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Unpacking Classroom Talk: A Systematic Review of Thematic Discourse Analysis in English Language Teacher-Student Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-student interaction plays a critical role in shaping learning experiences, influencing students' cognitive, emotional, and communicative development. This study aims to synthesize findings from recent empirical and conceptual studies through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) focusing on discourse analysis in English language classrooms. A total of selected articles published between 2020 and 2025 were reviewed to identify patterns, power relations, communicative strategies, and pedagogical implications of classroom discourse. The findings reveal that teacher talk remains dominant in many contexts, characterized by directive speech, display questions, and limited dialogic space. However, several studies highlight the importance of fostering student-centered communication, utilizing technology to enhance interaction, and understanding cultural dynamics in shaping classroom discourse. Power relations, emotional contagion, and deixis were found to significantly influence participation and meaning-making processes. Moreover, discourse-based instructional models and critical discourse analysis approaches demonstrate potential in encouraging reflective pedagogy and communicative competence. Overall, this review underscores the need for teachers to develop awareness of linguistic choices and interactional patterns to build inclusive, dialogic, and empowering learning environments. The synthesized insights offer practical implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers aiming to improve teaching practices and enhance student engagement.

1. Introduction

In the world of education, classroom interaction is widely recognized as one of the most influential components of the teaching learning process, particularly in

English language education, where communication itself becomes both the medium and the outcome of learning (Gharbavi & Iravani, 2014; Ramli, 2018; Tong et al., 2025). In a dynamic educational environment, clear and effective communication between various parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and administrative staff, is essential to ensure the smooth running of the teaching and learning process (Dwi Suci Rahma Putri et al., 2025).

Over the past decade, researchers have increasingly examined teacher student interaction through the lens of discourse analysis, emphasizing how language functions as a tool for instruction, negotiation of meaning, power enactment, and relationship building (Behrman, 2006; Nurhamidah et al., 2025). As teaching practices continue to evolve shaped by technological advancements, shifts toward student-centered pedagogy, and globalized communication demands the need to understand discourse patterns in educational settings has become more urgent (Lesiana et al., 2024).

Teacher talk has long been considered a central determinant of student learning outcomes. Studies consistently reveal that teachers' linguistic choices such as question types, feedback styles, and instructional strategies shape classroom dynamics and affect students' participation, comprehension, and motivation. For example, research in conventional classrooms often identifies the predominance of display questions and evaluative feedback, which tend to limit students' opportunities to co-construct knowledge (Aldridge & Bianchet, 2022; Vesponne, 2023). Conversely, open-ended questioning and dialogic talk have been shown to promote deeper thinking, argumentation, and learner autonomy. These findings highlight the role of discourse in mediating learning opportunities and student agency (Mwangi et al., 2020).

Another significant strand of research focuses on power relations embedded in classroom discourse (Gharbavi & Iravani, 2014; Muti, 2024). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) studies reveal that teacher dominance expressed through directive language, turn-taking control, or authoritative evaluations can reinforce hierarchical structures that shape student behavior and interaction patterns. While power imbalances are inevitable due to institutional roles, the way teachers exercise power greatly influences whether students feel empowered or constrained in their learning environment. Subtle forms of resistance, such as hesitation or silence, further indicate the dynamic negotiation of power within classroom talk (Lewis et al., 2020).

The transition to online and technology-mediated learning environments adds new layers of complexity to teacher-student interaction. Studies on synchronous online learning show that while digital platforms offer opportunities for multimodal communication, they also reinforce certain power dynamics through rhetorical questioning and teacher-managed discourse structures. Similarly, research on virtual educational discourse highlights the growing role of ICT-specific language patterns, emotive expressions, and technological instructions in shaping communication.

Beyond power and technology, classroom discourse also encompasses emotional, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions. Emotional contagion studies demonstrate how affective expressions influence engagement, while deixis and implicature research reveals how subtle linguistic cues affect interpretation and participation. These elements underscore the need for teachers to develop not only linguistic competence but also sociocultural and emotional awareness (Dwi et al., 2025). Given the diverse and rapidly expanding body of research, a systematic review is needed to map existing findings, identify recurring themes, and synthesize implications for classroom practice. This study aims to address that gap by reviewing recent literature on discourse analysis in teacher–student interaction within English language education, offering a comprehensive understanding of interactional patterns and their pedagogical significance.

