Exploring Classroom Interactional Competence in Synchronous Online Teaching Platforms: Insights from EFL Instructors

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Abstract: This study investigates EFL instructors' classroom interactional competence (CIC) when they teach via synchronous video conferencing to see if they perceive any differences in their CIC displays in face-to-face settings versus synchronous online teaching. The participants consisted of 16 EFL instructors from two different state universities in Turkey. The convenience sampling method was employed to reach the participants, all of whom conducted their classes solely on a synchronous online platform throughout the 2020-2021 academic year. The data were collected through the Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) chart as well as semi-structured interviews during the 2020-2021 academic year. Findings highlight that the participants expressed feeling more interactionally competent in teaching face-to-face classrooms. The range of the CIC components reported as in need of improvement in synchronous online education was found to be much wider than the ones in face-to-face education. Synchronous online education is an avenue marked by its inherent differences from face-to-face education. It creates a need for EFL instructors to reconsider ways of displaying their CIC satisfactorily in online education, which can be achieved via a comprehensive planning ranging from pre-service teacher education to in-service teacher training. Additionally, this study argues that the concept of CIC needs expansion to include e-platforms-oriented components.

Sınıf İçi Etkileşimsel Yetinin Çevrimiçi Eşzamanlı Eğitim Platformlarında Araştırılması: Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri

Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin video-konferans yöntemiyle çevrimiçi eş zamanlı ders verirken sergiledikleri sınıf içi etkileşimsel yetilerini ve onların yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi platformlarda sergiledikleri etkileşimsel yetileri arasında herhangi bir fark algılayıp algılamadıklarını araştırmaktır. Bu çalışmanın katılımcıları Türkiye'deki iki farklı devlet üniversitesinde görev yapan 16 yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. 2020-2021 yılında verdikleri tüm eğitimi yalnızca çevrimiçi platformlarda yürüten katılımcılara kolayda örnekleme sistemi ile ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmanın verisi, öğretmen konuşması öz değerlendirme tablosu ve yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakatlar aracılığıyla 2020-2021 akademik yılında toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın öne çıkan bulgusu katılımcıların yüz-yüze eğitim ortamında etkileşimsel açıdan daha yeterli hissettiklerini ifade etmiş olmalarıdır. Çevrimiçi eş zamanlı eğitim ortamında geliştirmeye ihtiyaç duyduklarını ifade ettikleri yetiler yüz-yüze ortamlar için ifade ettiklerinde çok daha kapsamlıdır. Çevrimiçi eşzamanlı eğitim yapısı gereği yüz-yüze eğitim ortamlarından farklı özelliklere sahiptir. Bu yüzden yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretmenlerinin çevrimiçi eş zamanlı eğitim ortamlarında sınıf içi etkileşimsel yetilerini nasıl etkili bir şekilde sergilemeleri gerektiğini gözden geçirmeleri ihtiyacını doğurmaktadır ki bu da hizmet-öncesi eğitimden başlayıp hizmet-içi eğitime uzanacak şekilde kapsayıcı bir planlamayla başarılabilir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma sınıf içi etkileşimsel yeti kavramının çevrimiçi platformlar odaklı içerikleri de kapsayacak şekilde genişletilmeye ihtiyaç duyduğunu öne sürmektedir.

1. Introduction

Classroom research, which briefly focuses on what happens when teachers and students come together, offers researchers a wide array of inquiries as what happens in the classroom is reshaped in each encounter of the parties. The findings of the studies on classroom research have implications "for many facets of teaching, syllabus design, material development, testing, and teacher education" (Allwright, Allwright, & Bailey, 1991, p. 14). As for all other branches of education, classroom research is highly important for foreign language teaching as it allows us to understand better why language teachers do what they do in the classroom. Considering that language teachers take many instant decisions during their teaching practices and achieve multi-tasking from initiating turns to giving linguistic feedback (Sert, 2019), it is not surprising that language teachers' actions have inspired a substantial amount of classroom research. Within the scope of language teaching, the notion of interaction is one of the areas that classroom research presents valuable insights. How language teachers achieve the match between pedagogical goals and the flow of classroom interaction is particularly valued on the ground that the harmony of these two points creates the most conducive-to-learning instances for learners (Sert, 2019).

The interactional actions of language teachers have been discussed both theoretically and practically. Adopting the approach of taking interaction as the sine qua non of classroom pedagogy, Allwright (1984) argued that interaction is a joint production of both students and teachers in the classroom. Yet, as Allwright (1984) put it, the teacher is the side who should plan the lesson and manage the tone of the interaction in the classroom for learning to happen. In an attempt to provide some general premises for language teachers to optimize classroom interaction, Kumaravadivelu (1992) listed macro strategies for language teachers, which are to "create learning opportunities in class, utilize learning opportunities created by the learner, facilitate negotiated interaction between participants, activate the intuitive heuristics of the learner, contextualize linguistic input" (pp. 41-46). Sticking to these general premises, L2 classrooms deserve to be counted as institutional contexts where L2 functions as both the means and aim of education and pedagogy, and interaction continually takes new forms thanks to their mutually-shaping relationship (Seedhouse, 2009).

