

# LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER–STUDENT INTERACTION AND ITS IMPACT ON SPEAKING DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAMESE EFL CLASSROOMS

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how students at private language centers perceive their interactions with teachers during speaking activities in Vietnamese EFL classes. Drawing on data from 150 learners through surveys and open-ended answers, the research determines which speaking activities are viewed as most interactive, the factors influencing learners' willingness to interact, and strategies to promote interaction. The results indicate that students regarded "Discussion and Debate," "Individual Presentation," and "Information Gap" as the most interactive, with the primary drivers being topic familiarity, teacher feedback, and friendliness. Negative teacher behavior and the fear of making mistakes were cited as common hurdles.

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**Keywords:** *Teacher-student interaction, learner perceptions, EFL speaking, willingness to communicate, interaction-based instruction, Vietnamese language centers, affective factors.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background to the Study

Among various factors, interactions between teachers and students are essential for providing learners with opportunities to use language, receive feedback, and develop communicative confidence. This is supported by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that low-anxiety environments advance language acquisition, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996), which underscores the importance of meaning negotiation in facilitating comprehensible input. Moreover, Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005) argues that learners enhance their language system more effectively when encouraged to produce extended output. In parallel,

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the significance of scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development. In the Vietnamese EFL context, interaction is frequently restricted by teacher-centered practices and exam-oriented instruction (Nguyen, 2011), which limits students' opportunities for extended discourse. Therefore, this study examines the perceptions and evaluations of teacher-student interaction in speaking activities among Vietnamese EFL students. It employs surveys and open-ended responses to propose classroom-based strategies informed by learners' real-life experiences.

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### **1.2. Research Objectives**

This study aims to explore how Vietnamese EFL learners perceive and respond to teacher–student interaction in speaking activities in the classrooms. In particular, it seeks to:

1. Identify which speaking activities students believe involve the most interaction between teachers and students.
2. Examine the factors that affect students' willingness to speak with their teachers during speaking tasks.
3. Derive pedagogical implications to improve teacher-student interaction based on students' stated experiences and preferences.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

To achieve those objectives, the study attempts to respond to the following research questions:

1. What kinds of speaking activities do students believe require the most interaction between them and their teachers?
2. What factors affect students' willingness to communicate with the teacher in the classroom?
3. What educational implications can be drawn from learners' experiences and preferences to enhance teacher-student interaction in EFL speaking classrooms?

### **1.4. Scope of the Study**

This study examines how students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) perceive their interactions with teachers during speaking exercises in the classroom. Participants include students enrolled in various English programs at private English language centers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. These programs include units, lessons, or activities that involve oral communication, where teacher-student interaction occurs, even when they do not primarily concentrate on speaking. To capture a wide range of learner experiences with speaking-related interactions, the study does not limit participants based on age or program type. It focuses exclusively on interaction with the teacher during speaking tasks in class, in contrast to peer interaction or engagement with other skills, such as writing or listening. Structured surveys with open-ended questions are used to gather information on learners' perspectives. This study's focus is restricted to teacher-student interaction that occurs in real time during speaking tasks that are incorporated into different English language programs. Regardless of the

course type, the emphasis is on the students' experiences during in-class speaking components, even if they are not enrolled in speaking-exclusive courses. Long-term language development and interaction outside of the classroom setting, such as peer-to-peer interactions, online communication, or informal environments, are not examined in this study.

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the expanding corpus of research in English language teaching by investigating the perspectives of EFL learners toward teacher-student interaction in speaking classes, a topic that has received relatively less attention in the Vietnamese setting. Fewer studies have explicitly underscored how students perceive and respond to teacher-student interaction during speaking activities, whereas many have examined interaction in general or peer-based dynamics. Using survey data and open-ended responses, this study focuses on three aspects: (1) the types of speaking activities that learners identify as promoting interaction, (2) the factors affecting their willingness to communicate with teachers, and (3) their recommendations for enhancing interaction in the Vietnamese EFL context. These insights are particularly crucial in private language centers where class sizes, teaching philosophies, and curriculum types vary.

Furthermore, the study also has useful pedagogical implications for teachers and administrators seeking to establish more encouraging and participatory speaking environments. The findings may assist in shaping classroom practices by identifying learner-informed methods that promote meaningful teacher-student exchanges. Finally, this study is significant because it emphasizes the motivational and affective aspects of classroom interaction. By doing this, it highlights the fact that speaking development is influenced by classroom dynamics, emotional comfort, and the teacher's perceived approachability, in addition to language skills. The study's findings might be beneficial to curriculum developers, teacher preparation programs, and EFL practitioners who desire to strengthen communicative competence and learner engagement through teacher-led interaction.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Conceptual Framework of Teacher–Student Interaction*

The study of second language acquisition (SLA) has experienced substantial theoretical evolution, shifting from an early focus on input alone to a greater awareness of the active role of learner output and interaction. This study characterizes teacher-student interaction as a coordinated system that engages affective, cognitive, social, and productive processes throughout speaking activities. Five fundamental perspectives—Krashen’s Affective Filter, Schmidt’s Noticing, Long’s Interaction, Swain’s Output, and Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory—are regarded as interrelated elements of a unified system functioning within classroom discourse.

