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Between Participation and Order: Teachers' Interactional Adjustment in Early Primary Chinese Language Classrooms

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Abstract. With the increasing emphasis on student participation in contemporary classroom instruction, teachers are facing growing challenges in maintaining classroom order within oral interaction-based classrooms, while existing research has yet to adequately explain how teachers manage these challenges through interactional adjustment in practice. This study examines how teachers in early primary Chinese language classrooms maintain classroom order while promoting student participation in oral interaction-based classrooms. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and employing thematic analysis, it explores how teachers address the relationship between the expansion of student participation and the organization of classroom interaction within classroom management practices. The findings indicate that when instruction relies heavily on student talk, the expansion of student participation often generates interactional organizational challenges. These challenges take three forms: non-rule-breaking forms of interactional disorder triggered by increased student participation, disruptions to instructional progress caused by imbalanced interactional pacing, and heightened interactional fragility associated with the developmental characteristics of early primary students. Teachers

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respond through interactional adjustment practices embedded in ongoing classroom interaction, including organizing turn allocation and interactional boundaries, regulating interactional pacing to sustain instructional progress, and contextually adjusting responses to different types of student participation. These practices reflect three judgment orientations: prioritizing participation, prioritizing classroom order and instructional progress, and contextualized balancing. This study contributes to the understanding of classroom management as an interactional adjustment process grounded in teachers' situational judgments and offers a process-oriented perspective on classroom management in interaction-oriented settings.

Keywords: early primary Chinese language classrooms; student participation; classroom order; interactional adjustment; classroom management

1. Introduction

In the current context of classroom instruction that emphasizes active student participation, classroom interaction has gradually become a central element of the teaching process (Decristan et al., 2023; Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025; van Driel et al., 2023). Particularly in oral interaction-based classrooms characterized by student talk, communication, and collaboration, instruction largely depends on sustained teacher–student interaction (Boyd, 2023; Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025). Existing research indicates that classrooms across different subjects and grade levels vary significantly in the quantity and quality of interaction and dialogue. Within this body of research, interactional characteristics are particularly prominent in early primary Chinese language classrooms and are closely associated with student learning outcomes (Muhonen et al., 2024; Tong & Ding, 2025).

At the same time, this growing emphasis on student participation also reshapes the structure of classroom interaction. As more students contribute, classroom discourse becomes increasingly distributed, less predictable, and more dependent on real-time coordination. This shift introduces greater interactional complexity, requiring teachers to manage not only participation opportunities but also the organization of turn-taking, interactional pacing, and topical progression within ongoing classroom dialogue (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

While existing research has extensively emphasized the pedagogical benefits of student participation in interaction-oriented classrooms, it has paid comparatively less attention to the interactional tensions that such participation

generates in practice. When classroom instruction relies heavily on interaction, the openness and unpredictability inherent in student participation pose ongoing challenges to the organization of classroom interaction. As opportunities for student talk expand, classroom interaction may become increasingly fragile at the organizational level, particularly in terms of turn allocation, interactional pacing, and topic progression (Huang et al., 2025; Sedova et al., 2025; van Driel et al., 2023). Although providing students with ample opportunities to speak is an important condition for supporting their language development and meaning-making (Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2023; Boyd, 2023), frequent and open interaction can sometimes disrupt the coherent progression of classroom activities.

In this sense, the shift toward dialogic teaching does not merely increase the quantity of student talk but fundamentally transforms classroom interaction into a more complex and less predictable process that requires continuous organizational work. Consequently, teachers inevitably face practical interactional organizational challenges in their classroom practice: namely, how to maintain the organizational coherence and instructional progress of classroom interaction while promoting student participation.

In this study, classroom order is not understood as disciplinary control over student behavior. Rather, it refers to the organizational state manifested in classroom interaction in terms of turn allocation, interactional pacing, and topic focus. In other words, classroom order is reflected in whether classroom dialogue sustains coherence and forward progression during interaction, rather than whether it adheres to external rules or disciplinary requirements (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

From this conceptual perspective, the expansion of student participation and the maintenance of classroom order should not be treated as a simple opposition. Instead, they form an interactional relationship that emerges and is continually negotiated within classroom management practice. In this process, student participation functions as an essential resource for the development of classroom dialogue, while simultaneously introducing additional organizational demands on classroom interaction.

Existing research on classroom management has primarily approached the topic from the perspectives of behavioral control, rule enforcement, or management strategies, focusing on how teachers maintain classroom order through explicit norms and regulatory measures (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Marder et al., 2023). As classroom instruction has gradually shifted toward an interaction-oriented approach, related studies have begun to emphasize the interactional characteristics of classroom management, suggesting that classroom

order is continuously constructed and maintained through interaction (van Driel et al., 2023). However, existing studies still tend to focus on types of management strategies or instructional outcomes, and they seldom provide a detailed process-oriented account of how teachers negotiate the relationship between student participation and classroom order through sustained interactional adjustment in specific classroom contexts, particularly from the perspective of teachers' practical experience (Duan et al., 2024). In early primary Chinese language classrooms, this interactional relationship between student participation and classroom order is closely associated with students' developmental stage (Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025). Students in the early stages of schooling have not yet fully developed their language abilities and self-regulation skills, and significant differences exist among them in terms of willingness to participate and language readiness (Blair & Raver, 2015a).

In Chinese language classrooms where oral interaction serves as a central instructional format, student participation often does not occur in a naturally balanced manner and requires teachers to continuously organize and regulate interaction throughout the process (Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025). For this reason, examining teachers' interactional practices in early primary Chinese language classrooms provides a theoretically sensitive context for understanding how interactional adjustment operates in classroom management practice. The present study therefore focuses on teachers' practical experiences in early primary Chinese language classrooms. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, it examines, from a process-oriented perspective, how teachers understand and implement interactional adjustment in classroom management practice to address the interactional relationship between the expansion of student participation and the maintenance of classroom order.

