

The effectiveness of classroom discourse in improving teachers' and learners' classroom practices

Dr. Ailoum Moussa ¹

¹ Laboratory of Linguistic and Literary Practices in the Algerian Desert Regions and their Extensions on the African Coast, University of Tamanghasset (Algeria). Email: ailoum.moussa@univ-tam.dz

Abstract---Classroom discourse represents the cornerstone of the communication process and constitutes a central pillar of teaching and learning interactions between its main actors the teacher and the learner. It functions as a vital medium for reception, discussion, exchange of viewpoints, and the articulation of questions and problems related to educational issues within the classroom setting. This study aims to highlight the value and role of classroom discourse in the teaching-learning process and to identify its most significant learning outcomes for both teachers and learners.

Keywords---Classroom Discourse, Classroom Environment, Teacher, Learner.

Introduction

Discourse represents a communicative activity that is fundamentally based on spoken language and is closely associated with the expression of various systems of meaning within social practice. Every field of knowledge has its own discourse through which its contents are explained and described and its objectives defined; discourse thus functions as its expressive medium within knowledge systems required by different domains of life and their diverse social contexts.

Teaching is a dynamic process that is primarily based on what the teacher provides to the learner in terms of information and knowledge, as well as on what the learner undertakes to acquire and reinforce this knowledge. The teaching-learning process takes place within the classroom between its two main participants, the teacher and the learner, where **classroom discourse** constitutes the (axis) of this process. Classroom discourse is considered one of the domains of applied linguistics and is concerned with **spoken interaction** in educational contexts; that is, the discursive language used within the classroom.

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This includes oral classroom discourse produced by the teacher for explanation and clarification, and by the learner for comprehension, inquiry, problematization, as well as dialogic interaction that emerges during the teaching-learning process in classroom lessons. In this context, an important question arises: to what extent does the improvement of classroom practices depend on the procedures of classroom discourse in developing teachers' professional skills and equipping learners with communicative competence that enables them to discuss opinions and ideas in a sound and effective manner

First: The Concept of Classroom Discourse Linguistically and Terminologically

A. Discourse in Linguistic Usage

The lexical root (*khaṭaba*) appears in Arabic dictionaries with closely related meanings. Ibn Fāris (1969) states that the root (*kh-t-b*) has two primary origins, one of which refers to speech exchanged between two parties, as in *khaṭabahu yukhaṭibuhu khaṭaban* (he addressed him with speech), from which *khaṭbah* (sermon) is derived.

Al-Zamakhsharī (1998) explains that addressing someone implies confronting them with speech, while delivering a sermon denotes eloquent and well-structured discourse. Ibn Manẓūr (1993) defines *khaṭb* as an affair or matter, whether minor or major, commonly used to inquire about one's condition (*mā khaṭbuka?*), and to describe matters of significance (*khaṭbun jalil*). Similarly, Al-Fayrūzābādī (2005) defines *khaṭb* as an affair or matter of varying importance.

The Arabic Language Academy (1972) defines *discourse* as speech and communication, citing Quranic usage such as “*and he overpowered me in discourse*” (Qur'an, 38:23), and “*and We granted him wisdom and decisive speech*” (Qur'an, 38:20). The term also denotes messages, letters, and public or open discourse.

Collectively, these linguistic definitions converge on shared meanings: **an important matter or affair, dialogue, communication, verbal interaction between two or more participants, direct confrontation through speech, and eloquent expression**. These concepts are semantically interconnected and reflect a unified linguistic core.

B. Discourse in Terminological Usage

Ahmed Al-Mutawakkil defines discourse as:

“Every spoken or written utterance that constitutes an autonomous communicative unit” (Al-Mutawakkil, 2010).

This definition entails three main implications:

1. Neutralizing the traditional binary opposition between sentence and discourse, whereby discourse becomes inclusive of the sentence.
2. Adopting communicativeness as the primary criterion for discursivity.
3. Excluding size as a defining factor, allowing discourse to range from a full text to a sentence, a phrase, or even a semi-clause (Al-Mutawakkil, 2010).

C. Educational Discourse

Educational discourse refers to the discourse that occurs within the classroom between teachers and learners. It is characterized by its pragmatic and functional nature, through which scientific knowledge is transformed into teachable content (Farfūrī, 2020). Its importance lies in equipping learners with linguistic tools that enable them to act through language in ways that are appropriate to context and communicative intentions (Dallāsh, 1992).

