



Characterizing the Online EFL Classroom: An Observational Study in the Iranian Context

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Original Research

Received:
01 November 2025

Revised:
29 November 2025

Accepted:
02 December 2025

Published in Issue:
31 December 2025

Abstract

This study investigates discourse and interactional patterns in Iranian online EFL classrooms, with a focus on how technological affordances and constraints shape participation and engagement. Drawing on four observed intermediate-level General English classes delivered via the BigBlueButton platform, involving two experienced EFL instructors (with an age range of 35-45 years) and 10 to 15 mixed-gender students per class (aged 19-23 years), data were collected through synchronous classroom observations, audio recordings, annotated transcripts, and field notes. A hybrid coding framework was developed by integrating established models of classroom discourse – FLINT (Moskowitz, 1971), Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model (1975), the COLT scheme (Allen et al., 1984), and CET/Teach Observer adaptations (USC Center for Excellence in Teaching, 2021) – to capture both traditional interactional features and online-specific behaviors such as chat-based checks, file sharing, and troubleshooting. Findings reveal a predominantly teacher-led instructional style characterized by frequent Initiation–Response–Feedback sequences, concise student contributions, and strategic scaffolding. Online affordances, including chat confirmations, screen sharing, and attendance checks, supported classroom management and joint attention, while persistent constraints such as connectivity disruptions and absenteeism limited learner participation. Student talk was largely brief and reactive, with limited extended interaction unless explicitly scaffolded. The results highlight both continuities with traditional Iranian EFL classroom discourse and the distinctive dynamics of the online medium. The study underscores the need for targeted teacher training in online discourse strategies and the integration of more student-centered tasks to foster engagement and autonomy in virtual EFL environments.

Keywords: Discourse; Interactional patterns; Iranian context; Online EFL classrooms; Technological affordances

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Cite this article: Hadi, S., Yousefi Azarfam, A. A., & Amirghassemi, A. (2025). Characterizing the Online EFL Classroom: An Observational Study in the Iranian Context, *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning*, 4(4), Article 26.

<https://doi.org/10.57647/JNTELL.2025.0404.26>

1. Introduction

The rapid shift toward online learning has transformed the nature of classroom interaction, particularly in the

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Online delivery affects the distribution of teacher talk, student talk, interaction patterns, and the balance between form-focused and meaning-focused instruction. While frameworks such as the Foreign Language Interaction

Analysis (FLINT) system (Moskowitz, 1971) have long provided structured ways to code classroom discourse, online classrooms introduce new interactional moves – such as digital file sharing, chat-based participation checks, and technology troubleshooting – that require adaptation of existing coding schemes.

Digital competence, defined as the interplay of teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward educational technology, has become central to effective online language instruction. Teachers' digital literacy and self-efficacy strongly influence their adoption of technology-enhanced pedagogy, with institutional support and professional development serving as critical enablers (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Scherer et al., 2019; Spante et al., 2018). While digitally competent teachers are able to design interactive and engaging learning activities, challenges such as limited training, infrastructure, and resources continue to constrain practice, particularly during rapid shifts to online education (Hedayati & Marandi, 2014; Molina et al., 2018). Consequently, teacher preparedness and positive attitudes are increasingly recognized as essential to the digital transformation of EFL classrooms (Taherkhani & Ghaleei, 2024).

Observation-based studies provide further insight into how teaching quality and technology integration unfold in practice. In the Iranian context, Mozafari and Wray (2013) revealed the gap between national ICT policies and classroom realities, emphasizing the need to align institutional goals with teachers' lived experiences. Broader scholarship has highlighted the benefits of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which enhance engagement, retention, and learner autonomy (Sung et al., 2015; Lei et al., 2022). Empirical evidence also shows that mobile learning can improve learners' speaking and motivation, while Iranian teachers demonstrate moderate to high digital competence overall, albeit with disparities in areas such as digital assessment and institutional support (Taherkhani & Ghaleei, 2024).

Furthermore, recent research shows that learners' interaction and satisfaction in online EFL classrooms are influenced by pedagogical and technological factors (Ghobadi & Dehghanpour, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of adapting teaching strategies to support effective participation and interaction in online learning environments. In addition, specific online activities, such as collaborative augmented reality tasks, can create opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful communication and practice speaking, highlighting how digital tools may facilitate interaction in online EFL classrooms (Yousefi, Salehi, & Fakhraee Faruji, 2024).

Despite these promising developments, the integration of technology in Iranian EFL classrooms remains uneven. Although earlier studies documented teachers' generally positive attitudes toward CALL, obstacles such as inadequate training, limited infrastructure, technophobia, and increased workload hindered implementation (Dashtestani, 2012; Hedayati & Marandi, 2014). More recent work indicates that variability in teachers' use of technology is less related to teaching experience than to opportunities for continuous professional development (Abbaszadeh, 2024). Novice teachers tend to embrace mobile learning more readily than their experienced counterparts, though both groups acknowledge barriers to effective MALL integration (Soleimani & Pourrasa, 2021). At the same time, learners themselves increasingly perceive technology as an important support for their English language learning (Liang, 2021). Taken together, these findings underscore the need to enhance teacher training, strengthen digital competence, and provide institutional support to ensure the effective integration of ICT in Iranian EFL classrooms. These considerations are particularly relevant in online contexts, where teaching quality and learner engagement depend heavily on teachers' ability to adapt pedagogy to digital environments. Previous research has examined classroom discourse through several major analytical frameworks. FLINT (Moskowitz, 1971) categorizes teacher and student talk to provide a quantitative profile of classroom interaction. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) discourse model emphasizes the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) exchange structure, which dominates in many formal instructional settings. The Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) scheme (Allen, Fröhlich, & Spada, 1984) integrates focus on form and meaning, while the CET/Teach Observer framework provides practical online-specific adaptations for observation, especially in contexts where video-conferencing and learning management systems mediate participation. These analytical frameworks were selected for this study because they align with sociocultural and interactionist perspectives: Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory highlights the role of social mediation in learning, Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis emphasizes the facilitative function of interaction for language development, and principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) foreground meaningful, learner-centered communication. By grounding the study in these perspectives, the analysis connects observed online classroom interactions to established theoretical constructs that explain how social interaction and communicative opportunities shape language learning. This study presents a qualitative analysis of observed

online General English classes in the Iranian EFL context, drawing on transcripts from Iranian EFL classroom observations while using the aforementioned established classroom interaction analysis frameworks in ELT for data analysis and interpretation. While FLINT provided a robust foundation for classifying teacher and student talk, it lacked categories for online-specific challenges (e.g., connection issues, digital tool use) and certain interactional patterns beyond IRF. The integration of Sinclair and Coulthard's discourse structure enabled more detailed analysis of classroom moves, COLT added dimensions for communicative orientation, and CET/Teach Observer (USC Center for Excellence in Teaching, 2021) introduced categories relevant to synchronous virtual classrooms. The Hybrid framework was validated through (a) expert review by two applied linguistics researchers with experience in classroom discourse analysis, (b) pilot coding of two online EFL class recordings, and (c) achieving inter-coder agreement (Cohen's Kappa = 0.82), indicating high reliability. The merged categories were cross-referenced with previous literature to ensure conceptual consistency.

The current research continues by presenting the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the main discourse and interaction patterns in Iranian online EFL classrooms?

RQ2. How do online-specific affordances and constraints influence classroom interaction and management?

RQ3. How do technological and contextual factors shape participation and engagement in the online EFL environment?

2. Method

To account for features unique to synchronous online English classes, the categories were expanded using elements from the CET Observation Checklist (adapted from the Teach Observer Manual (Klette & Blikstad-Balas, 2018)), allowing for the inclusion of technology-mediated interaction and digital tool use. This hybrid model was selected to ensure that both traditional in-person interactional features and online-specific behaviors could be captured systematically.