Situated within dialogic instructional contexts, the study conceptualizes classroom management as interactional organizational work centered on turn allocation, interactional pacing, and participation boundaries. It further explores how teachers develop context-sensitive judgments and adjustment pathways based on classroom cues in uncertain interactional situations, thereby addressing the limited process-oriented explanations of adjustment practices in interaction-oriented classroom management research. On this basis, the study addresses the following research question:

How do teachers in early primary Chinese language classrooms implement interactional adjustment in classroom management practice to respond to the interactional organizational challenges that arise between the expansion of student participation and the maintenance of classroom order in oral interaction classrooms?

2. Literature review

2.1 Student Participation and Classroom Order in Oral Interaction Classrooms

Interaction-oriented research regards student participation as a defining characteristic of oral interaction classrooms, emphasizing speaking opportunities, participation breadth and interaction quality in classroom dialogue, and examining how different participation forms influence the learning process (Asterhan et al., 2025; Boyd, 2023; Decristan et al., 2023; Muhonen et al., 2024).

Student participation is treated as a learning resource through discursive interaction, with its value lying in both the quantity of speaking turns and the equity and coherence of interaction (Bouton et al., 2025). Recent review studies indicate that student participation is collaboratively organized through questioning, feedback and turn allocation, highlighting the processual character of participation in classroom dialogue (Bozbiyik, 2025).

While these studies have provided important insights into how student participation is structured and organized in classroom interaction, less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which participation facilitates learning. From a language acquisition perspective, interaction supports learning through the process of negotiation of meaning, whereby learners resolve communication breakdowns and refine their linguistic and conceptual understanding (Long, 1996; Ardasheva et al., 2015).

During interaction, learners engage in strategies such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and recasts, which enable them to process input more deeply and adjust their output (Rohmah et al., 2026), thereby supporting both language development and content learning (Ardasheva et al., 2015; Rohmah et al., 2026). Furthermore, teacher scaffolding plays a crucial role in mediating these processes by providing linguistic and conceptual support, allowing learners to participate effectively in meaning-making activities (Ardasheva et al., 2015; Rohmah et al., 2026).

Meanwhile, interaction-oriented research suggests that classroom order in oral interaction classrooms does not depend on teacher control or predetermined rules but emerges as a dynamic generation and repair process in turn allocation, interactional pacing and speaking norms during teacher–student interaction (Blair et al., 2024; van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Student participation and classroom order are thus interrelated and continuously negotiated dimensions of interaction-oriented classrooms: expanded participation opportunities may reshape existing interactional order structures, and order organization in turn influences students' participation modes and scope

(Asterhan et al., 2025).

In this sense, student participation and classroom order are two interrelated interactional dimensions in oral interaction classrooms: participation is a resource for classroom dialogue while introducing new interactional organizational demands, and classroom order refers to the organized state of turn allocation, interactional pacing and topical progression, rather than mere disciplinary control (Bouton et al., 2025; Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025).

2.2 Classroom Management as an Interactional Adjustment Process

Research on classroom management has long been framed through behavioral control, rule enforcement and management strategies, focusing on how teachers sustain classroom order via explicit norms, procedural arrangements and reward-sanction systems (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Sabornie, 2014; Marder et al., 2023). In this scholarship, classroom order is viewed as a necessary condition for effective instruction, and teachers' management actions are interpreted as professional practices for preventing, responding to or correcting student behavior (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014; Marder et al., 2023).

With the growing shift to interaction-oriented instruction, the traditional control-centered classroom management perspective is insufficient to explain student talk and dialogue-centered classroom practices (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). In oral interaction classrooms, classroom order is less dependent on external rules and more embedded in ongoing teacher-student interaction, emerging through turn allocation, interactional pacing regulation and immediate participation boundary adjustment (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Recent research indicates that classroom management is often achieved through subtle interactional adjustment rather than explicit disciplinary intervention (Stokke, 2025).

In interaction-oriented classrooms, teachers' classroom management practices are highly intertwined with instructional interaction. Their managerial functions are not always explicit directives or disciplinary intervention, but enacted through responding to student talk, reorganizing interactional structures or redirecting dialogue (van Driel et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2024). Classroom order is thus a dynamic outcome emerging in interaction, continuously constructed, repaired and negotiated, rather than a fully predetermined fixed state (Ødegård & Solberg, 2024; Duan et al., 2024).

Building on this research, recent studies conceptualize classroom management as a processual and context-sensitive practice in which teachers make ongoing judgments and engage in dynamic interactional adjustment in response to student participation (van Driel et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2024). Rather than being limited

to maintaining order, classroom management involves sustaining the coherence and intelligibility of classroom interaction by continuously organizing and regulating dialogue while creating opportunities for student participation (Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2023; Boyd, 2023).

In this sense, classroom management can be understood as the ongoing work of maintaining the organizational integrity of interaction throughout the unfolding of classroom dialogue (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Its emergence and repair do not rely primarily on external rules or disciplinary control, but on teachers' continuous coordination of turn allocation and interactional pacing, which together shape the flow, coherence, and progression of classroom interaction (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

This is particularly evident in Chinese language classrooms, where extended student talk and open-ended responses increase the unpredictability of interaction and require teachers to dynamically manage speaking turns and regulate interactional pacing in order to maintain instructional focus and coherence (Duan et al., 2024). Within this framework, classroom management is best understood as organizational work embedded in instructional interaction, requiring teachers to make immediate judgments based on interactional cues and to enact ongoing adjustment through situated actions (Boyd, 2023; Wolff et al., 2021).

2.3 Interactional Challenges in Early Primary Chinese Language Oral Interaction Classrooms

In early primary Chinese language classrooms, the relationship between student participation and classroom interactional organization is closely linked to students' developmental stage (Cutler, 2023; Zheng, 2023). Early primary students are still developing language abilities, self-regulation skills and understanding of classroom interactional norms, with substantial differences in participation willingness, expressive ability and adherence to interactional rules (Blair & Raver, 2015a; Muhonen et al., 2024). Teachers thus need to regulate classroom interactional structures to ensure equitable participation among students with varying involvement levels (Mhewa, 2025), leading to greater uncertainty and contextual dependence in the organization of oral interaction-centered instruction.

