

## Learner Initiative Through Multimodal Communication Resources in the English Classroom\*

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Using a conversation analysis (CA) framework, this study investigated how kindergarten-aged learners took initiative during classroom interactions through multimodal communication resources. Over a thirteen-week period, data was collected from kindergarten English classroom interactions between two male native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and 125 children divided into six classes. The analysis revealed that learners deployed several multimodal communication resources in teacher-initiated sequences, such as finger-folding gestures, hand-raising, and gaze direction. These multimodal resources were employed to retrieve words, acquire turns, provide answers, and impart other kinds of information. The study also showed how very young learners, with limited linguistic resources, were able to attract the teacher's attention, draw on embodied resources to access a turn, and become active agents influencing the trajectory of both teacher talk and classroom learning. The study concludes with a discussion of learner initiative and multimodal communication resources, and the pedagogical implications carried by the results of the study for classroom interaction with very young learners.

**Key words:** learner initiative, multimodal communication resources, gestures, conversation analysis, kindergarten, interaction, early English education

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes learner initiative through verbal and multimodal resources of very young learners during classroom talk. The extant literature on learner initiative has found evidence that initiative motivates learners to use the second language (Damhuis, 2000). Initiative was also found in a pair of studies to play even more vital role in the learning process than inputs transmitted to learners via a teacher or a textbook, with the underlying logic being that initiative implies attention being paid to the matter at hand (van Lier, 1988, 2008). The literature on initiative has also found that it encourages learners to participate in classroom talk (Garton, 2012; Jacknick, 2011) and facilitates better learning outcomes (Waring, 2011). Initiative-taking is simultaneously a pedagogical moment, a teaching opportunity, and a promise of future learning, and therefore an institutional goal in the language classroom (van Lier, 2008).

And yet the centrality of the teacher's role remains largely unchallenged. Teachers are essential to track learning objectives, organize class time, and work to facilitate the establishment of a learning environment in the classroom. The teacher-learner relationship influences the nature of classroom talk, which tends to comprise teacher-centered or teacher-controlled interactions, reflecting the structural format in which such talk typically occurs, the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence. In IRF sequences, the learners' participation is limited to the response move. That is, the learners' role is largely reactive, limited to responding to the teacher initiation.

Based on the predominant research assumption for years that "only teachers can direct speakership in any creative way" (McHoul, 1978, p. 188), a considerable amount of research has examined teacher behavior at the expense of student behavior. A great deal of research, for example, has investigated how certain types of teacher initiation facilitate student participation (Hall, 1998; Lee, 2017a; Long & Sato, 1983) and how a teacher's use of feedback-moves (F-moves) supports learning (Cullen, 2002; Jarvis & Robinson, 1997; Kasper, 2001; Lee, 2007; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Park, 2014; Walsh, 2002). This research trend focusing on teacher behavior is particularly noticeable in classroom interactions with very young learners. As very young learners learn most effectively when they are interested and engaged, researchers and educators have come to emphasize the pedagogical use of their interests in classroom talk and teacher behavior. A growing body of research investigates how language teachers use repetition activities, such as sets of interactional routines, to elicit learner contributions that may eventually serve as the groundwork for foreign language learning (Cekaite, 2017; Kanagy, 1999; Roh & Lee, 2018; Watanabe, 2016). The view that it is the proper role of the teacher, and the teacher alone, to control classroom talk suppresses the educational potential of learner initiative in the classroom. Studies conducted from this perspective have left us with very little information as to how the learners can affect

interaction. Thus, the purpose of this study is to help fill this gap in the literature by examining the contributions and impacts of learner initiative to classroom talk and teacher behavior through very young learners' use of multimodal communication resources.

Classroom talk (whole-class interactions in particular) is a very complex phenomenon. For this reason, an analysis of multimodal communication resources such as gestures may illuminate aspects of classroom interactions that an analysis of verbal communication alone would fail to discover. In recent years, multimodal conversation analytic research has gained momentum and has produced several significant analyses on various types of multimodal resources using data extracted from classroom observations. However, there remains a dearth of research into the use of multimodal resources by very young learners in the field of the Early English Education (EEE). The present study analyzes how very young learners employ their multimodal communication resources in classroom talk and how these behaviors influence classroom talk.

Very young learners are still in the process of becoming used to the forms of discourse, including what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. Given this, these learners may find it challenging to successfully engage in an interactional activity in which the teacher is perceived as the owner of knowledge. This dynamic requires the teacher to use classroom authority to manage classroom talk and to foster language practice on the part of the learners. In particular, teacher initiation, in providing the linguistic input and the forms of discourse and eliciting children's contributions, may be a *sine qua non* for developing very young learners' language use.

The question is how learners bridge the gap between the teacher's initiation and the achievement of productive classroom talk. This study's empirical analysis of very young learners' use of multimodal resources during classroom talk works to explain this. The study furthermore presents a detailed description of sequential development and a close analysis of intertwined verbal and multimodal resources, illuminating how very young learners capture the teacher's attention, draw on embodied resources to make their turns accessible, and establish common ground or mutual understanding using multimodal resources. It also illustrates how very young learners, with limited interactional resources, are capable of exercising agency in the classroom, influencing the trajectory of teacher talk and classroom learning through the moment-to-moment sequencing of participants' actions. The analysis focuses on learners' multimodal resources in the second-pair part of teacher-initiated sequences. These multimodal communication resources were gestures for retrieving words, acquiring turns, answering questions, and conveying additional information.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1. Learner Initiative

The concept of initiative is not new. It can be linked to long-studied topics in language teaching, such as responsive teaching and active participation (van Lier, 2008). The term ‘initiative’ refers to “decisions about who says what, to whom, and when” (Stevick, 1980, p. 19). A comparable definition defined initiative as “when to speak and what to speak about, and how to convey their intended meanings in the target language” (Damhuis, 2000, p. 246). Child initiative, which is particularly relevant to the present study, was proposed by Wood and Wood (1988). It is defined as “any occurrence of a child offering more than he or she has to, such as putting forward an idea (or questions) that has not been specifically requested” (p. 284). Considering the definition of initiative, learners can become initiators by asking questions, thereby altering the direction of lesson discourse (Mehan & Griffin, 1980). In other words, learners exercise their agency through unsolicited participation, which is a departure from canonical IRF/IRE sequences (Kapellidi, 2015). In this way, initiative is closely related to the concepts of agency, control, autonomy, and motivation (van Lier, 2008). In classroom talk, initiative can be seen through a “choice of action” and “voluntary (i.e., actor-originated) participation in the goings on” (van Lier, 1988, p. 107).

