

**CLASSROOM TALK IN EFL CLASSES IN THE  
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study sought to examine the patterns of talk and other patterns that emerged in the classroom talk and aimed to investigate the level of questions, the syntactic structure of questions, and the initiated repairs used by teachers in classroom interaction. There were 10 English teachers from 5 colleges who were randomly selected as participants. The instrument used in the study was the recorded teaching observation of the teachers. The verbatim transcriptions of the video materials were used as the main instrument in examining the teachers' patterns of talk; their syntactic and cognitive level of questions; and the other-initiation repairs used by them to resolve the issues and to sustain the smooth flow of conversation. The study made use of the qualitative and quantitative approaches and revealed that teacher Initiation-Response-Feedback pattern was mostly used by teachers which signify the restricted adherence of teachers in a one cycle turn of asking questions by the teacher, providing response by student and giving feedback by the teacher. Whereas on the emerging patterns of talk, Initiation-Response pattern emerged which was predominantly used by teachers. This shows that there are deviations on the IRF pattern of eliciting verbal responses from the learners. Teachers used low level type of questions both in the cognitive level and syntactic structure of questions posted by teachers. This means that questions used were not intended to develop students' creativity. Most teachers preferred to use the hearing repair which is the least sensitive approach in resolving issues. This provided the teachers more opportunities to address the problems in the course of the conversation. The teachers have to accept the responsibility of providing solutions to the identified problems instead of delegating the responsibility to the students to solve the problem.*

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**Keywords:** *Classroom talk, EFL classes, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

## INTRODUCTION

Talk serves as a channel to encompass widely the interrelated realms of interaction in the classroom. The initiation of talk between interactants starts if there are questions raised either by the teacher or the student. The pattern of talk varies depending on how the interactants start, sustain, or end a cycle of conversation.

In the EFL classroom discussion, the life of interaction depends on the quality of questions posted by the teacher and how the interactants address the intervening problems in the course of the conversation. These factors serve as initiators to facilitate the effectiveness of talk between the instructor and the students. This means that the quality of communication really matters to facilitate the smooth flow of transaction and negotiation of meaning in order to produce an effective result of interaction. According to Tofade, et al. (2013), embracing the ideal practices in teaching and using questions in teaching are among the most powerful tools and are sufficiently important in the development of excellent standards of instruction.

Thorns (2008); Hellermann (2005); Cazden (2001); Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, (1995), emphasized that in the construction of social meaning in a classroom the context of teacher and students' talk is affected by a variety of factors. These might be the ones which would hold, produce and sustain the discourse. In this sense, it is important to see the different factors that may affect the flow of interaction between the teacher and students in order to uncover these aspects. It is significant to investigate the different patterns of talk and other emerging patterns, the cognitive and syntactic structures of questioning, and the initiated repairs used by teachers. These variables can be used as instruments to improve classroom teaching and learning.

To reveal the different patterns of talk in the classroom, the Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model was used. The Bloom's Taxonomy of learning is also utilized to identify the teacher's syntactic structure of questioning and the cognitive level of questioning. Further, the other-initiation repair is employed to identify the teachers' preference of addressing and repairing identified problems in classroom interactions.

In a socio-cultural perspective, the introduction of English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was introduced as early as nineteen twenties. According to Alshahrani (2016) and Al-Shabbi (1989), the English language was formally introduced to Saudi Arabian education by the United Kingdom and the United States of America with the purpose of speeding up its integration with other countries. This started when the General Directorate of Education was established in 1924. Additionally, Alshahrani (2016) cited the work of Baghdadi (1985), that English as a school subject was first introduced in Saudi elementary schools in 1924. However, it was believed by Al-Seghyer (2014) that English started to be taught in KSA only after five years, when the Directorate of Education was established in 1923. It was further cited by claim of Al-Johani (2009), that English was introduced in 1930s in the KSA after the discovery of oil. This was only then used in business transactions until such time that it was introduced into the syllabus for schools in 1950s. As explained by Mahboob and Elyas (2014); Al-Ghamdi and Al-Saadat (2002), the teaching of English was first introduced in school in KSA when the Scholarship Preparation School (SPS) was established in 1936 in Makkah. The purpose was to respond to the needs of the Saudis who travel and study in the Western countries where English is used as the medium of communication. This marks the “beginning of modern day high school education in the KSA”. However, the school was only limited to Saudis who were going abroad.

