




Student-Initiated Sequences in IELTS Preparation Courses: The Role of Socioeconomic Status and Gender

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and the frequency of student-initiated sequences in IELTS preparation classrooms in Iran.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a quantitative correlational design within the context of IELTS preparation courses in Isfahan, Iran. The participants consisted of 40 Iranian IELTS candidates, including 21 female and 19 male learners at intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency levels, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio recordings, and a structured socioeconomic status questionnaire. Eight IELTS instructional sessions taught by four instructors were observed and recorded. A researcher-made observational check sheet was utilized to quantify student-initiated sequences, specifically assertions and interrogatives produced independently by learners during classroom discourse. Socioeconomic status and demographic information were measured using the questionnaire developed by Ghodrathnama et al. Data were analyzed using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between SES and student-initiated sequences and point-biserial correlation to analyze the relationship between gender and learner initiation.

Findings: The findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between learners' socioeconomic status and the frequency of student-initiated sequences, indicating that learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds produced more assertions and interrogatives during classroom interaction. The results suggested that socioeconomic status acted as a moderate predictor of learner participation and communicative engagement in IELTS classrooms. In contrast, the analysis demonstrated that gender was not significantly associated with the frequency of student-initiated sequences. Although a weak positive relationship emerged statistically, the association was insufficient to support the hypothesis that gender predicts learner initiation patterns in IELTS preparation contexts.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping learner participation and classroom discourse patterns in IELTS preparation courses, whereas gender does not significantly determine student initiation behavior.

Keywords: Classroom Discourse, IELTS Preparation Courses, Student-Initiated Sequences, Socioeconomic Status, Gender, Learner Agency, EFL Interaction

1. Introduction

Classroom discourse has long been recognized as one of the most influential dimensions of second language learning because it reflects how teaching, interaction, participation, and knowledge construction occur within educational settings. In language classrooms, discourse is not merely a medium for transferring information; rather, it constitutes the central mechanism through which learning opportunities are negotiated, identities are shaped, and interactional competence develops. Classroom discourse analysis therefore provides valuable insights into how learners and teachers collaboratively construct meaning and manage communication during instructional activities (Hammond, 2012; Walsh, 2011). Within second language education, interaction has consistently been considered fundamental to language development because learners acquire linguistic competence through participation in communicative practices and socially mediated exchanges (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Seedhouse, 2010). Consequently, examining patterns of classroom interaction can reveal how pedagogical practices either facilitate or constrain learners' opportunities for engagement and participation.

One of the most influential frameworks in classroom discourse research is the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model proposed in classroom interaction studies. This framework conceptualizes classroom talk as a sequence in which teachers initiate interaction, students respond, and teachers subsequently provide feedback. Although this model has been highly valuable in explaining institutional classroom discourse, scholars have increasingly argued that excessive reliance on teacher-controlled interaction may restrict learner agency and reduce opportunities for spontaneous communication (Seedhouse, 2004; Walsh, 2011). As language pedagogy gradually shifted toward communicative and learner-centered approaches, researchers began to emphasize the importance of learner participation and learner-initiated discourse moves in the classroom. This shift directed scholarly attention toward the ways students independently contribute to interaction by asking questions, introducing topics, negotiating meanings, and expressing opinions during instructional exchanges (Sert, 2015; Waring, 2011).

Student-initiated sequences have therefore emerged as a central concept in contemporary classroom discourse analysis. These sequences refer to moments in which learners independently initiate interaction rather than merely responding to teacher prompts. Such initiations may take the

form of interrogatives, assertions, requests for clarification, topic shifts, or repair initiations (Solem, 2015, 2016). Student initiation is particularly important because it reflects learner agency, autonomy, and active engagement with instructional content. According to Nieminen et al., student agency involves learners' ability to intentionally influence learning processes and participate meaningfully in educational interactions (Nieminen et al., 2022). In second language classrooms, learner-initiated discourse demonstrates that students are not passive recipients of information but active contributors to communicative events and knowledge construction.

Research has shown that learner initiatives create valuable learning opportunities by promoting interactional competence and negotiation of meaning. Waring emphasized that learner initiatives often generate moments of authentic communication that extend beyond predetermined pedagogical structures (Waring, 2011). Similarly, Rodriguez and Wilstermann demonstrated that learner initiatives contribute significantly to interactional development in foreign language classrooms because they encourage learners to participate more actively in meaning-making processes (Rodriguez & Wilstermann, 2018). Watanabe also found that self-selection and learner-initiated turns can substantially increase interactional participation and foster communicative competence in second language learning environments (Watanabe, 2017). These findings collectively indicate that student-initiated discourse is closely associated with language development and communicative engagement.

