

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on presenting the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

In recent years, the use of online English courses and tutoring programs has increased rapidly. The rapid development of digital technology has sustained high demand for online learning even post-COVID-19, as research shows hybrid models persist due to their flexibility and effectiveness, with no full return to offline-only education (Wang et al., 2024; Dos Santos, 2022). Many learners perceive online learning as more flexible and accessible than traditional face-to-face instruction in contemporary contexts, allowing self-paced study, resource sharing, and global access without time/location constraints (Martin & Bolliger, 2021; Bolliger & Martin, 2018). In the context of English learning, online tutoring platforms provide more personalized interactions between tutors and students, creating new dynamics in communication, feedback delivery, and learner engagement. However, this personalized format also presents challenges related to managing interaction during live online sessions.

In Indonesia, a growing number of elementary and junior high school students participate in online English tutoring programs as supplementary learning outside formal schooling. Post-pandemic data shows this trend continues to rise, with 68% of Indonesian parents opting for online tutoring for their children in 2024-2025 due to convenience and quality access, particularly for English as a global skill (Kemendikbud & EdTech Indonesia Report, 2025). Platforms such as Ruangguru Kids and Zenius Kids report 40% enrollment growth in elementary English programs since 2023. Young learners benefit from online English tutoring as supplementary learning because it provides personalized pacing and interactive multimedia content beyond rigid school curricula (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017).

These programs offer exposure to native-like pronunciation and global teaching methods unavailable in standard Indonesian elementary classrooms. However, when structured interaction, affective support, and clear instructional guidance are not adequately addressed in online settings, lessons may result in passive participation, reduced attention, and low motivation among young learners.

When these needs are not adequately addressed, online lessons may result in passive participation, reduced attention, and low motivation. Therefore, understanding how tutors manage interaction in online tutoring contexts becomes an important issue. In online tutoring settings, these challenges are often intensified by the nature of synchronous virtual interaction. Limited physical presence, unstable internet connections, and reduced non-verbal cues can hinder smooth communication between tutors and young learners (Bond et al., 2020; Martin & Bolliger, 2021). As a result, tutors are required to manage classroom interaction more deliberately, not only to deliver instructional content but also to sustain students' attention, encourage participation, and create a supportive learning atmosphere. Without effective interactional management, online tutoring sessions may fail to foster meaningful engagement, particularly among younger learners who depend heavily on guidance, feedback, and emotional support.

Despite the increasing popularity of online English tutoring, managing interaction remains a major challenge for tutors. Tutors must find ways to maintain student participation and motivation in a virtual environment where immediate feedback and visual cues are limited. Studies have shown that online learners often become passive listeners, experience distractions, or feel emotionally disconnected during virtual lessons if interaction is not well facilitated (Martin & Bolliger, 2021; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020). In Indonesia, online learning emerged rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic as a necessity due to school closures affecting 60 million students, leading to platforms such as Ruangguru and Zenius expanding English tutoring for elementary levels (Kemendikbud, 2021; 6Wresearch, 2025). This sudden shift created unique challenges in Indonesia's diverse contexts such as uneven internet access in rural areas and cultural adaptation to virtual classes

differing from gradual adoption in developed countries, thus highlighting the need for context-specific interaction management in online English tutoring. These issues underscore the importance of examining how interaction is organized and sustained in online tutoring contexts.

Previous studies have emphasized the role of interaction in promoting student engagement in online learning. Muzammil et al. (2020) found that different types of interaction—student–student, student–teacher, and student–content—positively influence student engagement and satisfaction in online learning environments. Similarly, Bond et al. (2020) reported that teacher interaction plays a crucial role in fostering engagement, although it is often less effectively implemented compared to other forms of interaction. Recent studies, Wulandari & Jager (2023) and confirm this trend in Indonesian EFL contexts, showing high engagement levels but persistent low interaction scores in online platforms.

However, most of these studies focus on large-scale online courses or institutional e-learning systems, rather than small, synchronous tutoring sessions that rely heavily on real-time tutor–student interaction. Moreover, existing research predominantly employs quantitative approaches, such as surveys and statistical analyses, to measure engagement levels, while lacking micro-level discourse analysis of live interactions, studies on elementary learners specifically, and qualitative examinations of tutor strategies in small-group Zoom tutoring. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they offer limited understanding of how engagement is constructed through moment-to-moment interaction. There is still a lack of discourse-oriented research that closely examines how tutors use interactional strategies during live online English tutoring, particularly at the elementary school levels.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a classroom discourse perspective to examine interaction in online English tutoring sessions. Classroom discourse focuses on how language is used for teaching and learning purposes, including how tutors manage turn-taking, ask questions, provide feedback, scaffold learning, and support student participation (Walsh, 2011). These interactional practices are not

