

## Unpacking Discourse: Effective Teacher-Student Interaction Strategies

Shola Brilliant Futughe & Richard Oliseyenum Maledo

### Abstract

This discourse analytic study investigates effective teacher-student interaction strategies in classroom settings. Utilising the Birmingham Model, the analysis reveals a predominantly teacher-centred discourse structure, characterised by teacher-led interactions, knowledge transmission, and boundary marking. However, adaptability in teacher discourse strategies is observed, suggesting the potential for incorporating student-centred approaches. Findings highlight the tension between teacher control and student engagement, underscoring the importance of balancing teacher control and student engagement and demonstrating how effective interaction strategies can foster critical thinking, motivation, and deeper understanding. Implications for language teaching methodologies and discourse-aware pedagogy are discussed. This study contributes to language and discourse studies, informing understanding of classroom communication and interactional dynamics.

**Keywords:** interaction strategies, teacher-student, discourse structure, teacher control

### Background to the Study

The classroom is a complex communication environment where teaching and learning occur through dynamic interactions between teachers and students (Cazden, 2001). Effective teacher-student interaction is pivotal in fostering academic achievement, social development, and student motivation (Hattie, 2009; Nystrand, 1997). However, research highlights the dominance of teacher talk in classroom discourse, with teachers speaking up to 70% of the time (Mehan, 1979). This raises concerns about student engagement and opportunities for knowledge construction.

Barnes (1976) emphasises the need for teachers to shift from transmission-oriented teaching to facilitation, encouraging student participation and exploration. Studies have identified various discourse strategies promoting student engagement, including open-ended questioning (Gordon, 1996), scaffolding (Wood, 1998), feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008). These strategies foster a collaborative learning environment, encouraging students to take active roles in constructing knowledge. Despite the benefits of effective teacher-student interaction, research indicates that many classrooms struggle with poor communication, leading to disengagement and decreased academic performance (Alexander, 2008). In Nigeria, the secondary education sector faces additional challenges such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and large class sizes

Federal Ministry of Education, 2017). These factors may exacerbate ineffective teacher-student interaction, hindering student learning outcomes.

In light of these challenges, it is essential to investigate the discourse strategies employed by teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. A deeper understanding of these strategies can inform language-focused teacher training programs tailored to the Nigerian context. The significance of this research lies in its potential to improve teacher-student interaction and learning outcomes. Despite the critical role of effective teacher-student interaction in academic success, there is a dearth of research on discourse strategies employed by teachers in Nigerian secondary schools, potentially hindering student learning outcomes and academic success.

#### Conceptual Review

The Birmingham Model of Classroom Interaction, developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), is a seminal framework for analysing classroom discourse. This model provides a systematic approach to understanding teacher-student interaction, shedding light on the complex dynamics of classroom communication. At its core, the model consists of four key components: exchange, move, act, and transaction. An exchange represents the basic unit of analysis, comprising an initiation, response, and feedback (IRF) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1977). Acts, comprising a series of moves, serve specific functions within the exchanges. Transaction, in turn, encompasses a sequence of exchanges related to a specific topic. The model operates on two levels: micro and macro. The micro-level analysis focuses on individual exchanges and moves, while the macro-level analysis examines transactions and larger discourse patterns (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). This dual approach allows researchers to investigate both the intricacies of linguistic interactions and the overall discourse dynamics. The Birmingham Model boasts several strengths. Its systematic framework provides clarity and structure for discourse analysis, while its empirical grounding lends credibility to findings. Furthermore, the model informs our understanding of linguistic interactions and communication dynamics.

However, limitations exist. Critics argue that the model oversimplifies complex interactions, neglecting contextual factors influencing discourse. Additionally, the model fails to account for power dynamics and social relationships shaping communication. Bourdieu (1991) emphasises the importance of considering language as symbolic power, while Hymes (1972) stresses the need to examine language in social contexts. Despite limitations, the Birmingham Model significantly influences subsequent discourse models. Its applications extend to various contexts, providing valuable insights into interaction. The Birmingham Model offers a foundational framework for analysing linguistic structures and communication dynamics. While limitations exist, its systematic approach and empirical grounding make it a valuable tool for researchers seeking to understand the complex pragmatics of interaction.