Bouayad (2001) describes educational discourse as discourse that has already been articulated either by others or by the teacher who simplifies and adapts it for learners. Teaching, therefore, cannot be easily separated from epistemology. Accordingly, educational discourse is:

“A discourse in which scientific material is transformed into pedagogical discourse, and one that recurrently incorporates the discourse of others” (Bouayad, 2001).

Educational discourse significantly influences learners’ behaviors and language acquisition. Hence, it should be linguistically simple, explicit, minimally implicit, and non-authoritative, enabling teachers to align with learners’ levels, stimulate motivation, and foster communicative engagement through explanation and argumentative utterances (Al-Yāmna & ‘Īsānī, 2021).

D. Educational Text

The educational text parallels educational discourse and constitutes the starting point of the teaching–learning process. It functions as a pedagogical support. In general terms, a text is defined as:

“An instructional unit integrating linguistic, pedagogical, psychological, and social knowledge, embedded within linguistic textures of sounds, words, and structures. It evolves into a cognitive unit where linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge interact, transcending mere linguistic phenomena to become a broader socio-cultural construct. It is a vehicle for transmitting knowledge and culture, enduring across time and space” (Habbāshī, 2008).

E. Classroom Discourse in Applied Linguistics

In applied linguistics, classroom discourse refers to:

“The language used in classrooms regardless of the subject matter. Studies have addressed classroom discourse in mathematics, science, history, social studies, and second language classrooms. Classroom discourse includes both spoken and written language” (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018).

Thus, classroom discourse in applied linguistics encompasses both oral and written forms and is not restricted to a specific subject but rather to language use within instructional settings.

Applied linguistics seeks to address two fundamental questions in language education: **What should be taught?** and **How should it be taught and learning problems addressed?** (Darquāwī, 2017). It aims to develop communicative competence through active engagement in authentic communicative situations.

F. Classroom Interaction and Its Importance

Classroom interaction is a pedagogical practice grounded in the assumption that individuals who share a common educational space tend to communicate verbally or non-verbally to exchange ideas and emotions, achieving mutual adaptation. This interaction may be verbal (speech) or non-verbal (gestures and body language) (Azīz Ibrāhīm & Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, 2002). Consequently, discourse and interaction are inseparable in the educational process.

The teaching–learning process is influenced by various interactive dynamics, including social, human, communicative, verbal interactions, and questioning strategies. Effective classroom communication should be participatory rather than unidirectional (Azīz Ibrāhīm & Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, 2002).

Empirical studies emphasize the importance of classroom interaction in creating an active learning environment. Its benefits include fostering communication, enhancing cognitive growth, supporting emotional and social climates, promoting self-regulation, encouraging expression of cognitive structures, improving teaching strategies, increasing learner engagement, cultivating positive attitudes, and raising academic achievement (Al-‘Amāyirah, 2007).

1.1 Classroom Discourse: Importance, Nature, and Characteristics

A. Importance of Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse plays a central role in strengthening teaching and learning within the educational triangle (teacher–learner–content). Language constitutes the core medium of classroom interaction, facilitating conceptual clarification, critical thinking, self-expression, and collaborative learning.

1.1.1 Importance for Teachers

Classroom discourse enables teachers to:

- ✓ Assess students' understanding and needs.
- ✓ Identify misconceptions and learning difficulties.
- ✓ Build positive and supportive learning environments.
- ✓ Evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices (Al-' Amāyirah, 2007).

1.1.2 Importance for Learners

For learners, classroom discourse:

- ❖ Enhances cognitive and linguistic skills.
- ❖ Develops critical thinking abilities.
- ❖ Improves expressive competence.
- ❖ Increases participation and motivation.

1.1.3 Importance for the Learning Environment

Effective classroom discourse:

-  Promotes collaborative learning.
-  Encourages shared authority between teachers and learners.

B. Nature and Characteristics of Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse represents the communicative system of the classroom, encompassing all spoken, written, and non-verbal language exchanged during lessons. It includes questions, answers, instructions, explanations, discussions, and gestures. Discourse functions as a means to accomplish social and pedagogical activities rather than an end in itself (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018). Classroom discourse often coexists with other semiotic practices such as reading, writing, and drawing, forming an integrated system of meaning-making.

