

Interactional Gatekeeping in EFL Classrooms: How Students Shape Participation Rights in Talk-in-Interaction

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Abstract

This study investigates how Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students shape participation rights in classroom talk-in-interaction through interactional gatekeeping. Using a Conversation Analysis (CA) approach, the study draws on audio/video recordings from six one-hour, teacher-fronted integrated-skills lessons in a private institute in Karbala, Iraq. The analysis focuses on the turn-by-turn organization of classroom interaction to show how students negotiate who may speak, when, and under what conditions. The findings indicate that participation rights are continuously managed through recurrent student practices, including self-selection into teacher-nominated answer slots, competitive and overlapping turn entries, permission-seeking pre-sequences, peer interventions that protect or restrict a speaker's continuation, and repair/correction moves that can both support learning and reallocate the floor. The study also shows that participation rights become particularly visible in specific sequential environments, especially after teacher questions, during answer slots, and in post-answer turns, where peers and teachers ratify, delay, or sanction contributions. By documenting student-led gatekeeping in an Iraqi EFL context, the study highlights how participation is not simply a matter of individual willingness or teacher control, but a locally accomplished interactional order that shapes learners' access to classroom talk and learning opportunities.

Keywords: *Conversation Analysis (CA), EFL classrooms, interactional gatekeeping, Iraq, participation rights, talk-in-interaction*

دراسة المشاركة في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: كيف يشكل الطلاب حقوق المشاركة في الحوار

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المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تشكيل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في العراق لحقوق المشاركة في الحوار داخل الفصول الدراسية من خلال حراسة المشاركة. باستخدام نهج تحليل المحادثة (CA)، تستند الدراسة إلى تسجيلات صوتية/فيديو من ست دروس متكاملة المهارات مدتها ساعة واحدة في معهد خاص في كربلاء، العراق. تركز التحليلات على تنظيم التفاعل في الفصول الدراسية من خلال دورات تعليمية تظهر كيف يتفاوض الطلاب بشأن من يمكنه التحدث، ومتى، وتحت أي ظروف. تشير النتائج إلى أن حقوق المشاركة تُدار باستمرار من خلال ممارسات طلابية متكررة، بما في ذلك الاختيار



الذاتي في الأماكن المخصصة للإجابات المعينة من قبل المعلم، والمدخلات التنافسية والم overlapping، وتقديم الأدونات، والتدخلات من الأقران التي تحمي أو تقيد استمرارية المتحدث، وحركات التصحيح التي يمكن أن تدعم التعلم وتعيد تخصيص الدور. كما تظهر الدراسة أن حقوق المشاركة تصبح مرئية بشكل خاص في بيئات تسلسلية معينة، خاصة بعد أسئلة المعلم، أثناء فترات الإجابة، وفي الأدوار التالية للإجابات، حيث يقوم الأقران والمعلمون بالتصديق على المساهمات أو تأخيرها أو تنظيمها. من خلال توثيق حراسة المشاركة التي يقودها الطلاب في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيف أن المشاركة ليست مجرد مسألة رغبة فردية أو سيطرة المعلم، بل هي ترتيب تفاعلي يتشكل محلياً ويؤثر على وصول المتعلمين إلى الحوار وفرص التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل المحادثة (CA)، فصول EFL دراسة المشاركة، العراق، حقوق المشاركة، الحوار في التفاعل

1. Introduction

In EFL classrooms, the distribution of turns in talk is not always controlled by the teacher. In teacher-fronted classrooms, for instance, students are continually involved in the regulation of turns through entering the answer space, holding the floor, managing the inclusion and exclusion of other students in the interaction, and evaluating the relative legitimacy of contributions (Wong et al., 2020). Such micro-level practices are highly relevant to the distribution of turns in talk because they are a key channel through which learning opportunities are accessed. If a student is unable to access turns in talk, they are simultaneously unable to access learning opportunities. Conversation analysis studies of EFL classrooms in recent years show that learning opportunities may be managed through micro-level practices in talk rather than through the broader design of lessons (Gosen et al., 2025).

In the context of EFL classrooms in Iraq, the level of whole-class participation has often been viewed as a variable controllable by the teacher through methods of question-asking, student nomination, and response evaluation (Himmele & Himmele, 2017). However, in reality, the level of participation might be unequal even when a system of turn-taking is in place. Some students might be able to gain access to the floor, while others might be unable to complete their responses, experience the loss of their turn, or fail to make a noise despite being present and competent speakers (Schegloff, 2000). This, therefore, becomes a practical classroom concern since the level of participation is not only dependent on the student's willingness and/or competence but also on the interactional conditions necessary for the student's response to be heard, completed, and recognized.

The importance of this issue is that classroom discourse is not just talking. In teacher-centered lessons, a "speaking turn" is a public resource where learners can demonstrate their understanding, obtain corrective feedback, develop their confidence, and become visible and competent participants (Duran



& Jacknick, 2020). If learners repeatedly fail to get a turn because a classmate selects a turn first, a correction interrupts their turn, or the conversation moves on before they finish their turn, they not only fail to get a turn to talk, but they also fail to get a turn to learn, to be considered knowledgeable, and to develop interactional confidence that is a foundation for participation over time (Duran & Jacknick, 2020). In other words, unequal participation is not just an effect; it is also a means by which participation is constructed and reproduced.