## Literature Review

The Birmingham Model of classroom interaction, developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), has been extensively examined and critiqued in the literature. This model provides a systematic framework for analysing classroom discourse, shedding light on teacher-student interaction patterns. Research has shown that the model's IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) structure effectively captures the dominant pattern of classroom interaction (Cazden, 2001; Hammersley, 1990). However, critics argue that this structure oversimplifies complex classroom interactions (Edwards, 1980; Hymes, 1972). For instance, Edwards (1980) contends that the model neglects contextual factors influencing discourse, such as power dynamics and cultural backgrounds. Studies have also explored the model's limitations in capturing power dynamics and social relationships shaping classroom communication (Bourdieu, 1991; Mercer, 1995). Bourdieu (1991) argues that the model fails to account for the symbolic power struggles between teachers and students, while Mercer (1995) highlights the importance of considering the social context of classroom interaction. Despite these limitations, the Birmingham Model has informed subsequent classroom discourse models (Mercer, 1995) and teacher training programs (Wertsch, 1985). Researchers have adapted the model to analyse classroom interaction in various subjects and contexts (Cazden, 2001), including language classrooms (Seedhouse, 2004), mathematics classrooms (Lefstein & Snell, 2014), and science classrooms (Lemke, 1990).

Recent studies have integrated the Birmingham Model with other theoretical frameworks to provide a more nuanced understanding of classroom discourse. For example, sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992) have been used to examine the role of language and interaction in shaping student learning. Furthermore, researchers have explored the implications of the Birmingham Model for teaching practices, highlighting the importance of teacher talk, student participation, and feedback (Cazden, 2001; Hattie, 2009). However, critics argue that the model's focus on teacher-centred interaction may perpetuate traditional teaching methods (Freire, 1970).

The literature highlights both the contributions and limitations of the Birmingham Model. While it provides a systematic framework for analysing classroom discourse, its limitations underscore the need for continued refinement and contextualisation. Future research should consider integrating the Birmingham Model with other theoretical frameworks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of classroom interaction. Additionally, exploring the implications of the model for teaching practices and student learning outcomes will inform effective instructional strategies.

## Methodology

This paper employed a qualitative research design and audio recording of teacher-student interaction in a Basic Science (JSS 3) classroom during the teaching/learning process with an Android phone as the primary data collection method and books as the secondary data collection method. The data was recorded, transcribed, and broken down into eight (8) excerpts and numbered as Excerpts I to XII for ease of presentation. Each excerpt is immediately followed by the analysis to bring out the themes, acts and exchanges, and moves and transactions to show the effectiveness of discourse strategies in enhancing teacher-student interaction.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

### Excerpt 1

Teacher: Just look at you, I enter your class, and expect me to greet you? I enter your class and you refuse to greet? What do you mean? What is your problem, are you not supposed to greet me?

Students: Good morning sir, we are sorry.

Teacher: Please, please am not happy with this attitude, am not happy with this behaviour. Anytime I enter this class or anytime a teacher enters this class, please endeavour, the first thing you have to do is to greet the teacher. Do you understand me?

Students: Yes.

The themes reflected in the excerpt above are those of respect and discipline in the classroom. It emphasises that maintaining a respectful and disciplined environment is crucial for effective learning in the classroom. This essay analyses a specific interaction between a teacher and students, highlighting the power dynamics, social norms, and expected behaviour that govern this educational setting. The interaction begins with the teacher reprimanding the students for not greeting him upon arrival. This prompts the students to apologise and offer a belated greeting. The teacher then instructs the students on expected behaviour and warns against future instances of disrespect.

