

# EXPLORING TEACHER–STUDENT TALK IN ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS (EYL) LED BY A GEN Z TEACHER: A FIACS-BASED CASE STUDY IN INDONESIA

Arienta Eka Kurniawati, Hamamah Hamamah, Syariful Muttaqin

Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

E-mail: [arienekha03@gmail.com](mailto:arienekha03@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Effective classroom interaction significantly contributes to successful English language learning among young learners. Despite extensive research on classroom interactions, the impact of Generation Z (Gen Z) teachers' distinct communication traits remains underexplored, particularly within the Indonesian context. Drawing from social constructivism and digital pedagogy frameworks, this study addresses this gap by focusing on verbal interactions in an EYL setting in Indonesia. The research aims to explore how a Gen Z teacher's communication style influences classroom interaction patterns and what pedagogical implications arise for student engagement, autonomy, and emotional development. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving one Gen Z teacher and 28 third-grade students at a private primary school in Indonesia. Data were collected over three 55-minute sessions using video recordings and coded through Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS). Reliability procedures and ethical consent were ensured prior to data collection. Findings show that direct talk such as asking questions (56.8%) and giving directions (41.5%), is more prevalent in Gen Z teacher interactions than indirect talk, like using student ideas (14%) and offering praise (15.11%). The emphasis on directive and questioning approaches limited the potential for fostering student autonomy and collaborative dialogue. Student responses were frequent (66.3%), indicating active engagement, yet minimal student-initiated talk suggests limited learner autonomy. The study suggests a need for professional development that encourages Gen Z teachers to balance directive communication with emotional support and digital integration. Enhancing these communicative strategies could improve student engagement, autonomy, and collaborative learning in EYL settings.

**Keywords:** *FIACS; Gen Z Teacher; Student Talk; TEYL; Teacher Talk*

## 1. Introduction

In classroom settings, teacher talk serves as a pivotal medium through which educational intentions, content, and classroom management strategies are conveyed.

Particularly in English for Young Learners (EYL) contexts, where students' linguistic and cognitive development is still emerging, the nature and quality of teacher-student verbal exchanges play a critical role in shaping both language acquisition and socio-emotional development (Pinter, 2006; Vygotsky & Cole 1978). Teacher talk in such environments comprises both instructional languages—including explanations and directives—and interactional language, such as questioning, feedback, and praise (Brown & Lee, 2015).

With the increasing presence of Generation Z (Gen Z) teachers in EYL classrooms, it is essential to investigate how their distinct communication patterns, shaped by digital literacy, informality, and a preference for visual and interactive media, influence classroom interactions. While numerous studies have examined teacher talk in TEYL settings (Ayunda et al., 2021; Khusnaini, 2019), scant attention has been paid to how generational characteristics may affect classroom discourse patterns and pedagogical dynamics.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the interaction patterns of a Gen Z teacher in an Indonesian private primary school classroom, employing Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS) as an analytical framework. By integrating insights from Vygotsky social constructivism and contemporary EYL pedagogy, this research aims to elucidate how Gen Z teachers mediate classroom talk. This study specifically aims to address the following research questions: (1) What interaction patterns characterize the communication between a Generation Z teacher and young learners (EYL) in the Indonesian context? And (2) How do these interaction patterns affect student participation and autonomy in classroom learning activities? Gaining insight into these interaction dynamics has important pedagogical implications, particularly for the design of targeted teacher development programs that foster active, inclusive, and student-centered learning environments in EYL classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

Effective classroom interaction is a critical element of second language acquisition, especially for young learners whose cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities are still evolving (Goswami & Bryant, 2007). Teacher talk plays an essential role, not only in managing classroom activities but also in scaffolding language use, demonstrating communicative competence, and facilitating authentic verbal exchanges (Brown & Lee, 2015). Striking a balance between directive forms of teacher talk, such as lectures and direct instructions, and more facilitative talk, including questioning, praising, and incorporating student ideas, is pivotal for enhancing student engagement, autonomy, and language development (Harmer, 2008).

