



University Teachers Attitudes on the Efficiency of Classroom Discourse

Attitudes des enseignants d'université sur l'efficacité du discours en classe

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Abstract: The study aims at highlighting perspectives on classroom discourse effects on students' academic achievement. It stresses the role of classroom language to promote learners' communicative skills, critical thinking and linguistic competence, which consequently lead to better academic outcomes. Primarily, it insists to prove whether teachers are aware that oriented-discourse can help learners to gain higher self-esteem to affect learning positively. It assumes that language in classroom is used purposefully to meet with the teaching objectives. A questionnaire is directed to university teachers to share experience of classroom discourse for either academic purposes or social communicative ones and its influence on learners. Results confirm that interaction is very vital in the language-learning environment to enlarge knowledge and build mature teacher-students contact. A good orientation of classroom discourse makes learners feel comfortable, belonging, and important; such qualities get them committed and motivated to perform better and rank higher academically.


Key words: classroom discourse, teacher-students communication, teachers' opinions

Résumé : cette étude vise à indiquer les perspectives des enseignants sur les effets du langage en classe sur la réussite académique. On insiste sur le rôle de discours en classe pour améliorer les compétences académiques, la pensée critique et les compétences linguistiques des apprenants qui conduisent en outre des meilleurs résultats académiques. Il s'agit principalement de prouver que les enseignants sont conscients du fait que le discours bien orienté a un impact positif sur l'apprentissage. On suppose que le langage en classe est utilisé délibérément pour atteindre des objectifs pédagogiques. Un questionnaire est adressé aux enseignants pour partager leurs opinions et expériences du discours en classe pour des raisons académiques ou communicatives et son influence sur les étudiants. Les résultats confirment que l'interaction est très vitale dans l'environnement de l'apprentissage des langues pour élargir les connaissances et établir un contact mature entre enseignant et étudiants. Un bon discours en classe permet de sentir important, motivant et intéressé à mieux réussir.

Mots-clés : discours en classe, communication étudiants-enseignant, perspectives des enseignants



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 studies on language teaching and learning indicate a significant rate in scientific and academic research; yet the scope varies to investigate methods of teaching, role of teachers, classroom management, learners' individual differences, and blended learning to guarantee quality-teaching practices. Discourse analysts, as well, focus via a plethora of works on explaining the discourse used in classroom and teacher-students interaction as an undeniable contextualized linguistic behaviour. Classroom discourse refers to teacher-students language used in classroom for the purpose of communication. The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. It does not focus on the description of linguistic forms independent of the intentions or functions, which those forms are designed to serve. The discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for (Brown and Yule, 1983). Discourse analysis emerged as a discipline that emphasizes the role of context in the study of language by the early 1960s. In other words, where and when language is used, by whom, to whom, for which purpose and in which manners are all crucial components for language analysis (Hymes, 1972). In the same line for the analysis of language in use, conversation analysis also stresses as an approach the study of social interactions where turn taking is required. Face-to-face talk is a predominant concept of almost all human interactions like the classroom environment where teacher-students interaction is undeniable. Recent research in second language learning focuses on what is happening within the classroom and significantly on the classroom discourse. More than the scientific material presented in classrooms, teacher's talk and learners' discussions share also responsibility for the class success. If such kind of discourse helps students to understand better, build communicative skills, analyze critically, and gain confidence in their learning abilities; therefore, classroom discourse is worth investigation and research. This paper will present a literature review of classroom discourse; an analysis of data is required as well to demonstrate the crucial role of classroom discourse according to teachers' feedback and a discussion of findings will summarize major research points emphasizing the positive role of purposeful classroom discourse on students' communicative and academic outcomes.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Classroom Discourse

The role of teachers and learners within the classroom context is not arbitrary but acted to reach certain learning objectives. In the same respect, Stubbs (1979) assumes that a person cannot simply walk into a classroom and be a teacher: he or she has to do quite specific communicative acts . . . social roles such as 'teacher' and 'pupil' do not exist in the abstract. They have to be acted out, performed and continuously constructed in the course of social interaction (as cited in Harkin, Turner & Dawn, 2001). A classroom is a social context where participants' interaction is dominantly verbal. Teacher-students or students-students communicate intentionally to achieve defined learning objectives primarily and to develop certain social communicative skills secondarily. Historically, the classroom language has been a scope of study in discourse, conversation and interaction analysis for many researchers as (Bellack, Hyman, & Smith, 1966) in interaction analysis, (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) in discourse analysis, and (Seedhouse, 2004) in conversation analysis.

