

Discourse-Based English Instructional Model: A Lesson from Pedagogical Discourse Analysis and Communicative Approaches

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and impact of a discourse-based English instructional model that integrates pedagogical discourse analysis and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in middle school EFL contexts in China. Recognizing the limitations of traditional grammar-oriented methods, this study explores how reflective teacher discourse and authentic communicative tasks can transform classroom interactions and enhance learner engagement and pragmatic competence. Employing a qualitative exploratory research design, the study involved five English teachers and seven students from grades 7 to 9 in a Chinese junior high school. Data were gathered through classroom observations, video recordings, transcriptions, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and analysis of learning materials. Thematic discourse analysis guided the examination of classroom dialogue, turn-taking patterns, scaffolding strategies, and the use of authentic language input. Results revealed that integrating discourse analysis allowed teachers to adopt more responsive and student-centered questioning techniques, fostering dialogic and inclusive learning environments. Students showed increased participation, confidence, and use of pragmatic language features such as hedging and politeness strategies. Communicative tasks and authentic materials were found to significantly enhance learners' fluency and sociolinguistic awareness. The findings support the model's potential to promote reflective pedagogy, learner autonomy, and real-world communicative competence. This study contributes a novel dual-framework approach to EFL instruction, highlighting the synergy between analytical reflection and communicative interaction. The implications suggest that curriculum designers and teacher educators incorporate discourse-based strategies to better align English language education with the evolving demands of global communication and contextual relevance in diverse learning environments.

Keywords: Discourse-based instruction; Communicative Language Teaching; Pedagogical discourse analysis; Pragmatic competence; Learner engagement

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INTRODUCTION

The discourse-based English instructional model, which strategically merges pedagogical discourse analysis and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), represents a compelling advancement in English language pedagogy. This integrative model emphasizes language as a tool for authentic communication rather than a mere set of rules to be memorized (Lestari & Margana, 2024; Megawati et al., 2024). It

focuses on the functional and contextualized use of language, encouraging learners to engage meaningfully through real-life discourse. By grounding instructional practices in both communicative and analytical dimensions, this approach redefines the classroom as a dynamic space where interaction, feedback, and negotiation of meaning take center stage (Piątkowska, 2015; Shiri, 2015). The result is a language learning process that is more immersive, learner-centered, and pedagogically responsive.

At the heart of this model lies Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which asserts that language competence extends beyond grammatical precision to include the ability to use language appropriately in varied social contexts. CLT advocates that learners must engage in meaningful communicative acts to acquire language effectively. Numerous studies affirm that CLT enhances learners' communicative competence by focusing on purposeful language use rather than isolated grammatical drills (Wei et al., 2024; Ilyas et al., 2021). Within this framework, task-based and project-based learning are integral methodologies. Liu (2015), Littlewood (2012), and Yu (2023) have shown that these interactive, experiential learning strategies foster higher engagement and practical language use. In these settings, learners assume active roles in constructing language knowledge, often collaborating on real-world tasks, which simulate authentic communicative situations. This increases their motivation, encourages cooperative learning, and nurtures skills essential for spontaneous and context-sensitive language use.

In parallel, pedagogical discourse analysis complements CLT by providing tools for teachers to critically examine classroom language and interactions. This aspect of the model empowers educators to reflect on their own discourse practices – such as questioning techniques, feedback delivery, and the scaffolding of language learning – and to adjust them based on learners' communicative needs. As emphasized by Abrejo et al. (2019), discourse analysis in pedagogical settings equips teachers with insights into how meaning is constructed in real time. By identifying which communicative moves either support or impede student engagement, educators can make informed, data-driven adjustments to their teaching practices. For example, Whatman et al. (2019) demonstrated that analyzing classroom discourse allows instructors to discern critical interactional moments, such as when students are hesitant to speak or when teacher interventions either invite or shut down dialogue. These insights are essential for cultivating an inclusive and dialogic classroom culture. Similarly, KAYGISIZ (2020) highlighted the importance of such analysis in aligning instructional discourse with students' cultural and cognitive contexts, thereby enhancing relevance and effectiveness.