### 2.1 Teacher Control and Dominant Talk Patterns

The Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS), developed by Flanders (1970), has been widely employed to classify verbal exchanges in language classrooms. Recent studies using FIACS in EYL contexts (Khusnaini, 2019; Ayunda et al., 2021) have consistently found high frequencies of teacher-initiated talk, with questioning and lecturing dominating interaction patterns. These patterns reflect a teacher-centered approach that may restrict student autonomy. While effective in maintaining classroom order and content delivery, excessive directive talk can limit dialogic learning, where learners actively co-construct meaning. Notably, prior studies largely feature experienced teachers from older

generations, offering limited insight into how younger, digitally native educators shape classroom discourse differently.

## 2.2 Gen Z Teachers vs. Previous Generations

Generation Z teachers, born after 1995, represent a marked shift from their predecessors. Unlike Gen X or Millennial educators, Gen Z teachers often labeled as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), possess distinctive traits including technological fluency, multitasking, and a preference for visual and interactive communication modes (Cilliers, 2017; Okros, 2020). These preferences could redefine traditional classroom discourse by encouraging more student interaction and digital engagement. However, studies show mixed outcomes. For example, Köttl et al. (2021) found that Gen Z's digital fluency can foster engagement, while Maisarah et al. (2024) caution that novice Gen Z teachers—despite being tech-savvy—may struggle with providing consistent praise or emotional support. This distinction suggests that while technological competence may enhance interaction, affective and pedagogical maturity remain critical.

## 2.3 Student Autonomy and Affective Support

According to social constructivist principles, meaningful learning occurs through socially mediated interactions (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Effective EYL teaching, therefore, requires not only content delivery but also the creation of dialogic spaces where students can negotiate meaning, ask questions, and express ideas independently. Studies by Wedyawati et al. (2023) and Hikmawan et al. (2023) highlight the importance of balancing direct instruction with collaborative activities and affective scaffolding to maximize young learners' language development. Thus, effective EYL pedagogy requires a nuanced balance between direct talk and student-centered interactions, coupled with emotional and affective scaffolding.

Although prior research outlines the significance of interactional balance in EYL classrooms, it often overlooks the influence of generational differences in teaching style. This study addresses that gap by examining how a Gen Z teacher navigates the dynamics of teacher control, student autonomy, and emotional support. By highlighting these generational differences, the research aims to inform targeted pedagogical practices that enhance EYL learning environments.

## 3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design to examine the verbal interaction patterns between a Generation Z (Gen Z) teacher and young English language learners (EYL) in an Indonesian private primary school. The case study approach was selected for its effectiveness in offering a detailed and contextualized exploration of classroom dynamics within authentic educational settings (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014). Although the findings are specific to the context studied, they contribute meaningful insights into the evolving nature of classroom interaction, particularly as influenced by generational shifts and advancements in technology.

### 3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of one Gen Z teacher and a class of 28 third-grade students aged 8–9 years. The teacher was purposively selected based on her alignment with the Gen Z birth-year range (1997–2012), professional experience in EYL teaching, and capacity to represent emerging generational traits such as technological fluency and interactive pedagogical practices. While this single-case design may not capture the full diversity of Gen Z teachers, it offers a valuable, context-specific glimpse into the interactional tendencies and pedagogical orientations associated with this generational cohort. As such, it serves as a meaningful reference point for understanding broader trends in contemporary EYL instruction.

### 3.2 Instruments

Data were collected through three consecutive classroom meetings, each lasting fifty-five minutes, using audio-visual recordings and based on an observation tally sheet modified version of the Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS) (Flanders, 1970; Singh et al., 2008). FIACS categorizes verbal interactions into distinct types of teacher talk (e.g., accepting feelings, praise, asking questions, lecturing, giving directions, criticizing), student talk (responses, initiations), and instances of silence or confusion. For instance, a teacher’s content-based question was coded as “asking questions,” whereas a student’s unsolicited comment was classified as “student initiation.”

