

## Learner Initiative Based on Learners' Turns in a Korean Kindergarten English Classroom

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Learner initiative and very young learner talk have not been fully investigated despite the growing recognition of their importance in English education. Therefore, the present study examined the sequential development of talk-in-interaction observed in an after-school English program in a Korean kindergarten classroom by investigating how children contributed their behaviors to class participation using the methodological framework of conversation analysis. Data was collected from one intact classroom interaction between a native teacher and 28 seven-year-old children. The analysis highlighted a noticeable interactional phenomenon, *learner initiative*, which was revealed through children's turn position in the Initiation-Response-Follow-up (IRF) sequence. In particular, this study presented evidence that learner initiative could be displayed through learners' self-selected turns: initiating repair of the teacher's previous utterance, asking a question, and displaying knowledge of words. These findings were discussed in relation to the view of learners as active agents through the process of interaction and suggested pedagogical implications of very young learners' classroom interaction.

**Key words:** learner initiative, IRF, Conversation Analysis, kindergarten, interaction

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English education for “very young learners” (Slattery & Willis, 2003, p. 4), which refers to English education for learners under seven years of age, has gained a great deal of attention in Korea. Since English became a mandatory third year class subject of elementary schools in the Korean national curriculum of 1997, the number of private English programs has increased, and the age of starting English learning has been getting younger. This is clearly indicated by the fact that over 80% of kindergartens and daycare centers run English programs in the form of after-school English education programs (Sohn, Lee, & Kim, 2008) to meet the parents’ considerable demands. Nonetheless, English education for very young learners still has not been included in the national kindergarten curriculum, which is called *Nuri GwaJeong* in Korean.

However, within recent years, the Korean Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018) made an announcement of restrictions for after-school English education programs for preschools and the lower grades of elementary schools (hereafter, after-school English education). These announcements evoked educational, social, and even political debates over English education, leading to the Korean MoE putting on hold the enforcement of the restrictions imposed on an after-school English education until it could solicit public opinion about after-school English education from parents and education experts. After one year of discussions, a compromise was reached in which the restrictions imposed on an after-school English education would be lifted, as long as the after-school English education were implemented through *play-based* learning (MoE, 2018). Specifically, the MoE mandated that an after-school English education must be limited to one hour per day and advised kindergartens that children who do not want to participate in English education should be provided with separate care.

In the midst of carrying out an after-school English education, “not much research has looked into what actually goes on in a kindergarten English classroom” (Park & Kim, 2018, p. 77). While steady growth in the number of articles on English program and education for young children over the past 16 years in Korea does exist (Ma, 2016), specific research investigating the nature of very young learners’ classroom interaction rarely has taken place.

Thus, the present study attempts to document, with particular emphasis on detailing the children’s participation, what is occurring in an after-school English education. To accomplish this goal, a conversation analysis is utilized to examine children’s participation in classroom interaction, and of interest is the children’s turn position of the initiation-response-follow-up (IRF) sequence.

The IRF sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) is well-documented and frequently used in recent CA literature on classroom interaction. Most of the studies, however, have

focused on investigating how a teacher initiates a sequence and provides an evaluation or follow-up to the student's responses while relatively overlooking the students' initiation in the IRF sequence. Moreover, how very young language learners initiate a sequence in the classroom settings was rarely addressed in the literature. To bridge this gap, the present study aims to gain an understanding of children's behaviors in English classrooms and illuminates how children sustain and accomplish participation in English lessons by scrutinizing the students' turn position of the IRF sequence. The findings of this study will lead to a discussion in relation to potential learning and the view of learners as active agents through the process of interaction.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1. IRF and Classroom Talk

Classroom talk is a form of institutional talk in which the teacher and the student come together to make efforts to achieve specific learning objectives. Across the literature about classroom talk, the most common sequential form of talk documented has been that of the Initiation-Response-Follow up sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; cf. Initiation-Reply-Evaluation (IRE) in Mehan, 1979). It is not just a string of language forms, but instead, it features a highly systematic structure that consists of three moves: *initiation*, *response* and *follow-up*. Each move has an overall function. The first move is initiation (I), whether with a statement, a question or a command. In the second move, students respond (R), whether in words or action. In the status of the follow-up move (F), the teacher takes a vital role of providing evaluation or feedback to the students' responses.

The traditional classroom is a rather restricted context where the teacher makes the initiation and the Follow-up move, while students are restricted to responding moves. Teachers, like chair-persons, have the privileged right to allocate next turns, to control of classroom talk, and to evaluate the quality of students' contributions to the emerging interaction, which generally does not occur in an ordinary conversation. For instance, "turn sharks" (Erickson, 1996), which refer to those who take the conversation turn from the teacher-designated student, are examples illustrating one of the unique characteristics of classroom talk.