Different forms of learner initiation have been explored in classroom discourse research. Interrogatives constitute one important category of student initiation and involve learners asking spontaneous questions related to lesson content, clarification, or understanding (Solem, 2015). Assertions, on the other hand, involve students independently presenting knowledge claims, explanations, or opinions during classroom interaction (Solem, 2016). Dolce and Van Compernelle examined topic management and student initiation in advanced foreign language classrooms and demonstrated that learner-initiated sequences contribute significantly to sustaining classroom interaction and expanding pedagogical discussions (Dolce & Van Compernelle, 2020). Similarly, Jacknick investigated how students negotiate activity shifts and expand classroom interaction through post-expansion sequences and independent participation (Jacknick, 2011a, 2011b). These studies highlight that student initiation is not a peripheral

phenomenon but rather a central component of interactive learning environments.

In addition to interactional dimensions, scholars have emphasized the role of sociocultural and contextual variables in shaping classroom discourse. Rymes proposed that classroom discourse is influenced by three major dimensions: social context, interactional context, and individual agency (Rymes, 2008). Social context includes factors such as educational policies, socioeconomic conditions, gender norms, and cultural expectations, all of which may affect how students participate in classroom communication. Duff similarly argued that learners' social positioning and demographic characteristics can shape their participation patterns and communicative behavior in academic discourse communities (Duff, 2010). Therefore, understanding classroom discourse requires attention not only to pedagogical interaction itself but also to broader sociocultural factors that influence learners' willingness and ability to participate.

Among the sociocultural variables that may shape classroom participation, socioeconomic status (SES) has received increasing scholarly attention. SES is generally understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing educational background, occupational status, and economic resources. Educational research consistently demonstrates that SES influences academic achievement, learning opportunities, confidence, and participation patterns (Maqbool et al., 2018; Munir et al., 2023). Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often have greater access to educational resources, more supportive learning environments, and stronger communicative confidence, all of which may positively affect their classroom participation. Kustiyah and Kusprasetia found that higher socioeconomic status was associated with stronger academic performance and more effective educational outcomes (Kustiyah & Kusprasetia, 2018). Similarly, Munir et al. reported that socioeconomic background significantly influences educational achievement and participation opportunities (Munir et al., 2023).

Recent studies have further linked SES to learner autonomy, engagement, and student voice. Chien Thang and Thi Nguyet Trang demonstrated that socioeconomic status significantly affects academic outcomes and learner well-being, while student voice mediates part of this relationship (Chien Thang & Thi Nguyet Trang, 2024). Their findings suggest that learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may participate more actively in classroom communication and educational decision-making processes.

Likewise, Cosgun Ogeyik examined the influence of low socioeconomic status on learner autonomy and motivation and found that lower SES can negatively affect learners' autonomous behavior and engagement (Cosgun Ogeyik, 2016). Carlana and La Ferrara also highlighted how educational inequalities associated with SES can shape learning opportunities and student outcomes (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021). Despite these important findings, relatively little research has directly examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and student-initiated classroom discourse, particularly in second language learning contexts.

Gender is another major variable frequently discussed in classroom discourse and interaction research. Studies investigating gender differences in classroom communication have produced inconsistent and context-dependent findings. Some research suggests that male learners tend to participate more actively in classroom discussions and initiate more interactions with teachers (Rashidi & Naderi, 2012; Rashidi & Rafieerad, 2010). Rashidi and Rafieerad observed that male students in Iranian EFL classrooms demonstrated higher frequencies of classroom interaction compared to female learners (Rashidi & Rafieerad, 2010). Similarly, Rashidi and Naderi reported that gender significantly influenced classroom interaction patterns and participation behaviors (Rashidi & Naderi, 2012). In another Iranian context, Chalak and Karimi found that male learners tended to take more conversational turns in online EFL classrooms (Chalak & Karimi, 2022).

However, findings across international contexts have not always been consistent. Minasyan found that male learners in Greek EFL classrooms demonstrated greater classroom participation and volunteered more frequently during instructional interaction (Minasyan, 2017). In contrast, Ghilzai and Baloch reported that women often took more conversational turns in multimodal interactions, challenging stereotypes about gendered communication patterns (Ghilzai & Baloch, 2016). Huang's investigation of EFL textbook dialogues further demonstrated that although gender differences existed in some discourse features, conversational participation patterns often remained relatively balanced overall (Huang, 2024). These inconsistencies indicate that gender-related participation patterns may vary substantially depending on instructional contexts, cultural norms, pedagogical approaches, and interactional expectations.