Generally, initiative has been used as a synonym for autonomy, self-regulation, and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Williams & Burden, 1997). In this usage, initiative may be interpreted as an individual character trait or activity. But initiative is a clear indicator of agency and “something that learners *do* rather than something the learners possess, i.e., it is behavior rather than property” (van Lier, 2008, p. 171).

Identifying initiative is neither an easy nor straightforward matter. While initiative has a certain degree of intuitive plausibility, it can be captured empirically by studying learner contributions in classroom interaction through overt, observable behavior. A broad definition of learner initiative tells us where it can occur and how it can be measured. In proposing a definition of initiative, Waring (2011) presents an example of locating initiative: “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” (p. 204).

Learner initiative manifests itself in all self-selected turns. According to van Lier (1988), when applying the notion of volition into the concept of learner initiative, learner initiative is expressed in four ways, such as self-selection to speak, allocation, topic work, and activity management. Initiative also manifests as self-initiated output in numerous other aspects, such as wording, turn-taking, and choice of topic (Damhuis, 2000). It is observable in classroom talk through unsolicited second-pair parts, anticipatory completions of the

teacher's turn, and first-pair parts (Kapellidi, 2015). The literature thus shows how the most common types of learner initiative occur when learners initiate a sequence or volunteer a response (Waring, 2011). The following is extracted from van Lier (2008). It demonstrates how learner initiative is manifest in the self-selected second-pair part.

**Extract 1. Example of IRF sequence (Adapted from van Lier, 2008, p. 165)**

A geography class in a secondary school in the Netherlands:

- |    |   |    |                                       |
|----|---|----|---------------------------------------|
| 01 |   | T: | Is there anyone who knows subduction? |
| 02 | → | S: | If one plate moves under another.     |
| 03 |   | T: | Yes                                   |

Extract 1 is a straightforward example of an IRF exchange, where the learner gives a response to a teacher's question and receives an evaluation of that response. In line 2, the learner responds to a teacher's question voluntarily and receives a positive evaluation (03). According to van Lier, the learner in line 2 is exerting initiative, even though his turn begins with the second-pair part. This is because this learner formulates and articulates a thought and therefore expresses a valid linguistic response. It is reasonable to argue that other learners may formulate their ideas and thoughts even if they do not express them verbally. However, this learner demonstrates some additional level of initiative since the teacher does not choose to elicit a response from him or her specifically, but rather solicits responses from the entire class, to which this learner chooses to respond. A great deal of research demonstrates learner initiative in the second-pair part only through verbal behaviors, but the current study demonstrates learner initiative in the second-pair part through both verbal and multimodal communication resources.

## 2.2. Multimodal Communication Resources in Classroom Talk

The multimodality of language use is now well-established in the literature. Seyfeddiinipur and Gullberg (2014) argued that "language use is fundamentally multimodal" (p. 1). Contemporary SLA scholars have identified a variety of functions performed by gestures and have sought to describe the relationship between language and gesture (Gullberg, 2013; McNeill, 2005). This represents a departure from legacy studies in the SLA corpus, which overwhelmingly focused on the verbal aspects of language while overlooking the critical role played by nonverbal behaviors such as gestures (Lazaraton, 2004). Former studies' emphasis on verbal behavior may have been because nonverbal communication was differently assumed as a strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) or compensatory strategy (Canale, 1983). Moreover, some studies have argued that nonverbal communication is highly culture-dependent and is therefore difficult to objectively quantify (Brown, 2014).

Much of the earlier CA research also studied recorded telephone conversations, focusing on verbal behaviors, and far fewer studies investigated the importance of gestures, body movements, and facial expressions. But thanks to the increased availability of video recordings, more recent CA studies have broadened their analytical focus to examine how modalities are used as resources for interaction (e.g., Auer, 2021; Carroll, 2005; Markee, 2008, 2011; Markee & Kunitz, 2013; Mori, 2002, 2004; Mori & Hasegawa, 2009; Seo & Koshik, 2010). The main thrust of this body of research is that participants' use of multimodal communication resources during interactions is not a merely random or peripheral bodily display, but rather an orderly, socially structured phenomenon that engenders particular types of turns and sequences.

CA classroom interaction analysts have been interested in exploring how bodily conduct is used systematically and recognizably as a resource for designing educational actions in language classrooms. This can be possible because embodied resources can be summoned to interpret and express participants' thoughts and intentions (Goldin-Meadow & Singer, 2003). Within sequentially organized interactions, specifically gestures or embodied resources can be a second-part part in the action sequence of an adjacency pair. Put differently, learners' gestures or movements function as forms of lexical compensation. For instance, if a teacher asks for a pen, the action of passing the pen to the teacher can be interpreted as an adequate response without accompanying talk. These kinds of hybrid interactions have been extensively described in the literature (Mori & Hayashi, 2006; Olsher, 2004).

A growing number of studies have provided evidence that multimodal resources play an important role in classroom talk. That is, both learners and teachers make use of the interactional character of multimodal resources to expand the scope of a language class and contribute to learning outcomes. Teachers, for example, deploy multimodal resources to manage the class by making gestures to capture students' attention (Poyatos, 1980) and to improve intersubjectivity by utilizing gestures to enhance the clarity of information conveyed (McCafferty, 2002; Waring, Creider, & Box, 2013) during classroom talk. The literature also documents the ways in which teachers utilize numerous other commonly understood gestures. These include the thumbs up gesture, which is commonly employed to signal a positive evaluation, the pointing gesture to designate the next speaker (Kääntä, 2012; Mondada, 2007; Mortensen, 2008), and the cupping-the-hand-behind-the-ear-gesture to initiate a repair (Mortensen, 2016).

Studies have also exhaustively investigated how students utilize various multimodal communication resources in classroom talk. Learners have been found to use multimodal communication resources to reproduce (Tellier, 2008) and search lexical items (Seo, 2021). Students perform other common gestures, such as hand-raising or holding up a finger to get a turn or speakership (Kääntä, 2012; Lauzon & Berger, 2015; Sahlström, 2002; Sert, 2013),

gaze to signal willingness to participate (WTP) (Lee, 2017b; Mortensen, 2008), and head poke, upper body movement forward, head turn, or head tilt to initiate a repair (Seo & Koshik, 2010). Learners were also shown to fully exploit the interactional character of multimodal resources. They were found to smile, withdraw their gaze, look outside a window, or make a noise to demonstrate unwillingness to participate or claim insufficient knowledge (Koole, 2007; Lauzon & Berger, 2015; Lee, 2017b; Sert, 2013; Sert & Walsh, 2013).

