

## **Language Input Modification by Indonesian EFL Teachers across Teaching Experience and Students' Grade**

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### **Abstract**

*This article deals with input modification as a strategy to solve low level students' comprehension problems. Input modification has been widely discussed in terms of listening and reading comprehension, yet some studies related to input modification in communication comprehension is still in search. This study captured how input modification is used for low level students at EFL classrooms' communication and how teachers' teaching experience as well as students' level shaped the communication pattern. The data were taken from three Indonesian EFL teachers with various lengths of teaching experiences who taught students at different levels. Classroom observations and interviews were done to get the data. The finding shows that input modification is different in terms of students' level, but not teachers' teaching experiences.*

**Key Words:** input modification, students' level, teachers' teaching experiences

### **1. Introduction**

The importance of language exposure in the EFL classroom requires teachers to use at least 80% up to 90% of the target language. However, regarding to this requirement, some studies pointed some negative issues raised from its implementation. First, it dialed with the inappropriateness of English for the low level students. Second Language (L2) is considered inappropriate for low level students. Hall and Cook [12] and Jenkins [14] pointed out that First Language (L1) usage is more appropriate with lower level students. Hall and Cook [12] did a survey over 2785 teachers in 111 countries including Indonesia. One of the findings shows that own language usage was more frequently implemented in lower level students to explain grammar. Further, Jenkins [14] states that low level students have low linguistic and cultural awareness of L2 which means that their main preferences are L1 and L1 culture. Therefore, when target language exposures were directly given, students found it difficult to construct understanding because of the limitation of L2 mastery and they are unable to construct understanding based on their background knowledge. L2 may cause difficulty for the low level students to comprehend and understand the information because of failing in connecting new language and prior knowledge (Jenkins [14]). Chiang and Dunkel [4] and Jenkins [14] point out that prior knowledge is considered important in students' comprehension. Students will comprehend language input better if the teacher provides material which is familiar to the students.

Second, another negative issue points out that using L2 creates negative environment. The use of L2 could decrease the students' affective factor. A study by Kahraman [15] found that the use of L2 increases insecurity feeling, anxiety and fear as well as decreases self-confidence. Tiono and Sylvia [31] state that performing L2 in classroom context could increase students' anxiety because they are afraid of making mistakes. Further, Lightbown and Spada [18] state that students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 is related to anxiety. Students may avoid communication in L2 because of their anxiety. Clemen, Baker, and Macintyre cited in Lightbown and Spada [18] say that communicative confidence is formed by two variables: the degree of relaxation and students' competence. The more relax and competent the students in L2 the more confident the students are in communication.

From those two ideas, we see the negative sides of the implementation of L2 relating to the low level students. The first is that the students fail in connecting new language and background knowledge which also fail students' comprehension, and the second is that student's anxiety is increasing.

## 2. *Related Literature*

Input modification (IM) deals with input hypothesis which says that acquisition takes place only if the input is comprehensible. Krashen [14] says "Humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages or by receiving "comprehensible input." Ellis [9], Foster [10], Long [20] and Krashen [17] point out that comprehensible input plays an important role in subconscious language acquisition. Loschky [21], Krashen [17], and Lundeberg [18] argue that people are able to speak not merely because of the amount of input, yet how comprehensible the input is. Therefore, students cannot study the language from any kind of songs. Even though students are provided with a lot of songs, it will work not much if the songs' lyrics are not comprehensible. Due to the importance of comprehension in language acquisition, Krashen [14] states that the teacher should use the so-called input modification. According to Kelch [16] input modification is an effort to make L2 comprehensible and understandable. It can be done by simplifying the structure, vocabulary, and repeating the utterances. Thus, the employment of L2 about 80% up to 90% will not cause negative effects for the students' comprehension as long as the input is comprehensible.

The employment of input modification is important due to several positive aspects. First, it provides comprehensible input so that the students can easily decode the meaning. Pica [27]; Foster [10] and Chiang and Dunkel [4] agree that input modification is able to enhance comprehension input. Chiang and Dunkel [4] did an empirical study to see the effectiveness of input modification. Their study showed that input modification is beneficial for high-intermediate students up to low- intermediate students. Oh, [24] and Maxwell [23] found out that simplification and elaboration work for reading comprehension. While Chiang and Dunkel [4] revealed that elaboration helped students in listening comprehension.

