

## **Learner-Centred Discourse in an English Language and Literature Classroom in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The paper investigated the differences between teacher-centered (TC) and learner-centered (LC) methods and the views of the students about the same in an academic context in Pakistan. Keeping in view the nature of research, mainly a qualitative research method was used. Data was collected by audio-recording two classroom discourses on LC and TC modes respectively. Further a questionnaire with a focus on open-ended questions was also served to the participants of the study. Data was analyzed informed by Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study showed certain conversational and ideological differences between the two types of discourses: TC and LC. The students preferred LC method. The study will help encouraging other academicians to carry out further research on different teaching methodologies. Moreover, it will contribute to the field of Applied Linguistics, specifically language teaching.

**Keywords:** learner-centered, teacher-centered, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, applied linguistics.

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## Introduction

In academia, classroom holds a prominent position because interaction amongst students and teacher is largely initiated in this premises. It is the dire need of the classroom to develop harmonized and mutually embedded interaction amongst teacher and students. The purpose is, to strengthen learning and teaching process, commence to employ in a classroom. Hence, classroom discourses are given importance to carry out the learning and teaching process effectively. Classroom discourse can be defined as the interactions between all the participants that occur throughout a lesson (Walle et al., 2014). Gonzalez (2008) shows the importance of the classroom discourses, according to him, classroom discourse is an integral part of teaching and learning process, consists of interactions between teacher-student and student-student. Classroom interaction is the accumulation of healthy exchange of similar and opposing viewpoint which is fruitful for all members of the classroom.

During the last decade, classroom discourses have been widely studied mainly from two perspectives: Teacher centered and learner centered perspectives. Teacher centered approach is the traditional and old one of the two, wherein the teacher occupies a very prominent position and standing tall in the entire process of learning and teaching. In this method teachers are considered to be information providers and evaluators. The aim of the teacher is to make the student pass the test or score well than to improve or polish his conduct or personality (Zohrabi, et al., 2012). Besides, in teacher centered the focus mainly remained on text book. The teacher very rarely encourages the students to go learning other materials at their own (Acat & Donmez, 2009). The teacher centered approach is a one man show. The teacher controls all learning experiences of the students. In addition to certain disadvantages, the teacher centered approach also carries some advantages such as, it suits well large classes where it is difficult to approach each student individually, consumes limited times, easy to manage the students, materials can be well prepared and so on (Nagaraju, 2013).

On the other hand, the learner centered approach is oriented towards students. Here the students are engaged in different learning activities. In other words, learning activities are done through students. The students are given importance. Here the teacher plays the role of facilitators (Zohrabi, et al., 2012). In learner centered method, the students have a kind of autonomy. They can be alone, in pairs and groups. It makes the students bold, less anxious, cooperative, sharing ideas, contribute to personality development and so on (Nagaraju, Madhavaiah & Peter, 2013). Keeping in view the potential and utility of the learner-centered approach on the

one hand and its orientation towards the students and their active engagement in the learning activities on the other, most of the studies recommend the use of learner-centered approach.

So far, the range of classroom research and teaching methods in applied linguistics are concerned; it has been extended and widened by the new advancements in the field of discourse analysis. These new developments have impacted the teaching methodologies particularly add to the surge of learner-centred pedagogic practices in language teaching. An overview of research studies on methodologies shows that classroom discourse has been mostly investigated either from the perspective of a teacher-centred method or learner-centred method, but the comparative study of these methods has been slightly overlooked. In addition, a very limited number of studies have approached the exploration of method coupled with the perceptions of the participants.

In the present context (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan), the aforesaid area has not been investigated by the researchers. In this way, the current study will not only address the gap exists in Pakistani context (aiming at the differences between teaching methods (LC and TC) and the perceptions of the students regarding the same in Pakistan in an academic setting) but also contribute to applied linguistics in general by combining comparative studies of teaching methodologies with participants' perceptions. The paper will help to encourage researchers in field of literature and linguistics to espouse effective classroom discourses, specifically in the developing world, to further research the area for implementation.