From a disciplinary perspective, Chinese language classrooms rely heavily on oral interaction for instruction. This reliance can be explained not only pedagogically but also linguistically. In Mandarin Chinese, meaning is often interpreted in relation to interactional and contextual cues, making oral communication an essential medium for constructing understanding in classroom discourse (Zhao, 2024). In addition, the acquisition of lexical tones and accurate pronunciation

requires sustained auditory and oral practice, which cannot be fully achieved through written instruction alone (Hao, 2012). Research positions interaction at the core of language learning, arguing that language as both learning content and medium is co-constructed through teacher–student interaction (Hiver et al., 2021).

Recent research shows interactional participation is associated with learning engagement, learning depth and language proficiency (Decristan et al., 2023). Oral interaction is thus not merely an instructional strategy but a central component of Chinese language curricular goals, as students develop text and language understanding through speaking, responding and meaning negotiation (Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025).

Sustained student participation is structurally important in Chinese language classrooms, as instructional progression largely depends on the smooth unfolding of classroom interaction. In interaction-oriented classrooms, classroom order issues rarely take the form of overt disciplinary violations, but emerge as interactional difficulties including imbalanced turn allocation, disrupted interactional pacing, broken turn linkage and shifted classroom focus (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

These situations reflect organizational challenges in classroom dialogue rather than a lack of behavioral norms, requiring continuous regulation of speaking order and turn progression by teachers and students to sustain interactional coherence (Moser, 2025; Tao, 2024). Classroom order is a dynamic outcome emerging in ongoing teacher–student dialogue; teachers organize interaction through pacing regulation, student contribution uptake and appropriate turn closing or extension to maintain instructional progression (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024) and can be conceptualized as a dynamic process continuously constructed and repaired in sustained dialogue.

Existing research has increasingly interpreted classroom management from interactional and process-oriented perspectives, yet the literature still lacks detailed explanations of how teachers develop judgments and conduct interactional adjustment in specific classroom interactions. This limitation is particularly prominent in early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms, where student participation differences are often pronounced.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Research Context

This research adopted a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews as the primary data source. Participants were early primary Chinese language teachers in Beijing, all teaching lower-grade Chinese classes and having experience

organizing oral interaction classrooms (e.g., whole-class discussions, oral expression tasks, communicative activities). For this study, oral interaction classrooms are defined as instructional settings where teacher–student spoken dialogue serves as the central mechanism for instruction and student turn-taking occurs frequently, aligning with established research on classroom dialogue and dialogic instruction (Mercer & Howe, 2012; Boyd, 2023).

Table 1: Demographic Information of Interviewed Chinese Language Teachers

Participant ID	Gender	Teaching Experience (Years)	Interview Length (Minutes)
T1	Female	2	32
T2	Female	9	26
T3	Female	5	37
T4	Female	30	20
T5	Male	4	29
T6	Female	23	28
T7	Female	7	31
T8	Male	4	35
T9	Female	16	28
T10	Female	7	25
T11	Female	1	30
T12	Female	6	32
T13	Female	14	27
T14	Female	21	26
T15	Male	30	25

Note. The information presented in this table describes the background characteristics of the participating teachers. All participants were early primary Chinese language teachers with experience teaching in oral interaction classrooms.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants could provide relevant accounts of classroom interaction in early primary Chinese language settings. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) teachers currently teaching or having continuously taught early primary Chinese classes within the previous two semesters; and (2) teachers working in public elementary schools in urban Beijing and following the national Chinese language curriculum. All participants reported regularly conducting classroom activities that involved teacher–student oral interaction, such as whole-class discussions, oral expression tasks, and communicative activities.

A total of 15 Chinese language teachers participated, with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 30 years, representing a range of teaching experience (see Table 1). The participants were recruited from multiple public elementary schools

within the same urban educational context in Beijing, ensuring contextual consistency while allowing variation in instructional practices and professional experience. This variation enabled the study to capture diverse perspectives on interactional judgment and adjustment across different stages of teacher development.

The researcher had no direct instructional or administrative relationship with participants. For confidentiality, all participants were assigned anonymized codes (T1–T15), with gender, teaching experience and interview duration recorded (see Table 1). The information in Table 1 solely describes sample background characteristics and cannot identify individual participants. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, at which point no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. This approach is consistent with established qualitative research standards on data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). This indicates that the sample size was sufficient to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.2 Data Collection and Interview Dimensions

The interviews focused on early primary Chinese language teachers' classroom management practices in oral interaction classrooms, with particular attention to interactional organizational challenges from expanded student participation and teachers' practical response experiences. They aimed to elicit teachers' retrospective accounts of specific classroom situations, including their judgment bases and enacted interactional adjustment forms.

To enhance data's process-oriented quality and reconstruct classroom contexts, teachers were encouraged to narrate concrete classroom events as analytic units. Follow-up questions explored interactional cues, teachers' decision points, and adjustment actions shaping classroom interaction development for greater clarity. The interview protocol covered three key dimensions: (1) Specific classroom situations where expanded student participation correlated with changes in interactional organization; (2) Teachers' interactional adjustment actions in response to emerging organizational challenges and their practical implementation; (3) Judgment orientations and context-sensitive balancing relied on by teachers during interactional adjustments.

Data collection was conducted between October and December 2025 via online and in-person interviews, each lasting 20 to 40 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, verbatim transcribed in Chinese by the researcher, and de-identified prior to analysis. Teacher quotations in this article were translated into English post-analysis, with contextual meaning preserved.

3.3 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

This study employed reflexive thematic analysis to systematically examine the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The analytic process began with multiple readings of full interview transcripts to develop a holistic understanding of the data corpus. Text segments related to student participation, interactional order, teachers' judgments and adaptive practices were identified for initial coding, with all transcripts imported into NVivo to facilitate data management during coding.

