one learns a language, he needs to know that the rules of the language is related to the culture of the origin of the language, therefore, learning it means also to learn its rules, values and norms of the speakers of the language. In children classes, this can take place when introducing the children to the English children stories. Teachers can introduce to the culture where the story is taken from, so that it will be more easily for learners to take the moral value of the story. The sixth is *interlanguage*, a long process of acquiring competence in using the language through interactions may cause learners to produce some errors that will affect their development of acquiring the language. Other people feedback, in forms of corrections

and supports are crucial, therefore, teachers as those who involve during the learning process have important roles to assist the learners' developmental process for the real interactions in a classroom requires the teachers to sometimes step out of the limelight, to code a full role to the learners in developing and carrying through activities, to accept all kinds of opinions, to be tolerant of errors the learners make while attempting to communicate (Rivers, 1987: 4–6). What teachers can do is giving supportive feedback by showing them the correct way of pronouncing or spelling words without embarrassing the children. Teachers can do “parroting” while giving examples of how to pronounce words or having choral drills with the whole children in the class. Doing these will reduce the tension that a particular child has made an error when pronouncing words, rather than having that particular child repeating the word on his own.

The seventh or the last is *communicative competence*, it comprises grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistics, pragmatic, and strategic competence (Bacham 1990, Canale and Swain 1980) to help learners to interact with others. It is necessary for every meaning depends on who one talks to, in what situation one talks (when), and for what purpose (reasons) is all depends on this competence. Communicative competence for children, of course will not comprise too complicated aspects of language; at least they know the expected acts or behavior, of using the language that is already good enough. Helping the children to be able to use the simple utterances and expressions while talking

or communicating ideas with others (teacher or other children) by creating conversational setting through routines use of language expressions in the classroom can help them practice the language in contexts. The last two principles of interaction may not naturally be appeared in children classes, but these can be promoted by giving the support and encouragement for children to have more interactions during classroom activities so that they will gradually possess better competency in communication.

Interactions in children classes cannot be directly take place without any attempts and efforts from both teachers and learners to promote it. Teachers are, of course demanded to initiate interactions in the first place by providing supportive atmosphere including classroom setting, proposed activities, assistances or help and guidance, and continuous encouragement for children to have trial and errors in using the language being learned. Finally, children's willingness to communicate must be supported by providing more chances for them to use the language more naturally through the routines in the classroom.

### **Teacher Roles in Children Classes**

In children classes, teachers have more dominant authority over the classroom discourse for children learners still do not know what to learn and need to be guided during the learning process to show them how language will work. In other words, they need other people to help them learning. Besides, teachers are also needed to mediate the learning and make it

accessible for the learners (Vigotsky, 1962). These mean with the existence of teachers, children learners will feel secure and accepted by the environment, teachers help them learn together with the other learners. At this moment, teachers' role is to create accessible environment for the children and make them feel secure and accepted, that is by creating friendly atmosphere. This initial encounter is also the first step for learners to start to have interaction, with their teacher and with the other learners in their class. Once children are comfortable with the classroom, they will be able to have their initial interaction with the teacher and the other children as well.

When interaction is initially started, teachers also start to play their role to maintain and promote better interaction within the class. Here is the time for teachers to play the role as the controllers and facilitators where teachers set the stage for learning, to start the movement of the dynamic into the students mind and let them take part in it by actualizing their genuine ability in supportive atmosphere Teachers as controllers plays an important part in maintaining the class to well organized since children are not yet able to decide what to learn, teachers need to take control of what the children need to learn and provide them with the environment where they can be safe and secure. This moment is the time for teachers to get to know the students and start to find out who they are, as Donyei and Csizer (1998) stated in the "ten commandments" for motivating learners, based on a survey of Hungarian foreign teachers; (1) set a personal example with your own behavior, (2) create a

pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom (3) present the tasks properly, (4) develop a good relationship with the learners. (5) increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence, (6) make the language classes interesting, (7) promote learner autonomy, (8) personalize the learning process, (9) increase the learners' goal-orientedness, and (10) familiarize learners with the target language culture.

The “ten commandments” above enlighten us that learning should be something enjoyable and supportive. This is very important in all classes of EFL, especially for children classroom. This enjoyable and supportive environment will help learners to feel secure and accepted in the classroom. This first two feeling, feeling secure and accepted will promote learners involvement in the learning process including the interactions offered in it. When children as learners have the feeling of security and acceptance they will be easily blended with the other learners and engage in the classroom interactions.