The nature of IRF sequences has come to be associated with a *skill and drill* mode of instruction (Hicks, 1995). However, an IRF sequence can encompass a number of effective instructional functions depending on the tasks and goals (Wells, 1993). This leads to the number of research studies having focused on the teachers' role to facilitate the students'

participation in the classroom interaction (J. Lee, 2017; Y. A. Lee, 2006, 2008; Lerner, 1995; Mehan, 1979; Rha, 2004).

Recently, more works on classroom interaction have emphasized the importance of viewing students as active participants in the learning process (Markee & Kasper, 2004). For instance, Mondada and Pekarek Doehler (2004) examined French second language classrooms and investigated how tasks were accomplished and collaboratively organized by learners and teachers. Their article showed that learning was situated in learners' social and interactional practices. When Young and Miller (2004) analyzed ESL writing conferences with the aim of describing the interactional architecture and participation framework of the discursive practice, they discovered the processes by which the novice moved from peripheral to fuller participation in the practice. Mori's (2004) study also focused on the students' conduct but in a Japanese language classroom. By observing the participants' vocal and non-vocal conduct during the different types of talk, various types of learning and learning opportunities were demonstrated.

In an article particularly relevant to the present study, Park and Kim (2018) examined 5 and 6-year-old children's participation and highlighted two interactional phenomena of young learners' conduct, namely shadowing (Björk-Willén, 2007) and procedural display (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989). They described the children's conduct in their study as procedural display as a large part of the instruction was done in a *skill and drill* manner, which they argued could undermine actual language learning. However, they also observed shadowing behaviors, which were seen as a sign of local competence and an opportunity to practice the target language in an ongoing activity. In another applicable study taking place in an elementary school setting, Kim, Park, and Choi (2016) examined the opening stage of English class and highlighted participants' initiative.

## 2.2. Learner Initiative

Learner initiative is broadly defined as "any learner attempt to make an uninvited contribution to the ongoing classroom talk, where 'uninvited' may refer to (1) not being specifically selected as the next speaker or (2) not providing the expected response when selected" (Waring, 2011, p. 204). Fagan (2012) referred to learner initiative as "learners' unexpected contribution" (p. 107), as it is unexpected for teachers and the rest of learners what learners can say spontaneously. Mehan and Griffin (1980), who encouraged "learners' initiation rights" (p. 377) in their article, argued that students could become initiators when they asked questions instead of answering questions. Students' initiation also creates new lesson opportunities. For this, a learner contribution must occur at the completion of an IRF sequence. It must be picked up by other participants. Furthermore, a

learner contribution should be interesting enough to extend the educational topic already on the floor (Mehan & Griffin, 1980).

As learner initiative has been considered an important factor in generating learning opportunities (Boulima, 1999; van Lier, 1988), the number of studies has placed increased emphasis on conducting studies related to various types of learner-initiated interactions (Jacknick, 2009) in the classroom by focusing on turn-taking and sequence. Waring (2009), for example, detailed how one ESL student in close coordination with the teacher asked a question to understand a specific grammatical point during a homework review activity.

Learner initiative occurs in various forms during classroom interaction. van Lier (1988) put forward four basic ways in which initiative was expressed: “self-selection, allocation, topic management, and activity management” (p. 123). Waring (2011) utilized the methodology of conversation analysis to bring forth an empirical-based typology of learner initiative. The three types of learner initiatives found were: initiate a sequence, volunteer a response, and exploit an assigned turn.

Classroom interaction cannot be treated as isolated from non-vocal behaviors, especially for young children. Hand-raising is one of the most important interaction devices used for turn-allocation in a multiparty institutional setting. Students generally raise their hands to get a turn, which is a highly visible and recognizable display of doing active work. Hand-raising is not just a plain arm-lifting. It is a powerful device “in shaping participation in, and orientation to, the talk that co-occurs with hand-raising” (Sahlström, 2002, p. 51). It has a more complex construction since students raise their hands in systematic coordination with places of possible turn-transition, turn-transition relevance-places (TRP) (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

Sahlström (2002) analyzed Swedish children’s plenary classroom interaction in comprehensive schools by focusing on children’s hand-raising for turn-allocation. While hand-raising had a sequential location in classroom interaction, it displayed learner initiative since it gave a systematic influence on the length and content of the teacher initiating turns.

Language learning requires learner initiative (van Lier, 1988; Waring, 2011). In the teacher-fronted interaction where the students have very limited rights as speakers, learners need opportunities for learner initiative, as learning is considered to be more dependent on learner initiative (van Lier, 1988). However, despite its considerable potential, learner initiative has not been widely researched. Therefore, the goal of this study is to investigate how very young learners initiate a sequence by examining turn-taking and sequence during classroom interaction. Although this study describes *what occurs* (van Lier, 1988) in classroom interaction, description of *what occurs* will lead to discussion of *what ought to occur* in classroom interaction. That is, the findings of the study will suggest pedagogic

insights regarding how the teacher's teaching behaviors for very young learners should be done in an English kindergarten classroom.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

#### **3.1. Research Setting**

The present study examined an intact classroom at a private kindergarten located in a populous city of Gyeonggi province in South Korea. The location was selected because the author had worked for this kindergarten as an English teacher for seven years. This kindergarten, like most ordinary kindergartens, implemented an afterschool English education program.