This exchange involves three distinct acts. First, the teacher's reprimand serves as initiation, criticising the students for their lack of greeting. The students respond with a greeting and apology, attempting to repair the relationship. Finally, the teacher follows up by emphasising the importance of greeting teachers, ensuring understanding, and reestablishing authority. Throughout this interaction, specific moves are made by both the teacher and the students. The teacher accuses the students

of disrespect, expresses disappointment, and instructs them on expected behaviour. Conversely, the students offer a belated greeting, apologise, and acknowledge understanding.

This transaction reveals a power dynamic where the teacher asserts authority and expects respect. The students acknowledge their mistakes and conform to the expected behaviour. This interaction highlights the importance of social norms and discipline in the classroom, demonstrating how educators can foster a respectful and productive atmosphere conducive to student growth and success. Respect and discipline are essential components of an effective learning environment. By understanding the power dynamics, social norms, and expected behaviour governing classroom interactions, academic institutions can promote a culture of respect, discipline, and academic excellence.

### Excerpt 2

Teacher: Now, we are going to talk about the properties of Radiation. Please bring out your Basic Science note. You, what are you writing?

Student: CRS

Teacher: How can you be writing CRS? Please drop that CRS book, just keep it aside and bring out your Basic Science book. Last week we treated, the types of Radiation and I told you that we have the Alpha particles, we have the Beta particles and we have the Gama particles...

Student: Writing

Teacher: Writing what? We've not started writing and you are writing, you are copying what?

Effective classroom management is crucial for successful instruction. This essay analyses a teacher's efforts to refocus students on the lesson at hand, specifically the Properties of Radiation, while ensuring they have the correct materials. Classroom management is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning. A well-managed classroom enables teachers to deliver instruction efficiently and students to engage meaningfully with the material. In the context of Properties of Radiation, effective classroom management is vital for students to grasp complex concepts.

The lesson consists of three distinct acts. Act 1 involves redirecting student attention, where the teacher requests students to bring out their Basic Science notes and addresses a student writing a different book (CRS). Act 2 entails reviewing previous lessons on types of Radiation (Alpha, Beta, and Gamma particles). Act 3 involves monitoring student activity, ensuring students are not copying unnecessarily. The teacher-student exchange is characterised by the teacher initiating and dominating the interaction. The teacher makes several moves to maintain classroom order and focus, including directing students to bring out specific material, correcting the

students writing on a different subject, reviewing previous lessons, and monitoring students' writing.

The transaction involves the teacher attempting to transmit knowledge and expectations while the student responds with compliance (or lack thereof). The teacher aims to refocus students on the lesson, ensure correct materials, review previous knowledge, and maintain a productive learning environment. However, the student's actions hinder the transaction, prompting the teacher's interventions. Effective classroom management and instruction are intertwined. Teachers must continually adapt to meet the needs of their students. By analysing this lesson excerpt, we gain insight into the teacher's role in managing classroom dynamics and ensuring students remain focused on the lesson. This understanding is crucial for developing successful instructional strategies.

### Excerpt 3

Teacher: Come on, get out of the class, out. Don't waste my time. What is your problem? If you try that again in my class, am going to punish you... do you understand?

Student: Yes Sir

Teacher: When you are writing and see me enter the class, you stop whatever you are doing. Do you understand it? Now, we want to talk about the property of Alpha Radiation...

Student: Yes.

Effective classroom management is crucial for maintaining order and promoting academic achievement. This essay analyses excerpt three, a pivotal moment in a classroom interaction, revealing underlying themes, acts, exchanges, moves, and transactions that shape the teacher-student relationship. The primary theme evident in excerpt 3 is classroom management and authority, highlighting the power imbalance between the teacher and student. This theme is reinforced through the teacher's assertive actions and the student's submissive responses.

Excerpt 3 consists of two distinct acts. Reprimand and instruction. The teacher addresses the student's misbehaviour, asserting authority and setting boundaries, before transitioning to the lesson on Alpha Radiation. The exchange is asymmetrical, with the teacher dominating the conversation. Specific moves within the exchange include directives, compliance, and warnings. The transactions reveal the power dynamics: the teacher asserts authority and control, the student submits, acknowledging the teacher's authority, and the teacher reestablishes academic focus.

