

Impact of teachers' linguistic choices on ESL students' verbal participation in selected secondary schools in Ekiti state, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the linguistic choices made by teachers and their effects on students' verbal participation in English as a second language classroom in selected secondary schools in Ekiti state in Nigeria. A mixed-methods approach was used involving a case study and descriptive research design. The methods were triangulated to analyse extracts from 20 recorded classroom lessons and teacher interviews. The findings show that the linguistic choices of teachers significantly affected the classroom discourse structure and students' verbal participation. Teachers mainly used linguistic choices to teach content, initiate classroom exchanges, provide feedback, and maintain control,

resulting in students giving limited verbal responses.

The analysis recommends teachers' further professional training to enhance their discourse and pedagogical practices, as well as the provision of language resources and conducive classroom environments by the government. Suggestions include that the Ministry of Education should prioritise developing a language policy and curriculum to improve classroom interactions and students' communication skills.

Keywords: classroom interaction; linguistic features; discourse; linguistic choice; linguistic features; ESL; pedagogy; classroom practice; verbal participation

CITATION

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1. Introduction

Spoken language is the primary source of linguistic input in the classroom (Riskiati et al., 2021). Research reveals that meaningful classroom interaction occurs when teachers fully understand how to provide an appropriate and constructive discourse pattern that promotes student participation (Ononye, 2015; Hardman, 2019; Maine & Cermakova, 2021). Using spoken language to create an interactive and learner-friendly environment strengthens verbal communication among classroom participants (Zhou & Landa, 2019). It is also a significant educational resource through which teachers impart knowledge and students share learning experiences. Hence, teachers' linguistic strategies in fostering stress-free interaction patterns that encourage adequate students' participation have become relevant bases of research concern. Specifically, examining teachers' linguistic choices and techniques employed to create engaging classrooms is crucial to this study.

The role of interactive pedagogy in language education and its benefits to students' academic achievement and language learning have been extensively studied and authored (Hardman et al., 2008; Nnorom & Erhabor, 2019; Atubonoima & Amadi, 2021). Despite the considerable number of studies on classroom interaction, the most effective ways to enhance students' learning and effective verbal participation in classroom discourse remain challenging for many Nigerian teachers. The causes of the challenges are obvious, as indicated by the prevalent use of teacher-led instruction and rote learning pedagogy in Nigerian schools (Hardman et al., 2008; Idogho, 2017; Ugwu, 2021). These studies and more in education argue that different current innovations have developed across the educational sector in some parts of the world. In contrast, most classrooms in Nigeria have continued to be dominated by traditional teaching methods, emphasising teacher classroom dominance and coverage of academic content in conventional and instructive teaching above interactive teaching.

Amusheghan (2007) observes that although the design and purpose of the ESL curriculum are to promote students' academic and communication achievements, communication skills are not given much attention in the classroom contexts. The lack of implementation of the curriculum content is a pointer to the challenge identified by Amuseghan (2007) in considering the approach, methods, and techniques teachers employ in teaching English in Nigerian schools. One of the most pressing issues in the Nigerian educational system that needs attention is the challenges presented by this situation. According to Faloye (2022), there is a need to look at the challenges in relation to the teacher, the language of instruction, the teaching techniques, the inability of teachers to move from the traditional to the suitable pedagogy, or a combination of available methods.

The prevalence of teacher-dominated classrooms in Nigerian schools has generated concern from scholars in language studies and others in education (Hardman et al., 2008; Agbatogun, 2013; Ononye, 2015; Idogho, 2016; Ugwu, 2016; Onotere, 2019; Nnorom & Erhabor, 2019; Abuh, 2021). These existing studies provide valuable insights into primary school classroom discourse, communicative language teaching, and the influence of classroom discourse patterns on secondary students' achievement in subjects like Literature-in-English, Biology and Physics. However, the question of how teachers' linguistic practices impact students' verbal participation in Nigerian secondary school classrooms remains unanswered, highlighting the need for further research. Furthermore, the relationship between teacher linguistic choices, classroom discourse structure, and students' classroom interaction competence remains inadequately clarified. This lack of context-specific research hinders the development of effective teaching strategies and policies tailored to Nigerian secondary schools' unique needs.

The current study explores an aspect of classroom interaction, specifically how teachers' linguistic practices influence students' verbal engagement and subsequent communication skills development in English classes in Nigerian secondary schools. Classroom interaction, as an essential part of what happens in the classroom, comprises the reciprocal actions that describe the form and content of behaviour or social connection in the classroom. Managing the quality of classroom interaction would play a core role in improving the quality of those reciprocal actions in teaching and learning (Hardman et al., 2008). Thus, exploring the linguistic choices made by participants is essential when considering effective reciprocal actions that could facilitate quality classroom interaction. Given the crucial role of classroom interaction in developing communication competence, further study is needed to address and extend our understanding of the dynamics of English language learning in Nigerian secondary schools, especially in Ekiti State. Hence, this study investigates the impact of teacher linguistic choices on students' verbal participation in Ekiti State's secondary school ESL classrooms, with the aim of informing strategies that can facilitate a shift away from the prevalent didactic teaching methods in Nigerian schools and enhancing students' English language learners' interaction skills and communication competence. Therefore, this paper was guided by the following research questions:

1. What linguistic choices are made by teachers in classroom interaction?
2. How effective are teachers' linguistic choices on students' verbal participation?