Codes were inductively generated and grounded in participants' accounts, focusing on preserving descriptions of classroom interaction events, teachers' situation interpretations and practical responses to support theme development around teachers' interactional adjustment practices. Coding proceeded through iterative cross-transcript comparison. Initial codes were reviewed, clustered and refined into preliminary categories, which were further developed into themes reflecting recurring patterns in teachers' adaptive interactional practices. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis principles, themes were analytic constructions developed through ongoing engagement with data and the study's theoretical framework, rather than pre-existing elements embedded in the data.

To enhance analytic transparency and methodological rigor, a comprehensive audit trail (coding log) was maintained, documenting the progression from raw interview excerpts to initial codes, categories and final themes. Peer debriefing by a qualitative research expert was conducted on selected coding and theme development portions to provide critical feedback. Discrepancies were discussed to refine interpretations, with disconfirming evidence actively sought to strengthen analysis robustness.

Rich quotations and contextualized descriptions (thick description) are presented to support readers' judgments on finding transferability. Theme development and interpretation were led by the primary researcher, with a reflexive stance maintained and key analytic decisions documented throughout the process. Generative AI (ChatGPT) was used solely for language editing and improving the clarity of English expression. No AI tools were used for data analysis, coding, or interpretation. A full disclosure is provided in the section "Use of Generative AI."

3.4 Data Saturation

The evolution of themes was monitored throughout the thematic analysis of 15 in-depth interview transcripts to evaluate data saturation. A preliminary thematic framework emerged after coding the first ten interviews, with the remaining five (Interviews 11–15) analyzed using a constant comparative approach to identify

potential new themes. While no new central themes emerged after Interview 12, Interviews 13–15 contributed additional nuance and depth to the existing themes, providing more detailed illustrations and strengthening the interpretive richness of the analysis. These later interviews refined the understanding of established themes rather than generating new analytic categories. Given stabilized thematic development and the increased depth and coherence of the findings, the study concludes that data saturation was achieved within the scope of the research questions and analytic framework (Guest et al., 2006).

4. Results

The findings are organized around three interrelated themes. First, teachers described recurring experiential patterns of interactional organizational challenges arising between expanded student participation and interactional order maintenance. Second, when facing these difficulties, teachers responded through interactional adjustment practices embedded in classroom interaction rather than external disciplinary control. Third, different judgment orientations underlay teachers' adjustment actions, shaping how they balanced student participation promotion and interactional order maintenance.

Taken together, the findings are structured into three analytically distinct themes: (1) the specific forms of the participation–order relationship in classroom management practice; (2) the pathways of interactional adjustment in classroom management practice; and (3) the judgment orientations underlying interactional adjustment. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

4.1 The Specific Forms of the Participation–Order Relationship in Classroom Management Practice

In early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms, teachers commonly described the participation–order tension as a routine, embedded feature of classroom interaction. This tension did not manifest as overt disciplinary violations or student defiance, but as ongoing instability in interactional organization and instructional progress.

This pattern is consistent with broader classroom management research that conceptualizes classroom order as an interactionally achieved and dynamically maintained process within ongoing classroom interaction (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Teachers' accounts indicate that in student talk-centered classrooms, participation serves as a necessary condition for classroom interaction unfolding, while making classroom order more dependent on the moment-to-moment organization of the interactional process.

4.2 Non-Rule-Breaking Interactional Disorder Triggered by the Expansion of Student Participation

Teachers frequently described instances of interactional disorder as occurring in situations characterized by a high concentration of students' willingness to participate. During classroom discussion or teacher questioning activities, students frequently spoke at the same time, interrupted one another, or produced simultaneous responses. Teachers generally did not interpret these moments as intentional violations of classroom rules. Instead, they tended to view such situations as spontaneous expressions of students' enthusiasm to participate.

This form of non-rule-breaking disorder can be understood within broader dialogic and interactional frameworks, where moments of overlapping talk and participation are seen as inherent features of dialogic space rather than disruptions to be eliminated (Wegerif, 2007). From this perspective, the interactional friction observed in these classrooms reflects a productive and emergent form of classroom order, in which heightened student participation generates temporary instability while simultaneously creating opportunities for meaning making and learning. As one teacher explained:

"Sometimes it's not that the children are being undisciplined; they just really want to speak. When they get excited, they start talking before I call on them." (T7)

Another teacher similarly noted:

"Once a discussion gets going, they all want to express themselves. The noise level rises quickly – it's not disruption; they just can't hold back." (T14)

In these classroom situations, teachers tended to interpret interactional disorder as a consequence of students' increased willingness to participate, rather than viewing it as behavior that required disciplinary correction.

4.3 Imbalanced Interactional Pacing and Obstructed Instructional Progress

Beyond surface-level interactional disorder, teachers frequently referred to the impact of the expansion of student participation on interactional pacing and instructional progress. In some classroom situations, although students continued to speak and respond, the accumulation of fragmented contributions disrupted the established instructional rhythm, making it difficult for classroom discussion to advance coherently toward the intended instructional goals.

One teacher explained:

"When too many children speak, the time gets broken into small pieces,

and the content I originally planned has to be postponed.” (T2)

Another teacher noted:

“The classroom isn’t particularly noisy, but it just doesn’t move forward. The discussion continues, yet the instructional progress slows down.” (T10)

In these situations, the participation–order relationship did not manifest as overt classroom chaos. Instead, it appeared as an imbalance in interactional pacing that impeded instructional progress.

4.4 Developmentally Amplified Interactional Fragility in Early Primary Classrooms

When reflecting on the interactional experiences described above, teachers consistently linked the relationship between student participation and classroom order to the developmental characteristics of early primary students. They noted that students in the early stages of schooling are still developing their awareness of classroom norms, self-regulation skills, and listening abilities. Under these developmental conditions, classroom interaction becomes more susceptible to fragility when student participation expands.

One teacher stated explicitly:

“It’s an age issue, not an attitude issue. Children in the lower grades naturally find it difficult to listen and wait at the same time.” (T11)

Another teacher, contrasting early primary classrooms with upper grades, remarked:

“By the upper grades, it’s much better. In the lower grades, it’s just easier for things to become disorganized – it’s developmental.” (T4)

In teachers’ experiential accounts, the participation–order relationship was not viewed as an occasional or isolated occurrence. Rather, it was described as a recurring and characteristic feature of oral interaction classrooms in early primary Chinese language education.