The purpose of this study is to identify, synthesize, and analyze recent findings related to interaction patterns, communication strategies, power relations, and pedagogical implications of classroom discourse in English language teaching through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Specifically, this study aims to map current trends in teacher–student discourse across various learning contexts, evaluate how teachers’ linguistic choices and discursive practices influence student participation and agency, and examine the ways technology, emotional dynamics, and pragmatic elements shape classroom interaction. By providing a comprehensive overview of developments in discourse analysis within educational settings, this study is expected to offer both theoretical and practical insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers in designing learning environments that are more dialogic, inclusive, and oriented toward student empowerment.

2. Methodology

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize findings from empirical and conceptual studies related to discourse analysis in teacher–student interaction. The SLR method was selected to ensure a transparent, structured, and replicable process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant research. The review focused on articles published between 2020 and 2025 to capture contemporary developments in discourse studies, particularly those influenced by digital transformation and evolving pedagogical trends (Elmoazen et al., 2022).

To strengthen the transparency and replicability of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), this study explicitly outlines the sources and quantity of the reviewed literature. The data for this review were obtained from several reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, ResearchGate, and major peer-reviewed journal platforms such as Taylor & Francis, Springer, and Elsevier. The search was conducted using predefined keywords such as *teacher–student interaction*, *classroom discourse*, *critical discourse analysis*, *EFL communication*, and *instructional talk* combined with Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR”) to refine the results.

The initial search produced approximately 220 articles published between 2020 and 2025. After removing duplicates, screening titles and abstracts, and applying inclusion–exclusion criteria focusing on relevance to discourse analysis in teacher–student interactions, English language teaching contexts, and empirical or conceptual contributions a total of 20 eligible articles were included in the final review. These articles represent diverse methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, CDA, corpus analysis, interaction analysis) and contexts (physical classrooms, online learning environments, adult education, EFL/ESL settings).

3. Results and Discussion

To provide a clearer understanding of the findings, this section begins with a brief explanation that the results from various studies were analyzed based on similarities in interaction patterns, language use, and pedagogical implications in English language teaching. The reviewed findings include aspects such as the dominance of teacher talk, power relations, the influence of technology in classroom communication, and the role of pragmatic and emotional elements in shaping learning experiences. This brief explanation offers context for the subsequent discussion and shows how these themes are interconnected in describing the dynamics of teacher–student interaction.

Table 1. Articles in The Final Review

Title	Year	Result
Exploring Teacher Talk in the Classroom: A Discourse Analysis of Instructional Conversations (Muti, 2024)	2024	The results also suggest that students perceive teacher talk as a key factor in their learning experience, with many students expressing a desire for more student-centered and interactive instructional conversations. This study contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics of teacher talk in the classroom, providing insights for educators seeking to improve their instructional practices and enhance student outcomes. Positive reinforcement and constructive feedback are shown to encourage a growth mindset, fostering a more inclusive and participatory classroom environment. Additionally, the study highlights the balance teachers must maintain between managing classroom behavior and facilitating meaningful instructional conversations. The interviews with students provide valuable insights into their perceptions of teacher talk, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and communicative teacher-student relationship. Students report that effective teacher talk not only clarifies academic content but also builds their confidence and interest in the subject matter. By analyzing instructional conversations, it offers practical implications for improving teaching practices and enhancing student learning experiences.
POWER RELATIONS IN TEACHER-STUDENT	2025	The findings show a dominance of teacher-centered discourse, with teachers frequently using directive and