### 3.3 Data Procedure

Data collection took place over three consecutive classroom sessions, each lasting fifty-five minutes. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the teacher, school administration, and the students’ parents or guardians. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring participant confidentiality, clearly communicating the purpose of the study, and guaranteeing participants the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, a reliability workshop was conducted to train the researchers in the consistent application of the FIACS categories, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the coding process.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two phases. First, a quantitative frequency analysis was used to determine the dominant patterns in teacher and student talk categories. Second, a qualitative interpretative analysis was carried out to connect these patterns to theoretical frameworks, particularly social constructivism (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) and contemporary views on effective EYL discourse (Brown & Lee, 2015; Pinter, 2006). This dual-method approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical implications stemming from the observed interaction dynamics.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

In this section, the researchers present and elaborate on the key findings derived from the research. These findings represent the results obtained through systematic data

collection and analysis, offering empirical evidence that addresses the research questions. Each result is discussed in relation to the study's objectives, providing insight into the observed phenomena and contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation.

In this research, the Gen Z teacher engaged with students in the classroom utilizing both English and Bahasa Indonesia. Data collected across three 55-minute classroom sessions were analyzed using the FIACS framework. This was done to investigate the interaction in the classroom, considering that Gen Z teachers' teaching methods are relatively consistent. Teachers of Gen Z frequently employ code-switching, which combines various language features inside a single sentence. It was used by Gen Z teacher to deliver clear teaching materials that improve students' comprehension of directions and explanations.

The findings on the dominant type of teacher talk in classroom interactions is asking questions, which accounts for an average of 56.8% of teacher discourse. Following closely, giving directions constitutes 41.5% of teacher talk, indicating a substantial focus on guiding students through tasks and activities. Lecturing, which is often perceived as the primary mode of instruction, appears third at 26,3%, showing that while it is significant, it is not the predominant method. Criticizing or justifying authority occurs 19.72% of the time, reflecting the teacher's role in maintaining classroom order and authority. Praise or encouragement, which is crucial for student motivation, comprises 15.11% of the talk. These findings reveal that direct talk, such as asking questions and giving directions, is more prevalent in Gen Z teacher interactions than indirect talk, like using student ideas and offering praise. This indicates a structured approach to classroom management and instruction, emphasizing clear communication and control. The summarizes the frequency of teacher talk that occurs in all 3 meetings as shown in *Table 1*.

No	Types of Teacher Talk	1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting		2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting		3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting		Total Utterances	
		Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
1.	Accepts feeling	10	3,50%	3	0,94%	2	2,19%	15	6,63%
2.	Praise or encouragement	26	9,12%	19	5,99%	0	0%	45	15,11%
3.	Accepts or uses ideas of students	9	3,15%	17	5,36%	5	5,49%	31	14%
4.	Asking questions	61	21,40%	71	22,39%	12	13,18%	144	56,8%
5.	Lecturing	23	8,07%	31	9,77%	8	8,79%	52	26,63%
6.	Giving directions	24	8,42%	25	7,88%	23	25,27%	72	41,5%
7.	Criticizing or justifying authority	15	5,26%	18	5,67%	8	8,79%	41	19,72%

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of FIACS Categories in Gen Z Teacher Talk

*Note.* To enhance readability, the data are presented in *Figure 1*, which illustrates the percentage distribution of each FIACS interaction category recorded during the observed sessions.