Within Iranian EFL contexts, classroom discourse research has expanded considerably over the past decade.

Several studies have examined discourse structures, teacher dominance, interaction patterns, and learner participation in language classrooms. Babaii et al. explored issues of power and dominance in language classrooms through a critical discourse analysis perspective and emphasized how interactional structures can privilege or marginalize learners (Babaii et al., 2017). Chalak examined interaction features and teacher power dominance in Iranian EFL classrooms and highlighted the importance of balanced participation opportunities (Chalak, 2021). Zare-ee and Hejazi investigated the effects of teacher gender and teaching experience on interaction patterns in content-based classrooms, further demonstrating the contextual complexity of classroom discourse (Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2019). Esmaeilibavili et al. also analyzed teachers' discourse initiation patterns and found that factors such as teaching experience and learner proficiency influence interactional dynamics (Esmaeilibavili et al., 2023).

Conversation analytic studies in Iranian EFL settings have additionally explored learner self-repair, interactional competence, and communicative negotiation. Emrani and Hooshmand investigated self-initiated self-repair structures among advanced Iranian EFL learners and demonstrated that learners actively manage communication breakdowns through interactional strategies (Emrani & Hooshmand, 2019). Mozaffari and Yaqubi examined learner initiatives across question-answer sequences and highlighted the pedagogical importance of spontaneous learner participation (Mozaffari & Yaqubi, 2015). These studies collectively suggest that learner initiation constitutes a critical component of successful classroom interaction and communicative competence.

The theoretical foundations of learner initiation are closely connected to sociocultural perspectives on second language acquisition. Sociocultural theory emphasizes that language learning occurs through mediated social interaction and collaborative participation in communicative activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Within this framework, student-initiated sequences are especially significant because they reflect learners' active engagement in constructing meaning and negotiating knowledge. Park emphasized that learner initiatives often emerge from epistemic asymmetries within interaction and serve as mechanisms through which learners seek understanding and participation (Park, 2012). Estaji and Mirzaei Shojakhanlou similarly argued that classroom interaction patterns create both learning opportunities and participation constraints

depending on how discourse is managed by teachers and learners (Estaji & Mirzaei Shojakhanlou, 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on classroom discourse, important gaps remain in understanding the sociocultural variables associated with learner initiation. Although previous studies have explored either socioeconomic influences on educational outcomes or gender differences in classroom interaction, very few investigations have specifically examined how SES and gender relate to the frequency of student-initiated sequences in IELTS preparation classrooms. This gap is particularly significant because IELTS preparation courses are highly interactive environments that require extensive verbal participation, negotiation of meaning, and communicative engagement. Rezaei Rajani et al. recently examined assertions and interrogatives in IELTS preparation courses in Iran and highlighted the interactionally rich nature of these classrooms (Rezaei Rajani et al., 2025). Moreover, Rezaei Rajani and Heidari Tabrizi emphasized that learner-centered approaches and active engagement are increasingly prioritized in contemporary language education contexts (Rezaei Rajani & Heidari Tabrizi, 2026). However, the potential relationship between learner sociodemographic characteristics and initiation patterns in IELTS classrooms remains insufficiently investigated.

Understanding whether SES and gender influence student-initiated sequences can contribute substantially to both theory and practice in second language education. From a theoretical perspective, such research can deepen understanding of how sociocultural variables shape classroom participation and learner agency. From a pedagogical perspective, identifying factors associated with learner initiation may help educators create more inclusive and equitable classroom environments that encourage active participation among learners from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' socioeconomic status, gender, and the frequency of student-initiated sequences in IELTS preparation courses in Iran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between learners' socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and the frequency of student-initiated sequences in IELTS preparation courses. The study was conducted within the context of IELTS

speaking preparation classes in Isfahan, Iran, during 2024. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to manipulate variables experimentally, but rather to determine whether naturally existing learner characteristics were associated with variations in classroom interaction patterns. The focus of the investigation was specifically on student-initiated sequences, operationalized as learner-produced assertions and interrogatives that emerged independently during classroom discourse. IELTS preparation courses were selected as the research context because these classes are highly interaction-oriented and require candidates to actively participate in speaking activities, negotiate meaning, and demonstrate communicative competence. Compared to general English language courses, IELTS preparation classes place greater emphasis on epistemic engagement, spontaneous communication, and verbal participation, making them an appropriate environment for examining learner initiation patterns.