The literature review shows how previous research has demonstrated the significance of using gestures during classroom talk for both learners and adults. But there remains a lack of research on the use of gestures in the context of EEE in Korea. A mere handful of studies have examined Korean kindergarten English classrooms, using CA to investigate the teachers' interactional behaviors (Park, 2014; Roh & Lee, 2018; Seong, 2011) and the verbal behavior patterns by young children (Kwak, 2021; Park & Kim, 2018) in the field of English education. But there is a dearth of research on very young learners' use of multimodal communication resources. This phenomenon may be attributed to the misconception that very young learners tend to be relatively passive recipients of knowledge due to their limited linguistic resources. Thus, the current study aims to enhance our understanding of very young learners' classroom interaction and investigate a relatively unexplored aspect of EEE, with a specific emphasis on the use of multimodal communication resources by young learners. Micro-details of turns at talk shed light on how the children deploy multimodal communication resources to accomplish classroom talk in teacher-initiated sequences.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. Research Setting

The data for this study come from intact English classroom observations. These observations were taken at a private kindergarten in a populous city of Gyeonggi province, South Korea. The kindergarten in question is located in an apartment complex that is itself situated near a major company and a government office. The English language teachers employed at this kindergarten work on loan from a nearby English language institute *hagwon*. This kindergarten has offered English education classes since the early 2000s, even though teaching kindergarten-aged children English was far less common back then. Teachers at this kindergarten develop and use their own age-appropriate pedagogical materials to teach English.

As part of its after-school English program, the kindergarten offers two types of English classes, taught by either a NEST or a Korean English teacher: a 15-minute lesson that focuses on speaking and listening, and which can be attended by any child free of charge, and a paid

40-minute lesson that focuses on speaking, listening, reading, and writing. All students are provided the 15-minute English lessons for free, but those who want more in-depth English lessons must enroll in and pay for the additional 40-minute after-school English program that expands the focus to include reading and writing using textbooks. This study observed only the 15-minute NEST English lessons.

### 3.2. Participants

The data comprise observations of behavior by the subjects of the study. These subjects include of two male American NESTs and 125 seven-year-old children. For the first set of data collected in 2021, the NEST was Mr. David (pseudonym), who was at the time in his mid-twenties. He had a TESOL certificate and three months of teaching experience. In the following year, when the second set of data was collected, the NEST was Mr. Evans (pseudonym), who was in his early twenties. He had a TESOL certificate and four months of teaching experience. In addition, he had experienced babysitting children as a teenager.

In 2021, Mr. David taught 66 seven-year-old children in three classes. The average age of the 37 girls and 29 boys that populated his classroom was 76 months; all were born in 2015. Forty-three of the 66 children had attended the kindergarten for more than two years, while 23 had attended it for less than two years. Twenty-three of the 66 children were additionally enrolled in the paid lessons at the same kindergarten.

In 2022, Mr. Evans taught 59 seven-year-old children in three classes. The 30 girls and 29 boys were born in 2016 and were on average 73 months old. Forty-eight of the 59 children had attended the kindergarten for more than two years, while 11 had attended it for less than two years. Twenty-eight out of the 59 children were enrolled in the paid English program at the same kindergarten.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Informed consent forms were obtained from all of the research subjects and adjacent participants prior to the conduct of the study, including the kindergarten's director, the teachers, and the parents or guardians of all children. All of the parents or guardians of the children originally granted me permission to record video of their children for the purpose of academic research. In addition, all parents completed a short background questionnaire on the age of their child and their attendance record, as well as enrollment in any other after-school programs. Three parents in 2021 declined to release photos. It is unusual for CA analysts to collect ethnographic data with regards to the context of the interactions under analysis. Nonetheless it is worth noting that the questionnaire distributed to all parents or guardians of the learners included basic questions on previous language-learning or overseas



living experiences.

As mentioned earlier, the data for this study consist of classroom observation recorded over a two-year period at a kindergarten. The first set of data was recorded over a five-week period from October 4<sup>th</sup> to November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. The class covered a variety of topics, including body parts, Halloween, and animals. The second set of data was recorded over an eight-week period from June 3<sup>rd</sup> to July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. The curriculum included globes, hobbies, nature, and insects. A total of 13 weeks of classroom interactions were captured. I was present in the classroom to operate the cameras but was otherwise a silent observer for the duration of the recordings. No field notes were taken, as is typical in CA research given the ability of the cameras to collect any and all details for later review and study (Psathas & Anderson, 1990).

It is worth briefly discussing some methodological quirks of CA. Some specific theoretical assumptions, methodological principles, and analytical techniques differentiate CA from other academic approaches. CA is an entirely bottom-up and data-driven approach, since the initial step involves collecting and transcribing data before forming any research hypotheses or specific lines of inquiry. CA analysts thus directly analyze talk-in-interaction, focusing on the details of actual talk and the organization of talk. Utterances, turns at talk, and individual actions can be evidence of talk-in-interaction, and such visible evidence generated during interaction is designated the analysis (He, 2004).

After collecting the whole set of data, I repeatedly examined video recordings of classroom talk through “unmotivated looking” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 89; Psathas, 1995, p. 45; Sacks, 1984, p. 27). I transcribed the recordings and scrutinized the transcripts. I then systematically worked through the transcribed data to identify any recurrent patterns through IRF sequences and turn-takings. The analysis conducted in this way revealed that children’s gestures in the second-pair part showed a noticeable increase compared to the children’s use of multimodal initiation, and children’s gestures elicited further classroom talk.

### 3.4. Transcription

On a very practical level, when it comes to the transcription of collected data, there are two main concerns about how the researcher transcribes verbal behavior (e.g., second language talk) and multimodal communication resources. Here I will briefly discuss this issue and address the problems of accuracy, readability, and selectivity. The first issue concerns whether to transcribe what speakers say (i.e., native-speaker institution) or what they actually do (i.e., naturalistic speech behavior). This is the question of whether to capture the actual speech in a modified orthography (e.g., Saus America or wanna...) or to write down the words spoken in standard orthography (e.g., South America or want to...).

