

A Pragmatic Analysis of the Influence of Situational Context on Teacher-student Interaction in the Nigerian University Classroom

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a pragmatic analysis of teacher-student interaction to investigate how situational context shapes classroom conversation. The study uses a qualitative, discourse-analytic technique based on pragmatic theories, specifically Speech Act Theory and contextual models. Data on spontaneously occurring speech exchanges were gathered from audio-recorded and transcribed classroom sessions in the Department of Primary Education, Federal University of Education, Zaria. The analysis presents how the physical environment, participant roles, and classroom procedures impact the structure, meaning, and purpose of speech. Key findings show that immediate environmental signals including spatial deixis, instructional resources, and institutional expectations significantly influence the utterances of teachers and students. While students perceive and react within these limitations, teachers usually rely on implicit instructions and context-bound allusions. The paper concludes that situational context serves as a dynamic element that co-constructs pragmatic meaning in classroom discourse, rather than just serving as a background. These results have important ramifications for language instruction and classroom engagement, indicating that developing students' contextual awareness can improve their pragmatic competency. The paper recommends that context-aware discourse techniques should also be included in teacher preparation programs to enhance student engagement and instructional communication.

Keywords: Classroom discourse; Situational context; Pragmatics; Teacher-student interaction; Discourse analysis; Contextual meaning

Introduction

As the primary medium through which knowledge is created, negotiated, and disseminated, classroom discourse is the lifeblood of teaching and learning. It encompasses the totality of verbal and non-verbal communication between educators and learners, serving as the essential mechanism for fostering cognitive engagement, managing classroom life, and building a community of inquiry (Mercer & Howe, 2021; Walsh, 2017). The specific ways language is deployed in the classroom fundamentally shape a student's opportunity to participate, demonstrate understanding, and ultimately develop communicative competence within academic settings (Alexander, 2020). Effective classroom discourse, therefore, is not merely a matter of delivering content; it is a highly skilled activity involving deliberate linguistic choices that are acutely sensitive to the context in which communication unfolds.

Historically, the analysis of classroom talk has provided invaluable insights into pedagogical interaction. The pioneering work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) identified the ubiquitous Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) exchange, a triadic structure that revealed a great deal about the underlying power dynamics and epistemological assumptions of traditional instruction. This model, further explored by scholars like Cazden (2001), highlighted a

common pattern where the teacher initiates, a student responds, and the teacher provides feedback or evaluation. While foundational, this structuralist approach has been critiqued for its tendency to decontextualize utterances, analyzing them as abstract linguistic units rather than as actions embedded within a rich and dynamic environment (Seedhouse, 2004). Such analyses often overlook the crucial fact that the meaning and function of an utterance—for instance, whether a teacher's question is a genuine inquiry or a test of recall—is not inherent in the words alone but is profoundly shaped by the context in which it is spoken.

This recognition of context's centrality necessitates a pragmatic turn in the study of classroom discourse. Pragmatics, as a subfield of linguistics, is concerned with language in use, focusing on how context contributes to the construction of meaning (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). From a pragmatic perspective, communication is an active, interpretive process where participants draw on a wide array of contextual resources to make sense of one another's intentions. These resources extend far beyond the co-text of the conversation to include the immediate physical surroundings, the social roles and relationships of the participants, their shared history and knowledge, and the overarching institutional expectations that frame the interaction (Auer & Zaykovska, 2021; van Dijk, 2008). Elements as seemingly mundane as the seating arrangement, the presence of a digital whiteboard, the time of day, or the implicit rules of classroom conduct all contribute to the "contextual configuration" that participants use to produce and interpret utterances (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992). For example, a teacher's utterance, "It's getting a bit noisy in here," can function simultaneously as an observation, a directive to be quiet, and a face-saving alternative to a direct command, with its precise interpretation depending on the shared understanding of the classroom's institutional rules and the immediate state of activity.

