



TEACHERS AND STUDENTS' BELIEFS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS IN LARGE NON-ENGLISH MAJORED CLASSES AT SOME UNIVERSITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY

Tran Thi Thanh Thuong*

University of Foreign Languages, Hue University
57 Nguyen Khoa Chiem St., Hue, Vietnam

Abstract. This survey study aims to investigate teachers and students' beliefs of classroom interactions in non-English major large classes. The participants included 100 teachers of English and 100 non-English major students. The survey method, more specifically, the questionnaire was chosen as a data collection tool. The data were then processed using SPSS. The results showed that both the surveyed teachers and students believed that the classroom interactions involved talks between teachers and students ($M = 4.8$ and 4.83 for teachers and students, respectively). Besides, the teachers and students similarly considered that the classroom interactions in non-English large classes were limited because the students did not have many opportunities for speaking ($M = 4.74$ and $M = 4.70$ for both groups). However, the surveyed teachers tended to think that the students could learn from other peers through interactions ($M = 4.39$), whereas the mean score for this statement attained $M = 4.0$ for students' responses in the survey. Furthermore, the teachers reported that the interaction among the students led to the development in cognition and language learning ($M = 3.76$), but the students provided a lower appreciation of this issue ($M = 3.0$). Based on the findings, the study suggested implications for developing classroom interactions as well as future studies.

Keywords. Interactions, non-English majored students, large classes

1. Theoretical framework of the study

The current study adopted two main approaches, namely, the interaction hypothesis and the socio-cultural theory as conceptual frameworks for investigating the classroom interactions. Before the approaches are presented, it is necessary to give the working definitions of the key concepts used in the study.

Definitions of interaction

There are many definitions that have been put forward in the research on interaction. However, it has become difficult to reach an agreement exactly on what constitutes interaction.

* Corresponding: tiladori@gmail.com

Vrasidas and McIsaac (1999, p. 25) pointed out that interaction is “the process consisting of the reciprocal actions of two or more actors within a given context”. Interactions in large classes are one of the major challenges for English teachers. For example, Coleman (1989) studied large classes and English Foreign Language (EFL) learning and pointed out that the the question of the class size cannot be simplistically answered. It depends much on the context, individual experiences, and cultural perceptions. Vrasidas and McIsaac (1999) identified four major factors that influenced interactions in large classes, including the structure of courses, class size, feedback, and prior experience with computer-mediated communications.

Interaction hypothesis

There are different points of view concerning interaction. The Interaction Hypothesis is probably the most dominant approach. Long (1983) introduced the Interaction Hypothesis theory dealing with the role of interaction in the second language learning. According to this theory, during interactions, participants can create a modified input. The modified input then facilitates understanding, and this process facilitates comprehension. Besides, through interaction, learners have the possibility to create the input they need in order to better understand new information and receive additional input and produce a new output out of it (Ellis, 1999)

Socio-cultural theory and classroom interactions

The socio-cultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1978) and his colleagues has been widely applied in the field of education. In the socio-cultural view, a language is not comprised of internal structures located in the individuals. Rather, it is considered to be fundamentally social, comprised of linguistic resources whose meanings are both embodied in and constitutive of our everyday communicative activities and practices. Therefore, language learning is a fundamentally social process initiating in our social world. Interaction provides mediation and scaffolding from the more capable learners or teachers to peers or novice ones (Lantolf, 2000). Interaction, therefore, leads to the development in language learning.

Previous studies relating to classroom interactions

Several researchers have studied classroom interactions. For example, Ralston (2004) explored how students interact in a classroom context and how these interactions are elicited by teachers in that classroom context. The researcher also investigated how various forms of instruction and scaffolding impact the learning of English language learners in a mainstream classroom. Contrast to Ralston, Muramatsu (2008) investigated the general characteristics and influence of both teachers and students’ non-native speaker status on the teacher-student interaction during writing conferences within the context of university-level composition

courses. Clearly, the teacher's verbal interaction is important in classroom studies. Joan Gorham (1988) explored a set of teacher's verbal immediacy behaviours and their interrelation with classroom learning. The results indicated that the use of different types of verbal immediacy messages has both a verbal and non-verbal impact on students' learning. In another study, Hsien-Chuan Lin (2009) examined students' experiences and perceptions of multiple interaction activities, more specifically, self-directed, peer, and teacher feedback in a large multilevel EFL class in Taiwan. The findings show that large-sized classes cannot be effectively operated to meet individual student's needs in improving their language performance. In the Vietnamese context, Tran and Le (2013) examined the strategies the English teachers used in managing interactions in large classes. The results indicated that the majority of teachers reported adopting teamwork, group work, and pair work as strategies to make students more responsible and active in their study and to increase classroom interactions.