Despite differences in pronunciation among the research subjects, for the current study I employed standard orthography in the representation of classroom talk. This follows the assumption that the participants “are engaged in the use of conventional linguistic forms grounded in a common language with semantic and syntactic conventions” (Psathas & Anderson, 1990, p. 81). This study thus conforms to the widely accepted practice of transcribing actual spoken words in standard orthography (i.e., an idealization of speech) in the majority of instances, except for some particularly significant deviations (see ten Have, 2007, p. 99 for this issue). This is done for the benefit of readers and researchers who are accustomed to reading texts written in standard orthography. The second contentious issue concerns the transcription of multimodal communication resources, as there is no standard format for depicting the nonverbal behavior of young children (Ochs, 1979) and there is a need to manage the tension between “simultaneity” and “sequentiality” (Deppermann, 2013, p. 3). Thus, regarding multimodal communication resources, for the current study I follow Jefferson’s (1982) transcription conventions as a basic system and modified Mondada’s (2016) multimodal transcription for the temporal trajectory of multimodal communication exhibited by all embodied actions. This is done to remain in compliance with the standard in the CA literature as well as to maximize the readability of the text. Speech in Korean is written as actual talk in Korean script. A Romanized version of this talk is italicized on the following line according to the standards of the National Institute of Korean Language’s Romanization of Korean guidelines. The names of all individuals in this study are pseudonyms.

## 4. RESULTS

This section describes how children’s gestures are related to classroom talk in teacher-initiated sequences. The results show how very young learners attract the teacher’s attention, draw on embodied resources to make turns accessible, and influence teacher action and classroom talk through detailed descriptions of sequential development and a close analysis of the fusion of verbal and multimodal communication resources. The analysis focuses on learners’ use of multimodal communication resources in the second-pair part in teacher-initiated sequences, and specifically on gestures for retrieving words, acquiring a turn, answering, and for conveying additional information.

### 4.1. Gestures for Retrieving Words

The following illustrates how one child imparts a response with the help of a gesture. Extract 2 takes place during the class’s morning routines. Immediately prior to the events

that comprise this extract, the teacher and the children described how they were personally feeling. After talking about children's feelings, the teacher prefaces a question about days of the week. Extract 2 below begins with the teacher seeking to elicit a response the class, asking what day it is.

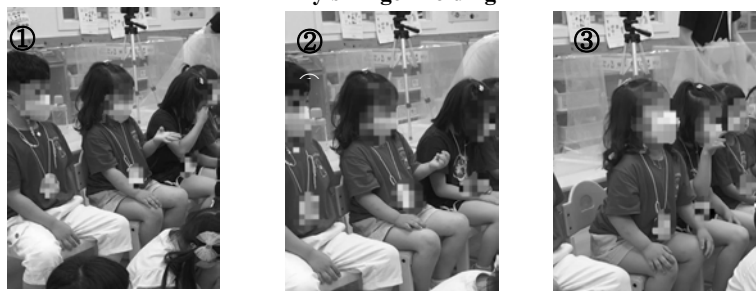
### Extract 2. Mily's Finger-Folding

- 31 T: ((looks at the children)) So, what is it today?  
 32 Ss: Hmmm (2.7" pause)  
 33 T: ((looks right and left)) When is today?  
 34 Ss: [(2.9)  
 35 → Mily [((begins to fold her thumb # fig. 1 ① folds her three fingers in turn,  
 36 and [folds her little fingers) # fig. 1 ②  
 37 T: [Do you remember? ((while looking around))  
 38 Mily: ((leans forward)) FRIDAY #fig 1 ③  
 39 T: YES, ((points his finger at Mily)) G↑ood j↓ob Mil↑y. Today is Friday ~  
 40 ((points his finger at the window)) How's the weather?

In line 31, the teacher initiates a sequence by asking a question. The children do not immediately respond and instead employ turn-holding tokens (hmm). These sounds stretch over a 2.7 second pause between speech. The children's use of these turn-holding tokens demonstrates to the teacher a difficulty in producing an appropriate linguistic response (Duran, Kurhila, & Sert, 2022). This prompts the teacher's second attempt in line 33. This time, his inquiry incorporates the interrogative "when" (33). Mily, sitting on a chair, begins to fold her thumb (Fig. 1 ①). She keeps folding her fingers in order over a 2.9 second pause.

FIGURE 1

Mily's Finger-Folding



While Mily is counting her fingers over the 2.9 second pause, the teacher initiates an epistemic status check (ESC). Such checks often take the form of questions such as "do you remember?" and "you don't know?" His use of ESC requires a display of "having known

prior to the question” (Lee, 2017a, p. 15; Koole, 2010, p. 206) in order to “pursue certain pedagogical goals” (Sert, 2013) (37). The goal, in this case, is to generate classroom talk or elicit a response. Mily folds her fingers during the teacher’s ESC turn, and is almost done counting by the time the teacher finishes the question. As soon as Mily completes her finger-folding in order (Fig. 1②), she leans toward the teacher and shouts “FRIDAY” (Fig. 1③). The teacher acknowledges her answer, who responds with a pointing gesture, favorable appraisal, and an expansion of the talk (39).

Extract 2 contains a long, 2.9-second period of silence in which no answer is generated. This period corresponds to Mily’s lexical search, working to fill in the second-pair part of an adjacency pair. In order to retrieve the word (Friday) from memory, she engages in finger folding, an identifiable resource and evidence of learner initiative. Her gesture does not significantly influence classroom talk or teacher action, but it does grant her access to a turn, and establishes mutual understanding between the teacher and herself. This observation of the independent use of multimodal resources to enter into classroom talk and establish mutual understanding could serve as evidence of learner initiative.

#### 4.2. Using a Gesture to Acquire a Turn

The following Extract 3 illustrates how children use gestures such as hand-raising and name tag lifting to gain a turn in teacher-initiated sequences. The analysis reveals that gestures signal learner WTP and additionally function to attract the teacher’s attention. Hand-raising and name tag lifting prompt the teacher to provide continuous feedback. The following interaction took place during the final day of a lesson on insects. The learners engaged in a picture-labeling activity on previous days. On the other hand, on the day of this observation, the teacher proposed that learners share their favorite insects in a my-favorites-naming activity. The teacher uses the imperative mood to elicit learner participation.