L2 classroom discourse is rebuilt every time it takes place, and thus it is always a promising area to uncover "how the teacher is 'doing' teaching through talk" in any case of L2 education (Huth, 2011, p. 300). Classroom research offers a deeper understanding of how teachers manage interaction with learners thanks to studies reporting naturally occurring talk in the language classroom. Though not in a prescriptive manner, insights taken from how teachers manage teacher talk are certainly useful for pre-service and in-service teacher education (Crandall, 2000). Apparently, investigation of language teacher talk has strong theoretical underpinnings. Yet, how to carry out this investigation varies with the methodological frameworks adopted. Some studies took an outsider perspective where researchers evaluated another teacher or teachers. Vattoy and Gamlem (2020) used Classroom Assessment Scoring System for evaluating the quality of teacher-student interaction and feedback in an EFL classroom in a data set gathered from 9 EFL teachers. Likewise, Li, Sun and Jee (2019) took the initiation-response-feedback pattern as a base for evaluating the teacher-student interaction in their study that used a data set coming from 37 EFL instructors.

Yet, this study employs an insider perspective, which is quite limited in research conducted on language teachers' interactional moves and takes the classroom interactional competence (CIC) framework of Walsh (2006). Walsh (2006) himself also acknowledges the unique but

institutional nature of L2 classroom instruction and comes up with a comprehensive list of labels for language teachers' moves made to increase students' gains from L2 classroom interactions. The argument made in this study is that teachers themselves should engage in a reflective process for understanding their own decisions in the classroom, and they need a metalanguage to discuss their thoughts (Walsh, 2006). At this point, CIC emerges as a solid and comprehensive scheme for teachers to express their insider perspectives. As such, it is particularly appropriate for this study in which English instructors were invited to evaluate their language use in the L2 classroom held on synchronous online platforms. This study is particularly concerned with how language teachers view their management of teacher talk in synchronous online platforms because EFL teachers experienced an unexpectedly swift transfer to online platforms due to COVID-19. Thus, this study may offer insights that contribute to language teachers' management of classroom interactions on synchronous online platforms, which are sure to keep their presence more noticeably in the educational space and needs further investigation (Moorhouse, Li, & Walsh, 2021).

1.1. Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC)

CIC is a construct that has been proposed by Walsh (2006) who has been inspired by the premises of sociocultural theory and communicative language teaching. In broad terms, the CIC of language teachers refers to their competency in taking any interactional move as an opportunity to increase students' educational benefits (Walsh, 2011). According to Walsh (2006), a language teacher who has full command of CIC should demonstrate a set of skills comprised of "use of language … appropriate to classroom mode and learners, …facilitating interactional space [where] learners are given adequate space to participate in the discourse, to contribute to the class conversation, and to receive feedback on their contributions, …shap[ing] learner contributions … by seeking clarification, scaffolding, modeling, or repairing learner input, …mak[ing] use of a range of eliciting strategies and to recognize their different functions" (pp. 131-136).

In order to see if CIC is employed effectively by a language teacher, Walsh (2006) suggests looking for three sets of evidence. First, a language teacher should be able to fine-tune the direction of the dialogue in such a way to allow learners to attain a better way of expressing their messages or make their messages attainable for other learners. The teacher can achieve it in different ways, such as using confirmation checks or clarification requests. Second, CIC should create space for learners to find abundant opportunities for participation in classroom interaction and also for getting feedback on their performances. This feedback shapes the learner's output to enable them to better render their messages attainable for other learners. Finally, a skillful display of CIC requires language teachers to create an environment where not only teachers themselves but also language learners exploit questions for clarification of meaning, refining the topic at hand and again attaining a better way of expressing themselves.

In order to track how these features are manifested in the teacher talk, Walsh (2006, 2011) refers to a comprehensive list of labels on teacher moves that are thought to be conducive to learning and combines them in an instrument called Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT). The deployment of SETT for evaluating CIC assists in promoting L2 teachers' awareness on two levels: the appropriateness of their linguistic choices in the L2 classroom and the efficiency of their teaching strategies to lead learners to achieve pre-established academic goals (Walsh, 2006).

CIC framework has been widely used in decoding face-to-face (F2F) classroom interaction. The pioneering studies were conducted by Walsh (2006, 2011), who referred to a wide array

of cases to explicate how classroom interaction is shaped by language teachers, and SETT can be used as a means to unveil their interactional decisions. Following this study, CIC has been used as a framework for explicating teacher talk in F2F education settings in several other studies. Sert and Walsh (2013) referred to CIC as a framework for explaining how a language teacher managed classroom interaction when students claimed insufficient knowledge. Can Daşkın (2015) employed CIC to investigate how an EFL teacher shaped learner contributions in different classroom modes. Urmeneta and Walsh (2017) traced how CIC was displayed by language teachers in content and language-integrated classrooms. However, none of these studies addressed the teachers' reflections. Moorhouse et al. (2021) conducted a pioneering study that analyzed the CIC on online platforms by relying on teachers' reflections and they coined the term e-CIC. The researchers pooled the perceptions of 75 tertiary-level language teachers onto their synchronous online teaching experiences. The findings highlighted language teachers' need to integrate new technologies into their teaching, empower themselves with online classroom management competencies for keeping learners engaged and adapt their interactional strategies to the online environment. Inspired by the need for further studies in the field, this study employed the CIC frame as a critical reflection tool for language teachers who experienced a compulsory transition to online teaching platforms as the mode of education on the upswing.