In general, various aspects of classroom interactions have been explored; however, similarities and differences in teachers and students' beliefs of classroom interactions, especially, their beliefs of interactions in large non-English major classes remain a question for investigation.

2. Methodologies

Research participants

The participants included two groups: teachers and students. 100 teachers teaching non-English major large classes from four universities in Ho Chi Minh City were invited to participate in this study. They consisted of 76 females and 24 males, aged from 25 to 55 years with from 2 to 15 teaching experience years. The other group included 100 third-year students also from these four universities. They consisted of 65 females and 35 males, aged from 20 to 21, with about 10 years of studying English.

Survey research method

The survey research was chosen for the current study. It is a specific type of field study that involves the collection of data from a sample of elements drawn from a well-defined population through the use of a questionnaire (Visser, Krosnick & Lavrakas, 2000, p. 223). Due to a large number of participants in this study, a questionnaire was chosen to collect data for the current study. The surveys were generally standardized to ensure that they had reliability and validity and the results could be generalized to a larger population.

Questionnaire for students

A written questionnaire was used in order to gain a general understanding of students'

beliefs towards interactions in non-English major large classes. The designed questionnaire consisted of 38 questions. Each question is measured on the 5-point Likert scales, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The items of the questionnaire were categorized into four clusters, namely, the class size and classroom interactions, roles of teachers in classroom interactions in large classes, roles of students in interactions in large classes, and roles of the target language. After the pilot research, the main study was carried out. The time for the students to complete the questionnaires was within 30 minutes, but they had 4 hours to return the questionnaire to the data collector.

Questionnaire for teachers

The clusters of the teacher questionnaire are similar to those of the student questionnaire. The time for the teachers to complete the questionnaires was within 20 minutes and they also had 4 hours to return the questionnaire to the data collector.

The data gained from the questionnaires for both teachers and students were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for quantitative analysis.

3. Results and discussion

Before the findings were analysed, the reliability of the questionnaires was measured using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of all scales of both teachers and students' responses were larger than 0.6 and, therefore, achieved reliability. The items in the questionnaires were put into two main themes: teachers' beliefs of classroom interactions in non-English major large classes and students' beliefs of the same topic. They are presented in Tables 1–8 followed by the discussion on similarities and differences in teachers and students' belief of classroom interactions in non-English major large classes.

3.1. Class size and classroom interactions

The class size obviously affected the interactions in the language classroom. Their responses are presented in the following Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Teachers' beliefs of class size and classroom interactions

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
1. A language class with from 40 students or more reduces the speaking opportunities for students to interact with each	0	0	45	33	22	3.77

other.						
2. It is difficult for the teacher to interact with students and vice versa in non-English major large classes.	0	7	49	26	18	3.55
3. There is not enough time for students to interact with one another in a large class.	0	0	14	45	41	4.27
4. In a large class, teachers are usually unable to manage classroom interactions.	0	0	0	45	55	4.55
5. Classroom interactions in non-English large classes are not effective because students do not have a lot of opportunities to talk to other students	0	0	0	26	74	4.74
6. The atmosphere in a large class encourages students to interact.	0	7	49	16	28	3.65
7. In a large class, students can learn from other peers through interactions.	0	0	3	55	42	4.39
8. Teacher-students interactions are necessary for teaching non-English large classes.	0	0	0	37	63	4.63
9. Interactions among students in a large class lead to development in cognition and language learning.	0	0	48	28	24	3.76
10. Classroom interactions include talking between teacher and students.	0	0	0	20	80	4.83
11. Classroom interactions include talking between students and students	0	0	0	41	59	4.59