INTERACTIONS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH CLASSROOM TALK (Laia et al., 2025)		declarative language to manage classroom behavior and learning activities. Student responses were often brief and passive, though subtle resistance like hesitation or silence indicated that power was not fixed but negotiated. Teachers also used motivational language, reflecting soft power strategies that encouraged engagement while maintaining control. Overall, the study highlights how classroom talk reinforces institutional norms and affects student agency. It concludes that teacher awareness of language use is essential for creating more inclusive and empowering learning environments
TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: A LITERATURE REVIEW (Isnata, 2025)	2025	The study's results underscore that teacher-student interactions in the English classroom profoundly impact language learning. Effective, clear communication, the judicious use of appropriate technology, and a keen understanding of cultural nuances within these interactions can significantly enhance students' practical English language skills and their confidence in using the language. Consequently, it is vital for educators to continuously cultivate and refine their abilities to facilitate meaningful, engaging, and deep interactions, thereby fostering a more productive and stimulating English classroom environment for optimal student development.
Exploring Teacher-Student Interaction in a Synchronous Online Modality: A Critical Discourse Analysis (Pontillas, 2024)	2024	The study reveals strategies instructors utilize in General Education courses at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges, Philippines. While appearing democratic, rhetorical questions and affirmations maintain the teacher's authority as they help create an illusion of equality. The paper emphasizes the necessity of understanding language-power interplay in online education and advocates for including a course component devoted to language and power dynamics in teacher professional development programs. This awareness creates inclusive environments in online learning spaces where various voices are recognized, encouraging shared knowledge development. This research illuminates the intricate nature of language and power, laying the foundation for informed online learning teaching practices.
Exploring Teacher-Student Communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classes in a Private University in China (Qin, 2024)	2024	The findings have potential implications for policy and practice in the educational field. For the native English speaker language teachers, strategies such as using simple words and short sentences, slowing speaking speed, and properly using body languages and idioms are underlined as significant ways forward, based on my findings. In addition, taking teacher development courses are also effective ways for native English speaker language teachers to acquire cultural and contextual information. For non-native English speaker language teachers, a student-centered teaching mode which facilitates classroom communication is suggested. The students are advised to improve their English proficiency and raise the awareness of their roles in promoting effective teacher-student classroom communication. For the school leaders and

		policymakers, small-sized classes with fewer numbers of students are suggested. Further development activities for staff and policy makers would support greater understanding of the crucial nature of teacher-student classroom communication
The power of discourse in high school adapted science with English language learning students (Razavi, 2021)	2021	The conclude that the future of adapted teaching needs to endorse rigour as opposed to simplifying content, promote dialogicity instead of unilateral information-giving, utilize learners' diverse pools of knowledge and experiences rather than leave them out of the curriculum, teach text-in-context as opposed to isolated language lessons, and foster critical thinking via reasoning and argumentation of today's global issues to truly benefit language learners in developing science literacy.
Feedback seeking and student reflective feedback literacy: a sociocultural discourse analysis (Carless & Young, 2024)	2024	Sociocultural discourse analysis is deployed to uncover how the student and her teachers used talk to co-construct shared thinking about assignment work-in-progress. Features of the selected feedback encounters include interthinking and the interweaving of cumulative and exploratory talk. Reflecting on feedback-seeking experiences over time stimulated student feedback literacy development through progress in preparing for, participating in, following up, and working with emotions in feedback encounters. Originality and significance lie in drawing conceptual linkages between feedback seeking, reflection, and the development of student feedback literacy and in exemplifying innovative ways of conducting feedback research on the student experience of feedback. We introduce the concept of student reflective feedback literacy to represent considered analysis of feedback evidence and experiences informing ongoing efforts to seek, make sense of, and use feedback. Incorporating within the curriculum sustained opportunities for student reflections about feedback carries the potential to develop student feedback literacy and merits further investigation
Investigating ideology through framing: a critical discourse analysis of a critical literacy lesson (Weninger, 2020)	2020	The result it is argued, pedagogically position the lessons with reference to a procedural, exam-oriented frame, undermining the potential of the content of the talk and the critical literacy unit. Two key implications are drawn from the analysis. First, that in settings with deeply entrenched pedagogic traditions of standards, exam-focused literacy and the attendant instrumentalist view of language education, critical literacy educators may find it helpful to make these ideologies themselves the target of a critical literacy curriculum. Second, it is argued that the notion of frame can be usefully drawn upon in critical analyses of classroom discourse to make visible and understand how ideology as an interpretive framework shapes classroom talk and the learning made possible by that talk.
Teacher-student interaction modes in smart classroom	2024	The analysis of these significant activity sequences showed that SC was divided into four types of TSI