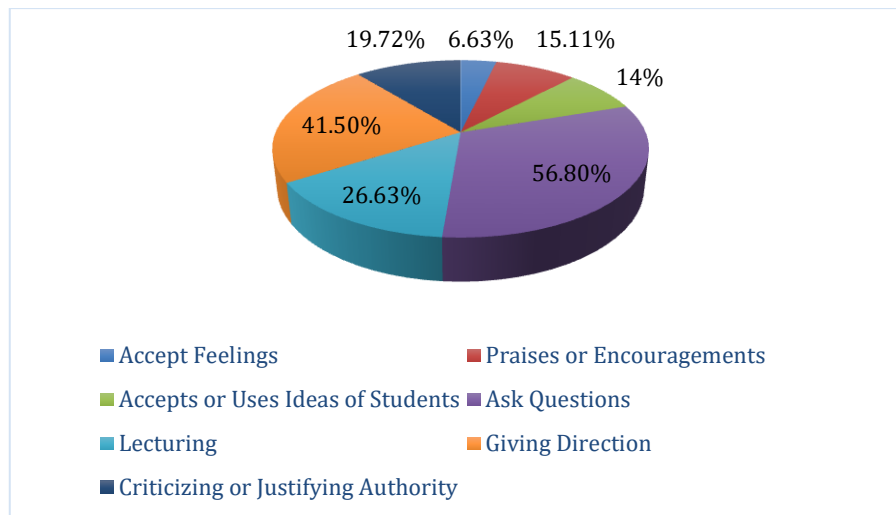


Figure 1. Distribution of FIACS Categories in Gen Z Teacher Talk.

*Note.* This pie chart shows the proportion of each FIACS interaction category based on cumulative data from three classroom sessions.

Additionally, the researchers also calculated the frequency of student talk as shown in *Table 2*. The dominant type of student talk in classroom interactions is student response, which accounts for an average of 66.30%. Following closely, student initiation constitutes 30.01% of student talk, indicating a substantial focus on answering questions of the teacher. These findings reveal that EYL students are active enough in classroom interaction.

No	Types of Student Talk	1st Meeting		2nd Meeting		3rd Meeting		Total Utterances	
		Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
1.	Student Response	75	26,31%	85	26,81%	12	13,18%	172	66,30%
2.	Student Initiation	30	10,52%	27	8,51%	10	10,98%	67	30,01%
3.	Silence	12	4,21%	21	6,62%	11	12,08%	44	22,91%

Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages of FIACS Categories in Student Talk

*Note.* To enhance readability, the data are presented in *Figure 2*, which illustrates the percentage distribution of each FIACS interaction category recorded during the observed sessions.

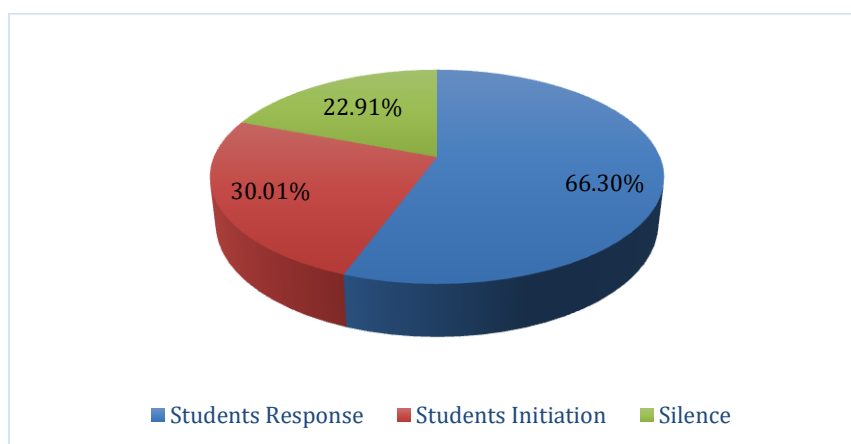


Figure 2. Distribution of FIACS Categories in Student Talk.

*Note.* Figure 2 summarizes the frequency of student talk that occurs in all 3 meetings, as well as the silence that accounts for both teacher and students.

The most prominent categories were *student responses* (66.30%) and *teacher questioning* (56.80%), indicating active participation in a teacher-guided format. *Giving directions* (41.50%) also played a substantial role, reflecting a procedural teaching style. Conversely, *praise/encouragement* (15.11%) and *criticism* (19.72%) appeared infrequently, suggesting limited affective feedback. These trends highlight a pattern of structured, teacher-led interaction with relatively few moments fostering student autonomy or emotional support.

Furthermore, through data from teacher talk and student talk, the most predominant pattern of Gen Z teacher classroom interaction could also be defined (see Table 3). The patterns are classified into four different patterns: (1) teacher support (2) content cross (3) teacher control and (4) student participation. The researchers presented each type and classify it into those four patterns of classroom interaction to know the interaction pattern that occurred in EYL Gen Z Teacher’s class.