Table 2. Students' belief of class size and classroom interactions

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
1. A language class with from 40 students or more reduces the speaking opportunities for students to interact with each other.	0	6	38	33	23	3.73
2. It is difficult for the teacher to interact with students and vice	0	8	46	42	4	3.42

versa in non-English major large classes.						
3. There is not enough time for students to interact with one another in a large class.	0	0	38	24	38	4
4. In a large class, teachers are usually unable to manage classroom interactions.	0	0	0	47	53	4.53
5. Classroom interactions in non-English large classes are not effective because students do not have a lot of opportunities to talk to other students	0	0	0	30	70	4.7
6. The atmosphere in a large class encourages students to interact.	0	6	39	53	2	3.51
7. In a large class, students can learn from other peers through interactions.	0	2	30	34	34	4
8. Teacher-students interactions are necessary for teaching non-English large classes.	0	0	6	38	56	4.5
9. Interactions among students in a large class lead to development in cognition and language learning.	0	41	20	37	2	3
10. Classroom interactions include talking between teacher and students.	0	0	1	15	84	4.8
11. Classroom interactions include talking between students and students	0	0	0	46	54	4.54

The results showed that both surveyed teachers and students believed that in large classes, students can learn from their peers through interactions ($M = 4.63$ and $M = 4.0$ for teachers and students, respectively). This indicates a high level of agreement with both interactionism and socio-cultural theory because, through peer interactions, learners can have both language input and verbal mediation to think and carry out the task at hand. Furthermore, the surveyed teachers and students' responses achieved mean scores of 3.76 and 3.0 for the statement that interactions led to the development of cognition and language learning. Clearly, more teachers had these beliefs than students, and both groups appreciated the principle of socio-cultural theory in terms of the connection between the level of thinking and social talks. Besides, the survey showed that classroom interactions involved talks between teachers and students ($M = 4.83$ and 4.8 for teachers and students, respectively).

3.2. Roles of teachers in classroom interactions in large classes

Clearly, teachers play important roles in promoting classroom interactions. Table 3 and Table 4 present the data of the roles of teachers.

Table 3. Teachers' belief of the roles of teachers in classroom interactions in large classes

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
12. The atmosphere in non-English major large classes is teacher-centered.	0	0	17	51	29	4.18
13. In non-English major large classes, teachers should talk less to give opportunities for students to interact more.	0	20	45	32	3	3.18
14. Teachers should use audio-visual aids in non-English major large classes to promote classroom interactions.	0	0	17	42	38	4.27
15. Classroom interactions are to promote learners' processing capacity.	0	0	22	59	19	3.97
16. In non-English major large classes, students should be scaffolded by teachers.	0	0	0	16	84	4.84
17. The teacher should provide language input in non-English major large classes.	0	0	0	32	68	4.68
18. The teacher should encourage shy students in non-English major large classes to talk more.	0	3	19	56	22	3.97
19. Teachers should use guiding questions to help students with their language learning in non-English major large classes.	0	0	3	45	52	4.49
20. Interactions in non-English	0	0	4	56	40	4.36

major large classes create language input and meaningful contexts for language learning.

Table 4. Students' belief of the roles of teachers in classroom interactions in large classes

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
12. The atmosphere in non-English major large classes is teacher-centered.	0	0	18	62	20	4.02
13. In non-English major large classes, teachers should talk less to give opportunities for students to interact more.	0	3	42	54	1	3.53
14. Teachers should use audio-visual aids in non-English major large classes to promote classroom interactions.	0	3	15	58	24	4.03
15. Classroom interactions are to promote learners' processing capacity.	0	3	43	53	1	3.52
16. In non-English major large classes, students should be scaffolded by teachers.	0	0	0	22	78	4.78
17. The teacher should provide language input in non-English major large classes.	0	0	3	42	55	4.52
18. The teacher should encourage shy students in non-English major large classes to talk more.	0	0	14	52	34	4.2
19. Teachers should use guiding questions to help students with their language learning in non-English major large classes.	0	3	43	52	2	3.53
20. Interactions in non-English major large classes create language input and meaningful contexts for language learning.	0	0	11	57	32	4.21

According to the Interaction Hypothesis theory, opportunities for students to talk in the classroom are vital to the language learning process. Teachers and students' responses ($M = 3.18; 3.53$, respectively) showed a rather high level of agreement of their beliefs to the issue. There were more students who thought that teachers should talk less in the classroom.

However, the two groups gave a very significant appreciation to the scaffolding of teachers to students in interactions ($M = 4.84$ for teachers and $M = 4.78$ for students) as in line with the socio-cultural theory, in which teachers are considered to be more knowledgeable. Also, both groups believed that the language input from teachers was necessary for students' language learning ($M = 4.68$; 4.52 , respectively).

3.3. Roles of students in interactions in large classes

Table 5 and Table 6 show the findings from the questionnaire regarding students' roles in classroom interactions.