Research demonstrates that classroom verbal behaviour has crucial impact on the learning process and environments, equally. Thus, the analysis of classroom discourse has provided significant insights in the specific structure of classroom, its participants' interactions and relationships (Lee, 2021). On classroom discourse, Nunan (1993) points that it is a particular discourse which takes place within classrooms between teachers and students. Classroom discourse is any language used in classrooms, and it is either teacher-students or student-students interaction for learning and communicative purposes. In this respect, Richard and Schmidt (2002) indicate that classroom discourse is different in form and function from language used in other situations because of the particular social roles students and teachers have in classrooms and the kinds of activities they carry out there (p.79-80). In this study, the focus is on the role of classroom-spoken discourse in particular and its effectiveness on the students' academic performance. It is worth mentioning that in terms of production, spoken and written discourse make somewhat different demands on language-producers; accordingly, it is affirmed that:

The speaker has available to him the full range of 'voice quality' effects (as well as facial expression, postural and gestural systems). Armed with these he can always override the effect of the words he speaks. Thus, the speaker who says 'I'd really like to', leaning forward, smiling, with a 'warm, breathy' voice quality, is much more likely to be interpreted as meaning what he says, than another uttering the same words, leaning away, brow puckered, with a 'sneering, nasal' voice quality. These paralinguistic cues are denied to the writer (Brown & Yule, 1983:4).

Therefore, speakers communicating verbally are always better equipped with certain paralinguistic features which naturally simplify the understanding and interaction of participants, unlike writers who would convert these paralinguistic cues into written words or punctuation marks. In educational settings like the classroom, the use of language varies from other social environments where it is mainly for socialization and personal expression; in classrooms, spoken language is used to explain, give instructions, ask questions, seek clarification, argue, and discuss to achieve the lesson objectives. As any kind of spoken discourse, classroom discourse is achieved through turn taking, pauses, interruptions, overlaps, and the use of hedges, adjacency pairs, and different moves as components of verbal exchanges.

The structure of classroom-spoken discourse has been already investigated through the work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) at the University of Birmingham, where research initially concerned itself with the structure of discourse in school classrooms. It has been found that in the language of the traditional native-speaker school classrooms a rigid pattern, where teachers and learners spoke according to very fixed perceptions of their roles and where the talk could be seen to conform to highly structured sequences (McCarthy, 1991). They give that fixed structure the name of *an exchange* of three moves (a question, an answer, and a comment). To keep the similarity of the pattern in each case, the moves are named differently by Sinclair and Brazil (1982) who prefer to name the moves as initiation, response, and follow up (McCarthy, 1991). This model has described the structure of discourse used regularly in traditional classrooms where the teacher used to be the source of knowledge and the classes were more teacher-centered classes, and the approach is referred as the **IRF** (initiation, response, feedback) model of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975).

Practically in classrooms, asking short closed questions does not provide a chance for learners to express ideas and opinions, which means that the learning process is impeded.

On the other hand, open-ended questions invite students to share more ideas and personal experiences, which in turn build considerable self-confidence for the students and simplify the learning process.

1.2. Dialogic Teaching

Dialogic Teaching is regularly in an attempt to be used in classrooms. It was first introduced by Robin Alexander in the early 2000. The approach is about using talk more effectively in the process of teaching and learning. It implies continuous talk between the teacher and students during class and does not base the lesson progress on teacher monologues. Accordingly, dialogic teaching is defined as “....a technique teachers use to help students effectively meet learning goals or accomplish tasks through dialogue” (Gupta & Lee, 2015:p.11). Dialogic teaching enhances talk and interaction in class to get students feel more involved/engaged in the learning process. Eventually, it stimulates students to improve their linguistic capacities, logical and critical thinking, and communicative skills. Dialogic teaching ameliorates students understanding, sharing knowledge, explanation and opinion expression. In short, dialogic teaching prepares learners for real life engagement and commitment. The implementation of this approach turns classrooms a collaborative and supportive environment for learners, as it permits teachers, through encouraging students to talk and think loudly, to detect learners’ needs, check their progress to better guide and accompany the learning obstacles and challenges (Alexander, 2018).

