Exploring the Complexities of Teacher Talk in English Language Learning: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the complexities of teacher talk in English language learning through a discourse analysis of classroom interactions in a non-formal educational setting. The school provides a learning environment that caters to diverse groups of students, with a focus on developing their English communication skills. Three English teachers participated in the study. Classroom interactions were recorded and analyzed over two weeks using discourse analysis. Findings reveal that classroom interaction is shaped significantly by how teachers use language to facilitate learning. Teachers often face challenges in consistently using English, stemming from their limited proficiency and concerns about students' ability to comprehend. The study identifies key patterns of teacher talk, including questioning, giving instructions, lecturing, and using expressions to support student engagement and comprehension. These patterns are shown to impact student understanding and participation, particularly in contexts where English is not the primary language. Through discourse analysis, the study sheds light on how teacher talk functions within instructional conversations and highlights its influence on students' cognitive and communicative development in English language classrooms. Overall, the study shows that the way teachers talk in class affects how students learn and interact, especially in settings where English is not their first language. It also suggests that teacher training should pay more attention to classroom talk and how it can support language development.

Keywords: *Communication, Discourse, Teacher talk.*

Introduction

In English language classrooms, the way teachers speak to students, often referred to as ''teacher talk'', has long been seen as a core part of the learning process. It's through this kind of classroom communication that students not only receive information but also learn how to engage, respond, and build confidence in using the language. Especially in places like Indonesia, where English isn't used much outside the classroom, teacher talk becomes one of the most consistent sources of exposure for learners (Villalobos & Arellano, 2018).

Researchers have examined teacher talk from several perspectives. One group focuses on how it supports instructional, including giving directions, explaining concepts, and managing classroom routines (Handayani & Umam, 2017). Another perspective examines how teachers utilise language to interact with students, for example, by asking questions, checking understanding, or providing feedback (Walsh, 2006). There's also growing interest in the challenges teachers face when using English consistently, as some may not feel confident in their skills, while others worry that their students might not understand (GSholiha, 2024). In more flexible environments, like non-formal schools, these issues can be even more pronounced because there's usually less structure or official guidance compared to formal institutions.

Most of what's been written about teacher talk focuses on traditional, formal school settings where lessons follow a structured curriculum. However, what happens in less formal settings, such as language centres, community programs, or independent projects, isn't discussed nearly as often. These are places where teachers may have to improvise more, adapt on the spot, and work with students who have very different learning needs. What is missing from the current research is a closer examination of how teacher talk functions in these settings, as well as the specific challenges and opportunities that arise from them (Handayani & Umam, 2017).

To make sense of what is happening in the classroom, this study employs discourse analysis as a guiding lens. This method examines how people use language in real-life situations, specifically how teachers and students communicate during lessons. Discourse analysis doesn't just look at what's said, but also how, when, and why it's said (Gee, 2011). It's beneficial in settings where classroom routines aren't fixed, because it helps reveal how meaning is built and negotiated through talk. For teachers, this kind of analysis can show how their words shape the classroom environment and influence how students respond and learn.

This study isn't just about pointing out problems, it's about understanding how communication works in learning environments that often deviate from the usual rules. Suppose we can understand the types of teachers talk that help students

engage and understand more, especially in informal settings. In that case, we can start thinking about how to support teachers better, whether through training, curriculum materials, or even policy changes. By drawing more attention to the way language is used in these spaces, this study aims to contribute something valuable to ongoing discussions about effective teaching and learning.

Teacher talk plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality of classroom interaction, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It involves the language used by teachers to facilitate understanding, engage students, and manage classroom discourse. While numerous studies have addressed the significance of teacher talk in formal educational settings, limited research has explored how this manifest in non-formal education, such as community learning centres.

This study addresses this gap by examining how teacher talk unfolds in a non-formal English learning context, providing insights into language use, interaction patterns, and pedagogical strategies. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, which views language as a form of social practice and examines how communication constructs learning opportunities. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What types of teacher talk are commonly used in a non-formal EFL classroom? (2) How does the teacher's talk influence student engagement and comprehension? These questions aim to shed light on the dynamics of instructional conversations and contribute to pedagogical practice in underexplored settings.

Method

This study employed qualitative approach, utilizing discourse analysis to examine the various ways teachers communicate during classroom interactions. The researcher conducted this research at the Arden Project, a non-formal school in Indonesia that focuses on developing students' English communication skills. Four English teachers, each with approximately three years of experience teaching various class levels, were intentionally chosen to participate. Data collection involved observing each teacher in the classroom four times and conducting one semi-structured interview with each.