2. Literature review

2.1 Discourse of classroom interaction

The primary component of classroom interaction is the structured discourse generated through participants' verbal exchanges, questioning, responding and reacting. Classroom interaction is of a particular nature when compared to other forms of interaction as it performs a range of functions such as formal instruction, whole class and task management and progress of group unity which are all controlled by the teacher (Some-Guiebre, 2020). Rido and Sari (2018) discovered in their study that teacher talk contributes significantly to the discourse structure of classroom interaction. Rido and Sari (2018) identify teachers' language accuracy (pronunciation, vocabulary, instructions, and questions) and classroom discourse as the two elements defining classroom interaction. Ononye (2015) states that questioning is one of the ways teachers initiate or introduce instructional tasks in their classes. Chafi and Elkhousai (2016) highlight the importance of enhancing teachers' questioning techniques and feedback strategies to foster a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Teachers' feedback consists of evaluative, interactive, corrective, and descriptive moves according to Chafi's and Elkhousai's (2016) categorisation. Evaluative feedback provides an assessment of student performance, while interactive feedback is used to encourage student engagement, with teachers asking follow-up questions to help students understand and improve their answers. It is a method of providing information or guidance to help students improve their answers to questions. Descriptive feedback is described as written feedback or conversations that provide explicit information that enables students to get what has to be done to enhance their learning. Correction feedback is usually expressed with words or phrases like 'no', 'not correct', or the teacher's explanation to give provision for the correct answers (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010).

A typical pattern of classroom discourse has been identified as Initiation – Response – Feedback (IRF) which Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) proposed. It has to do with a traditional discourse pattern – when students respond to a question from the teacher, the teacher evaluates their responses and gives feedback. Some studies examine classroom interaction from the sociocultural perspective and have premised their analyses on the S&C study (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010; Evnitskaya, 2018; Wang, 2020). The pattern of teacher-student classroom interaction can be defined by various factors such as the teaching method, the topic of discussion, and the student's learning ability (Abuh, 2021).

Domogen (2021) analysed the patterns of teacher-student communication in English language classrooms and the levels of questions used and concluded that the prevalent

teachers' linguistic influences and questioning techniques prevented students from improving their reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the classroom communication process is directly characterised by communication apprehension and other communication restrictions on the part of the students. The practice has been that students should get the teacher's attention and approval before speaking, according to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975).

Further research on classroom discourse examined factors that are crucial in influencing classroom talk (Moleke & Montle, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021). These factors are connected to the sociocultural viewpoints that inform the discourse. In addition, the physical environment, participants' socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and emotional factors such as their experiences, feelings, opinions, and preferences are included among the factors. There have been issues about how discourse unfolds differently among many different types of classrooms, what kinds of classrooms play host to discourse and promote students learning, and also, how classroom discourse unfolds over time in higher or lower-quality directions (Rezaie & Lashkarian, 2015; Some-Guiebre, 2020; Wang, 2020).

2.2 English classroom practices in the Nigerian context

It is no news that English has retained its position and importance in Nigeria as a *lingua franca*, the official language of the government, the press, schooling, law, and economic transactions (Jowitt, 2019). Although English is a second language in Nigeria, many Nigerians prefer using English over any indigenous language because of the role the language plays in national development as well as the international platforms (Deji-Afuye & Ayeni, 2015). Consequently, teaching and learning the language become necessary for all citizens to be relevant academically, socially, politically, economically, technologically and globally. English language teaching practices in Nigerian classrooms appear to have been informed mainly by the belief that possibilities for learning English are maximised when the language is used as a medium of instruction and studied as a subject. One of the main goals of English as a subject and a language of instruction is to enable students to communicate intelligibly in diverse social contexts and write proficiently in English. However, many of the successes recorded and challenges encountered in achieving such effective English language learning relate to the methods of teaching and classroom practices (Deji-Afuye & Obadare, 2019).

English language teaching is intimately linked with language policy and what operates in the English curriculum. For example, according to Amuseghan (2007), the target of the Nigerian secondary school English language curriculum is that ESL learners should

be academically competent. Learners are expected to have developed good linguistic and communicative proficiencies after nine or more years of learning the language.

Amuseghan (2007), Onotere (2019), and Yede (2021) have noted that the communicative approach has not been effectively implemented in Nigerian schools. Some of the factors contributing to this issue include the preference for the traditional methods of teaching, lack of authentic materials and activities for classroom interaction, casual attitude of teachers towards the practice, inadequate teacher training, and students' negative attitude to learning. Obayan (2002), as cited in Amuseghan (2007:320), has earlier identified that several characteristics typify ESL classroom practices in Nigeria. Firstly, the predominant use of textbooks as the only teaching-learning material is a common feature. Secondly, traditional methods such as repetition, recitation, and imitation reading are frequently employed in the classroom. Additionally, minimal emphasis is placed on the usefulness of speaking and listening skills in language teaching and learning. Furthermore, an unnecessary emphasis is placed on finishing the textbooks and covering the syllabus, while a disproportionate amount of time is spent practising examination-based skills.

Studies indicate that ESL teachers in Nigeria need to be more positive and less indifferent to the use of the communicative approach. They need to consciously adopt appropriate communicative activities to meet their students' learning needs (Onotere, 2019). Yede (2021) discovered that the traditional approaches to teaching the English Language in L2 contexts could not promote adequate communicative competence expected of secondary school students. The study observed that ESL teachers lack the knowledge of various teaching skills needed to promote effective classroom interaction. Therefore, he recommends that remedial, situational, and dialogue drills be embedded in the appropriate skills to enhance learners' communicative competence and promote national and international intelligibility in the use of English among the learners. Likewise, Akinpelu (2020) argues that translanguaging in Nigeria's formal education would help reduce the challenges of the nation's inadequate and defective language-in-education policy. In response to the clarion call for a more learner and language-friendly pedagogy, Zhou and Landa (2019) argue that there is a need to challenge subtractive linguistic practices and embrace translanguaging. Akinpelu (2020) describes the translanguaging approach as an effective educational strategy that encourages the use of indigenous languages in formal education. Translanguaging in class enables students to use whichever languages boost their confidence to speak and participate in learning, transforming them from being silent observers into active contributors. In an experimental study, Zhou and Landa (2019) observe that recognising the students' entire linguistic repertoire as a learning resource enables them to express themselves and relate with both the teacher and peers without fear or prejudice.