Second, it is more appropriate to implement input modification in classroom context than in Communication Strategies (CSs). Both input modification and CSs are strategies that are used to ease interaction, yet for classroom context, input modification is more appropriate. From the definition, according to Oh [24] input is all linguistic data from L2 to which the students are being exposed as well as from which the students learn. Whereas modification means giving a change to something (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Therefore, input modification can be defined as a strategy to change the target language exposure in order to make L2 comprehensible and understandable (Keltch [16]). Input modification focuses on providing comprehensible exposure for the students to ease their comprehension in order to trigger acquisition (Krashen, [17]). Therefore, there are some studies which investigate the role of IM in both reading and listening comprehension (i.e., Foster [10]; Chiang & Dunkel [4]) and vocabulary recognition (i.e Xiaohui [33]). Whereas, CSs are strategies which are employed to solve communication breakdown (Dornyei [8]). Some strategies of CSs are strategies such as message abandonment, topic avoidance and omission will not be found in input modification since those strategies allow the speakers to leave the message unfinished, avoid, and omit the topic. Despite their differences, input modification and CSs have similarities in strategies. Some strategies can be used in both input modification and CSs (e.g., Simplification, Elaboration, and Gesture). These similarities sometimes make these two strategies overlap.

Third, the input modification bolsters students' affective factors (i.e. self-confidence, motivation). Students' anxiety happens because the students have low proficiency in the target language (Ohata [25]). Students' anxiety appear when students have to express their ideas in the target language in which they have a little knowledge (Ohata[25]; Young[35]). Students sometimes get stuck in delivering ideas because of their limitation. Further, anxiety also happens when the students could not get the meaning. Tiono and Sylvia [31] state that to avoid anxiety, students should use strategies to ease understanding. IM can decrease anxiety because its strategies such as repetition gives more time for students to understand; elaboration and paraphrase that make the utterances more understandable could ease the teachers to make their input comprehensible, so that teacher-students' interaction can run well. Light own and Spada [19] state that modified interaction can make the language comprehensible which in turn trigger mutual conversation. One way to provide input is through interaction. Even though competence can be made without conversation (Saville-Troike [29]). Krashen [17], Long [20] and Mackey [22] state that the best way to provide input is through conversation. Mackey [22] did a study on the development of second language acquisition in relation to the input and interaction. He revealed that the interactive students have more sustainable improvement than those who are not.

Loschky [21] specified his study in terms of negotiation of meaning. He found out that negotiation of meaning is pivotal for comprehension. This study investigated classroom interaction which focused on input modification made by the teacher in order to ease students' comprehension. This further aimed to ascertain the strategy in modifying the input employed by the teacher in the class.

Some studies on input modification have been carried out by researchers (i.e. Park [26]; Maxwell [23]; Hasan [13]; Oh [24]; Gallien, Hotho & Staines [11]; Chiang & Dunkel [4]). Some researchers focused their studies on theseek of effective strategies of input modification, while the others attempted to see whether input modification works for comprehension. Park [26] and Hasan [13] attempted to expound on the effectiveness of teachers' talk in providing comprehension input. Hasan [13] reveals that the non-native teachers use echoic questions, repetition of learners' utterances, expansions of learners' utterances, and conversational frames to make the input comprehensible. In another study, Park [26] stipulates input modification in the repetition used in language learning. It turned out that repetition plays a part in elaborating and giving confirmation to the students. On the other hand, Maxwell [23], Oh [24], Gallien, Hotho and Staines [11] and Chiang and Dunkel [4] specify their study in the role of input modification in comprehension. Maxwell [23] and Oh [24] focused their study over listening comprehension. Two types of input modification are important: simplification and elaboration. Whereas, Gallen, Hotho and Staines [11] and Chiang and Dunkel [4] studied the role of input modification over listening comprehension.