1.2. Online Platforms

Though the history of distance education can be lengthened as far as the employment of the postal delivery system in the 18th century (Pregowska, Masztalerz, Garlinska, & Osial, 2021), the current sense of distance education relies on the use of internet connection for the purpose of language teaching as of the 1980s and it is called online education (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008). The paramount feature of online education -as the third phase in the evolution of distance education- is that it makes two-way communication possible, contrary to early forms of distance education that enabled simply one-way interaction (Sumner, 2000). While online education is turning into a strong alternative for conventional education forms for foreign language teaching practices thanks to either institution-based preferences or concepts with wide-reaching impacts such as COVID-19, the discussions into the efficiency of online education are still around as it is an area that requires language teachers to adjust their teaching practices mainly in three categories of professional skills: socio-affective, multimedia and pedagogical competencies (Guichon, 2009; Wigham & Satar, 2021).

A language teacher's socio-affective competency is about building and maintaining a good rapport with students (Ally, 2019; Guichon, 2009). Next, multimedia competency describes the processes a language teacher needs to complete for a successful management of online teaching platforms (Guichon, 2009). CIC is directly related to the pedagogical competency encompassing each move a language teacher makes from giving instruction to providing feedback along with all strategies employed to enhance student learning (Guichon, 2009). This latter type of competency is crucial as it is the reflection of language teachers' expertise accumulated over the years into leading students to make the most of their learning process. Still, the problem is that teachers have gained that experience in mostly F2F settings, and an approach to directly and readily transfer them into online teaching does not bring in the desired level of higher-order cognitive processes (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). As such, the research tailored to the online pedagogical competency of foreign language teachers along with other subjects emerges as a desideratum.

There are only a few other studies on the online pedagogical competency of language teachers during synchronous classes. Sun (2011) researched the delivery of Chinese classes in an online format at an Australian university. The delivery of the course was quite enriched thanks to the employment of video-conferencing tools along with asynchronous recordings and materials. Regarding the synchronous classes, the researcher highlighted that due to either technological hurdles or the students' approach to synchronous online settings, the in-service teachers could not fulfil their pedagogical competency in online classes as long as they insisted on treating online environments as similar to F2F settings. Allegedly, the teachers needed to tailor their 'online' pedagogical competency to address more one-to-one feedback in synchronous classes. One study that narrowed its focus on the online teaching experiences of ELT instructors was carried out by Şener, Sağlam Ertem, and Meç (2020), who collected views of 39 instructors on what problems they experienced during their synchronous classes. Their findings, which also highlighted the technical problems, showed that the worsening quality of interaction between students and teachers as well as students and students put the teachers' pedagogical decisions at risk. These studies are extremely valuable in proving that pedagogical decisions of language teachers should be constructed in line with the technology at their disposal and that still very little is known about the pedagogical content of the teacher talk that takes place in SOLT settings, which signals both local and universal gap for further research. More studies, as Moorhouse et al.'s (2021) research revealed, are needed to investigate language teachers' perceptions of their interactional competence in synchronous online settings with reference to the CIC framework in the related literature. Our study aims to contribute to the field by investigating language teachers' pedagogical competence by employing the CIC framework and exploring language teachers' reflections on their own CIC via SETT by utilizing data from their synchronous online language teaching (SOLT) as well as by inviting them to reflect on their CIC performances in F2F education.

2. Method
2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate tertiary-level EFL instructors' perceptions of their CIC on synchronous online teaching platforms versus F2F classrooms. The merit of adopting a qualitative design is to gather more individual insights to be interpreted around context-based variables (Stickler & Hampel, 2015). This study focuses on tertiary-level EFL instructors' perceptions of their CIC in SOLT settings versus F2F classrooms. It sets out to address the following research questions:

1. How competent do EFL instructors feel in terms of classroom interaction in SOLT versus F2F education?
2. Which CIC components do the EFL instructors want to improve in SOLT and F2F education?
3. What suggestions do the EFL instructors make about addressing their needs for a better SOLT performance?

2.2. Participants

The participants were all from two Turkish state universities the researchers were affiliated with. These universities were located in two different cities located in different regions of Turkey. All the participants were teaching general English in the compulsory preparatory program of their institutions. In both institutions, students were required to pass an in-house

English proficiency exam to be eligible to study their majors, and their attendance was compulsory during SOLT. The sampling method of this study aligns with the premises of convenience sampling, as Robinson (2014) suggested. The rationale behind collecting data from the colleagues of the researchers via convenience sampling was twofold. First, the participants were accessible to the researchers in terms of readiness and willingness during the data collection period that took place in the 2020-2021 academic year. Upon receiving the ethical committee's permission, the researchers sent an invitation email to the instructors working in their institutions by underscoring the voluntary nature of the study as well as the phases of the data collection, and only the respondents who expressed their willingness to study were further included in the study. Second, the profile of the instructors working in these settings was appropriate for answering the research questions. They were already experienced in F2F, and they also got experience in SOLT because both institutions switched to compulsory SOLT throughout the 2020-2021 academic year. Thus, the participants were familiar enough with both platforms to give detailed accounts of their experiences. The respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Demographic information of the participants