The current study has been spurred by the need to improve English language teaching and learning, emphasising students' verbal participation as one of the strategies to help students develop interaction aptitude in Nigerian classrooms. The paper sought to investigate how the linguistic choices made by participants could contribute to successful and effective classroom interactions, which could lead to learners' enhanced communicative competence in English.

3. Theoretical framework

The paper used Halliday's (1961) systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory, and Sinclair and Coulthard's (S&C) (1975) discourse analysis model. Systemic functional linguistics theory focuses on what language does and how it accomplishes what it does. Trask and Stockwell (2007) point out that systemicists constantly ask questions such as what is this author's intention?; what linguistic tools are available to assist them in achieving the intention, and on what basis do they make their linguistic choices? An important perception of the theory is that linguistic choices are made whenever language is used in any context. These linguistic choices are made and communicated within the formal linguistic systems that the language provides for constructing meaning. However, there are constraints to the choices people can make using these systems because of two factors (Schleppegrell, 2004). The first one concerns the context within which meaning is usually generated. The context mainly restricts or determines the choice of meanings that can be made. The second element that limits people's linguistic preferences is the reality that not every individual within a speech community or culture has access to all the available linguistic contexts. According to Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 34, "contextual values influence linguistic choices but are also influenced by them".

The present study employs SFL as an analytical tool to understand how language interacts with the social context to make meaning. It demonstrates the influence language has on the goals and challenges of classroom discourse practices. According to Halliday (1975), language has an open-ended and theoretically vast range of meaning possibilities. As a result, language is not seen as an abstract system of relations but rather as a practical tool for transmitting meanings (Christie, 2002; Eggins, 2004). According to the metafunction concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a sentence structure conveys three different sorts of meaning: meaning as a representation (ideational), meaning as a message (textual), and meaning as an exchange (interpersonal). (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The principal focus of the Sinclair and Coulthard model is on exchanges, moves, and acts. In this paper, the emphasis is on teaching exchanges to guide the interpretation of

the results of the study. Exchanges are identified as teaching exchanges and boundary exchanges. Boundary exchanges are categorised into focusing and framing moves that are used to segment and identify the different stages of the lesson. On the other hand, teaching exchanges concentrate on the specific subject matter of the lesson. They contain free and bound teaching exchanges (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992: 25). Informing, directing, and eliciting exchanges are the three main types of teaching exchanges that Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) identify. The teaching exchanges comprise at least one move and, at most, three moves (Ginting, 2017). These moves are also recognised as opening, answering, and follow-up moves or Initiation (I), Response (R) and Feedback (F), which are the terms used to express the structure of exchanges. According to this model, the teacher makes the Initiation (I) moves, which requires a student's verbal or non-verbal Response (R) move. The student's response is followed by the teacher's feedback or follow-up (F) move. The teacher's feedback is to acknowledge, oppose, assess, or make remarks on the student's response move (Hellermann, 2003). Sinclair and Coulthard viewed classroom discourse as a category in its own right, following a structural-linguistic criterion based on analysing individual components and sets of essential rules. This model serves as a resource in the present study to examine classroom interaction to make the order and form in discourse transparent after analysis.

The application of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) discourse classifications, for their simplicity, has been applauded and widely applied to the study of structured discourse (McCarthy, 1991). This model provides a systematic framework for analysing teacher-student interactions, shedding light on the structural organisation of classroom communication. Its continued significance can be attributed to several factors as being a foundation for subsequent research in discourse analysis, its general applicability, adaptability, and insight into teacher-student dynamics. Studies have applied the model to analyse online learning interactions and CLIL classroom interactions (Paterson, 2008; Nicholson, 2014; Ginting, 2017; Abeti, 2022). The model informs teacher training programs, emphasising effective communication strategies.

However, one of the major limitations of Sinclair and Coulthard's discourse classifications is that they can mainly be used to describe aspects of classroom discourse generated during whole-class verbal exchanges between teachers and students (Raine, 2010). They do not apply to student-student interaction in small-group tasks, discussion groups, or on the playground. According to Raine (2010), the model analysis system does not adequately consider the non-verbal aspects of classroom discourse. When criticisms occurred, it was frequently due to the difficulties encountered in the analysis of discourse in less structured situations. Nevertheless, Sinclair and Coulthard's analytical approach applies to the present study because the scope covers the analysis of verbal components of the discourse of the observed classrooms. Furthermore, the

model is relevant to the study, as the observation revealed classroom dynamics characterised by a dominant teacher role, adherence to the IRF pattern and a teacher-centred approach where students relied heavily on their teachers. Applying the Sinclair & Coulthard model could enable teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practices and how the choices they make impact classroom communication (Nicholson, 2014; Abeti, 2022).

4. Research methodology

A mixed-method approach was employed to collect data and conduct a descriptive analysis of the impact of teachers' linguistic choices on students' verbal participation in classroom interaction. The mixed-method approach facilitated methodological triangulation of interaction and discourse analyses from the video-recorded lessons as well as the narratives from teacher interviews. This study adopted a case study and descriptive survey design. The sample of this study was obtained using multistage sampling with four stages. In the first stage, a simple random sampling of the district was made with the probability of selection proportionate to size. Therefore, Ekiti South senatorial district with the highest number of local government areas was selected out of three senatorial districts in the state. In the second stage, random sampling was used to select four local government areas out of the six local government areas in Ekiti South senatorial district. Proportional sampling was used to select ten senior secondary schools from the four selected local government areas. In the final stage, twenty ESL teachers, two from each school, randomly including male and female teachers, were selected for the study.

