

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Group discussions are considered effective in encouraging students to express their opinions to one another, respond to different points of view, and develop logical reasoning together (Tran & Pham, 2025). However, the effectiveness of discussion groups is not always solely about linguistic ability or instructional design. It can also be influenced by social factors, particularly the issue of unequal participation. In many classroom discussion groups, some students simply rely on more dominant students and agree without contributing actively (McArdle et al., 2005). Therefore, more attention is needed to explore patterns of student interaction in discussion groups.

One of the social factors that most influences interaction patterns in discussions is gender (Francis, & Skelton, 2005). Gender-based interactions in learning and teaching activities are receiving close attention in the world of education universally due to their direct relationship with quality, equitable distribution of learning opportunities, and the effectiveness of class gatherings in achieving learning objectives themselves (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). According to UNESCO, male students have a tendency to take more opportunities to speak in class discussions or collaborations, while female students, even though they have the same or even higher level of understanding, they more reserved. This pattern is also evident across Asian contexts, including Indonesia.

Communication patterns that are influenced by gender constructs and social norms do not only happen in developed countries (Park, 2020). Schools are important spaces for combating gender inequality through more gender-conscious curriculum and pedagogical practices (Susilowati, 2012). Looking at the Indonesian curriculum currently being implemented, namely the independent curriculum, it sufficiently supports discussion, exploration, and collaboration. Consequently English classrooms, particularly during group discussions become key sites where gender-based interaction dynamics are made visible.

Schools in Indonesia also report that mixed-gender groups often experience imbalanced participation, while homogeneous groups tend to be more effective in promoting equal contribution and smoother collaboration (Rosyidah et al., 2023). This could have an impact on learning outcomes, as well as on classroom organization. Since it is not inclusive and learning opportunities are not evenly distributed (where all students should be active collaborators), it becomes uneven and causes bias in learning evaluation, especially in writing and speaking skills (Walsh, 2011). Based on limited preliminary observation during teaching practicum (PPL) at SMAN 25 Bandung from September to November 2025, similar patterns also appeared, where female students hesitated to take leadership roles and male students dominated turn-taking.

In EFL classes, males are also dominant contributors and females are silent observers (Sunderland, 2006). In Indonesian junior high and high schools, it is also evident that women are more passive in mixed-gender groups due to social norms (Shaberina et al., 2023 & Iriana et al., 2024). Gender differences were clearly evident in mixed-gender groups. Male students were more vocal, competitive, and took 65% of the turns. They used assertive language such as “I’m sure!” and often interrupted the girls (Widya, 2025). Observation data showed that boys speak for 12 minutes per session compared to girls who speak for 5 minutes (Sadker & Zittleman, 2018).

They were more confident in defending their arguments even when they were wrong, reflecting the stereotype of masculinity in Indonesian culture. Female students were more cooperative, listening 80% of the time before speaking. They used polite phrases such as “I think that’s okay” but rarely challenge others. Their participation is only 25-35%, influenced by social norms that avoid conflict (Azzahra, 2024). These differences in style indicate that gender affects interaction patterns. Patriarchal cultural factors made men dominant and women quiet (Suhirman et al., 2024). In Southeast Asia, Women also more reluctant to express their opinions due to social customs and culture for the sake of group harmony (Nguyen, 2017).

While previous studies have shown that there is an imbalance in interaction in the context of gender in EFL classrooms, but most of them use quantitative methods, which do not provide an in-depth picture about verbal and nonverbal interaction using observation, so the social context is not fully covered (Akib et al., 2018; Hassaskhah & Zamir, 2013; Chalak & Karimi, 2017). Most of the studies that observe at the junior high and high school levels, but with one major focus, just in general interaction patterns, rather than focusing on gender-specific interactional patterns within group discussions.

On the other hand, there are studies that show gender dynamics but at the university level, so the classroom conditions and assignments are quite different (Apriyanto & Anum, 2018; Oktarini & Citraningrum, 2025). Considering this gap, it is important for this study to focus more on investigating in detail how gender-based interaction patterns affect groups discussion at the high school level through in-depth observation and interviews that previous studies have not examined comprehensivel.

B. Research Question

A set of research questions is formulated to ensure a clear focus and consistency with the study context, allowing the dynamics of gender interaction in group discussions to be systematically illustrated, as follows:

- 1) How are gender-based interaction patterns manifested in student-student group discussions at the high school level?
- 2) How do male and female students perceive their experiences when interacting in group discussions?

C. Research Purpose

Based on the research question above, this study has several objectives, including:

- 1) Providing a clear picture of how female and male students collaborate and discuss.
- 2) Identifying social and instructional factors that shape these interaction patterns, such as how participation occurs and how roles in discussions

emerge.