Two teachers were present in all English classes. The first was a Korean homeroom teacher who sat with the children to take care of them, but she did not participate in the English lessons (Figure 1). The second was an English teacher, Mr. Charlie (pseudonym), who was an American native speaker of English in his late twenties with six years of teaching in Dubai, the United Arab Emirate, and one year of teaching in Korea.

Officially, a 20-minute long English lesson was scheduled for every day with children learning from a native teacher twice a week and a non-native teacher three times a week. However, due to many outdoor activities and special occasions, English classes usually only met two or three times a week.

This study collected data from the native teacher's lessons only, which was organized into three major activities: singing songs; learning vocabulary; and reading story books. All materials were designed and presented in English by the language teachers. Generally, the lyrics for songs, new vocabulary words, and storybooks were presented on the TV screen connected to the computer. The teacher controlled the computer while presenting the various activities.

#### **3.2. Participants**

In total, 28 seven-year-old children, 22 girls and 6 boys, participated in the study. Ten of the 28 children have been attending a private English institute for one year, while three of the 28 have been going for two years. The remaining 15 children reported that they were solely relying on this kindergarten's English lessons for their foreign language learning. According to the information that the principal of this kindergarten provided, 23 of 28 children in this class have been studying English for over two years in this kindergarten by

registering for the after-school English program. In addition, although most students are not new to English learning, they are not able to read English.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted with the permission of the children, their parents, and the kindergarten staff. The data for this study came from fifteen 20-minute English lessons videotaped at the kindergarten over approximately six weeks in 2015. Since particular behaviors could not be predicted at the time of videotaping three cameras were used, with two placed on either side of the TV screen to capture a full view of the class, and the remaining camera placed at the back of the classroom to capture the teacher. To examine children's interactions that could not be captured by the cameras, the observer sat in the front of the room facing the children so that she could observe in detail how children participated in the English lessons. The children did not care about observer's observation since they were familiar with the observer and had been taught previously.

To analyze the data, the following steps were executed. Firstly, without any particular question in mind, video recordings were examined with repeated 'unmotivated looking' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Psathas, 1995). Second, after noticing the recurrent patterns of children's behaviors, a collection was built of children's self-selected turns initiating a sequence in the IRF sequence from among the whole set of data that was collected. Lastly, the collection was analyzed with a turn-by-turn basis in sequences of talk in relation to learner initiative.

### 3.4. Transcription

Based on observational notes and video recordings of 15 English lessons, data were transcribed using modified CA transcript conventions (see Appendix) adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984). In cases of overlap talking, the researcher counted the number of participants who talked or responded one-by-one while watching the video. Due to limited space, the names of two or more children who talked simultaneously were not written in the extract. Instead, the number of students who talked simultaneously was indicated by the Arabic numerals marked next to Ss (students). In case of a child in need of more detailed observation, the researcher transcribed her/his verbal/non-vocal behaviors and attached frame grabs of children's behaviors by following Mondada's (2016) conventions for multimodal CA (see Appendix). Video tapping taken from the three different angles made it possible to recognize every student's verbal and non-vocal behaviors and the teacher's talk. The non-vocal actions were described in comments and also shown by video frame grabs. All participants had pseudonyms.

## 4. RESULTS

This section analyzes children's participation in an English classroom. While focusing on the student's turn position in the IRF sequence, the analysis shows how children display learner initiative in three ways: initiating repair of the teacher's previous utterance, asking a question, and displaying knowledge of words. The following extracts illustrate how various types of learner initiative are intertwined and sequentially organized in classroom interaction.

### 4.1. Repair of the Teacher's Previous Utterance

The following interaction is taken from the opening routines of an English lesson before moving on to the main learning activities for the day. The opening routines of the English lesson include greetings, questions about the weather, what day of the week it is, and a brief discussion about what they are going to do.

Extract 1 shows how Mary initiates repair of the teacher's previous utterance. Her turn directly launches a teacher's "diagnostic sequence" (Sacks, 1975, p. 70), which refers to a series of exchanges using further inquiries of "why?" or "what's the matter?" to identify a particular condition or problem.