The analysis of classroom discourse intends to develop awareness among teachers in general about the critical role that classroom discourse plays in improving teaching skills and student performance as well as the overall development. Classroom discourse analysis is not very common in educational settings where teachers still adopt old ways of teaching. They cannot figure out the significant influence of their discourse in classrooms on their students’ academic performance. The analysis is also an opportunity for instructors to assess their performance, notice their weak areas, and highlight students’ struggles daily. If Classroom discourse is applied effectively and purposefully, it can function as an efficient pedagogical tool to foster a safe, active, highly collaborative and cognitively stimulating learning experience for students (Hardman, 2016).

2. Study Framework

The primary objective of this research paper is to discuss the importance of classroom discourse and highlight teachers’ perspectives on its vital role in classrooms and on students’ academic performance and willing to learn. The study also aims at indicating university teachers’ usual routines in class and the implementation of different teaching models in orienting classroom discourse to motivate students and boost contribution in the lesson progress, frequently.

2.1. Participants and Instrument

The research participants of this study are teachers at university and mainly form the department of English in the University of FrèresMentouri, Constantine 1.

The sample is purposefully selected to fit the aim of working on the impact of effective classroom discourse on students in higher education where learners are supposed to think critically, share knowledge, and be prepared for real professional life. The research tool adopted to collect the required data is a structured questionnaire of 21 closed and open

questions. The questionnaire is distributed to 73 teachers online, using google form. Only 51 informants participated answering the questionnaire.

2.2. Results and Discussion

1. The first question is on the teaching experience. The results reveal that **45.1%** of participants are teaching for *more than 15 years* which indicates that they are highly experienced working with students of different generations and professional enough to manage their discourse in class to encourage students' contribution. About **43.1%** of informants have an experience of teaching from *five to 15 years* and only **11.8%** are teachers with *less than five* years of experience. Dealing with students for many years equips teachers with tips and techniques to orient the classroom language to suit students' needs, interests and capacities.

2. The second question is to determine the teachers' global relationship with students. Findings demonstrate that **92.2%** hold a *friendly academic relationship* with their students and only **7.8%** of informants confirm that it is a *very formal academic relationship*. No one describes his/her relationship as *very friendly and informal*. This proves that teachers and students share a kind of friendly contact that implies a friendly learning atmosphere in classrooms. Human type of relationships implies the quality of language they use. The friendlier the relationship between participants (teacher and students) of the same environment (classroom) the better and effective language (classroom discourse) will be to attain mutually shared learning objectives.

3. The next question aims to figure out the frequently used techniques, teachers run their classes through, whether they are discussion, knowledge or task-based classes. Findings show that **52.9%** base their classes on *discussions*, **23.5%** affirm that it is *knowledge-based* and only **19.6%** point that their classes are *task-based*. This variety seems acceptable since teachers are dealing with subjects of different nature and every classes requires a definite way of learners' contribution. Teaching a content-based class or a skill-based one implies different visions how to involve students in the lesson progress.

4. The fourth question seeks teachers' attitudes on the scientific and academic capacities of students to discuss with their teachers. Data prove that a great majority of teachers **70.6%** confirm that students are academically and scientifically able to open discussion in class, whereas **29.4%** do not consider students able to do so. The majority of students do not lack knowledge or skills to discuss and debate in class but some are not given fair opportunities to express their views, knowledge and skills because of time constraints, large classrooms, lack of tolerance and even psychological individual factors.

5. The teacher talking time (TTT) is an important criterion in classroom discourse. Participant are asked about the amount of their talking time. Results reveal that **37.3%** are using about 70 to 50% of the whole class talking time, which means they are talking more than students; **23.5%** assume that they are talking 50% during class and here students are getting fair opportunities to speak.