The researcher sought and obtained ethical clearance from the University of Fort Hare, before commencing the research. The respondents were adequately informed about the purely academic interests of the research and assured of the confidentiality of any information gathered from them. They were allowed to make their own informed decisions about whether to participate in the study. The researcher also sought and obtained permission from the Ekiti State Ministry of Education, the principals of the schools, and the teachers to conduct the study in the schools. Participants were assured of confidentiality and that their names would not be disclosed during the course of carrying out the study. Moreover, if the respondents were uncomfortable, they could withdraw from the study.

Classroom observations were carried out in the selected senior secondary school class 2 English lessons, two (2) from each school. The researcher used overt participant

observation in which the participants were aware they were being observed. All observations were done during school hours, in which the researcher was in the classrooms as a non-participant observer throughout each session. Twenty (20) lessons lasting between twenty (20) to forty (40) minutes each were observed and video recorded. The variables observed in the lessons were the features of the linguistic choices teachers made, student talk, and the extent of students' verbal participation in the lessons. Post-lesson interviews were conducted with the teachers whose classes were observed to understand the patterns and processes they followed during classroom interactions, especially in engaging the students in verbal interaction. The interviewing periods varied between interviewees; thus, the sessions were scheduled at their convenience. Some sessions were done immediately after the classes were observed, while others were done later because some of the teachers had other classes or engagements after their classes.

Data collection on classroom observation was done in phases. The first phase involved collecting the data through video recordings of twenty classroom sessions, two from each school. The observation schedule contained two parts aimed at personally observing what characterised teachers' and students' utterances during English lessons and how those characteristics affected students' verbal participation. The second phase included the transcriptions of the lessons and analysis of the transcripts. The third phase followed the Sinclair & Coulthard model in the observation schedule to classify the utterances indicating participants' initiation, responding, and follow-up acts in both interaction and discourse analyses (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). The final phase involved the presentation of the analysis in tables and descriptions. The data collected from classroom observations were analysed using qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The analysis focused on explicitly examining the lessons' interaction structure and the types and frequency of occurrence of discourse moves made by the participants, as presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. Extracts are used to exemplify the discourse moves. In each of the extracts, 'T' stands for teacher, 'SS' for students answering in chorus and 'S' stands for a student responding to the teacher's questions or instructions. 'I' stands for Initiating move, 'R' for Responding move and 'F' for Feedback move, while 'NV' stands for Non-Verbal response. The second part of the data focused on students' verbal participation, as presented in Table 3.

5. Findings

Table 1: Teachers' linguistic choices

Teachers initiating moves			
<i>Moves</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>No of occurrence</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Elicitation	Close/Display questions	192	7.7
	Open/Referential questions	3	0.12
	Yes/No questions	26	1.0
	Repeating elicits	119	4.7
	Requesting clarification	73	2.9
	Focus-elicit	138	5.5
Directive	Advising	49	1.9
	Warning	11	0.4
	Nominating	268	10.7
	Focusing	91	3.7
	Requesting	47	1.9
	Instructing	315	12.6
Informative	Reporting	89	3.6
	Explaining	249	9.9
	Clueing	91	3.7
Checking		164	6.6
Teachers' responding moves to students' initiating moves			
Positive		17	0.7
Negative		3	0.12
Temporisation		2	0.08
Teachers' feedback moves			
Evaluative	Praising	84	3.4
	Repeating	165	6.6
	Accepting	108	4.3
Interactive (asking further questions)		56	2.2
Corrective	Direct correction	56	2.2
	Recasting	26	1.0
	Metalinguistic explanation	40	1.6
Descriptive	Acknowledging	5	0.2
	Refocusing	8	0.3
Total		2475	100.0

5.1 Teachers' linguistic choices

Table 1 shows the number and the percentages of occurrences of the linguistic choices made by teachers.

5.1.1 Teachers' initiating moves

As shown in Table 1, the two highest-scoring initiating moves of the teachers were 'directive' move, 'instructing' at 12.6 and 'nominating' at 10.7% respectively, while 'explaining' (9.9%) was the highest-scoring 'informative' move. This indicates that for the teachers, the most common linguistic choice made in their lessons is instruction. The results also indicated that the use of 'display questions (7.7%) took precedence over other types of questioning techniques used by the teachers. 'Focus-elicited' scored 5.5%, 'requesting clarification' scored 2.9%, while 'yes/no questions' and 'referential questions' scored 1.4% and 0.12%, respectively.

The classroom observations showed that teachers' talk was more dominated by 'instruction' and 'nomination' than other subcategories of 'directive' initiating moves – 'advising' (1.9%), 'warning' (0.4%), 'focusing' (3.7%) and 'requesting' (1.9%). All the observed teachers used instructions to have the students' verbal and non-verbal responses. Table 1 reports that 'nomination' was used to call on students to answer questions or respond to instructions, which was observed in the classroom as students did not often answer questions or talk in class unless they were called or beckoned to by the teacher.