Table 2: Subthemes of the Participation–Order Relationship and Illustrative Interview Excerpts

Theme	Subtheme	Description of Subtheme	Illustrative Interview Excerpts
The Manifestations of Tension Between Student Participation and Classroom Order in Classroom Interaction	Non-Rule-Breaking Interactional Disorder Triggered by the Expansion of Student Participation	Interactional disorder emerging in contexts of heightened student participation, primarily driven by concentrated eagerness to express rather than intentional rule violations.	<p>“Sometimes it’s not that the children are being undisciplined; they just really want to speak. When they get excited, they start talking before I call on them.” (T7)</p> <p>“Once a discussion gets going, they all want to express themselves. The noise level rises quickly – it’s not disruption; they just can’t hold back.” (T14)</p> <p>“When several children speak at the same time, I honestly can’t keep up.” (T1)</p>
	Imbalanced Interactional Pacing and Obstructed Instructional Progress	Interaction continues, yet classroom pacing becomes fragmented, making it difficult to sustain instructional progress and complete planned content.	<p>“When too many children speak, time gets broken into small pieces, and the content I originally planned has to be postponed.” (T2)</p> <p>“The classroom isn’t particularly noisy, but it just doesn’t move forward.” (T10)</p> <p>“If I don’t rein in the discussion, the rhythm of the whole lesson becomes disorganized.” (T6)</p>
	Teachers’ recognition that the participation–order tension reflects developmentally Amplified Interactional Fragility	Teachers’ recognition that the participation–order tension reflects developmental characteristics of early primary students, particularly in self-regulation and understanding of interactional norms.	<p>“It’s an age issue, not an attitude issue.” (T11)</p> <p>“Children in the lower grades naturally find it difficult to listen and wait at the same time.” (T4)</p> <p>“They want to speak but don’t yet know how to participate appropriately – that takes time to learn.” (T9)</p>

Note. Interview excerpts are illustrative selections. The codes in parentheses indicate individual teacher participants

4.5 Pathways of Interactional Adjustment in Classroom Management Practice

In early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms, teachers described

their responses to the interactional organizational challenges arising between student participation and classroom order primarily as forms of interactional adjustment embedded within the unfolding of classroom interaction. These adjustments did not typically take the form of explicit managerial directives or rule-based interventions. Rather, they were carried out continuously during classroom instruction as teachers organized and modified interactional structure, regulated interactional pacing, and responded to different forms of student participation.

4.6 Adjusting Interactional Structure: The Immediate Organization of Turn Allocation and Participation Boundaries

Several teachers explained that when classroom interaction involved frequent student talk or multiple students speaking at the same time, their immediate concern was to reorganize the interactional structure, especially the allocation of speaking turns. In these situations, teachers often adjusted the structure of interaction by selecting one student's contribution to respond to, clarifying who should speak next, or briefly setting aside certain responses so that classroom interaction could regain stability.

For example, one teacher explained that when multiple students begin speaking at the same time, she would

"First take up one student's comment and repeat what he said; the other students would naturally stop" (T1).

Another teacher described that when students spoke out of turn, she would

"Not interrupt immediately, but first finish addressing the current point and then indicate who should speak next" (T3).

Similarly, another teacher noted that in moments of heightened interactional disorder, she would

"Select one student to respond to first and set the others aside temporarily" (T14).

These interview accounts illustrate that teachers managed interactional adjustment by selectively responding to particular speaking turns while postponing others. In doing so, they clarified participation boundaries and helped restore the organization of classroom interaction in real time.

4.7 Adjusting Interactional Pacing to Sustain Instructional Progress

Teachers also reported making interactional adjustments aimed at managing the pacing of classroom interaction. In some classroom situations, students continued to participate actively in discussion; however, the growing amount of interaction

divided instructional time into smaller segments, which made it difficult for the planned sequence of the lesson to proceed as intended.

One teacher explained:

“Once a discussion gets going, time passes very quickly. If I don’t rein it in, we definitely won’t finish the remaining content.” (T2)

Another teacher noted:

“The classroom isn’t noisy, but when it just doesn’t move forward, I will stop the discussion and make sure the main instructional thread is completed first.” (T10)

Similarly, another teacher stated that when she noticed the discussion

“Going in circles,” she would “pause and restate clearly what this step is supposed to accomplish” (T6).

Through these adjustments—pausing, tightening, or refocusing the discussion—teachers attempted to maintain instructional progress while classroom interaction continued to unfold.

4.8 Contextualized Adjustment in Response to Different Forms of Student Participation

Teachers further referred to adjustments that depended on the specific forms of student participation observed in classroom interaction. In some classroom situations, students continued to participate actively in discussion, yet the expansion of interaction divided instructional time into smaller segments, making it difficult for the planned sequence of the lesson to unfold fully.

For example, one teacher stated explicitly:

“Not every comment needs to be responded to. Sometimes not taking it up actually helps maintain classroom order.” (T11)

Another teacher explained that she distinguished herself among different modes of participation during classroom interaction:

“If certain students speak out of turn, I may choose not to respond right away; otherwise, the classroom can become disorganized.” (T8)

Other teachers noted that they tended to allow more wait time for hesitant or incomplete contributions, while reducing uptake of frequent interruptions (T4; T9). Taken together, these accounts indicate that teachers carried out interactional adjustment through selective uptake of student contributions. By doing so, they managed participation boundaries while responding to different forms of student participation in ways that remained sensitive to the specific classroom context.