## **Literature Review**

Jamshidnejad (2011) and Pica (1987) highlighted that classroom discourse has been approached from different theoretical perspectives, i.e. psychological, sociological, conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis. Lantof (2006) and Kramsch (1984) emphasized that language learning and socio-cultural context are tied together, and one could not make sense without the other. In other words, for understanding a particular phenomenon in a specific context, it is also important that one should have knowledge of the broader socio-cultural context of the teaching event. Therefore, the range of classroom discourse needed to be extended beyond the instructional dimension to the social context. Consequently, in order to adopt the learning environment, adjustments and readjustments should be made accordingly.

The teachers and learners are required to be introduced and familiarized with the instructional strategies, problem-solving skills and

communicative uses and strategies, which will mitigate the danger of communication breakdowns. Some of the research studies while investigating classroom discourse turned to critical discourse analysis and tried to approach the relation between teacher and student from the perspective of power paradigm (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2000; Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2012; Idress & Mustaffa, 2006; Thornton & Reynolds, 2006). Likewise, some of the research studies have approached CD from the perspective of conversation analysis and tried to explore the meaning of the interactions from the immediate context of the situations (Kok, 2008; Kruningen, 2012; Lee, 2007; Lehtimaja, 2011).

Jones (2007) elaborated that in most of the developed and under developing countries of the world the teacher-centred method is vogue. In the teacher-centred method, the floor is dominated by the teachers, whilst the students remain passive agents. Nevertheless, TC has been replaced by a learner-centred method which could be linked to Constructivism, Progressivism, Perennialism and Essentialism according (Massouleh, 2012, p.51).

Izumi and Coburn (2001) explained that John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Vygotsky, and Kilpatrick strongly influenced the LC method. They elaborated that in this context Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy in California conducted an important project on TC and LC approaches which aimed at finding out the effectivity of both TC and LC methodologies. Interestingly, the project showed the utility of the TC method. Likewise, Zohrabi (2012) and Rao (2002), probed students' perceptions on LC and TC by means of communicative and non-communicative means in EFL context, which showed the students' negative reflection on LC approach. Similarly, Morel (2007) explored the perceptions of students and teachers in the interactive lecture session in a classroom in the EFL context. The research recommended that all stakeholders including students, teachers, policy makers and parents should also be involved in the decision-making process regarding changing the teaching method. In the same way, Wohlfarth, et al (2008) conducted a very relevant study where the perceptions of the participants of the students regarding LC were probed, which showed that students tended towards LC approach.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan teaching methodologies have not been studied properly. There did exist some studies which tried to explore teaching methodologies, but these studies are limited in range and scope. For instance, Khalid and Azeem (2012) investigated students' performance on constructivist and additional models in Lahore, which showed differences in the students' performances on both the models. However, the study just reported the differences but did not go beyond

that. Rawat and Thomas (2012) explored the issues and problems hampering the process of the introduction of LC method in Lahore and highlighted that certain constraints such as class size and so on did not LC method to be implemented in the classrooms.

The short review shows that most of the research studies have focused on the performance of either LC or TC method or they have approached classroom discourse from a specific methodological dimension or issue but the comparative studies of LC and TC method appear to be neglected. The current research is different from other studies as her classroom discourse has not only been investigated in a different setting and analyzed differently but here in addition to the comparative study of methods, the perception of students regarding these methods have also been explored.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions of the study addressed two questions as given below:

- i. What are the differences between LC and TC methods in English language teaching context in a university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?
- ii. What are the perceptions of students regarding TC and LC methods in English language teaching context in a university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?

### **Methodology**

The present study aimed to highlight the differences that exist in learner-centered and teacher-centered (TC) methods and to find out the students' perception regarding the same in a university in Pakistan. Keeping in view the nature of the research which requires exploration of the differences in teaching methods and perceptions of students a qualitative approach was opted. For this purpose, a graduate class consists 16 students, department of English, Abdul wail Khan University Mardan (AWKUM), Pakistan was selected, purposively. To control the variables such as student, teacher and subject one and the same class was having the same teacher and students teaching the same subject was observed in both modes: TC and LC methods. As in Pakistan mostly, the teachers used TC method in the classroom, therefore it was audio-taped as routine classroom practice. Though, for the LC method, the teacher was aware of the basic principles of learner-centred approach which facilitated the process of administering the class on the same line. After recording the discourses data were transcribed. Further, a short feedback session after the teaching

component was organized, which was followed by a questionnaire served to the students. Then an observational analysis informed by conversation analysis (Sack, Emanuel, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) were conducted.