No.	Characteristics of Classroom Interaction	M1 (%)	M2 (%)	M3 (%)	Average
1.	Teacher Support	15,77%	12,29%	7,68%	11,91%
2.	Content Cross	29,47%	32,16%	21,97%	27,86%
3.	Teacher Control	13,68%	13,55%	34,06%	20,43%
4.	Student’s Participation	36,83%	35,32%	12,08%	28,07%

Table 3. The Most Predominant Pattern of Gen Z’s Teacher Classroom Interaction

From the observation results as seen in Table 3, Four interaction patterns were identified: student participation (28.07%), content cross (27.86%), teacher control (20.43%), and teacher support (11.91%). Student participation, including responses and initiations, was highest in the first and second meetings, declining during the third, assessment-focused meeting.

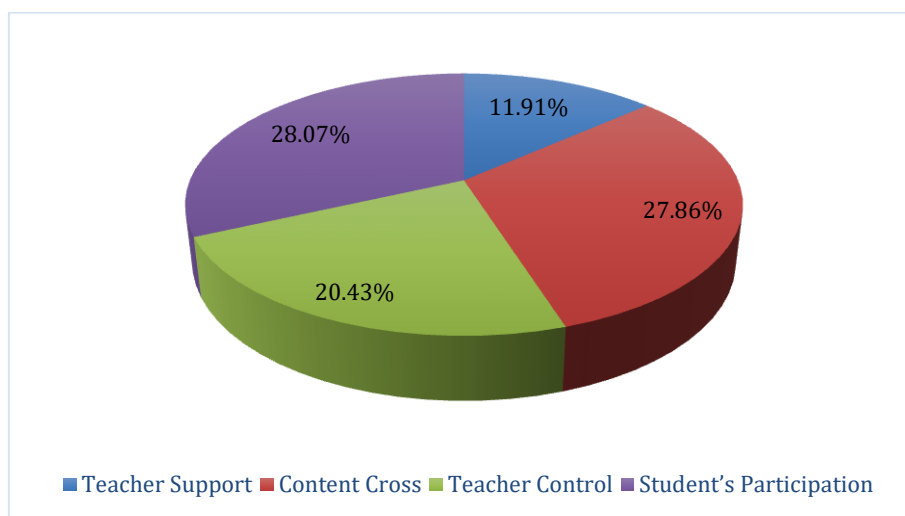


Figure 3. Distribution of the Pattern of Gen Z’s Teacher Classroom Interaction.

*Note.* This pie chart shows the pattern of Gen Z’s Teacher Classroom Interaction that occurs in all 3 meetings.

It showed that the EYL students were active enough to participate in responding to the teacher's utterances such as questions, directions and explanations. The students not only responded to the Gen Z teacher but also initiated their opinion during the discussion. In conclusion, the Gen Z teacher frequently asked questions to stimulate student thinking but provided limited support, often ignoring students' feelings, offering minimal praise or encouragement, and rarely Accepting their ideas. This lack of support may stem from the teacher's perception that many students are not serious, leading to a disregard for students' remarks and emotional needs.

Overall, the findings reveal interactional tendencies characteristic of a novice Gen Z teacher, particularly the dominance of directive and questioning talk types. While this ensures lesson control and content delivery, it risks limiting opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and student autonomy.

## **4.2 Discussion**

Here the researchers elaborate on the discussion related to the research. The discussion explains further explanation related to the findings of the study aimed at finding the interaction patterns characterize a Gen Z teacher's communication with EYL students in the Indonesian context and how do these interaction patterns influence student participation and autonomy in classroom learning activities.