Table 3: Subthemes of Interactional Adjustment Practices in Classroom Interaction and Illustrative Interview Excerpts

Theme	Subtheme	Description of Subtheme	Illustrative Interview Excerpts
Adjusting Interactional Structure (Turn Allocation and Participation Boundaries)	Adjusting Interactional Structure (Turn Allocation and Participation Boundaries)	Teachers reorganize classroom dialogue by regulating turn order, selectively taking up student contributions, and redefining participation boundaries in real time.	<p>“When several children speak at the same time, I first take up one student’s comment and repeat what he said.” (T1)</p> <p>“When students speak out of turn, I usually don’t interrupt immediately. I finish addressing the current point and then indicate who should speak next.” (T3)</p> <p>“When many students speak at once, I can only select one to respond to first and set the others aside temporarily.” (T14)</p>
	Adjusting Interactional Pacing to Sustain Instructional Progress	Teachers tighten or loosen the rhythm of discussion according to the interactional state in order to maintain overall lesson advancement and coherence.	<p>“Once a discussion gets going, time passes very quickly. If I don’t rein it in, we won’t finish the remaining content.” (T2)</p> <p>“The classroom isn’t noisy, but when it just doesn’t move forward, I stop the discussion directly.” (T10)</p> <p>“If I notice the discussion going in circles, I pause and restate clearly what this step is supposed to accomplish.” (T6)</p>
	Contextualized Adjustment in Response to Different Forms of Student Participation	Teachers differentiate among types of student participation, selectively taking up or withholding responses to sustain interactional coherence.	<p>“Not every comment needs to be responded to. Sometimes not taking it up actually helps maintain classroom order.” (T11)</p> <p>“For some interruptions I respond, but for others I don’t; otherwise, the classroom can become disorganized.” (T8)</p> <p>“I allow more wait time for incomplete contributions, but I respond less to frequent interruptions.” (T9)</p>

Note. Interview excerpts are illustrative selections. The codes in parentheses indicate individual teacher participants

4.9 Judgment Orientations Underlying Interactional Adjustment

In early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms, teachers’ interactional adjustment practices did not arise only from immediate interactional demands. Instead, these practices were guided by teachers’ judgment orientations concerning the relative importance of student participation and classroom order.

Teachers' accounts show that, in specific classroom situations, they continuously decide how to balance the encouragement of student participation with the maintenance of classroom order.

Notably, the judgment orientations described by teachers in this study should not be understood as abstract attitudes separated from classroom interaction. Rather, they reflect teachers' explanations of the decision-making logic that informs their moment-to-moment actions in particular interactional contexts. This balancing did not occur as a single decision but functioned as an ongoing evaluative process throughout instruction, revealing different priorities and trade-off considerations related to the goals of classroom interaction.

4.10 Participation-Prioritized Judgment Orientation

Several teachers described a judgment orientation that placed priority on student participation. In their view, an important aim of early primary Chinese language classrooms is to encourage students to speak and gradually develop confidence in taking part in classroom interaction. Under this perspective, a certain level of looseness in classroom order during interaction was regarded as pedagogically acceptable.

One teacher explained:

"In the early grades, I care more about whether they are willing to speak. Even if it gets a bit disorganized, it's still better than having no one speak at all." (T7)

Another teacher similarly noted:

"At this stage, the key is to help children dare to speak. Issues of order can be addressed gradually." (T14)

Likewise, a teacher remarked that during classroom interaction,

"As long as things are not completely out of control, I usually don't rush to suppress their contributions" (T1).

These interviews illustrate that when teachers adopted participation-prioritized judgment orientation, they tended to interpret classroom order more flexibly. Moments of loosened order were understood as a developmentally situated accompaniment to expanding student participation, rather than as situations that required immediate correction.

4.11 Order and Instructional Progress Prioritized Judgment Orientation

Compared with the participation-prioritized orientation, some teachers placed greater emphasis on maintaining classroom order and ensuring instructional

progress in specific classroom situations. These judgments often appeared when instructional time was limited or when the lesson content was considered particularly important. In such situations, teachers tended to tighten the flow of interaction so that the planned instructional goals could be completed.

For example, one teacher stated:

"It's not possible to let them keep talking in every lesson. When it's time to rein it in, it has to be done; otherwise, we won't finish the remaining content." (T10)

Another teacher remarked:

"In certain segments, if I don't maintain control, the lesson just can't move forward. At that moment, order becomes more important than participation." (T6)

Similarly, one teacher explained that at key instructional junctures,

"I will first stabilize the classroom and then consider giving students more opportunities to speak" (T2).

Under this judgment orientation, teachers viewed classroom order as essential for maintaining instructional progress. Within this perspective, student participation was organized as part of the overall structure of the lesson.

4.12 Contextualized Balancing as a Judgment Logic

Teachers more often described their decisions as situational rather than tied to a single judgment orientation. In practice, they engaged in ongoing contextual balancing that depended on the immediate classroom situation. Several teachers explained that their decisions were not guided by a fixed rule. Instead, they considered a range of factors, including students' behavioral and emotional states, the difficulty of the instructional content, and the amount of instructional time available.

One teacher remarked:

"It really depends on the situation. Sometimes you can loosen it a bit; other times you have to tighten it." (T9)

Another teacher stated:

"It's not that I favor one side over the other – it depends on the objective of that particular lesson." (T4)

Similarly, one teacher explained:

"When students are in a good state and there's enough time, I let them

...speak more. But when time is tight or the content is challenging, I can't be too loose." (T11)

Taking together, these accounts show that teachers did not approach the relationship between student participation and classroom order as a fixed position or a simple choice. Instead, their judgments developed through an ongoing and context-dependent process of balancing and recalibration. Through this continuous adjustment, teachers actively shaped how classroom interaction unfolded.

Overall, although early primary Chinese language teachers expressed different judgment orientations in oral interaction classrooms, dynamic contextualized balancing appeared to be the more prevalent pattern. By repeatedly negotiating trade-offs between student participation and classroom order, teachers provided directional guidance for the sustained unfolding of classroom interaction. This judgment-oriented practice forms a critical foundation of teachers' interactional adjustment in classroom management.