merely pragmatic features of conversation but function as instructional strategies that shape learning opportunities and student engagement. Student engagement is measured through observable discourse indicators such as verbal participation frequency, response latency, initiative in turn-taking, and affective markers (laughter, enthusiasm), which are established metrics in classroom discourse analysis (Fredricks et al., 2004; Walsh, 2011). These interactional practices are not merely pragmatic features of conversation but function as instructional strategies that shape learning opportunities, student engagement, and oral proficiency skills evidenced by improved fluency, accuracy, and complexity in student responses during tutoring sessions. By analyzing tutors' interactional strategies in real-time online instruction, this study seeks to understand how engagement is fostered through discourse practices that ultimately enhance elementary students' spoken English skills.

Thus, this study addresses the problem that although online English tutoring has become a widely used and effective mode of learning, the specific interactional strategies such as extended questioning, strategic pausing, and contingent recasts (Walsh, 2011) employed by tutors to promote student engagement remain poorly documented (Muir et al., 2022; Wulandari & Jager, 2023). By examining tutors' interactional practices and their influence on student engagement, this research aims to contribute to the field of classroom discourse studies and provide practical insights for improving interaction and engagement in online English tutoring contexts.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background problem above, the research question are formulated as follows:

1. What interactional strategies are employed by tutors in online English lessons?
2. How do these strategies promote student engagement?
3. How do tutors' interactional strategies enhance elementary students' oral proficiency skills in online English tutoring sessions?

C. Research Purpose

Based on the research questions formulated above, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the types of interactional strategies employed by tutors during online English lessons.
2. To analyze how these strategies promote student engagement
3. To examine how tutors' interactional strategies enhance elementary students' oral proficiency skills in online English tutoring sessions.

D. Research Significances

The study is expected to provide theoretical and practical significance.

1. Theoretical Significances

This research is expected to contribute to the existing literature on online English tutoring by providing insights into how tutors' interactional strategies influence student engagement among elementary and junior high school learners. The findings are anticipated to enhance understanding of tutor–student interaction, instructional communication, and engagement practices in synchronous online learning environments. By focusing on real-time online tutoring sessions, this study offers practical perspectives on how effective interactional management can support meaningful student participation and engagement in virtual English learning contexts.

2. Practical Significances

a. For English Tutors

This study provides valuable information regarding effective interactional strategies that can foster engagement among young and early teenage learners. The findings may help tutors enhance their teaching practices when conducting online sessions by applying communication techniques that boost participation, motivation and active involvement.

b. For English tutoring Institutions (e.g., EFE Indonesia)

The results of this research can serve as feedback for online tutoring providers to improve the quality of instruction by designing training programs or guidelines based on effective interactional approaches. Institutions may use this research to evaluate tutor performance and strengthen pedagogical support systems.

c. For future Researchers:

This study is expected to serve as a reference for future research concerning interactional strategies, discourse analysis, or online EFL learning. It may inspire further studies focusing on different levels of learners, various online platforms, or comparative analyses between online and offline tutoring practices, by contributing to the advancement of English education research.

E. Research Scope

The focus of this research is to examine the interactional strategies defined by Walsh (2011) as specific teacher moves such as turn-taking control, speech modification, elicitation techniques (questioning), and repair mechanisms that create pedagogic space for learning used by English tutors during online tutoring and to analyze how these strategies promote student engagement. This study is grounded in the concept of classroom interaction, drawing mainly on Walsh's (2011) Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), which emphasizes how teachers' interactional choices support student participation in instructional settings. The study is limited to non-participant observation and triangulation of online English tutoring sessions conducted through Zoom at EFE Indonesia, specifically involving elementary (SD) learners. Primary data from video recordings will be validated through interactional transcription, tutor reflections, and discourse analysis checklists to ensure reliability of observed patterns (Walsh, 2011).

The focus of this research is to examine the interactional strategies defined by Walsh (2011) as turn-taking, questioning, feedback, scaffolding, and repair,

and to analyze how these strategies promote student engagement and oral proficiency. This study is limited to synchronous online English tutoring sessions conducted via Zoom at EFE Indonesia, involving elementary school learners. Formal learning outcomes such as test scores or curriculum completion are excluded from the scope of this study.

Engagement (participation, motivation, and interaction) manifests as observable discourse behaviors including increased verbal turns (behavioral engagement), affective markers such as enthusiasm and laughter (emotional engagement), and response latency reduction or elaborated responses (cognitive engagement) (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). These engagement indicators correlate with measurable oral proficiency gains across three dimensions: fluency (speech rate and length of turn), accuracy (grammatical correctness and target-like forms), and complexity (syntactic variety and elaboration). This study excludes formal learning outcomes, curriculum evaluation, platform comparison, or tutor self-reports beyond observable behavior. Thus, findings focus strictly on interaction patterns during live tutoring and their relationship to student engagement and oral proficiency development.

F. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is based on how tutors' interactional strategies are enacted and interpreted during online English tutoring sessions and how these practices shape students' engagement in learning activities. Rather than emphasizing a statistical relationship, this framework adopts a qualitative perspective that views classroom interaction as a socially constructed process occurring through talk and participation (Walsh, 2011). The chart below illustrates the conceptual direction of this research.

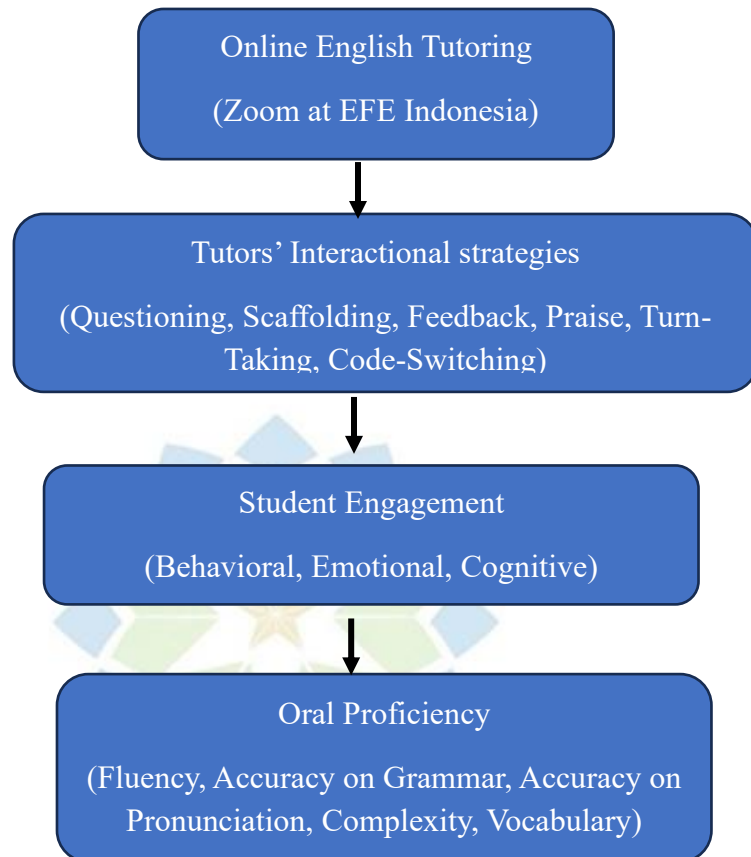


Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the assumption that tutors' interactional strategies play a crucial role in shaping students' engagement during online English tutoring sessions. Drawing on Walsh's (2011) concept of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) and supported by principles of Conversation Analysis proposed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), tutors' interactional strategies are understood as purposeful instructional moves used to manage classroom talk and create opportunities for student participation (Walsh, 2011). These strategies include turn-taking management, questioning, scaffolding, feedback, praise, affective support, and code-switching, which together influence how students participate and respond during online instruction (Walsh, 2011; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

In this framework, tutors' interactional strategies function as the central instructional practices shaping the learning interaction. According to Walsh (2011), effective classroom interaction allows teachers to align pedagogical goals with interactional choices, enabling learners to engage more actively in meaning-making. Through strategies such as open-ended questioning, guided scaffolding, and supportive feedback (Walsh, 2011), tutors can encourage learners to respond, elaborate their ideas, and sustain interaction, particularly in synchronous online settings where engagement is easily disrupted.

Student engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that becomes visible through discourse behaviors during class. Engagement can be observed through active verbal responses, participation frequency, attentiveness, initiative in asking or answering questions, and enthusiasm toward tasks or explanations (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). These indicators reflect meaningful engagement rather than passive presence in online learning.

Student engagement in this study is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioral engagement: Active verbal responses, frequency of participation, turn-taking initiative. Emotional engagement: Enthusiasm (laughter, positive affect), attentiveness (gaze, body language). Cognitive engagement: Extended responses, question comprehension, idea elaboration. Engagement becomes observable through students' discourse behaviors during tutoring sessions, such as active verbal responses, frequency of participation, attentiveness, initiative in asking or answering questions, and expressions of enthusiasm. These observable indicators reflect meaningful engagement rather than mere physical presence in online learning environments, which is especially important in virtual instruction for young learners.