A key concern is that many studies of classroom participation describe the phenomenon in terms of broad categories such as ‘active learners’ or ‘quiet learners,’ which shed little light on the detailed ways in which participation is restricted or facilitated in the moment (Kibler et al., 2018). The present study remedies this. Rather than exploring the broader attitudes and classroom dynamics through which participation is managed, the study examines the interactional machinery of participation rights – the small, repetitive practices through which students claim a turn to speak, gate entry to the conversation, protect a speaker’s turn, seek permission to speak, and so forth (Enyi, 2015). In the Iraqi teacher-fronted EFL classrooms, the study thus offers a more detailed account of the ways in which some voices are readily audible and others readily inaudible, even in the same activity and with the same classroom norms.

This article seeks to offer a comprehensive description of student-led interactional gatekeeping in Iraqi EFL classroom interaction, revealing the recurrent student practices in negotiating and exercising participation rights and showing how these rights are publicly visible and consequential in classroom interaction. In this study, audio and video recordings from a private institute in Karbala are used to analyze naturally occurring interaction through a form of analysis known as sequential analysis. The goal of this research is to describe: (a) the recurrent student interactional practices in negotiating and exercising participation rights, and (b) the context in which these rights are publicly visible and consequential. Accordingly, the study is guided by two research questions:

RQ₁: What interactional practices do EFL students use to negotiate, enforce, and contest participation rights in classroom talk?

RQ₂: How are participation rights displayed, oriented to, and consequentially managed in the turn-by-turn organization of classroom interaction?

Through its focus on student-led gatekeeping, the article contributes to CA research on participation in the classroom by showing that participation rights are not just granted on the basis of institutional position, but are enacted and negotiated through observable actions such as self-selection into nominated slots, blocking and sanctioning by peers, competition for talk via overlaps, challenging via repair, and ratification of answers by peers. From a practical perspective, the study has implications for issues of equity in the classroom,



with teachers being encouraged to focus on who is volunteering, but also on how peer gatekeeping may facilitate or limit the participation of others.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conversation Analysis and Classroom Interaction

Conversation Analysis (CA) is considered appropriate for classroom research because it views interaction as something that is collaboratively constructed by the participants in the interaction, utilizing the resources provided by Wong and Waring (2020). When utilizing the principles of CA in classroom research, the goal is not to study the interaction by imposing some external categories prior to the data collection, but rather to critically investigate how the actions of the teachers and the students are made recognizable by the participants, such as answering, challenging, inviting, turn allocation, or closing, in naturally occurring classroom settings (Ingram & Elliott, 2019). Such an emic approach has emerged as the most prominent approach in classroom discourse research, as it allows the researcher to closely align with the actual texture of classroom life through interaction rather than through other retrospective or decontextualized methods (Gosen et al., 2025).

Methodologically, CA employs recordings and transcripts to examine the interactional practices that underpin classroom discourse. In this study, three CA domains are employed: turn-taking, sequence organization, and repair (Chen & Ye, 2022). In turn-taking, the research examines the mechanisms by which participants take and give turns, including the timing and turn-entry practices that facilitate or impede opportunities to speak (Girgin & Brandt, 2020). In sequence organization, the research examines how turns are made coherent by virtue of their positioning in an ordered sequence, including how questions are projected to elicit answers, how answers are projected to elicit further questions, and how expansions facilitate or close participation (Van Balen et al., 2022). In repair, the research examines how participants deal with issues of speaking, hearing, and understanding, and how classroom discourse research has consistently demonstrated that repair not only deals with issues of difficulty but also has consequential effects for classroom interaction (Bukari et al., 2025).

Moreover, CA is particularly well-suited to the study of participation rights because it enables a principled way to evidence the orientations of the participants without recourse to inferences about their intentions. At the heart of CA is the next-turn proof procedure. What a turn “does” is evidenced by the next turn’s response to the original turn. This response may be to ratify the original turn, to resist the original turn, to sanction the original turn, to repair the original turn, to deem the original turn inappropriate, and so forth (Gosen et al., 2024). In the classroom context, where speakership may be institutionally relevant, the next-turn proof procedure is particularly useful. CA thus provides a



direct route to the study of participation rights as an interactional achievement rather than an a priori entitlement based on roles.

2.2. Participation Rights and Interactional Gatekeeping

In studies on classroom interaction that draw on CA, participation rights have been found to be an interactional achievement, with participation, allocation of floor, qualification to respond, and extension or redirecting of talk not being seen as being determined by roles but being negotiated through moment-to-moment interaction (Ren & Seedhouse, 2026). Current studies on CA suggest that learners have been seen to appropriate participation rights by engaging in self-selection, topic initiation, and demonstration of their contribution through bodily actions, with their orientations being made auditable through their next turns (Duran & Sert, 2021). Even where activities are teacher-led, learners have been seen to restructure participation by engaging in side sequences, seeking assistance from their peers, and transitioning from passive to active participation, thereby indirectly influencing participation and access to talk and knowledge (Chen & Ye, 2022).

From this position, gatekeeping emerges as a teacher-mediated but also a student-mediated practice, a finding supported by Girgin and Brandt (2020). A teacher might, for instance, control the space of interaction by failing to provide a third-turn evaluation, using minimal receipt tokens, or strategically self-withdrawing from the interaction, making the student-mediated practice of peer participation more salient and significant (Gümüşok & Balıkcı, 2020; Li, 2025). At the same time, students might also exercise gatekeeping towards each other through practices like labeling peers' contributions as premature, re-issuing nominations through gaze and embodied action, and aligning with participation entitlements that restrict the scope of lawful entry into the interaction space (Park, 2024). In these cases, the entitlements of participating are publicly displayed and are expressed through the sequential consequences of action.