D. Research Significance

This study has a number of important contributions that can be seen from both theoretical and practical perspectives in the development of language learning studies and practices;

- 1) Theoretically
 - a. This result of this study are expected to expand the study of gendered classroom interaction and sociocultural theory in the context of EFL classroom in Indonesia empirically.
 - b. To test whether the theories discussed in the Western context appear in the same, different forms, or not at all when compared to the Indonesian EFL classroom context.
 - c. To support the development of theories on cooperative learning regarding equal opportunities to express opinions and contribute to discussion groups at the high school level.
- 2) Practically
 - a. To help teachers understand patterns of interaction between male and female students and form the basis for more inclusive learning strategies especially in group discussion.
 - b. To support policy makers in schools with guidelines for organizing optimal group work that is more inclusive and conducive.
 - c. To provide guidance for curriculum developers to create materials that take gender dynamics into consideration.
 - d. As a reference to other researchers who will continue the study that explore gender-based, classroom interaction or collaborative learning.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on high schools in Bandung that use *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The participants are 10th-grade students who are divided into mixed-gender groups discussion in EFL classroom. The focus of observation is the

interaction patterns during group discussion activities, regardless of the specific English learning material being discussed, to capture a broader dynamic of student communication.

Teachers here only provide information during interviews, not as the main subjects. It observes and analyzes patterns of verbal and non verbal interaction that arise during discussions, which are examined using Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) framework, focusing on social and instructional factors as well as psychological factors, sourced from observation and interview.

F. Conceptual Framework

The view that the language learning process, especially in EFL classes, is also determined by the patterns of social interaction that occur among students, particularly in discussion groups, forms the basis of this study (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Teachers often use discussion groups as a strategy and forum for students to exchange opinions, develop arguments, and collaboratively analyze parts of the text. Thus, group discussions provide an appropriate context for analyzing patterns of student interaction.

The main focus that forms the conceptual basis of this study is student-student interaction, which is a branch of classroom interaction theory (Brown, 2007). Brown classifies interaction into three main types, namely teacher-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-student interaction. It is student-student interaction that is formed in group discussions and plays an important role in the collaborative learning process to analyze in depth the patterns of interaction that emerge when students in discussion groups, the main framework of this study adopts Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA).

Bales (1950) points out that interaction patterns in groups are a series of social practices that can be identified and classified into interaction categories grouped into three main dimensions, namely socio-emotional positive (shows solidarity, shows tension release, agrees) task oriented (gives suggestion, gives opinion, gives information and asks for information) and socio-emotional negative (disagrees, shows tension, shows antagonism).

In addition, gender is positioned as a social factor that influences the distribution of interaction patterns in group discussions. In interpreting these dynamics, the study uses the perspective of Genderlect Theory from Deborah Tannen (1990). Tannen argues that men and women have different communication styles, which can be summarized into six main contrasts:

- 1) Status vs. Support: Men tend to communicate to maintain status, while women communicate to seek support/connection.
- 2) Independence vs. Intimacy: Focus on independence (men) vs. maintaining closeness in relationships (women).
- 3) Advice vs. Understanding: A tendency to provide direct solutions (men) vs. providing empathy (women).
- 4) Information vs. Feelings: Focus on facts (report talk) vs. sharing feelings and comfort (rapport talk).
- 5) Orders vs. Proposals: Use of direct commands (men) vs. more subtle suggestions or advice (women).
- 6) Conflict vs. Compromise: Open attitude toward debate (men) vs. efforts to seek compromise (women).

Through this lens, Tannen's perspective (1990) is used to explain the reasons behind these interaction patterns. The six contrasts in Genderlect Theory provide a basis for understanding why, for example, male students tend to dominate task-oriented interactions or why female students show more emotional support. This analysis also considers situational factors in group discussions in EFL classes. Group discussions are considered a space where students exchange ideas and negotiate meaning, making the analysis of interaction patterns highly relevant to see the extent to which the classroom context facilitates or limits student participation.

Based on the framework illustrated in Figure 1, this study views that the relationship between classroom interaction types (Brown, 2007), the function of interaction patterns in groups (Bales, 1950), and gender-based social dynamics (Tannen, 1990) produces distinctive student interaction patterns. From this, an analysis was conducted to understand how participation is formed, how dominant

or supportive roles emerge, and how interaction balance occurs in group discussions in high school EFL classes.