The population of the study consisted of Iranian learners enrolled in IELTS preparation programs. However, the target population was limited to IELTS candidates studying in language institutes in Isfahan. Convenience sampling was utilized due to practical and administrative constraints associated with accessing IELTS classrooms and obtaining institutional permission for classroom observations and audio recordings. Several institutes and freelance IELTS instructors were contacted to participate in the research; however, because IELTS instruction is often considered academically sensitive, many instructors and institutions declined participation. Ultimately, one language institute agreed to cooperate in the study. Data collection involved observing and audio-recording eight instructional sessions taught by four different IELTS instructors. Across these classes, a total of 40 learners participated in the study, including 21 female and 19 male students. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 years old and represented varying socioeconomic backgrounds. In terms of language proficiency, the participants were categorized at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. All participants were Iranian nationals. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that the information gathered would remain confidential and be used solely for academic analysis. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaires and permitted the observation and recording of classroom interactions.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Two primary instruments were employed for data collection in this study: a researcher-made observational check sheet and a structured socioeconomic status questionnaire. The observational instrument was specifically designed to document and quantify the frequency of student-initiated sequences during classroom interaction. The check sheet included separate columns for each participant's name and the number of initiated sequences observed during the classroom sessions. The researchers focused on two forms of learner initiation: assertions and interrogatives. Assertions referred to learner-generated knowledge claims or declarative statements through which students contributed information, interpretations, or explanations related to classroom topics. Interrogatives referred to spontaneous learner-generated questions intended to seek clarification, request elaboration, or express curiosity regarding the lesson content. These two categories were selected because they represented meaningful manifestations of learner agency and participation in classroom discourse.

To ensure the reliability of the observational instrument, inter-rater reliability procedures were conducted after data collection. Approximately 30 percent of the recorded classroom sessions were randomly selected and independently analyzed by a trained second rater who applied the same coding procedures used by the primary researcher. The ratings produced by the two coders were then compared, and the inter-rater agreement was calculated. The resulting agreement coefficient of 86 percent indicated a strong level of consistency between raters and demonstrated the reliability of the observational coding procedures.

The second instrument used in the study was a structured questionnaire developed by Ghodrathnama (2013) to assess participants' socioeconomic status and demographic information. The questionnaire had previously been validated and used in related studies examining socioeconomic variables. The reliability and validity of the instrument were later confirmed by Eslami et al. (2013), who reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating satisfactory internal consistency among the questionnaire items. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section gathered demographic information such as participants' names, ages, occupations, and gender. The second section focused specifically on socioeconomic status and contained five Likert-scale items designed to evaluate learners' SES. Each item was scored on a five-point scale,

allowing total SES scores to range from 5 to 25. Since the questionnaire was originally developed in Persian and the participants were native Persian speakers, no translation or linguistic adaptation was required prior to administration.

The data collection process took place in the selected language institute over the course of eight IELTS preparation sessions. During each session, the researcher observed classroom discourse and simultaneously completed the observational check sheet to document the frequency of assertions and interrogatives initiated by students. All classroom sessions were audio-recorded to facilitate subsequent review and verification of the observational data. Immediately after the observational stage, participants completed the SES questionnaire in paper-based format. They were instructed to provide their names for the purpose of matching questionnaire responses with observational records while being reassured that all information would remain confidential and be used exclusively for research analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, the observational and questionnaire data were systematically organized and prepared for statistical analysis. The frequency of student-initiated sequences produced by each participant was quantified individually based on the observational check sheets and verified through the audio-recorded classroom sessions. The total number of assertions and interrogatives initiated by each learner was calculated to represent the participant's level of classroom initiation. In parallel, participants' responses to the socioeconomic questionnaire were scored according to the Likert-scale framework of the instrument. Each questionnaire item was assigned a score between one and five, and the sum of the five items generated a total SES score ranging from 5 to 25 for each participant.

To address the first research question concerning the relationship between socioeconomic status and student-initiated sequences, correlational statistical analysis was conducted. Preliminary examination of the observational

data indicated that the distribution of initiation frequencies did not satisfy the assumptions of normality required for parametric statistical procedures. Consequently, the researchers selected Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho) as a suitable non-parametric statistical technique. Spearman's rho was considered appropriate because it measures the strength and direction of the association between ranked variables and can be effectively applied when variables do not follow a normal distribution. This statistical procedure enabled the researchers to determine whether higher socioeconomic status was associated with increased frequency of learner-initiated assertions and interrogatives.