##### **Extract 3. Hand-Raising and Name Tag Lifting**

510		((Pictures of various insects and today’s expression appear on the TV))
511	T:	So, ((an open palm hand gesture)) name your favorite insects, ready?
512	→	((Several children raise their hands)) #fig. 2①
513	T:	((points at Isabel)) Isabel?
514		((Several children lower their hands))
515	Isabel:	((lowers her hand)) Ladybug
516	T:	((two thumbs up)) [Ladybug
517	→	[((Several children raise their hand))
518	T:	((points at Albin)) Albin
519		((Several children lower their hands))
520	Albin:	((lowers his hand)) Dragonfly

521 T: [Dragonfly  
522 → [((Several children raise their hand, and Jenny lifts her name tag))  
523 #fig. 2②  
524 T: ((points at Tei)) Tei?  
525 ((Several children lower their hands))  
526 Tei: ((Lowers his hand)) Ant  
527 T: [Ant  
528 → [((several children raise their hand and Jenny lifts her nametag))  
529 T: ((points at Micky)) Micky?  
530 ((Several children lower their hands))  
531 Micky: ((lowers her hand)) Ladybug [((covers her mask with both hands))  
532 T: [((wiggles his fingers)) ladybug~  
533 Jenny [((lifts her name tag))  
534 [((Several children raise their hand))  
535 T: ((points at Emily)) Emily?  
536 ((Several children lower their hands))  
537 Emily: [((lowers her hand)) dragonfly  
538 Jenny [((almost stands up on her knees))  
539 T: Ooh! [Dragonfly!  
540 → Jenny [((kneels down on the floor and lifts her name tag # fig. 3①  
541 while showing it to the teacher with hand-raising))  
542 → [((Several children raise their hands))  
543 T: ((points at Jenny)) Jenny?  
544 [((Several children lower their hands))  
545 Jenny [((lowers her hand)) dragonfly  
546 T: ((looks at Jenny)) [dragonfly  
547 → Vicky [((lifts her name tag while showing it to the teacher  
548 with hand-raising)) # fig. 3②  
549 [((several children raise their hands))  
550 T: ((looks at Vicky)) Vic[ky?  
551 Vicky: [((lowers her hand)) Bee  
552 [((Several children lower their hands))  
553 T: [Bee  
554 [((several children raise their hands))

**FIGURE 2**  
**Hand-raising and Jenny's Name Tag Lifting**



The teacher begins a sequence by telling the children using imperative mood to name their favorite insects. In this instance, this was done without directly asking the children a question or directly asking about their favorite insects. Here, the teacher encourages student participation and gives a verbal cue (ready?) to prompt hand-raising, along with an open palm hand gesture (511). In response to the teacher's initiation, several children raise their hands to acquire a turn during which they might name their favorite insects (512, Fig. 2①). Among the many children, the teacher nominates Isabel to take a turn, calling her name with rising intonation. Isabel is given a permission to speak and the children who failed in bidding lower their hands. Isabel then announces her favorite insect, "Ladybug" (515). On the subsequent turn, the teacher gives a positive assessment of Isabel's response by using repetitive feedback moves (Hellermann, 2003) (516) that overlap with hand-raising by several other children (517). Albin is nominated (518) immediately after the teacher's repetitive feedback move. Albin and the children spontaneously lower their hands. On his turn (520), Albin too receives repetitive feedback indicating a positive assessment from the teacher (521). This overlaps with hand-raising by other children. At this point, Jenny performs a name tag lifting gesture (522, Fig. 2②). Despite lifting her name tag to attract the teacher's attention, Jenny is not nominated to take a turn. The teacher nominates Tei instead (524). The teacher's nomination of Tei prompts the children (including Tei) to lower their hands immediately (525). Tei provides a response (526), to which the teacher offers repetitive feedback (527). Afterward, several children raise their hands to get a turn. Jenny once again simultaneously lifts her name tag and shows it to the teacher (528).

Despite doing so, the teacher again fails to nominate Jenny to take a turn. The teacher instead permits Micky to talk (529). She says the name of her favorite insect, and then performs a gesture in which she covers her face with both hands. The teacher provides Micky too with repetitive feedback, with a wiggling fingers gesture. While the teacher provides repetitive feedback and Micky performs her gesture (covering her face with both hands),

several children raise their hands, and Jenny again lifts her name tag in an attempt to capture the attention of the teacher.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Hand-raising and Vicky's Name Tag Lifting**



Yet this time too, Jenny is not selected by the teacher, who calls upon Emily to take a turn. While a dyadic face-to-face interaction occurs between the teacher and Emily, Jenny rises to her knees and lifts her name tag into the air (540, Fig. 3①). Jenny is finally nominated by the teacher (543) and lowers her hand (544). Jenny fills in the second-pair part (545) and receives the teacher's repetitive feedback (546). While the teacher is performing a feedback move, Vicky lifts her name tag in an effort to acquire a turn in the same manner as Jenny (547) (Fig. 3②).

Extract 3 illustrates how children utilize gestures to obtain a turn in a teacher-initiated sequence. In the activity described, the teacher did not limit interaction to any one child in particular. Indeed, using the imperative mood in Extract 3, he initially opens the floor to everyone in the classroom. In response, children spontaneously raised their hands without explicitly being told to do so. Two children were found to lift their name tags in order to obtain a turn in the event that hand-raising failed to win the teacher's nomination. That is, they actively solicited nomination by the teacher. Both hand-raising and name tag lifting prompted the teacher to provide feedback. The extract described how very young learners' use of hand-raising and name tag lifting gestures produce classroom talk with minimal face-to-face dyadic conversations. Thus, hand-raising and name tag lifting in Extract 3 constituted a form of active participation, a sign of learner initiative.

#### 4.3. Gestures as Answers

The following Extract 4 showcases different examples of children's use of two particular gestures in teacher-initiated sequences, specifically gazing and hand-raising. The mutual gaze, also known as eye contact, is seen as a sign of attention and confidence in classroom

talk. For example, learners lacking sufficient knowledge to provide a response often fail to establish a mutual gaze with the teacher to avoid being selected as the next speaker. They may also seek to avoid a turn in such a circumstance to spare themselves embarrassment (Sert, 2013; Sert & Walsh, 2013). Gazing toward the teacher, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a display of WTP (Mortensen, 2008).

Hand-raising is another useful device for obtaining a turn or otherwise attracting the attention of the teacher (Sahlström, 2002). But hand-raising can assume a different meaning during whole-class talk events, such as the scene depicted in Extract 4. Extract 4 illustrates how the direction of a child's gaze can trigger a dyadic face-to-face interaction, and how a child raising his or her hand can constitute performance of the second-pair part of an adjacency pair, for example by functioning as a substitute for the verbal expression "yes" during a picture-labeling activity. The following extract also shows how children's use of hand-raising influences teacher behavior and classroom talk turn by turn.