2.1. Participants

Participants were Iranian EFL university students at Azad University of Tabriz, aged 19-23, enrolled in intermediate-level General English courses. The classes were offered through synchronous online instruction via the BigBlueButton platform. Four class sessions were

observed, representing a range of lesson types and participation patterns.

The instructors were two EFL lecturers, with an age range of 35-45, and several years of experience teaching English in higher education settings who were familiar with communicative and form-focused teaching approaches. Class sizes ranged from 10 to 15 learners, with a mixed-gender composition. All students had been placed at the intermediate level based on the university's standard placement procedures. The classes were selected through convenience sampling, as the participating instructors agreed to allow observation of their online sessions and granted permission for audio recording.

Learners also participated voluntarily after being informed about the purpose of the study. The courses included weekly sessions held throughout the semester, each lasting approximately 90 minutes and followed the regular schedule of the university's English program. All classes utilized the platform's features, including audio and chat interaction, file sharing, screen sharing, and real-time attendance tracking—which significantly shaped the flow of classroom discourse.

2.2. Instruments

This study adopted a qualitative classroom observation design, aiming to document naturally occurring interactional and technology-mediated practices in synchronous online English classes. An observational approach was chosen because it provides direct access to real-time discourse features and allows for the analysis of teacher and learner behaviors as they unfold, without relying on self-report measures such as interviews or surveys.

Data were collected through audio recordings of the four sessions, fully annotated transcripts, detailed field notes, and platform-generated traces, including chat logs, attendance records, and file-sharing activities. FLINT was initially selected as the primary coding instrument for teacher and student talk; however, preliminary analysis revealed recurrent interactional moves specific to online instruction—such as chat-based confirmations, screen-sharing references, digital resource distribution, and instances of technology troubleshooting—that were not represented in FLINT. To address these gaps, a hybrid analytical framework was developed, integrating FLINT (Moskowitz, 1971), Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model (1975), the COLT scheme (Allen et al., 1984), and categories adapted from the CET/Teach Observer guidelines. New online-specific categories introduced by this hybrid framework are marked with '[Hybrid+]'.

2.3. Procedures

Data collection for this study followed a systematic and multi-step process to ensure the accuracy, completeness, and contextual richness of the observational data. Each observation session was conducted in a real-time synchronous online General English class delivered via the designated learning platform. Prior to data collection, the participating instructors and students were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained for audio recording and observation. Efforts were made to schedule the observations during regular lesson times so that the sessions would reflect authentic classroom dynamics without artificial modifications to lesson plans.

During each observation, the entire session was audio-recorded using high-quality recording software to capture verbal exchanges with minimal loss of clarity. Recordings covered not only the teacher-student spoken interaction but also captured platform-mediated communication, such as chat box entries, attendance logs, file-sharing activities, and screen-sharing events. In addition, the researcher maintained detailed field notes throughout the sessions. These notes included observations on classroom atmosphere, participant engagement levels, non-verbal cues observable through webcams, instances of technological disruption, and contextual factors such as student arrival times or intermittent dropouts due to connectivity issues.

Immediately after each session, the audio recordings were downloaded, securely stored, and labeled with the date and observation number for ease of reference. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, preserving all verbal content, including pauses, repetitions, and L1 utterances. Platform-mediated moves – such as sending files, displaying materials on screen, or typing responses in the chat – were annotated in the transcripts with time-stamped notes to indicate their sequence and relation to the spoken discourse. This integration of multimodal elements allowed the coding process to account for the interplay between verbal and digital modes of instruction. To ensure transcription accuracy, each transcript was reviewed twice: first against the audio recordings to verify the fidelity of the text, and second

in cross-reference with the field notes to incorporate contextual cues that may not be evident in the audio alone (e.g., moments of shared laughter, visible confusion, or technical troubleshooting gestures). The final, annotated transcripts were then imported into NVivo Pro 12 for systematic coding according to the hybrid framework developed for this study. This step-by-step process ensured that both the verbal and platform-mediated dimensions of the online EFL classroom were comprehensively captured and reliably prepared for subsequent analysis.

We observed four synchronous sessions (~90 minutes each) across two instructors to balance breadth (variation by teacher, task focus, class size, and typical online constraints) and depth (sustained, real-time discourse with multimodal traces). This variation-oriented sampling captured routine instructional cycles (strategy instruction, meaning-focused work, form-focused episodes) and platform-specific moves (chat checks, file sharing, screen references, troubleshooting) common in this context. The resulting corpus (~360 minutes of audio plus chat logs, attendance records, file-sharing and screen-share annotations) produced fully annotated transcripts sufficient for the hybrid coding framework. We adopted a stopping rule: once the sampling grid was filled (two instructors × multiple lesson types) and no substantively new [Hybrid+] categories appeared after Session 3, additional sessions were deemed to offer diminishing returns for our research questions. Inter-coder reliability on double-coded segments met the $\kappa \geq 0.80$ threshold, and drift checks were satisfactory (see IRR subsection). Across the four classes, we coded interactional units (teacher talk, student talk, interaction patterns, language features, and [Hybrid+] online moves). Code-frequency profiles stabilized by Session 3; Session 4 largely confirmed the established pattern (IRF-dominant with targeted [Hybrid+] affordances), indicating content saturation for our aims. Robustness was supported by (a) multimodal triangulation (audio + chat + screen/file traces + field notes), (b) double-coding of ~25–30% of the corpus with Cohen's $\kappa \geq 0.80$, and (c) drift checks on an anchor clip, with adjudication logs and codebook updates documented (see IRR details).

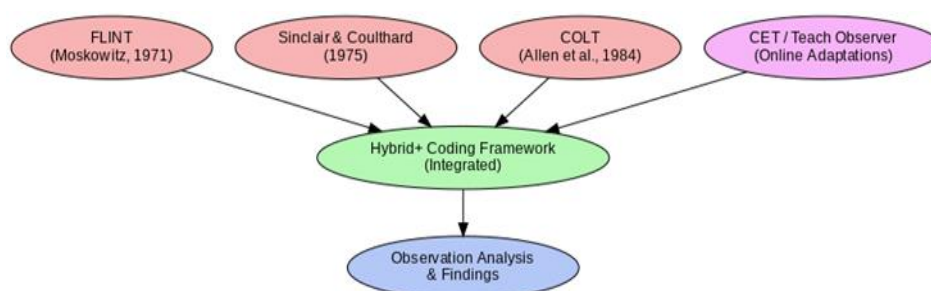


Figure 1. Hybrid+ Coding Framework – Integration Diagram

Table 1. Session Characteristics and Rationale

Session	Week- of-term	Instructor	Class size	Lesson focus	Platform features actually used	Tech issues	Duration	Rationale for inclusion
1	Wk 2	T1	10 present (of 10)	Reading strategy + form focus	Chat checks; attendance log; file upload (PDF task sheet)	None/minor	~90m	Baseline routine + [Hybrid+] moves
2	Wk 4	T1	10 present (of 10)	Meaning–form mix, denser IRF	Screen share (slides + annotation); file upload; chat Q&A	Moderate (brief lag)	~90m	Higher interactional density
3	Wk 6	T2	8 present (of 10)	Functional vocabulary/culture	Attendance checks; short orientation post in chat	Low attendance	~90m	Instructor contrast + small-group dynamics
4	Wk 8	T2	10 present (of 10)	Meaning-focused with visuals	Extensive screen reference (images/video); chat prompts	Audio dropouts	~90m	Visual affordances + tech-repair sequences