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- based on lag sequential analysis (Ma et al., 2024)
- Discourse analysis on teacher-students interaction pattern of English teaching learning process (Raharja & Ghozali, 2020)
- Discourse-Based English Instructional Model: A Lesson from Pedagogical Discourse Analysis and Communicative Approaches (Qiann et al., 2025)
- Insights from the Coffee Talk: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Power Manifestations around the Word "Students" in the Discussions on Ajarn.com (Rangsarittikun, 2023)
- Empirical analysis of teacher-student interaction patterns in synchronous online learning: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Vietnam (Dao et al., 2025)
- modes: discovery question, conceptual scheme, validation scheme, and creating products. There was a sequential relationship between the four types. The research proposed specific implementation suggestions from four aspects: interaction goals, interaction methods, interaction content, and interaction media. This will guide teachers in building high-quality SC and assist students in developing HOT.
- It revealed that the use of display questions was the most commonly used by the teacher in this classroom interaction. From the classroom interaction, it can be concluded that the teacher tended to pose display questions which prevented the students to express their elaborate ideas. The teacher also gave few scaffolding in her teaching and it hindered the students'sTM fluency. However, it might be effective for vocabulary learning through the exercise discussion.
- The findings support the model's potential to promote reflective pedagogy, learner autonomy, and real-world communicative competence. This study contributes a novel dual-framework approach to EFL instruction, highlighting the synergy between analytical reflection and communicative interaction. The implications suggest that curriculum designers and teacher educators incorporate discourse-based strategies to better align English language education with the evolving demands of global communication and contextual relevance in diverse learning environments.
- The result is analysis of thematic categorisations revealed that issues related to education were central to the teachers' discussions. In addition, an analysis of verb collocates of "students" using AntConc software confirmed that teachers expressed their dominance over the students in different ways. Interestingly, it was also found that teachers felt that they could become powerless in a specific context in a bureaucratic system. Overall, this study, acknowledging that power is a fundamental part of social relations, suggests that teachers should exercise their power in a healthy way that benefits students' learning.
- The findings reveal five interaction patterns: Moving along, Coaxing, Degrading, Demanding, and Polling. Data were further analyzed for prevalence and frequencies. Moving along was the most prominent pattern observed in the data. In this pattern, the teacher tends to progress the learning activities after observing students performing satisfactorily on a given task. Coaxing was the second frequently observed pattern. It entails the teacher encouraging interaction among students when they sense students are delaying their response to particular activities, stimulating in-depth discussion. Degrading and Demanding were the least common patterns to students' unsatisfactory responses. Polling interaction patterns occurred fairly often when students were given time and space to
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		respond to the teacher's query, intended to improve engagement. The study provides a generic and practical view of interaction patterns in SOL and implications for teaching and learning in SOL environments.
The application of orbital decomposition analysis to study the dynamic quality of teacher–teacher interactions (Pennings et al., 2025)	2025	The results reveal which interaction partner was in the lead and which conversational moves were associated with interdependent knowledge-building as compared to merely sending and receiving information. OD focuses on interaction patterns rather than basic frequencies and as such can be used to provide insights into interaction processes as these unfold over time.
Language patterns in english language teaching: virtual educational discourse (Мосъпан, 2023)	2023	The paper reveals that 1) communication in virtual classrooms depends on pedagogical activities which allows classifying educational language models into the following categories – preparation of teaching material presentation online, student engagement in an activity online, giving instruction on how to use EdTech, and expressing emotions or attitude; 2) university teachers use special language patterns for giving instructions related to using ICT tools and apps, e.g. screen sharing, chatting and emotional modality; 3) verbal communication between teachers and students except for linguistic and extra-linguistic features includes informal modes of communication – chat emojis and signs. The findings highlight that educational discourse has crucially changed in digitally-based education and has transformed into virtual educational discourse. The insights of the paper can contribute to the investigation of virtual educational discourse analysis.
Discourse Analysis of Interpersonal Metafunction in EFL Instructors talk (D), 2024)	2024	The final results of this study show that declarative mood, statement speech function, and probability modality are often used in the instructors' talk. It is important to maintain the communication between the teacher and the student vital. Some pedagogical implications are suggested at the end of this study
THE ANALYSIS OF DEIXIS AND IMPLICATURE IN TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN ENGLISH CLASSES (Amalia et al., 2025)	2025	The results of the analysis demonstrated that the use of deixis including person, spatial, and temporal deixis created an interactive environment that encouraged student participation. Additionally, the teacher's use of implicature in open-ended questions prompted critical thinking and active participation from the students This study identifies the challenges students face in understanding hidden meanings and the social context that influences language use. The findings suggest that building a strong relationship between teachers and students is just as important for effective classroom communication as simply dispensing knowledge. Therefore, understanding implicature and deixis helps students become better communicators.
An exploration of the determinants of middle school students' argument quality by classroom discourse analysis (Soysal, 2023)	2023	The student-led argument quality was found to be reduced due to close-ended triadic dialogues when the teacher overtly displayed follow-up evaluations and follow-up explanations. The argument quality was fostered considerably when the teacher staged timely