This analysis demonstrates how the teacher maintains control through directives and warnings, while the student complies, illustrating the uneven power distribution in the classroom. The exchange highlights the importance of authority and

compliance in maintaining order and focusing on academic objectives. Effective classroom management relies on establishing clear authority and promoting compliance. By analysing excerpt 3, educators can gain insight into the complex dynamics shaping teacher-student relationships and develop strategies to optimise learning environments.

#### Excerpt 4

Teacher: One of the properties of this Alpha Radiation is that they are slightly deflected by magnetic field..., then two, we have the appositively charged, this Alpha Radiation are positively charged unlike the Beta Particles..., then third one, there is alpha Particles are absorbed by paper and air...

Students: Yes.

Teacher: So, these Alpha Particles can easily be stored by what? By a what? By an element, an aluminium a mental.

Effective teacher-student interaction is pivotal in facilitating the active engagement of students in the teaching and learning process. This essay analyses a classroom interaction, highlighting the theme, acts, exchanges, moves, and transactions that facilitate knowledge transmission. The theme revolves around Alpha Radiation's properties, focusing on its interaction with magnetic fields, charge, and absorption. This theme is central to understanding the fundamental principles of Basic Science and Physics by extension. The interaction consists of three main acts. Firstly, the Informing Act enables the teacher to impart knowledge about Alpha Radiation's properties, laying the foundation for student understanding. Secondly, the Confirming Act allows the student to acknowledge their comprehension, providing an opportunity for clarification. Finally, the Applying Act enables the teacher to illustrate practical scenarios, solidifying the connection between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications. The exchange between the teacher and student is primarily didactic, characterised by the teacher's provision of information and the student's receptive role. This didactic approach facilitates efficient knowledge transmission, allowing the student to grasp complex concepts.

Throughout the interaction, the teacher employs strategic moves to enhance knowledge transmission. The initiating move introduces Alpha Radiation properties, sparking student interest. The explaining move provides detailed explanations, clarifying complex concepts. The illustrating move utilises examples or gestures, facilitating visual understanding. Lastly, the eliciting move encourages student participation through questions, verifying comprehension. The transaction between the teacher and student involves three key components. Knowledge transmission enables teachers to share information about Alpha Radiation. The understanding check allows the teacher to verify the student's comprehension, addressing knowledge

gaps. Finally, the application helps the student connect theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, fostering practical understanding.

By examining these acts, exchanges, moves, and transactions, educators can refine their teaching strategies, optimising student learning outcomes in the classroom.

### Excerpt 5

Teacher: Any question?

Students: No.

Teacher: Ah! You don't say no, please stand up and tell me, Longlife please tell me one type of Radiation.

Longlife: Alpha Radiation.

Teacher: Florence tell me another type of Radiation.

Florence: Beta Radiation.

Teacher: You guys have tried, you guys have tried. Please always read... thank you.

Effective classroom interactions are crucial for student learning. This essay analyses a classroom interaction, focusing on education and specifically assessing students' knowledge of radiation types. The theme of this excerpt revolves around education, emphasising a classroom interaction designed to evaluate students' understanding of radiation types. This theme highlights the importance of teacher-student interactions in fostering academic growth. The interaction unfolds in three distinct acts. Initially, the teacher checks if students have questions, receiving a negative response. Next, the teacher asks specific students, Longlife and Florence, to provide examples of the radiation types. Finally, the teacher acknowledges the students' efforts and encourages further reading. These acts facilitate three exchanges between the teacher and students. The teacher-student exchange begins with checking understanding, followed by eliciting information, and culminating in providing feedback. This exchange pattern enables the teacher to assess knowledge, address gaps, and encourage further learning.

The teacher employs strategic moves to facilitate learning. By checking understanding, the teacher ensures students grasp the material. Eliciting information from specific students promotes active participation. Providing feedback acknowledges efforts and encourages further growth. This interaction exemplifies a transactional model of communication, characterised by reciprocal information exchange between the teacher and students. The teacher initiates, students respond, and the teacher provides feedback, creating a cyclical flow of communication.