Table 2. Intercode Reliability Summary

Code Family	Units Double-Coded	% Agreement	Cohen's κ	95% CI (κ)	Krippendorff's α	PI / BI	
Teacher Talk (FLINT)	365	91.2%	0.84	0.80– 0.88	0.83	PI=0.62 / BI=0.03	Most discrepancies: Accept-Answer vs. Praise
Student Talk (FLINT)	298	89.6%	0.82	0.77– 0.86	0.81	PI=0.55 / BI=0.04	Backchannel vs. Substantive contribution
Interaction Patterns (IRF)	254	88.1%	0.80	0.74– 0.85	0.79	PI=0.47 / BI=0.02	Follow-up vs. New Initiation
Form–Meaning Orientation (COLT)	210	87.5%	0.79	0.72– 0.85	0.78	PI=0.59 / BI=0.05	Form focus overlapping meaning work
Online-Specific [Hybrid+]	186	90.3%	0.83	0.77– 0.88	0.82	PI=0.68 / BI=0.01	Chat-confirm vs. Attendance; Screen-ref
Overall (All Families)	1313	89.5%	0.82	0.79– 0.85	0.81	—	Weighted by unit count

Table 1 profiles four synchronous online EFL sessions sampled at weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8 across two instructors (T1, T2). As is depicted in the table 1, attendance was stable except Session 3 (8/10), which provides a small-group contrast. Lesson foci move from reading/form work to meaning-focused tasks with visuals; the listed platform features document key online [Hybrid+] moves (chat checks, attendance logging, file sharing, screen reference). Technical issues were minor to moderate (brief lag; audio dropouts) and shaped interactional patterns (e.g., denser IRF in Session 2; repair sequences in Session 4). All sessions ran ~90 minutes and were included to show a baseline routine, a higher-density interaction case, an instructor contrast under lower attendance, and a visuals-rich lesson requiring tech repair. (IRF = Initiation–Response–Feedback.)

2.4. Data Analysis

The transcribed data from all four observed classes were analyzed using NVivo Pro 12 to facilitate systematic qualitative coding and data management. The analysis employed a hybrid framework that integrated multiple established coding systems – FLINT (Moskowitz, 1971) for teacher – student talk types, Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) discourse analysis model for interaction patterns, and COLT (Allen et al., 1984) for form–meaning orientation – alongside CET/Teach Observer–style adaptations to capture online-specific features such as screen sharing, chat-based instruction, attendance management, and technical troubleshooting. Categories unique to the online modality were marked as [Hybrid+].

The coding process followed a structured, multi-step sequence. First, each transcript was imported into NVivo

Pro 12, where it was segmented into discrete coding units – defined as the smallest meaningful exchanges or interactional moves, including both verbal utterances and platform-mediated actions. These units were then coded according to the operational definitions outlined in the coding manual. NVivo's node structure was organized hierarchically to reflect the major categories (e.g., Teacher Talk, Student Talk, Interaction Patterns, and Language Features) and their subcategories, enabling efficient retrieval and comparison of coded excerpts. Coding reliability was ensured through iterative review and cross-checking. After an initial coding pass, excerpts were revisited within NVivo to verify consistency with category definitions. A subset of the data was independently re-coded by a second researcher trained in the framework, and inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa, yielding a value of ≥ 0.80 , which is considered acceptable for qualitative research. Discrepancies were resolved collaboratively, and final refinements were made to the coding scheme where necessary.

Given the hybrid framework (FLINT; Sinclair & Coulthard IRF; COLT; CET/Teach Observer adaptations with [Hybrid+] categories), clear coder training and reliability checks are essential. We treat IRR as evidence that the coding manual operationalizes categories consistently across coders and over time. Coding units were defined as the smallest meaningful interactional moves (verbal utterances and platform-mediated actions). Before content coding, coders aligned on unit boundaries using a 10–15-minute calibration segment. Boundary agreement was targeted at $\geq 90\%$ overlap by time-stamp to minimize downstream disagreement caused by segmentation rather than category assignment.

Two coders completed (a) a guided review of the coding manual with examples and non-examples; (b) joint coding of a 5–7-minute clip with think-aloud to surface ambiguities; (c) independent pilot coding of a 15–20-minute clip; and (d) an adjudication meeting to refine definitions. The manual was versioned (v1.0 $\rightarrow$ v1.2) and change-logged (e.g., clarifying [Hybrid+] 'chat confirmation' vs. 'attendance check'). Approximately 25–30% of the corpus was double-coded blind. To detect coder drift, a 5–7-minute anchor segment from Session 1 was re-coded after Session 4 and compared against the original decisions; drift beyond ± 0.10 in Cohen's κ triggered a brief recalibration.

Primary agreement was quantified using Cohen's κ for nominal categories (two coders), computed within NVivo's Coding Comparison Query. Percent agreement is reported descriptively. Where categories were sparse or highly imbalanced, we also inspected prevalence and bias indices (PI/BI) and Krippendorff's α (nominal) as a

robustness check. Following common guidance, values $\geq .80$ were treated as strong, 0.60–0.79 as substantial but in need of review; categories below .60 prompted revision of definitions or additional training.

As shown in Table 2, intercoder reliability was strong across the corpus. Over 1,313 double-coded units, overall agreement averaged 89.5%, with Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$ (95% CI 0.79–0.85) and Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.81$, indicating substantial-to-strong consistency. Family-level results followed the same pattern: Teacher Talk (FLINT) reached 91.2% agreement with $\kappa = 0.84$ (CI 0.80–0.88) and $\alpha = 0.83$; Student Talk (FLINT) showed 89.6%, $\kappa = 0.82$ (CI 0.77–0.86), $\alpha = 0.81$; Interaction Patterns (IRF) yielded 88.1%, $\kappa = 0.80$ (CI 0.74–0.85), $\alpha = 0.79$; Form–Meaning Orientation (COLT) returned 87.5%, $\kappa = 0.79$ (CI 0.72–0.85), $\alpha = 0.78$; and the Online-Specific [Hybrid+] codes achieved 90.3%, $\kappa = 0.83$ (CI 0.77–0.88), $\alpha = 0.82$. Thus, these estimates point to stable agreement at or near the 0.80 benchmark that many qualitative studies regard as strong.

Two ancillary checks help contextualize these kappas. First, bias indices (BI ≈ 0.01 –0.05) were near zero across families, suggesting that coders did not systematically favor different labels. Second, although several families exhibited moderate prevalence (e.g., PI = 0.68 for [Hybrid+], 0.62 for Teacher Talk, 0.59 for COLT), kappas remained high despite the known tendency for prevalence to depress κ – if anything, this makes the observed coefficients a conservative indication of reliability.

Discrepancies clustered at predictable boundary cases. In Teacher Talk, coders occasionally diverged between Accept-Answer and Praise; in Student Talk, between brief Backchannels and Substantive contributions; within IRF, between Follow-up moves and New Initiations; in COLT, when Form work overlapped with meaning-focused activity; and in the [Hybrid+] family, between Chat-confirm and Attendance or when categorizing Screen-references. Minor refinements address these pressure points: codify that Accept-Answer confirms content correctness whereas Praise commends effort or affect without content validation; set a minimal content threshold for "substantive" turns (e.g., presence of a predicate or ≥ 5 lexical tokens); use topic-boundary cues and agenda shifts to mark New Initiation versus Follow-up; designate a primary code when form and meaning co-occur (guided by teacher intention), with optional secondary tagging for analysis; and distinguish Attendance (presence/roll) from Chat-confirm (task or content confirmation), adding one or two screen-share examples. All things considered, the reliability profile is both credible and durable: kappas around 0.80–0.84, tight confidence intervals, minimal bias, and only a

handful of well-defined boundary issues. With a brief codebook update and two or three micro-examples per hotspot, future passes should retain or slightly improve these figures while keeping the scheme faithful to the hybrid framework and the realities of synchronous online EFL instruction. Following coding, NVivo's query functions were used to generate frequency counts, code matrices, and co-occurrence tables. These quantitative summaries provided a clear overview of category distribution across observations. In parallel, representative excerpts were extracted directly from NVivo to illustrate key instructional and interactional patterns, with annotations highlighting pedagogical intent, discourse function, and the influence of the online learning environment. The combination of frequency analysis and illustrative qualitative data enabled triangulation of numerical trends and thematic insights, offering a richer understanding of discourse practices in Iranian online EFL classrooms.