Despite a growing appreciation for pragmatics in educational linguistics, particularly in areas like politeness phenomena, speech acts, and the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Curle, 2020), a significant gap persists in the literature. The specific influence of the *situational context*—comprising the tangible, physical environment and the palpable institutional framework—on the real-time unfolding of classroom discourse remains surprisingly underexplored. Much of the existing research treats context as a static backdrop rather than as a dynamic, mutually constitutive element of the interaction itself (Christie, 2002). The physical layout of the room, for instance, is not merely a container for learning but an active agent that shapes interactional possibilities. A classroom with desks in rows pragmatically invites a teacher-fronted, IRF-dominant discourse style, while a circular arrangement may afford more peer-to-peer interaction and dialogic exchanges (Königs, 2019). Similarly, institutional pressures, such as an impending high-stakes examination, can dramatically alter the nature of classroom talk, prioritizing rote recall and convergent questioning over exploratory, divergent dialogue (Pinter, 2017).

This study, therefore, is motivated by the need to bring the situational and physical environment from the periphery to the center of classroom discourse analysis. It seeks to understand how the architecture of the classroom—both physical and institutional—is actively oriented to by teachers and students as they collaboratively construct meaning. By failing to systematically investigate these contextual factors, we limit our understanding of the dynamic

interplay between language, context, and pedagogy. This research aims to address this lacuna by investigating the following questions:

- How does the situational context (including physical layout and institutional norms) influence the structural patterns and functional diversity of classroom discourse?
- In what ways do teachers and students pragmatically adapt their linguistic choices in real-time response to the opportunities and constraints of the physical and institutional classroom environment?

By adopting a pragmatic lens to examine authentic classroom interactions, this study's primary objective is to illuminate how the immediate physical, social, and institutional setting shapes teacher-student discourse. It intends to move beyond describing *what* is said to explaining *why* it is said in a particular way at a particular moment. The goal is to identify context-dependent patterns of language use and highlight the sophisticated pragmatic strategies that teachers and students employ to successfully navigate the complex communicative landscape of the classroom, thereby offering a more holistic and ecologically valid account of language as the principal tool for teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Effective communication is the cornerstone of all educational endeavors. The classroom, as a unique and dynamic environment, operates on a complex web of linguistic and social interactions that shape learning, socialization, and identity formation. This literature review explores the intricate nature of this communication by examining three interconnected domains. It begins by defining and deconstructing classroom discourse, tracing its conceptualization from traditional, teacher-centric models to more contemporary, dialogic perspectives. Subsequently, it delves into the field of pragmatics, the study of language in context, to provide the analytical tools necessary for understanding how meaning is constructed beyond literal words. This leads to a focused examination of the situational context—the immediate physical and institutional environment—and its profound influence on communication. Finally, the review synthesizes these areas by surveying studies in educational pragmatics, highlighting a significant research gap concerning the role of the physical environment, and advocating for a more holistic approach to understanding the communicative ecology of the classroom.

Classroom Discourse: From Monologue to Dialogue

Classroom discourse refers to the specialized form of language used by teachers and students within the instructional setting, encompassing everything from formal lectures to informal interactions that facilitate learning, manage behavior, and build social relationships (Cazden, 2001; Walsh, 2011). It is not merely a vehicle for transmitting information but a powerful medium through which knowledge is jointly constructed, classroom culture is established, and participant roles are negotiated.

Historically, research into classroom talk has been dominated by the identification of recurring, asymmetrical patterns of interaction. The most well-documented of these is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence, first identified by Sinclair and Coulthard

(1975). In this triadic structure, the teacher Initiates an exchange, typically with a known-answer question (e.g., "What is the capital of France?"); a student Responds with a brief answer (e.g., "Paris"); and the teacher provides Feedback or evaluation (e.g., "Correct."). This pattern, while efficient for quizzing and managing large groups, has been criticized for positioning the teacher as the primary authority and limiting students' opportunities for extended, exploratory talk (Mercer & Howe, 2019). It reinforces a transmission model of education where knowledge is a commodity passed from teacher to student, rather than something co-created.