Participants	Age	Sex	Teaching Experience	Educational Background	Weekly SOLT Hours during the 2020-2021 Academic Year
P 1	34	F	12 years	MA in English Literature	18
P 2	41	F	14 years	BA in Translation Studies	18
P 3	35	F	13 years	MA in TEFL	17
P 4	38	F	15 years	MA in TEFL	18
P 5	34	F	12 years	MA in Educational Management	20
P 6	33	M	9 years	MA in TEFL	14
P 7	41	M	18 years	PhD in Philosophy	15
P 8	30	F	8 years	PhD in TEFL	24
P 9	35	F	10 years	MA in TEFL	9
P 10	45	F	23 years	MA in Curriculum Development	12
P 11	31	F	9 years	PhD in TEFL	15
P 12	40	F	17 years	PhD in Sociology	13
P 13	38	F	16 years	BA in TEFL	15
P 14	33	F	11 years	MA in TEFL	15
P 15	34	F	11 years	MA in Linguistics	20
P 16	35	F	10 years	BA in TEFL	12

All the participants were quite experienced in terms of EFL teaching. Only one of the instructors (P7) mentioned having a previous course on online teaching prior to his actual SOLT experience. As all other participants got this experience during the compulsory switch to SOLT, this study should prove useful in unearthing the points in need of improvement for their better SOLT performance.

2.3. Data Collection

Employing a qualitative research design, the present study utilized two different data collection tools, which are the Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) table, which was adopted from Walsh (2006) and semi-structured interviews. Hence, data gathering was

performed in two phases. The first phase concerned the instructors' self-observation process by filling in the SETT table relying on video-recordings of their own classes. The participants were asked to return the SETT they filled to the researchers before the semi-structured interview to make sure that they had gone through the required self-observation phase to be able to reflect on their SOLT experience on more solid ground. Furthermore, the participants provided the lesson recordings in which they carried out a self-observation process for the study. The second phase was conducted through verbal interviews with the instructors. This two-way data collection process was carried out for each participant separately.

This study used Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) as the research tool for conducting synchronous online interviews. In order to ensure thematic integrity, the study uses a semi-structured individual interview style where probes were mainly composed of references to the components of CIC. The probes to be used during the interviews were first determined by the researchers in line with research questions and then piloted with two teachers to evaluate if they have the content validity. Upon noticing that the questions had the content validity, they were employed with the other respondents, as well. The interviews were conducted by only one of the researchers, who asked the questions verbally and also displayed them on the screen throughout the interview. Each participant was interviewed once, and each interview lasted between 25 to 35 minutes. The data collection process for 16 participants took three months. It is important to note that during the data collection, all of the participants were conducting their classes in SOLT settings for nearly one year due to the COVID-19 outbreak that happened in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The results obtained from SETT were converted into frequencies, and the interviews were subjected to content analysis. To analyze the data gathered via the interviews, the researchers first transcribed the interviews. Then, for the content analysis, the researchers went through each transcription sheet for separate individuals. On each data set, the researchers followed the six-stage process of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2008). Appropriate to the nature of qualitative data, this was a recursive process in which the researchers moved back and forward on the data set for a better appreciation.

3. Findings
3.1. Use of CIC components

Findings of the study were presented in different sections. Starting with the instructors' frequencies of CIC based on SETT, we continue with the display of their preferences in terms of F2F or SOLT, factors hindering effective use of CIC in SOLT, positive and negative influences of SOLT on the instructors' interactional competence, type of CIC to be improved, instructors' suggestions for improvement of interaction in SOLT.

As shown in Figure 1, the instructors' self-observation and self-evaluation experience based on watching the recordings of their online classes revealed that among the CIC components, the use of paralinguistic features and extended teacher turn had the highest frequency, respectively. On the contrary, teacher interruption, form-focused feedback and confirmation check were the least frequently used components.
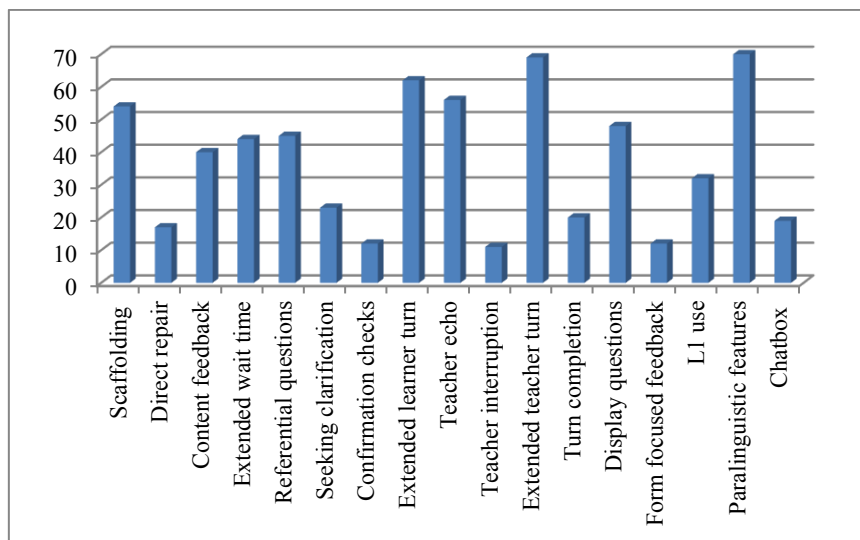
Figure 1. Frequencies of instructors' use of CIC in online classes based on SETT

Concerning the use of CIC, during the semi-structured interviews, a common point was the participants' hesitations towards direct feedback both in F2F education and particularly in SOLT.