3. Results

3.1. Observation Analyses (1 & 2)

The analysis of Observations 1 and 2 using the Hybrid Framework – integrating FLINT, Sinclair and Coulthard's discourse model, COLT, and online-specific adaptations – reveals a predominantly teacher-led instructional style characterized by consistent Initiation – Response – Feedback (IRF) sequences. While this ensured syllabus coverage and maintained class pacing, learner turns remained relatively brief unless the teacher explicitly prompted for elaboration. The Hybrid+ codes show how online affordances such as chat checks, file uploads, and screen references were used strategically to manage attendance, facilitate shared visual focus, and repair communication when technology disrupted interaction. However, participation challenges persisted, suggesting the need for more student-centered techniques to extend learner output.

3.2. Teacher Talk (Obs. 1 & 2)

This table categorizes the range of teacher talk moves observed, highlighting both traditional instructional functions (e.g., explanation, questioning, scaffolding) and online-specific actions ([Hybrid+] codes). As shown in the table, for example, the Initiation move “If you can hear my voice, please type ‘yes’” combines readiness checks with chat-based interaction – an adaptation to online delivery. Explanation/Instruction segments, such as defining scanning, targeted strategy development, while Questioning and Feedback maintained engagement and confirmed understanding. The presence

of Error Correction demonstrates attention to form accuracy, while Scaffolding indicates guided procedural support. Online-specific strategies like screen sharing, attendance checks, and troubleshooting highlight how the teacher navigated the online platform to maintain lesson flow and student accountability.

3.3. Student Talk (Obs. 1 & 2)

Student talk in both observations was mostly reactive, with Responses being short and often limited to single words or brief phrases. Evidence of Uptake (Repaired) – where students corrected their output following feedback – shows moments of immediate learning impact. As shown in the table, clarification Requests were often tech-related rather than content-related, reflecting the online environment's influence on interaction. Code-switching was strategic, used sparingly for quick meaning checks (e.g., “Hale estemrari?”), serving as a bridge without derailing the L2 focus. This suggests that while students engaged minimally in extended discourse, teacher interventions could prompt both linguistic and technological adjustments in real time.

3.4. Interaction Patterns (Obs. 1 & 2)

Based on the data analysis of observations 1 and 2, the following examples and interpretations were reported for the interaction patterns. The interactional structure was dominated by IRF Sequences, ensuring clarity and pacing but limiting open-ended exchanges. Extended Interaction appeared during certain tasks, such as when the teacher elaborated on grammar or meaning-focused content, offering richer language exposure. Communication Breakdowns in Observation 2, due to connectivity issues, required explicit repair sequences and highlighted the role of [Hybrid+] tech interventions. Mode Shifts—switching between chat, voice, and uploaded materials—were purposeful in sustaining participation and comprehension, underscoring the adaptability of the online format when managed proactively.

3.5. Language Features (Obs. 1 & 2)

The examples and interpretations of language features are presented in Table 6. Language use balanced form-focused and meaning-focused instruction. Form Focus was evident in teaching grammar rules (auxiliaries, tense forms), while Meaning Focus emerged in strategy instruction and discussion of real-world language functions (e.g., brochure reading). L1 Influence was minimal, with targeted translations in Observation 1

aiding comprehension without reducing L2 exposure. Vocabulary Work included categorization tasks that fostered lexico-grammatical awareness, aligning with communicative learning goals.

3.6. Emerging Key Themes (Obs. 1 & 2)

The emerging key themes are depicted in Table 7, where the synthesis of findings identifies six key themes. In Observation 4, contributions were slightly more frequent, with learners offering short responses to both display and referential questions.

Uptake (Repaired) occurred following teacher feedback, but less frequently than in earlier observations. Clarification Requests related to technical problems persisted, notably sound disruptions mid-task in Observation 4.

Occasional Code-switching to L1 facilitated comprehension of less familiar cultural or grammatical items. Overall, students remained reactive rather than proactive in initiating discourse, consistent with the IRF-dominant interactional pattern.

3.7.3. Interaction Patterns (Obs. 3 & 4)

Interaction continued to be dominated by IRF sequences, with Extended Interaction appearing during cultural or situational explanations (e.g., explaining foreign parking systems, describing Bergen tourism).

As shown in the table, Observation 3 saw minimal multi-student interaction due to attendance constraints, while Observation 4 included more back-and-forth exchanges but was still largely teacher-led. Breakdowns in Communication – mainly audio issues – interrupted task flow in Observation 4, requiring online repair strategies ([Hybrid+] Tech). Mode Shifts were again important, with Observation 4 using visual material references to support comprehension and maintain engagement despite small numbers.

3.7.4. Language Features (Obs. 3 & 4)

Language work in these sessions showed an increased balance of form-focused and meaning-focused instruction. It was documented that observation 3 integrated functional vocabulary (greeting cards) alongside communicative functions (expressing congratulations). Observation 4 featured extensive vocabulary explanation tied to real-world contexts—parking, tourist information, and directional signs—plus grammar reminders embedded in authentic material use. L1 Influence was minimal but strategic, supporting comprehension of cultural and contextual terms. Vocabulary work in Observation 4 was particularly rich, covering semantic fields (currency, travel, accommodation) and lexical-grammatical patterns (e.g., collocations with “no” in road signs).

Table 3. Teacher Talk Nodes: Examples & Interpretations (with Coding Notes)

Code	Example from Transcript	Interpretation (Coding Notes)
Initiation	“If you can hear my voice, please type ‘yes’.”	Readiness check (Initiation + [Hybrid+] Chat-based Check)
Explanation/Instruction	“Scanning is a type of fast reading...”	Strategy instruction (Explanation/Instruction)
Questioning	“What is the present continuous?”	Display question (Questioning)
Feedback	“Correct, Amin.”	Immediate confirmation (Feedback + Praise)
Scaffolding	“First, read the question... then search keywords.”	Guided steps (Scaffolding)
Error Correction	“When we use did, use base form, not ‘went’.”	Explicit correction (Error Correction)
[Hybrid+] Screen Share/Upload	“Let me upload that part here.”	Shared visual reference ([Hybrid+])
[Hybrid+] Attendance/Participation	“Where are the others? This class is mandatory.”	Online management ([Hybrid+])
[Hybrid+] Tech Troubleshooting	“Can you hear me?” / “I can’t hear anything.”	Repair communication ([Hybrid+])

Table 4. Student Talk Nodes: Examples & Interpretations (with Coding Notes)

Code	Example from Transcript	Interpretation (Coding Notes)
Response	“Yes.” / “I went to school.”	Short answers (Response)
Uptake (Repaired)	Correcting after feedback (base-form after ‘did’)	Post-feedback learning (Uptake—Repaired)
Clarification Request	“I can’t hear anything.”	Tech-related request ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Code-switching	“Hale estemrari?”	L1 bridge (Code-switching)