The affective climate is the opening element of any speaking event. Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) elucidates why identical input may be beneficial for one learner yet ineffective for another. This hypothesis states that even when the input is comprehensible, learners with a high affective filter—those who are anxious, unmotivated, or insecure—are less likely to effectively take in or process it. In contrast, low affective filter learners are more open to language input. As a result, they are more likely to successfully learn a language. A reduced filter does not facilitate learning independently. Instead, it enables the subsequent cognitive processes.

Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis adds a cognitive lens. It highlights the attentional mechanism that transforms exposure into intake—language that is processed and stored for later use. During a receptive state, learners must acknowledge form–meaning relations during interaction for acquisition to proceed (Schmidt, 1990, 2001). In other words, in addition to being exposed to comprehensible input, students who interact with teachers also have the chance to identify their own language barriers. Teachers can draw students’ attention to particular linguistic forms by using techniques including reformulation, repetition, and explicit corrective feedback. For example, a student may become aware of errors in their grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation when the teacher corrects their utterance or requests clarification.

Long’s Interaction Hypothesis explains how attention arises. When communication breaks down, negotiating meaning prompts comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests that adjust input to the learner’s existing interlanguage and encourage

responsive adjustment (Long, 1996). These interactional modifications personalize the linguistic context and provide opportunities for learners to compare their outputs with target-like alternatives, which in turn enhances processing depth. This idea is supported by Swain’s Output Hypothesis, which suggests that speaking is a problem-solving activity. When output is “pushed” to be more complex or accurate, learners test form hypotheses and restructure their linguistic system (Swain, 2005). According to Swain (2005), teacher-student interaction is a valuable source of “pushed output”—situations where students are expected to use language that is more advanced or spontaneous than they currently can. Especially during speaking tasks, teachers generate communicative pressure that motivates students to produce extended, meaningful language by asking open-ended questions, requesting clarification, or encouraging elaboration. In other words, negotiation of meaning creates opportunities, and “pushed output” fills these opportunities with productive efforts that reshape the learner’s system.

Finally, interaction is framed as a mediated activity inside the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a mediated process within the Zone of Proximal Development, which is the difference between what a learner can achieve on their own and what they can accomplish with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other. Teacher scaffolding—such as modeling, cueing, and graduated assistance—facilitates learners in achieving performance beyond their independent capabilities. In speaking lessons, teacher scaffolding assists in reducing affective barriers to create a safe environment for participation, directs focus on relevant features as they arise, maintains negotiation to prioritize meaning, and adjusts the level of “push” to ensure that output is demanding yet manageable.

In summary, the development of second language speaking in classroom environments can be understood as the result of four interconnected mechanisms: access to comprehensible input influenced by affective factors (Krashen, 1982), attention to form and meaning through noticing (Schmidt, 1990, 2001), conversational engagement that ensures mutual intelligibility of input and output (Long, 1996), and opportunities for producing “pushed output” (Swain, 2005) within social scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). In this integrated perspective, teacher-student interaction acts not only as a channel for information but also as the driving force that coordinates these mechanisms during speaking tasks. Teachers and

students collaboratively construct dialogue, negotiate meaning, and manage participation, which will influence the input learners receive, the aspects they notice, and the output they attempt.

## **2.2. Teacher–Student Interaction in Speaking Development**

Teacher-student interaction is essential for developing speaking abilities in EFL classrooms, especially in environments where learners have minimal opportunities for authentic English communication beyond the classroom. In contrast to other language skills, speaking necessitates real-time processing, which is most efficiently engaged through interactive and dialogic exchanges with more proficient language users, often the teacher. It is crucial to comprehend the mechanisms by which interaction facilitates speaking development to enhance students' oral proficiency.

Teacher-student interaction includes the verbal and nonverbal communication that occurs between teachers and students during instructional activities. This involves the processes of asking and answering questions, providing feedback, requesting clarification, and facilitating discussions. Exchanges can occur in both structured contexts, such as speaking tasks, and spontaneous instances, such as responding to student contributions. Brown (2001) highlights that meaningful interaction is central to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), with teacher talk serving both as a source of linguistic input and as a model for communicative behavior. Teachers facilitate structured opportunities for learners to practice language, thereby promoting independence and confidence in oral communication.

Enhancing students' speaking abilities also heavily depends on corrective feedback given during interaction. Mackey and Goo's (2007) meta-analysis indicates that interaction with feedback markedly improves second language acquisition results, especially in terms of grammatical accuracy, lexical development, and syntactic complexity. Recasts enable teachers to reformulate incorrect learner utterances into correct forms without disrupting communication, whereas clarification requests prompt learners to reconsider their output and improve their expression. Metalinguistic cues promote learning by providing explicit explanations of grammatical or syntactic rules, thereby deepening students' comprehension of target language structures. These feedback strategies encourage deeper cognitive processing among learners, enable them to identify gaps in their interlanguage, and

collectively improve their speaking proficiency. Besides, in research by Rekim (2024), learners stated that instant feedback from teachers helped them boost their accuracy and fluency.