Empirically, gatekeeping is most readily traceable in three interactional sites: (a) teacher turn design projecting an answer slot or a next-speaker position, thereby allowing for competition in self-selection; (b) answer slots in which learners display their epistemic rights; and (c) post-answer turns in which learners may upgrade or downgrade the participation status of the prior speaker. To illustrate, studies of follow-up turns in CA studies of EFL interaction show how post-answer turns may be either minimalist or elaborative and how students may initiate post-expansions to invite further voices and speakership (Van Balen et al., 2022). Other studies of student-initiated question sequences in mobile classroom interaction illustrate how participation rights to ask, seek, and redirect are managed through adjacency pair obligations and insertion sequences (Amri & Sert, 2025). Similarly, studies of repair initiation practices show how participation rights to signal trouble and seek clarification are



managed in EFL interaction (Bukari et al., 2025). In summary, the above findings motivate a CA study of the interactional sites in which students display and manage their participation rights in Iraqi EFL classroom interaction.

2.3. Aim of the Present Study

Recent research on CA-for-SLA has shown that participation in EFL settings is not simply mediated by predetermined roles but rather by the sophisticated management of turn-taking and sequencing, with special emphasis on questions, answer slots, and post-answer moves. Empirical studies, for example, have shown how the teacher's moves may open opportunities for learner participation by withholding closure or by slowly transferring control to the learner (Li, 2025); how the following turn may expand or limit opportunities for further discourse (Van Balen et al., 2022); and how repair practices are crucial sites in which mutual understanding, legitimacy, and access to the speaking turn are co-constituted in interaction (Bukari et al., 2025). Moreover, studies on the relationship between participation and learner positioning have shown that learner participation and access to learning opportunities are mediated by the locally constructed rights and obligations of interaction (Salehi-Amiri & Hashemi, 2026).

Despite the growth of the body of studies on CA, the practices of student-led gatekeeping and participation rights in Iraqi EFL classrooms have been under-described. In previous studies on Iraqi classrooms, there has been an exploration of teacher-learner discourse and participation rights from a general perspective. However, there has been a greater tendency for such studies to rely on discourse analytic descriptions of teacher-learner discourse and participation rights, rather than using the turn-taking analytical model of CA to reveal how speaking rights are claimed, denied, or challenged. The current study, inspired by the CA tradition and the contextual void, aims to reveal how student gatekeeping is practiced and how participation rights are made visible and consequential in Iraqi teacher-fronted EFL classrooms.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative methodology with a foundation in CA. CA is a methodology for the study of interaction in natural settings. In the case of EFL classrooms in Iraq, CA is particularly focused on the turn-taking organization of classroom discourse. It is particularly focused on the way in which students



negotiate, enforce, and oppose their participation rights. In the present study, interactional gatekeeping is conceptualized as a set of observable practices through which students shape access to speakership. In the analysis of the interactional data, CA is particularly useful as a methodology for the study of the way in which actions are constituted and recognized in sequence.

3.2. Participants

The current study took place in an Iraqi EFL classroom in a private language institute in Karbala, Iraq. The curriculum design focused on the development of four language skills in an integrated manner in general English. The instructional design was informed by Top Notch 2A, which provided the bulk of tasks and activity types through which classroom interaction was realized. From an institutional perspective, the instructional design predominantly involved teacher-fronted whole-class teaching, which made turn allocation, nomination, and competition particularly noteworthy in the context of classroom interaction.

The participants included 12 Iraqi EFL learners (7 male, 5 female) and one teacher. The learners were between 15 and 18 years of age, and their proficiency levels were pre-tested by the institute's placement test before the beginning of the class. The participants' L1 was Arabic, which occasionally surfaced in classroom interactions in the form of brief insertions during meaning negotiation, support, or management. The teacher was a male instructor with ten years of experience in teaching and a Master's in English Language Teaching. From an instructional perspective, the teacher managed the class mainly through nomination, evaluation, and progression, while learners' participation rights were also realized in terms of teacher-oriented allocation and peer-oriented gatekeeping during whole-class discourse.

3.3. Instruments

The data collection for the present study involved the use of audio recordings and video recordings of naturally occurring instances of English as a Foreign Language classroom interaction. The use of recordings of naturally occurring classroom interaction provided the opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of participation rights as they occurred in the classroom, including factors such as the timing of contributions, the occurrence of turn-taking, the use of pauses, and the often accompanying body language related to turn-taking in the classroom setting. The data were collected during six classroom sessions, each of which lasted approximately one hour.

To ensure the collection of data that could provide an accurate and comprehensive account of the interaction, the use of multiple devices was built into the data collection procedure. A mobile phone was placed at the front of the classroom to ensure the accurate collection of data on whole-class interaction,



including student responses and evidence of student participation. A second device was positioned at the classroom to provide better access to the interaction of the teacher, including the use of nomination and other classroom interaction strategies. When the classroom activities involved group discussions, each group made use of a mobile phone as an audio recorder, thereby facilitating the collection of data on peer-to-peer interaction and the detailed examination of turn-taking, including instances of turn-taking that may not be audible during whole-class interaction.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through the systematic classroom recording. At the start of each class session, the recording devices were set up, and teaching went ahead as normally scheduled without any change in the intended pedagogy and classroom practices. Recording started at the start of each session and continued for about an hour to ensure the recording captured the full cycle of activity, such as teacher initiations, student responses, and the next turns in the interaction sequence, as well as any peer-to-peer PM that emerged during the class session.