In response to the limitations of the IRF model, a significant shift has occurred towards understanding and promoting dialogic teaching. Championed by scholars like Robin Alexander (2020), this perspective reimagines the classroom as a space for genuine dialogue, where meaning is collaboratively negotiated. This approach emphasizes talk that is collective (teachers and students address learning tasks together), reciprocal (they listen to each other and share ideas), supportive (students articulate ideas freely without fear of immediate judgment), cumulative (they build on each other's contributions), and purposeful (talk is geared towards specific educational goals). This aligns with concepts like "exploratory talk," where students reason together and critically yet constructively engage with each other's ideas, fostering deeper cognitive engagement (Mercer, 2008). The focus thus moves from the teacher's performance to the quality of the interactional space created for all participants. This dialogic turn necessitates a more sophisticated analytical framework that can account for how context influences these richer, more complex interactions, a framework provided by the field of pragmatics.

Pragmatics and Context: Unpacking Intended Meaning

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader) in a specific context (Yule, 2020). It moves beyond the literal, semantic meaning of words (the "what") to explore the intended, inferred meaning of an utterance (the "why" and "how"). A core tenet of pragmatics is that communication is a context-dependent activity, reliant on the shared assumptions, intentions, and background knowledge of its participants (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). To analyze this, pragmatics offers several key analytical concepts:

Speech Acts: First proposed by J.L. Austin (1962) and later refined by John Searle (1969), speech act theory posits that in saying something, we are also *doing* something. Utterances can be analyzed on three levels: the locutionary act (the literal words), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intention, e.g., to request, promise, or warn), and the perlocutionary act (the effect on the hearer, e.g., persuading, annoying, or inspiring them). For example, a teacher saying, "It's getting very loud in here," is performing a locutionary act, but the illocutionary force is likely a directive to be quiet, and the intended perlocutionary effect is the students quieting down.

Implicature: This concept, developed by Paul Grice (1975), explains how we understand more than what is explicitly said. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle, suggesting that participants in a conversation expect each other to be truthful (Maxim of Quality), sufficiently informative (Maxim of Quantity), relevant (Maxim of Relation), and clear (Maxim of Manner). When a speaker overtly flouts one of these maxims, the listener infers an additional, unstated meaning—an implicature. For instance, if a teacher asks, "Did you finish

the homework?" and a student replies, "I had a football match last night," the student is flouting the Maxim of Relation. The implicature is that they did not finish the homework because of the match.

Presupposition and Deixis: Presupposition refers to the background beliefs or assumptions that a speaker holds and assumes the listener shares (Yule, 2020). The utterance, "Could you open your textbook again?" presupposes that the textbook was previously open. Deixis refers to "pointing" language whose meaning is tied directly to the context of utterance. This includes personal deixis ('I', 'you'), spatial deixis ('here', 'that one'), and temporal deixis ('now', 'tomorrow'), all of which require contextual information for interpretation.

The analysis of communication is impossible without considering the context in which it is embedded. Leech (2014) usefully categorizes context into several types: linguistic (the surrounding text or co-text), epistemic (the shared knowledge between speakers), social (the roles and power dynamics), and physical (the actual setting). As Levinson (1983) famously argued, context is not an incidental factor but is fundamentally constitutive of meaning. Within this broad understanding of context, the immediate situational environment warrants special attention in the educational setting.

The Primacy of Situational Context in Communication

The situational context refers to the immediate physical, temporal, and institutional environment in which communication unfolds. It is the "where" and "when" of an interaction, encompassing the physical layout of the room, the available tools and artifacts, the time of day, and the institutional frameworks that govern the event (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Its role in shaping language use is profound yet often underestimated.

Two influential frameworks help articulate the components of the situational context. The first, from systemic functional linguistics, is Halliday and Hasan's (1985) model of context, which identifies three key variables that influence language choices:

- **Field:** What is happening? This refers to the subject matter and the nature of the social activity. The language of a science experiment differs vastly from that of a poetry analysis.
- **Tenor:** Who is taking part? This concerns the participants, their status, and their roles. Teacher-student talk is typically more formal than student-student talk during group work.
- **Mode:** What role is language playing? This involves the channel of communication (e.g., spoken, written, multimodal) and its function in the event. A formal lecture (monologic, spoken mode) serves a different purpose than a collaborative digital document (dialogic, written/multimodal mode).

The second framework is Dell Hymes' (1974) ethnographic SPEAKING model, which provides a mnemonic for the components of a communicative event:

- **Setting and Scene:** The physical time and place, and the cultural definition of the event.
- **Participants:** Speaker, listener, and any onlookers.