Scaffolding is another mechanism by which teacher–student interaction fosters spoken development. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), scaffolding entails teachers modifying their language, questioning techniques, and task assistance to correspond with students' proficiency levels, supporting their development within the Zone of Proximal Development. Through the modeling of target forms, reformulation of errors, encouragement of elaboration, and the control of performance anxiety, scaffolding develops linguistic competence and enhances learners' confidence and motivation to communicate. Timely and responsive support enhances learners' willingness to take risks, experiment with language, and progressively improve their fluency and accuracy.

Creating opportunities for output in teacher–student interactions is essential for the development of speaking skills. Research indicates that learners derive greater benefits from structured opportunities to produce language rather than from passive input reception. According to students in Rekim's (2024) mixed-methods research of first-year University of Biskra English majors, discussion-based tasks, role-plays, and debates prompted them to speak more and enabled them to feel more involved. Compared to typical exercises or teacher-led question-answer sessions, learners found these tasks to be more engaging since they allowed for more natural interaction and personal expression. Similarly, Adaba (2017) revealed that Ethiopian primary school students preferred tasks that required them to actively engage with the teacher, especially when they were asked to elaborate on or clarify their responses. Because they allowed students to use English in meaningful ways and involved direct engagement with the teacher, learners regarded these exchanges as beneficial. The studies emphasized how crucial it is for teachers to provide the opportunity and support for students to express themselves and develop speaking skills.

However, fostering effective teacher-student interaction presents distinct challenges within Vietnamese EFL contexts. Conventional classrooms typically adopt a teacher-centered model, resulting in restricted opportunities for extended student talk. Additional factors that limit students' speaking opportunities include large class sizes, exam-focused instruction, and

cultural norms that discourage assertiveness (Nguyen, 2011). In addition, Nguyen (2024) emphasized that features of Confucian-heritage culture, especially the focus on face-saving, contribute to the feelings of shame, embarrassment, and anxiety during classroom interactions, thereby discouraging students from engaging in risk-taking when speaking. Nevertheless, studies show that even in settings with limited resources, adopting more interactive practices—such as increasing wait times and encouraging student questions—can result in significant improvements in speaking results (Rekim, 2024; Adaba, 2017). The findings highlight the significance of teacher awareness and the intentional implementation of interactional strategies that foster supportive environments for learners to develop their speaking skills.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. Research Design

##### 3.1.1. Types of Research

This study uses a descriptive, exploratory research design that primarily relies on a structured survey, integrating both closed-ended and open-ended items, to examine how EFL learners perceive teacher-student interaction during speaking tasks. This process does not include distinct interviews or experimental manipulation. The quantitative component employs Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to gather numerical data regarding students' self-reported experiences, preferences, and perceived challenges, enabling the identification of patterns across a relatively broad sample size. Several open-ended questions are utilized in the same survey to provide a more in-depth understanding of the beliefs, emotions, and suggestions given by particular students. This component guarantees that students' voices are included in their words and aids in contextualizing and explaining the patterns observed in the closed-ended items.

##### 3.1.2. Research Approach

The study employs a single-instrument, multi-data approach, concentrating on the exploration of learner perceptions through both numerical and narrative dimensions. The quantitative component is implemented using a closed-ended survey given to EFL learners. To detect broad patterns in student views, such as which speaking tasks they find most engaging or which elements affect their willingness to communicate with

the teacher, this tool produces numerical data that can be statistically examined. Open-ended questions at the end of the survey constitute the qualitative strand. These open-ended responses provide rich, narrative insights that reveal nuances that are difficult to obtain through closed-ended items. Through these responses, learner attitudes, classroom memories, and particular experiences that shape their perceptions of teacher-student interaction can be explored.

##### 3.1.3. Justification of the Design

The chosen design effectively addresses the exploratory purpose of the study, which involves identifying common patterns in students' perceptions and understanding the underlying reasons for those patterns. Using either quantitative or qualitative approaches would have limited the extent and depth of the findings because the research focuses on learner perceptions, a concept that requires both observable patterns and subjective interpretation. The study integrates closed-ended and open-ended survey items within a single instrument, thereby capturing both breadth and depth in the investigation of students' experiences regarding teacher-student interaction during speaking tasks. The closed-ended items allow for the identification of shared preferences, perceived barriers, and the frequency of interaction among speaking activity types. However, the underlying causes of these preferences and the emotional and psychological elements impacting learner behavior might not be well conveyed by these items alone. In order to overcome this constraint, open-ended questions are incorporated as an additional means for collecting detailed learner narratives. These narratives enable the researcher to better understand trends and reveal nuances such as classroom dynamics, teacher manner, and the importance of self-confidence in speaking interactions.

#### 3.2. Research Site

The study was carried out at a number of private English language centers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. These centers provide a range of programs, such as sessions for exam preparation, skills-based modules, and general English. Although speaking skills development is not the sole goal of the programs, they usually incorporate oral communication-focused units, courses, or activities where teacher-student interaction occurs naturally. These centers cater to a wide range of learners, including working adults, teenagers, and school-age children. The typical class size is between 10 and 20 students, which allows for a level of teacher-student interaction that

facilitates interaction-based instruction. The majority of classrooms are equipped with digital media, whiteboards, and visual aids, and instruction is delivered in face-to-face, in-person formats. The centers were chosen on the basis of institutional collaboration and the researcher’s accessibility to participants. The centers’ names are kept confidential to preserve the privacy of the institutions and students. Crucially, the study focuses on students’ first-hand experiences with teacher-student interaction as it unfolds throughout various speaking activities in regular classroom settings rather than on any particular curriculum or teaching approach.