**Extract 4. Yes or No!**

- 387 ((A picture of four dancers appears on TV))  
 388 T: [(moves his shoulders up and down))  
 389 Alvin: [I can dance  
 390 T: Yes. Good job. Alvin ((The statement 'I can dance' appears on TV))  
 391 So ((points at 'I can' on TV)) I c↑an  
 392 Ss: I c↑an  
 393 T: ((points at 'dance' on TV)) Da::nce ((looks at the class))  
 394 Ss: Da::nce.  
 395 T: Good job. Do you like to dance? [(looks at the class))  
 396 → Joe: [(turns her gaze toward the teacher))  
 397 T: ((looks at Joe)) Yes?  
 398 → Joe: [(shakes her head and makes an X with her arms)) # fig. 4  
 399 → [(two children raise their hand))  
 400 T: ((looks at Joe and makes an X with his arms)) You don't like to dance?  
 401 → Joe: ((makes an X with her arms and shakes her head))  
 402 T: ((looks at Joe)) No?  
 403 → Joe: ((makes an X with her arms and shakes her head))  
 404 T: ((looks at June)) June [likes to dance! \*((shows one thumb up))  
 405 June: [(lowers his hand))  
 406 T: ((looks at Mary)) Mary likes to dance! heh heh --- >>\*)  
 407 Mary: ((lowers her hand))

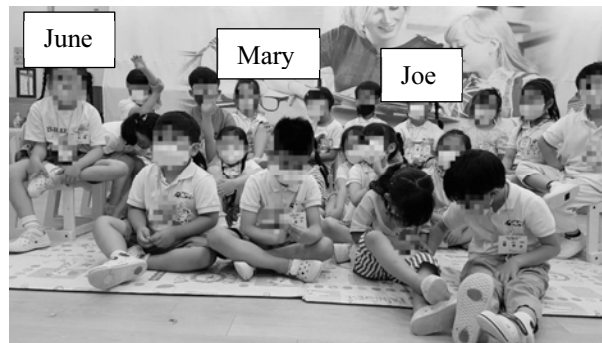
As a picture of four dancers is shown on the TV, both the teacher and Alvin begin their turns simultaneously. The teacher begins a turn with a gesture, moving his shoulders up and down (388). Simultaneously, Alvin self-selects a turn, producing the phrase "I can dance"



(389), which is followed by teacher confirmation and positive evaluation (390). After issuing confirmation and providing validation to Alvin, the teacher initiates a repeat-after-me activity. Without any verbal direction, the teacher directly models the first part of the statement, producing “I can” by using prosodic cues such as rising intonation, while at the same time pointing to the statement displayed on the TV (391), which prompts choral repetition (392). After choral repetition, the remaining part of the statement is modeled with emphasis on the /a/ vowel sound and rising intonation, followed by more choral repetition by the children (394). In response to the children’s repetition, the teacher provides a positive evaluation and immediately begins another initiation by asking the class if they like to dance while looking at them. During the teacher’s turn in line 395, the teacher directs his gaze toward the class to monitor the reaction of the children. In doing so, the teacher ultimately establishes a mutual gaze with Joe (396), who had already turned her gaze toward the teacher. The teacher subsequently selects her and offers an opportunity for Joe to confirm that she likes to dance by saying “yes?” with a questioning rising intonation. Joe shakes her head and then makes the shape of an X with her arms (398, Fig. 4). Her performance of this gesture overlaps with two children raising their hands in response to the teacher asking the class whether they like to dance (399).

**FIGURE 4**

**Joe’s “No” Gesture and June and Mary’s “Yes”**



The teacher repeats his question to Joe, giving her the opportunity to confirm her answer. But this time, he modifies it into a negative sentence (you don’t like to dance) with a high pitch, fast tempo, and a questioning rising intonation while making the shape of an X with his arms. In response to the teacher’s question, Joe again makes an X with her arms while shaking her head but does not produce a verbal response. The teacher repeats his question again to confirm her answer, but this time he uses the plain word “No?” with a questioning rising intonation and an eager tone. Joe again crosses her hands while shaking her head (403). The teacher then turns his gaze to two children who have been raising their hands, delivers

comments, and makes the thumbs-up gesture. As the teacher begins each feedback move, each child retracts their raised hand.

Extract 4 focuses on Joe's gazing toward the teacher and the other children raising their hands. The establishment of a mutual gaze between Joe and the teacher led to a dyadic, face-to-face interaction. The teacher did neither address nor select an individual child when he initiated a sequence. Rather, the selection was solidified following the establishment of eye contact with the child who had first turned her gaze toward the teacher. Joe's gaze was the factor that ultimately provoked a dyadic face-to-face interaction. The extract also shows how hand-raising could alter the teacher's behavior. While children could respond in the affirmative to teacher inquiries by saying "yes," some chose to raise their hands instead in response to the teacher's initiation. The hand-raising gestures made the learners stand out to the teacher, prompting him to provide certain forms of feedback. Hand-raising allowed the teacher to determine which of the young learners liked to dance. It was in this manner that classroom talk took the form of a series of small scale, dyadic conversations. Although it is unclear whether a collection of small, dyadic face-to-face interactions (404-407) informs certain aspects of language learning or development, it is evident that children's use of hand-raising influences teacher action and classroom talk, resulting in linguistic exposure. This extract shows well that children are active agents capable of influencing teacher action and classroom talk.

#### 4.4. A Gesture for Conveying Additional Information

The following takes place on the first day of the lesson on the topic of hobbies. The aim of the lesson is for children to learn the names of hobbies and learn how to describe their ability to perform certain actions (I can dance). Extract 5 illustrates how the teacher prompts the children to puzzle out the meaning of the word "dance." The extract also shows how a learner named Roy fills in the second-pair part of an adjacency pair and how the child's gesture influences teacher action and classroom talk during a picture-labeling activity.

