

ABSTRACT

Salma, Chacha Siti (2026): **Tutor's Interactional Strategies in Fostering Student Engagement and Oral Proficiency in Online English Tutoring for Elementary Students.**

This study examines the interactional strategies employed by English tutors in synchronous online tutoring and how these strategies foster student engagement and oral proficiency among elementary-level learners. The research addresses three questions: (1) What interactional strategies are employed by tutors? (2) How do these strategies promote student engagement? (3) How do these strategies enhance elementary students' oral proficiency? Drawing on Walsh's (2011) Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) framework, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris's (2004) three-dimensional engagement model, and the CAF framework (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2008), this qualitative study analyzed four Zoom-based tutoring sessions conducted at EFE Indonesia, involving two tutors and 40 elementary students. Data were collected through video recordings, verbatim transcriptions, observation checklists, and validated through inter-rater reliability with an independent second rater. The findings reveal that the tutors predominantly employed closed questions (15–20 times per session), explicit nomination, and praise, while open questions (2–3 times per session) and extended wait-time were notably rare. In terms of student engagement, behavioral and emotional engagement were consistently high across all sessions, as evidenced by students' active verbal participation, laughter, and positive backchannels. However, cognitive engagement remained low, with students rarely producing elaborated responses or using reasoning markers. Regarding oral proficiency, accuracy on grammar and pronunciation scored highest (overall means = 2.67 and 2.69 out of 3), while complexity was consistently the lowest dimension (overall mean = 1.66). Fluency and vocabulary remained at moderate levels (2.08 and 2.03, respectively). This pattern indicates a trade-off between accuracy and complexity, where students prioritized accurate production over elaborated responses, consistent with Skehan's (1998) trade-off hypothesis. The study concludes that while the tutors' strategies effectively supported accuracy and emotional engagement, they limited opportunities for cognitive engagement and complexity development. Recommendations include increasing the use of open questions, incorporating extended wait-time, and designing tasks that encourage elaborated production. Future research is encouraged to include interviews with tutors to gain deeper insights into their interactional decision-making.

Keywords: *Elementary EFL learners, Interactional strategies, Oral proficiency, Online tutoring, Student engagement*