**3.3. Participant**

Participants in this study came from a variety of private English language centers located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study sample consisted of 150 EFL students enrolled in different English language programs, including 66 males (44%) and 84 females (56%). Participants varied from children to adult professionals; however, the majority were teenagers. As indicated in Table 3.1, teenagers represented the largest proportion of participants (53%), followed by children under 13 years old (24%), and adults over 20 years old (23%).

**Table 3.1: Age group distribution**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Children	36	24%
Teenagers	80	53%
Adults	34	23%

Depending on the course level or their own assessment, learners’ self-ratings of their English proficiency ranged from beginning (A1) to upper-intermediate (B2), with B1 being the most prevalent level (39%). The remaining learners were relatively evenly distributed across A1 (21%), A2 (20%), and B2 (20%) (See Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2: Distribution of self-rated English proficiency**

Proficiency Level	Frequency	Percentage
A1	32	21%
A2	30	20%
B1	58	39%
B2	30	20%

With diverse exposure to speaking-focused tasks and teacher interaction, the majority of participants stated that they had been learning English for more than 3 years (68.7%), 6% reported less than a year of experience learning English, and 27.3% for 1–3 years. Besides, all participants received information about the goal of the study and were guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers. Respondents were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any moment without consequence.

**3.4. Data Collection Instruments**

This study utilized a single integrated bilingual Google Form that combined open-ended questions and structured survey items to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. This method captured both quantifiable patterns and deep personal insights while facilitating effective data collection. To guarantee accessibility and understanding across proficiency levels, every item was presented in both Vietnamese and English. The survey was divided into four main sections. Section A (Demographics) collected background information on self-rated proficiency, age, gender, and English learning experience. Section B (Speaking Activities) measured the degree of teacher-student interaction during typical classroom speaking exercises using Likert-scale items (1–5). Section C (Willingness to Interact) participants were asked to score how much certain elements affect their readiness to engage with teachers during speaking tasks. Section D (Learner Voices and Suggestions) consisted of four open-ended questions to explore students’ experiences in the classroom, preferred methods of interaction, perceived barriers, and suggestions for enhancement.

**3.5. Data Collection Procedures**

A Google Form that integrated the structured survey and open-ended interview components was used to collect data over a period of two weeks in July 2025. The form was sent digitally to students at several private English language centers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Participants were asked to voluntarily complete the form during or after class, according to the policies and scheduling of each center. Each respondent received a brief introduction outlining the goal of the study, the anticipated completion time (about 10 to 15 minutes), and ethical guarantees prior to participation. Respondents were able to disregard any question or withdraw at any time, and they were informed that their identities would be kept confidential. The researcher ensured that learners with varying levels of ability could use the instrument

due to its bilingual format (English–Vietnamese). All 150 responses were automatically compiled into a safe Google Sheet. The researcher verified that only one submission was approved per participant, checked for duplicate or missing information, and tracked form submissions daily to guarantee data integrity. To protect respondent privacy and adhere to study ethics, no personal identifiers, including name, class code, or center name, were gathered.

### 3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, to identify general patterns in learner perception. A one-way ANOVA was performed to detect statistically significant differences among activities and influencing factors. Where significant effects were identified, Tukey's HSD post hoc tests were utilized to determine specific group differences. Simultaneously, qualitative data from open-ended responses were thematically coded to supplement quantitative findings.

This study employed within-instrument triangulation by examining both closed-ended and open-ended responses received from the same survey instrument. The integration of these two data strands enabled the researcher to cross-validate findings and strengthen the understanding of results. For instance, to guarantee consistency and offer deeper insights into learner perspectives, patterns found in Likert-scale responses were compared with participants' written reflections. This method enhances the validity of the conclusions without necessitating the utilization of various data sources or distinct methodological frameworks.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. Result

#### 4.1.1. Perceived Interaction in Speaking Activities (Research Question 1)

In six different speaking activities, students were asked to rate their level of interaction with the teacher. The quantitative indicators used to measure students' perceptions were the mean interaction score (with standard deviation) on a 5-point Likert scale and the percentage of students who rated the level of interaction as high (4–5 points). The results are presented in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Perceived interaction in speaking activities**

Activities	Average Score	Standard Deviation	% Rated 4–5
Role-play	3.6	1.20	57%
Picture Description	3.7	1.05	58%
Discussion and Debate	4.3	0.89	81%
Individual Presentation	4.2	1.05	79%
Group Presentation	3.2	0.94	39%
Information Gap	4.1	0.99	74%

As shown in Table 4.1, Discuss and Debate ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ; 81%) and Individual Presentation ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ; 79%) were considered to be the most interactive speaking activities. Their relatively low standard deviations ( $SD$ ) indicate uniform perceptions, implying that tasks necessitating opinion exchange and teacher feedback consistently promote interaction. This was closely followed by Information Gap ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ; 74%), with open-ended responses verifying that the negotiation of meaning made it highly engaging. The ratings for Picture Description and Role-play were modest. However, a number of younger students expressed positive comments about enjoyable or familiar activities, such as "when I play games" or "when doing favorite activities," indicating that even simple or structured activities can feel engaging when students are involved and the teacher actively participates, especially for youngsters (Vygotsky, 1978). Group Presentation, which was regarded as highly engaging by only 39% of participants, giving it the lowest average rating. Although no explicit negative comments were found regarding this task, the lower scores might be explained by the absence of individualized interaction. These descriptive findings indicate that speaking performance was generally enhanced in activities that required more structured and cognitively demanding discourse (Schmidt, 1990, 2001).