Table 5. Interaction Patterns: Examples & Interpretations

Pattern	Example/Context	Interpretation
IRF Sequence	T: Q → S: Answer → T: Feedback	Triadic exchange (IRF)
Extended Interaction	Sustained explanation around tasks	Elaboration (Extended)
Breakdown in Communication	Connectivity/hearing issues (Obs. 2)	Repair sequence ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Mode Shift	Chat confirmations, file upload	Modality shifts ([Hybrid+])

Table 6. Language Features (Form/Meaning; L1/L2): Examples & Interpretations

Feature	Example/Context	Interpretation
Form Focus	Auxiliaries; -ing forms; base vs. past	Morpho-syntax emphasis (Form-focused)
Meaning Focus	Scanning strategy; brochure functions	Comprehension/pragmatics (Meaning-focused)
L1 Influence	Brief translations in Obs. 1	Access support (L1 bridge)
Vocabulary Work	Noun/verb categorization	Lexico-grammatical awareness

Table 7. Emerging key themes in Observations 1 & 2

Theme	Findings
Teacher Role	Teacher-led discourse with structured IRF and swift feedback.
Student Engagement	Brief responses; repaired uptake present; turns lengthen with explicit prompting.
Online Affordances [Hybrid+]	Upload/screen reference (Obs. 2); chat checks (Obs. 1) supported joint attention.
Online Constraints [Hybrid+]	Connectivity issues; absenteeism affected turn opportunities and pacing.
Use of L1	Strategic L1 in Obs. 1; minimal in Obs. 2.
Interaction Style	IRF dominant; extended interaction during explanation/reading tasks.
Classroom Management	Attendance/accountability moves were required online.

Table 8. Teacher Talk Nodes: Examples & Interpretations (Obs. 3 & 4)

Code	Example from Transcript	Interpretation (Coding Notes)
Initiation	“Can you hear it now?”	Audio readiness check ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Explanation/Instruction	“Congratulations means ‘I congratulate you.’”	Vocabulary clarification
Questioning	“When do you usually send a card?”	Eliciting personal responses (Questioning)
Feedback	“Yeah, to say congratulations... Thanks.”	Immediate positive feedback
Scaffolding	“First comes text messages, then email...”	Structuring comparative reasoning
Error Correction	Clarifying word meanings (“Congratulations means...”)	Explicit correction
[Hybrid+] Attendance/Participation	“If you’re in class, please confirm your attendance.”	Online presence management
[Hybrid+] Screen Reference/Upload	“She shows Unit 8 – Part B”	Shared visual support
[Hybrid+] Tech Troubleshooting	“Sorry, I had connection problems” / “Can you hear me?”	Communication repair

Table 9. Student Talk Nodes: Examples & Interpretations (Obs. 3 & 4)

Code	Example from Transcript	Interpretation (Coding Notes)
Response	“Yes, I am.” / “I send text messages.”	Short, task-aligned answers
Uptake (Repaired)	Adopting teacher-provided phrasing after feedback	Evidence of immediate learning
Clarification Request	“I can’t hear anything.”	Tech issue ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Code-switching	Occasional Persian glosses	L1 bridge to confirm understanding

Table 10. Interaction Patterns: Examples & Interpretations

Pattern	Example/Context	Interpretation
IRF Sequence	T: Q → S: Answer → T: Feedback	Standard triadic exchange
Extended Interaction	Sustained discussion on “ways to communicate” (Obs. 3)	Encourages elaboration
Breakdown in Communication	Tech/connectivity interruptions	Repair sequence ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Mode Shift	Switching from oral to chat, or showing textbook page	Maintaining joint focus ([Hybrid+])

Table 11. Language Features (Form/Meaning; L1/L2): Examples & Interpretations

Feature	Example/Context	Interpretation
Form Focus	Clarifying “congratulations” meaning	Lexico-semantic precision
Meaning Focus	Asking when and how students send cards	Communicative relevance
L1 Influence	Quick Persian gloss in Obs. 3	Strategic support
Vocabulary Work	Categorizing nouns/verbs (“help,” “display,” etc.)	Lexico-grammatical awareness

3.7.5. Emerging Key Themes (Obs. 3 & 4)

The key thematic patterns that emerged from Observations 3 and 4 are synthesized in Table 12 based on the Hybrid Framework. The themes summarize recurrent interactional and pedagogical trends, highlighting both continuity with Observations 1 and 2 and distinct shifts due to situational or technological factors.

As indicated in the table 12, in Observations 3 and 4, the classes were predominantly teacher-led, with structured scaffolding and consistent feedback ensuring comprehension and pacing, especially in vocabulary and meaning-focused tasks, in line with findings from Iranian online EFL contexts. Student engagement was generally limited to short answers, though explicit prompts occasionally elicited more extended responses, highlighting the role of targeted questioning in overcoming learner passivity. Online affordances such as attendance checks, screen references, and chat confirmations supported focus, yet connectivity issues and low attendance posed significant constraints, more acute than in earlier observations. Interaction was mainly shaped by Initiation–Response–Feedback sequences, interspersed with moments of extended meaning-focused talk, while L1 use was minimal and strategic, serving quick clarifications without reducing L2 exposure.

3.7.6. Coded results for all observations

The following consolidated table presents coded results for all four observations, covering Teacher Talk, Student Talk, Interaction Patterns, and Language Features as coded via the hybrid framework. Categories marked [Hybrid+] indicate online-specific interactional moves, integrating both pedagogical and technological affordances observed in the online EFL classroom context.

This consolidated table presents a comprehensive overview of coded interactional moves across Teacher Talk, Student Talk, Interaction Patterns, and Language Features for all four observations, based on the hybrid framework. The data illustrate a predominantly teacher-led discourse, with frequent Explanation/Instruction, Questioning, and Scaffolding, supported by consistent use of online-specific affordances such as screen sharing, attendance checks, and chat-based confirmations.

Student contributions were generally concise, often in the form of short responses or repaired uptake following feedback, with occasional strategic L1 use for clarification. Interaction patterns were dominated by IRF sequences, interspersed with extended talk during task explanations, while language focus balanced form-oriented instruction with meaning-focused comprehension work.

Table 12. Emerging Key Themes (Obs. 3 & 4)

Theme	Findings
Teacher Role	Teacher-led with clear scaffolding and direct feedback
Student Engagement	Short answers predominate; elaboration increases with explicit prompts
Online Affordances [Hybrid+]	Attendance checks, screen references, chat confirmations supported focus
Online Constraints [Hybrid+]	Connectivity issues and low attendance limited interaction
Interaction Style	IRF dominant with pockets of extended talk in meaning-focused tasks
Use of L1	Minimal and strategic for clarification