In an attempt to reduce reactivity to the recording situation and to ensure more natural interaction patterns in the classroom, the first session was recorded without the video camera. This session acted as an acclimatization session for both the teacher and the students to get used to the researcher's presence in the class before the full video recording started. From the second session onwards, the standard procedure involving the video/audio setup was followed.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the transcription of the data from the recordings. This was done in accordance with the rules of Conversation Analysis, as outlined by ten Have (2007), since this approach makes the micro-level organization of talk transparent, particularly with respect to the organization of participation rights, timing, overlaps, pauses, and completion of turns. Since the study focuses on the real-time enactment of gatekeeping and participation, a transcript that makes the production of talk, and not just the content, transparent was necessary for the analysis of the interactional practices through which the students enacted speakership and negotiation of speakership.

As a result, the transcripts included the most important interactional features of the talk, such as the design of the turns and the features of the turn-taking, together with laughter and other audible features, if necessary. In addition, where the video recording quality allowed, the transcription included the most important embodied features of the talk, such as the direction of the gaze, hand raises, pointing, and so on, if they were indicative of the negotiation of speakership. In the transcription and analysis of the data, the researcher sometimes had to switch between the recording files, in order to capture the talk



with the highest possible degree of accuracy, for example, in cases where one recording file provided better audio quality, or where the group work recording provided access to the quieter peer interactions, which were not audible in the recording of the whole class.

After transcription, the analysis continued with the process of data familiarization. This involved the repetition of viewing and listening to the recorded data in relation to the transcripts. This phase allowed for the initial identification of recurring participation phenomena, especially in relation to salient junctures. This led to the development of a collection-building process. This involved the aggregation of relevant episodes into analytic collections for the development of gatekeeping practices. This helped the analysis to transcend individual episodes and show the recurrence of practices.

Further analysis of each episode was conducted through the process of sequential analysis. This was achieved through the application of the CA next-turn proof procedure. This involved the analysis of the performance of a turn in an action and the assessment of the reaction to the action by the next speaker. This helped to avoid any presuppositions about the intentions of the participants. Finally, the analysis findings were organized in direct relation to the two research questions.

3.6. Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations were evident across the entire study. Institutional approval was granted before data collection, and consent from the teacher and parental consent from the student participants were obtained due to their status as a minor. The recordings and transcripts were anonymized by giving pseudonyms to the participants and removing any identifiable information regarding the participants or the institution. The audio and video recordings, along with the transcript, were stored on an encrypted device that only granted access to the researcher. Due to the sensitive nature of video recordings, additional precautions were taken to ensure that the participants' identities were protected, and permission was granted for its use in any publication or presentation.

4. Results

The following section presents the findings from the conversation analysis on interactional gatekeeping in Iraqi EFL classes. The following extracts were chosen for their relative frequency and representativeness with regard to observed interactional patterns, as well as their elucidation of the context in which student gatekeeping occurred. The names used in the following extracts were chosen randomly for maintaining participant anonymity.

4.1. Results of the First Research Question



In the context bellow, the teacher is checking past tense verbs. The teacher selects Sara to answer, but Ali self-selects and delivers the answer first.

Extract 1

- 1 T: okay Sara, what's the past of go?
- 2 (0.4)
- 3 Sara: u::m (.) I think-
- 4 Ali: [WENT teacher!]
- 5 Sara: [miss I was] going to say (0.2) went.
- 6 T: Ali::: (.) I asked Sara.
- 7 Ali: sorry miss (.) but it's went, yəʕni ((I mean)) correct.
- 8 T: mhm. Sara?
- 9 Sara: went.
- 10 T: good. (.) next one.

In line 1, the instructor assigns the next interlocutor (“okay Sara”), which makes Sara the current rights-holder for the next turn in the conversation. The pause in line 2 shows a momentary gap in which Sara does not yet hold the right to speak. In line 3, Sara starts to speak with hesitation and an initial onset (“I think-”), indicating the developing formation of an answer to the question posed. In line 4, Ali starts to speak in overlap with Sara (“[WENT teacher!]”), which is a self-selection to a turn already assigned to Sara. In line 5, Sara speaks in overlap and asserts her right to speak (“miss I was going to say...”).

From line 6 onwards, the teacher explicitates her rule on turn-taking by saying “I asked Sara,” which is an indication that Ali has violated a rule and that the teacher has full control over turn-taking. In line 7, Ali offers an apology with an account “but it's went” and makes his account stronger by adding a stance marker “yəʕni,” which means he is not only competing with Sara but also helping/being correct. In lines 8 to 10, the teacher reopens the response slot for Sara, who repeats her previous answer. Therefore, Sara's “went” is now accepted as a correct answer, and the teacher ends the sequence.