Furthermore, the subcategory 'explaining' was of greater significance to the lessons than other subcategories under 'informative' initiating moves, such as 'clueing' with a percentage of (3.7%) and 'reporting' (3.6%). Thus, the results indicated that teachers in the study relied on 'clues' to help the students respond to elicitation and instructions appropriately and 'informative: reporting' to give information to the students regarding the lesson. Nevertheless, 'explaining' under 'informative' initiating moves was of greater significance to describing or/and explaining the subject matter of the lessons. 'Checking' was mostly used after teachers' 'explaining' move to determine whether students understood the explanation and to be sure if the assignments given were completed.

Extract 1 demonstrates teachers' initiating moves as shown in turns 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 13, revealing the use of 'directive': 'instructing' and 'nominating' as well as 'informative' and 'elicitation'.

Extract 1

Turn	Speaker	Exchange	Move	Act	Feature/ Function
1	T	We have summary writing. English composition?	I	Informative Elicitation	Reporting Yes/No Question
2	SS	Yes.	R	Reply	Acknowledging
3	T	Who is reading from the textbook? Kehi read.	I	Directive	Instructing Nominating
4	S1	(Reads)			
5	T	According to the passage, what is the first thing you do when you want to write a composition? Toria, Agboeye: Number 2, Kehi: Number 3, Toyo: Number 4.	I	Elicitation Directive	Focus: Eliciting Nominating
6	S2	Selection of topic.	R	Reply	Positive
7	T	Selection of topic. So, how will you say it? How will you say it? Tammy, answer the question.	F-I	Evaluative Elicitation Directive	Repeating Focus: Eliciting Nomination, Instruction
8	S3	(Silent)			
9	T	Now, exchange your books.	I	Directive	Instruction
10	S3	Selection of a topic.	R	Reply	Positive
11	T	(Writes student's answer on the chalkboard) The five steps to be taken when writing a composition are...? So, what did I say you will do here? (Points to the writing on the board). That is one... Selection of a topic.	F-I	Evaluative Elicitation	Accepting Focus: Eliciting
12	S4	Selection of a topic.	R	Reply	Positive
13	T	Selection of a topic. How do you begin? You begin with a small letter because it continues what we have here (pointing to the board). That is the 's' that begins the selection of a topic. What is the second step? After choosing a topic, what is the next? Who is doing number two?	F-I	Evaluative Elicitation Informative Elicitation	Repeating Focus: Eliciting Explaining Focus: Eliciting Repeating elicit Focus: Eliciting
14	S5	Generation of ideas.	R	Reply	Positive

The above extract features the teacher eliciting, directing, and informing during a lesson on *English Composition*. The teacher initiated the conversation with 'informative: reporting' to introduce the day's topic. This act of providing information, described by

Sinclair and Coulthard (1992), was observed across the classes. The observation showed that more than two-thirds of the teachers used reporting in the opening phase of their lessons to briefly describe the previous instructional activities and introduce the topic of the day's lesson. Eliciting was a vital aspect of classroom communication. In the extract, the teacher used elicitation (yes/no question, display question and focus-elicitation) to elicit students' linguistic responses as the lesson progressed (turns 1, 5, 7, 11 and 13). The teacher usually nominates students to answer questions as shown in turns 3, 5 and 7. As revealed in the extract, the classroom discourse shows teachers' explanations in turns 13. Moreover, 'informative: explaining' was used by the teacher to inform and define concepts or ideas relating to the topic of the lesson, while 'directive: instructing' was used to request students' verbal or non-verbal responses. The discourse analysis discussed here shows the IRF structure of the teaching exchange in the extract.

5.1.2 Teachers' responding moves

Furthermore, the data in Table 1 reveal teachers' 'responding moves' to students' initiating moves. The results indicated that teachers responded to students' initiations in a more encouraging/positive manner (0.70%) than negative (0.12%) and temporisation (0.08%). Tsui (1995) described temporisation as a dispreferred response that is marked by linguistic features like silence, delay or acting evasively. Extract 2, turns 3, 5, 7, and 9 exemplify teachers' responding moves as shown below.

Extract 2

Turn	Speaker	Exchange	Move	Act	Feature/Function
1	T	Submit your work now	I	Directive	Instructing
2	SS	(Some students) Mummy please, mummy, please.	I	Requestive	Requesting
3	T	If I write the correction and you write, I will know	R	Responding	Negative
4	SS	Ah... mummy, please	I	Requestive	Requesting
5	T	If you are waiting for me You are waiting for me before you underline, and you come here to submit. I will give you zero. Whether you get it or not, I will give you zero. Can we?	R-I	Responding Checking	Negative Checking
6	SS	Yes// No// mummy, please.	I	Requestive	Requesting
7	T	Can we?	R	Responding	Temporisation
8	SS	Yes// No// mummy, please.	I	Requestive	Requesting
9	T	Okay, if you are still writing, put your hands up.	R	Responding	Positive

In extract 2, the teacher gave a directive for which the students were unprepared. Students' requestive act was to enable them to complete their classwork. The teacher's response was not favourable to the students' requests; hence, it is classified as negative in turns 3 and 5. In turns 7, the teacher's response is classified as temporisation as she seemed to ignore students' requestive acts in turns 2, 4, and 6. In turn 9, the teacher's response was positive because she finally considered the students' requests. Extract 2 shows the IR pattern in the discourse, indicating student initiation and teacher response.

5.1.3 Teachers' feedback moves

The data in Table 1 above indicate that teachers' 'feedback' moves consisted of evaluative, interactive, corrective, and descriptive acts. The findings indicate that teachers' evaluative acts followed three patterns – praising students for providing the correct answers, repeating, and accepting students' responses. According to the results presented in Table 1 above, the subcategory 'repeating' (6.6%) was teachers' most common evaluative move to demonstrate that students' answers were correct. Other subcategories were 'accepting' (4.3%) and 'praising' (3.4%). Extract 1 above (turns 7, 11, 13, 15) exemplifies teachers' 'evaluative' feedback.