> *I don't think that I do that a lot. I repeat them, correct their sentences, but I do not say: this is the correct version, etc. … I prefer to give feedback in an indirect way. (P2)*

> *... Students do not find direct repair very comfortable in online education. It is not like a classroom environment; they do not know their classmates, they do not feel very safe. Students write to me from the chat box or even send emails to explain that they do not feel safe and so they do not join the classes; they do not know their friends, and when they make mistakes, they do not feel good, etc. That is why I change my style and do not give instant feedback. (P4)*

Another participant's comments also imply that direct repair is a bit threatening for students.

> *If we are in the very first week of the educational semester, I give them some time to know me and learn my intentions so that I am not a threat while directly repairing. I delay direct repair a bit. (P7)*

Considering that CIC has been mainly framed on the conventional F2F classroom environment by Walsh (2006), it is no surprise that the chat box is not a component of CIC. Still, depending on what our participant reported, we suggest that there is a need to expand CIC so as to include the employment of chatbox as a component as it has been found to fulfil several needs in the class. First, the chatbox use has been of great help for giving feedback to students even in times of technological interruptions arising from the problems in students' microphones or bandwidth problems, as mentioned by a participant.

> *Chatbox, I use it only for checking students' answers who do not have microphones. In order not to leave them out, I ask them to reply and give answers by using the chatbox. (P10)*

As one participant mentioned, along with being a means of providing learners with the feedback, chatbox also appears to be a tool for extending learner turns as one participant mentioned.

> *I sometimes send extra things, pictures, handouts, and links via chatbox. I also share the answers for the activities via chatbox. Sometimes I use it to get students' responses for short written answers: I ask them to write short paragraphs and send it via chatbox so that everyone can see the answers. (P16)*

Based on the observations of students' feeling insecure in SOLT due to course recordings, some instructors reported utilizing the chatbox to enrich the classroom discussion platform.

> *I use it for teaching practical points or as a kind of idea sharing. (P12)*

> *I know some students do not want to speak, but they are very good at typing. This generation is different from us; they are digital natives and faster at typing than speaking. They are also practising writing, which is very good. When I ask a question, I say you can either speak or write. And I receive a lot by chatting. (P7)*

In addition to extended learner production, chatboxes were reported to increase synergy in the class. In order to facilitate communication among students, one participant mentioned how he wittily utilized the chatbox by becoming a role model.

> *Also, I had a synergistically high group. We kept sending emojis, hearts to each other or comments such as that is fantastic, good etc. I feel like these emojis really talk to the digital natives. (P7)*

When instructors were asked to state the platform where they felt more comfortable, the majority of them (f=10) chose F2F environment because of real interaction (f=9), use of body language more (f=4), more familiarity with F2F (f=3), close observation of students (f=3) and a higher sense of security (f=2). F2F seems to act as a 'safe harbour" for the participants due to the sense of building a sound rapport with students, which was expressed by 11 participants

> *Though we have gained some experience in OE, I still feel confident and more productive in F2F education because we can see our students' faces and interaction is really important to transmit your feelings. So, I feel more secure in f2f education. (P6)*

Concerning the use of CIC, the instructors were found to use different methods to maintain interaction with students in both F2F and SOLT; however, the following factors were recursively remarked to hinder the effectiveness of CIC in SOLT environments.

3.2. Barriers against the effective use of CIC in SOLT environment

Closed cameras: The participants mentioned how bad they felt when their students kept their cameras off during the SOLT. Regarding its impact on CIC, one participant described how the class harmony was disturbed.

> *There is not the harmony or synergy because you feel aloof. But in the real classroom, you are all like in a box, and you have the communication. But in online education, even some students say that they cannot speak or concentrate while people are waiting for them and while those others' cameras are off, they do not feel comfortable. (P1)*

Next, the closed cameras were mentioned as a hindrance in observing students' reactions to instructions or other points, such as how fast or slow they are doing for a timed exercise. One of the participants discussed how this situation affected her employment of extended learner turn.

> *In OE, I wait a bit, and I react more quickly without waiting. I don't know why I do so, I need to re-watch my recordings. It depends on the classroom. Sometimes I do not get any answers. I ask a question and wait for the answer; if there is no answer, I re-ask the question, and I answer it myself without waiting a lot. I can balance extended waiting time in a better way in F2F class because you can observe it in your students' faces. (P2)*

Additionally, closed cameras were stated to be a barrier to students' relating to each other and building trust with one another. One of the teachers discussed how this situation affected her employment of direct repair.

> *In F2F education, I do it more often. Students do not know their friends in OE, and when they make mistakes, they do not feel good, etc. That is why I change my style and do not give instant feedback. (P4)*

Time limitation: Another frequently mentioned factor keeping the respondents from the effective employment of CIC was time limitation. The majority of the participants (N=13) used the free version of ZOOM for carrying SOLT, in which each meeting is limited to 40 minutes, after which the meeting ends automatically. One participant described her 40-minute class time directed her to seek less clarification from students:

> *I did not seek any clarification in the recording I have observed. It is difficult in OE maybe because time is not enough, and I have to fill in any silence, because of this kind of stress, I may not be seeking clarification. (P5)*

Teachers acknowledged that they took their decisions in line with 40-minute long lessons also for other CIC components such as extended wait time, teacher interruption or scaffolding.

> *I did not do that scaffolding online because of time problems, actually. I thought that if I focused on some points more, maybe I could miss some other points in the outline. (P16)*

As it is explicit in the extract above, the participants did not feel equipped to overcome the time-restriction of the SOLT platform they used.