Key characteristics include:

- ❖ The prevalence of the IRE (Initiation–Response–Evaluation) or IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) structure.
- ❖ Dominance of closed questions over open-ended ones.
- ❖ Strong alignment with classroom activities and objectives.
- ❖ A collaborative and co-constructed nature.
- ❖ Dynamic and emergent meaning-making.
- ❖ Multidimensional engagement involving cognitive, emotional, and physical participation (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018).

According to Steve Walsh, classroom discourse particularly in second language classrooms exhibits four core features:

1. **Control of interaction**
2. **Speech modification**
3. **Elicitation**
4. **Repair** (Walsh, as cited in Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

2.1 The Role of Classroom Discourse in Improving Classroom Practices

Steve Walsh argues in *Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action* that improving classroom practices requires systematic analysis of classroom discourse in educational contexts. Teachers can enhance their instructional effectiveness by developing a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between language, interaction, and learning (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

- The teacher's ability to listen attentively to what students say, to maintain focus, observe, seek clarification, and use these skills to encourage discussion and guide students toward the intended understanding. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

- The teacher's ability to recognize moments that can generate learning—so-called *teachable moments* namely, moments when a student asks a question, provides information, offers a suggestion, or comments on an issue in a way that enables the teacher to build upon it, expand it, and thereby create a critical, dialogic classroom discourse that may lead to qualitatively rich learning. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)
- Creating effectiveness and creative thinking in learners inside the classroom through a range of methods and strategies, most notably: cooperative learning, mastery learning, problem-solving, discovery learning, brainstorming, formative feedback, activity-based learning, project pedagogy, and the questioning circle strategy, among others. (Zāyir & Dākhil, 2015)

3.1 Characteristics of the School Classroom Environment

Doyle identified six key features of life inside the instructional classroom, as follows:

1. **Multidimensionality:** Classrooms are multidimensional settings, crowded with students, tasks, and time pressure.
2. **Simultaneity:** Many events occur at the same time; while explaining a lesson, the teacher must monitor students' attention and decide how to respond for example, to two students whispering or determine what to do next in the upcoming activity.
3. **Unpredictability:** Events cannot be fully anticipated, even when plans are carefully prepared (e.g., the illness of a teacher or a student).
4. **Immediacy:** Classroom life unfolds rapidly; teachers engage in hundreds of exchanges with students during the school day and must respond quickly.
5. **History:** Classrooms have a history; the meanings of teachers' and students' actions depend partly on prior shared experiences. (Abū Jādū, 1998)

Second: The Effectiveness of Classroom Discourse Practices for the Teacher

A general assumption about classroom interaction is that:

Interaction is a natural human process. Evidence for this is that whenever individuals gather in a place bound by some relationship, they inevitably interact either verbally or through signs and gestures to convey the ideas and emotions occurring in their minds regarding a situation or issue, in order to achieve harmony and adaptation. The classroom is one of the most important formal contexts in which individuals (teacher and learner) meet and share a close relationship; thus, their inclination to interact is a response to a natural human state through which they express vitality and contribute to an atmosphere of safety, positivity, and peaceful relations. (Al-Sulayṭī, 2008)

Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) constitutes a foundational capacity that teachers and learners must develop. To support them in teaching and learning effectively, teachers and students should “use a range of appropriate linguistic and interactional resources to enhance active, engaged learning.” (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

Nāṣir Al-Shuwayrikh further emphasizes that analyzing classroom discourse constitutes “one tool of professional development that teachers can employ to achieve professional growth.” (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018) Drawing on what Al-Shuwayrikh reports from Betsy Rymes in *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection*, four principal benefits may accrue to teachers who use classroom discourse analysis as a tool for sustainable professional development:

1. **Enhancing mutual understanding:** Insights from discourse analysis strengthen mutual understanding between teacher and students, because close scrutiny of classroom talk reveals differences in communication patterns across groups turn-taking practices, topic introduction, use of languages and dialects, and storytelling styles thereby explaining how misunderstanding arises across social groups and how it may be addressed.
2. **Understanding local classroom talk beyond stereotypes:** By analyzing their own classroom discourse, teachers can understand local differences in classroom talk and move beyond cultural

stereotyping and broad generalizations. When teachers master discourse-analytic procedures and apply them themselves, they are better positioned to study the changing local discourse patterns specific to the classes they teach.