Table 5. Teachers' belief of the roles of students in interactions in large classes

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
21. It is difficult for students in non-English major large classes to interact with the teacher because students are often too passive.	0	0	0	19	81	4.81
22. Students feel shy to speak in non-English major large classes.	0	0	6	56	38	4.32
23. In non-English major large classes, students would not like to interact because the input level of students is different.	0	6	87	7	0	3.01
24. In non-English major large classes, students can exchange ideas with the teacher.	0	0	20	70	10	3.9
25. Student to student interaction takes place in non-English major large classes when teachers set language items and group students into pairs or groups.	0	0	23	73	4	3.81
26. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes is necessary because students may	0	0	9	81	10	4.01

not have opportunities to talk to classroom teachers.							
27. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes helps students understand the lesson better.	0	0	9	81	10	4.01	
28. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes mediates students' thinking process.	0	0	3	17	80	4.77	
29. The interactional collaboration among peers can lead to second language learning	0	0	0	39	61	4.61	
30. Peer interaction provides language input for students in non-English major large classes.	0	0	0	87	13	4.13	
31. Peer interaction creates an active learning environment.	0	0	6	27	67	4.61	
32. The modified input created within classroom interactions can be facilitating in explaining linguistic forms that learners found difficult to understand.	0	0	0	30	70	4.7	
33. In non-English major large classes, the environment is safer because students do not have to answer every question.	0	0	0	51	49	4.49	
34. Students play the role of negotiators in peer interactions.	0	0	7	85	8	4.01	

Table 6. Students' belief of the roles of students in interactions in large classes

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
21. It is difficult for students in non-English major large classes to interact with the teacher because students are often too passive.	0	0	0	20	80	4.8
22. Students feel shy to speak in non-English major large classes.	0	0	4	82	14	4.1
23. In non-English major large classes, students would not like to interact because the input level of students is different.	0	8	62	30	0	3.22
24. In non-English major large classes, students can exchange ideas with the teacher.	0	0	19	70	11	3.92
25. Student to student interaction takes place in non-English major large classes when teachers set language items and group students into pairs or groups.	0	7	86	7	0	3
26. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes is necessary because students may not have opportunities to talk to classroom teachers.	0	0	40	56	4	3.64
27. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes helps students understand the lesson better.	0	0	8	74	18	4.1
28. Peer interaction in non-English major large classes mediates students' thinking process.	0	0	1	65	34	4.33
29. The interactional collaboration among peers can lead to second language learning	0	0	1	56	43	4.42
30. Peer interaction provides language input for students in non-English major large classes.	0	0	19	71	10	3.91
31. Peer interaction creates an	0	0	8	50	42	4.34

active learning environment.							
32. The modified input created within classroom interactions can be facilitating in explaining linguistic forms that learners found difficult to understand.	0	0	0	40	60	4.6	
33. In non-English major large classes, the environment is safer because students do not have to answer every question.	0	0	0	69	31	4.31	
34. Students play the role of negotiators in peer interactions.	0	0	0	89	11	4.11	

Both the interactionism and socio-cultural theory emphasize the roles of peers in interactions and learning. The data from the questionnaire for teachers and students reflected the features of both approaches. The surveyed teachers and students gave nearly the same evaluation of the roles of peers in interactions ($M = 4.01$ and 4.10) for this issue. The teachers' responses to the statement that peer interaction provides the input attained a mean score of 4.13 , which is higher than the score of 3.91 from the students' responses. The interaction hypothesis theory states that the modified input facilitates language learning. The data from the two tables above show a similar agreement for both groups ($M = 4.7$ and 4.6 , respectively).

3.4. Roles of the target language in classroom interactions

Clearly, the target language use is the goal of any EFL classes. To find out the belief of teachers and students about the roles of the target language in classroom interactions, a questionnaire was given to both teachers and students. The data are presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7. Teachers' belief of the roles of the target language

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
35. Classroom interactions should be mainly in English in the process of teaching in large classes for non-English majors.	0	0	29	68	3	3.74
36. The target language is used as a social tool for	0	0	25	70	5	3.8

communication in classrooms.							
37. Throughout the process of interaction in the target language, learners have the possibility to create the input they need in order to better understand new information.	0	0	31	69	0	3.69	
38. Teachers should use only English in non-English major large classes so that students can have a rich language environment.	0	0	0	48	52	4.52	

