

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Language plays a fundamental role as a tool of communication in human life and is an essential component of the educational process. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, reading skills are one of the key aspects that students must master to critically comprehend texts and accurately obtain information. At the junior high school level, descriptive texts are taught to train students in identifying factual information, recognizing object characteristics, and expanding their vocabulary. However, many Indonesian students still face obstacles in understanding text structure, identifying main ideas, and interpreting information in depth. This issue is reinforced by Brown (2001), who emphasized that active interaction is a crucial prerequisite for successful language learning. Therefore, an interactive strategy is needed to foster students' engagement in reading activities in a more participatory and meaningful manner.

Unfortunately, in many EFL classrooms including in Indonesia reading instruction is still dominated by teacher-centered and one-way communication. Students often hesitate to participate actively due to a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes during interactions. Dalia and Putra (2024) noted that when teachers dominate the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) pattern and focus solely on correct or incorrect answers, classroom interaction becomes mechanical and leaves little room for the exploration of meaning.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) also emphasized that the types of questions teachers use and the forms of feedback they provide greatly influence student engagement in classroom discourse. Therefore, interaction strategies that primarily emphasize evaluation need to be replaced with more reflective and dialogic approaches. One such approach that can be adapted for this purpose is the more open and exploratory use of the IRF pattern.

Classroom interaction plays a crucial role in promoting meaningful learning, particularly in language classrooms where communication is central to instructional goals. However, in many Indonesian junior high schools, interaction during English lessons remains limited and predominantly teacher-centered. This limited classroom interaction was based on observation at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu. Based on interviews, the English teacher stated that students rarely ask questions voluntarily and only respond when directly called upon. The teacher further noted that most students provide only one- or two-word answers and seldom elaborate even when open-ended questions are used. Additionally, classroom interaction tends to stagnate, as students lack confidence and often remain silent when asked to read or respond to a text. These conditions suggest that, despite the teacher's efforts to promote communication, the interaction model employed has not yet succeeded in fostering active student participation. This reality contradicts the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes dialogic learning and positions students as active subjects in the learning process.

One of the most widely recognized frameworks for analyzing classroom interaction is the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) model introduced by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). The IRF sequence provides a systematic structure for teacher–student exchanges, enabling teachers to manage discussion and assess student understanding through their responses and the subsequent feedback. However, scholars have highlighted the need for flexibility in its application. Nunan (1991) emphasized that learning becomes meaningful only when students are given opportunities to co-construct meaning, rather than simply respond to teacher prompts. Supporting this view, Hall and Walsh (2002) warned that IRF may become overly rigid if teachers rely on it solely for evaluation, thereby limiting its developmental potential. Thus, adaptive and context-sensitive use of the IRF model is essential to ensure that interaction genuinely contributes to shared meaning-making.

Research on IRF has shown that its effectiveness depends largely on how it is implemented. Several studies have demonstrated positive outcomes when IRF is used in an exploratory and dialogic manner. For instance, Atmojo et al. (2020) found that open-ended feedback within the IRF structure encouraged students to expand their responses and improve comprehension in writing tasks. Conversely, Alawiyah et al. (2024) reported that reading instruction remains heavily teacher-dominated, resulting in limited student participation. Saragih et al. (2024) also discovered that although students sometimes initiate discourse, teachers rarely respond reflectively, causing discussions to stall. Similarly, Hasanah et al. (2024) noted that IRF interactions often merely repeat student answers without deepening

understanding. Mercer and Dawes (2008) further highlighted the importance of open-ended questioning within the IRF framework to promote exploration of meaning, particularly in reading lessons.

Despite these insights, research specifically examining the application of IRF in reading instruction for descriptive texts at the junior high school level especially within the context of Kurikulum Merdeka remains limited. Most existing studies focus on speaking or writing skills and are often conducted in schools with well-prepared teachers and more advanced student proficiency. In contrast, schools such as SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu face unique challenges, including students' limited vocabulary, a passive classroom culture, and high teacher workloads. Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate how the IRF pattern is actually implemented in reading classrooms and whether this interaction structure can encourage active student responses and support deeper text comprehension.