In addition, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant influence of activity type on students' speaking performance ( $F(5, 894) = 25.464$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results of Tukey's test indicated that cognitively demanding tasks consistently outperformed less structured ones. Discussion and Debate yielded scores that were over

one point higher than those of Group Presentation and approximately 0.69 points higher than those of Role-play. Similar trends were observed in the Individual Presentation, which outperformed the Role-play by 0.62 and the Group Presentation by 1.03. Additionally, Information Gap produced better results than Role-play and Group Presentation, demonstrating the advantages of task-based engagement (Swain, 2005). Even Picture Description exceeded Role-play and Group Presentation, although it was average overall. In contrast, the three most favored tasks—Discussion and Debate, Individual Presentation, and Information Gap—did not differ significantly from one another, suggesting that they comparably supported speaking development (Refer to Appendix A for the full table of Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons between the six speaking tasks and One-way ANOVA results.)

4.1.2. *Factors Influencing Willingness to Interact (Research Question 2)*

To determine which factors influence students’ willingness to communicate with the teacher during speaking tasks, participants rated five commonly reported criteria on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Factors influencing learners’ willingness to interact**

Factors	Average Score	Standard Deviation	% Rated 4-5
Fear of making mistakes	4.6	0.84	89%
Peer pressure	4.0	1.10	67%
Teacher’s friendliness	4.7	0.75	93%
Class size	3.3	1.24	37%
Interest in topic	4.5	0.88	87%

With 93% of respondents choosing values 4 or 5, teacher friendliness emerged as the most decisive factor. This pattern was also confirmed by open-ended responses. In post hoc comparisons, teacher friendliness was ranked substantially higher than class size and peer pressure. The second most significant factor was the fear of making mistakes. In the qualitative comments, Many students expressed hesitation to speak because they were

embarrassed by their mistakes or mispronunciations. Other students pointed out that when teachers exclusively called on “good students,” it made less proficient students unwilling to participate in communication. Besides, according to post hoc testing, fear of making a mistake was ranked far higher than peer pressure and class size.

Interest in the topic was also highly valued, as students felt more at ease speaking when the subject matter was familiar, relatable, and provided adequate vocabulary for expression. Many highlighted in their qualitative comments that they were particularly interested in subjects that related to their own experiences. Comparisons showed that interest in the topic scored far higher than peer pressure and class size. In contrast, peer pressure had a moderate impact. Some students said that receiving encouragement from their peers increased their motivation, while others felt constrained by their fear of being judged negatively. Lastly, the least significant factor was consistently ranked as class size. Students stressed that interpersonal and psychological factors influenced their willingness to interact more than class size, even though larger classes may limit speaking opportunities.

In summary, these results show that students’ willingness to interact was strongly affected by interpersonal and affective factors, especially teachers’ friendliness, fear of making mistakes, and interest in the topic, while contextual factors such as peer pressure and class size were less impactful. A one-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference among the five factors,  $F(4, 745) = 57.174, p < .001$ , supporting these patterns. Furthermore, the results of Tukey’s post hoc test showed that the three highest-ranked factors—teacher friendliness, fear of making mistakes, and topic interest—were all rated significantly higher than peer pressure and class size. However, there were no significant variations between these top three factors, which suggests they were comparably influential. (Refer to Appendix B for the full table of Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons between the five factors and One-way ANOVA results.)

#### 4.1.3. Participants' Suggested Strategies to Enhance Teacher–Student Interaction (Research Question 3)

Students offered a variety of strategies in response to the open-ended question that asked what teachers can do to encourage greater involvement during speaking exercises. A summary of the frequencies and percentages of their coded and theme-grouped suggestions was made (See Appendix C).

Specifically, *“Be more friendly and encouraging”* (S1) was the most often recommended strategy, with 97 participants (65%) endorsing it. Many participants reported that pleasant teacher behavior lessened their nervousness and increased involvement. *“Use more interactive games or activities”* (S5) was the second most popular strategy, claimed by 44 students (29%), followed by *“Give positive feedback and gentle correction during speaking”* (S3) at 25%. These indicate that learners strongly favor interesting formats and positive feedback, as one participant shared: *“Teachers should incorporate games into speaking activities instead of inviting each student to speak while the others listen.”*, or *“Correct errors gently, praise students with both words and actions (high fives)”*.

Several other strategies received notable support, including *“Use more familiar and fun speaking topics, ask open-ended questions”* (S2) – 21%, *“Support students in producing answers with vocabulary or prompts”* (S9) – 22%, *“Allow collaborative works or demonstrations before individual speaking”* (S10) – 22%, and *“Actively walk around the class and try to talk to as many students as possible”* (S8) – 14%.