Table 4: Judgment Orientations Between Student Participation and Classroom Order and Illustrative Interview Excerpts

Theme	Subtheme	Description of Subtheme	Illustrative Interview Excerpts
Differentiated Judgment Orientations Enacted in Interactional Adjustment When Addressing Participation-Order Organizational Challenges	Participation-Prioritized Judgment Orientation	Teachers position student participation as the central pedagogical value in early primary Chinese language classrooms and adopt a relatively tolerant stance toward temporary looseness in classroom order.	<p>"In the lower grades, I care more about whether they are willing to speak. Even if it gets a bit disorganized, it's still better than having no one speak at all." (T7)</p> <p>"At this stage, the key is to help children dare to speak. Issues of order can be addressed gradually." (T14)</p> <p>"As long as things are not completely out of control, I usually don't rush to suppress their contributions." (T1)</p>
	Order- and Instructional-Progress-Prioritized Judgment Orientation	In key instructional segments or time-constrained situations, teachers emphasize the necessity of classroom order and instructional progress.	<p>"It's not possible to let them keep talking in every lesson. When it's time to rein it in, it has to be done." (T10)</p> <p>"In certain segments, if I don't maintain control, the lesson just can't move forward." (T6)</p> <p>"At key points, I first stabilize the</p>

			classroom and then consider participation.” (T2)
	Contextualized Balancing as a Judgment Logic	Teachers do not adhere to a single orientation; instead, they engage in dynamic balancing based on lesson goals, student state, and time conditions.	<p>“It really depends on the situation. Sometimes you can loosen it a bit; other times you have to tighten it.” (T9)</p> <p>“It’s not that I favor one side over the other—it depends on the objective of that particular lesson.” (T4)</p> <p>“When students are in a good state and there’s enough time, I let them speak more.” (T11)</p>

Note. Interview excerpts are illustrative selections. The codes in parentheses indicate individual teacher participants

5. Discussion

5.1 The Interactional Nature of the Participation–Order Relationship

Based on teachers’ interview accounts, this analysis explores how the participation-order relationship is continuously shaped in early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms. The identified tension rarely manifested as explicit disciplinary issues but emerged in the unfolding of classroom interaction, typically as instability in interactional organization and instructional progression. In student talk-centered contexts, participation serves as a key resource for sustaining interaction, while its expansion makes classroom order increasingly reliant on moment-to-moment interactional organization.

Previous research highlights the pedagogical value of student participation in interaction-oriented classrooms, noting that expanded speaking opportunities support engagement and collaborative meaning-making (Asterhan et al., 2025; Muhonen et al., 2024; Sedova et al., 2025). Meanwhile, classroom order is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic outcome of sustained teacher–student interaction, rather than a state maintained solely through external rules (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). The present findings further indicate that heavy reliance on oral interaction in instruction inevitably introduces new interactional uncertainties, making classroom order maintenance an ongoing organizational task within the interactional process.

This participation-order relationship is particularly salient in early primary Chinese language classrooms, given students’ developmental status in self-regulation and understanding of interactional norms. Developmental research shows that self-regulatory capacity differences significantly influence students’

attention maintenance and behavioral organization in classrooms (Blair et al., 2015b). Classroom interaction research adds that open, student-centered dialogue increases demand on turn allocation and interactional pacing (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Consequently, interactional imbalance in oral interaction classrooms is best understood as an organizational challenge rather than simple rule-breaking—consistent with dialogic instruction research emphasizing that dialogic space openness inherently entails uncertainty and organizational risk (Bouton et al., 2025).

Taken together, this analysis conceptualizes the participation-order relationship as a dynamically negotiated interactional process, rather than a fixed opposition resolvable through predetermined rules. This reconceptualization provides a foundation for understanding how teachers engage in interactional adjustment to address organizational challenges in interaction-oriented classrooms.

5.2 Classroom Management as an Interactional Adjustment Process

In early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms, the findings suggest classroom management is not a control-oriented activity separate from instructional interaction but emerges through ongoing interactional adjustment within the unfolding of classroom dialogue.

Previous research on dialogically oriented classrooms notes that teachers must continuously attend to classroom events as interaction develops, with coherence maintenance requiring moment-to-moment adjustments in turn allocation, interactional pacing and participation patterns—rather than waiting for visible interactional disorder (van Driel et al., 2023; Wolff et al., 2021). In contrast, traditional classroom management research emphasizes order maintenance through rules, procedures and behavioral interventions (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006), while interaction-oriented studies show that in student talk-centered classrooms, order emerges through ongoing coordination of speaking turns and interactional pacing (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

In such interactional settings, classroom management is closely intertwined with instructional interaction, with its regulatory role realized primarily through interaction organization rather than explicit directives. Research on classroom dialogue indicates teachers sustain interaction intelligibility and instructional progression by taking up, delaying or reorganizing students' contributions during interaction (Mercer & Howe, 2012), an interpretation aligned with theoretical perspectives framing classroom management as teachers' use of experience-based "scripts" to recognize and respond to complex classroom events (Wolff et al., 2021).

From this perspective, interactional adjustment also reflects teachers' reflective professional capacity. Qualitative studies of professional practice similarly emphasize that teachers' actions are situated, interpretive and continuously responsive to changing classroom conditions (Evitasari, 2025).

5.3 Judgment Orientations Between Participation and Order

This study shows that early primary Chinese language teachers' interactional adjustment in oral interaction classrooms does not rely on predetermined or fixed strategies, but on context-sensitive judgment orientations emerging in specific classroom situations. The findings also indicate teachers do not make a single, one-off decision between promoting student participation and maintaining classroom order; instead, they continuously balance these two concerns in response to the evolving state of classroom interaction.

This interpretation aligns with previous research showing teachers' relational understanding of classroom situations shapes their moment-to-moment decision-making (Ekornes, 2025). From an interaction-oriented classroom management perspective, the concept of judgment orientation offers a useful lens for understanding teachers' action logics amid interactional uncertainty.