#### Extract 1. No hot

- |    |         |   |
|----|---------|---|
| 01 | T:      | <u>hello class</u>  |
| 02 | Ss:     | hello Charlie teacher ↑   |
| 03 | T:      | °good° how's everyone(.) everyone's very good today?              |
| 04 | Ss:     | YE:::S  |
| 05 | T:      | °good° [how's]  |
| 06 | → Mary: | [NO: <u>HOT</u> ] ((fans her face))                               |
| 07 |         | ((several children fan their face))                               |
| 08 | Sue:    | <u>HOT</u>  |
| 09 | T:      | <u>h[ot?]</u>   |
| 10 | Ss5:    | [hot]   |
| 11 | T:      | [it's °hot°-  |
| 12 | Joe:    | <u>[VERY VE]RY VERY HOT</u>                                       |
| 13 | T:      | >it's hot and see (.)< how about <u>outside?</u>                  |
| 14 |         | Is it hot <u>outside?</u> ((points his finger toward the window)) |
| 15 | Ss:     | [YE:::]:S   |
| 16 |         | [NO:::]   |

- 17 Sean: [( )] TODAY:  
 18 T: out[side is] very::↑ (0.2)  
 19 Jack: [war:m]  
 20 T: [co::ld today]  
 21 Jack: [war:m war:]m [war:]m  
 22 Joe: [hot] today  
 23 Ss2: h[ot]  
 24 T: [ho]t's in here ((points his finger at floor))

The teacher, Mr. Charlie, sits on the chair facing the children and initiates a sequence by saying “hello class” (01). The children respond to the teacher’s greeting with “hello charlie teacher,” which is followed by the teacher’s feedback “good” in a lower voice. As soon as Mr. Charlie asks “how’s every one?” (03) to elicit information about students’ personal state or value state, he immediately modifies his question to a simple yes/no question instead of waiting for an answer from students. After the students respond “YE::S” (04), the teacher provides feedback with “good” in a lower voice (05). When the teacher attempts to have another initiation turn by asking “how’s,” Mary launches a repair of the teacher’s understanding by producing “NO: HOT,” which is followed by Sue producing “HOT” (08). Their turns directly prompt the teacher’s production of “hot?” (09). In fact, it is a little bit hot inside the classroom since it has been exposed to the sunshine all day long through the wide windows, enough to make the children sweat despite cold temperatures outside (Figure 1). After confirming the students’ answer (11), Mr. Charlie begins a ‘diagnostic sequence’ (Sacks, 1975, p.70), through the question “how about outside?” and “is it hot outside?” which may itself lead to an accounting move (Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992). Then the students simultaneously provide various answers (15-17). This is followed by the teacher pointing his finger toward the window and attempting to respond “outside is very::↑” elongating the last syllable with rising intonation, and then uses designedly incomplete utterance (Koshik, 2002), generally known as DIU, prompting students to complete teacher’s incomplete utterance by beginning a turn. Following a 0.2 second pause, he immediately begins a turn to complete his DIU saying “co::ld today” (20) in overlap with Jack’s utterance “warm warm.” Joe and two other students still provide their opinions “hot,” but the teacher looks at them and says “Hot’s in here,” pointing his finger at the floor in line 24.

In the IRF sequence, the teacher’s initiation prompts students’ responses, and the teacher offers feedback to students’ responses. Extract 1 shows that the turn of the students is almost situated in the response turn. Nonetheless, the first reason why Extract 1 is a case of learner initiative is the turn of “NO HOT.” Mary initiates repair of the teacher’s previous

utterance by producing “no” and produces “Hot.” In general, it is the teacher that usually initiates repair of the students’ utterances, but in this case, a student initiates repair of the teacher’s previous utterance and gets the teacher to keep asking questions. That is, Mary, who is a learner, initiates repair of the teacher’s utterance, which launches the teacher’s diagnostic sequence. The second reason is that her turn “gains the main floor where more than two people are involved” (van Lier, 1988, p. 103), and participants’ attention is obtained (Mehan & Griffin, 1980). Whereas it is the teacher who initiates a sequence in classroom interaction, it is a student, Mary, who makes the teacher initiate a diagnostic sequence. Mary’s turn “NO HOT” (06) triggers the teacher’s extended question sequence. Therefore, her turn shows a learner’s initiative.

## 4.2. Asking a Question

### 4.2.1. “Chicken?”

Extract 2 is taken from the lesson where children are learning to name various animals using pictures on the TV screen. The image on the TV screen is the first page of animal pictures with a title ‘Animals’ and the image of chicks and a dog (Figure 1). Extract 2 shows a learner’s initiative while using their turn to ask a question (17).

**FIGURE 1**  
**What Animal Is This?**



Extract 2. Chicken?