##### **Extract 5. Roy's Index Finger for Spin**

754 ((A picture of four dancers appears on the TV))  
 755 Oliver: [BALLERINA  
 756 Heo: [dance:=  
 757 Oliver: =BALLERINA=  
 758 Heo: =°dance:°  
 759 T: Oh! Ballerina? Okay. That's good.  
 760 so [ballerinas-  
 761 Heo: [dance:  
 762 Elsa: [((waves her hands)) no no no no

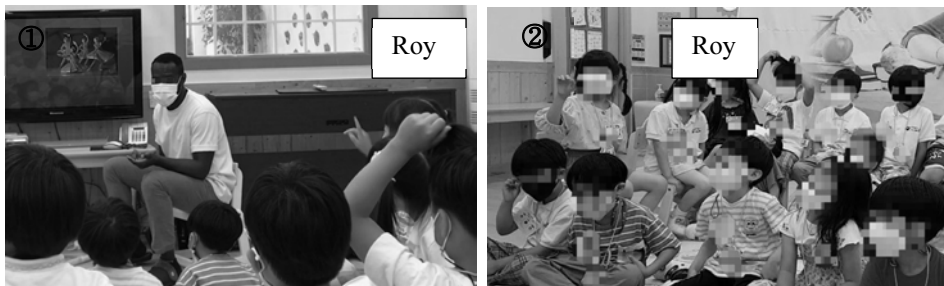
- 763 T: ((points at Oliver)) what do ballerinas do?  
 764 Heo dance:  
 765 Roy: A::h  
 766 T: ((looks at Roy)) what do [ballerinas do?  
 767 Elle: [발레? 발레?  
 768 bal-le? bal-le?  
 769 Ballet? Ballet?  
 770 Ss: (.)  
 771 T: \*((looks at Roy)) they dance?  
 772 Elle: [발레?  
 773 bal-le?  
 774 Ballet?  
 775 → Roy: [(makes a circle in the air with her index finger and nods her head)  
 776 ye:s # fig. 5②  
 777 T: --- >>\* # fig. 5①  
 778 T: ((makes a circle in the air with his index finger while looking at Roy)),  
 779 Yes, they dance, >and they< spin?  
 780 Roy: ((nods her head)) Yes=  
 781 Elle: ((one arm maintains a curved shaped, and the other is rounded and  
 782 raised above the head)) =dance?=  
 783 Oliver: =yes  
 784 T: Good job. ((one arm maintains a curved shape, and the other is  
 785 rounded and raised above the head)) Yes. they dance, and they spin.

As a picture of four dancers is shown on the TV, Oliver and Heo label the picture twice, respectively. They take their turns simultaneously. During the turn, Oliver shouts “ballerina” (755), while Heo says “dance” in a raspy voice with an elongated final vowel /e/ sound (i.e., [dansü]) (756). On their second turns, Oliver labels the picture “ballerina” again (757), followed by Heo again saying “dance” in the same manner, only at a lower volume, and with the same elongated last /e/ sound (i.e., [dansü]) (758). In the following turn, the teacher produces *oh*-prefaced assessments, in which the utterance of an initial *oh*-token is followed by assessments of prior talk (Goodwin, 1986; Maynard, 1997) (759). By producing the *oh*-token and assessments with a rising-falling pitch (Oh! Ballerina? Okay, that’s good!), the teacher expresses his approval of Oliver’s comment, signifying it as a reasonable response to the stimulus provided. After issuing additional assessments, the teacher attempts to talk, but abruptly stops after producing the word “ballerinas” (760), which overlaps with both Heo’s and Elsa’s utterances. When the teacher is in the middle of saying the word “ballerinas,” Heo again produces “dance” in a raspy voice, at a lower volume, and with an elongated last vowel /e/ sound (i.e., [dansü]) (761), and Elsa produces the word “no” five times in a louder voice at a fast tempo, while shaking her hands (762). The teacher initiates

another sequence meant to inquire into the ballerinas' actions, this time asking the class what ballerinas do (763). In response to the teacher's inquiry, Heo and Roy both provide answers. Heo once again produces the word "dance" in a raspy voice, at a lower volume, and with an elongated final vowel /e/ sound (i.e., [dansü]) (764). Roy then uses a turn-holding token "A::h" with an elongated vowel sound /a/ (765). The teacher immediately asks Roy the same question (766), which overlaps Elle's responding in Korean with "bal-le? bal-le?" (767). Although Elle responds by producing "bal-le" in Korean in an overlapping turn, the teacher poses the question again during the subsequent turn. The teacher directs the question to Roy, but this time modifies it into a much simpler yes/no type question (771). In response to this question, Elle and Roy provide an answer simultaneously. While Elle again provides the Korean "bal-le" with a rising questioning intonation (772), Roy makes a circle in the air with her index finger and nods her head. This gesture is accompanied by a verbal response of "yes" (Fig. 5① and Fig. 5②) (776).

**FIGURE 5**

**Roy's Index Finger for Spin**



In the following turn, the teacher re-voices Roy's utterance (yes) (779), gives a clear answer (they dance), and describes Roy's gesture (they spin) with a questioning rising intonation while imitating Roy's gesture (779). This is followed by Roy again answering with a gesture (nodding her head) (780). Following this dyadic, face-to-face interaction between Roy and the teacher, Elle, who sits in front of the teacher, asks a question. She utters "dance" with a rising intonation while raising her right arm high and placing her left arm in front of her belly button (782), and Oliver provides his answer in response to the teacher (783). The teacher delivers a positive evaluation and describes the ballerina's movements (they dance and they spin) while imitating Elle's gesture (785).

The above Extract illustrates how the teacher can articulate a very young learner's gesture and how articulated gestures are used during classroom talk. Roy's gesture influenced teacher action as follows. First, the teacher imitated Roy's gesture while articulating it (778-779). Second, the teacher recycled the articulated gesture to teach the word "dance" (785).

In effect, a classroom learner, Roy, expanded the lesson, getting the teacher to use the word “spin” in addition to “dance.” It was in this way that a child’s gesture influenced teacher action, enhancing linguistic exposure for the entire class. In addition, the teacher’s new vocabulary (spin) can be seen to induce implicit learning. This demonstrated influence of a child’s gesture on teacher behavior and language use provides clear evidence of learner initiative among very young learners.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The current study was motivated by the dearth of classroom research on very young learners and the need for more EEE research focused on learners’ multimodal communication resources. The study documented the current state of a kindergarten English classroom by approaching the data with a view to explicating and uncovering how very young learners actually use language and multimodal resources in Korea. The data analyzed consisted of observations collected from two kindergarten English classrooms over a total period of thirteen weeks. The research subjects included 125 children divided into six classes and two NESTs. Classroom interactions were observed, videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for this study.

The data identified the presence of a great number of multimodal resources deployed by very young learners. These included but were not limited to finger-folding gestures, hand-raising, gaze direction, and gestures used to express additional information. The learners used multimodal resources for their own purposes, and their use of multimodal communication resources was seen to function as a significant interactional resource, allowing them to exert influence on teacher action and classroom talk alike.