According to the data in Table 1, the instances of interactive feedback were very low (2.2%) compared to other types of feedback. The teachers' choice, in this case, could have been because of time constraints, students' disposition to verbal participation in the classes and teachers' plans to cover the syllabus within the specified time. Turns 11 to 13 in Extract 1 show the teacher's interactive feedback. In the example, the teacher used 'directive: focusing' move and 'focus: eliciting' to prompt students to give better and complete answers after the first attempt. The teacher also gave metalinguistic explanations to correct students' wrong or inappropriate answers and gave them time to answer the questions as appropriately as possible.

According to the data in Table 1, 'corrective' feedback moves include the use of 'direct correction', 'recasting', and 'metalinguistic explanation'. The table shows that 'corrective' feedback occurred 122 times, which is 5.5% of the total teachers' utterances. Extract 1 above shows the instances of teachers' use of 'direct correction', 'recasting' and 'metalinguistic explanation' in turns 21, 27, 29, and 33.

According to the data in Table 1, descriptive feedback seems to be the least often used of the teachers' utterances. Extract 3 below shows an example of teachers' use of descriptive feedback.

Extract 3

Turn	Speaker	Exchange	Move	Act	Feature/ Function
1	T	What are the things you can do to come up with a debate writing that is devoid of mistakes and errors? Yes. Who can answer that question?	I	Elicitation	Repeating elicit
2	SS	(Silent)			
3	T	Yes, who can try? Yes, Fatia.	I	Elicitation Directive	Repeating elicit Nominating
4	Fatia	Using figurative expressions, proverbs and... and idioms.	R	Reply	Positive
5	T	Yes. Is that all?	F-I	Descriptive	Acknowledging Refocusing
6	Fatia	No	R	Reply	Acknowledging
7	T	Yes.	I	Directive	Instructing
8	Fatia	Then, giving detailed explanation of the points which, you have to put in the essay	R	Reply	Positive
9	T	Yes. Thank you. God bless you.	F	Evaluative	Accepting Praising

In Extract 3 above, the teacher acknowledged the student's answer but led him to refocus (turn 5) to help the student understand what to do to get the right response to the question in turn 1.

5.2 Student talk

Table 2 Students' Linguistic Moves

		No of occurrence	Percentage
Initiating moves	Elicitation	13	2.0
	Requestive	5	0.7
	Informative	5	0.7
Responding moves	Individual	252	38.9
	Choral	143	22.1
	Silence	112	17.3
	Self-repair	1	0.15
	Peer-repair	3	0.5
Feedback moves	Endorsement/ thanking	0	0.0
	Acknowledging (choral)	116	17.9
Total		648	100.0

Table 2 reveals that a substantial part of the students' talk was apportioned to responding moves (61.7%). The table shows the disparity between individual (38.9%) and choral (22.1%) responses. The categories under 'initiating' moves took only a small portion of students' interaction with the teachers, which include 'eliciting clarification' (2.0%), 'requesting for permission' (0.7%), 'informing' (0.7%), indicating that the students hardly made initiations in the interaction. Furthermore, the category 'acknowledging' under 'feedback' moves, which were mainly students' choral replies of yes or no to teachers' 'checking questions', scored (17.9%). The results indicated that choral responses were common. The instances of 'silence' accounted for 17.3% of the students' talk, suggesting either a lack of understanding, apprehension or a need for clarification regarding the teachers' questions or instructions. Moreover, the results in the table indicate that the students did not use 'endorsement/thanking'. The 'responding moves' of 'self-' and 'peer-repair' scored lower, with only one of the students using the 'responding move' of 'self-repair', while there were three instances of 'peer-repair'.

5.3 Students' verbal participation

Table 3 Observation of students' verbal participation

Items	Likert scale, total number and percentages						
	Very often	Often	Some-times	Seldom	Mean	SD	Decision
Students are apprehensive when asked to speak English	2 (10) %	5 (25) %	8 (40) %	5 (25) %	2.20	0.73	Sometimes
Students do not want to talk in the classroom	2 (10) %	7 (35) %	5 (25) %	6 (30) %	2.25	0.70	Often
Students prefer to use one or two words to respond to every question asked by the teacher	3 (15) %	14 (70) %	3 (15) %	0 (0) %	3.00	0.53	Very often
Students spoken English is error-free	0 (0) %	2 (10) %	16 (80) %	2 (10) %	2.00	0.80	Sometimes
Students are allowed to ask questions freely	0 (0) %	4 (20) %	9 (45) %	7 (35) %	1.85	0.88	Sometimes
Teacher engages students in conversation to promote spoken English in the classroom	1 (5) %	4 (20) %	8 (40) %	7 (35) %	1.95	0.86	Sometimes
Grand mean = 2.46 SD= 0.67							

Table 3 reveals that out of 6 items on observed students' verbal participation, 4 have higher percentages for sometimes and seldom when combined, ranging between 90.0% and 55.0%. The items are as follows: students are apprehensive when asked to speak English; students spoken English is error-free; students are allowed to ask questions freely, and the teacher engages students in conversation to promote spoken English in the classroom. The table also reveals that students preferred to use one or two words to respond to every question asked by the teacher very often (85.0%). In the classes observed, some students chose to be silent instead of giving wrong answers or speaking incorrect English. It was also observed that some of them who talked were answering teachers' questions in chorus. The results in Table 3 above reveal that the grand mean of 2.46 is less than the mean benchmark of 2.5, showing that students' participation was below the expected level.