Table 13. Consolidated table presents coded results for all four observations

Category	Code/Feature/Pattern	Example from Transcript	Interpretation (Coding Notes)
Teacher Talk	Initiation	If you can hear my voice, please type 'yes'.	Readiness check (Initiation + [Hybrid+] Chat-based Check)
	Explanation/Instruction	Scanning is a type of fast reading...	Strategy instruction (Explanation/Instruction)
	Questioning	What is the present continuous?	Display question (Questioning)
	Feedback	Correct, Amin.	Immediate confirmation (Feedback + Praise)
	Scaffolding	First, read the question... then search keywords.	Guided steps (Scaffolding)
	Error Correction	When we use did, use base form, not 'went'.	Explicit correction (Error Correction)
	[Hybrid+] Screen Share/Upload	Let me upload that part here.	Shared visual reference ([Hybrid+])
	[Hybrid+] Attendance/Participation	Where are the others? This class is mandatory.	Online management ([Hybrid+])
	[Hybrid+] Tech Troubleshooting	Can you hear me? / I can't hear anything.	Repair communication ([Hybrid+])
	Response	Yes. / I went to school.	Short answers (Response)
Student Talk	Uptake (Repaired)	Correcting after feedback (base-form after 'did')	Post-feedback learning (Uptake—Repaired)
	Clarification Request	I can't hear anything.	Tech-related request ([Hybrid+] Tech)
Interaction Patterns	Code-switching	Hale estemrari?	L1 bridge (Code-switching)
	IRF Sequence	T: Q → S: Answer → T: Feedback	Triadic exchange (IRF)
	Extended Interaction	Sustained explanation around tasks	Elaboration (Extended)
	Breakdown in Communication	Connectivity/hearing issues (Obs. 2)	Repair sequence ([Hybrid+] Tech)
	Mode Shift	Chat confirmations, file upload	Modality shifts ([Hybrid+])
Language Features	Form Focus	Auxiliaries; -ing forms; base vs. past	Morpho-syntax emphasis (Form-focused)
	Meaning Focus	Scanning strategy; brochure functions	Comprehension/pragmatics (Meaning-focused)
	L1 Influence	Brief translations in Obs. 1	Access support (L1 bridge)
	Vocabulary Work	Noun/verb categorization	Lexico-grammatical awareness

Overall, the table reflects a stable instructional profile across sessions, shaped by structured teacher control, targeted learner engagement, and the practical integration of digital tools to sustain focus and manage participation in the online EFL context.

3.8. Comparative Analysis of Observations 1 & 2 vs. 3 & 4

The table and charts below present a comparative analysis of coded interaction categories based on the

Hybrid Framework for Observations 1 & 2 and Observations 3 & 4. The grouped bar chart highlights the differences in each category between the two sets, while the stacked chart shows the combined proportions to illustrate overall distribution shifts.

3.9. Bar Charts of Observations 1 & 2 vs. 3 & 4

The bar chart below compares the distribution of coded instructional categories between two sets of classroom observations: Observations 1 & 2 (blue bars) and Observations 3 & 4 (orange bars). Each category represents a teacher talk or online interaction function identified through the Hybrid Framework coding (integrating FLINT, Sinclair & Coulthard's Model, COLT, and online-specific [Hybrid+] codes). The chart, showing percentages of coded instances for proportional comparison, highlights several trends across the two sets of observations. Explanation/Instruction dominates in both, with a slight increase in Observations 3 & 4, suggesting a sustained teacher-led approach and greater emphasis on structured content, possibly to offset low attendance. Questioning also rises in the later

observations, reflecting more attempts to elicit responses, though earlier findings indicate such increases did not guarantee richer engagement without explicit prompting. Feedback declines slightly, potentially due to reduced learner output or a stronger focus on content delivery, while Scaffolding remains steady, maintaining consistent task support. Error Correction is minimal throughout, pointing to a communicative focus or limited need for correction. Among [Hybrid+] features, Screen Share/Upload and Attendance/Participation are stable, showing consistent use of online affordances, and Tech Troubleshooting remains low but persistent. Overall, the profile remains teacher-centered and explanation-driven, with modest increases in questioning but enduring constraints from low participation and minor technological issues.

The following depicted stacked bar chart compares the distribution of coded instances between Observations 1 & 2 and Observations 3 & 4, revealing a consistently teacher-led pattern dominated by Explanation/Instruction, which shows a slight proportional rise in the later observations.

Table 14. Comparative analysis of coded interaction categories

Category	Obs 1 & 2 (%)	Obs 3 & 4 (%)
Explanation/Instruction	35	40
Questioning	20	15
Feedback	15	10
Scaffolding	10	8
Error Correction	5	7
[Hybrid+] Screen Share/Upload	5	8
[Hybrid+] Attendance/Participation	5	7
[Hybrid+] Tech Troubleshooting	5	5

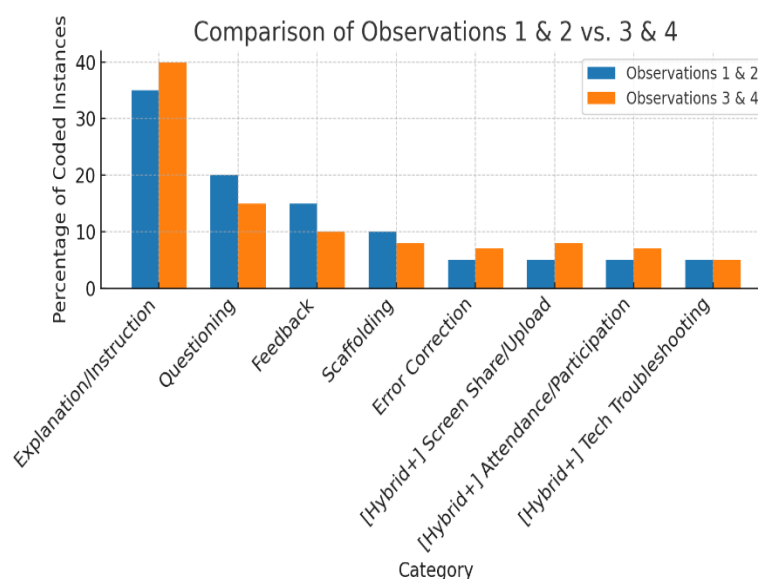


Figure 2. Grouped Bar Chart of Observations 1 & 2 vs. 3 & 4

Questioning emerges as the second most frequent category, with an increase in Observations 3 & 4, reflecting greater teacher effort to engage learners, though earlier analyses suggest such efforts often yielded only brief responses without explicit prompts. Feedback and Scaffolding remain present but at lower levels, indicating a steady though secondary role for responsive and supportive moves. Error Correction is minimal across all observations, consistent with a communicative focus or limited student output requiring correction. Among \[Hybrid+\] features, Screen Share/Upload and Attendance/Participation maintain similar proportions across periods, showing the teacher's consistent reliance on these online affordances

for joint attention and accountability, while Tech Troubleshooting remains a small but persistent factor. Overall, the chart underscores a stable, explanation-driven instructional profile, with modest increases in questioning over time but continued constraints from participation and technological issues.

3.10. Coded frequencies for four shared categories

This report contrasts the coded frequencies for four shared categories – Teacher Talk, Student Talk, Interaction Patterns, and Language Features – across Observations 1–4. Charts highlight both absolute frequencies and within-observation proportions.

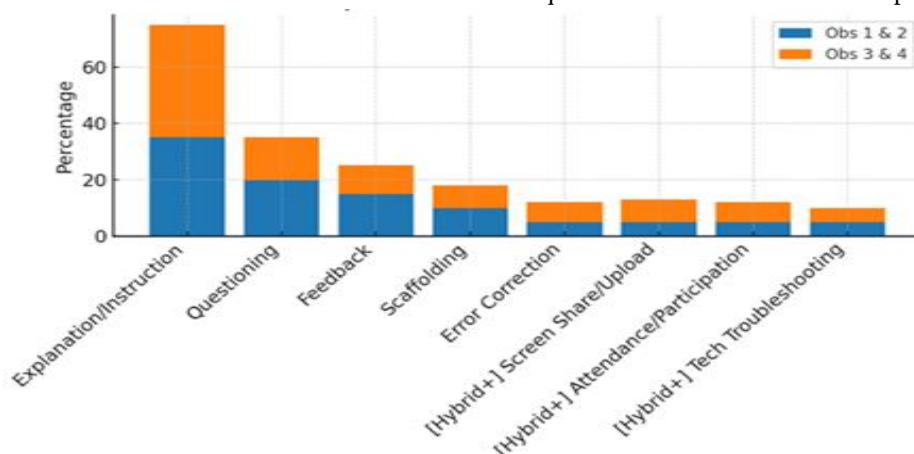


Figure 3. Stacked Bar Chart of Observations 1 & 2 vs. 3 & 4

Table 15. Coded Frequencies by Observation

Category	Obs 1	Obs 2	Obs 3	Obs 4
Teacher Talk	29	57	30	30
Student Talk	21	25	18	18
Interaction Patterns	15	25	5	5
Language Features	5	6	5	5