Although less common, strategies such as *“Create a cheerful and respectful classroom environment”* (S7) and *“Do not interrupt students while they are speaking”* (S6) nonetheless addressed specific learner needs for psychological safety and uninterrupted speech. The idea that received the least number of mentions was *“Let students choose the topics”* (S11), which was only brought up by two students (1%), perhaps reflecting a lack of confidence or interest in this degree of autonomy. In summary, students highlighted the importance of linguistic support, activity design, and teacher behavior in improving interaction in speaking classes. The results imply that students value emotionally safe, enjoyable, and scaffolded learning environments over structural changes.

## 4.2. Discussion

### 4.2.1. Learner-Preferred Speaking Activities

Learners identified Discussion and Debate, along with Individual Presentation, as the most interactive speaking activities, highlighting the significance of cognitively demanding activities that promote extended language use and active teacher engagement. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), these tasks offer scaffolding opportunities for teachers to mediate meaning, challenge learners' thinking, and co-construct knowledge. This scaffolding facilitates dialogue and situates students within their Zone of Proximal Development. Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005) clarifies the efficacy of these activities: the necessity to articulate complex ideas forces learners to broaden their linguistic repertoire, while corrective feedback from the teacher promotes output modification. In the Vietnamese EFL context, characterized by predominantly teacher-centered classroom interaction, these findings indicate that learners prefer structured opportunities for intellectually engaging exchanges with the teacher, rather than depending exclusively on peer interaction.

Plus, Information Gap tasks were also highly rated for interaction, indicating that students value tasks that call for real-world knowledge sharing. This supports research by Long (1996), who claimed that tasks involving two-way information exchange led to increased meaning negotiation and natural teacher scaffolding. This is especially relevant for Vietnamese students, who frequently express reluctance in engaging with open-ended speaking tasks. Structured gaps facilitate communication while simultaneously minimizing the risk of errors.

In contrast, Group Presentation was regarded as the least interactive task. The limited direct engagement of teachers in group presentations likely accounts for this view, as students tend to depend more on their peers than on teacher comments. This discovery undermines the presumption in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that group work inherently enhances communication opportunities. However, the current findings indicate that diminished teacher involvement may restrict its perceived effectiveness. In Vietnam, where students typically regard the teacher as the main source of linguistic authority, activities that divert focus from teacher feedback may not promote equivalent levels of perceived interaction. Swain (2005) warned that the design of a communicative activity

alone does not guarantee meaningful connection; teacher mediation is essential for maintaining engagement.

The findings suggest that learners exhibit the most favorable responses when tasks integrate cognitive challenge, authentic communicative purpose, and active teacher mediation. Given that scaffolding offers support, pushed output guarantees language progress, and negotiated interaction generates possibilities for meaning-making. The interplay of Sociocultural Theory, Output Hypothesis, and Interaction Hypothesis assists in clarifying why these activities were valued. In the Vietnamese context, this synergy is particularly vital, as students depend significantly on the teacher for both linguistic input and emotional support during communicative tasks.

#### *4.2.2. Key Factors Shaping Teacher–Student Interaction*

The analysis indicated that learners' willingness to engage was significantly influenced by affective and social conditions, as also explained by the interplay of Sociocultural Theory, the Output Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

The significance of teacher friendliness underscores the essential function of scaffolding within Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978). Learners highlighted that approachable and supportive teachers fostered a secure interpersonal environment conducive to taking risks in communication. Teacher immediacy behaviors serve as scaffolding mechanisms that lower barriers and facilitate greater learner participation. This aligns with Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), as students who feel secure are more inclined to extend their output and engage in pushed production when receiving feedback. The affective dimension of friendliness functions simultaneously as a precondition and as a sociocultural resource for output to take place.

The prominence of fear of mistakes illustrates the blocking mechanism outlined in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). Vietnamese students frequently report feelings of embarrassment and anxiety during public performances, reflecting the face-saving norms prevalent in collectivist educational settings. Nguyen (2011) highlighted that in teacher–student interactions, the notion of "face" significantly influenced learner behavior, leading students to refrain from responses that could subject them to public criticism. More recently, Nguyen (2024) stressed that Vietnam's Confucian heritage culture

values harmony and respect, resulting in learners opting for silence to avoid the risk of "losing face," despite the availability of interactive opportunities. In other words, when the affective filter is elevated, opportunities for interaction, even when offered, may not result in effective intake or output.

Finally, interest in the topic demonstrates the intersection of cognitive engagement and affective states in maintaining interaction. Familiar and meaningful topics reduce processing demands, thereby enhancing learners' lexical access and confidence. This aligns with Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) and Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), which assert that meaningful negotiation and pushed output occur most effectively when learners are motivated and cognitively engaged. This study confirms that topic relevance functions as a motivational trigger and a cognitive scaffold, facilitating more substantial teacher–student interactions.

These findings indicate that no singular framework comprehensively accounts for learners' willingness to engage in interaction. The Vietnamese EFL context illustrates the interplay of sociocultural scaffolding, output opportunities, and affective filters. Teacher supportiveness offers essential scaffolding for output, contingent upon low affective barriers. Familiarity with the topic enhances this process by providing the cognitive resources necessary for sustained interaction. This integrated interpretation validates previous theories and demonstrates their interdependence in shaping communicative behaviors across various age groups in Vietnam.