A rate of **15.7%** use only 40 to 20% of the talking time and **5.9%** use less than 20%, which means that such classes are a good example of learner-centred class where students get

significant contribution in the lesson progress. The adequate distribution of the class talking time between teachers and students is of great importance to guarantee learners contribution and involvement.

6. Learners' participation within the classroom is usually assumed to bring out the best of students. The next question is for the aim to see if teachers believe that the participation/discussion of their students can bring benefits to the class. The vast majority **98%** of informants *agree* that learners' contribution is essential and beneficial. Contrarily, **2%** *refuse* that students can bring benefits to the class. Some instructors consider that some learners' participations negatively affect the class progress and it is a waste of time to engage students with low qualities to contribute.

7. The question attempts to highlight the students' needs defined by their teachers. A number of alternatives is presented to choose. Data reveal that **74.5%** insist that students need to *build communicative competence and critical thinking*, **60.8%** of teachers believe that students need *to be more committed and involved in class activities*, **37.3%** say that students need *to follow their teachers' explanation and practice regularly*. A great percentage of informants (**72.5%**) assume that students need to discuss ideas and express themselves more within the classroom. One can conclude that gaining communication skills and the ability to think reasonably is a crucial objective for teachers.

8. The eighth question is on the importance of teacher-students or student-students discussion/communication in class. Findings demonstrate that it is *very important* for **80.4%** of teachers; it is just *important* for **17.6%** and only **one** teacher points that it is *not important at all*. Interaction in class is undeniable and how instructors assume its importance depends on their belief that teachers and students share responsibilities towards the lesson success. In terms of comparing teacher-students discuss or students-students discussion, it is assumed that the former is much appreciated and favoured than the latter; however, students-students discussions can also bring insightful ideas to the class if they are well organized and accompanied.

9. The next question is to indicate the teaching models/techniques teachers follow frequently in their classes. It is proved that **29.4%** go on *IRF (initiation-response-feedback) model*; the *FLE (facilitate-listen-engage)* is applied by **39.2%** and **25.5%** *develop discussions from students' contributions*. The results show that students' contribution is favoured in class and the teaching techniques boost students to engage their learning skills. Informants' choice is remarkable to motivate students' participation in class and the techniques applied can ameliorate the learning outcomes.

10. The use of feedback is a necessity in the teaching/learning process. It is used for the aim of guiding and well orienting students understanding. This question is about the frequency of giving feedback in class. Findings reveal that **66.7%** of informant *always* give feedback, and **31.4%** *sometimes* do but **one** teacher says that he/she *hardly ever* provides feedback. Research on feedback shows always-positive correlation between positive constructive feedback and academic achievement of students. Personalized positive feedback gets learners more involved and willing to do better.

11. The type of the feedback proves the teachers' objective of teaching as it has a sound impact on students if it is intentionally and appropriately given. This question implies the most frequent type of feedback provided by teachers. Results reveal that **86.3%** go on *motivational feedback*, **51%** give *interactional feedback*, **45.1%** use *corrective feedback*, **39.2%** provide *descriptive feedback*, and **29.4%** give *evaluative feedback*. Data prove that teachers' feedback is used differently for different purposes, as the situation requires. Helping learners to understand better and correct their mistakes is the teacher's job in class; however, it can bring valuable outcomes if it is done in a motivational encouraging manner.

12. Talking about communication in class means taking into account both participants views (teachers and students); this implies that students' response to the teacher's feedback is of great importance as well. If students accept and react positively towards their teacher feedback, it means that their performance will improve. This is the objective of this question. Findings reveal that the entire number of teachers (**98%**) confirm that their students *accept the feedback* and **2%** point that students are *indifferent* to the feedback. Thus, results confirm the students' appreciation and acceptance of teachers' feedback.

13. About classroom discourse, teachers are asked if they are using it carefully and purposefully to encourage and ameliorate students' performance in class. All teachers with a rate of **98%** confirm that their talk in class is intentional to boost students' learning, while **2%** of answers pick *No* to indicate that their talk is spontaneous. Intentional language use in class has great impact on students' development and academic engagement; students used to like or dislike the class only because of the instructor's words. Through formal and informal discussions with students and teachers as well, learners may complain and admit their poor performance in class because of the teacher feedback, comments and underestimation sometimes.