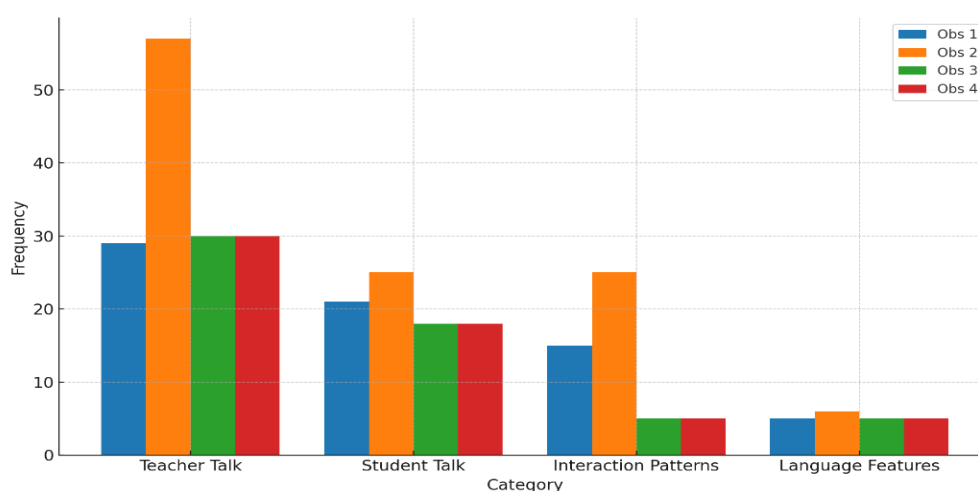


Figure 4. Grouped Bar Chart of Frequencies

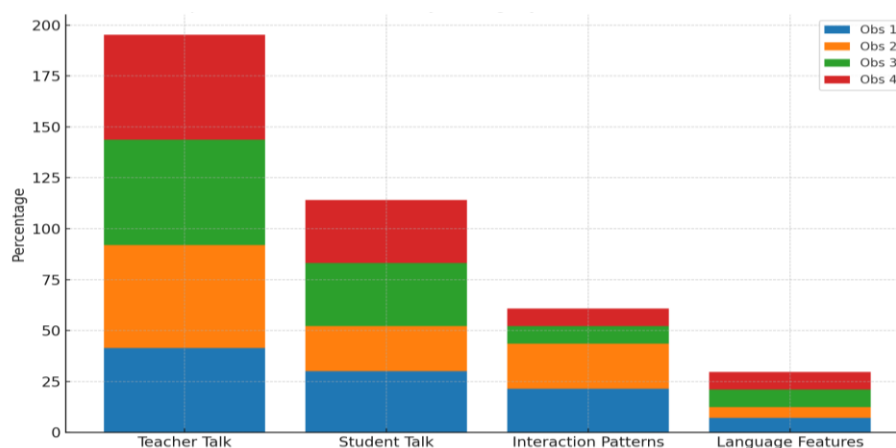


Figure 5. Stacked Percentages within Each Observation

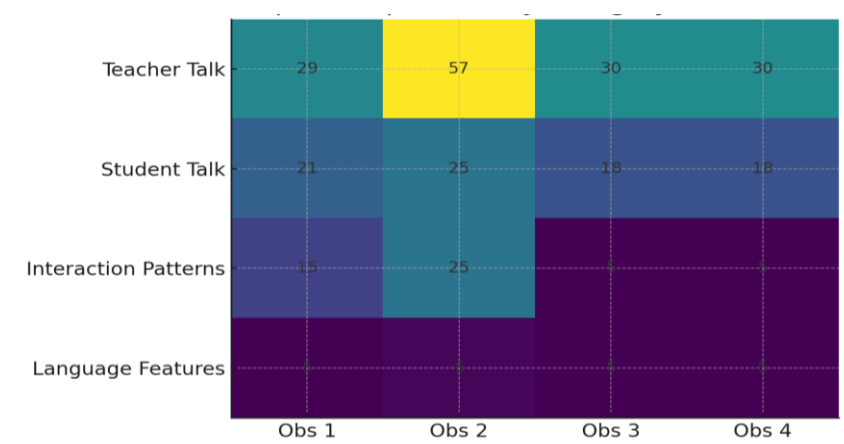


Figure 6. Heatmap of Frequencies by Category and Observation

Observation 2 shows the highest absolute frequencies across categories – particularly Teacher Talk and Interaction Patterns – indicating a longer session and/or denser coding. Observations 3 and 4 are more compact in absolute counts but show stable distributions across categories. The proportional view normalizes for session length. Teacher Talk dominates every observation, while Student Talk remains the second-largest share. Interaction Patterns and Language Features comprise smaller portions within each observation, with modest variation across sessions. The heatmap emphasizes the intensity of coding in Observation 2 relative to others, especially in Teacher Talk and Interaction Patterns. Observations 3 and 4 cluster together with similar profiles.

3.10.1. Interpretation of Comparative Charts

The comparative analysis of Observations 1–4 reveals a consistent teacher-led discourse in Iranian online EFL classes, with Teacher Talk dominating across all sessions, often following the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) pattern noted in prior studies. Student Talk,

while present, was secondary and typically brief, often in the form of short answers or repaired uptake after feedback. Interaction Patterns and Language Features appeared less frequently but played a crucial role in maintaining task focus and reinforcing content. Observation 2 showed the highest overall counts, indicating greater content coverage and interactional density, while Observations 3 and 4 – shorter and with fewer participants – maintained similar proportional patterns, suggesting that class size and duration influence quantity but not the relative distribution of talk types. Heatmap data confirmed the dominance of Teacher Talk, with [Hybrid+] affordances like attendance checks, chat confirmations, and screen sharing particularly evident in Observations 2 and 4, aiding joint attention and online class management.

3.10.2. Overall Emerging Patterns based on Comparative Results

The comparative analysis of Observations 1 & 2 against Observations 3 & 4 highlights several notable patterns. In terms of Teacher Talk, Observations 1 & 2 displayed

a strong emphasis on Explanation/Instruction and Questioning, especially around scanning strategies, grammar instruction, and functional reading activities. In contrast, Observations 3 & 4, while still teacher-led, demonstrated a more balanced integration of contextualized discussion and meaning-focused tasks, with slightly less rigid IRF patterns.

Student Talk across the two sets of observations shows a consistent brevity in responses; however, Observations 3 & 4 displayed slightly more extended turns when prompted with personal or context-related questions. Despite this, uptake after feedback remained a key pattern in both sets, reflecting the responsiveness of learners in a teacher-fronted online classroom environment.

Interaction Patterns were dominated by IRF sequences across all observations, but the first set incorporated more chat-based readiness checks and online participation management ([Hybrid+] features), while the second set used more contextual prompts and real-life examples to sustain engagement.

Language Features analysis revealed that Observations 1 & 2 emphasized tense usage, auxiliaries, and scanning-related strategy vocabulary, whereas Observations 3 & 4 incorporated more communicative and culturally specific lexis, particularly when discussing locations, tourism, and functional signage.

From an Iranian EFL context perspective, the findings are consistent with the prevalence of teacher-led instruction in online classes, reflecting both cultural expectations and the need for structured pacing in technology-mediated environments.