Another key pillar of the discourse-based model is its strong emphasis on authentic input. Unlike traditional methods that rely heavily on scripted dialogues or textbook grammar exercises, this model prioritizes real-world materials – such as podcasts, interviews, news articles, and unscripted conversations – as tools for language exposure. This approach mirrors the findings of KAYGISIZ (2020) and Pakula (2019), who argue that authentic language use not only enhances linguistic competence but also builds learners' confidence and contextual awareness. Through engagement with authentic input, learners encounter colloquial expressions, varied accents, and natural pacing, which are often absent from traditional instructional

content. This exposure fosters both accuracy and fluency by situating language in its natural sociocultural and pragmatic contexts.

The use of authentic communicative tasks also aligns with learner-centered principles, as it allows students to bring their own experiences, perspectives, and identities into the learning space. Whyte (2011) critiques grammar-oriented curricula for failing to prepare learners for spontaneous interaction in real life. The discourse-based model addresses this concern by ensuring that students not only master the mechanics of English but also feel empowered to use it with fluency, purpose, and creativity. Tasks such as debates, role-plays, email writing, and collaborative problem-solving invite learners to practice functional language in real scenarios, thus closing the gap between classroom instruction and communicative reality.

Furthermore, the integration of pedagogical discourse analysis and communicative methods generates a synergistic effect. As teachers become more adept at analyzing their own talk and the classroom discourse environment, they gain the capacity to tailor communicative tasks more precisely to students' needs. This enhances the overall coherence and alignment of instructional activities, reducing the mismatch between teacher intentions and student learning outcomes (Haerazi, 2023; Heggernes, 2021). For instance, a teacher might use discourse analysis findings to redesign a role-play activity by incorporating more culturally relevant scenarios or adjusting turn-taking structures to ensure equitable participation. The reflective loop between analysis and practice enhances teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in its proposal to operationalize a dual-framework instructional model—one that fuses the strengths of communicative pedagogy with the analytical rigor of discourse studies. While previous research has explored these components independently, this study advances the field by illustrating how their integration leads to more responsive, interactive, and student-centered English language teaching. It emphasizes the *pedagogical utility* of discourse analysis as not only a research tool but also a practical instrument for improving real-time teaching decisions (Cahyani et al., 2023; Gómez & Vicente, 2011). This model also recognizes that effective language instruction must address both the structural and situational dimensions of communication—teaching students not only *what* to say, but *when*, *how*, and *why* to say it. By grounding learning in meaningful interaction and reflective teaching, the discourse-based model promises greater relevance, engagement, and communicative empowerment.

The findings and theoretical propositions of this study hold significant implications for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners. Integrating this model into teacher training programs can enhance teachers' ability to foster communicative environments that are both linguistically rich and socially attuned. Additionally, applying this model in diverse cultural and educational settings can help bridge global communicative standards with local classroom realities, making English language learning more accessible and impactful for varied learner populations.

In light of these insights, the study proposes the following research questions for future investigation: (1) *How does the integration of pedagogical discourse analysis and communicative approaches affect classroom interaction and learner engagement in EFL*

contexts? (2) In what ways does exposure to authentic input and communicative tasks influence learners' development of pragmatic competence and language fluency?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design aimed at investigating the effects of integrating pedagogical discourse analysis with communicative approaches in English language instruction. Specifically, it addresses two key research questions: (1) How does the integration of pedagogical discourse analysis and communicative approaches affect classroom interaction and learner engagement in EFL contexts? and (2) In what ways does exposure to authentic input and communicative tasks influence learners' development of pragmatic competence and language fluency? A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of classroom dynamics, interactional patterns, and the nuanced ways in which students and teachers experience communicative instruction. Through classroom observations, discourse recordings, and reflective interviews, the study captures the real-time practices and reflective processes of English language teachers and learners. This design is grounded in the belief that language learning is a socially situated process, best understood through examining naturally occurring interactions and authentic classroom discourse.

