

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN INTERACTION OF GRADE VII JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RURAL AREAS IN ENGLISH LEARNING: A STUDY IN CLASSES WITH LIMITED NUMBER OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Examining speech in English learning interactions in grade VII at junior high schools (SMP) in rural locations is the goal of this study, particularly in classes with comparatively few students. Finding patterns of teacher-student interaction and examining how discourse dynamics impact the learning process are the primary goals of this study. This study combines a case study methodology with a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, classroom conversation recordings, and direct observation were used to gather data. The findings demonstrated that the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern dominated classroom interactions, highlighting the crucial role that teachers play in guiding the flow of classroom communication. Nonetheless, there are benefits to small class numbers, such as increased chances for student participation, a more intimate setting, and more intense engagement. Furthermore, it was discovered that pupils in small courses were more likely to have the bravery to talk in English, which helped them improve their speaking abilities. This study offers empirical contributions to the study of discourse analysis in the context of English learning in rural areas and validates Vygotsky's sociocultural theory regarding the significance of social contact in learning. It is anticipated that these findings will help educators, curriculum designers, and education policymakers create more contextual and communicative teaching methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Empirical or Theoretical Problems

The quality of relationships between students and teachers is a major obstacle to English language learning in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas. The number of students in the class is one of the primary factors that affects the quality of learning. Less student enrollment in rural locations frequently results in various interaction dynamics in addition to the teacher giving each student more attention. Particularly in constrained circumstances, these interactions—which take place between students and professors as well as between students—can offer insights into efficient methods of teaching English. Because it reveals how students engage in learning, create meaning, and communicate in the target language, discourse analysis is crucial in these interactions (Gee, 2014). However, not much research has been done on how discourse is created in these interactions in small-class settings, particularly in rural areas (McGroarty, 2002). There is still a dearth of research on language acquisition in rural areas, which requires greater focus (Setiawan, 2020).

Rich interactions between students and teachers are essential for efficient language learning, and these might happen more readily in classrooms with fewer pupils, according to Prabhu (1987). Teachers can focus more on each pupil in this situation, which could enhance communication and language acquisition. Because it allows for more frequent speaking and more direct feedback from the teacher, research by Swain and Lapkin (1998) further demonstrates that direct engagement in smaller situations can enhance students' comprehension of the language being taught.

Recent Studies

Interaction in English language schools in a variety of settings has been the subject of several earlier studies. Ellis (2008) demonstrated, for instance, that contact in English language instruction is crucial to the growth of students' communication abilities. According to Ellis, children' speaking and listening abilities are enhanced when they interact with their teachers and with other pupils. According to a related study by Long (1983), interaction is crucial in language instruction in order to give pupils the chance to enhance and rectify their language use. These studies, however, were more frequently carried out in classrooms with lots of students, particularly in cities. There is currently little research on interaction in small class sizes, particularly in rural areas, and few studies have concentrated on discourse analysis in these settings. Although it did not consider courses with extremely few students, Tsui's (1995) work on the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) pattern in teacher-student contact offers crucial assistance in understanding how such interaction plays a role in language learning.

Furthermore, a study on communication-based engagement by Gass and Mackey (2007) emphasizes how crucial space is for students to have more intense talks, particularly while learning a second language. Although these studies give a broad picture of the value of interaction in language instruction, they have not talked much about interactions in small-class classes, particularly in more specialized rural settings. According to research by Lantolf (2000), social interaction—particularly in small groups—is crucial for developing students' social and cognitive abilities. However, further research is still needed in the rural context.

Research Gap

Even though there are many studies that address interactions in English classes, the most of them still concentrate on classes with a sizable student body, both in metropolitan and more affluent places. Lack of research on classroom settings with small student populations, particularly in rural locations, is a major gap in the literature. Little research has been done in the past on how discourse relationships develop in this setting and how the small class size

impacts teaching and learning dynamics. By investigating how discourse in interactions between students and teachers in courses with a small student body can impact the English learning process in junior high school grade VII in rural areas, this study seeks to close this gap.

This supports the findings of Vygotsky (1978), who demonstrated that when pupils receive more individualized attention during interactions in a more constrained social setting, greater cognitive growth can result. According to research by Swain (2000), students are better able to comprehend and assimilate the information they are learning when they participate in collaborative-based interactions in small class sizes. This study will increase knowledge on the impact interactions in small classrooms have in improving English language acquisition, an area that has received little attention in rural settings thus far.