- 01            T:        ((looks at TV) yes we ( ) look at animals)  
 02            Ss:        Animals  
 03                    ((a picture of a dog and chicks appears on TV screen))

- 04 → Jean: d[og] d[og]  
 05 → Kim: [do]g [do]g  
 06 T: what animal is this? ((points a picture of a dog on TV))  
 07 Jane: d[og]  
 08 Ss6: [do]g  
 09 T: a dog a:nd ↑ ((points a picture of five chicks))  
 10 Ted: do[g]  
 11 → Kate: [ch]icke-  
 12 T: there's one t[wo three four fi:ve ↑] ((points a picture))  
 13 Grace: [∞Chicke:::~:~:n ↑ ∞]  
 14 Ss2: =chicken=  
 12 T: dogs [or chicks [chicks chicks (( points a picture))  
 15 Clare: [ chickihehe [hehe  
 16 Ss: [hehehehehehe  
 17 → Kate: ((to Mr. Charlie)) °chicken?°  
 18 T: ((to Kate)) That's fo:d  
 19 ((points the TV screen)) °they're° chicks  
 20 Kate: ((looks at Mr. Charlie and to the TV screen)) °chicks°

Extract 2 begins with the teacher's directive "look at animals." By replicating the part of the teacher's turn "animals" (02), children are seen to engage in verbal shadowing of the teacher's previous utterance (Björk-Willén, 2007). As the first picture of animals appears on the TV screen, Jean and Kim immediately display knowledge of the word "dog" in English (04 and 05), even before the teacher has verbally formulated his next question. Without providing any evaluation or acknowledgment to Jean or Kim, Mr. Charlie asks the class to say what the animal is while pointing the picture on the TV screen (06) and receives the answer "dog" (07 and 08). Mr. Charlie confirms their answers and continues his turn using DIU to receive another expected answer "chicks" by pointing to the corresponding picture (09). Ted then begins a turn to complete the teacher's DIU by saying a dog (10). At the same time, Kate begins an overlapping turn but abruptly stops pronouncing the [n] in "chicken" for some reason. As Ted and Kate's answers are not the reply called for, Mr. Charlie begins a turn to attempt to give the correct answer. While Mr. Charlie produces a lengthy answer in his turn saying "there's one two three four five dogs or chicks chicks chicks" (12), Grace, another two students, and Clare enter into an overlapping turn producing their utterances in series. Grace produces "chicke:::~:~:n ↑" with a rising intonation and animated tone in a playful manner. Another two students simultaneously produce "chicken," which seems to complete the teacher's DIU with their responses happening between "five" and "dogs" of the teacher's utterance. Clare laughs

after the two children's simultaneous utterance, which leads to more laughter. In this now very awkward situation, Mr. Charlie continues his turn attempting to complete his DIU and emphasizing chicks repeatedly by pointing the picture on the TV as though nothing happened (12). From there, Kate initiates a sequence by asking "chicken?" in a lower voice (17). She offers a simple question by marking her intended question with a questioning rising intonation, followed by the answer "that's foo:d" from Mr. Charlie. After receiving Mr. Charlie's comment, Mary repeats "chicks" in a lower voice.

Case in point, line 17 is an instance of how asking a question is an example of learner initiative, in that it occurs when the teacher's turn is finished, and it initiates a sequence. Although her question receives the teacher's answer, the question itself contains learner initiative.

#### 4.2.2. "Monster?"

A similar case of asking a question occurs in Extract 3, which illustrates the process by which Mary moves from providing an utterance "monster" in overlapping turns to asking a question "monster?" during the time of using pictures to practice Halloween vocabulary. While the students are shown the pictures of each Halloween vocabulary on the TV screen, they are asked to name the proper Halloween vocabulary words. Each picture has the image of the Halloween items along with the printed question (e.g., An image of a pumpkin and 'what is it?') at the top and the printed answer (e.g., 'It is a pumpkin.') at the bottom.

**FIGURE 2**  
**What Is It?**



Extract 3. Monster?

[[ (an image of Frankenstein appears on the TV) ]]

- 01 T: [let's do it together ((points a printed word)) wha:t↑ i:s↑ it(.) #fig.2
- 02 → Mary: [monster
- 03 T: ((starts pointing a printed word one by one))
- 04 Ss: ((follow the teacher's finger)) wha:t↑ i:s↑ it(.)
- 05 Kim: f:[:f
- 06 T: [°go[od° what is it? ((points the picture on the TV))
- 07 → Mary: [monster
- 08 Ss: (1.93)
- 09 T: ((models finger point reading)) i:t↑ i:s↑ [Frankenstein
- 10 → Mary: °mon[st[er°
- 11 Kim: [Frankenstein
- 12 Ss: Frankenstein
- 13 T: ((points an image of Frankenstein)) it [is Frankenstein
- 14 Ss: [it is Frankenstein
- Mary: [it is Frankenstein
- 15 → Mary: ((to Mr. Charlie)) °monster°
- 16 T: ((to Mary)) °yes. It's a monster >but it's called< Frankenstein°
- 17 ((points the picture of animals on the TV))
- 18 Mary: ((smiles at Mr. Charlie))
- 19 T: ((looks at the TV screen using a mouse))