14. The next question's aim is to determine whether teachers are managing their classroom discourse to meet with the lesson objectives. Data demonstrate that **98%** of teachers positively say that the classroom language and the lesson objectives go hand in hand and **2%** disconfirm. The teachers' greetings, warmups, compliments, feedback, critics and even jokes should definitely fit the classroom-learning environment. Teachers are conscious enough that whatever they say in the classroom will be taken seriously and this is the reason they ought to communicate purposefully to meet with the learning objectives.

15. This question is about the teachers' perspectives if really a good intentional classroom discourse can make students bring out their best and gain academic skills and knowledge better. Informants highly believe that an effective classroom discourse can influence learners positively, so they can contribute efficiently to achieve better academically. Thus, **98%** confirm while **2%** disconfirm. The individual differences of either teachers or students can highly influence the learning-teaching process; personality traits of both partners orient the class discourse and effectively a good manipulation of language will simplify the teacher task and the learners' learning and communication skills.

16. Teachers are professionals who check their performance in the classroom walls as any professional who wants to improve his/her skills. This question objective is to see if teachers

used to ask their students, those who are always sharing the learning environment with them, about their pedagogical performance in class. The findings reveal that **62.7%** of teachers ask their students about their performance, but **37.3%** do not. Some teachers believe that students are not yet competent and logical to evaluate the teachers' performance and see that their students' opinions are very subjective either positively or negatively. Students' feedback usually helps teachers to improve, correct, modify and even change some practices and ideas concerning the classroom management, teaching and dealing with learners.

17. The next question is to carry on with the previous one, for the category of teachers who do not ask students on their performance. We ask them if they ask other colleagues, friends or administration staff on their pedagogical performance and classroom discourse. The results show that **72.5%** discuss the issue with other professionals, while **27.5%** do not even talk about their performance even with their workmates. Teachers find it more appropriate if they discuss their teaching practices with their friends who can understand better their point to ameliorate their teaching and talk in class. Discussions with professionals and members of the same community always enrich teachers' knowledge to understand and yet improve teaching scientifically, academically, linguistically and pedagogically.

18. For participants who refuse to ask either students or co-workers if they are appropriately performing within the classroom, they are asked about their ways to check their pedagogical performance. The answers include various opinions as:

- Students' understanding and performance are the mirror of the teacher well doing
- More than discussing the issue with other, I use my own reflective diaries
- Since I use the correct academic language, no need to ask others (self-evaluation)
- Students' body language, improvement in grades, level of interaction is an evidence.

19. This question insists to highlight teachers' ideas about features of an effective classroom discourse. Indeed all informants participate answering and some features are frequently mentioned by different teachers; accordingly, effective classroom discourse should be:

- Academic, constructive, supportive and adaptive to students' level
- Motivational and friendly to make students feel comfortable in class
- Informative, well-framed to meet with students' needs
- Very encouraging and objective to reach a healthy learning environment
- Students' contributions are welcome regardless their adequacy and logic still oriented and positively commented on by their teachers
- Respectful, inspiring, intellectual, and obedient to the classroom rules and codes
- Inclusive, collaborative to let students believe in their capacities and develop skills

20. In this question, informants are given a list of statements on classroom discourse and asked to show their agreements/disagreements.

The aim is to see their opinions on features and effectiveness of classroom discourse on students' performance. The results summarize the answers with the highest rate of each, as the followings:

- **57% strongly agree** that teacher-students good communication impacts positively students' willing to learn
- **51% strongly agree** that class discussion helps students to understand and learn better
- **48% strongly agree** that careful classroom discourse builds students' communicative and academic skills
- **53% disagree** that classroom discussion provokes chaos and gives opportunity to inappropriate class behaviour
- **45% agree** that classroom discussion depends on the nature of module
- **45% agree** that effective classroom discourse cannot be controlled and achieved in oversized classrooms
- **42.85% agree** that many learners fail the class not because of the complexity of the task/module but the language of the teacher
- **55% strongly agree** that classroom discourse is a good pedagogical tool to impact students' commitment and motivation positively
- **53% strongly agree** that learners get higher self-esteem and trust better their learning capacities because of good classroom discourse managed mainly by their teachers
- **63% strongly agree** that students perform better if they feel important, comfortable and belonging in the class