Alshahrani (2016) and Mahboob and Elyas (2014) cited that Al-Braik (2007) made clear that as early as 1978, the economic development of KSA was mostly contributed by foreign companies and most of the workers in almost all establishments like restaurants, hospitals, and shopping malls were expatriates. This resulted to the perceived value of English in the Saudi Arabian educational system which was one of its main objectives in the teaching of EFL in the country. It was necessary then to teach students to communicate satisfactorily in English in order to communicate with the expatriates in the kingdom. Also, it became more significant with the establishment of the Arabian American Oil Company in 1933. The company dominated the Saudi economy and influenced the framing of EFL instruction in the country. Its great influence was due to the fact that Saudis must learn the English language as a priority to communicate with foreign workers and managers. In addition, Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) believed that

English is one of the major subjects in the system of education in Saudi Arabia. This was due to its significance as a language which is used in business and commerce, science and technology and others. These were only some of the substantial reasons why the study of English grew rapidly in the kingdom.

The researcher had observed teachers during classroom visits in five colleges of Al Ghad International Colleges for Applied Medical Sciences. The classroom scenarios were mostly teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. The students had limited time to be communicative and develop other skills that they are expected to gain. In a microscopic view, it was noticed that the utterances used by teachers played an important role in encouraging students to speak their ideas. It is believed that the use of effective and quality questions encourage the learners to express and elaborate their ideas which could result in a productive classroom talk. To shed light on the aforementioned observation and to provide research based solutions, the researcher became interested to determine the reasons behind the limited opportunities for student talk and the barriers that hinder the students to become more communicative during class discussions.

The purpose of this study is to generally examine the pattern of talk and other patterns that emerge in the classroom talk; examine the syntactic and cognitive types of questioning; and investigate the initiated repairs used by teachers in classroom interaction.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study generally aimed to describe and analyze the classroom talk of teacher - student in an EFL classroom interaction in five branches of Al-Ghad International Colleges for Applied Medical Sciences.

Specifically, it answers the following questions:

1. How frequent do the teachers use the patterns of talk as defined by Sinclair?
2. What emerging patterns of talk are observed in the classroom?
3. What levels of questions are asked during classroom interactions?
4. What are the types of syntactic structures in the questions asked

during the classroom interaction?

5. What repair actions do teachers use in classroom interactions?
6. What teacher-enhancement training program could be proposed to improve classroom interactions?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The descriptive multi-method was employed using the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The use of qualitative data gathering method allows greater spontaneity and employed a flexible, emergent but systematic process. Moreover, the textual data which was obtained were from the video materials. This means that the description and interpretation using the method produced findings that solved interaction problems and led to the establishment or development of new concepts in organizing classroom interaction after thorough analysis of the data.

In addition, to quantify and synthesize the data gathered the quantitative method was also used.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study were ten (10) male English teachers in the following colleges: Riyadh College, Dammam College, Burraidah College, Jeddah College, and Abha College. The participants were randomly selected per branch regardless of the instructors' experience in teaching, educational attainment, nationality, and the students' IQ level.

Table 1.

*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Participants in terms of Nationality*

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Egyptian	3	30.00
Filipino	1	10.00
Jordanian	5	50.00
Pakistani	1	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of participants in terms of nationality. Most of the participants were Jordanian with 5 (50%) participants. This is followed by the Egyptian with 3 (30%) of the total number of participants. Since Jordan and Egypt are geographically proximal with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the recruitment process is faster and easier compared to the Philippines and Pakistan. Besides, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia used the same Arabic language in daily conversation and in teaching some academic courses.