Since the study was dealing with human population, therefore, due consent of the participants was taken into consideration and then as per their desire, their identity was not disclosed. For this purpose, they were given codes such as “T” for teacher and codes, such as (S1, S2, S3...) for students.

### **Research Instruments**

Keeping in view the nature of the study, two classroom discourses were audio-taped one each on LC and TC method respectively which were followed by a feedback session with a duration of one hour. Further, the responses of the students on LC and TC methods were elicited through a questionnaire comprising six questions (three open-ended and three close questions).

### **Sample of the Study**

A graduate class comprising sixteen students was purposively selected. The reasons for selecting a graduate level of students were the nature of study on the one hand and ready availability on the other. The students were selected from both genders; four males and twelve females, ageing from 20 to 25 years.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collected through audio taping classroom discourses was transcribed. Then the data was analyzed and informed by Conversation Analysis (Sack et al., 1974), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). To confirm the responses of the students further, a feedback session followed by a questionnaire was also arranged. The findings and discussion were organized on the sequence of the research questions. First of all, data is analyzed informed by observations and the critiques of conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis. This is followed by the analysis and discussion of the feedback session and questionnaire.

### **Conversation Analysis**

The Conversation Analysis of the data revealed specific linguistic features, which were typical of both the discourses, LC and TC discourses.

LC was found interactive showed features such as frequent change of turn, adjacency pairs and active involvement of students. Here the meanings of the discourse developed from the sequence and pattern of the interactions. While in the case of TC, the discourse mainly focused on the content and pattern of narration. The teacher directly started the discourse; gradually unfolded the plot. The discourse is monologue in nature, where the students were found passive recipients, who sporadically interrupted the learning process with information seeking questions. The topic of learning developed in a way which gives a feeling that all these happenings due to a prior assumed plan. The same patterns were shown by other studies as well (Morell 2007).

The very first lines of the discourses outlined the differences between TC and LC. The teacher-centred (TC) discourse begins formally with adjacency pairs:

1. *T dear students (.) AssalamAlaikum ((may you be safe and sound))=*
2. *LL = walakumAssalam ((you be safe and sound))*

while learner-centered (LC) discourse begins informally:

1. *T Dear students (.) today we are going to discuss (.) as:: we discussed in the previous*

These formal and informal beginnings are the harbinger of the differences to be seen onwards. Subsequently, the teacher-centred discourse mostly remained one man show stayed undisturbed till the points when the students intervene with information questions in lines 85, 119, 132, 136, 138, 149, 152, 155, 161. The teacher sticks to the narrative technique and tied the students to the text by rhetorical techniques as *then what happened*. The learner-centred discourse moves the other way round. The pattern of the interactions remained interactive which keeps the floor changing among the participants. The discourse outlines the specific sequence of turn-taking, managed initially through adjacency pairs, question/answer pattern continued from line 9-19. Adjacency pairs are a pair of sentences/clauses which are dependent on each other for completion of meaning, including greeting/greeting, question/answer, invitation/acceptance etc (McCarthy, 1994, p.119). Then, the turn-taking pattern takes a shift and for presentations, the students are divided into a small group.

1. *T ok students thank you (.) now its time to come you to come here one by one person from each group and say something about the*

In the end, the teacher turns to the management of class/ for discipline maintenance in the class by asking the students one by one for feedback. The pattern of sequence mostly in line with the principle that the dominant speaker allocates turn to other participants (Sacks, et al. 1974, p.700).

Besides, the frequent use of adjacency pairs in the question/answer format remains one of the hallmarks of the entire interactions.