### **4.2.1 Interaction Patterns Characterize a Gen Z Teacher's Communication with EYL Students in the Indonesian Context**

The classroom interaction patterns exhibited by the Gen Z teacher in this study reflect a highly structured and teacher-centered communication style, characterized by a predominant reliance on questioning (56.8%) and directive talk (41.5%). This pattern aligns with previous studies using FIACS in EYL classrooms, where questioning frequently dominates interaction (e.g., Khusnaini, 2019; Ayunda et al., 2021). However, viewed through a generational lens, these patterns reveal unique nuances: Gen Z teachers, shaped by technological fluency and efficiency-driven communication habits, tend to prioritize clarity and control over emotional expressiveness.

In this case, the Gen Z teacher also demonstrated notable technological adaptability, as evidenced by her use of multimedia and digital prompts during instruction. This supports research suggesting that Gen Z educators are likely to integrate digital tools seamlessly into their pedagogy (Prensky, 2001). However, her interaction patterns showed limited use of affective communication, such as praise (15.11%) or acknowledgment of students' feelings (6.63%) and ideas (14%). On the other hand, as stated by Maisarah et al. (2024) underscores the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in fostering engagement, emotional well-being, and positive behavior among students. It is important to note that primary school students particularly benefit from praise and positive reinforcement as part of teacher talk. Nevertheless, this research result validated a previous study by Martina et al. (2021), which indicated that novice teachers seldom praised or rewarded students. Compared to earlier-generation teachers—who may emphasize warmth and encouragement through verbal affirmation—the Gen Z teacher appeared to focus more on maintaining task-oriented efficiency and behavioral structure. Additionally, Köttl et al. (2021) stated that teachers perceive older generations as lacking the ability to use digital technologies, attributing this to a decline in physical, social, and personal skills associated with aging. By capitalizing on

digitalization, Gen Z teachers are able to create dynamic learning environments that cater to the diverse learning preferences of today's students.

Furthermore, the most dominant interaction pattern observed was "content cross," followed closely by "student participation." This indicates that, while there was an effort to stimulate engagement, much of the interaction still centered on content transmission, with fewer instances of reflective or emotionally supportive dialogue. Thus, the teacher's generational identity influenced not only the communication tools used, but also the tone and purpose of her interactions—precise, goal-oriented, yet emotionally reserved. These findings are in line with Kapoe's (2021) research, which also identified content cross as the dominant classroom interaction. Although Kapoe's study was conducted at the university level, the prevalence of content cross suggests that this pattern of delivering materials—through questioning and lecturing—may persist across various educational levels.

In sum, the interaction patterns of Gen Z teachers in the context of EYL in Indonesia show a dominant structured and teacher-centered communication style, with a focus on questions and instructions. Although technologically adaptive and able to create a dynamic learning environment, Gen Z teachers tend to use less affective communication such as praise. Their approach is more efficient and task-oriented, but less emotionally warm. The content cross pattern becomes the main form of interaction, reflecting a tendency to deliver material directly rather than building reflective dialogue. Gen Z's generational identity influences both the tools they use and the way they interact in the classroom.

#### **4.2.2 The Impact of Gen Z Teacher Interaction Patterns on EYL Student Participation and Autonomy in the Classroom**

The teacher's interaction style, marked by frequent questioning and direction, fostered a relatively high rate of student responses (66.30%), indicating that students were actively engaged in responding to prompts. However, student-initiated talk remained significantly lower (30.01%), revealing limited opportunities for students to lead dialogue, ask questions independently, or negotiate meaning. This asymmetry suggests that while participation was encouraged, autonomy was not fully developed. In contrast, a study by Oktaviana et al. (2024) found that interactions that allow children to take responsibility and make their own decisions support the development of self-confidence and independence. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role not only as transmitters of content but also as facilitators of character growth. Their findings emphasize the importance of adopting more collaborative and participatory approaches to enhance student initiative and autonomy—unlike dominant instructional styles that tend to suppress student-led learning.

Supporting this perspective, Suminar et al. (2019) highlighted a mismatch between the student-oriented goals of the EYL curriculum and actual classroom practices, which remain largely teacher-centered. Although the 2013 curriculum promotes student-centered learning, its classroom implementation often fails to reflect this ideal. Thus, there is a need for ongoing teacher training and evaluation to effectively implement student-centered approaches.

From Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes learning through socially mediated interactions, the limited student-initiated talk observed also indicates a missed opportunity to foster higher-order thinking and linguistic independence. Dialogic teaching—where students are encouraged to take greater ownership of classroom discourse—is

especially beneficial for EYL learners as it supports both language acquisition and confidence (Wedyawati et al., 2023).

The dominance of directive talk may also condition students to rely heavily on teacher cues, inhibiting the development of initiative. This raises pedagogical concerns about its long-term effect on learner agency, particularly for young learners in critical stages of language and identity formation. In culturally hierarchical contexts like Indonesia, where teacher authority is traditionally upheld, directive tendencies may go unchallenged, further limiting students' communicative independence. However, Gen Z teachers, who are generally more comfortable with technology and open to collaboration, have the potential to disrupt these traditional boundaries. For example, the use of digital platforms such as online discussion forums, real-time feedback apps (e.g., Mentimeter, Padlet, Kahoot), and Google Classroom can create opportunities for students to express their ideas freely and asynchronously—something rare in conventional hierarchical settings.

Moreover, Gen Z individuals, having grown up in the digital age, exhibit preferences for visual learning and technology-integrated instruction. Their digital fluency presents promising avenues for modern pedagogy. Consistent with Twenge's (2017) findings, Gen Z learners and educators tend to be more independent and accustomed to rapid access to information. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z teachers often favor efficiency-oriented interaction styles, which may be influenced by digital norms that prioritize brevity and task completion over affective exchanges (Okros, 2020). Nevertheless, digital tools such as interactive apps, gamified learning methods, and collaborative platforms can be used not only to deliver content but also to support dialogic learning that values student voice.

With appropriate pedagogical training, Gen Z teachers can shift from directive instruction toward a more facilitative role, encouraging student-led discussions, reflective questioning, and collaborative problem-solving. Additionally, collaboration with senior teachers plays a vital role in Gen Z teachers' professional development. By seeking mentorship and sharing experiences, they can refine their instructional methods and increase their effectiveness. As Lipscombe et al. (2023) noted, teacher learning supported by senior colleagues leads to better teaching practices, pedagogical innovation, and improved student outcomes. This collaborative model underscores the importance of continuous professional development in overcoming classroom challenges and enhancing teaching quality.

To support this shift, several practical strategies can enhance EYL classroom participation and autonomy: (1) applying multisensory and multimodal approaches, (2) connecting lessons to real-life situations (e.g., shopping, greetings, family), (3) incorporating positive reinforcement to build student confidence, and (4) integrating technology to boost engagement.

In conclusion, while Gen Z teachers' structured and efficient interaction style succeeds in promoting surface-level engagement, it falls short in fostering student autonomy. Targeted pedagogical support can help balance their digital strengths with strategies that promote deeper participation, student voice, and learner independence.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found that Gen Z teachers in EYL settings predominantly use questioning and directive forms of communication, with comparatively limited use of praise, emotional support, or encouragement of student-initiated talk. While this instructional approach

facilitates classroom control and content delivery, it may hinder the development of student autonomy and collaborative meaning-making—critical components of language learning at an early age.

To address this, several pedagogical recommendations emerge. First, teacher education programs should incorporate training modules on affective communication and emotional support to enhance Gen Z teachers' confidence in offering praise and support. Second, practical workshops on dialogic teaching strategies can help educators shift from directives to more student-centered discourse. Third, integrating reflective practices using classroom video analysis may increase teacher awareness of their interaction patterns and the impact on learner engagement.

This study's findings are limited by its single-case design, involving only one Gen Z teacher and one school. As such, the results cannot be generalized to all Gen Z educators or EYL settings. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples across multiple schools and regions to validate these findings. Comparative studies between Gen Z and earlier generational cohorts would also offer valuable insights into how generational identity influences classroom interaction styles and pedagogical effectiveness.

By understanding and supporting the evolving communicative practices of Gen Z teachers, stakeholders can better prepare the next generation of educators to create balanced, inclusive, and digitally enriched learning environments for young language learners.

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