Discomfort/Unfamiliarity with the online environment: The participants also raised some issues related to students' and their own unfamiliarity with the online teaching environment. One teacher expressed how the silence of students triggered extended teacher turn in online classes.

> *I try not to speak more, but in online education, we speak more. But in F2F, we speak less. Because of the harmony in the class where no one is talking in online education, it is usually the teacher who speaks. Online education atmosphere makes you talk more. (P2)*

The following comment made signals that she needed pedagogical guidance in breaking the insistent silence of her lower proficiency students for referential questions.

> *...Especially for lower levels, when I ask referential questions, they keep mostly quiet. It depends on the student level, especially in online education. But in F2F education, they do their best to answer my questions regardless of proficiency level. (P3)*

Another instructor had difficulty in arranging the wait time for tasks at hand, and she could not allocate enough time for tasks.

I am more successful in this in F2F as I cannot tolerate silence in SOLT, and I feel like I am hurrying up things more. (P13)

Still, one another mentioned that students' maintained silence led her to speak even during the waiting time she allocated for task completion.

In SOLT, I wait longer for them, and I find myself always saying something while waiting; I rephrase my instructions, I repeat myself, but I don't keep silent. I feel like that if I keep silent, they will also keep silent. Maybe this is wrong, but I can't stop myself. (P14)

Body language: Sitting in front of their cameras whose angles and quality are restricted limits both teachers and students in their employment of body language. One participant shared that as her students could not grasp the meaning due to limited body language, she resorted more to L1 use for clarification in her online classes.

I use it more in OE though it depends on the class. Especially in low-level students, I feel like I should use it. In f2f, I can use my body language, I never sit in the class. Students can understand meaning from my body language. In OE, I can't use it more, and I am not sure if they understand or not. (P16)

3.3. Components to improve

Although instructors seemed to use various components to maintain interaction in their classes, they pointed out that they did not feel much competent in several of them. The following table specifies the CIC components that need improvement based on the mode of teaching.

Table 2.

Components that need improvement based on F2F education and SOLT

Type of Interaction	F2F education *(f)*	SOLT *(f)*
Scaffolding	1	3
Direct repair	-	3
Content feedback	1	4
Extended wait time	3	5
Referential questions	1	3
Seeking clarification	-	3
Confirmation checks	-	2
Extended learner turn	1	4
Teacher echo	2	3
Teacher interruption	-	3
Extended teacher turn	-	4
Turn completion	-	4
Display questions	-	2
Form focused feedback	-	2
L1 use	-	2
Paralinguistic features	-	2
Chatbox	-	3

As can be understood from the frequencies given in Table 2, the instructors seemed to need to improve their interactional components, mostly in SOLT. All of the components were remarked in relation to the SOLT more than once. Extended wait time was the most frequently cited component in need of improvement. It was followed by content feedback, extended learner turn, extended teacher turn and turn completion. Considering the points to be improved in F2F, instructors pointed out fewer components. The most frequent responses were extended wait time and teacher echo, respectively. In both modes of instruction, improving wait time, in other words, giving students more time and opportunity to speak, outnumbered the other components.

3.4. Possible suggestions to improve CIC in SOLT

Apart from remarking the components to be improved, the participants were asked to state their suggestions to improve CIC in online education.

Table 3.

Instructors' suggestions for improving CIC in online education

Themes	Codes	f
Extra-curricular solutions	In-service training on online education	5
	Workshops for instructors	1
	Webinars	1
Teacher-related	More reflection-on-action	2
	More self-learning	1
	More self-motivation	1
Activities encouraging students to	increase interaction	1
	give feedback	1
	be more attentive	1
	make mistakes	1

Instructors' suggestions centered around three main themes. The most frequently recommended solution was found to be in-service training (f=5) on online education. Related to technical and professional training, workshops and webinars were also cited by the instructors. Another point concerned the instructors themselves. Their reflection on online teaching more (f=2), teacher autonomy and self-motivation were listed as suggestions for rendering online education more effective. The third point was about the possible activities to encourage students to interact more, give feedback about the process, pay more attention and even not to be afraid of making mistakes to increase their participation.

The participants were also questioned on their ideas about the content of in-service training on SOLT. The responses centered around the inclusion of Web tools (f=7), handy strategies (f=3) and different activities (f=2) to be used in online sessions. Context or problem-specific suggestions (f=2), idea sharing among instructors (f=1) and class representatives on students' problems (f=1) were among the preferences for the content of in-service training on online education.

3.5. Perceived effects of online education on CIC

Given the relationship between online education and CIC, the instructors voiced both positive and negative influences.

Table 4.