From the previous research, it was known that many studies have been conducted on input modification, but to the best of researchers' knowledge, none of the researchers focus their study on how teachers modify their input through teacher and students' interaction. In addition, input modification has been widely studied over many EFL countries, yet to the best of researchers' knowledge, none was conducted in Indonesia. Furthermore, those studies were done over subjects with various proficiencies, yet none of the research studies were conducted to figure out how input modification differs in terms of students' grade. For example, Maxwell [23] did a study over beginner to advanced students; Oh [24] did a study over second-year high school students; Chiang and Dunkel [4] did a study over low and high intermediate students. Therefore, the present study attempted to find out how input modification differs in terms of students' grade. From his study, Prihananto [28] suggested to see how teaching experience differs the way teachers modify their input. Therefore, this study examined input modification from students' grade and teachers' teaching experiences.

This study focuses on some strategies in the way teachers modify the input based on Saville-Troike [29] and Light own and Spada [19]. This taxonomy is based on those two frameworks (Saville-Troike [29]; Light own & Spada [19]). It is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Interactional Modifications Strategies Taxonomy**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Example</b>
Repetition	Teacher's repeating part or all of their previous utterances allow students more time for processing and an opportunity to confirm or correct perception.	T: This is your assignment for tomorrow S: What? T: This is your assignment
Paraphrase	Restating utterances by using different words in order to make it clearer	T: This is your assignment for tomorrow S: What? T: This is homework
Expansion and Elaboration	Adding more information to the utterance.	S: Hot T: Yes, it's very hot today
Sentence completion	The students express sentences which are in complete and the teacher completes the sentences	S: For tell how old tree is, you count ... T: Rings. Tree rings
Frame for substitution	The available sentences are used as a model the part of which can be substituted by the students	T: How old are you? S: Five old are you.
Vertical Construction	Students are allowed to construct discourse sequences beyond their current independent	S: Take (name of another student) T: What did Take do?

Strategies	Meaning	Example
	means	S: Pencil T: What did Take do with the pencil? S: Throw. (makes throwing motion) T: Take don't throw pencils
Comprehension check and request for clarification	Request for clarification by the teacher to focus students' attention on segments of sentences which are unclear,	T: Subtract, and write the remainder here. S: What is "remain"?
Explicit Correction	Giving correction explicitly which is done by giving its correction form	S: The dog run firstly. T: Firstly doesn't exist. "Fast" does not take -ly. That's why I picked "quickly" ("Oh, you mean...", "You should say...")
Recasts	Giving correction implicitly which is done by reformulating all or part of students' error utterance.	S: Why you don't like Marc? T: Why don't you like
Clarification Requests	Indicating either teachers cannot understand students' utterances or the utterance is incorrect, so a repetition or a reformulation is needed.	T: How often do you wash the dishes? S: Fourteen. T: Excuse me. (Clarification Request) S: Fourteen. T: Fourteen what? (Clarification Request) S: Fourteen for a week. T: Fourteen times a week? (Recast) S: Yes. Lunch and dinner ("Pardon me...", "What do you mean by ...?")
Elicitation	Referring to three techniques to elicit the correct form from students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. teachers elicit completion of their own utterance (e.g. "it's a ...</li> <li>b. Teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (How do we say x in English?)</li> <li>c. Teachers occasionally ask the students to reformulate their utterance.</li> </ul>	S: My Father cleans the plate. T: Excuse me he cleans the---" S: Plates?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative study in the form of case study. Case study was appropriate design for the study because this study aimed to answer how questions; no treatment was administered to the subjects and it focused on the contemporary event (Yin[34]). According to Creswell [6], case study is employed to see a case through detailed, in-depth data study by using various information such as data from observation, interview, and video recording. Here the researchers focus on a single case on how students' grade and teachers' teaching experience differs the teachers' strategy in modifying the input. In order to answer the research problems, several steps of case study were employed. The first was setting the criteria of the subjects. Then in order to select the appropriate subjects, the researchers did a pilot study. The researchers did an observation to see the teachers' characteristics and decided whether the teachers were appropriate as the subjects or not. After selecting the subjects, the next step was collecting the data. The data were collected by video recording and interview.