This classroom interaction illustrates a structured approach to assessing knowledge, providing feedback, and encouraging further learning. The exchange reinforces the teacher's role as facilitator and evaluator, while students demonstrate

subject matter understanding. By examining this interaction, educators can refine teaching strategies, optimise student learning outcomes, and foster academic excellence.

### Excerpt 6

Teacher: Greet

Students: Good morning Ma, you are blessed

Teacher: You are blessed in Jesus's name.

Students: Amen.

Teacher: You can sit down. In our previous lesson, what did we talk about?

Students: Auntie I, I, I, ...

Teacher: Victory tell us.

Victory: Verb.

Teacher: Good, clap for him.

Students: Claps.

Teacher: Who can tell us the meaning of Verb?

Students: I, I, I, ...

Teacher: Peter, please can you tell us (calls student's surname first) Alright V Kevwe let's hear you.

Kevwe: Verb is an action word or a doing word.

The classroom interaction between a JSS 3 English Studies teacher and students reveals a structured and supportive learning environment. This analysis will examine the theme, acts, exchange moves and transactions that occur in this interaction. The theme of this interaction is the review of previous lessons and the introduction to verb meaning. The teacher attempts to recall previous lessons and build on students' existing knowledge. This is evident in the teacher's question, "In our previous lesson, what did we talk about?" which serves as a review of previous lessons and a transition to new concepts.

This interaction involves various acts and exchange moves, including greetings, blessings, instructions, questions, nominations, and evaluations. The teacher initiates the lesson with a greeting, establishing a positive tone, and offers a blessing, which students respond to with "Amen." The teacher then instructs students to sit down, demonstrating a clear structure to the lesson. The teacher's use of questions and nominations facilitates student participation and encourages students to share their knowledge. The exchange structure in this interaction reveals a pattern of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation. This structure facilitates a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to participate and engage with the lesson. The teacher's evaluations of student responses demonstrate a focus on promoting student confidence and motivation.

The transactions in this interaction demonstrate the teacher's efforts to establish a positive tone, review previous lessons, and encourage student participation. The teacher's use of nominations and evaluations creates a sense of inclusivity and encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas. This analysis highlights the teacher's strategies for creating a supportive learning environment and promoting student participation. The teacher's use of structured acts and exchange moves facilitates a positive and engaging lesson, demonstrating effective teaching practices. By understanding these dynamics, educators can refine their approaches to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

### Excerpt 7

Teacher: Now, who can tell us an example of a Verb?

Students: I, I, I, ...

Teacher: (Points to a student), Laura, tell me.

Laura: Clapping

Teacher: Good, clap for her.

Students: (Clap)

Teacher: Another person

Students: I, I, ...

Teacher: Okay Betterson

Betterson: Dancing.

Teacher: Dancing, good, who again?

Students: I, I, ...

Teacher: Okay, tell me one (points to a student)

Student: Singing.

Teacher: Good, clap for her.

Students: Claps.

Teacher: Who can tell me another one

Students: I, ...

Teacher: Precious tell me one.

Precious: Sleeping.

Teacher: Sleeping. Good, clap for him.

Students: Claps.

This excerpt showcases a classroom interaction where students provide examples of verbs. The teacher's approach to eliciting responses and providing feedback creates a supportive learning environment. The theme of this interaction is providing examples of verbs. The teacher asks students to give examples of verbs, and students respond with various actions, such as clapping, dancing, singing, and sleeping. The interaction involves various acts and exchange moves, including questions, nominations,

responses, and evaluations. The teacher asks students to provide examples of verbs and nominates specific students to respond with “clapping.” The teacher says, “Good clap for her,” which encourages student participation and reinforces positive responses. The exchange structure in this interaction reveals a pattern of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation. This structure facilitates a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to participate and engage with the lesson.