The observations covered students of different ages to get a broad view of how teachers' talk varies. During the observations, this research utilized audio recordings and field notes. Then, the researcher analyzed the data thematically to identify common types of teacher talk. The type of discourse analysis used examines how language functions in real social settings, which is particularly well-suited for understanding the give-and-take between teachers and students during lessons.

Each observation lasted approximately one to one and a half hours and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Alongside the recording's,

detailed notes were taken about what was happening things like teacher gestures or student reactions. After each observation, the teacher participated in an interview lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. These chats were semi-structured, meaning the questions guided the conversation while also leaving room for teachers to share their thoughts and feelings about how they use English or switch to Bahasa Indonesia during the lessons, as well as the challenges they face in keeping the class mostly in English. The researchers also used these interviews and notes together to get a fuller understanding.

Once the data were gathered, the researchers reviewed the transcripts and notes several times to identify common themes. Pieces of teacher talk were coded, such as when a teacher was giving instructions, asking questions, or providing feedback. These codes were grouped into bigger themes that showed how teachers communicate and support students in the classroom. Then, these themes were examined closely to determine how they aligned with the research questions and what made this non-formal learning environment unique.

To make sure the findings were trustworthy, several checks were in place. The researchers compared the findings from observations, interviews, and notes to determine if they aligned. The teachers were asked to review parts of the transcripts and the researchers' ideas to ensure everything made sense from their perspective. Additionally, two other experts in language teaching reviewed the coding and themes to identify any errors or potential biases.

Results

The types of teacher talk are commonly used in a non-formal EFL classroom During teacher talk learning activities used by teachers in the Arden project, they tend to use a language style that looks relaxed and informal. This is influenced by several activities in the learning process, such as when the teacher gives instructions to students to repeat the sentences mentioned. Communication takes place more often using very relaxed language based on the results of observations made by researchers, this is influenced by the close relationship between teachers and students. Students and teachers have a very good relationship. There are direct quotations from classroom observation that the teachers used in instructing the students:

> ''Guyss, please repeat the word after me, say it load and clear''

> '' Before we start for study today, I would like to check who is ready today, if I say good morning everybody how are you, you can say I am good but follow my gesture okey''

When giving instructions, teachers use gestures, which help increase students' attention. In this session, the students need to repeat the word. Although the teachers ask the students to speak clearly, some students fail to do so. When students fail to follow the instructions, the teacher will call them to the front of the class and have them repeat the instructions. It happened on the elementary level class.

The Arden project has several classes, such as basic English, where the ages of the students and teachers are not too far apart, making the communication sound very light. The school's non-formal background also influences this. Furthermore, the researchers found several incidents where the teacher gave instructions in a low voice, which had an impact on students' understanding of the instructions provided. Some students asked again or confirmed with the teacher regarding the instructions given by the previous teacher.

At the Ardan Project school, there are four classes with different levels, but teachers teach at all levels. The teacher's talk varies depending on the students' ages. When teaching students who are around 9 to 12 years old, the teacher's speaking style appears very active, with frequent repetition of instructions or commands 2 to 3 times. The teacher also uses more expressions than when teaching students who are in high school or around the age of 14 to 15 years. The teacher communicates with them less actively in the lower grades, depending on the students' age. There are direct quotations from classroom observation that the teachers used in instructing the students:

> '' Do not write something before you listen to me, pay attention please''

> ''I will give you a punishment if you are not attention, okey''

> '' Read this together, if somebody not open the mouth, no games afer class''

In this section, the teacher used to style communication, in first quoting are show how the teacher makes sure the students are followed the instruction, when the teachers explain some students are do another activity like drawing, trace something, the students repeat the sentence in three times and it give the results. This pattern of repetition aligns with discourse control strategies that aim to regulate turn-taking and direct focus. Notably, student compliance appeared to be influenced not only by the teacher's language but also by the implied consequences of noncompliance.

The students follow the instruction because they are afraid to get the punishment. The punishment has several types. If the students do not follow the

instructions, the teachers will ask them to stand in front of the class, clean the floor, or write a lengthy paragraphas part of the broader interactional structure that shaped power relations within the classroom. These disciplinary practices highlight how discourse is intertwined with institutional authority and behavioural management in pedagogical settings.