Table 8. Students' belief of the roles of the target language

Statements	N = 100					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
35. Classroom interactions should be mainly in English in the process of teaching in large classes for non-English majors.	0	0	18	62	20	4.02
36. The target language is used as a social tool for communication in classrooms.	0	3	42	54	1	3.53
37. Throughout the process of interaction in the target language, learners have the possibility to create the input they need in order to better understand new information.	0	3	15	58	24	4.03
38. Teachers should use only English in non-English major large classes so that students can have a rich language environment.	0	3	43	53	1	3.52

Clearly, a rich environment of the target language helps learners much in the process of learning it. In the socio-cultural theory, a language is a tool for social communication and the expression of thoughts. More teachers' responses agreed with this fact: $M = 3.8$, as compared with $M = 3.52$ for students' responses. The statement that teachers should use only English in non-English major large classes achieved a very high mean score from the teachers' answers ($M = 4.52$) and a rather low from students' ($M = 3.52$).

3.5. Comparison of teachers and students' beliefs of classroom interactions in non-English major large classes

Similarities

From the data presented in the tables, it can be concluded that both surveyed teachers and students believed that classroom interactions involved talks between teachers and students ($M = 4.8$ and 4.83 for teachers and students, respectively). Besides, the teachers and students similarly considered that the classroom interactions in non-English large classes were limited because students did not have many opportunities for speaking ($M = 4.74$ and $M = 4.7$, respectively). In terms of the role of teachers in classroom interactions, the two groups of participants agreed that teachers should talk less to give more opportunities for students ($M = 3.18$ for both groups). Regarding the role of students in classroom interactions, the mean scores for teachers and students' answers were almost the same, at 4.81 and 4.80 , respectively. Furthermore, the mean scores of the two groups were nearly equal (4.7 and 4.6) when they both agreed on what modified input, created within classroom interactions could be facilitating in explaining linguistic forms for learners. In general, the surveyed teachers and students reiterated the important role of the components of classroom interactions which provided the language input (Long, 1983) and negotiation for linguistic forms (Ellis, 1999).

Differences

There were four differences in the teachers and students' beliefs of the classroom interactions in non-English major large classes.

First, the surveyed teachers tended to think that students could learn from other peers through interactions, as pointed out by Vygotsky (1978) and Lantolf (2000). However, the mean score for teachers' responses was 4.39 , whereas this value for the students was 4.0 . Furthermore, teachers also considered that interactions among students led to the development in cognition and language learning ($M = 3.76$), but students provided a lower appreciation of this issue ($M = 3.0$).

Second, while teachers valued the teacher centredness and their dominant roles in class ($M = 4.18$) and guided students ($M = 4.49$), students rated these roles of teachers at lower scores, with their mean of 4.02 and 3.53 , respectively. Students, however, expected teachers to scaffold them ($M = 4.78$) and to provide language input ($M = 4.21$).

Third, teachers gave a higher evaluation of student-student interactions if they provided with language items and arranged students in groups or pairs ($M = 3.81$ and $M = 3.0$ respectively).

Finally, there was a noticeable discrepancy between the teachers and students' beliefs of whether only the target language should be used in the classrooms. The mean score of the teachers' answer was 4.52, whereas it was only 3.52 for students' answer. Overall, the differences in the teachers and students' belief level of components of classroom interactions in large classes confirmed the findings of the study by Hsien-Chuan Lin (2009).

4. Conclusions

The findings of the study revealed that the teachers and students tended to have different levels of belief of classroom interactions in terms of the roles of teachers, roles of students, class size, and use of the target language. In general, the surveyed teachers and students tended to believe that the classroom interactions involved talks between teachers and students and that classroom interactions in non-English large classes were limited because students did not have many opportunities for speaking. Despite these limited opportunities, both teachers and students considered that classroom interactions provided language input and negotiation for the linguistic forms for students. However, the surveyed teachers gave higher appreciation to peer interactions and development in cognition and language learning thanks to classroom interactions.

The findings from this study implicated a slight mismatching in teachers and students' beliefs of interactions in large classes at some universities in Ho Chi Minh City. However, they both considered classroom interactions to be of great importance in the process of learning English. Therefore, interactions should be promoted in language classes, especially, large classes for non-English major students. Due to the scope of the paper, the findings of the role of the mother tongue were not reported, and the data from interviews and the audio-recordings of classroom interactions were not included. It would show a more comprehensive understanding of the teachers and students' beliefs of classroom interactions if those data sources could be presented. Further research can dwell into such factors of classroom interactions as patterns and turn taking.

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