- Ends: The purposes, goals, and outcomes.
- Act Sequence: The form and order of the event.
- Key: The tone, manner, or spirit of the event (e.g., serious, playful).
- Instrumentalities: The channels (e.g., speech, writing) and forms of speech.
- Norms: The social rules of interaction and interpretation.
- Genre: The type of speech event or communicative act.

In classroom discourse, these situational factors are constantly at play. As Walsh (2013) notes, teachers perpetually use deixis ("Look at *this* diagram," "Put your bags *over there*") that is only comprehensible by referencing the shared physical space. Gestures, gaze, and the manipulation of physical artifacts (e.g., pointing to a whiteboard, holding up a prop) are integral to meaning-making. Furthermore, the institutional roles of "teacher" and "student" pre-configure expectations about who can ask questions, who can allocate turns, and what counts as a valid contribution (Christie, 2002). The physical layout of the classroom itself—whether desks are in rows facing the teacher or in collaborative pods—can either constrain or afford certain types of interaction, directly impacting the tenor and field of discourse (Steel, 2007). Recognizing this situational context is therefore not a supplement to linguistic analysis but a prerequisite for a rich interpretation of communicative intentions in the classroom.

Studies on Pragmatics in Education and the Path Forward

The application of pragmatic principles to educational research has yielded valuable insights. Studies have explored how speech acts function in classroom management, the provision of feedback, and the elicitation of student responses (Curle, 2020; Taguchi, 2019). For example, research has examined the pragmatic differences between a direct command ("Be quiet") and an indirect request ("Can we have it a little quieter, please?"), and how these choices affect classroom climate. Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated a strong link between students' pragmatic awareness—their ability to understand and produce contextually appropriate language—and their academic participation, politeness strategies, and comprehension of teacher intent (Nguyen, 2019).

However, despite these advances, a significant portion of research in educational pragmatics has privileged the verbal and cognitive dimensions of interaction over the material and situational ones. For example, in his influential work on classroom interactional competence, Sert (2015) provides a meticulous analysis of turn-taking and sequence organization but gives less direct attention to how the physical arrangement of the classroom or the use of technological artifacts co-constructs these interactions. Similarly, while Taguchi (2019) calls for a more holistic understanding of pragmatics in context, she acknowledges a scarcity of empirical studies that systematically investigate the direct impact of physical and institutional variables on discourse.

This represents a critical gap. The classroom is not a disembodied space; it is a physical environment where bodies, objects, and technologies are in constant interplay with language. Emerging work has begun to address this, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive, multimodal approach that integrates analysis of gaze, gesture, posture, and the use of space alongside talk (Youn & Bae, 2022). Examining how situational context—from the architecture

of the room to the design of a learning task—shapes pragmatic choices provides a more ecologically valid understanding of how meaning is negotiated in real-world educational settings.

In sum, a thorough understanding of classroom communication requires a synthesis of discourse analysis and pragmatics, grounded in a deep appreciation for the situational context. Moving beyond traditional IRF models to embrace dialogic pedagogies necessitates a focus on how meaning is co-constructed. Pragmatics provides the tools to unpack these constructions, but its application must be expanded to fully account for the tangible, physical environment in which learning takes place. By investigating the interplay between language, the physical setting, and institutional norms, future research can offer invaluable insights for both pragmatic theory and pedagogical practice, ultimately helping educators create more effective and equitable learning environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the principles of Pragmatics, with particular reliance on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and the Context Model Theory proposed by van Dijk (2008). These frameworks offer a robust foundation for examining how situational factors shape the production and interpretation of language in the classroom setting. Together, they provide insights into how utterances function as actions within specific contexts, and how meaning is co-constructed based on physical, institutional, and interactional cues.

Speech Act Theory

According to Speech Act Theory, language can be used to execute actions including asking, demanding, commanding, and promising in addition to communicating information (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Teachers and students use a variety of speech actions in classroom discourse to accomplish learning objectives and foster connection. For instance, when a teacher asks, "Can anyone tell me what this means?" it serves as both a query and an invitation for participation. Speech Act Theory is especially helpful for examining teacher-student interactions because of this duality, in which an utterance has both a literal meaning (locutionary force) and an intended consequence (illocutionary force).