Positive and negative effects of online education on CIC

Positive effects of online education on CIC	Negative effects of online education on CIC
increased awareness on technology ● increased use of technology (4) ● easier access of online resources ● quicker document sharing ● better appreciation of digital natives	**communication-related problems** ● difficulty in engaging students (3) ● lack of interaction (3) ● increase in teacher talk (2) ● lack of understanding their needs (2) ● lack of rapport with students (2) ● lack of eye-contact ● lack of group discussions
facilitative factors ● time-saving (2) ● more feasible/practical classes ● better classroom management ● opportunity to re-watch the class recordings	**debilitative factors** ● sense of uneasiness ● physical distance ● difficulty in classroom management ● less class hours ● student bias against online education
instructional gains ● more productive writing tasks ● easier instruction of grammar	

Regarding the benefits OE creates for CIC, most of the responses pointed at indirect effects rather than underlining CIC components. The first theme was about the increased awareness of technology, and they stated that they started to benefit from technology and accessed online resources more easily. The facilitative factors of the second theme included the time-saving nature of online teaching, better classroom management and the opportunity to re-watch the class recordings. From an instructional perspective, online education allowed for more productive writing tasks and teaching language forms more easily. As for the negative impacts, socio-affective issues resulting in less student-engagement were notable. Thus, teacher talk was cited to increase in the SOLT environment.

4. Discussion

The present study dwelled upon the CIC of EFL instructors in both F2F and SOLT environments. The participants from two different Turkish state universities, engaged in reflection processes upon their own video-recordings of SOLT. This kind of reflection-on-action aimed at enabling the instructors' self-observation and self-evaluation related to their application of CIC in their language teaching classrooms. Given their responses, the following points constituted the foci of the study: their performance of CIC based on SETT instrument, the use of CIC in both F2F and synchronous online teaching environments; factors hindering the use of CIC in SOLT; the positive and negative effects of SOLT on classroom interaction; CIC components in need of improvement; the instructors' suggestions for increasing the efficiency of CIC.

As Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) and Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) suggest, interaction facilitates language learning; therefore, it is essential for teachers to provide students with opportunities for interaction and to sustain the interaction effectively. In the present study, EFL instructors reported revealing a better potential in terms of classroom interaction in F2F education. When it comes to using of CIC in SOLT

environment, the instructors applied all types, but consulted less to direct repair, confirmation checks, teacher interruption, turn completion and form-focused feedback, most probably not to disrupt the flow of interaction. However, the use of paralinguistic features and extended teacher turn had the highest frequency, respectively. This finding is in line with another study designed on SETT instrument in an EFL classroom (İzzati, 2021), revealing that extended teacher turn was used most frequently in online settings while confirmation check and display questions were consulted less frequently. Considering that extended teacher turn implies a lessened place for student participation, EFL teachers should find ways of balancing their talking time in SOLT environments.

Although the instructors benefitted from classroom interaction components in both F2F and online education, they voiced some factors impairing the efficiency of their CIC performance during SOLT. One of them presented itself as closed cameras during the class. Not seeing students due to off-cameras limited the instructors' chance of observing students' needs and comprehension as well as building rapport with them, which has also been reported to be problematic by some other Turkish-context studies (İşpınar Akçayoğlu & Dişlen Dağgöl, 2021; Şener et al., 2020). Similarly, Rosell-Aguilar (2007) found that it was harder for language teachers to perceive and interpret students' reactions due to the lack of visual cues in audiographic conditions than in an F2F classroom. Moreover, time constraints formed another barrier against the effective use of interaction components. Due to the limited time, participants found it difficult to apply such components as scaffolding or seeking clarification in SOLT. This suggests that the curricular adaptations were not made accordingly and the teachers felt forced to make sacrifices in the application of CIC to keep up with the pace of the curriculum. Therefore, there is an increasing need for the rearrangement of the curriculum for online lectures (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Toquero, 2020). Additionally, unfamiliarity with online education had a negative impact on the sense of real classroom climate, and thus caused student silence. Greater silence in SOLT than in F2F leads to higher extended teacher turn and less extended wait time. Another study conducted at tertiary-level (Beaudoin, 2002) also indicated that online learning as a new experience led to greater student silence. Hence, not only students' but also instructors' readiness for distance education proved to be of great importance. Synchronous teaching necessitates certain pedagogical, technical and interpersonal skills such as transferring content across a screen; ensuring student involvement using two-dimensional (2-D) images; performing interaction in a digital classroom; addressing learners' affective needs across distance; allowing for a sense of presence despite physical distance; and dealing with technical difficulties (Rehn, Maor, & McConney, 2018). Hence, the integration of practical experiences into initial teacher education addressing components of professional digital competence bears significance (Moorhouse, 2021), which could be attained through offering online teaching practicums (Tømte, Enochson, Buskqvist, & Kårstein, 2015). Relying on the assumption that all the pedagogical guidance provided during pre-service education of EFL teachers was based on F2F practice, EFL teachers are now in need of in-service training about how to manage online education. Hence, not only pre-service but also in-service teacher education should be enriched through workshops or idea-sharing sessions among peers for professional development in online teaching.

As a last but not least obstacle, limited use of body language in the SOLT environment resulted in interactional problems such as the higher use of L1 and greater teacher talk. In conventional classrooms, students' body language could be used by instructors as an indicator of students' seeking support, but it takes more time to identify these instances and problems in online teaching (Davis, Gough, & Taylor, 2019). In the present study, instructors

tried to compensate for the lack of body language to prevent probable interactional problems by employing paralinguistic features purposefully. In other words, although the lack of body language could weaken the two-way interaction between instructors and students, knowledge of communication barriers in online teaching could enable instructors to maintain an effective interaction with online learners (Alawamleh, Al-Twait, & Al-Saht, 2020). Among the pedagogic solutions to be taken may be to suggest EFL instructors more frequent employment of visuals as well as enhanced intonation. Additionally, teachers are advised to ponder more on the skilful use of alternative interaction channels in online education such as breakout rooms, digital interactive whiteboards or chatboxes (Hüblová, 2021). In this sense, the frame of CIC should be enriched to include e-competencies such as the purposeful use of chatboxes or annotation tools to address needs arising from the inherent features of online platforms, and their pedagogical applications should be considered by instructors.