After that, the data obtained were analyzed to find out the kind of input modification strategies used by the teachers and how students' grade and teachers' teaching experience influence the findings. Finally, the finding was concluded and used to answer the research questions.

### **3.2 Subjects of the Study**

The subjects were decided by the result of a pilot study which was done by the researchers. The subjects were teachers who teach beginner level students, using 80%- 90% English usage in classroom interaction as well as modification input, and having good interaction with students. From the result of pilot study, three subjects were selected. The subjects of this study were three Indonesian EFL teachers of a Cambridge Primary School who have different length of teaching and experience and taught different levels of students. The first teacher teaches the first grade of primary school. She has been teaching for fourteen years and three months. She has got two Cambridge certificates: Cambridge Tutorial Online and Cambridge International Certificate for Teachers and Trainers (CICTT). The second teacher teaches the second grade of primary school. She is a fresh graduate of undergraduate program in English Language Teaching. She has been teaching for 4 months, so she has not taken any Cambridge certification tests. The last teacher teaches the third grade of primary school: 3a and 3b. She has been teaching for eight years and five months. She passed one Cambridge certificate which is Cambridge Tutorial Online.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

After selecting the teachers, the researchers collected the data which was in the form of teacher talks in the classroom settings. The data were collected by recording the teaching and learning activities: 4 meetings in every class, one meeting is 2 times 40 minutes. Thus, the total class observations were 12 meetings, 320 minutes per class. The teacher talks were recorded using video recorder. The data obtained from the video recording was transferred into the form of observation sheet in order to see the frequency of each strategy. These data were the core data for the interview. The teacher was asked regarding the reasons for using certain strategies.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed in three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Data reduction was done after finishing transcription. The reduction was done by analyzing the whole transcriptions and grouping them based on the input modification taxonomy. The data were put in the observation checklist. The process of displaying the final data was done by classifying the group of data based on the students' level and teachers' teaching experience, so that there should be three groups of data: 1) first grade teacher who had more than 10 years teaching experience, 2) second grade teacher who had under 5 years teaching experiences, and 3) third grade teacher who had more than 5 years teaching experience. The last step was conclusion. The data was concluded by triangulation data technique. The data from the transcriptions, observation sheet and the interviews were triangulated to answer the research questions.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Input Modification Strategy Used by Teacher of Different Students' Grade**

From the observation checklist, the comparison between students' level and teachers teaching experience can be seen in Table 2. The first teacher used input modification 50 times, the second teacher used 41 times, and the third teacher used 25 times.

**Table 2: The Comparison of Input Modification Strategies Used by the Primary School Teachers.**

Input modification strategies	Frequency		
	Teacher 1 Grade 1 14 yrs	Teacher 2 Grade 2 4 months	Teacher 3 Grade 3 8 yrs
Repetition	25	3	-
Paraphrase	11	1	4
Expansion and Elaboration	1	-	3
Sentence Completion	-	-	1
Frame for substitution	2	2	1
Vertical Construction	-	-	-
Comprehension Check and Request for Clarification	4	17	11
Explicit Correction	-	6	1
Recast	4	1	2
Clarification Request	2	2	2
Elicitation	2	9	-
<b>Sum</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>25</b>

Based on this study it was known that students' level requires different input modification strategies. It confirms some previous research showing that different students' level requires different input (i.e., Hall & Cook [12]). First of all, from the frequency shown in Table 3, we can see that the lower the level, the more strategies are needed.