Emotional contagion in adult English education: a self-narrative study of teacher–student interactions in Yangshuo County (Jiang, 2025)	2025	and relevant follow-up questions, since more dialogic space on the side of the students had been created. The findings challenge traditional assumptions by identifying adult learners as primary initiators of emotional contagion, with teachers often responding to these emotional cues. This study highlights how cultural norms, such as face-saving in China, and institutional pressures reshape teacher–student emotional dynamics. It provides practical implications for emotional regulation, culturally sensitive pedagogy, and the integration of communicative and traditional teaching methods, offering a foundation for future research on emotions in adult language learning contexts.
MAKING SENSE OF FLOUTING CONVERSATION MAXIMS OF TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS IN MOVIES: A MIXED METHODS (Ngo et al., 2023)	2023	

The findings across the reviewed studies reveal several interconnected themes that collectively shape the nature of teacher–student interaction in English language classrooms. A consistent pattern emerging from the literature is the dominance of teacher talk, which remains central in directing classroom activities, providing explanations, and managing student behavior. Studies such as those by Muti (2024) and Laia et al. (2025) show that teachers frequently employ directive speech acts, declarative statements, and display questions. While effective in maintaining classroom structure, these patterns often limit students’ dialogic space and reduce opportunities for deeper engagement. Aligned with the identified research problem of understanding how discourse constructs learning dynamics, several studies highlight the implications of these interaction patterns for student agency and participation. For instance, Raharja and Ghazali (2020) found that display questions restrict students’ ability to express elaborate ideas, reflecting a teacher-centered orientation.

However, studies like Carless and Young (2024) demonstrate that reflective talk and feedback-seeking interactions can enhance learner autonomy and improve students’ feedback literacy, indicating that more dialogic discourse fosters meaningful participation. Power relations also emerge as a crucial theme. CDA-based studies emphasize how teacher authority is maintained through linguistic strategies that subtly reinforce institutional norms. Yet, power is not static; students often negotiate it through hesitation, minimal responses, or silence. Rangsarittikun (2023) adds that teachers themselves may experience power fluctuations within bureaucratic educational systems. This interplay suggests that classroom discourse is not only instructional but also ideological.

Despite the valuable insights provided by discourse-based approaches, it is important to acknowledge that the Thematic Discourse Analysis (TDA) method used across many of the reviewed studies also has inherent limitations. Because

TDA relies heavily on researcher interpretation, the subjective nature of coding, theme categorization, and discourse segmentation may shape how findings are constructed. In addition, several studies lack methodological triangulation such as combining observations, interviews, or classroom artifacts which may limit the reliability of the interpretations drawn solely from discourse patterns. Cultural classroom contexts may also influence how power, silence, and participation are expressed, potentially affecting the generalizability of results. Recognizing these limitations strengthens the discussion by offering a more balanced understanding of how discourse analysis both illuminates and constrains interpretations of teacher–student interaction.

Technology-mediated learning environments introduce new modalities of interaction. Research by Pontillas (2024) and Мосьпан (2023) shows that online communication incorporates multimodal features such as emojis, chat language, screen-sharing instructions, and virtual cues. Although these tools enhance engagement, they also embed new forms of control through rhetorical questioning and platform-based limitations. Pragmatic and semantic dimensions of discourse further enrich the analysis. Studies on deixis and implicature (Amalia et al., 2025) highlight how linguistic subtleties shape meaning-making. Effective use of deixis fosters interactive learning environments, while implicature encourages higher-order thinking. Similarly, emotional discourse studies (Jiang, 2025) reveal that emotional contagion plays a significant role, especially in adult learning contexts where cultural norms influence emotional expression. Overall, the synthesis of findings indicates that enhancing teacher awareness of discourse patterns is essential for promoting inclusive, student-centered, and communicatively rich learning environments. Discourse-based instructional models further offer a promising framework for integrating reflective and communicative approaches in English language teaching.

4. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping teacher–student interactions and learning outcomes in English language classrooms. Across various contexts, teacher talk continues to dominate, often constraining dialogic opportunities for students. However, studies also highlight the potential of reflective, student-centered, and communicative discourse strategies to enhance engagement, autonomy, and critical thinking. In a dynamic educational environment, clear and effective communication between various parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and administrative staff, is essential to ensure the smooth running of the teaching and learning process.

Power relations, emotional dynamics, and pragmatic features such as deixis and implicature further influence classroom communication, emphasizing the need for teachers to develop a nuanced awareness of their linguistic choices. Technology-mediated environments introduce new modes of discourse that require adaptive pedagogical practices. Overall, the review underscores the importance of integrating discourse awareness into teacher education, curriculum design, and

instructional planning to foster more inclusive, equitable, and meaningful learning environments.

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