The above extract illustrates how self-selection by means of overlap is a form of gatekeeping by students. Ali seizes an opportunity to respond to a question that has been allocated to Sara. In conversation analysis, competitive entry is a key practice where overlap is used with an immediate response that reassigns the right to respond from the initially selected student to the self-selecting student. The comment by Sara, “I was going to say...” is interesting because it shows that participants recognize that selection is a right that can be invoked to challenge another student's entry.

A second pattern to be extracted from the discourse is how the students manage the issue of accountability for gatekeeping through discourse. In the



case of Ali's apology and justification for the interruption, the discourse is redefined as correct intervention. In the case of the teacher's "I asked Sara," the original normative order is re-established and Sara's right to speak is re-legitimized. The two turns illustrate how the right to speak is not solely granted by the teacher but is a matter of negotiation by the students. In the following extract, three students collaborate to speak for the teacher as a single voice, with Ahmed taking the position of spokesperson and blocking Mustafa from participating.

Extract 2

- 1 Ahmed: okay I will answer (.) just listen.
- 2 Mustafa: but I have idea (.) we can say-
- 3 Ahmed: Ahmed: no no (.) wait wait.=
- 4 Mustafa: =why? (0.2) teacher asked "reasons".
- 5 Ahmed: I know (.) I know (.) give me (0.3) one minute.
- 6 Noor: (0.2) let him say.
- 7 Ahmed: shh:: (.) khalli ana. ((let me))
- 8 Mustafa: (0.4) okay.
- 9 Ahmed: so we say (.) "because it saves time" (.) that's it.
- 10 Noor: add "reduces traffic".
- 11 Ahmed: okay (.) reduces traffic too.

In line 1, Ahmed clearly claims his right to speak for the group and immediately issues a command to "just listen," thereby creating a local participation rule. Ahmed clearly claims his right to speak for the group and immediately issues a command to "just listen," thereby creating a local participation rule. In line 2, Mustafa makes a counterclaim to participation by saying "but I have idea...," which attempts to insert himself into the conversation. Ahmed blocks this attempt to participate in line 3 with successive negations and commands of "no no... wait wait," which prevents Mustafa from completing his turn and maintains his own control of the floor. Mustafa's attempt to participate in line 4 enhances his claim by tying it to the task's demands.

In line 5, Ahmed claims epistemic primacy through his use of "I know... I know," and his appeal for time, which ensures his exclusive right to the floor while at the same time projecting his claim as a temporary necessity. Noor interrupts Ahmed's turn in line 6 with "let him say," which places her on Ahmed's side and that of Mustafa, counter to Ahmed's gatekeeping. Ahmed responds with a stronger claim to the floor in line 7 by using a silencing token "shh" and a local directive "khalli ana," which means "let me," projecting his power over the group. Mustafa's contribution in line 8 with "okay" suggests a level of acquiescence or resignation, after which Ahmed delivers the group's



response. Noor's contribution in line 10 suggests that while participation is being blocked, it is being rerouted, which is ratified by Ahmed, projecting his role as gatekeeper that determines when and how other members' contributions are allowed into the final response.

This extract is indicative of gatekeeping in student discourse, particularly in terms of spokesperson utterances and controlling turns in discourse. The initial utterance by Ahmed, "I will answer," is not only indicative of planning but also takes on the role of a turn rights claim, thereby altering the dynamics of participation by converting the other individuals into listeners. The blocking practices, in this context, are very specific, such as repeated directives, latched turns, and silencing, which serve as mechanisms for controlling entry to the floor and speaker dominance. The use of "why" and task-based justification in the utterance by Mustafa is indicative of gatekeeping in discourse, particularly in terms of challenging gatekeeping by referencing the institutional task, "the teacher asked for reasons," thereby supporting the notion that turn rights should be distributed in a more equitable manner.

A second key aspect of CA in this extract revolves around the maintenance of gatekeeping through epistemic positioning and recipient compliance. Ahmed's "I know" represents a form of epistemic positioning, where he seems to have the right answer. This gives him a basis to impose gatekeeping. However, Noor's bid to reopen access to participation shows that this group is not entirely resistant to gatekeeping. Moreover, Ahmed's insistence and Mustafa's eventual withdrawal from participation show that there is a possibility of rights to participation becoming asymmetrical and fixed through interaction. What is significant is that the final lines of this extract show that gatekeeping does not always mean total exclusion. It is possible to have a form of filtered participation where others are allowed to have a say, but under the gatekeeper's approval.

In this next extract, there is a whole-class discussion where the teacher asks for an opinion. Two students are confident and are in competition to have their say. However, Fatima intervenes to give participation rights to another student, Zainab.

Extract 3:

- 1 T: who disagrees with this idea?
- 2 Hussein: I disagree because-
- 3 Ali: [no no] it's correct because-
- 4 Hussein: [listen] I was first!
- 5 Fatima: stop (.) khallas. ((enough))
- 6 Zainab ↑tell miss (.) you said it before.
- 7 (0.6)



- 8 Zainab: u:m (.) I disagree (.) because it's not fair.
 9 T: thank you Zainab. Hussein?
 10 Hussein: yes (.) also not fair because (.) some students-

Initially, the instructor's question, "who disagrees," provides a space for self-selection without specifying the next speaker. Hussein takes the floor with "I disagree because-," but Ali simultaneously enters the conversation in line 3, saying "[no no] it's correct..." and this instant competition for the floor makes the right to speak a focal point of the interaction. Hussein's "listen, I was first!" asserts her right to speak, and the right to speak becomes a focal point of the interaction. In line 5, Fatima enters the conversation with a "stop" and the Arabic word "khallas," meaning "enough," and treats the overlap between Hussein and Ali as a disruptive event, implying her entitlement to the floor.