**Table 3: Input Modification Strategies Frequency**

Grade	Frequency
Grade 1	50
Grade 2	37
Grade 3	25

The first grade students used 50 times, the second grade was lower which were 41 and the lowest was the third grade which was 25. It was in line with Brown [17], Chaudron [3], and Long [20] who agree that input modification were more beneficial for the lower level students. Additionally, students' level also influences input modification which was used. The first was the number of repetition and paraphrase. The lower grade students used more repetition and paraphrase. The first grade students used 25 times repetition and 11 times paraphrase. The second grade used 3 times repetition and 1 paraphrase. The third grade did not use any repetition and used 4 paraphrase. Among other strategies, the first graders need more repetition and paraphrase which means that the students need more time, simpler input and instruction than the other two classes. Second, the higher the level, students need more strategies that trigger them to speak. From Table 2 we can see that the third graders used more production compared to the two classes. The third grade students used 3 out of 4 production strategies. They were expansion and elaboration, sentence completion, and frame for substitution. The first grade students used two production strategies. For the third grade students, the teacher mostly focused on the mastery of vocabulary as we see in Table 2 the frequency of comprehension check strategy used was 17. It was quite a lot compared to the other strategies.

#### 4.2 Input Modification Strategy Used by Primary School Teachers of Different Teaching Experiences

The subjects of the study were three teachers with different lengths of teaching experiences. The first teacher has been teaching for fourteen years and three months. She has got two Cambridge certificate; Cambridge Tutorial Online and Cambridge International Certificate for Teachers and Trainers (CICTT). The second teacher graduated from undergraduate program in 2015. She has been teaching for 4 months, so she has not taken any Cambridge certification tests. The third subject has been teaching for eight years and five months. She passed one Cambridge certificate which is Cambridge Tutorial Online. Based on the study, teachers' teaching experience affected the way of teaching. Some studies revealed that teaching experience improves effectiveness and promotes better achievement (Diall [7]).

Unal and Unal [32] also point out that teaching experience can influence classroom management. The result of this study shows that first, teaching experience affects input modification used by the teachers. The first teacher has been teaching for fourteen years and three months used 8 strategies out of 11 strategies. Those eight strategies cover explanatory strategy, comprehension strategy, production strategies, and recast. In other words, she gave explanation and instruction, making sure that the students comprehend the explanation and the instruction by using comprehension strategy. She gave the students chances to speak and give them feedback by mostly using recast or by giving correction implicitly.

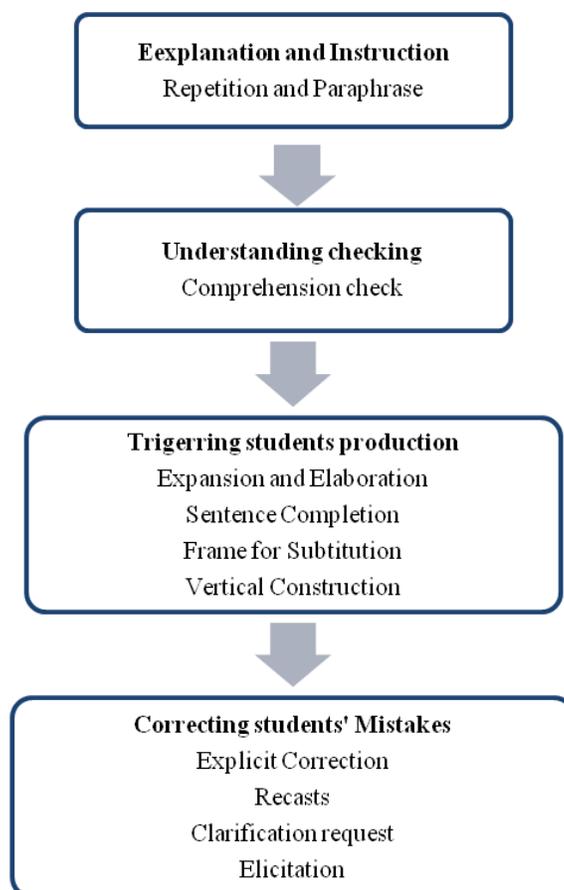
The third teacher, who has been teaching for eight years and five months, also used all of the strategies except repetition, vertical construction, and elicitation which mean she used the same number of the strategies as the senior teachers. She gave the students explanation and interaction by using paraphrasing. She used more strategies to trigger students in speaking and feedback and fewer strategies in giving explanation and feedback. The third teacher has been teaching for 4 months. She employed 7 strategies. She used all of the explanatory strategies, comprehension check, feedback, yet only use one production strategy which was framework for substitution. The strategy mostly employed by the third teacher was comprehension check as we can see that the number of frequency was 17. Mainly the teacher focused on vocabulary compare to the production. This can be seen from the frequency of production strategy and the comprehension strategy used. From the result of the observation, we can say that teacher with more than 5 years teaching experience use more input modification strategies. They focused not only in the comprehension strategy but also in production strategy. Borg [1] claims that teaching experience is one of many factors that affect teachers' cognition which later on influence teachers' practice in the classroom context and vice versa.