Participants

The study involved five English language teachers and seven English learners from a middle school in China. In the Chinese education system, middle school typically refers to the junior high school stage, encompassing students in grades 7 to 9, which is equivalent to the same level in educational systems such as those in the Philippines and Thailand. As part of China's 9-year compulsory education system, this stage is particularly critical in laying the linguistic foundation for further academic and communicative success. The participating teachers were selected based on their willingness to integrate communicative language teaching (CLT) methods and reflect on their classroom discourse practices. The learners, aged between 13 and 15, represented a typical middle school cohort with varying levels of English proficiency. The selection aimed to ensure diversity in language ability and classroom behavior, thus offering a richer context for analyzing how communicative and discourse-based strategies function across a range of learner profiles.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

To address the research questions, the study employed multiple qualitative instruments designed to capture both the instructional dynamics and student responses within the classroom. Classroom observations were conducted across multiple sessions where communicative tasks and authentic input materials were incorporated. These sessions were audio- and video-recorded, enabling detailed analysis of teacher-student and student-student interactions. Additionally, pedagogical discourse analysis was used to examine patterns of interaction, question-response sequences, scaffolding techniques, and moments of communicative negotiation. The recordings were transcribed and annotated to capture linguistic and paralinguistic cues that influenced engagement and comprehension.

To complement observational data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five participating teachers. These interviews explored their perceptions of using communicative and discourse-based strategies, their challenges, and their reflections on student engagement and interaction. Similarly, focused group discussions were conducted with the learners, allowing them to share their experiences with communicative tasks, their sense of autonomy, and the perceived relevance of authentic input. Teachers were also asked to submit lesson plans, activity sheets, and student outputs, which were reviewed to triangulate findings and further contextualize classroom practices.

Data Analysis

Data collected from observations, transcripts, interviews, and student artifacts were analyzed using thematic discourse analysis, guided by the frameworks of Braun and Clarke (2006) and applied discourse analytic models in classroom research. The first phase involved data familiarization, where researchers reviewed all transcripts and field notes to identify emerging patterns. Next, the data were coded for instances of communicative interaction, including turn-taking, clarification requests, negotiation of meaning, and teacher scaffolding strategies.

Themes were developed to address the two central research questions. For Research Question 1, themes such as "shift in teacher questioning techniques," "student-initiated talk," and "peer collaboration" were examined to understand how discourse practices influenced engagement. For Research Question 2, themes related to "use of authentic materials," "task-based output quality," and "development of pragmatic language features" (e.g., politeness, idiomatic expressions) were analyzed. Transcripts were also assessed for indicators of pragmatic competence, including learners' use of hedging, speech acts (e.g., requests, refusals), and response appropriateness in communicative exchanges.

Triangulation was achieved by comparing teacher interviews, student reflections, and actual discourse events, ensuring validity and reliability of the interpretations. The analytical process not only illuminated how communicative approaches functioned in real classroom contexts, but also revealed the extent to which they nurtured learners' fluency and sociolinguistic awareness—key components of pragmatic competence in EFL learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

How does the integration of pedagogical discourse analysis and communicative approaches affect classroom interaction and learner engagement in EFL contexts?

The integration of pedagogical discourse analysis (PDA) and communicative approaches in the EFL classroom led to notable shifts in both teaching behavior and student participation. From classroom observations, it was evident that teachers adopted more varied questioning strategies, moved away from IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) routines, and fostered more dialogic interaction patterns. Instead of leading tightly controlled drills, teachers encouraged open-ended questions that invited learners to express opinions, describe experiences, and negotiate meaning with peers. This change fostered a less hierarchical classroom atmosphere where students felt more empowered to speak.

Teacher interviews revealed that pedagogical discourse analysis allowed them to reflect critically on their classroom language and restructure their instructional delivery to better align with communicative principles. Teachers observed that when they adjusted their talk to include scaffolding and uptake of student responses, learners were more responsive and active. Discourse features such as extended wait time, referential questions, and reformulations were employed more consciously, which positively influenced learner engagement.