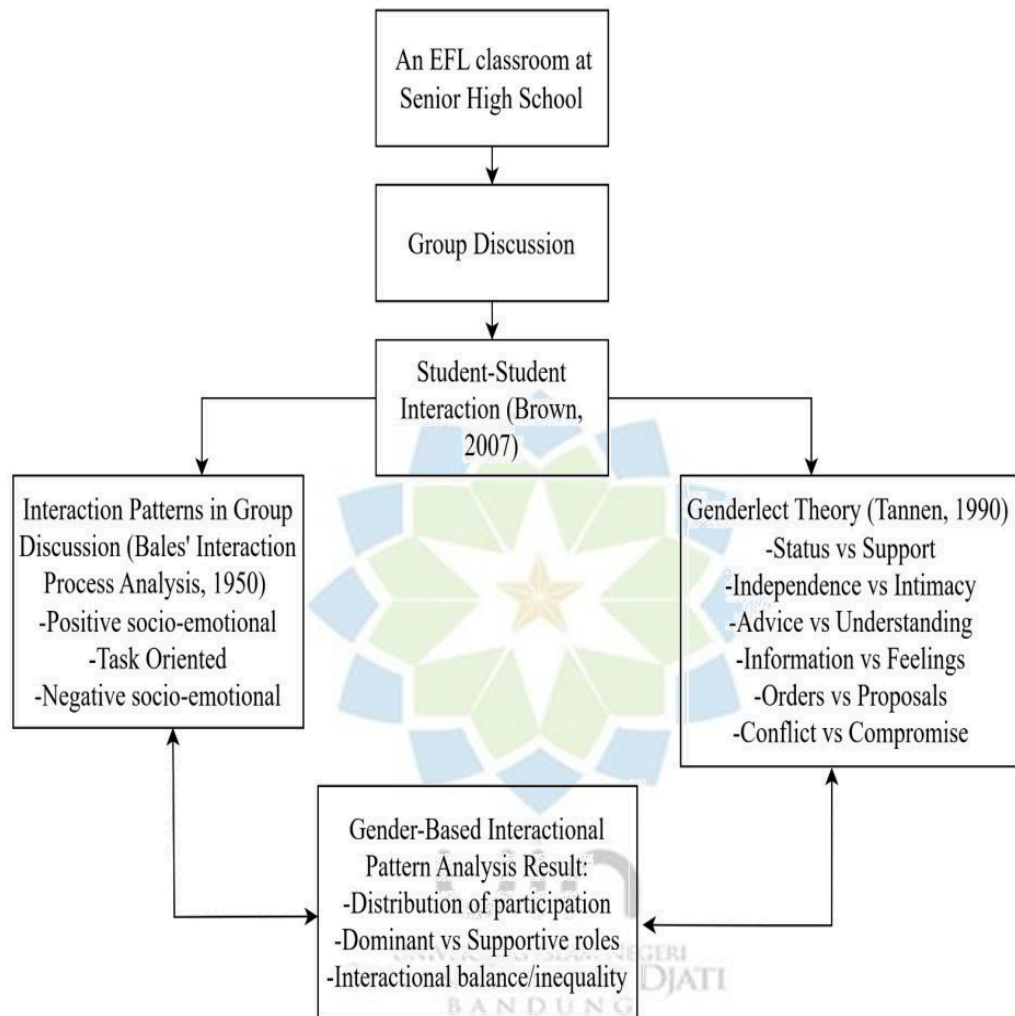


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

G. Previous Studies

Several studies have investigated the relationship between gender and interaction in EFL classrooms from different perspectives. Karimi and Chalak (2017), in their study entitled "Analysis of Turn-Taking and Repair Strategies among Male and Female Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners", provided insights into turn-taking and repair strategies at the secondary school level involving 120 EFL learners. The study elaborated on the differences in communication styles between males and females, where females tended to wait for direction, while males were more initiative. Furthermore, self-repair strategies were the most frequently used after receiving stimulation from the classroom environment. This research was still limited to the scope of language institutes, had not yet revealed student group dynamics within the context of Senior High School under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, and only described general classroom interactions, even though it presented a strong database regarding conversational mechanisms.

Meanwhile, a study by Hassaskhah and Zamir (2013) entitled "Gendered Teacher-Student Interaction in English Language Classroom: A Case of Iranian College Context" found the existence of gender bias in the relationships between lecturers and students at a university in Iran. This study showed that male students received broader interaction opportunities, such as higher frequency of feedback and questions from both male and female teachers. An imbalance in participation between genders could be seen in this study. However, the interaction was two-way between teacher and student, leaving a gap regarding how peer interaction occurred during group discussions without direct intervention from the instructor.

In contrast to the findings above, Apriyanto and Anum (2018) in their research "Gender Dynamic on Speaking Interaction In the College Classroom" found that female students were more dominant and active in classroom interactions. This was supported by their more capable motivation and study preparation. However, this study also stated that the students' freedom of movement in interacting could be limited by authoritarian teaching styles. While this research provided new findings

and perspectives regarding female dominance, it was conducted at the university level where the background, cognition, and task levels differed from the high school level, and it had not yet specifically examined interaction patterns within discussions.

In line with the findings regarding female dominance at the university level, Oktarini and Citaningrum (2018) explored turn-taking strategies as a form of gender dynamics in their research entitled "Turn-taking Strategy as Gender Performance in EFL Classroom." Through interview analysis, it was found that female students were more proactive in taking speaking turns, which demonstrated a more active role for women in the flow of classroom conversation. However, this study focused more on linguistic strategies in oral conversation in general. Thus, it had not yet deeply examined how the division of roles and the effectiveness of interaction took place when students were engaged in collaborative group tasks, as emphasized in *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Lastly, Shaberina et al. (2023), in their study "Students' Perception in Group Work Based on Gender Stereotypes in EFL Classroom", provided students' perspectives on gender stereotypes in group work at a Senior High School in East Java. The results indicated that students tended to choose group members of the same gender, based on the assumption that male students excelled in technical coordination, while females were better in communication and academics. While this research was highly relevant, because it employed a mixed-method approach and focused solely on students' perceptions, direct observation was still needed to describe the reality of gender dynamics as manifested in communication within group discussion.