21. The last question aims at knowing the teachers' opinions on the concept of classroom community. The classroom community is a learning environment comfortable to students where they trust their capacities and contributions. Teachers' answers are like:

- Classroom is not just a place where teachers teach and learners absorb. A classroom is a space where experience and knowledge are shared and where everyone can learn from the other. Creating a community is not just a room for pedagogical purposes.
- It is a very useful strategy to make students feel that they all belong to the same community. Along with their teacher, students will also feel seen. In community, all members are important and respected.
- It is a collaborative atmosphere where students are supported to express and share their ideas and encouraged to engage in discussion.
- It is very important to make the students feel that they belong to that class. When students feel welcomed and valued, they become better achievers
- It is simply creating the most adequate comfortable atmosphere for students to better learn within an encouraging environment
- When we teach students who share the sense of belonging all together WE can speak about classroom community
- An ideal situation that is not easy to reach
- Classroom community is **Not** always possible but always desirable

The study in hand is carried out with the objective to put light on a very important concept in the teaching and learning environment which is 'the classroom discourse' or as referred to by some scholars, 'classroom talk' or 'classroom language'.

The research investigates university classrooms and particularly English classrooms where the language used either for teaching or instruction is not the students' native language. As language teachers, we know that a significant number of learners struggle daily to learn

English and what is more required is that they should discuss, explain, argue and debate in English, which seems to be a hard task for some. Researchers have conducted many studies on the language used inside the classroom to conclude how formal and academic is the register used by teachers and how students usually reply to a fixed pattern of structure. The teacher-centred classrooms seem as a frame-structured planned classes; teachers run classrooms through monologues and students' contribution is very limited; knowledge is the main purpose of the class and the teacher is the sole responsible of the lesson progress. Professional demands and work life require other skills more than knowledge to cope with the market and academic life advancement. Therefore, a reconsideration of the classroom structure, roles and language become fundamental. Studies on pedagogy prove the vital role of the students' participation in classrooms, and show that the more students are involved in the learning process the better is their academic production. Henceforth, students' motivation and desire to learn have been key variables in a plethora of research to enhance students' willing to learn and achieve better academically. This research confirms that the teacher has a great role to play in the student's commitment; it is also proved that the teacher's language in classroom has a crucial role to motivate students, make them feel comfortable, and valuable. Students spend in classrooms a considerable amount of time daily more than the time spent at home; if they feel belonging and comfort, they contribute frequently because they believe that they are not rejected and their performance is not criticized. The teacher is a model for many learners and if that teacher gains his/her learners' confidence, students will feel motivated to share knowledge, discuss ideas, tolerate others differences and analyse critically. A learner with such qualities will be ready for the professional life after graduation because he/she is well equipped with communicative social skills and analytical logical abilities. An effective classroom discourse helps students to learn, understand better from each other and the explanation task will not be the responsibility of the teacher only. Students' encouragement to share knowledge, tasks, ideas, and experience with each other makes learners more involved in class and develop their group work spirits. Therefore, motivational classroom discourse and supportive/inclusive language lead students to feel belonging and comfort that will in turn bring out their best; intentional discourse creates an appropriate learning environment because students feel their contribution is appreciated and essential. Although, reaching a classroom with such characteristics is not always possible because of other factors like large classrooms, incompetent teachers, heterogeneous needs and backgrounds, demotivated with low-level learners and incompatible education policies; it is always desired to improve the teaching and learning context. Generally, it is difficult to generalize about classroom discourse because each class has its own special culture. Classrooms, teachers and students are different in different contexts (Alexander, 2018). Furthermore, the type of learners and instructors' discourse, the patterns of talk in classroom, instructional conversations, politeness strategies, turn taking patterns, topic management, and the power and solidarity issues can be different in different settings.

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