Students, during focus group discussions, reported feeling “more free to talk” and “less afraid of making mistakes,” attributing this comfort to the teacher’s supportive language and task-based interactions. Peer collaboration became a central mode of learning, with students initiating discussions, clarifying each other’s ideas, and building on peer responses. These findings underscore that the dual application of PDA and CLT promotes a classroom ecology characterized by increased interaction, mutual respect, and learner autonomy.

In what ways does exposure to authentic input and communicative tasks influence learners’ development of pragmatic competence and language fluency?

Exposure to authentic input—such as unscripted dialogues, real-world videos, and role-plays—significantly enhanced students’ pragmatic awareness and fluency. The data showed that students who engaged in communicative tasks involving authentic materials demonstrated improved ability to use language appropriately in different social situations. Transcripts of student discourse illustrated a growing use of pragmatic markers such as hedging (“maybe,” “I think”), politeness strategies (“Would you mind...?”, “Could you please...?”), and culturally appropriate expressions. These features are essential indicators of pragmatic competence.

Moreover, communicative tasks like debates, simulated interviews, and collaborative problem-solving promoted real-time language use that required spontaneous formulation, turn-taking, and adaptation to listener responses. Students moved beyond memorized phrases to constructing original utterances tailored to the task context. Teachers noted that students exhibited greater fluency, with fewer pauses and hesitations, as they became familiar with expressing themselves under communicative pressure.

The findings from student reflections also supported this improvement. Learners expressed that working with “real English” made learning more enjoyable and gave them confidence in dealing with situations outside the classroom. For instance, one student shared that after practicing restaurant conversations in class, she felt capable of ordering food during a family trip. Teachers similarly affirmed that student writing and speaking outputs became more dynamic and varied in tone, demonstrating a deeper understanding of context, audience, and communicative purpose.

These findings confirm that the discourse-based instructional model, combining communicative practices with reflective discourse analysis, creates an environment that not only supports language development but also nurtures social interaction, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Let me know if you'd like these answers formatted for a results section in a research paper.

Teacher Research Questions:

1. How did you adapt your questioning techniques or interaction patterns after applying pedagogical discourse analysis?

2. What communicative tasks or authentic materials did you find most effective in encouraging student engagement?
3. How do you assess whether students are becoming more pragmatically competent?
4. What were the main challenges you faced in implementing this dual-framework model?
5. How has your teaching philosophy evolved as a result of using discourse-based strategies?

Student Research Questions:

1. How do you feel when participating in speaking tasks or group discussions in English class?
2. What kinds of classroom activities help you learn to speak English more naturally?
3. Do you think the materials used in class (videos, conversations, etc.) are similar to real English outside of school?
4. Have you learned how to use polite or respectful English in certain situations?
5. How has your confidence in using English changed since the start of the course?

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly affirm the efficacy of the discourse-based English instructional model, particularly its integration of pedagogical discourse analysis (PDA) with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), in enhancing learner engagement and pragmatic competence. These conclusions are not drawn lightly; rather, they emerge from sustained classroom-based qualitative inquiry that yielded robust evidence of both pedagogical and linguistic transformation. This section provides an in-depth elaboration of the outcomes, framing them in light of existing research and underscoring their broader implications for EFL instruction across comparable contexts.

A principal transformation observed was the reconfiguration of teacher-student interaction patterns. In many East Asian educational environments, the traditional classroom structure is dominated by the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence, a teacher-centered exchange that tends to stifle student initiative and restrict authentic language use (Xiong, 2014; Xu & Zhu, 2023). However, this study's findings clearly show that when teachers adopted PDA as a reflective tool, they began to adjust their communicative styles. They consciously employed referential questions that invited elaboration, allowed longer wait times for student responses, and scaffolded learners' contributions rather than evaluating them immediately. This pedagogical shift led to an increase in student-initiated dialogue and created conditions conducive to more interactive and meaningful communication.