The ultimate outcome of this framework is students' oral proficiency, which refers to the ability to use the target language effectively and appropriately in real-time communicative situations (Ellis, 2008). In this study, oral proficiency is operationalized through the CAF framework (Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency)

proposed by Skehan (1998) and elaborated by Ellis (2008), with additional dimensions of Pronunciation and Vocabulary. Fluency refers to the smoothness and speed of speech production, measured through response latency and turn length. Accuracy encompasses both grammatical correctness and pronunciation clarity. Complexity refers to the use of multi-clause sentences and elaborated responses. Vocabulary refers to the range and appropriateness of lexical items used. These dimensions are assessed through analysis of student utterances transcribed from Zoom tutoring sessions, with scores assigned based on a three-level rubric (High, Moderate, Low).

The framework assumes a sequential relationship in which tutors' interactional strategies shape student engagement, which in turn facilitates the development of oral proficiency. Behavioral engagement provides opportunities for fluency practice through extended speaking; emotional engagement lowers the affective filter and supports willingness to communicate, thereby supporting accuracy development; and cognitive engagement promotes noticing and restructuring, which are essential for complexity development (Schmidt, 1990; Krashen, 1982). However, this study does not claim causal inference given its qualitative, observational design. Contextual factors including student age level, class size, technological conditions, tutor experience, and instructional materials may mediate or shape the strength of this relationship (Martin & Bolliger, 2021). Thus, the conceptual framework illustrates how tutor talk and discourse practices contribute to fostering student engagement and oral proficiency in online English tutoring, specifically for elementary learners.

G. Previous Studies

There are a number of studies that have investigated tutors' interactional strategies and student engagement in online English learning contexts. First, Karafil and Uysal İlbay (2024) conducted a conversation analytic study on scaffolding strategies in an online English class at a Turkish state university. Using Walsh's (2006) Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) framework, they analyzed a 90-minute synchronous lesson on Microsoft Teams. The findings revealed that the teacher employed multiple scaffolding strategies, including

restating, reformulation, inviting participation, providing explanation, modeling, extension, and further explaining students' understanding. This study demonstrates the applicability of the CIC framework for analyzing online classroom interaction. However, it focused exclusively on scaffolding strategies rather than the full range of interactional strategies, and the participants were university-level students, leaving elementary EFL contexts unexplored.

Second, Ghadiri, Tajeddin, and Alemi (2024) investigated teachers' scaffolding practices in online L2 pragmatic instruction with 21 intermediate EFL learners in Iran. Based on 18 hours of online instruction via the Skyroom platform, they found that the most frequent scaffolding strategies were questioning (particularly display questions) and explaining, followed by feedback, hints, and modeling. Their study confirms that questioning serves as a primary tool for guiding learners toward appropriate language production in online settings. Nevertheless, this study focused on pragmatic instruction (request and refusal speech acts) rather than general English tutoring, and the participants were adults, limiting its relevance for elementary-level synchronous tutoring contexts.

Third, Lee, Yeung, and Osburn (2024) examined the relationship between informal digital learning of English (IDLE) and willingness to communicate (L2 WTC) among 308 Hong Kong secondary students, with foreign language enjoyment (FLE) as a mediating variable. Drawing on Fredricks et al.'s (2004) engagement framework, they found that different dimensions of FLE (teacher appreciation, personal enjoyment, social enjoyment) mediate the relationship between IDLE and L2 WTC. Personal enjoyment was identified as the strongest mediator. While this study contributes to understanding emotional engagement in EFL contexts, it employed quantitative survey methods rather than discourse analysis of actual classroom interaction, and focused on secondary students rather than elementary learners.

Fourth, Liu (2025) conducted a systematic literature review on teacher-student interaction in online ESL/EFL classrooms, examining both synchronous

and asynchronous communication. The review found that synchronous interaction enhances real-time engagement, facilitates immediate feedback, and supports oral proficiency development, but also identified challenges including technological barriers and participation anxiety. The study underscores the necessity of balanced integration of synchronous and asynchronous methods. However, as a literature review, it did not provide empirical analysis of moment-by-moment classroom discourse, leaving micro-level interactional processes unexplored.

Lastly, Aini et al. (2022) found that limited interactional variation reduces student participation, while Azzahro and Setiarini (2025) reported that tutors frequently use repetition, simplification, and praise to maintain interactional flow. Darmawan et al. (2023) and Nopriani and Martha (2024) further emphasized that supportive teacher behavior and responsive turn-taking enhance student motivation and engagement. However, these Indonesian studies primarily employ survey or interview methods and focus on general online learning contexts rather than micro-level discourse analysis.

Although these studies confirm the importance of interaction and engagement in online learning, most of them focus on university-level contexts or employ survey-based approaches. There is still limited discourse-oriented research that closely examines tutors' interactional strategies in live online English tutoring sessions, particularly at the elementary levels. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing tutor–student interaction in synchronous online English tutoring, focusing on how tutors' interactional strategies shape student engagement in practice.