In line 6, Fatima allocates the floor by referring to Zainab and provides a warrant for Zainab's entitlement to the floor, "you said it before," implying Zainab has a previous relevant statement and therefore has a claim on the floor at this point. The silence implies that the other students are orienting to Fatima's allocation of the floor and are not competing for it. In line 8, Zainab takes the floor, hesitates, and then provides a full disagreement statement. The teacher ratifies Zainab's statement with "thank you Zainab," and then the teacher re-allocates the floor to Hussein.

The interaction excerpt illustrates a form of pro-inclusion gatekeeping, wherein Fatima utilizes sequence-stopping in combination with overt turn allocation to redirect participation from competitive speakers to a quieter classmate. The gatekeeping extends beyond mere blocking, as a reorganization of turn-taking is involved, wherein a student assumes a regulating role, exploiting local resources ("khallas") to block an overlapping turn and then overtly allocating a turn by naming. The allocation is sustained by Zainab's response. The apparent silence of other classmates and Zainab's entry into the turn suggest that participation allocation may also be granted by classmates as well as by the teacher.

The second finding is that the right to participate is observable based on participants' orientation to, and treatment of, allocations as consequential. Fatima's comment, "You said it before," serves as a warrant that links the right to speak with prior relevance and entitlement, justifying gatekeeping on the basis of moral and interactional reasoning, such as "She already had something to say." The ratification of the teacher completes the institutional validation of the reallocation of turn-taking. In accepting Zainab's turn as legitimate and subsequently re-establishing the overall order of the classroom through the allocation of turn-taking to Hussein, the teacher shows how a teacher-led decision may re-establish equilibrium in the interactional setting. The extract



suggests that students may exercise influence over participation rights by: (a) intervening in turn-taking, (b) granting the floor to a peer, and (c) producing warrants that make the grant of the floor observable and acceptable in the interactional order of the classroom.

4.2 Results of the Second Research Question

In the next extract, the teacher asks an open question. Some students indicate their willingness to answer the question. The student claims the right to speak through a hand-raising gesture accompanied by a pre-request. The teacher grants the floor to the student.

Extract 4

- 1 T: so what is the main idea of this paragraph?
- 2 (0.6)
- 3 Muna: ((raises hand)) miss (.) can I say?
- 4 T: yes Muna.
- 5 Muna: it's about (.) protecting the river from pollution.
- 6 T: good. (0.2) anyone else?
- 7 Ali: miss I know (.) I can add?
- 8 T: wait (.) let her finish first.
- 9 Muna: and (.) the government should make rules.
- 10 T: okay. Ali.
- 11 Ali: also (.) people should stop throwing rubbish.

In line 1, an open question sequence is initiated without a specified turn-taking order, which constitutes an open floor interaction where student self-selection is relevant. The pause in line 2 is an occasion where there is no participant selection. In line 3, Muna selects to speak by means of an embodied action (raising her hand) and then formulates a pre-request to speak, “miss... can I say?” that publicly characterizes speaking as an activity requiring permission from the instructor. The instructor’s positive response to Muna’s pre-request to speak, “yes Muna,” in line 4 is an authorization that allocates a turn to Muna and grants her permission to speak. Muna then presents her response in line 5, followed by a positive evaluation from the instructor in line 6.

In line 7, Ali again asks for permission with “I can add?” and shows that he, too, thinks that speakership is dependent on permission, even though the floor is again made available. In line 8, the instructor delays Ali’s turn with “wait” and formulates the constraint in the form of a rule with “let her finish first.” Thus, the instructor regulates the participation rights by giving priority to the completion of the current speaker. Muna extends her turn in line 9, showing that she is still the legitimate speaker. In line 10, the instructor explicitly assigns the turn to Ali with “okay. Ali.”, and then he continues with his turn.



This extract shows how participation rights are made observable in the form of pre-sequences. Muna's raised hand, accompanied by her "can I say?" question, indicates that her subsequent talk is dependent on the teacher's permission, while the teacher's "yes Muna" is an interactional license that allows her to proceed with her subsequent contribution. Furthermore, Ali's "I can add?" also suggests that the teacher is perceived by the students as controlling turn access, even though the teacher's initial question established an open selection environment. The extract also shows how rights are managed consequentially in the sequential structure. The teacher's "wait... let her finish" indicates that overlap or entry during an ongoing turn is not legitimate, thereby protecting Muna's current turn space and re-establishing the need for completion before the allocation of the subsequent turn. The sequential "permission, go-ahead, answer, hold/deferral, reallocation" precisely captures the management of participation rights in this context.

The subsequent extract shows the teacher asking a question, and the students respond simultaneously. The teacher mitigates the problem of turn-taking by identifying the speaker and delineating the rule sequentially.

Extract 5

- 1 T: what's the plural of "child"?
- 2 Hussein: children.
- 3 Sara: [children]
- 4 Zainab: [children miss]
- 5 T: okay okay (.) one by one.
- 6 Hussein said it first.
- 7 Sara: (.) miss I also know.
- 8 T: yes (.) but wait your turn.
- 9 (0.4)
- 10 T: Sara?
- 11 Sara: children.
- 12 T: good.