T .....*what do you think are the most important female character*  
 SSElizabeth::*the ((all the students combined loudly))*

The adjacency pairs and its frequency serving as a collaborative enterprise contribute to the development of the topic of discussion. On the contrary, TC discourse is more like a narrative. Discourse markers like *ok* and *right* features prominently in LC and serve as transition markers moving from one point to another. Likewise, evaluative markers such as *good, very good and no* also make its way in the LC discourse.

In a nutshell, both the discourses are organised on different discursive patterns: interactive and narrative, typically associated with TC and LC methods. The closing of both the discourses remained the same. The main differences in the two types of discourses emerge in the introductory and instructive parts. TC starts in a formal way where the teacher stands tall and develops on narrative pattern while the LC begins in an informal manner and then develops on the interactive pattern.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

The Critical Discourse Analysis in the current case is informed by Fairclough (1995) three-dimensional model (which emphasizes: Discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice for the critical discourse analysis of transcriptions) explains the current analysis of discourse (pp.132-33). The study of discourse as text, particularly its relationship with other text and organization are covered by the first two dimensions while text and social ideologies are dealt by the later (p.132). According to Thornton and Reynolds (2006) organization of the TC discourse (in which past tense is used by the teacher) is a monologue in nature and narrative in the pattern, which are held together by rhetorical questions such as *what happened then*, and evaluative markers including *because* and *so* etc. Unlike TC, the LC discourse mostly remains in the present tense. The content information is the focal point in the discourse. The students are encouraged, and learning is considered a joint venture. These are the hallmarks of the majority of the TC (pp.275-276). Besides, LC is interactive. Ideas are generated through devices such as adjacencies pairs (line 13-21) and discussions that serve as building blocks of a joint enterprise and develop an overall topic of the discourse. Cohesion is formed and provided by the teacher in TC whilst it is formed by the students in LC (p.275).

Besides, the seven interventions by students mostly the teacher out rightly dominates the discussion, and the gap and distance between the teacher and students are clearly visible which are indicative of power and

authority embedded in the teacher and student relation. The status and authority of the teacher are shown by the fact that the students remained passive recipients while the teacher dominates the floor. On the contrary in LC mode, the students being actively engaged in discussion, activities and opinions to dominate the floor. In LC mode, learning is collaborative and joint venture wherein each student has the right to contribute his/her shares to the learning enterprise. The topic control in both the modes also reveals the distribution of power and authority among the participants. In TC, the teacher is in control of the whole process, while in LC the teacher plays the role of moderator. Notwithstanding, despite all its significance, the LC parallels the TC in that the discussion is controlled by the teacher, the topic is chosen by the teacher, the discussion is opened, closed and interfered by the teacher, and finally, the explanations are provided by the teacher at his own will. For example, in the discussion session, the teacher interjects and says:

*T.ok, Students. Thank you (.) now it's time to come; you two come here!*

Izumi (2001) explained that power is embedded even in the organization of both the classrooms. He elaborated that the dominance of the teacher in TC is shown by the fact that the teacher is standing tall and students are at the well of the teacher remain seated as passive recipients. In this way, the teacher has unchallenging authority in the TC. Zohrabi, et al. (2012) also confirms the authoritative status of the teacher in TC. On the contrary in LC, the situation gives a look wherein everybody can share their views and is a kind of mutual endeavour (p.35).

Finally, according to Zohrabi et al. (2012), the teacher's act of presenting a summary of the main points after each presentation by the students also gives a feeling of the element of dominance and authority. At the end of the presentation session, the summarization of the main points by the teachers indicates implicitly the teacher's dominance of the discourse (p.19).

## **Feedback and Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was designed to substantiate the understanding of the students about TC and LC. The questionnaire was mainly comprised of six questions. There is an overlap in the responses of questionnaires and feedback; therefore, they are combined in the results and discussion section. All the students preferred LC for teaching. The responses of the students are quoted and discussed below.