### **Instrumentation**

The research instrument which was used in gathering the data was the recorded teaching observation of the teachers in five colleges. The video materials were transcribed by English teachers who have experienced and background in transcribing videos. The transcripts were then validated by their heads for their accuracy.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The researcher undertook the following procedure in the conduct of the study:

1. The researcher sought permission from the Director of English Language Center for the use of the collected video materials.
2. After the approval was secured, the researcher sought consent from the randomly selected teachers for their videos to be used.

3. Then, the researcher hired three transcriptionists who have backgrounds in transcribing recorded discourse from the video file into a printed text for analysis and interpretation. The transcriptionists had the following assigned task. Two transcriptionists were tasked to transcribe the videos and the other one was assigned as the head of the team to validate the accuracy of the transcribed materials. To further validate the content of the transcribed text, the three transcriptionists exchanged video materials to validate the content of the scripts.
4. The patterns of utterances were identified per one complete cycle of talk. The cognitive levels of questioning and the syntactic structures of questioning were taken per question.
5. The researcher tabulated and made the appropriate treatment of data. The analysis and interpretation of the treated data commenced.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized statistical methods to analyze and interpret the data obtained through the use of frequency and percentage distribution to describe the participants' discourse structure in terms of pattern of talk, emerging patterns of talk, syntactic structure of questioning, cognitive level of questioning, and initiated repair actions used by teachers.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **On the pattern of talk**

Majority of the pattern of talk used by teachers on free exchanges were 60.61% IRF (Teacher Elicit) followed by 20.03% IRF (Check).

### **On the emerging patterns of talk**

There were 57 identified emerging patterns. The dominant pattern in the classroom interaction was IR (Initiation-Response) in a T-Elicit exchange which is 63.34% of the 461 total number of exchanges, followed by 7.38% IR (Initiation-Response) pattern in Repeat exchange.

### **On the cognitive levels of questions**

Most cognitive questions posted were 77.05% remembering questions, followed by 12.40% understanding questions; 6.35% evaluating questions; 2.83% analyzing questions; and 1.37% applying questions.

### **On the types of syntactic structure of questions**

Majority of the syntactic structure of questions used by teachers were 55.57% display questions; followed by 26.37% convergent questions; 16.80% referential questions; and 1.27% divergent questions.

### **On other-initiation repairs**

The teachers preferred to use hearing repair with 51.97% compared to understanding repair with 43.31% and acceptability repair with 4.72%.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the summary of findings, the following conclusions were derived:

Majority of the teachers in the five colleges used IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) pattern of exchanges in eliciting verbal response from the students during classroom interaction. While on the emerging patterns, IR (Initiation-Response) is the most used pattern of talk in eliciting students' responses.

The teachers' cognitive level and syntactic structure of questioning mostly focused on the use of low level questions which do not require critical thinking and inhibit the learners' creativity to practice and use the English language.

The teachers preferred to use hearing repair in addressing problems in classroom interaction that provided more opportunity for the teachers to address the problem in a least sensitive approach.



However, the teacher has to accept the responsibility to provide solutions to the identified problems instead of delegating them to the students.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the aforementioned summary of findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are formulated:

For the Teachers to:

1. Initiate questions that facilitate open discussion and not merely eliciting single utterance from the students.
2. Design a planned negotiated interaction activity that necessitates higher order thinking skills.
3. Employ giving follow up questions to help and guide students particularly coping learners to produce the target language.
4. Plan and tailor activities that require higher order thinking skills but suited to students' level of learning in order to maximize classroom interaction.
5. Allow the learners to discover ways on repairing the problems encountered in classroom conversation.

For the English Language Center to:

6. Conduct seminar workshops to English teachers on teaching strategies and methodologies in the art of questioning, creating an interactive classroom, and repairing problems in classroom conversation.
7. Conduct similar studies with more participants in order to validate the results of the present study.

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