Once the children learners feel comfortable with themselves in the classroom, teachers' job is to encourage them to start an interaction with the other members of the class, including the teacher and the other learners. How to make them confident is by giving them examples on the language and expressions used in the classroom. When begin the first encounter, try not to use long and complicated words or phrases to interact with the learners. Having short and meaningful utterances is more preferable when talking with children. They do not have enough exposure on the target language

(English), therefore additional help is needed. What they need is to comprehend the spoken words rather than knowing how the words are formed, children will learn gradually through repetitions of the words. Encountering the words over and over through interactions will help learners discover the use and the meaning of the words. Hence, teachers are demanded to treat the words not merely as utterances, but view it as something more meaningful with the help of movements or gestures, pictures, demonstrations or facial expressions when interact with children .By doing so, teachers have helped learners to discover the full meaning of the words from what they see, hear, and experience. Furthermore teachers need to treat language as language, which means that it is not only spoken but also a complete meaning of movement and illustrations including facial expressions when delivering it. They stated that children learn better through actions, and therefore teachers need to treat language as a part that will help children to act and experience with the language (Cameron, 2001; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

Joan Dean (1984: 23) mentioned in her book *Organizing Learning in the Primary School Classroom* that children want to make the adults happy; children want adults to be pleased with what they do. Therefore, as adult, teachers need to make sure that children's acts are accepted, even though they made mistakes in communicating using the language learned; teachers need to appreciate the children effort. This is a great responsibility for the teacher and teachers also need to be sure that the efforts made

to please them are worthwhile in the children's own right. It means that children want and need to be appreciated for what they do to please the teacher as the adult; therefore giving them opportunity in doing what they want and need is a must in learning in the classroom. However, teacher needs to justify that what they prepare for the learning will educate and also please the children and therefore it should be motivated. One way to motivate children in learning is by doing something enjoyable and non-threatening. As what Scott and Ytzenberg (1990 : 5 - 6) put in their book that teacher needs to play with the language, teacher can make up rhymes or songs or even games to have the language practice in the classroom. Let the children have their world by playing. When they are playing they are interacting with other children in the classroom and having fun. When children are having fun, they learn more quickly, and teacher is to make sure that they are still on the right track of learning the target language. Teacher controls and monitors the learning and make sure that the learning target is achieved. Meanwhile, teachers also have to consider that the "learning while playing" is appropriate for learners' characteristics and needs.

Elizabeth Jones and Renata M. Cooper (2006: viii) mentioned that young learners (children) are having their own world; they have their own ways of making their world has a meaning, however they cannot sit still for quite period of time. They do a lot of actions to make themselves more skillful by playing and they can do it for a long time without any feeling of hesitation. Playing has been the core of their

world. It echoes Vigostky's statement that children are active learners; they interact with others while playing. Playing is a part of their world and their life. When teachers are able to accommodate this, it means that teachers are able to please them and let them do some efforts to please the teacher as well. When children are playing, they learn something more easily. This is the chance for teachers to internalize the concept of interaction; teachers can create activity to let the children learning while playing, interacting while taking turn and also negotiating meaning while communicating. Those activities support interaction to take place. This proposal is also supported by the United Nation of the Rights of the Child which includes the child's right to play along with the rights to be fed, clothed, sheltered, and educated, it is stated that we need to give full opportunity for children to play and enjoy themselves in a non-threatening atmosphere, and this should also be considered when we educate them and to get them to be more skillful individuals in their future. It strengthens the idea that learning while playing for children need to be directed; and this is the teacher's role to make sure that children are well-directed during the playing. Learning needs to be purposeful as what education does. Through playing, children can develop their abilities to have moral and social responsibility when they have turn-taking among the children. The teachers' role as the controller and facilitator is needed to help children to develop their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teacher can facilitate children with assistance when they need help during the learning, and teachers can



also provide challenge to maximize the children's ZPD so that they can have the maximum potential of their learning ability.