## Results and Discussion

The feedback and findings on questionnaires reveal that the students have shown a strong preference for the learner-centred method. They have given solid reasons for their choice. The fact that the LCD was favoured by the students according to the findings is that because the claims made in favour of LCD are considered to be the major tenants of both modes of discourses. For instance, they prefer learner-centred discourse on the ground because here the teacher is a facilitator and the students are working on their own.

*L 5. Learner-centered is flexible for students to learn. The feelings of students are kept in view. The teacher serves as a facilitator. Teacher-centered is a conservative and conventional way.*

The students/ teacher relation has remained a hot issue of discussion in the academia. This issue has far-reaching and important implications. By preferring LC, the status quo, the traditional distribution of power and authorization in the realm of classroom discourse have been gainsaid by the participants. The issues of power and authority in the classroom in the context of teacher and student have been discussed by different studies (Izumi, 2001 & Wohlfarth, et al., 2008). Likewise, the students highlight that they prefer LC because; it focuses on fluency and communication, while TC emphasizes accuracy.

*.S1 Sir, also, when you are focusing on that method if you are focusing on that method like teacher-centred method ( ) like old grammarians (.) then fluency will never come > then you will be accurate but you will not be fluent*

Other studies have also endorsed the above mentioned distinction (e.g. Jones 2007). Pertaining to the purpose and function of language teaching, there have been debates about the issue of fluency and accuracy between LC and TC, having the supporters from both the poles, which ultimately results in post-method of language teaching, wherein parts and bits are taken from both LC and TC.

In addition, the students elaborate that LC makes learning easy, interesting, funny, relax, help to open the mind, making one confident, critical and bold while TC is conservative and boring.

*S1. LCM is interesting, easy, and flexible, students have liberty, the teacher is a facilitator, save time, feelings of students are considered, makes students creative, bold, open mind, develop communication skills, creativity.*

Boldness, creativity, criticality are something which could be linked to the socio-psychological aspect of the learners. In a way, here the focus is on the individual and cognitive development of the students and this is something which is the focal point of any educational programme in general. Special mentioned be made of critical thinking which is

considered to be one of the hallmarks of LC endorsed various studies (Wohlfarth, et al. 2008; Zohrabi, et al. 2012).

Finally, some of the students argue that LC is practical, which engages students in different activities, discussions and the students feel comfortable and easy to understand. On the contrary in TC, the teacher dominates the scene, which categorically taking us to the format and manner of teaching.

*S3 it can be learned easily through practical (.) and through discussion.*

The differences between LC and TC are also referred to and highlighted by many studies across the globe. In short, the desire for learning, power-sharing, self-expression, intellectual and personality development and suitable environment, are the main features of LC, shown by the current study, as well as highlighted by other research studies (e.g. Zohrabi, et al. 2012; Morrel, 2007 and Wohlfarth, et al. 2008 etc.)

## **Conclusion**

This study was carried out for two purposes: to find out the differences between TC and LC methodology and students' perception about these two methods. For the purpose of this study, two lectures, one on TC and the other on LC, were audio-taped and then transcribed. The data was then analysed through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The data reveals some significant differences between LC and TC. For instance, it reveals that the TC method is designed on a narrative pattern which is abounded with rhetorical questions. Moreover, the TC method is dominated by the teacher and the students fully remained passive agents. Contrarily, the LC method is highly interactive marked by the Discourse features, such as Adjacency Pairs, Discourse Markers, and Turn-taking. The data – based on the experiment – reveals that the LC method is fruitfully collaborative and the students remain active agents. Much participation in the class means more learning. In the LC method, the students feel friendly with the environment and the teacher. Even students with less confidence feel at ease and try to participate.

So, in the light of the above discussion, we come to the conclusion that from Socio-Cultural, functional, Socio-psychological and methodological perspectives, the LC method, compared to the TC method, is more productive, goal-oriented and instrumental to achieve the desired goals.

As the study was just limited in range to a university, therefore its range needs to be extended to other universities. In addition a thorough qualitative investigation regarding the application of LC at university level which could comprise all the stakeholders including teachers, students, parents and academic administrators are required which need to be conducted. Besides, the perceptions of teachers and students at college and school levels also need to be investigated.

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