3. **Supporting academic achievement:** When teachers analyze discourse in their classrooms and identify the different formats and forms of talk, students' academic achievement improves.
4. **Fostering positive professional orientation:** Classroom discourse analysis may encourage teachers to adopt a positive stance toward teaching and appreciate its future benefits; teachers' study of classroom interaction can enrich their pedagogical expertise and strengthen professional engagement. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

Third: Implications of Classroom Discourse Practices for the Learner

Classroom discourse namely the dialogue and discussion occurring within the classroom constitutes a cornerstone of the educational process. It is not limited to transmitting information from teacher to learner; rather, it is an effective means for constructing understanding and developing skills. How this discourse is managed has deep and direct implications for learners across multiple dimensions.

A. Cognitive Implications

Classroom discourse practices strongly shape how learners construct knowledge and develop cognitive capacities, as evidenced by:

1. **Deepening understanding and meaning-making:**
When learners are given opportunities to explain their ideas in their own words and discuss them with peers, they are compelled to organize and rephrase those ideas, thereby transforming superficial understanding into deeper, more coherent understanding.
2. **Developing higher-order thinking skills:**
Discourse grounded in open-ended questions (e.g., "Why do you think so?" or "What if...?") stimulates analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and critique. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)
Learners also develop the ability to construct arguments, support them with evidence, and respond logically to counterarguments.
3. **Developing linguistic and academic skills:**
Classroom discourse provides a rich environment for language practice, whether in the first language or a second language. Learners acquire new vocabulary, more advanced structures, and precision in expressing complex ideas.
4. **Enhancing problem-solving skills:**
Through group discussions around specific problems, learners encounter diverse perspectives and solution strategies, widening their horizons and strengthening cognitive flexibility.

B. Social and Affective Implications

The impact of discourse extends beyond cognition to shape learners' personalities and interactions through:

1. **Building self-confidence and self-esteem:**
When learners feel their ideas are heard and respected (even if incorrect), their confidence in participation increases. Supportive discourse reduces "speaking anxiety" and encourages shy learners to engage.
2. **Developing collaboration and communication skills:**
Learners practice working with others, active listening, and negotiating shared understanding. They also learn turn-taking and respect for others' right to speak.
3. **Developing empathy and acceptance of others:**
Listening to peers' diverse experiences and opinions helps learners view the world from multiple perspectives, fostering empathy and reducing egocentrism.

C. Implications for Motivation and Participation

The dominant discourse pattern in the classroom directly affects learners' willingness to learn:

1. **Increasing engagement and active participation:**

Interactive discourse makes learning active and enjoyable rather than passive reception. Learners feel they are part of learning rather than merely recipients.

2. **Enhancing ownership and autonomy:**

When learners contribute to dialogue and knowledge-building, they develop a stronger sense of ownership of their learning, which increases intrinsic motivation.

Fourth: The Teacher's Role in Shaping Classroom Discourse

These positive effects depend substantially on the teacher's role as a **facilitator** rather than a **transmitter** of knowledge. This is achieved through several strategies, including:

1. **Question quality:**

Shifting from closed questions (with one correct answer) to open questions that stimulate thinking. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

2. **Wait time:**

Allowing learners adequate time to think after a question is posed and before eliciting responses.

3. **Constructive feedback:**

Focusing on the thinking process underlying learners' answers, not only on correctness. (Al-Shuwayrikh, 2018)

4. **Creating a safe environment:**

Establishing a classroom culture based on mutual respect and viewing errors as a natural part of learning.

Conclusion

Key points about classroom discourse may be summarized as follows:

Classroom discourse practices are not merely "talk"; they are the driving force of learning. Effective discourse builds minds, refines social skills, strengthens confidence, and produces learners capable of critical thinking and effective self-expression.

The significance of classroom discourse becomes evident through its reflections on the educational process among its actors what is known as classroom interaction. Classroom discourse constitutes a fertile environment for language practice across its various domains and enhances learners' skills and rhetorical confidence during presentation and discussion in teaching and learning situations.

Discourse is emergent and contingent; because it is gradually constructed by multiple participants, its meaning and structure continuously renew and change. Teacher–learner interaction is the fundamental pillar of the educational situation, as it not only achieves lesson objectives but also enables learners to acquire diverse cultural and social patterns from teachers and peers, given that education is a social process.

Classroom interactional competence is the essential capacity that teachers and learners must develop. Classroom discourse analysis is one of the professional-development tools that teachers may employ to achieve professional growth. The effectiveness of classroom discourse in improving classroom practices is manifested through interaction and participation in constructing teaching and learning within the classroom environment, resulting in communication, shared information, and the exchange of ideas between teachers and learners.

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