Asking questions

Teachers have allocated sufficient time for students to be engaged in learning. However, the proportion of teachers speaking can often reach around 70–75% of the total class time. This aspect makes it challenging for teachers to determine whether students have a solid understanding of the material. Without soliciting student responses, the class atmosphere remains boring and unengaging. In ongoing learning activities, the teacher generally starts the class by checking attendance and greeting the students. The teacher also opens the class by using icebreakers to get the students' attention or focus. After providing the material, the teacher opens a question-and-answer session to ensure that the students understand the material presented. Here are the direct cuotes from the student response from teachers:

> ''I am sorry I can't hear you''

> ''so easy, miss''

> ''I like this ice breaking''

> ''can you explain again about this
> topic, I don't understand''

> ''oh my god that's so sompleceted''

When the teacher asks questions, some students do not answer the questions directly, but respond to them easily. Some students ask the teacher to explain the questions again because they do not understand the meaning of the question. In this case, the discourse emphasizes that the choice of language used will have an impact on student understanding, the teacher must of course choose simple sentences that can be easily understood, considering the age range of students is still very young, the questions given were first asked formally, but questions came back from students the teacher tried to explain again but in a simpler form. There are direct quotations from classroom observation that the teachers used in asking question to the students:

> '' what is the meaning of noun? Anybody, do you know what is
> noun''?

> ''can you give me the example of noun''? ''noun is kata benda''

> ''I already explain that, who still remember how many types of

nouns"

By making one statement, the teacher will provide supporting questions to stimulate student understanding. The questions given require teachers to speak out several times, using different sentences. The teacher does this because the teacher thinks the first question has not been able to provoke student understanding.

The types of questions asked are relevant to the material, but some questions have been presented in language that is suitable for the learning context. For example, when learning greetings, the teacher uses a packet book as a guide. In the packet book, there are several sentences explaining greetings. Still, the teacher chooses to practice greetings sentences directly with real examples such as ask students how they are with the addition of gestures and expressions which supports this statement, the teacher looks very expressive, so that in the classroom the atmosphere is very active, this occurs in lower grades or at junior high school level. In the observed classroom, asking questions was the most common type of interaction. It was common in all sessions, but lecturing took centre stage during the first one.

Lecturing

During learning, the teacher uses several learning methods in order to make the class atmosphere more active. The delivery of material is done orally. This is in line with research conducted by several previous studies such as the following research: one of the primary classroom activities is lecturing, in which the instructor instructs or provides knowledge to the class.

How to Communicate with Students Effectively

No	Component	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3
1	Directive statement: tells someone to do	√	√	√
2	Social statements: any form of chit-chat, praise, or control towards students	√	-	-
3	Questions: all questions asked to students	√	√	√

	in class			
4	Informative statements: information in the form of facts	√	√	√
5	Talk active and Using expression	√	-	√

The table above shows several methods used by teachers to provide information to students in several meetings. Teachers are not too inclined to give praise to student performance, but the method that teachers often use and almost always apply is by asking questions to students. The teacher uses several contextual discussion genres in the hope of providing a stimulus for students to be active in class.

The communication patterns observed across the three meetings reveal several interesting tendencies in how the teacher interacts with students. One of the most noticeable features is the consistent use of directive language, which appears in every session. This kind of talk telling students what to do serves as a key strategy for managing the classroom and keeping lessons on track. It reflects how authority is maintained through spoken interaction, with the teacher using language to guide behaviour and structure learning activities.

In the first meeting, there was also evidence of more relaxed, social interaction, such as casual remarks, praise, or brief jokes. These moments of less formal talk help build a connection with students and can make the classroom feel more welcoming. Interestingly, this kind of talk didn't appear in the subsequent two meetings, suggesting a shift away from building rapport toward a more task-oriented style.

Questions were used regularly throughout all meetings, showing that the teacher encourages some level of student involvement. Asking questions isn't just about checking answers it also keeps students alert and gives them a chance to speak. This kind of interaction often follows a familiar rhythm: the teacher asks, the student answers, and the teacher responds again. It's a fundamental structure that shapes a significant portion of what happens in classrooms.

There were also many moments when the teacher simply provided information. These moments reflect the teacher's role as the primary source of knowledge in the room. In these cases, the talk becomes more one-sided, focused on delivering facts or explanations rather than inviting discussion.

Finally, the teacher's overall energy and expressiveness varied. In two of the meetings, the teacher seemed lively and used tone and expression to support their

message. In the second meeting, however, this liveliness was missing, which may have changed how the students engaged with the lesson.

In short, the way the teacher spoke across these three sessions shows how different forms of talk serve different purposes from giving instructions and sharing information to managing relationships and encouraging participation. All of these elements contribute to the classroom's social and learning environment.