Research Questions and Objectives

This study is to examine discourse patterns in student interactions in junior high school English classrooms in grade VII in rural locations with a small student population, based on the gaps that have been found. The following are the research questions that this study aims to address:

1. How can teachers and students in English-learning classrooms with small student populations in rural places develop patterns of discourse interactions?
2. In that situation, how can student interaction patterns aid in the learning of English?
3. What part do teachers play in encouraging productive discourse exchanges in small-class English classes?

The goal of this study is to understand the discourse interaction dynamics that take place in English learning classrooms with a small student population and their implications for teaching English in rural locations. It is anticipated that this study will add to the body of knowledge on language learning in more constrained contexts and offer fresh insights into classroom interactions.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The case study design is highly appropriate for use in this study because it allows for in-depth focus on one particular unit or context, namely a class with a limited number of students. By using a case study design, researchers can examine phenomena that occur in natural settings without the influence of significant external intervention (Yin, 2009).

This design also facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that occur in interactions in a specific class and allows for richer and deeper discourse analysis (Stake, 1995). This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach because it aims to explore in-depth understanding of discourse interaction patterns in English classes in junior high schools in rural areas with a limited number of students.

2.2. Sample population or research subjects

Fifteen seventh-grade junior high school students from a remote location served as the study's subjects. This study's primary emphasis, classrooms with a small number of students, served as the basis for selecting this sample. In qualitative research, richness of information is more important than sample size, therefore small but representative samples can offer a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Purposive sampling, which enables sample selection based on specific criteria pertinent to the research aims, was used in the subject selection procedure. In this instance, children who participated actively in English classes and attended schools with a small student body were

included in the selection criterion. This is in line with Creswell's (2009) recommendation, which states that purposive sampling can be used in qualitative research to guarantee that the samples collected are directly related to the research issue.

2.3. Data collection techniques and instrument development

Three primary methods were employed in this study to gather data: semi-structured interviews, audio-visual recording, and observation.

1. Researchers observed interactions between students and teachers as well as between students during the seventh-grade English language learning process. The purpose of these observations was to document the organic interactions that take place in the classroom without outside interference. Dörnyei (2007) asserts that direct observation eliminates the possibility of distortion that comes with other approaches and enables researchers to gain a thorough understanding of interaction dynamics.
2. Conversations during learning exercises were captured on audio-visual recordings. Researchers can further examine the conversation that takes place throughout the engagement, including nonverbal cues that may influence students' comprehension of English, by using these recordings (Gass & Mackey, 2007). Researchers can use the recordings to revisit the transcripts of the conversations and spot trends that show up as the students learn.
3. Following the observation method, semi-structured interviews were carried out to delve deeper into the opinions of both teachers and students on the interactions that took place in the classroom. According to the tenets of qualitative research, which place an emphasis on the subjective perception of individual experiences, these interviews included open-ended questions, which allowed respondents the freedom to give more comprehensive and detailed responses (Seidman, 2013).

Discourse analysis theory and the idea of interaction in language learning served as the foundation for the development of the tools utilized in this data collection, specifically the observation and interview procedures. While the interview requirements concentrated on instructors' and students' experiences with the use of English in the classroom and the dynamics of interactions that take place, the observation guidelines concentrated on interaction patterns like Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF).

2.4. Data analysis techniques

Discourse analysis was used to examine information gathered from interviews, audio-visual recordings, and observation. The theory proposed by Gee (2014) and Fairclough (1995), which holds that discourse in social interaction not only reflects the meaning imparted but also reflects social power, ideology, and power relations within it, is cited in the discourse analysis approach utilized in this work. Three steps comprise the analytical process:

1. Transcription: To guarantee that every word and sentence said was faithfully captured, all recorded talks and interviews were transcribed verbatim. To make sure that the data utilized in the analysis accurately represents what occurred in the field, this transcription step is crucial.
2. Coding: To find important themes and trends in the interactions between students and between teachers, the transcribed data were first coded. IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) and other forms of collaborative interactions that take place in the classroom will be described by the codes utilized (Swain, 2000). In order to make the analysis more structured and methodical, these codes will assist researchers in classifying and organizing the data.
3. Interpretation and Presentation of Results: Following coding, the data underwent analysis to glean deeper insights from the observed patterns of interaction. This study was carried out by relating the results to pertinent theories regarding interaction in language learning

and to the particular setting of a small class size. In order to evaluate their applicability and distinctions, the researcher additionally contrasted the current findings with those of earlier investigations (Gee, 2014).