This study uses Speech Act Theory to help identify and categorize pragmatic functions in classroom discourse, particularly when it comes to participant roles and contextual cues that affect language use. Additionally, the theory backs up the examination of how institutional norms such as authority structures and turn-taking regulations mediate the kind of speech acts that are anticipated or acceptable in classroom environments (Searle, 1979; Curle, 2020).

Context Model Theory

This study also incorporates van Dijk's (2008) Context Model Theory, which views context as a mental model that is dynamically created by interaction participants, to supplement Speech Act Theory. According to van Dijk, context is an active and changing construct that influences discourse by means of participants' views of social roles, locations, aims, and knowledge rather than just being a static backdrop. Because it takes into consideration both the situational and

cognitive aspects of communication, this theory is especially well-suited to classroom conversation.

In educational settings, teachers and students continuously update their contextual models based on visual, spatial, and social cues—such as classroom layout, lesson goals, and institutional roles. These models influence what is said, how it is said, and how it is interpreted. By integrating Context Model Theory, this study emphasizes that understanding classroom discourse pragmatically requires attention not just to language forms but also to the situational factors that inform meaning in real time (van Dijk, 2008; Youn&Bae, 2022).

The immediate physical, institutional, and interactional setting in which communication occurs is referred to as the situational context. This comprises institutional roles (teacher vs. student), temporal aspects (lesson timing), activity kinds (discussion, lecture), and spatial arrangements (seating, visual aids) in the classroom (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Christie, 2002). It decides whether utterances in educational interactions are suitable, relevant, and interpreted correctly. The intended or implied meaning of a statement within a particular context, which transcends the literal meaning of words, is known as pragmatic meaning (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 2020). It includes the communication objectives of the speaker, the interpretations of the listener, and the environmental elements that influence both. Speech acts, implicatures, and deictic expressions based on the common classroom setting are frequently used in classroom discourse to convey pragmatic meaning.

Discourse refers to structured language use in communication, extending beyond isolated sentences to include patterns of interaction, coherence, and meaning-making across stretches of talk (Gee, 2014; Walsh, 2011). Classroom discourse specifically involves the organized linguistic practices that constitute teaching and learning activities, governed by pedagogical goals and social norms. By adopting these theoretical lenses, this study aims to illuminate how teachers and students use language not only as a vehicle for instruction but also as a tool for navigating the complex web of contextual variables that characterize classroom life. The integration of Speech Act Theory and Context Model Theory allows for a multi-layered analysis that foregrounds both the functional and contextual dimensions of classroom communication.

Methodology

In order to investigate how situational context influences teacher-student interaction in classroom conversation, this study uses a qualitative research design and pragmatic discourse analysis. The complex, context-sensitive character of language use and meaning-making in naturalistic contexts is best captured by a qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analyzing naturally occurring language events and identifying participants' pragmatic tactics in relation to the situational aspects of the classroom setting are the goals of this interpretive and exploratory study.

This study aims to determine how utterances carry out particular functions (such as asking, commanding, or questioning) and how the immediate classroom setting shapes or limits these functions by fusing aspects of pragmatics and discourse analysis (Gee, 2014; Walsh, 2011). A purposive sampling technique was used to select classrooms that would offer rich linguistic data for analysis (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants included three English language lecturers and 50 students (aged 14–16) at a University of Education in Northern Nigeria. Consent was obtained from all participants and school authorities, ensuring compliance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Non-participant classroom observations and audio-video recordings of instructional sessions were used to gather data. Nine class sessions, each lasting 40–45 minutes, were videotaped, with three sessions for each class. Both spoken conversations and contextual indicators such as gestures, gaze, movement, spatial arrangement, and the use of visual aids were captured on video (Heath et al., 2010).