The second research question examined whether gender was related to the frequency of student-initiated sequences. Since gender constituted a binary categorical variable while the frequency of initiations represented ratio-level numerical data, a standard correlational procedure was not suitable for this analysis. To address this methodological issue, point-biserial correlation analysis was employed. This statistical method is specifically designed to examine the relationship between one dichotomous variable and one continuous variable. By applying point-biserial correlation, the researchers were able to investigate whether male and female learners differed significantly in the frequency of their classroom initiations. The analyses provided a statistical basis for evaluating the predictive role of both socioeconomic status and gender in shaping learner participation patterns within IELTS preparation classroom discourse.

3. Findings and Results

The first research hypothesis posited that the SES of candidates serves as a reliable predictor of student-initiated sequences. To rigorously evaluate this hypothesis and to address the first research question, the candidates' SES and the frequency of student-initiated sequences were quantified. Table 1 presents the correlation between student-initiated sequences and their SES.

Table 1

Correlation between Student-Initiated Sequences and SES

		SES	
Spearman's Rho	Sum of Assertions and Interrogatives	Correlation Coefficient	.399*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.011
		N	40

As presented in Table 1, the results of the Spearman rho test indicate a significance level of .011, which is notably lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05. This finding suggests that the correlation observed between the two variables under investigation is statistically significant at a confidence level of 95%, so the first research hypothesis is accepted.

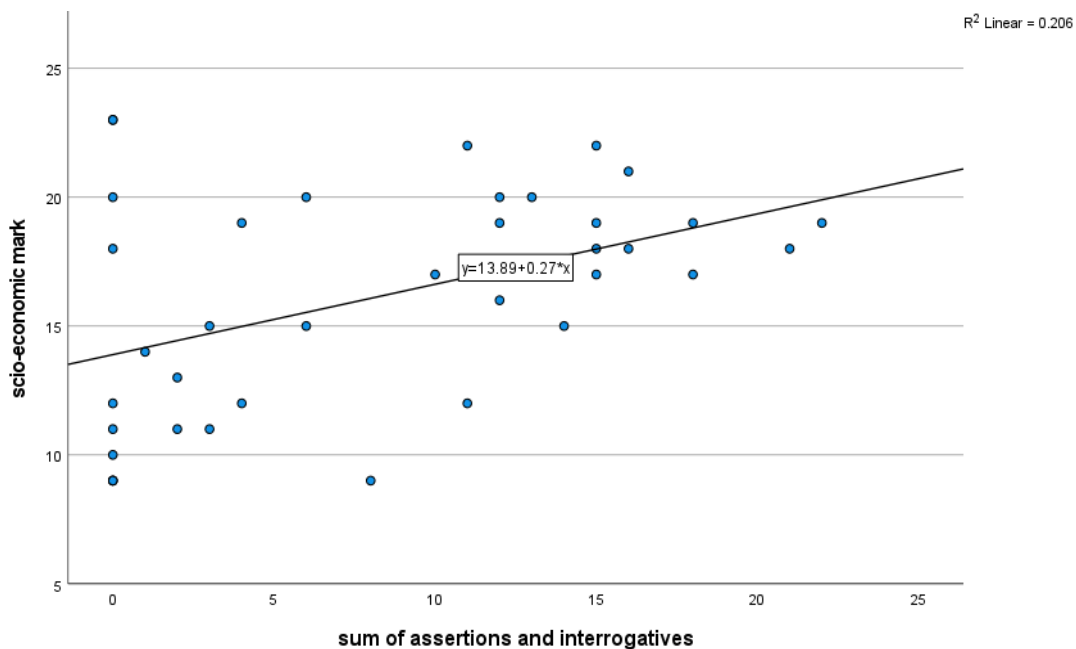
From this analysis, we can conclude that the SES of candidates is indeed a reliable predictor of student-initiated sequences. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between these two variables is calculated to be 39.9%. This value is characterized as positive and moderate, implying that there

is a direct relationship between the two variables: as the SES of the candidates increases, so too does the frequency of student-initiated sequences. Conversely, a decrease in SES corresponds with a reduction in the occurrence of such sequences.

Additionally, Figure 1 illustrates the linear regression analysis conducted between these two factors, providing a visual representation of the relationship. This graphical depiction further emphasizes the positive correlation identified in the statistical analysis, reinforcing the conclusion that SES plays a significant role in influencing student engagement through initiated sequences.