Another difference is the way the senior and the junior teachers give corrective feedback to the students. Based on Table 2, the senior teacher preferred to use implicit feedback than explicit feedback. Recast was used mostly by the senior teacher and the frequency of recast usage went down as the length of the experience shorter. As we can see from Table 2 the senior teacher used of explicit correction more than the senior teacher did. Even for the first teacher who had 15 years teaching experience did not use explicit correction at all.

The second differences between the senior and the junior teachers is the use of technology in the teaching and learning activities. Smith [30] revealed that older people lack of technology and he found that 53% of the senior people do not go online. Based on the observation, the first teacher did not use any technology in teaching. She used books, read the text by her and the students repeated after her. The second teacher who teaches in less than 10 years used audio (listening material). Before reading either by himself or herself or after the teacher, students always listen to the native speaker who reads the text through the video. Meanwhile, the third teacher always used videos from YouTube which are related to the topic; the also showed the students picture from the internet when the students asked about a certain vocabulary.

### **4.3 The Pattern of Input Modification Implementation**

Based on the context of teaching in the classroom, the three teachers have similarities in the way of input modification was made. Those similarities drew pattern as shown in Figure 4



**Figure 4: Teaching Procedure of Input Modification Strategy**

Input modification was used in giving explanation and instruction to the students. In this case input modification strategies frequently used were repetition and paraphrase. Repetition is used as the main strategy as the teacher also paraphrased their utterances in the repetition. After repeating the same utterances twice or three times, the teachers give more repeat ion in the form of paraphrasing. However, the exact repetition was not used by the third grade teacher because the teacher directly paraphrased the instruction in order to repeat the utterances.

The second step used was checking students' understanding by using Comprehension check strategy. This strategy was used to elicit students' comprehension on the teachers' explanations and instructions by asking a certain vocabulary meaning. Comprehension check mainly in the form of translation English to either Indonesia or Indonesia into English. From the finding, checking students' comprehension is important. Comprehension cheek strategy was the most potential and important strategy for all of the teachers since it was the most frequent strategy used by the teacher. After checking the students' understanding, the teacher stimulated the interaction use strategies that help the students' production. They were Expansion and Elaboration, Sentence Completion, Frame for Substitution and Vertical Construction. The last strategy used was giving feedback strategies. This strategy was used to give corrective feedback to the students toward their production/ output. The strategies used were explicit correction, recasts, clarification request, and elicitation. The implementation of those strategies frequently occurred one after another as a procedure.

Additionally, the use of repetition was found not only as a means of modifying the input but also as a strategy to catch students' attention. In many times, the teachers repeated their utterances because the students did not pay attention to them. After repeating twice or three times the students paid attention and understood the teachers' instruction. Based on the interview, the teachers confirmed that their repetition was not merely aimed to ease students' comprehension; yet it was done to catch the students' understanding. Repetition as a means of modifying the input was needed if the utterances contain new vocabulary or unfamiliar instructions.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study points out how modification strategies are used by the teachers, and how the students' level as well as teachers' teaching experience influences the input modification strategies used. Each of students' grades requires different input modification strategies. First of all, this study reveals that the lower the students' grade the more input modification strategies are needed. Second, the lower the grade, repetition, and paraphrase were more needed. Further, for the higher grade triggering students' production strategies were more beneficial. The last but not the least, teaching experience influences teaching strategies. Teachers who had more than five years teaching used more strategies for input modification than the teachers did under five years teaching experience. The teacher who had the longest teaching experience did not use technology as the media in the teaching of English.

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