As soon as the image of Frankenstein appears on the TV screen, Mr. Charlie and Mary simultaneously begin a turn. Whereas Mr. Charlie begins the turn proposing to read the word together, Mary begins the turn displaying an understanding of the picture on the TV. However, Mr. Charlie does not respond to Mary's turn by instead continuing to point at the words on the screen with his finger and reading along. Following their teacher's demonstration, the children pretend to read what they heard by following along with Mr. Charlie's finger-pointing (Figure 2). After the finger-point reading activity, Kim makes [f:] sounds (05). Almost at the same time, the teacher evaluates what the students read with good, and then he initiates a turn of asking what animal they see by pointing at a picture of Frankenstein on the TV screen (06). When the teacher carries on an evaluation turn and an initiation turn (06), Mary enters into an overlapping turn by saying "monster" (07). Following a 1.93 second pause, the teacher models by slowly finger point-reading the printed word to be responsible for the answer turn (09). While the teacher slowly reads the sentence, Mary and Kim enter into an overlapping turn. In this overlapping turn, Mary produces "monster" in a lower voice (10), and then Kim seems to pursue the teacher's utterance in haste (11). As this happening, the other students continuously repeated the part of the teacher's utterance in line 12. Then, Mr. Charlie produces the full sentence by saying

“it is Frankenstein,” which is followed by the children, including Mary, entering into an overlapping turn to repeat the teacher’s utterance (14). This is followed by Mary, who sits in front of the teacher, asking a question by marking a word with a questioning rising intonation (15) and receiving the teacher’s answer and a simple explanation about Frankenstein (16) before smiling at Mr. Charlie.

In brief, Extract 4 illustrates details about how Mary asks a question. Mary’s voice of understanding (e.g., monster) since she has noticed the image of Frankenstein has been overlapped three times for different reasons (02, 07, and 10). This ultimately leads to Mary asking a question (15). Mary’s question is an instance of learner initiative, in that it occurs when the teacher’s turn is finished and initiates a sequence.

### 4.3. Displaying Knowledge of Words

A self-selected turn in which learner initiative is expressed occurs in line 21 at Extract 4. Compared to Jean and Kim’s self-selected turns (04 and 05 at Extract 2), Joy’s self-selected turn at Extract 4 is different. Whereas Jean and Kim’s self-selected turns at Extract 2 do not have a second pair part and are in response to the teacher’s initiation, the turn of Joy’s talk is picked up by others, initiates a sequence, and is closely linked to hand-raising.

Extract 4 shows learners’ initiative on the turn by displaying knowledge of words (21). It highlights the process of how Joy’s talk is picked up by other students, how children keep raising their hands, and finally how Joy’s talk gains the main floor. It also illustrates when the children raise their hands to get a turn to talk. Extract 4 occurs immediately after Extract 2.

#### Extract 4. Bird! Bird!

- |    |   |      |   |
|----|---|------|---|
| 21 | → | Joy: | BIRD! BIRD! <u>Charlie teacher!</u> BIRD!                   |
| 22 |   |      | ((lifts her bag and shows a bird drawn on her bag)) #fig. 3 |
| 23 |   | T:   | ((to Joy)) <u>oh:</u> ! <u>excellent</u> bag!               |
| 24 |   | Joy: | ((gives a big hug to a bird bag))                           |
| 25 |   | T:   | ((points Joy’s bag)) how does <u>the bird</u> look like?    |
| 26 |   |      | is it <u>big</u> ?  |
| 27 |   | Joy: | ((looks at her bag)) <u>yes</u> [big big]                   |
| 28 |   | T:   | [°good°]  |
| 29 |   |      | Joy has a <u>bi:g</u> [ <u>bird</u> ] drawn on her nice bag |

**FIGURE 3**  
**Bird! Bird!**



- 30 Ss: [Char|ie teacher!  
 31 Jack: [Charlie teacher!  
 32 Kevin: ((points his shirt)) bird! bird!  
 33 T: Yes, [kevin, a nice bird drawn on your shirt  
 34 Kevin: ((smiles at Mr. Charlie and grabs his shirt looking at it))  
 35 Sam: ((to Mr. Charlie)) [ro|bot robot  
 36 Julie: ((to Mr. Charlie)) [rabbit rabbit  
 37 Lily: ((to Mr. Charlie)) [( )]  
 38 T: alright-((claps his hands twice))  
 39 ((places his finger on his lips)) °s[hhh°  
 40 Ss: . [((look at Mr. Charlie))  
 41 T: one by one ((raise [his hand]) °who°  
 42 Ss8: [((raise their hands))  
 43 Jack: [((raises his hand)) charlie teacher!  
 44 T: ((looks around and to sam)) [sam  
 45 Jack: ((raises his hand)) [char.lie.tea.cher!  
 46 Ss9: ((drop their hands))

**FIGURE 4**  
**Sam's Gesture and Sandy's First Hand-Raising**



- 47 Sam: ((grabs his shirt)) robot  
 48 T: oh: nice robots [on your shirt  
 49 Sam: .(((places his finger making a circle)) #fig. 4  
 50 Ss6: .(((raises their hands)) #fig.4  
 51 T: ((to Sandy)) Sandy  
 52 Ss6: ((drop their hands and look at sandy))  
 53 Sandy: ((grabs her name tag and [hesitates to say]) #fig. 5  
 54 Ss4: .(((look at sandy and raise their hands))