In line 1, the instructor asks a question without indicating whose question it is. This provides a context in which the relevance of self-selection is apparent. In line 2, Hussein responds. However, Sara and Zainab both contribute to the discourse in line 3. This provides a "choral" environment of responsivity. In line 5, the instructor enters the discourse with an "okay okay" and a rule for turn-taking: "one by one." This indicates a problem with the overlap in line 3. In line 6, the instructor prioritizes the contributions of the other participants by stating "Hussein said it first." This retroactively legitimizes the speaker role of Hussein and minimizes the simultaneous contributions of the other participants.



Sara's contribution in line 7, "I also know," represents a new attempt at participating. However, Sara's contribution is an expression of knowledge rather than an interruption. In line 8, the instructor legitimizes Sara's speaker role by stating "yes." The instructor then constrains the turn-taking process in line 8 by stating "wait your turn." This represents an attempt to frame the rights to participate in a turn at talk as orderly rather than simultaneous. The pause in line 9 represents the instructor's control of the turn-taking process. In line 10, the instructor selects Sara to speak by name. Sara responds in line 11. The instructor evaluates the response in line 12.

In this context, the observability of the student's participation rights becomes apparent through the handling of conflicting turns. Simultaneous speech acts are indicative of the student's orientation towards a potentially open speaking position, while the teacher's one-by-one approach represents the institutional stance on simultaneous speech, indicating dispreferred action in this activity type. The teacher's appeal to firstness represents a means of handling conflicting speech acts, where sequential timing is used to claim the right to the answer slot. This extract also shows how participation rights are consequentially organized through the use of rule formulations and designation. Even though the teacher grants Sara epistemic access, she limits her participation, showing that knowledge does not necessarily imply the right to speak at a given point in time. Participation rights are not abstract constructs; they are enacted and recognized through sequential action, such as overlap, the use of rules, designation of the next speaker, and the resulting observability of compliance.

In the following extract, a student produces a non-target form, and another student attempts a correction, but before doing so, the student seeks permission from the teacher.

Extract 6

- 1 T: say it: "wanted".
- 2 Mustafa: wanTED.
- 3 T: (0.2) again.
- 4 Mustafa: wanTED.
- 5 Ali: ((raises hand)) miss (.) can I help?
- 6 T: yes Ali.
- 7 Ali: it's °WON-tid° (.) not wanTED.
- 8 Mustafa: (0.3) WON-tid.
- 9 T: good. (.) thank you Ali.
- 10 Ali: yəʔni like "needed". ((I mean))



First of all, the teacher begins with an imperative directive, “say it,” which emphasizes Mustafa’s requirement to produce his next turn as the target word. In line 2, Mustafa responds with “wanTED.” The teacher’s “again” is an other-initiated repair, which suggests that the previous utterance is not correct without offering a correct version. Mustafa repeats his previous utterance again in line 4, which is an instance of persistence with the initial cause of difficulty. In line 5, Ali attempts to participate with a hand raise and a pre-request, “can I help?” that seeks permission from the teacher to correct, especially because he is diverting turn-taking from the current student.

The teacher gives her consent in line 6, where she says "yes Ali," thereby ratifying the legitimacy of the subsequent action by Ali. The teacher then produces the correction in line 7, where he contrasts the target and non-target forms, thereby accomplishing an example of authorized other-correction. Mustafa then repeats the corrected form in line 8, showing uptake and alignment with the repair trajectory. The teacher then ratifies the sequence in line 9, showing appreciation, thereby ratifying Ali’s right to interfere. In line 10, Ali produces an explanation, showing an orientation to instructional assistance, thereby maintaining his participation as "support" rather than "competition".

In this extract, we can see how the participation right becomes visible through the organization of repair. Ali does not only correct but seeks permission first, indicating his orientation towards the teacher's prerogative in the allocation of intervention rights, especially in a correction sequence, which has the potential for impinging on the face or the turn entitlement of the original speaker. In this case, the teacher's agreement, "yes Ali," acts as a sequential gate, making the peer correction legitimate and authorized. In the above extract, we can also see how the right becomes consequential through the organization of the sequence of repair: trouble source, teacher's initiation of repair ("again"), trouble source, peer's authorized correction, uptake of the correction by the original speaker, and ratification by the teacher. Legitimate correction by the peer does not come for free but through the organization of the sequence and the ratification of the teacher. The orientations of the participants provide evidence for the negotiation of the participation right.

5. Discussion

This CA study on interactional gatekeeping in Iraqi EFL classrooms focuses on the ways in which students themselves organize participation rights, i.e., "who has the right to speak, when, and with what warrant in ongoing interaction." Participation rights in the study are not treated as static, inherent, or given entities, but rather as locally managed and publicly observable practices.



The study suggests that students in the Iraqi EFL classrooms use three types of gatekeeping practices. The first is self-selection and competitive turn entry, where students frequently use self-selection and competitive turn entry, particularly at transition relevance places or during delays, in order to take a turn that is projected for someone else. The second is the use of norm-invoking and sanctioning, where students use norm-invoking and sanctioning practices in order to regulate access to the floor. The third is the use of repair and correction, where students use repair and correction in gatekeeping, particularly in ways that either promote participation or challenge the right of their peer to continue, and position themselves as the authoritative speaker.