5.4 Teachers' verbal practices to engage students in verbal participation

Table 4: Teachers' verbal practices to engage students in verbal participation

Interview questions	Teachers' responses
How did you organise your talk and plan to engage your students to participate in the classroom?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From previous knowledge to teaching the topic of the day and then evaluation. 2. Following the lesson objectives step by step using questions, instructions and explanations and allowing students to ask questions.
What discursive moves made students express themselves effectively?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questions 2. Repetitions 3. Praising.
What strategies did you employ to facilitate students' verbal participation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allowing students to volunteer to answer questions. 2. Nominating students when there was no volunteer to answer questions. 3. Grouping students for reading comprehension activities.
When do you usually place your students into small groups for class discussion?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The curriculum dictates determine when to group students for class discussion. 2. When topics like comprehension and summary are to be taught. 3. During practice in debates and quizzes.

The interview questions in Table 4 above sought to understand the teachers' verbal practices to engage students' participation. When the teachers were asked: "How did you organise your talk and plan to engage your students to participate in the classroom?" their responses showed that most of them started their lessons from the previous

knowledge to introduce the new topics. Some narrated that they used questions, instructions, and explanations and allowed students to ask questions while teaching.

Teacher 11 said:

I started by introducing the new topic to the students, asking them questions from the previous lesson to lead us into the new topic. I explained the topic, asked questions or allowed them to ask their own questions to check whether they understood the topic as I taught them.

All other responses agreed with the above except the opinions of Teachers 13 and 15, which were slightly different.

Teacher 15 said:

I don't believe in giving all information to students. I usually give them questions to elicit information from them in relation to the topic. Like today, during the lesson, I allowed them to supply most of the examples of the verbs and the verb phrases we used in the sentences I wrote on the chalkboard for them.

Teachers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 19 shared the same view with teacher 11.

Moreover, on the question of the kind of discursive moves the respondents thought made some of the students express their opinion well, they mentioned the use of questions, repetitions and praising when a student answered questions correctly.

Teacher 18 responded thus:

The topic we discussed today was the diphthong, which involves the pronunciation of sounds. I asked the students questions relating to the topic, but most of the time, I took them through repeating the sounds.

All other responses were related to that of Teacher 18.

The third interview question aimed to get teachers' instructional strategies that most effectively encouraged students' participation and talk in the observed classes. All the responses indicated that they used nomination or allowed students to volunteer to respond to questions.

Teacher 13 said:

I believe it is important to ensure that the questions are directed to each student at a time, and not only to a few of them have been identified as outspoken.

Teacher 20 said,

I tried to allow the students to volunteer to answer my questions, but if there was no volunteer, I chose any of them. Sometimes I deliberately nominate to ensure some silent ones among them also participate.

Some teachers mentioned that they usually use classroom activities such as class works, oral engagement, and textbooks to promote students' active involvement in most lessons. Most teachers' responses indicated the trend to be that they rarely engaged the students in classroom discussion; when they did, it was mainly during comprehension lessons whereby the students would be paired to use the few available textbooks, read aloud, and answer comprehension questions. Some respondents claimed that they could not engage the students in classroom discussions because of the limited time allocated for such activities.

Teacher 3 admitted thus:

We use classroom activities like asking the students to read comprehension passages and explain or summarise to the whole class in succession. Grouping students for classroom discussion is also one of the activities we do, but the time fixed for lesson periods is always too short to take all we plan to do during such activities.

Teacher 13 seemed to agree with teacher 3 above by saying:

Classroom activities like reading comprehension are involved. I asked some students to read the passage, explain and define some vocabulary items we were to consider in the lesson.

When asked about when the teachers usually place their students in small groups for the purpose of class discussion, their responses varied. One of the teachers explained that it depends on what the curriculum dictates, while many said they grouped the students mostly during comprehension lessons to make every student participate and have access to the available textbooks. Some of the teachers' answers indicated that students were placed in groups during school practice in debates and quizzes, which were done sparsely in a term.

6. Discussion

The results of this study in response to research question 1 indicated that the teachers' linguistic choices in classroom interaction were characterised by directing, informing, eliciting and giving feedback. Student talk tended mainly towards responding to teachers' eliciting and directing. The classroom interactions followed the IRF sequence with fewer student-initiated talks than teacher-initiated ones, as revealed in Extract 1. The classroom observations and discourse analysis revealed that the teaching exchanges followed the IRF structure in whole-class sessions in all the twenty (20) studied classes. The results indicate that teachers' linguistic choices significantly impact the structure of classroom interactions. The findings of the study corroborate those of Hardman et al. (2008) and Evnitskaya (2018). According to these studies, continuous use of the IRF greatly structures pedagogical discourse based on what teachers say and do. The results of the study reveal that teachers' linguistic input in initiation and feedback was higher than that of the students. In corroboration with Rido & Sari (2018) and Some-Guiebre (2020), this study found that through teachers' linguistic choices, it becomes apparent that teachers controlled the classroom discussions, deciding the structure of the interactions, as well as when students should talk, and the extent of students' talk.

The data analysis to answer research question 2 focused on how effective teachers' linguistic choices were on students' verbal participation. The findings showed that teachers' and students' linguistic choices significantly produced low students' verbal participation. Teacher talk was characterised by instructing, explaining, questioning, nominating and giving feedback. As such, students listened most of the time and gave brief answers to questions or instructions when asked to do so. When asked about the processes and practices they followed to enhance students' verbal participation, the teachers mentioned that they followed the stated objectives of the lesson, used explanations with illustrations, questions, praising (a feature of follow-up or feedback move), repetition, and nomination, all of which were observed in the lessons. The findings align with the observations made by Hardman et al. (2008) that traditional teaching methods in Nigeria typically involve whole-class instruction, characterised by teacher-led explanations, question-and-answer sessions, and subsequent classwork to assess students' understanding. The current study observed that such classroom practices seemed to have resulted in students' low cognitive engagement and high levels of passivity.

