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## INTERACTION PATTERNS IN ELT TEACHING: GROUP WORK AND PAIR WORK

**Abstract:** In English language teaching (ELT) interaction patterns play a prominent role in language acquisition and learning process. Interaction occurs when students discuss, share their opinions or talk to each other in class. Using the right interaction pattern is a fundamental factor in the success of any activity and the achievement of aims of the lesson. The interaction pattern is: teacher to the whole group (T-Ss); other patterns include pair work (S-S), and group work (Ss-Ss). Changing interaction patterns can help vary the pace of learning and choosing an appropriate pattern can help achieve learning outcome. This article aims at describing interaction patterns in EFL classroom.

**Key words:** interaction, group work, pair work, EFL classroom.

**Language:** English

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### Introduction

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In ELT interaction patterns are the different ways learners and the teacher can interact in the class. In teaching English, students' interaction plays an important role and it should be taken into consideration by language teachers. Language learning can be taken place in and through interaction with others in various social contexts. Thomas (2012) defines interaction is not only as a learning facilitator but also primarily is as a resource for what to learn and how to learn. According to Brown (2007) interaction is "collaboration of thought, feeling, or ideas between two people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other". To simplify, interaction is dual communication acts between two people or more that have implication among them.

### Materials and methods

Based on who communicates with whom, Dagarin (2004) formulated the four forms of interaction in the following:

- teacher-learners
- teacher – a group of learners

- learner-learner
- learners-learners

In these forms of interaction, the teachers alternately change their roles as a controller, language model, guide, evaluator, and advisor in pair-work or group work types of communication in the classroom. In addition to Dagarin, Malamah-Thomas (1987) proposed seven types of classroom interaction:

- teacher – whole class
- teacher – individual student;
- teacher- a group of students;
- student – teacher,
- student-student,
- student – a group of students.

A variety of interactional patterns in language classroom may affect the language learning process as well as the development of language proficiency.

Hence, what is a group work? What is the benefit of working in groups? All of us agree that group and pair work are so much a part of our everyday teaching routine in order to tackle some particular communicative tasks. Studies of contemporary foreign language classes revealed that before group work coming into the standard EFL teaching, almost 80% of lesson time consisted of the teacher talking to

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the students. Teacher Talking Time (TTT) became taboo and ways were devised to stamp it out and train the students to actually perform in the language they were learning. Alternatively, group work made it possible for the teacher to devote more time to the students' oral production. Instead of being dependent on the teacher, students get used to helping and learning from each other. Meanwhile, the teacher is left free to discreetly monitor progress and give help, advice and encouragement where and when it is needed.

According to Rance-Roney (2010) group work is a student-centered way of teaching that emphasizes collaboration, cooperation, and teamwork and he describes group work as a classroom practice where "students work in teams to construct knowledge and accomplish tasks through collaborative interaction." Rance-Roney (2010). Sometimes, teachers use groups to work on short activities in an informal way. However, a more formal structure to group work can provide many benefits for the students as well. Jennifer Morris (2012) explains that working together is effective as students interact meaningfully in the target language and get helpful feedback from peers. Students develop "positive interdependence." In many cases, group work can help you manage your classroom successfully regardless of class size or content. Group work creates an atmosphere that encourages successful behaviors. Working in groups engages students with others who may have different sets of language and social skills. Using smaller groups to meet classroom goals allows students to develop skills that are valuable in life and work, such as:

- talking about ideas
- justifying opinions
- collaborating with others
- building consensus
- handling conflict
- disagreeing politely Jennifer Morris (2012)

Working in pairs or groups students can learn from one another a lot. In a class there are always weak and strong students. Arranging the class into groups the teacher should remember that there can be a mixture of different ability levels in one group. With this in mind he/she can predict which roles would be the most adequate for which students and what they could teach their classmates, and then give them the tasks. What is more, they provide an enormous number of new items and expressions for their classmates. The point the present writer is trying to make is simply that the students need to work together as often as it is possible to learn how to cooperate with other people and get used to different ways of speaking in a foreign language. Moreover, they improve their listening, speaking and comprehension skills.

Pair work and group work also develop students' fluency. As it has already been stated, students really

do not have too much possibility to practice the language in a traditional classroom. The teacher presents new grammatical structures and then makes the students do exercises or drills connected with the new material. In fact, the learners do it automatically, without thinking - if the drill is not meaningful - and can forget it easily after a week or a month. It goes without saying that they do not develop their speaking skills, let alone fluency in a foreign language. On the contrary, pair work and group work do influence these abilities. The students can use the language freely and express their opinions and thoughts without any restrictions. It is difficult not to get the impression that fluency can be improved only during constant speaking practice in the atmosphere of independence and in the state of relaxation.

There is another magnificent advantage of pair work and group work. It is the variety of available activities. It must be said here that a huge variety of activities influences the course of a lesson and its success. The more different the activities the teacher uses during his/her lessons, the bigger their motivation towards learning the language. It is true that in pair work and group work students' motivation increases because they are active and feel important during these activities. In keeping with this, the teacher is going to experience success in his/her work because motivated students are usually good language learners and they always make progress.

Pair work and group work have advantages not only for the learners but also for the teachers. First of all they save time. Instead of asking individual students to practice a structure or answer the questions, he/she can divide the class into pairs and make them do the exercise at the same time. As a result students are able to practice the language more during the course. When the time is saved, the teacher can take his/her students through much bigger material and many more activities. This will be for sure appreciated by the students who will not have time to get bored because of the variety of activities and their own participation in the lesson. As a result, the lesson will seem to be more interesting, the teacher will be liked by the students, and he/she will enjoy his/her work because it will bring him/her satisfaction, pleasure, and fulfillment.

Pair work and group work may be a good way of checking students' progress in learning. The teacher can do it without students' knowledge about the fact that they are observed and checked. Walking round the class and listening to the speakers, the teacher can not only make notes of the most common mistakes to discuss them later, but also discover whether they are able to communicate with each other in the foreign language or not. Such discovery helps the teacher to decide which parts of material need to be repeated or explained later. Another important advantage for the teacher is that pair work and group work give him/her time to consult the lesson plan and organize materials

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for the next stage of the lesson. Although the teacher can be prepared for the lesson very well, sometimes it may happen that he/she simply forgets what he/she must do next. Pair or group activities are the best for looking up the lesson plan. It is also good for organizing materials for the next activity, for example hanging pictures or pieces of a text on walls, writing something on the blackboard, etc.

Some educators can argue that pair work or group work also bring a lot of disadvantages, both for learners and teachers. One of the problems is that students often speak in their native language. The teacher should establish certain rules at the beginning of the school year and be very strict about them. After some time the good habit of speaking only English may be established.

Another disadvantage is incorrectness. During pair work and group work the teacher usually does not disturb the students, even if he/she notices some mistakes they have made, but lets them speak freely. However after the activity, he/she should discuss the most common ones. It is tempting to suggest that the

learners may learn each other's mistakes or errors, but we should not forget that errors or mistakes are an indissoluble element of the process of learning.

### Conclusion

We can conclude briefly by saying that teachers set the classroom activities to make the student interact with each other. Pair-work and group-work help the students communicate and improve their language skills. Concerning to the interaction patterns in language classroom should focus on building communication and interaction among students. In these terms, teachers play the prominent roles as being facilitator of the lesson. They control the moves of lesson, they manage who talks, when and how much, and they also become student' speaking partners and language model. Students try to correct each other rather than learn the mistakes. One of the main points of having learners speak to each other is to help them increase their confidence and reduce the anxiety that is often found in a purely student-centered classroom.

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