**FIGURE 5**  
**Sandy's Hesitation and Julie's Hand-Raising**



- 55 T: (hh) (.) ((to Julie)) Julie  
 56 Ss4: ((drop their hands and look at julie))  
 57 Julie: ((to Mr. Charlie)) rabbit. cute rabbit  
 58 T: I can see you ((points julie))  
 59 okay [Julie has a rabbit's ears on her head  
 60 Jack: [°char°lie [teacher! char.lie. tea.cher!  
 61 Ss8: (((start raising their hands))) #fig. 6  
 62 Julie: ((to the teacher)) cute cute  
 63 T: ((to Julie)) >yes they're [cute<  
 64 Jack: .ugly  
 65 Julie: .[cute  
 66 T: ((to jack)) [jack  
 67 Jin: .[no ((cross with her arms))  
 68 Ss8: ((drop their hands))

**FIGURE 6**  
**Sandy's Second Hand-Raising**



After finishing talking about the picture of animals on the TV screen (Extract 2), Joy calls Mr. Charlie to show him her bird bag (21, Figure 3). After Mr. Charlie gives her the affective comment “oh:↑ excellent bag!” which is marked with a pitch leap, Joy gives a big hug to her bird bag. Then the teacher initiates a sequence asking how the bird looks like, but he immediately reconstructs a simple yes/no question from the initial open question. As Joy responds “yes big big,” Mr. Charlie enters into an overlapping turn and evaluates with “good” (28), before continuing his turn by describing the bird on Joy’s bag. This leads to Jack and several students entering into an overlapping turn and calling the

teacher to grab his attention (30-31). Kevin then initiates a sequence directly by saying what animal he comes up with, which receives a warm acknowledgment from the teacher (33). This leads to Sam, Julie, and Lily feeling eager to present what they come up with by saying what they have, which overlaps with the teacher's feedback. As a result, the teacher asks children to calm down, and those volunteers who wish to show their animals must raise their hands (38-41). When Sam is nominated from among the nine children who raise their hands (44), the children who raised their hands drop their hands (46). While Sam's utterance is being received with positive feedback (48), six students raise their hands (Figure 4). As soon as Sandy is nominated (51), six children including Sandy drop their hands (52). However, the nominated child, Sandy, only grabs her name tag and hesitates to say (53, Figure 5). Sandy's hesitation prompts four students to raise their hands to get a turn to say (54, Figure 5). So the teacher produces a deep sigh and nominates Julie with a bunny headband (55). When Julie is nominated, the children who raised their hands immediately drop their hands (56). The teacher does not ask them to raise their hands nor teach them when to; nonetheless, students raise their hands during a possible transition turn, or TRP. This recurring sequence of actions, wherein hand-raising that occurs during feedback or at the end of the teacher's turn is followed by learners raising their hands until one student is nominated, and the other students drop their hands, occurs until line 68. Whereas hand-raising was evidence of learner initiative since it gave a systematic influence on the length and content of the teacher initiating turn (Sahlström, 2002), hand-raising in this current study is not evidence of learner initiative since it is in response to the teacher's soliciting; verbal soliciting (e.g., feed-back to Joy, 23) and a non-vocal soliciting (41).

In the above extract, learner initiative occurs in the turn of Joy's personal talk. Her talk shows a learner's initiative since it initiated a sequence (21). Specifically, in line 21, Joy initiates a sequence consisting of a single adjacency pair. Of particular importance is the fact that her talk is picked up by participants and is given the main floor. This means that Joy's talk is not a chat, but rather it is related to previously established discourse topic about animals' vocabulary. Her uninvited contribution draws the teacher's attention so that several children also keep providing a personal talk or raising their hands to get a turn to talk.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The current study examined children's participation and investigated patterns of children's conduct in a kindergarten English classroom. Learner initiative occurred in three ways through the student self-selected turn position in the IRF sequence: initiating repair of

the teacher's previous utterance, asking a question, and displaying knowledge of words. These types of learner initiative were found to be prevalent in these English classrooms. Nonetheless, children's responses mostly took up their classroom talk since the teacher initiated a sequence by asking a question to the student immediately after the student's initiation. Children's self-selected turns received no response nor evaluation from the teacher due to the overlap with the teacher's talk or for other reasons, but that did not stop children from self-selecting their turns. They self-selected their turns continuously by providing utterances in response to locally emergent communicative needs. In particular, when children's self-selected turns of displaying knowledge of words were picked up by the teacher, children spoke out of turn to get a turn to talk.