To ensure the validity and depth of the analysis, this research applies data triangulation by comparing three main data sources: classroom observations, teacher interviews, and documentation. This triangulation is specifically focused on the instructional process of reading descriptive text to examine the consistency between pedagogical planning and actual classroom interaction. Classroom observations indicate that interaction is predominantly teacher-centered, with the teacher acting as the primary initiator while using visual media and video scaffolding to stimulate students' understanding of the generic structure of descriptive texts. Teacher interviews reveal that linguistic barriers, such as limited

vocabulary and a fear of making mistakes, are the primary reasons for the brevity of student responses during these reading activities. Furthermore, interaction transcripts and documentation confirm a high frequency of "No Response" patterns or silence, particularly when inquiries require more complex productive English skills, even though the teacher employs code-switching to maintain the momentum of the discourse. Through this triangulation approach, the study aims to accurately map how the IRF pattern is applied to assist students in comprehending the social functions and structures of descriptive text despite the challenges of classroom passivity.

From the background above, the main purpose of this research is to analyze how the IRF pattern is applied in the teaching of descriptive reading texts in Grade VIII at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu and to determine the extent to which it supports student-centered learning. This study also aims to reveal the teacher's pedagogical decisions in guiding interaction and to evaluate their impact on student participation and comprehension. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of classroom interaction strategies aligned with the values of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

The formulation of the problem involves a question that guides the study and helps to determine the assessment methods needed to address it. The problem in this study is: How is The IRF Application in Teaching Reading Descriptive Text of Eighth Grade at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

The objective of a study is specific goals and purposes that a researcher aims to achieve through their research. In this study, the objective is to analyze the application of the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern in classroom interaction during the teaching of reading descriptive texts to eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu. The researcher intends to identify how the three stages of IRF—Initiation, Response, and Feedback—are manifested in teacher-student interactions, and to evaluate whether these interaction patterns support student engagement and comprehension in accordance with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the pedagogical decisions made by the teacher and how they influence the quality of reading activities in the classroom.

1.4 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is made to focus the research and the main problems found by the researcher in the problem of the study. The researcher limits this study to examining the implementation of the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) interaction pattern in the teaching of reading descriptive texts, particularly in one class of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu. This study does not explore other language skills such as writing, speaking, or listening, nor does it investigate other interactional models outside the IRF framework. The data focuses on classroom discourse observed during English reading lessons that cover descriptive texts as outlined in the English syllabus. The study also

considers the classroom environment and teacher-student interaction as factors influencing reading comprehension within the IRF pattern.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The significance provides context and reasons for why the study is relevant and valuable with a clear rationale for why the research is worth conducting, and how it fits into the larger academic or practical landscape. For this reason, the researcher provides a description of the benefits of this research as follows:

a) Theoretically

This research is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on classroom interaction, particularly in the application of the IRF pattern in reading instruction. It aims to enrich theoretical perspectives on how discourse patterns can influence student engagement and comprehension in EFL classrooms, especially in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka that emphasizes dialogic and student-centered learning.

b) Practically

It is hoped that this research can serve as a valuable reference for various stakeholders in the field of English language teaching.

1. To the students

This research can enhance students' reading skills by promoting a more interactive and engaging learning environment, where students are encouraged to actively respond and reflect on the content of descriptive texts.

2. To the teachers

This research provides teachers with a framework for evaluating and improving their classroom interaction strategies through the effective use of IRF, enabling them to foster deeper comprehension and participation among students during reading activities.

3. To the school

This research motivates schools to support the implementation of student-centered teaching practices that align with national curriculum goals, and to provide professional development opportunities focused on classroom discourse and interaction techniques.

4. To the researcher

This research enhances the researcher's understanding of classroom discourse analysis and develops their academic and practical competence in investigating teacher-student interaction in EFL settings.