The unplanned move into synchronous online teaching brought about both positive and negative effects; however, the instructors reported experiencing indirect positive effects. To illustrate, better use of technology and easier access to online resources could help instructors to enrich the teaching content. Digital literacy eases the use of digital technology for learning purposes (Jang, Aavakare, Nikou, & Kim, 2021, p. 10); thus, greater command of technology could enable instructors to apply it in their teaching and to design more interactional activities. Based on Daumiller et al.'s (2021) categorization of attitudes towards the sudden shift to online teaching as *perceived threat*, *perceived usefulness for competence development* and *perceived positive challenge*, the higher use of technology and access to online resources could be recognized as perceived usefulness for competence development, which hints at an opportunity for professional development. This finding supports other studies indicating that teacher self-efficacy for technology application improves with increases in online teaching experience (Lee & Tsai, 2010; Ma, Chutiyami, Zhang, & Nicoll, 2021; Richter & Idleman, 2017). Likewise, watching the class recordings could trigger instructors' self-observation and self-awareness. Nevertheless, lack of communication and increased teacher talk constituted the negative sides of online teaching.

When it comes to the improvement of CIC in F2F teaching and SOLT, the instructors felt a greater need to enhance their interactional skills in online teaching. Particularly instructors need to reconsider how they employ extended learner turn and extended wait time in online settings. As Moorhouse et al. (2021) claim, CIC promotes interactional space, and increasing wait time, supporting extended learner turns, and planning times could provide learners with more space, thus contributing to more meaningful interactions. Extending wait time in online English classes could also solve the problem of student reticence (Cheung, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic could be a stepping-stone for educational institutions to boost their online learning capacity and realize a successful digital transformation of their educational systems (Maheshwari, 2021). Instructors' awareness of the problems enabled them to propose some suggestions for improving classroom interaction in online classes. As an extra-curricular solution, in-service training on online education presented itself. The instructors highlighted online tools related to the content of such a training. Inclusion of EFL teachers into professional development activities could enhance their knowledge and skills in digital platforms (Lailiyah & Cahyono, 2017; Nugroho, Haghegh, & Triana, 2021; Sithole, Mupinga, Kibirige, Manyanga, & Bucklein, 2019). Scholarship of teaching and learning could be promoted through the reflective practice of university teachers (Walsh, 2021); thus, more reflection-on-action practices and autonomous learning could address interactional difficulties in online classes. Moreover, activities that encourage higher student involvement

could boost classroom interaction in a virtual setting. Online discussion boards could promote not only student engagement and motivation but also rapport among students (Khoshnevisan & Rashtchi, 2021). However, it is true for instructors, as well. Due to the time constraints and modality of online teaching, instructors could feel isolated and miss out meaningful discussions and constructive feedback (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012); thus, idea-sharing among peer instructors could give an insight into interactional problems.

All in all, as a backbone in the language teaching and learning process, interaction could be a pivotal problem in both F2F and SOLT settings. Given the new era in online education, revisiting classroom interactional competence through the eyes of the instructors could help find the solutions and improve the interaction more. Instructors with greater awareness of problems, solutions and improvements could take more concrete steps to shape their classes.

5. Conclusion

Considering the results based on the research questions, it is possible to remark that the instructors had higher positive perceptions of F2F and detected some factors as a barrier to effective classroom interaction in online teaching; therefore, teacher talk increased in an online learning setting, and instructors sensed the need to provide students with more time and space for participation. Therefore, language teachers should design various activities and arrange their time flow more flexibly. Accordingly, new parameters could be added to the assessment criteria to gauge the process. The instructors could try to detect the specific reasons behind the students' silence through break-time conversations. In line with the interactional problems, the instructors would like to improve extended learner turn and extended wait time. Directing different questions about the related topic could increase the chance of eliciting more sentences from students. Likewise, including other students in the discussion is more likely to help use the wait-time more effectively. To cope with interactional problems better, the instructors also suggested different solutions given the increasing demand for online education and digitalization. Their responses mostly centered around getting in-service training on online education and especially on the use of online tools. The school administration should care about the demands of the instructors and search for ways to provide them with relevant workshops or webinars. As a matter of fact, courses about online teaching should be integrated even into the pre-service training programs.

Accelerated development of new technologies, increasing use of the internet and greater need for digital workforce training pave the way for online education, and it is on the path to becoming mainstream by 2025 and globalization of e-education is bound to happen; hence, the combination of strong aspects of online and F2F education such blended learning or flipped learning could build a balance (Palvia et al., 2018). Hence, it is better for EFL instructors to get more acquainted with online teaching to sustain interaction more effectively.

The number of the participants constituted one of the limitations of the present study. Another research with more participants could enable us to draw a bigger picture about the issue. Similarly, another limitation is about the inclusion of participants from different universities around Turkey. This study included the instructors working in only two state universities in Turkey. Therefore, researching the conditions in both state and private universities all around Turkey could provide more generalized results about the interaction issue in language teaching in both online and F2F learning environments.

Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from Social Sciences University of Ankara (Approval Date: 07/04/2021).

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