Hand-raising was not a type of learner initiative in the present study but sequentially organized and involved several meaningful actions related to participation and potential learning. As shown in Extract 4, hand-raising occurred at every TRP, which demonstrated that those who raised their hands were listening to what they had been discussing and showed the students' ability to recognize when the teacher had finished talking to get a turn to participate at talk. Thus, children's verbal and non-vocal behaviors were found to be intertwined and sequentially organized in classroom interaction.

As shown in the extracts of the present study, the number of children who displayed learner initiative was relatively low in this particular English classroom. Instead, overlapping talk and the blurring of boundaries between sequential turns of talk frequently occurred. Moreover, the so-called target student who actively participated in the classroom interaction in a self-initiated manner, and as a consequence of being selected by the teacher, was likely to monopolize materials and classroom interactions. For instance, several students in Extracts 2 and 4 kept entering into overlapping turns by calling out the teacher, which gave them an advantage over other students to gain the teacher's attention.

This kind of children's dynamic energy, which could undermine classroom interaction and inhibit future learning, was a serious concern for the author of this study. Yet, the existence of the target student may not have entirely prohibited learning. Instead, the target students provided interesting information so that the teacher can purposely use them in order to keep instruction moving and to achieve their lesson goals (Tobin, 1988). Therefore, the existence of target students became part of the icing on the cake of classroom interactions in schools (Jones, 1990). Joy, for instance, is an example of a target student in the classroom interaction at Extract 4.

Although the present study could not track children's developmental changes in a situated context of English use, their conduct would be discussed in relation to learning through the process of interaction (Markee & Kasper, 2004). Firstly, as shown in Extract 1, a student initiated repair of the teacher's previous turn, which led the teacher to initiate a diagnostic sequence. Through the process of interaction, children could have a chance to

practice the target language in the teacher's subsequent inquiries. Secondly, children asked a question to acquire knowledge or eliminate confusion. Asking questions is known to be a uniquely powerful tool for acquiring knowledge. In addition, it could be evidence that the questioners were keeping track of what they had been talking (Erickson, 1996). Thirdly, self-selected turns displaying knowledge of words could be good opportunities to practice the target language as well.

Whereas a previous research study showed children's talk consisting of children's responses to the teachers' questions in English classrooms (Park & Kim, 2018), the present study demonstrated different interactional patterns, possibly due to the children's proficiency level or the class size. This study also confirmed learner initiative, which was revealed through the children's turn position. Therefore, the current study is in line with the view of learners as active agents who use language through repeated participation in social activities (Kim, Park, & Choi, 2016; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Young & Miller, 2004).

The results of the study have implications for what language teachers can do to support children's language learning. First, teachers of very young learners need to pay more attention to their students' initiations and produce a 'follow-up' to them. This means that teachers should prepare for adopting classroom talk as a nexus of an interrelated speech exchange system rather than as a unified speech exchange system which is presented in question-answer-comments (Markee, 2000; Markee & Kasper, 2004). To this end, building a warm environment and giving specific praise and approval are crucial for a broader range of speech exchange systems (Waring, 2009). Second, language teachers of very young learners should be aware of common characteristics of children such as being active, being talkative and being noisy. Learners' characteristics could be a facilitator for successful participations. As shown in the extracts, a nominated child (e.g., Sandy) did not successfully carry out her turn and ultimately missed it, but that did not stop her from raising her hand in subsequent turns (Figure 6).

This study has highlighted preschool-aged children's initiation and the characteristics of very young learners conduct in a language classroom; however, there are some limitations in this study. The current study examines one single classroom interaction with a native English teacher in a kindergarten setting, making it difficult to make generalizations of children's conduct in all kindergarten English classrooms. More research is needed on the nature of learners' initiation in classes of varying age or ability levels to determine how age or proficiency affects learners' initiation. Further study of a variety of teachers in different classes will also provide more information on how teachers should response to learners' initiations. Additional studies of these sorts will offer valuable insights on how learners' initiations promote interaction and learning opportunities.

Applicable levels: Early childhood

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## APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Mondada, 2016)

[     ]	Overlapping utterances
(2.0)	Timed silence within or between adjacent utterances
(     )	An uncertain hearing of what the speaker said
(.)	A short untimed pause

=	Latching that indicated no interval between adjacent utterances
-	A halting, abrupt cutoff
.	Falling intonation
:	A prolongation of preceding vowel
<u>word</u>	Speaker emphasis
↑	Marked change in pitch: upward
(h)	Aspirations
hehehe	Laughter
°word°	Word between two degree signs is spoken noticeably quieter than surrounding talk
(( ))	Nonvocal behaviors or transcriber's comments on contextual or other features
?	A rising inflection
!	Exclamation mark or emphatic talk
CAPITALS	Noticeably louder than that surrounding talk (not in people's name)
∞word∞	Words between wavy lines indicate an animated tone
→	A particular feature discussed in the text
><	Noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk
#fig.3	The exact moment at which a screen shot has been taken, see FIGURE 3