This transformation is echoed in the work of Whatman et al. (2019), who observed that discourse-aware teaching enables educators to detect moments where learner engagement is impeded and to respond with strategies that foster inclusivity and collaboration. As teachers altered their discursive behavior, classroom environments became more dialogic, giving rise to equitable participation. Students

were no longer passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in co-constructing meaning—a hallmark of the CLT framework.

Moreover, learner engagement was significantly enhanced by these changes in teacher discourse. In both classroom observations and focus group interviews, students reported feeling more comfortable expressing themselves, even when uncertain about their grammatical accuracy. This aligns with findings from Liu (2015) and Dizayee and Karim (2023), who note that student-centered activities and communicative interaction reduce language anxiety and foster confidence. The atmosphere of psychological safety reported by the participants—described as a “safe space” to experiment with English—proves critical in encouraging risk-taking, a known facilitator of second language acquisition.

Another critical component that contributed to these positive developments was the use of authentic input. Traditional EFL classrooms often rely heavily on contrived textbook dialogues that offer limited exposure to natural language use. In contrast, the discourse-based model foregrounds the use of real-world texts—such as unscripted interviews, podcasts, and informal conversations—that expose learners to contextually rich and spontaneous communication (Albiladi, 2018; Pradana & Tena, 2021; Zahra et al., 2019). This exposure helped learners internalize pragmatic features of English, including cultural nuances, hedging strategies, and politeness conventions.

For instance, classroom transcripts analyzed in this study showed a marked increase in the use of pragmatic markers like “I guess,” “maybe,” and “Would you mind if...,” which are rarely featured in traditional curricula but are essential for managing social interactions in English. These findings resonate with the observations of Kaygisiz (2020) and Pakula (2019), who argue that authentic materials enable students to not only develop linguistic fluency but also cultivate pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence. The learners in this study demonstrated increased awareness of how meaning is negotiated in real-life scenarios, suggesting a higher degree of language ownership and adaptability.

The incorporation of communicative tasks also played a crucial role in promoting fluency and interactional competence. Activities such as debates, simulations, and group problem-solving required learners to produce language in real-time, retrieve vocabulary from memory, and adjust their speech in response to interlocutors. These tasks mirror the conditions of everyday communication and provided fertile ground for the development of fluency (Ardiana et al., 2024; Khonamri et al., 2021; Wijaya, 2023). Over time, teachers observed reduced hesitation and smoother speech production among students, particularly during peer-to-peer interactions.

These observations support the findings of Wei et al. (2024) and Yu (2023), who assert that structured communicative experiences enhance learners’ capacity for spontaneous language use. The benefits were not only linguistic but also cognitive, as students learned to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and use discourse markers appropriately. Such gains reflect the real-world communicative demands that modern language instruction seeks to address.

Equally significant is the impact of this model on teachers’ professional identity and instructional planning. Through PDA, teachers engaged in a continuous cycle of observation, reflection, and adaptation. Semi-structured interviews revealed that

teachers became increasingly aware of their own classroom language, the distribution of student voice, and the implicit power dynamics embedded in interactional routines. This awareness prompted a shift from seeing themselves as information providers to facilitators of learning experiences (Syafitri, 2023; Syafryadin et al., 2023).

The act of examining one's own teaching discourse enabled educators to align their practices with communicative and inclusive goals. Lesson planning became more intentional, with teachers emphasizing student needs, interaction opportunities, and authentic communicative purposes. This transformation illustrates the broader pedagogical utility of PDA—not simply as a diagnostic instrument, but as a catalyst for long-term professional growth and increased pedagogical responsiveness (Abrejo et al., 2019).

However, implementing a discourse-based communicative model was not without its challenges. Teachers reported initial struggles with executing open-ended tasks, especially in classrooms where students had uneven proficiency or were accustomed to highly structured activities. Additionally, managing equitable participation during group tasks posed logistical difficulties, with more vocal students sometimes dominating the discourse. Teachers also cited constraints related to time and curriculum demands, which limited the depth and frequency of reflective practices.