The analysis indicates that the participation rights are maximally visible in the following contextual locations: (a) the transition space following teacher questions, where nomination and self-selection are seen as competing options; (b) the post-answer slot, which may either extend or limit the scope of subsequent participation; and (c) the repair sequences, where “helping/correcting” is seen as an authorized support or a means of re-allocating speakership. In each of these locations, the consequential nature of the management of rights is indicated by next-turn orientation towards ratification, resistance, or repair.

The literature on self-selection has underscored that self-selection goes beyond the individual display of readiness to talk. Instead, self-selection is seen as a systematically achieved trajectory. Ren and Seedhouse (2026) have attempted a reconceptualization of learner-initiated self-selection as an interactional route that is shaped by local affordances, rather than an individual act of floor-grabbing. The current findings support the reconceptualization of self-selection by indicating that learner-initiated self-selection is precisely executed and is oriented towards ratification, deferment, or sanction. The findings on the Iraqi classroom also highlight the differences that exist between the current study and that of Ren and Seedhouse (2026), who studied self-selection in a technology-mediated context that lacked teacher presence. In classrooms with teacher presence, self-selection is more strongly constrained by institutional turn allocation norms, particularly the normative influence of teacher nomination as a rightful participation right.

Ji and Zhang (2022) show that irregular self-selection in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) peer conversation is achievable through interruption, competition, and multimodal resources, thereby showing the learners’ capability in interaction. The current study is in line with Ji and Zhang’s (2022) showing that competition and interruption are regular ways of self-selection in that, in the Iraqi classroom, self-selection is generally directed towards the teacher’s gatekeeping function, with peer self-selection in the conversation frequently



appealing to classroom norms in order to restore the participation order nominated by the teacher. In other words, the current study's findings show how institutional talk's rights to speak are made more explicitly accountable in terms of nomination, sequencing, and balance.

The study by Van Balen et al. (2022) also indicates that opinion questions are often accompanied by non-minimal or minimal post-expansions, and that non-minimal post-expansions may serve to foster dialogic space and promote more equalized participation. The current study is also in line with this approach inasmuch as it reveals that the post-answer period is an important site in which participation rights may be maximized or minimized. The contribution of the current study is that it reveals that gatekeeping is not only concerned with the initial acquisition of the floor, but also with the ways in which subsequent turns either continue or terminate the speaker's right to speak. The study by Girgin and Brandt (2020) reveals that minimal response tokens, such as "mm hm," may serve to foster space for learning by withholding the floor and thereby allowing for extended discourse. The current study is also concerned with such micro-actions inasmuch as they may function as gatekeeping practices that safeguard the current speaker's floor, prevent competitive action, or legitimate another's turn.

Gosen et al. (2025) show that students' "oh"-prefaced utterances during explanations Gosen et al. (2025) show that students' utterances beginning with an "oh" in explanation sequences indicate changes in understanding and are part of the management of explanation sequences. Our study is in line with this broader focus on the interactional significance of epistemic displays. The displays of knowledge and understanding, in particular, may serve as warrants for turn-taking, resources for initiating repair, and tools for legitimizing or challenging the right to speak in the next turn. From the gatekeeping perspective, epistemics and turn-taking are intertwined, and knowledge displays are regularly drawn upon as evidence for whose turn it is at any given point in the conversation.

Bukari et al. (2025) also show the use of verbal and nonverbal initiations of repair in classroom interaction and its relevance for pedagogy. Our study extends this line of research by showing the gatekeeping potential of repair in its dual function, on the one hand, as an invitation for participation, and, on the other hand, in its competitive function, where the floor is reallocated, the speaker's right is contested, or the initiator is positioned as having authority. The relevance of this is particularly evident in Iraqi EFL classrooms, where "helping" in correction sequences is designed in terms of management of face and solidarity, but also in terms of the reallocation of participation rights in the immediate sequence.



Ekin and Badem's work (2026) explains the manner in which the teacher's receipt of students' chat contributions reconfigures the opportunities for student participation in online EFL classrooms, especially when the teacher builds on discussion from chat contributions. Although our work takes place in a face-to-face setting, it extends the previous work by showing how, even when the teacher holds centrality, student-student pre-management of participation can be observed before ratification by the teacher. In short, the micro-orders of student-student interaction are observable in the sequence and are part of the regulation of student participation rights, not just the teacher.

6. Implications

The current study proposes an emic understanding of participation rights in terms of their publicly observable and sequentially consequential nature. The rights are not realized in terms of attitude or role, but in terms of practices such as requests, go-aheads, delays, allocations, continuers, and repairs, which participants use to indicate what constitutes legitimate speakership at any given point in time. The current study also suggests that participation inequities may emerge locally in terms of routine gatekeeping practices, such as repeated self-selection, which pre-empts speakers nominated by the teacher, or in terms of corrective action that suppresses contributions. The use of transcript-based professional learning strategies that focus on the question “why that now?” may assist teachers in identifying the ways in which participation is restricted or facilitated (Church & Bateman, 2019).

7. Limitations and future directions

As a CA study, the analytical aim is to identify demonstrably recurring practices rather than to seek statistical generalization. Further research directions for a prospective study might seek to expand the corpus to include other Iraqi regions and types of schools, compare teacher-fronted and small group activities, and incorporate more multimodal detail to specify the initiation and legitimization of claims to speak. Further longitudinal research directions might seek to examine whether repeated gatekeeping practices solidify “roles” of participation and how teachers work to reconfigure these.

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