This study revealed evidence of young learners’ initiative through their use of multimodal resources. Hand-raising in particular was one of several distinctive multimodal communication resources deployed by very young learners in teacher-initiated sequences. This study confirmed the findings of Lemke (1990) and Sahlström (2002), which demonstrated that learners’ hand-raising is sequentially organized during classroom talk. Additionally, the analysis of this study discovered that hand-raising could communicate the meaning of “yes” without being accompanied by a verbal response in classroom talk. This is despite the fact that the verbal utterance “yes” would often satisfy as an answer to teacher inquiry. Very young learners voluntarily and visually expressed where they were by raising their hands, and this was seen to prompt feedback by the teacher. And so, hand-raising was revealed to represent a clear demonstration of learner initiative and a gateway to participation in classroom talk. The study also identified two other gestures that were used to acquire a turn or otherwise display WTP, specifically gaze direction and name tag lifting. All these

gestures point to evidence of initiative-taking among very young learners.

Human social interaction can be envisioned as a game of table tennis (Erickson, 1996), a kind of reciprocity game, with serves (initiation), returns (response), and volleys (feedback and conversations). As a type of social action, classroom talk is also reciprocal, in the sense that initiation by one party is typically followed by a response by another party in successive real-time moments. This sequential reciprocity involves more than just turn-taking, since the listener is also performing an active listening activity concomitantly with the speaker. Moreover, the speaker and listener exert mutual influence upon each other simultaneously and successively during conversations. Classroom talk, as a kind of conversation, is also accomplished via reciprocal successive and simultaneous action by participants, and these actions may consist of both verbal and multimodal communication resources. They are, in other words, not solely dependent on teacher action in the classroom (Erickson, 1996).

It should be noted that this study departs from the traditional view of the concept of teacher action. The role of the teacher was at one point considered unquestionably paramount and predominant; however, in the context of this study, the teacher and students play mutually reinforcing roles through interaction. This study sees classroom talk as merely one type of human social interaction, and so takes the view that learners and teachers are of equal agency in an educational setting. That is, learners can actively influence teachers while also being influenced by the teacher. Classroom talk is accomplished reciprocally and sequentially.

The current study follows the contemporary body of research that investigates the nature of learners' active roles (Duran & Sert, 2021; Garton, 2002, 2012; Jacknick, 2011; Kapellidi, 2015; Kääntä, 2014; Kwak, 2021; Li, 2013; Solem, 2016; Warring, 2011). In addition, previous research has also examined children's talk, consisting of their responses to teacher initiation (Park & Kim, 2018), as well as verbal initiations by children (Kwak, 2021) in the classroom. This study, however, sheds light on children's use of multimodal communication resources in classroom talk. The findings of this study contribute to multimodal resources analytic research in EEE classroom settings. The findings described in this research also highlight the need for additional research in the field of applied linguistics. Specifically, it identifies a need to investigate the role of multimodal communication resources in classroom talk (Lauzon & Berger, 2015; Lee, 2017b; Mortensen, 2008; Seo, 2021; Seo & Koshik, 2010; Sert, 2013). This study also revealed EEE often consists of more than just play activities, centered on games, songs, and chants. EEE was observed to additionally function as a kind of human social activity through which the teacher and very young learners exercised initiative and through which the teacher exercised control (i.e., teacher-initiation).

The results of this study carry practical implications for the teacher's role by describing the process of classroom talk through multiple observable phenomena at the micro-level. For one, the analytical results suggest that teachers need to be more aware of the importance of "wait-time" (Rowe, 1974, p. 203) in interactions. Wait-time was shown to generate a variety

of changes in classroom talk (Ingram & Elliot, 2016). Second, teachers should support children's participation efforts by listening attentively and demonstrating clear interest in whatever the children are trying to express. The analysis revealed that the teacher's "re-voicings" (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996, p. 71) made learner utterances more concise, louder, or performed in a different register or social language, resulting in further language development (Wertsch, 1991). Third, the results suggest that teachers should pay more careful attention to students' use of multimodal resources. The observations clearly show that multimodal resources can lead to "teachable moments" (Alibali, Flevaris, & Goldin-Meadow, 1997, p. 183) and expand language use possibilities among learners.

The findings of the study suggested that limited linguistic knowledge did not hinder the use of language among very young learners. But the study has one notable limitation; that is, the research findings would carry additional relevance if the study had explored a wider range of language learning and analyzed more relationships to learner initiative. In addition, to broaden the scope of knowledge in the field of language learning and teaching, it makes sense to link CA to other theories of learning (Seedhouse, 2005). This should be feasible, as CA is an empirical research methodology. Combining CA with the sociocultural theory of learning, for example, would contribute to the expanding corpus of research in language education (Mondada & Doehler, 2004; Young & Miller, 2004). One potential approach could be to apply data to the concept of situated learning or the change in learners' participation framework over an extended period. This too would enhance our understanding of language education. Another potential approach would be to apply CA methodology to the practical theory of language known as "translanguaging" (García & Li, 2014). This approach could resolve a number of EEE issues and contribute to the growing body of EEE research.

The results of this study did not confirm language learning. But they do suggest that more EEE studies are needed. Regardless of research context, learner age, or research objectives, more EEE are urgently necessary since EEE represents the fundamental starting point of English education for all children. This is related to the purpose of CA studies, which is to foster an understanding of specific cases through robust descriptions and analyses. CA is not to be used to make generalizations derived from larger aggregate data. Diverse new research that informs a dynamic view of kindergarten English classrooms would help set benchmarks for a number of EEE, and in particular, for issues of how, when, and why to implement EEE and how to teach English.

Applicable level: Early childhood

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## APPENDIX A

### Transcript notation

[	The point of overlap on sets.
=	No interval between adjacent utterances
(2.0)	Elapsed time in silence by tenth of second
(.)	A short untimed pause
-	A halting, abrupt cutoff
.	A stopping fall in tone
:	A prolongation of the immediately prior sound
<u>word</u>	<u>Speaker emphasis</u>
↑	Marked shifts into a higher pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow
↓	Marked shifts into a lower pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow
°word°	Noticeably quieter than surrounding talk
WORD	Especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk
hehehe	Laughter
><	Noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk
→	A particular feature discussed in the text
( )	An uncertain hearing of what the speaker said
(( ))	Non-vocal behaviors or transcriber's comments on contextual features
# fig. 3	The exact moment at which a screen shot has been taken, see FIGURE 3
*(( ))	The action described continues across subsequent lines until the same symbol is reached for a teacher
--->>*	
+(( ))	The action described continues across subsequent lines until the same symbol is reached for a child
--->>+	
?	A rising inflection
!	Exclamation mark or emphatic mark
,	A continuing intonation
~	Animated tone