Based on teachers' statements in the interviews, relatively little consideration was given by teachers to the value of oral proficiency in language teaching and learning.

Amuseghan (2007), in response to a comparable finding, highlighted that the causes of such teachers' practices were excessive pressure on teachers to cover the syllabus and devoting a significant length of time to practising examination-based instructional tasks. The circumstances resulting from the teacher activities mentioned above are detrimental to encouraging students' verbal participation in classroom interaction, which could lead to a drop in language skills development.

From the teachers' narratives, it was noted that questioning is one of the techniques the teachers employed to elicit students' verbal participation, as was also revealed in the observation. However, the issue lies in the type of questions teachers ask, how they are asked, the questions' purpose and the level of encouragement teachers provide their students to answer them (Ononye, 2015; Deji-Afuye & Obadare, 2019). The observation revealed that teachers' questions were mostly display/closed questions used to assess or check students' understanding of the subject matter rather than creating opportunities for extensive discussions. Referential questions, requiring deeper thinking and more extended responses, were rare. Hence, students' responses were in one or two words and, at most, in a few simple sentences. This finding corroborates the findings of Domogen (2021), which indicates that most display questions teachers ask are at the level of recalling previous knowledge. The current study corroborates Domogen's assertion that classroom discourse becomes less extensive due to the frequent use of display questions. This is because students' responses are mainly used to evaluate their knowledge retention rather than fostering more extensive and meaningful conversations.

Teachers' feedback has been found to be very important to students' participation in classroom interaction. The findings of this study revealed that teachers' feedback moves were mostly evaluative and corrective, implying that teachers assessed students' responses both explicitly and implicitly. In the observed classrooms, the teachers' evaluative feedback comprised 'accepting', 'repeating' and 'praising'. Hardman (2019) notes that teachers' feedback/evaluation move is reactive in nature; hence, it can shorten classroom interaction and limit students' opportunities to talk. Interactive and descriptive feedback techniques, which could have enhanced students' effective verbal participation, as identified by Chafi and Elkhousai (2016), were infrequently used in the classes observed in this study.

The findings also revealed that students' linguistic choices during initiation, responding and feedback significantly affected their verbal participation. The observations show that students' responses were mainly characterised by brief answers to teachers'

questions expressed in one or two words or short sentences, individual and choral responses and silence. The analysis presented in Table 3 reveals that the grand mean of 2.46 falls below the mean benchmark of 2.5, indicating that students' verbal participation levels were lower than desired. The results in Table 2 show that the percentage of students' choral responses was higher than the percentage of individual responses both in response to teachers' questions and checking combined. From teachers' perceptions, this study found that the factors accounting for students' low classroom participation include anxiety, lack of confidence, disinterest caused by the lack of learning materials, an uncondusive learning environment, and lack of basic skills for self-expression in the language of instruction. This observation corroborates the remark of Hardman et al. (2008) regarding students' low levels of cognitive engagement and passivity in classroom interaction. Consequently, Zhou and Landa (2019) suggest translanguaging in ESL classrooms to promote active participation in classroom discourse. They explain that when students are allowed to communicate in a language they are comfortable with, they become enthused or feel free to participate in class discussions.

7. Conclusion

The study found that using the IRF pattern in the whole-class sessions enabled the teachers to monitor the interactional activities, ensure orderly classroom talk, and facilitate teachers' decisions. However, it reduced students' interactional engagement and only allowed them to contribute minimally to the interaction. Due to teachers taking most of the initiation moves, the extent of their explanations and the use of closed-ended questions, students were not adequately involved to thrash out their ideas and, more generally, engage in verbal activities to develop their language skills. The study revealed that teachers' pedagogical ideas affected their choices about the kinds of discourse styles and teaching techniques they employed in their classes. This is in line with Amuseghan (2007) and Hardman et al. (2008), who assert that the pedagogical ideas of ESL teachers in the Nigerian context are contained in how they are trained and the belief that teachers are expected to teach. The study indicates that some teachers' pedagogical beliefs are influenced by their focus on curriculum coverage, examination-oriented instruction, and less emphasis on students' oral language proficiency.

As revealed in the study, having students' full verbal participation in classroom interactions requires changes in discourse practices. The study indicates that teachers' discourse behaviour will improve by asking more referential questions to promote students' thoughtful responses and expressiveness. In addition, this study suggests that

through more efficient teacher training programs, pedagogical improvement may be accomplished within the teachers' experiences and the environment in which they work.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the government make available necessary teaching and learning materials, language laboratories, libraries, electricity, textbooks, and multimedia gadgets to teachers so they can excel in their teaching. It is also required that the Ministry of Education organises a purposeful and productive collaboration between the teachers, the head of schools and other educational professionals such as school inspectors and advisors to examine classroom practices, availability of adequate learning materials and how conducive the environment is. If this is done from time to time, it will allow appropriate adjustment as needed.

The study demonstrates that students' verbal participation was below the benchmark mean, which could indicate prioritising content delivery over teacher-student interactive language use. Thus, it is further recommended that the government consider placing less emphasis on examination-based curriculum, which demands that teachers teach students to pass examinations, heavily rely on textbooks, and speculate the particular syllabus to be covered by teachers at a specific period. Undoubtedly, the aspects that specify the linguistic and communicative language teaching in the curriculum are projected to promote communicative competence. These aspects should be categorically expressed and purposefully followed to enhance verbally engaging classroom interaction between teachers and learners.

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