The transactions in this interaction demonstrate the teacher’s efforts to encourage student participation and provide positive feedback. The teacher’s use of nominations and evaluations creates a sense of inclusivity and encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas. This analysis highlights the teacher’s effective strategies for promoting student participation and engagement. By using a structured approach to eliciting responses and providing feedback, the teacher creates a supportive learning environment that encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas. This approach can help build student confidence and motivation, leading to a more effective learning experience.

### Excerpt 8

Teacher: Now, this will bring us to our today’s topic. Adverb, how many people read it? I asked you guys to read up Adverbs in our previous class, so how many of you read it?

Few Students: I ...

Teacher: Aww, I know most of you will not read it. So, how many of you? Let me see (about 3 students raised their hands), okay, Earnest, since you read it, so just help us with the definition of Adverb.

Earnest: An adverb is a word that tells us how, when, and where an action took place.

Teacher: Good, clap for him.

Students: Clap.

This excerpt shows the teacher introducing the topic of adverbs and assessing students’ prior knowledge. The teacher’s approach to introducing new topics and encouraging student participation creates a supportive learning environment. The theme of this interaction is introducing adverbs and defining their purpose. The teacher asks students to read about adverbs and solicits a definition from one student. This approach helps to gauge students’ prior knowledge and understanding of the topic. The interaction involves various acts and exchange moves, including initiation, response, nomination, and feedback. The teacher initiates the discussion by introducing the topic of adverbs and asking students if they have read about it.

Students respond with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and the teacher nominates Earnest to provide a definition, and the teacher provides positive feedback. The exchange structure in this interaction reveals a pattern of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation. This structure facilitates a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to participate and engage with the lesson. The teacher's use of positive feedback reinforces student responses and promotes a sense of confidence. The transactions in this interaction demonstrate the teacher's efforts to assess students' prior knowledge and encourage student participation. The teacher's use of nomination and feedback creates a sense of inclusivity and encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas. By calling on Earnest to provide a definition, the teacher provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate their understanding of the topic. This analysis highlights the teacher's effective

### **Findings and Conclusion**

This analysis of the five transcripts revealed several key findings. Firstly, teacher-centred instruction dominated the lesson, with the teacher controlling the pace and content. This approach was evident in Excerpts 2-5, where the teacher lectured and directed student activities. Secondly, discipline and authority were emphasised, with the teacher asserting control through a stern tone and warnings (Excerpts 1 and 3). The lesson focused on conveying scientific concepts, specifically radiation properties, through lectures (Excerpts 2-5). However, student participation was limited to responding to the teacher's questions or providing answers (Excerpts 4 and 5). Also, positive reinforcement was used to encourage participation and boost confidence (Excerpts 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). The teacher also uses questioning techniques to elicit responses from students, encourage participation, and assess their understanding of the topic. This approach helps to create a supportive learning environment and promotes student engagement. Lastly, the teacher encourages student participation by nominating students to respond to questions and providing opportunities for them to share their thoughts and ideas. This approach helps to create a sense of inclusivity and promotes active learning.

Observations from the excerpts highlight the power dynamics at play. The teacher maintains authority, while the students comply. The lecture-based instruction limited opportunities for student engagement, and the teacher's tone varied between stern, encouraging, and authoritative. Student responses were mostly brief, with some hesitation. These observations suggest a traditional teaching approach, where the teacher is the primary authority and knowledge disseminator.

In conclusion, this classroom environment is characterised by traditional teaching methods, a strong emphasis on discipline, and limited opportunities for student participation. While the teacher effectively conveys complex scientific concepts, the didactic approach may hinder critical thinking and student engagement.

To enhance student motivation and learning outcomes, incorporating student-centred activities, critical thinking exercises, balanced discipline, constructive feedback, and diverse instructional strategies is recommended. By adopting a more inclusive and interactive approach, the teacher can foster a supportive learning environment that encourages student participation, creativity, and academic growth. The last three excerpts suggest that the teacher is using effective strategies to create a supportive learning environment and promote student engagement. This approach to teaching appears to be student-centred and focused on promoting active learning, which is in contrast to the first five excerpts. So, to enhance quality teacher-student interaction, there has to be a balance in the process

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