Figure 1

Scatter Plot of Socioeconomic Mark by Sum of Assertions and Interrogatives



The second research hypothesis indicated that the candidates' gender is connected to their initiated sequences. To evaluate this research hypothesis, a simple correlational analysis could not be used because the types of data involved were not suitable for that method. Specifically, the candidates' gender was classified as binary data, meaning it could only take on one of two values: male or female. On the other hand, the frequency of student-initiated sequences was treated as ratio data, which is a type of numerical data that allows for meaningful comparisons and calculations. Because of this difference in data types—gender being binary and student-initiated sequences being ratio data—the researchers faced difficulties in measuring the correlation between these two variables.

To overcome this challenge, they decided to use a statistical method known as point biserial correlation. This technique is specifically designed to analyze the relationship between one binary variable (in this case, gender) and one continuous variable (the frequency of student-initiated sequences). By using point biserial correlation, the researchers aimed to accurately evaluate how gender might relate to the frequency of student-initiated interactions in the study.

The findings of this analysis are encapsulated in Table 2, which illustrates the results of the Chi-Square test conducted to assess the association between the initiated sequences and the gender variable.

Table 2

The Chi-Square Test Between student-initiated sequences and Gender

	Value	df	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
			Significance	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	21.955 ^a	16	.065	.060	.070
N of Valid Cases	40				

a. 33 cells (97.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48

The results indicate a correlation coefficient of 0.212, suggesting a weak positive correlation between these two variables, so the second research hypothesis is rejected. This means that while there is a slight tendency for the frequency of student-initiated sequences to increase as the gender variable changes, the relationship is not strong enough to draw significant conclusions. Given the lack of statistical significance, it can be inferred that the gender of candidates—whether male or female—does not reliably predict the frequency of student-initiated sequences. In simpler terms, understanding a candidate's gender does not provide a solid basis for anticipating how often students will take the initiative in their learning environment.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between learners' socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and the frequency of student-initiated sequences in IELTS preparation classrooms. The findings demonstrated that socioeconomic status was positively and significantly associated with the frequency of student-initiated assertions and interrogatives, whereas gender did not show a statistically significant relationship with learner initiation patterns. These findings contribute to the growing body of classroom discourse research by demonstrating that learners' sociocultural background, particularly socioeconomic position, may shape participation opportunities and interactional behavior in second language learning environments.

The first research question examined whether there was a relationship between learners' SES and the frequency of student-initiated sequences. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between these two variables, indicating that learners with higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to produce more assertions and interrogatives during classroom interaction. This finding suggests that socioeconomic conditions may substantially influence learners' willingness, confidence,

and ability to participate actively in classroom discourse. Students from higher SES backgrounds may possess greater communicative confidence, broader exposure to educational opportunities, and stronger familiarity with academically valued discourse practices, all of which can facilitate more active classroom participation. Conversely, learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may experience reduced confidence or fewer opportunities for communicative engagement, leading to lower rates of initiation during instructional interaction.

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of socioeconomic factors in educational participation and achievement. Chien Thang and Thi Nguyet Trang found that socioeconomic status significantly influences student voice, academic outcomes, and learner well-being in higher education contexts (Chien Thang & Thi Nguyet Trang, 2024). Their findings support the present results by suggesting that learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may participate more confidently in educational discourse and express themselves more actively during classroom interaction. Similarly, Munir et al. demonstrated that socioeconomic status significantly affects educational achievement and learner performance, particularly through differential access to educational resources and support systems (Munir et al., 2023). Maqbool et al. likewise reported that learners from higher SES backgrounds tend to achieve better educational outcomes because of greater academic support and improved learning conditions (Maqbool et al., 2018). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that SES not only influences achievement outcomes but also affects the interactional dimension of classroom participation.

The findings are also aligned with research exploring the relationship between SES, learner autonomy, and communicative engagement. Cosgun Ogeyik reported that lower socioeconomic status negatively influenced learner motivation and autonomous behavior among language

learners (Cosgun Ogeyik, 2016). Because student-initiated sequences represent a form of learner autonomy and agency within classroom discourse, the present findings further support the argument that socioeconomic disadvantages may restrict learners' communicative participation. Similarly, Carlana and La Ferrara emphasized that educational inequalities associated with socioeconomic conditions can influence learners' participation opportunities and educational outcomes (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021). In this respect, the current findings reinforce the notion that classroom interaction cannot be separated from broader social and economic realities shaping learners' educational experiences.