#### *4.2.3. Pedagogical Implications*

For EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and language centers seeking to improve teacher-student interaction in speaking classrooms, the findings of this study provide several insights. The following pedagogical implications are suggested in light of the learners' perceptions, preferred strategies, and reported difficulties.

#### **Task Design and Classroom Activities**

The study revealed that discussion, debate, individual presentations, and information gap tasks were perceived as the most interactive, whereas group presentations were regarded as the least effective. This highlights that interaction does not occur automatically through group work. It necessitates intentional teacher engagement. In the Zone of Proximal Development, these high-rated

tasks served as sites for scaffolding from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), while Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) explains the reason for the facilitation of the negotiation of meaning in information gap tasks. The low evaluation of group presentations indicates a gap between the assumptions of Communicative Language Teaching and the actual classroom experience. In the absence of structured teacher input, such tasks may restrict interaction to peer engagement exclusively. In the Vietnamese EFL context, where passivity is frequently encouraged by hierarchical teacher-student roles and accuracy, task design needs to include explicit teacher checkpoints and guided feedback to ensure genuine interaction.

### **Teacher Behavior and Emotional Support**

Teacher behavior significantly influenced learners' willingness to interact, with friendliness identified as the most decisive factor. Simultaneously, fear of mistakes appeared as a significant barrier. Frequent or severe corrections are reported to increase silence and hesitation, especially among young students. This is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which argues that encouragement and emotional safety reduce anxiety and encourage risk-taking. Participants indicated that smiling, positive reinforcement, and constructive feedback increased their confidence in speaking. In the context of Vietnam, these emotional dynamics are strengthened by cultural expectations. Nguyen (2011) noted that students frequently choose silence to maintain face, while Nguyen (2024) highlighted that hierarchical teacher-student dynamics inhibit risk-taking. Therefore, teacher warmth and supportive feedback serve as essential tools to counteract cultural pressures toward passivity, rather than being merely interpersonal strategies. Teachers can implement immediacy behaviors, such as maintaining eye contact, smiling, and addressing students by name, while defining feedback as scaffolding instead of judgment. This approach reduces affective barriers and allows more genuine interactions in Vietnamese classrooms.

### **Topic Selection and Curriculum Integration**

Participants identified familiarity with the topic and interest as essential factors for interaction. When content aligned with their experiences, students engaged more readily with teachers, supporting Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), which proposed that learners require accessible contexts to produce extended language. In Vietnamese classrooms, speaking tasks are frequently associated with exam-oriented or decontextualized themes, which

restrict personal engagement. Nguyen (2024) noted that these curricula hinder spontaneous communication, with students perceiving language learning primarily as test preparation rather than as a means of effective communication. This clarifies why students in this study expressed increased confidence when teachers presented familiar themes, such as hobbies, school life, or local issues.

The selection of topics in pedagogy should be viewed as a fundamental design component, not a secondary consideration. Incorporating relatable and age-appropriate themes into curricular frameworks can convert routine tasks into opportunities for authentic teacher-student interaction. Flexible and open-ended prompts enhance learner ownership while balancing curricular requirements with communicative engagement. At a broader level, integration into official syllabi is essential. In Vietnam's exam-focused environment, communicative tasks are frequently overlooked. By incorporating interactional goals into the curriculum design, teachers receive institutional support to select subjects that are both engaging and exam-relevant, ensuring that speaking is viewed as a primary learning outcome.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study is not without limitations. Even though participants were drawn from a variety of language centers, the results only show a small portion of the educational context. Expanding the sample to include public schools and rural areas would improve the generalizability of the findings. A second limitation is the reliance on self-reported survey data. Although the open-ended questions offered insightful information, perceptions might not accurately represent real-world classroom dynamics. Future research could include classroom observations or discourse analysis to enhance and reinforce evidence. Moreover, the study concentrated exclusively on the perspectives of learners. Given that interaction is co-constructed, it is essential to examine teacher beliefs and practices. Incorporating teacher perspectives would enhance the comprehension of the dynamics influencing interaction. Future research should employ mixed-method approaches in diverse contexts to enhance pedagogical strategies that promote teacher-student interaction in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that successful speaking activities in EFL classrooms rely heavily on the teacher-student interaction. The teacher's active presence during communication and real-time feedback were major factors in learners' consistent perception of highly interactive tasks as the most engaging, including Discussion and Debate, Individual Presentation, and Information Gap. In contrast, tasks that minimize teachers' involvement, such as Group Presentations, were considered to be less stimulating for teacher-student interaction. Teacher friendliness, a decreased fear of making mistakes, and topic knowledge were important factors influencing students' desire to interact. When tasks were interesting, relevant, and led by encouraging teacher behavior, students reported feeling more confident. These findings indicate the significance of creating learning environments that support students' cognitive and emotional well-being, while also fostering connection and independence. Therefore, I suggest that EFL curricula and teaching methods should focus on developing a warm, embracing teacher presence to reduce anxiety, create speaking tasks that value interaction over performance. For Vietnamese EFL contexts, we may create speaking curricula that are more inclusive, responsive, and ultimately successful by matching pedagogical strategies with learners' stated preferences and requirements.