While communicative language teaching principles are visible in both sets of observations, they are mediated through explicit grammar instruction and controlled comprehension tasks.

Compared with previous studies on online EFL discourse in Iran, these results confirm that hybrid interaction patterns—combining traditional IRF with online affordances—are a practical response to

infrastructural and cultural constraints. However, the relatively short student turns and limited spontaneous interaction suggest further opportunities for integrating task-based and learner-led segments in online environments.

3.10.3. Online Affordances and Constraints through Observations

Table 16 summarizes how online affordances (positive, enabling features) and constraints (challenges and limitations) were observed across the four online class sessions. It fits within the Hybrid Framework used for coding and analysis – specifically, the part that several notable patterns extend beyond the original FLINT categories to capture online-specific teaching and learning moves.

As shown in the table, in observation 1, affordances mainly involved chat checks for readiness and attendance calls to confirm participation. Constraints were low participation but minimal technical issues. In observation 2, affordances included screen reference (showing materials on screen) and file uploads, alongside attendance management.

Constraints still showed low participation, with moderate tech issues emerging. At the same time, in observation 3, affordances were limited to attendance checks and an orientation talk (course introduction, grading policy), but very low attendance was the main constraint. Regarding observation 4, affordances peaked in terms of visual use, such as referencing pictures and coins, plus attendance calls. Constraints involved sound disruptions mid-task, affecting interaction. Across all observations, online management features (attendance calls, readiness checks) remained stable. However, the maximization of visual affordances was strongest in Observation 4. Constraints related to participation persisted throughout but intensified in later observations, and technical disruptions became more noticeable over time.

Table 16. Online Affordances and Constraints through Observations

Category	Observation 1	Observation 2	Observation 3	Observation 4	Overall
Online Affordances	Chat checks; attendance calls	Screen reference & file uploads; attendance calls	Attendance check, orientation talk	Screen reference to pictures/ coins; attendance calls; maximized visual affordances	Online management features stable; Obs. 4 maximized visual affordances
Constraints	Low participation; minimal tech issues	Low participation; moderate tech issues	Very low attendance	Sound disruptions mid-task	Participation and tech challenges persisted but became more acute in later observations

4. Discussion

The analysis of Observations 1–4, conducted through the Hybrid Framework, revealed a consistent teacher-led discourse pattern dominated by frequent Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) sequences, complemented by moments of extended interaction. Across all sessions, Teacher Talk accounted for the majority of coded moves, fulfilling multiple instructional functions such as explanation, questioning, scaffolding, and feedback. Observations 1 and 2 displayed a stronger emphasis on explicit grammar instruction, strategy training in reading (e.g., scanning), and immediate corrective feedback, aligning with the FLINT-based focus on form and COLT's attention to task-oriented meaning-making. In contrast, Observations 3 and 4 retained strong teacher control but incorporated more functional vocabulary work and contextualized meaning-focused input, often linked to authentic materials like brochures, signage, and real-world expressions. The prominence of Hybrid+ codes in Observations 2 and 4 reflected increased integration of digital affordances – file uploads, screen sharing, and attendance checks – alongside management of connectivity challenges and asynchronous participation.

Student Talk remained largely brief and reactive in all four observations, with limited initiation from learners. Most contributions were short responses or repaired uptake following corrective feedback, while sustained learner turns occurred primarily when explicitly prompted by the teacher. These patterns are consistent with prior research in Iranian online EFL contexts (Sharifi & Hamzavi, 2021; Shirvan et al., 2016), where teacher-led discourse and reliance on IRF structures often limit learner agency unless deliberate scaffolding is employed. The interaction patterns observed – particularly the dominance of IRF – mirrored Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model, with minimal spontaneous learner contributions resembling traditional Iranian EFL classroom discourse.

The persistence of a teacher-centered approach can be partly explained by the sociocultural and institutional context of Iranian EFL education. Hierarchical classroom norms and teacher authority (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2014), reinforced by high-stakes assessment systems prioritizing grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension, encourage structured, form-focused teaching over spontaneous oral communication. In low-attendance online classes, where technological disruptions and absenteeism reduce interactional diversity, maintaining a tightly controlled format may be a practical strategy for ensuring lesson continuity and syllabus coverage. Code-switching emerged as a strategic pedagogical tool, employed for clarification of

instructions, metalinguistic explanation, and administrative purposes. This selective L1 use aligns with Macaro's (2009) Optimal Use Hypothesis and is consistent with Iranian EFL research showing that Persian can serve as a cognitive and affective scaffold, facilitating comprehension and reducing learner anxiety in virtual environments (Rezvani et al., 2011). Similarly, the observed reliance on scaffolding – through modeling, step-by-step guidance, and elicitation – reflects sociocultural theories of learning (Thorne & Lantolf, 2006), which emphasize mediation in supporting learner development.

Despite these strengths, the findings also highlight limitations in promoting communicative competence and learner autonomy. Opportunities for interactional negotiation, collaborative meaning-making and extended learner output were scarce, particularly in Observations 3 and 4, where class length and attendance were lower. This limited emphasis on speaking contrasts with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles and recent calls for integrating task-based, interaction-rich activities in both face-to-face and online Iranian EFL classrooms (Safari & Rashidi, 2015).

Overall, the results are largely consistent with prior studies documenting the dominance of teacher talk and IRF patterns in Iranian classrooms (Walsh, 2021; Safari & Rashidi, 2015), the strategic facilitation of learning through code-switching (Bozorgian & Fallah, 2017), and the mediating role of scaffolding (Thorne & Lantolf, 2006). However, they also diverge from global best practices that advocate for more learner-centered, communicative approaches in online settings, underscoring a persistent gap between existing classroom practices and pedagogical trends aimed at fostering learner autonomy and oral fluency.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the current research from Observations 1–4 suggest that online Iranian EFL classrooms remain strongly teacher-centered, with structured IRF exchanges ensuring content delivery but often limiting spontaneous learner output. The Hybrid Framework analysis revealed the value of combining traditional observation schemes with online-specific categories, enabling a more nuanced account of how digital affordances and constraints shape interaction. While teacher-led discourse ensures clarity and efficiency, sustained learner engagement and extended talk require intentional scaffolding strategies, explicit prompts, and opportunities for peer interaction. The balance between form-focused instruction and meaning-focused communication was generally maintained, although each observation demonstrated different emphases

depending on instructional goals. For practice, these results point to the need for Iranian EFL instructors to consciously diversify interaction patterns in online contexts. Incorporating more open-ended questioning, peer discussion, and task-based interaction can help move beyond the IRF dominance and foster greater learner autonomy. The Hybrid+ elements – such as screen sharing, real-time file sharing, and chat-based confirmations – should be strategically harnessed not only for logistical purposes but also as interactional tools to extend student talk. Furthermore, teacher training in online-specific classroom management and discourse strategies is essential to address connectivity disruptions and absenteeism without compromising instructional flow. Given that strategic L1 use proved effective for comprehension, educators might consider structured, minimal code-switching as a pedagogical resource rather than a breakdown in target language use.

Future research could explore longitudinal patterns of interaction in Iranian online EFL classes to determine whether sustained exposure to Hybrid+ strategies increases learner-initiated contributions over time. Comparative studies between online and face-to-face classes using the same Hybrid Framework could illuminate modality-specific discourse shifts. Additionally, investigating the role of peer interaction and collaborative online tools (e.g., breakout rooms, shared documents) within this framework could provide insights into how to counterbalance the teacher-dominated patterns observed here. Finally, given the variability in internet infrastructure, research could address the relationship between technological reliability and participation equity, particularly in under-resourced regions.

Authors Contributions

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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