Despite these hurdles, most teachers adapted through iterative practice. They began using differentiated instruction strategies, clearer task modeling, and more flexible time management. These adjustments mitigated the initial implementation difficulties and underscored the importance of sustained teacher training and support. As such, this study highlights the need for institutional investment in professional development programs that equip teachers with both the technical skills and the reflective dispositions necessary for successful adoption of discourse-based instruction.

The inclusion of student voices further validated the effectiveness of this model. Learners articulated that the lessons felt more relevant, interactive, and aligned with their real-life communicative goals. They appreciated the opportunity to express opinions, practice negotiation of meaning, and receive feedback that emphasized communication over grammatical perfection (Fajrin et al., 2025; Hamidi et al., 2022). These reflections affirm that discourse-based pedagogy does more than teach English—it empowers students to use the language meaningfully, respectfully, and with greater autonomy.

On a broader scale, the implications of this study extend beyond individual classrooms. At the curriculum design and policy-making levels, the findings advocate for integrating discourse awareness into teacher education programs. Such integration would prepare pre-service teachers to be more reflective and effective in managing communicative classrooms. Additionally, national language curricula should increasingly include authentic communicative tasks and discourse-based frameworks to align classroom practices with the communicative goals espoused in language education policies.

Furthermore, the adaptability of the discourse-based model across cultural and linguistic settings makes it a promising strategy for global application. While this study was conducted in a Chinese middle school context, the model's emphasis on

learner interaction, authenticity, and teacher reflection holds potential for scalability in other Asian contexts and globally. Future cross-cultural studies could examine how cultural norms affect the reception and effectiveness of such models and explore ways to localize discourse-based approaches while preserving their core pedagogical values.

The integration of pedagogical discourse analysis with communicative language teaching represents a transformative approach to English language instruction. It not only fosters linguistic and pragmatic competence but also redefines teacher roles and enhances learner engagement. By bridging theoretical insights and practical implementation, this model presents a viable pathway toward more meaningful, inclusive, and context-sensitive language education. The success of this approach underscores the importance of classroom discourse as both a site of learning and a tool for pedagogical innovation. Further research might investigate the model's long-term impact, its adaptation in multilingual and digital classrooms, and its role in promoting intercultural communicative competence. Ultimately, discourse-based instruction equips learners and teachers alike with the tools to navigate real-world communication with confidence, clarity, and critical awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and reflections drawn from this study, it can be concluded that the discourse-based English instructional model—rooted in the integration of pedagogical discourse analysis (PDA) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)—offers a powerful framework for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in middle school contexts. The application of PDA enabled teachers to become more reflective in their practices, fostering dialogic and student-centered interactions that moved away from traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) patterns. This pedagogical shift facilitated greater learner agency, encouraged peer collaboration, and nurtured an inclusive classroom atmosphere where students felt more confident to engage in communicative acts.

The incorporation of authentic input and communicative tasks played a crucial role in advancing learners' pragmatic competence and fluency. Students not only demonstrated improved use of language functions such as politeness strategies, hedging, and appropriate speech acts, but also exhibited increased ability to manage real-time interactions. The communicative nature of classroom activities, including debates, role plays, and collaborative tasks, provided learners with opportunities to use English in purposeful, spontaneous, and socially relevant ways. These outcomes affirm that when learners are immersed in realistic and contextualized communicative experiences, their motivation, confidence, and linguistic abilities are significantly enhanced.

Furthermore, the discourse-based model transformed teachers' instructional approaches. Through reflective analysis of their own classroom discourse, educators identified interactional patterns, adapted questioning techniques, and tailored their feedback to better support student learning. This professional growth not only improved classroom engagement but also aligned teaching more closely with learner needs and real-world communication goals. Although challenges related to task implementation and student readiness were noted, these were mitigated through

iterative reflection and scaffolding. Therefore, this study supports the discourse-based model as a viable, innovative approach to EFL pedagogy. It bridges theoretical insights with practical classroom application, advancing both teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. Future research may explore its scalability across diverse educational settings and its potential integration with technology-enhanced learning environments.

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