Related to learners' characteristics and learning styles, Caroline Linse & David Nunan (2005: 25, 26) stated that learners' learning styles are divided into three; they are kinesthetic, auditory, and tactile. Teresa Cremin (2009) adds one more learning styles; haptic. For these various learning styles, teachers need to have varied activities in the classroom as well. It is important to accommodate the different styles of learning among children. Moreover, children are easy to get bored for they have short attention span. The variations in activities will help them lessen their boredom and get them engaged in the interactions during the offered activities. Varied activities will also give the children satisfaction of activating their senses while learning a language. This also helps their sensory input to develop). Providing children with variety of learning activities can accommodate their being active and positive about learning. To be lively also crucial to make the children motivated and feel encouraged while doing the proposed activities in learning (Brown, 2002; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

Interactions can also be made as parts of the classroom routines by making classroom rules of what to do and don't during the lessons (Scott & Ytreberg 1990). Having routines will sustain children learning and responsibility and also help them to remind their friends, the other learners to obey the agreement made in the classroom. When children remind each other on the stated rules, they interact. Teacher as the

leader helps them apply the rules and guides them during the learning. Interactions happens in the application of the classroom rules can be considered as a natural interaction before, during, and after the class, here learners try to apply the simple concept of understanding and be responsible of what they have agreed. It will then be more advisable if the rules are made in English as the language of instructions.

Dealing with instructions during the lessons, teachers have to consider the language use. They need to assure that the instructions are clear and understandable to the learners. Related to the statement "language as a language", (Scott & Ytreberg 1990: 5, 6), it is important to keep the sentence in the length that the learners are able to comprehend; do not make too complicated and long sentences to instruct children during the learning. It is better if teacher chunks the long and complicated instructions into parts which are simpler and more comprehensively for them. It is in line with what Krashen (1981, 1982) findings about acquisition and learning in his input hypothesis he mentioned that inputs, in the forms of instructions, can be comprehensible when they are put into series of simple instructions which can be followed by children. When this is achieved, interactions take place. In addition to teaching English for children, teachers need to pay attention on children's short attention span. Here teachers need to be animated, lively and enthusiastic about learning itself (Scott & Ytreberg 1990, Brown 2001). What the teacher does in the classroom will affect the learning from flowing, when teachers are enthusiastic and animated about learning, the

classroom will have it as well. Teachers as the role model for children is a crucial part of children learning; they need examples of what to do and how to do things and this can run smoothly if the teacher can offer interesting classroom activities through his/her animated, lively and enthusiastic performance during the lessons. Children will also be more motivated when teachers are lively and enthusiastic in giving the lessons because children expect something good from the learning for they are enthusiastic and positive about learning (Cameron 2001, Scott & Ytreberg 1990).

## CONCLUSION

Interactions in the classrooms, especially children classrooms, can be effective for two reasons; first, due to the atmosphere and second, due to the sufficient encouragement provided within the learning. This can be done when teachers as a part of the learning agent can play their roles. Teachers are not to be authoritative in the classroom, instead, they are more to be controller and facilitator who manage and provide assistance to encourage and motivate children to not stop trying to use the target language in communicating in the classroom.

The teachers have now got many roles depending on different classroom situations. In a broad sense, he is not to be the authoritative in the classroom, but more to be the controller and facilitator of learning', which includes the following (Littlewood 1981, 92):

a. A general overseer of learning, who coordinates the activities so that they form a coherent progression from lesser to greater

communicative ability.

- b. A classroom manager, who is responsible for grouping activities into lessons and for their overall organisation.
- c. A language instructor, who presents new language, controls, evaluates and corrects learners' performance.
- d. In free communicative activities he will act as a consultant or adviser, helping where necessary. Teachers may move around the classroom and monitor student consultant or adviser and weaknesses.

Sometimes teachers can take part in the activities with the students. Teachers may encourage learners without taking their main role. These roles are frequently interrelated and some others (e.g. assessor, observer as explained in Harmer 2001) could be added. The roles of a consultant or co-communicator encourage classroom interaction most, but they need the support of other roles (e.g. for organising and controlling activities). These can be done by: first, creating friendly and non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom by making the children feel secure and accepted in the learning, teacher can be the role model in the classroom on how to behave nicely to everyone in the classroom. Second, build motivated learning activities by supporting and encouraging children to try to use more English in communicating in the classroom. Third, appreciate any efforts made by the children including mistakes and errors made during the learning by not having too many corrections during the learning. Instead, provide assistance and guidance while children are trying to use the

language through variety of activities, media, pace, intonation, and movements during the process of teaching and learning to satisfy range of learning styles the children have.

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