This study's methodology was created to guarantee that the information gathered was trustworthy and representative. The researcher was able to investigate the interaction phenomena in a very specific setting and offer both a general description and a thorough grasp of how interactions are established in courses with a small number of students thanks to the qualitative research design and case study approach. While a variety of data collecting methods, including interviews, audio-visual recordings, and observation, offer a comprehensive view of the phenomena being observed, discourse analysis methods enable a more in-depth and theoretical examination of the interactions. As a result, this study can offer fresh insights into how English language learners engage in small-class settings in rural regions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The results of this study are based on a thorough examination of the interactions between the seventh-grade pupils and the English instructor in a small, rural junior high school. Discourse analysis techniques were used to transcribe and analyze the information gathered from audio-video recordings and classroom observations. Patterns of engagement, methods for taking turns, and kinds of answers given during the teaching and learning process were the primary elements that were investigated.

Classroom Interaction Patterns

According to the data, the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model—in which the teacher poses a question, the student answers, and the teacher offers feedback—is the most commonly employed interaction pattern in English classrooms. Furthermore, compared to students in bigger classrooms, individuals in smaller classes showed a greater propensity to participate in class discussions (Gee, 2014; Swain, 2000).

The frequency of interaction types that were noted during three class sessions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Interaction Types in English Classroom			
Interaction Type	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Teacher Initiation	18	22	20
Student Response	14	19	18
Teacher Feedback	12	17	15
Student-to-Student Interaction	8	10	9
Total	52	68	62

According to the findings, teacher-led conversations predominated in the classroom. However, the small class size encourages an active classroom climate, as seen by the comparatively high frequency of student-to-student contacts.

Excerpt from the Second Session Transcript

Below is a chosen passage from a transcript of a vocabulary session in English that shows how interaction takes place in this rural classroom.

Teacher: "What is the word for 'pohon' in English?"

"Tree," said Student A.

Instructor: "Well. Can you use the word "tree" to form a sentence?"

"I notice a large tree in the garden," said Student B.

Teacher: "Very good. That is an entire sentence. Excellent work."

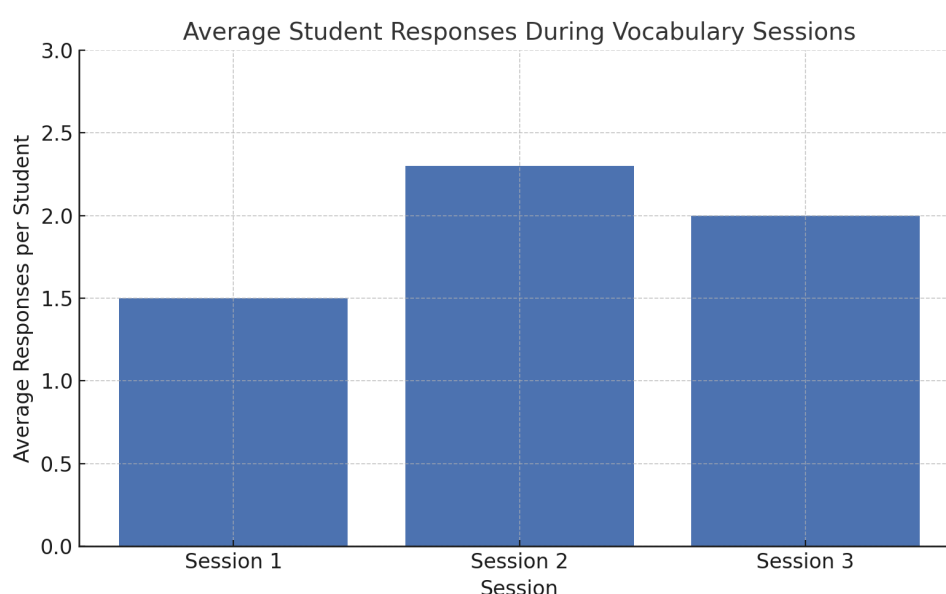
(Notes from observations: Students seem at ease and assured when answering. The majority of pupils respected one another's speaking time and waited their turn.)

In this passage, the teacher scaffolds language production through prompts and encouragement, exemplifying an IRF sequence. These kinds of exchanges were frequently seen, and the teacher was seen to be very important in regulating language use and encouraging student work (Walsh, 2011; Gass & Mackey, 2007).

Student Participation in Vocabulary Activities

To visualize student engagement in vocabulary-based activities, Figure 1 displays the average number of responses per student per session.

Figure 1. Average student responses during vocabulary sessions.



According to the chart, students actively participated in all monitored sessions, submitting 1.5 to 2.3 responses per session. The majority of kids took turns and demonstrated a willingness to answer when asked, but a select few students controlled the discourse.