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## Appendix A. One-Way ANOVA and Tukey HSD Post Hoc Comparisons of Speaking Tasks

**Table A1. One-way ANOVA results for differences in interactivity ratings across six speaking tasks**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	133.610	5	26.722	25.464	.000
Within Groups	938.180	894	1.049		
Total	1071.790	899			

**Table A2. Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons between six speaking tasks**

(I) Speaking Activity Type	(J) Speaking Activity Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Discussion and Debate	Group presentation	1.100*	.118	.000	.76	1.44
	Information gap	.240	.118	.327	-.10	.58
	Picture description	.593*	.118	.000	.26	.93
	Roleplay	.693*	.118	.000	.36	1.03
Group presentation	Discussion and Debate	-1.100*	.118	.000	-1.44	-.76
	Individual presentation	-1.027*	.118	.000	-1.36	-.69
	Information gap	-.860*	.118	.000	-1.20	-.52
	Picture description	-.507*	.118	.000	-.84	-.17
	Roleplay	-.407*	.118	.008	-.74	-.07
Individual presentation	Discussion and Debate	-.073	.118	.990	-.41	.26
	Group presentation	1.027*	.118	.000	.69	1.36
	Information gap	.167	.118	.722	-.17	.50
	Picture description	.520*	.118	.000	.18	.86
	Roleplay	.620*	.118	.000	.28	.96
Information gap	Discussion and Debate	-.240	.118	.327	-.58	.10
	Group presentation	.860*	.118	.000	.52	1.20
	Individual presentation	-.167	.118	.722	-.50	.17
	Picture description	.353*	.118	.034	.02	.69
	Roleplay	.453*	.118	.002	.12	.79
Picture description	Discussion and Debate	-.593*	.118	.000	-.93	-.26
	Group presentation	.507*	.118	.000	.17	.84
	Individual presentation	-.520*	.118	.000	-.86	-.18
	Information gap	-.353*	.118	.034	-.69	-.02
	Roleplay	.100	.118	.959	-.24	.44

(I) Speaking Activity Type	(J) Speaking Activity Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Roleplay	Discussion and Debate	-.693*	.118	.000	-1.03	-.36
	Group presentation	.407*	.118	.008	.07	.74
	Individual presentation	-.620*	.118	.000	-.96	-.28
	Information gap	-.453*	.118	.002	-.79	-.12
	Picture description	-.100	.118	.959	-.44	.24

**Appendix B. One-Way ANOVA and Tukey HSD Post Hoc Comparisons of Influencing Factors**

**Table B1. One-way ANOVA results for differences in ratings across five influencing factors**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	219.875	4	54.969	57.174	.000
Within Groups	716.260	745	.961		
Total	936.135	749			

**Table B2. Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons between five influencing factors**

(I) Factor	(J) Factor	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Class size	Fear of making mistakes	-1.327*	.113	.000	-1.64	-1.02
	Interest in topic	-1.280*	.113	.000	-1.59	-.97
	Peer pressure	-.693*	.113	.000	-1.00	-.38
	Teacher's friendliness	-1.447*	.113	.000	-1.76	-1.14
Fear of making mistakes	Class size	1.327*	.113	.000	1.02	1.64
	Interest in topic	.047	.113	.994	-.26	.36
	Peer pressure	.633*	.113	.000	.32	.94
	Teacher's friendliness	-.120	.113	.827	-.43	.19
Interest in topic	Class size	1.280*	.113	.000	.97	1.59
	Fear of making mistakes	-.047	.113	.994	-.36	.26
	Peer pressure	.587*	.113	.000	.28	.90
	Roleplay	.620*	.118	.000	.28	.96
Peer pressure	Class size	.693*	.113	.000	.38	1.00
	Fear of making mistakes	-.633*	.113	.000	-.94	-.32
	Interest in topic	-.587*	.113	.000	-.90	-.28
	Teacher's friendliness	-.753*	.113	.000	-1.06	-.44

(I) Factor	(J) Factor	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Picture description	Discussion and Debate	-.593*	.118	.000	-.93	-.26
	Group presentation	.507*	.118	.000	.17	.84
	Individual presentation	-.520*	.118	.000	-.86	-.18
	Information gap	-.353*	.118	.034	-.69	-.02
Teacher's friendliness	Class size	1.447*	.113	.000	1.14	1.76
	Fear of making mistakes	.120	.113	.827	-.19	.43
	Interest in topic	.167	.113	.581	-.14	.48
	Peer pressure	.753*	.113	.000	.44	1.06

### Appendix C: Summary of suggested strategies to enhance teacher–student interaction

**Table C1: Suggested strategies to enhance teacher–student interaction**

Strategy	Code	Frequency	Percentage
Be more friendly and encouraging	S1	97	65%
Use more familiar and fun speaking topics, ask open-ended questions	S2	32	21%
Give positive feedback and gentle correction during speaking	S3	38	25%
Allow more time to think	S4	9	6%
Use more interactive games or activities	S5	44	29%
Do not interrupt students	S6	5	3%
Create cheerful and respectful classroom environment	S7	14	9%
Actively walk around the class and try to talk to as many students as possible	S8	21	14%
Support them produce their answers (with vocabulary or prompts)	S9	33	22%
Allow collaborative works or demonstration before individual speaking	S10	33	22%
Let students choose the topics	S11	2	1%