Theoretically, the findings regarding SES can also be interpreted through sociocultural perspectives on language learning and classroom discourse. According to sociocultural theory, learning develops through socially mediated interaction and participation in communicative activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Students who possess greater social and cultural capital may therefore participate more actively in classroom discourse because they feel more comfortable engaging in institutional interactional practices. Rymes argued that classroom discourse is shaped by social context, interactional context, and individual agency (Rymes, 2008). The present findings strongly support this argument by demonstrating that learners' socioeconomic background, as a component of social context, is associated with variations in learner initiation patterns. Students from higher SES backgrounds may have developed greater interactional confidence through prior educational experiences, parental support, and access to communicative resources, which subsequently facilitates more active participation in classroom discourse.

The findings additionally support research emphasizing the importance of learner agency and student voice in educational settings. Nieminen et al. argued that learner agency involves students' active participation in shaping learning processes and communicative interactions (Nieminen et al., 2022). Student-initiated sequences, including assertions and interrogatives, clearly represent manifestations of such agency because learners independently contribute ideas, questions, and knowledge claims to classroom discourse. The positive association between SES and learner initiation observed in the present study therefore suggests that opportunities for exercising agency may not be equally distributed across social groups. Learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may require additional pedagogical support to develop the

confidence and interactional competence necessary for active participation.

The present findings are also consistent with classroom discourse research emphasizing the pedagogical importance of learner initiatives. Waring highlighted that learner initiatives create authentic opportunities for interaction and facilitate communicative learning processes (Waring, 2011). Rodriguez and Wilstermann similarly argued that learner initiative contributes significantly to interactional development in foreign language classrooms because it encourages learners to negotiate meanings actively and participate in communicative exchanges (Rodriguez & Wilstermann, 2018). In the current study, learners with higher SES backgrounds appeared more likely to initiate such interactional opportunities through assertions and interrogatives. Likewise, Watanabe emphasized that self-selection and learner-generated participation promote interactional competence and classroom engagement (Watanabe, 2017). The current findings therefore indicate that socioeconomic differences may indirectly influence opportunities for interactional development by shaping learners' willingness to initiate classroom discourse.

The second research question investigated whether gender was related to the frequency of student-initiated sequences. The findings revealed that gender was not significantly associated with the frequency of assertions and interrogatives produced by learners in IELTS preparation classrooms. Although a weak positive relationship emerged statistically, the association was insufficient to support the hypothesis that gender predicts learner initiation patterns. This finding suggests that both male and female learners participated relatively similarly in classroom discourse within the observed IELTS preparation context.

The absence of a significant gender effect contrasts with several previous studies conducted in Iranian and international EFL contexts. Rashidi and Rafieerad found that male students tended to participate more actively in classroom interaction than female learners in Iranian EFL classrooms (Rashidi & Rafieerad, 2010). Rashidi and Naderi likewise reported that gender significantly influenced classroom interaction patterns and teacher-student communication (Rashidi & Naderi, 2012). Similarly, Chalak and Karimi observed that male learners tended to take more turns during online EFL classroom interactions (Chalak & Karimi, 2022). International findings have also often suggested higher male participation rates. Minasyan reported that male students in Greek EFL classrooms volunteered more frequently and demonstrated greater

participation during classroom interaction (Minasyan, 2017). These studies collectively suggested that gender may shape classroom participation patterns and communicative behavior.

However, the present findings are not entirely inconsistent with the broader literature because several studies have demonstrated that gender-related interactional patterns are highly context-dependent. Ghilzai and Baloch found that female participants often demonstrated greater conversational participation and turn-taking behavior in multimodal communication settings (Ghilzai & Baloch, 2016). Huang similarly reported that although certain discourse features differed according to gender, conversational participation patterns often remained balanced overall in EFL instructional materials and communicative contexts (Huang, 2024). Therefore, the present findings contribute to the growing understanding that gender effects in classroom discourse may vary substantially depending on classroom type, instructional objectives, interactional norms, and sociocultural conditions.

One possible explanation for the absence of a significant gender effect in the present study is the specific nature of IELTS preparation classrooms. IELTS courses differ from many traditional EFL classrooms because they are strongly performance-oriented and emphasize communicative competence, spontaneous interaction, and equal participation in speaking activities. These instructional characteristics may reduce traditional gendered participation differences because all learners are expected to engage actively in classroom interaction regardless of gender. Rezaei Rajani et al. highlighted the highly interactional and communicative nature of IELTS preparation courses and emphasized that assertions and interrogatives constitute important components of classroom discourse in these settings (Rezaei Rajani et al., 2025). Consequently, the communicative demands of IELTS instruction may create more balanced opportunities for interaction among male and female learners.