4.2. Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

According to the study's findings, the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern is the most common interaction pattern in English classes at rural junior high schools with a small student body. This pattern consists of the teacher asking a question or giving instructions to start the conversation, the students responding, and the teacher giving feedback. The majority of learning sessions follow this IRF pattern, which suggests that the teacher plays a critical role in guiding interactions and guaranteeing student participation (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

A more inclusive learning environment is produced in the classroom when there are fewer students present, giving every student more chances to participate in the conversation. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development hypothesis, which holds that social interactions that are supported are necessary for effective learning.

Comparison with Other Studies

This result is in line with Walsh's (2011) research, which found that teacher mediation abilities and interaction patterns have a significant impact on classroom discourse in English instruction. Teachers help students improve their language abilities by serving as both facilitators and correctors. Furthermore, Garton's (2012) research demonstrates that small class sizes enable teachers to give each student more individualized and thorough attention, enhancing the quality of engagement.

However, research in rural contexts reveals more flexible language use and stronger teacher-student relationships than in urban schools, where curriculum pressures and high student populations frequently impair the quality of interaction (e.g. Hall, 2004).

Implications

This work theoretically advances our knowledge of speech dynamics in rural English as a foreign language (EFL) learning environments. This study demonstrates that, provided teachers are able to effectively promote communication, high-quality interactions can be had even with little resources.

Practically speaking, English teachers in places with a small student body might use the study's findings to help them make the most of small courses by using interactive and communicative methods. Educational policymakers can also use these findings to examine more contextualized methods of teacher preparation.

Research Limitations

There are various restrictions on this study. First, the results cannot be applied to all rural schools due to the relatively small number of courses and individuals observed. Second, the observation period, which only includes three learning sessions, might not accurately represent long-term differences in interaction. Third, the researcher is alone responsible for interpreting the data because the discourse analysis is qualitative and not supplemented by more advanced language analysis software like NVivo or ELAN.

Suggestions for Future Research

To get a more representative image, it is advised that the scope of participants be broadened for future studies to include many schools in different rural locations. To integrate the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative data, mixed approaches can also be used. Additionally, the significance of mother tongue in classroom interactions and the impact of local culture on teacher-student communication patterns might be further investigated by future scholars.

Statements describing the relationship between classroom climate and student learning motivation were also expressed by McBer. According to McBer (in Dean, 2005) classroom climate is a measure of students' collective perceptions regarding the people and dimensions of the classroom environment that have a direct impact on their learning capacity and motivation.

4. CONCLUSION

With an emphasis on courses with a small student body, this study attempts to examine discourse in the interactions of seventh-grade junior high school students in rural locations as they learn English. According to the study's findings, the most common pattern that instructors and students employ during the teaching and learning process is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern. According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), this cycle illustrates how teachers start conversations, students answer, and teachers then provide comments. These kinds

of interactions provide the foundation of classroom discourse dynamics and create a repeating communication framework.

In terms of communication intensity, the learning environment created in small classes offers benefits. Because the classroom environment is supportive and free from stress, teachers have more opportunity to give individualized attention, and students are more likely to participate (Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, the sense of community fostered in rural classrooms enhances constructive interpersonal interactions, which in turn affects students' motivation to learn (Mercer & Howe, 2012).

This study theoretically supports Vygotsky's (1978) theory regarding the significance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which holds that learning happens when children engage with more knowledgeable parties. In this situation, teachers serve as scaffolders, facilitating meaningful interactions that aid in students' language development. Furthermore, the study's findings close a gap in earlier research that mostly examined the environment of urban schools and infrequently examined small-sized classes in rural locations.

It is necessary to recognize the limits of this study, though. Data was gathered in a comparatively short period of time, and the study was limited to one school and a small number of participants. This restricts how far the results may be applied (Garton, 2012). Additionally, additional study involving more schools and a data triangulation approach is required to achieve more thorough results due to the dynamic and complicated nature of classroom interactions.

Practically speaking, this study helps educators and those who determine educational policy recognize the value of adaptive interaction techniques while teaching English in rural areas. Teachers in related fields can implement dialogical, inclusive classroom communication strategies that allow for the growth of natural language proficiency. The quality of learning can also be greatly enhanced by improving the quality of interaction.

As a result, this study adds to theoretical research in educational discourse analysis while also offering pertinent, useful insights into the actual environment of English language instruction in rural regions. In order to map the quality of language instruction more fairly, it is planned that future studies will examine additional linguistic and social facets of classroom interactions in different parts of Indonesia.

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