Giving Direction

During the lesson there were several students who were passive and looked very bored, at this stage the teacher tried to call on the students and provide motivation, several other ways the teacher used to increase student motivation was implementing a reward system, for students who actively participated in the class the teacher would provide prizes, several class rules that the teacher applies help students improve their ability to communicate using English, such as if students want permission to go to the toilet, they have to use English and when they want to ask something they don't understand, students also have to use English. The teacher has conveyed this type of sentence before class starts, students just have to repeat the sentence and apply it to the class.

Then, to make the class more enjoyable the teachers like to give a quizz. Before giving a quiz, the teacher often engages students through extended explanation accompanied by gestures and verbal cues, such as emphasizing adjectives like *"large"* and *"handsome."* After presenting these terms, the teacher clarifies their meanings and prompts students to repeat the words aloud. This instructional approach reflects an interactive lecture style, where explanation is supported by repetition and bodily movement to reinforce comprehension.

Discussion

This study validated the connection between the interactional traits of each classroom mode and their corresponding pedagogical goals (Seedhouse, 2004; Sert, 2010). This study discovered the managerial mode and the materials mode, two of the four modes under SETT. To prepare students for debate (Walsh, 2006), oversee his class (Nunan, 1991), provide directions, and plan students' activities (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982), the instructor employed the managerial method. The outcome supported McBer's (2000) assertion that teachers serve primarily as classroom managers.

This investigation verified every interactional trait Walsh (2006) found for this mode. The teacher's primary pedagogical objective in the materials mode was to get pupils to respond to their worksheet. The teacher had primary control over the interaction, which was defined by the IRF pattern. This result supports the assertions made by Blanchette (2009), Johnson (1995), Ribas (2010), Breen (1998), and Chaudron (1988) regarding the propensity of the majority of teachers to control classroom speech.

The interactions in the studies by Rashidi (2010), Mulyati (2013), and Nasir et al. (2019) were also teacher-centred. The lack of systems, skills, and classroom environment modes in this study suggests that instructor discussion dominated online classroom interactions and that student participation was, in fact, low. According to Kaur (2011), lectures can be categorized into three types: expository, which involves extensive teacher talk; lecture-recitation, where teacher talk is interspersed with questions and student readings; and interactive lectures, where short lectures are followed by group tasks before additional input is provided.

Kaur further argues that well-delivered lectures can stimulate motivation in ways that printed materials often cannot. This pattern of classroom interaction aligns with teacher-centered discourse in which teachers maintain control over the flow of information while providing strategic opportunities for student engagement. As Sofyan and Mahmud (2014) assert, giving students clear guidance and space to practice their language skills is essential for language development. Likewise, Cahyono (2022) emphasizes that instructional clarity and well-structured guidance are key to effective teaching. In the observed context, the teacher's use of repetitive instructions and emphatic tone is not only a linguistic strategy but also a tool for maintaining classroom focus.

Occasionally, emotional regulation among students poses a challenge, especially given their young age. In these cases, the teacher's talk serves an affective function expressing disapproval or asserting authority when needed. As noted by Sofyan and Mahmud (2014), teachers may need to convey frustration or discipline verbally to maintain classroom boundaries. However, such communication must be balanced. Gharbavi and Iravani (2014) caution that harsh criticism can harm student motivation, especially if not delivered constructively. In many cases, corrective feedback serves as a form of discourse control, redirecting student attention without discouraging participation.

Overall, teacher talk within this context serves multiple functions: to instruct, guide, regulate, and engage. As observed in the Arden Project, instruction was typically delivered in structured phases. Teachers began by explaining content, followed by guided discussion, often repeating instructions clearly and consistently. Without this repetition, students frequently requested clarification, demonstrating that comprehension in classroom discourse is an interactional achievement not simply the result of one-time transmission. Hence, teacher talk is central not only for content delivery but also for managing classroom interaction, supporting learner understanding, and shaping the emotional tone of the lesson.

Conclusion
Teacher's talk affects several aspects in the learning class, one wrong word

pronounced will affect several actions, in giving orders, improving students' abilities, teacher's talk plays an important role in the development of students' communication skills, teachers who talk actively help students understand instructions well. rather than monotonous and passive teachers. Giving instructions, outlining learning activities, and assessing students' comprehension are all examples of teacher discussion that occurs during learning activities. When a teacher uses English to communicate with the students, they employ a combination of languages, which makes it easier for the students to understand and follow what the teacher is saying. When the lesson becomes relevant, the teacher can use the teacher talk segments to get students more involved, engage with them, and provide feedback on their learning.

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