Earlier studies have noted that in classrooms with extensive student talk, teachers must manage turn allocation and interactional pacing in real time to address emerging instability (van Driel et al., 2023; Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). Extending this research, the present findings indicate teachers' interactional adjustment is not merely a reaction to isolated classroom events but shaped by ongoing evaluative processes through which teachers interpret the participation-order relationship. Notably, teachers' trade-offs did not reflect stable preferences for either participation or order; instead, these judgments were repeatedly recalibrated as interaction unfolded, accounting for student participation patterns, interactional pacing shifts and instructional progress requirements.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on interview data from early primary Chinese language teachers and thematic analysis, this study examined how teachers implement interactional adjustment between student participation and classroom order in oral interaction classrooms. In student talk-centered contexts, the analysis revealed the emergence of interactional organizational challenges when teachers seek to encourage student participation while maintaining classroom order during ongoing interaction.

The results show such challenges in early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms rarely manifest as explicit disciplinary violations but arise in the organization of classroom interaction and the ongoing management of instructional progress. In practice, they are reflected in tensions around turn allocation, interactional pacing and the coherence of classroom dialogue. The analysis also indicates teachers do not rely on fixed classroom management strategies in response to these situations. Instead, guided by judgment orientations toward the pedagogical value of student participation and classroom order, teachers continually regulate interaction openness and shape participation boundaries across varied classroom situations.

By foregrounding teacher's lived experiences of classroom interaction, this study conceptualizes classroom management as an ongoing interactional adjustment process. The findings illustrate the enactment of teachers' judgment orientations in early primary Chinese language oral interaction classrooms and provide empirical insights into the process-oriented nature of classroom management in interaction-oriented educational settings.

Although this study is situated in early primary Chinese language classrooms, the findings suggest that in interaction-oriented classrooms where student talk plays a central role, teachers similarly face the challenge of balancing participation and interactional organization. In this sense, the identified participation-order tensions can be understood as inherent features of dialogic classroom interaction, offering practical implications for teachers across different subject areas.

7. Recommendations

The findings of this study yield several practical implications for interaction-oriented classroom practice in early primary Chinese language instruction. A key implication pertains to teacher education and professional development. Training programs should prioritize strengthening teachers' interactional organizational competencies—specifically the ability to manage turn allocation, regulate interactional pacing, and define participation boundaries during classroom interaction. Such training can enhance teachers' sensitivity to the dynamic participation-order relationship and foster the development of context-sensitive professional judgment in oral interaction classrooms.

Another implication relates to instructional planning for early primary Chinese language oral communication lessons. Given that student participation and interactional pacing fluctuate during discussions, lesson design should incorporate flexible adjustment points. This approach supports teachers in maintaining instructional coherence while preserving space for meaningful student participation in oral interaction activities. Collectively, these

recommendations highlight that tensions between student participation and classroom order are inherent to oral interaction classrooms. Rather than framing these tensions as disciplinary issues, they can be addressed more constructively through teachers' ongoing interactional adjustment in the course of classroom dialogue and communication.

8. Implications

Drawing on early primary Chinese language teachers' practical experiences, this study conceptualizes classroom management as an interactional adjustment process through which teachers navigate organizational challenges arising between promoting student participation and maintaining classroom order. This reconceptualization yields key implications for understanding instructional practice in interaction-oriented oral communication classrooms.

At the conceptual level, the findings underscore the need to move beyond framing classroom management primarily as rule enforcement or behavioral control. In classrooms with extensive student talk, classroom order does not stem from predetermined rules alone but develops through teachers' ongoing judgments and adjustments amid unfolding classroom interaction. From this perspective, classroom management is best understood as a process embedded in classroom interaction itself, rather than an external regulatory activity imposed on it.

The findings also highlight the structural nature of the participation-order relationship in oral interaction classrooms. Episodes of interactional disorder rarely originate from students' oppositional behavior, but from tensions between expanding student participation opportunities and the organizational demands of sustaining interaction. Framing such moments as interactional organizational challenges, rather than disciplinary problems, provides a new lens for understanding classroom interactional difficulties in early primary oral communication instruction.

At the instructional practice level, the study emphasizes the central role of teachers' professional judgment in early primary Chinese language classrooms. Given young students underdeveloped self-regulation and limited familiarity with interactional norms, fluctuations in participation and pacing are inevitable. Teachers' ongoing adjustments to interactional pacing, turn allocation and response patterns are therefore essential for maintaining coherent classroom interaction and sustaining instructional progress. In this sense, professional expertise is demonstrated not only through lesson planning or rule setting, but also through teachers' continuous interpretation and balancing of specific, dynamic classroom situations.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The empirical data was drawn primarily from teacher interviews, with the analysis relying on teachers' retrospective accounts of classroom interaction. Thus, the study fails to capture the real-time unfolding of interaction during actual classroom practice.

Another limitation relates to the research context scope. This study focused exclusively on oral communication instruction in early primary Chinese language classrooms in Beijing, so the findings reflect instructional practices within this specific grade level and subject domain and cannot be directly generalized to other educational settings. In addition, the analysis centered mainly on teachers' perspectives, with no systematic incorporation of students' perceptions and experiences of classroom interaction. This may limit a comprehensive understanding of participation dynamics from the learners' viewpoint.

Future research could extend this work in multiple valuable ways. Incorporating classroom observations or video-based interaction analysis would allow researchers to examine how teachers' judgment orientations are enacted and recalibrated during real-time oral communication interaction, thereby providing a more detailed account of interactional adjustment processes. Comparative studies across different grade levels, subject areas or educational contexts could also explore whether the participation-order relationship operates in similar ways in other instructional settings of oral communication instruction.

10. Ethics Statement

This study was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand (COA No.: 050/68; Protocol No.: DPUHREC021/68EX; Approval Date: February 11th, 2026; Expiry Date: February 11th, 2027), in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, the Belmont Report, CIOMS Guidelines and ICH-GCP. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers prior to data collection. All research data were anonymized and treated with strict confidentiality and were used solely for academic research purposes. All research procedures were implemented in strict compliance with the ethically approved protocol.

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Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

11. Data Availability Statement

The interview data used in this study are not publicly available due to concerns regarding participant privacy and confidentiality. Researchers with a reasonable scholarly request may contact the corresponding author to inquire about access to the data, subject to compliance with applicable ethical guidelines.

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