Another possible explanation relates to changing sociocultural dynamics in contemporary educational settings. Several earlier studies reporting gender differences in classroom participation were conducted more than a decade ago. Since then, educational environments, gender expectations, and communicative practices may have evolved substantially. Increased emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy, communicative teaching approaches, and collaborative interaction may have reduced gender-

based participation inequalities in some educational contexts. Rezaei Rajani and Heidari Tabrizi argued that contemporary educational practices increasingly prioritize learner engagement and communicative participation (Rezaei Rajani & Heidari Tabrizi, 2026). This pedagogical shift may partly explain why gender did not significantly predict learner initiation patterns in the present study.

The findings of the current research can also be interpreted through classroom discourse theories emphasizing interactional structures and participation opportunities. Seedhouse argued that classroom interaction is strongly shaped by pedagogical focus and institutional interactional organization (Seedhouse, 2004, 2010). Similarly, Walsh emphasized that classroom discourse patterns are closely linked to the ways teachers manage interaction and participation opportunities (Walsh, 2011). The relatively balanced gender participation observed in the present study may therefore reflect instructional practices within IELTS classrooms that encourage active participation from all learners equally. Estaji and Mirzaei Shojakhanlou similarly argued that classroom interaction patterns can either facilitate or restrict learning opportunities depending on how discourse is organized (Estaji & Mirzaei Shojakhanlou, 2022). In the present context, the interactional structure of IELTS preparation classrooms may have created relatively equal participation opportunities for both male and female learners.

The findings additionally support research emphasizing the importance of learner initiatives and interactional participation in language learning. Solem demonstrated that learner interrogatives and assertions represent important mechanisms through which students negotiate knowledge and engage actively in classroom discourse (Solem, 2015, 2016). Likewise, Park argued that learner initiatives often emerge from learners' attempts to negotiate epistemic asymmetries and actively construct understanding during interaction (Park, 2012). The current findings suggest that while socioeconomic status may influence learners' readiness to engage in such initiatives, gender alone may not necessarily determine participation frequency within communicative IELTS classrooms.

Research on discourse and interaction in Iranian EFL contexts further supports the significance of classroom interactional structures in shaping learner participation. Babaii et al. emphasized the role of power relations and discourse structures in influencing learner participation opportunities (Babaii et al., 2017). Chalak similarly demonstrated that teacher dominance and interactional

control significantly affect participation patterns in Iranian EFL classrooms (Chalak, 2021). Esmailibavili et al. additionally reported that discourse initiation patterns vary according to instructional variables such as teaching experience and learner proficiency (Esmailibavili et al., 2023). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that classroom interaction patterns are influenced by multiple contextual and sociocultural factors rather than by gender alone.

The present study was not without limitations. One important limitation was the relatively small sample size resulting from limited institutional cooperation. Because many IELTS institutes and instructors were reluctant to permit classroom observation and audio recording, data collection was restricted to one institute and a limited number of classes. This limitation may reduce the generalizability of the findings across broader IELTS preparation contexts. Another limitation concerns the use of convenience sampling, which may limit representativeness and introduce sampling bias. Additionally, the study focused only on assertions and interrogatives as forms of student initiation, whereas other forms of learner-initiated interaction such as repair initiations, topic shifts, or negotiation moves were not examined. The observational nature of the study also limited the ability to explore learners' internal motivations, perceptions, and attitudes toward classroom participation.

Future research could expand the scope of the present study by including larger and more diverse samples across multiple educational institutions and geographical regions. Comparative studies involving public and private language institutes, online and face-to-face classrooms, or different proficiency levels may provide deeper insights into the sociocultural factors influencing learner initiation. Future studies may also investigate additional variables such as age, personality traits, language anxiety, cultural background, or teaching methodology in relation to student-initiated discourse. Longitudinal studies examining how learner initiation patterns develop over time could further contribute to understanding the dynamic nature of classroom interaction. Moreover, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative approaches such as interviews or stimulated recall sessions could provide richer insights into learners' perspectives regarding participation and communicative engagement.

The findings of the present study carry several important practical implications for language teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers. Teachers should

recognize that socioeconomic differences may influence learners' classroom participation and interactional confidence. Consequently, educators should create supportive classroom environments that encourage participation from learners of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Instructional strategies such as collaborative learning, scaffolded participation opportunities, and equitable turn-taking practices may help reduce participation inequalities. IELTS instructors should also remain attentive to interactional balance during classroom activities to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to initiate discussion and contribute to discourse. Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize awareness of sociocultural influences on classroom participation and equip teachers with practical strategies for fostering inclusive and communicative learning environments.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with

the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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