Field notes were also taken during observations to supplement the recordings and provide contextual information not always evident in the transcripts. These included notes on classroom layout, timing, teacher positioning, use of whiteboards and materials, and student seating patterns. The analytical procedure followed a two-level approach:

1. **Transcription and Initial Coding:** The recordings were literally transcribed, with particular focus on non-verbal clues and paralinguistic elements. Initially, pragmatic categories such deixis, implicature, speech acts (Searle, 1969), and politeness strategies (Yule, 2020; Leech, 2014) were used to code transcripts. The coding framework was created inductively through careful data analysis and deductively from pertinent hypotheses.
2. **Contextual and Situational Mapping:** The situational backdrop of each contact, including the physical arrangement, participant roles, time periods, and classroom procedures, was examined. Based on van Dijk's (2008) Context Model Theory, the study looked at how participants' intentions, institutional norms, and mental models of the setting affected their utterances.

Discourse excerpts were analyzed to identify how situational factors shaped pragmatic meaning. For example, the spatial positioning of the teacher when asking a question (e.g., standing at the board versus walking between desks) was evaluated for its impact on student responses. Visual data were crucial for understanding deixis, gesture-supported references, and spatially grounded speech acts.

Classroom Scenario: Teaching Contextual Meaning in English Language

Course: ENG 112 – Language and Communication in the Primary Classroom

Class: Primary Education Studies (English)

Level: NCE I

Venue: Lecture Room 5, School of Early Childhood and Primary Education

Time: 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Topic: Understanding Meaning in Context (Pragmatics in the Primary Classroom)
Scenario

Lecturer (Mr. Yusuf): (Enters the class, smiling) “Good morning, everyone.”

Students: “Good morning, sir.”

Mr. Yusuf: (Points to the window) “Please, can someone close that?”

Student 1 (Grace): (Walks to the door)

Mr. Yusuf: “Ah, no Grace, I meant the window, not the door.”

Grace: “Oh, sorry sir.” (She turns and closes the window instead.)

Mr. Yusuf: “Good. Now let’s talk. Why did Grace go to the door when I said that?”

Student 2 (Isaac): “Because you did not say what exactly you wanted to be closed, sir.”

Mr. Yusuf: “Exactly. That’s what we call context. In primary schools, when you tell students to ‘bring that book’ or ‘sit there,’ they might get confused if you don’t show clearly or describe what you mean. The words need help from the situation.”

Student 3 (Amina): “So we must say something like, ‘Close the window near the fan,’ not just ‘Close that?’”

Mr. Yusuf: “Very good, Amina! As future teachers, you must always think about how your students understand language in context — the classroom setting, where things are, and what they see and hear.”

Student 4 (Emmanuel): “So if I say, ‘Put this on the table,’ I must show what this is?”

Mr. Yusuf: “Correct! Without that, students may not understand. That is why situational context is very important in classroom communication.”

Why This Matters for Primary Education

Use of Simple Language: Teachers gave clear instructions that matched what children could see and understand.

Physical Gestures and Environment: Meaning depended on what was happening in the classroom — such as pointing, body movement, and the layout of the room.

Pragmatic Teaching: Students preparing to become teachers needed to understand that language is not just about grammar but also about how, when, and where it is used.

Learner-Centered Communication: Children in primary schools rely heavily on visual and physical cues to interpret meaning.

Pragmatic Insight

This scenario shows how misunderstandings in classroom discourse can arise when situational context is ignored. The teacher’s vague expression (“close that”) was unclear until clarified by gesture and feedback. This illustrates key pragmatic features such as:

Deixis (that, this, there)

Contextual dependence
Repair and clarification
Importance of learner perspective

Discussion of Findings

The core finding illustrated in the scenario is that ambiguous and deictic language—words like 'that', 'this', 'here', 'there'—is heavily reliant on context for successful interpretation. Without clear, shared attention on the object or location being referred to, communication can break down. This is particularly crucial in a classroom where the teacher's primary role is to convey information clearly. Mr. Yusuf's correction of his own language aligns with extensive research on the clarity of teacher instruction. Ambiguous requests force students, especially younger learners, to engage in a cognitively demanding process of guessing the teacher's intent. As Amina and Emmanuel correctly deduced, specificity is key.

Recent scholarship by researchers such as Kirschner and Hendrick (2020), in their work on cognitive load theory, emphasizes that extraneous cognitive load—mental effort not directly related to the learning task—hinders learning. When a student has to decipher a vague instruction like "bring that book," their cognitive resources are diverted from the actual learning objective. Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) argue that expert teachers reduce this extraneous load by providing explicit and unambiguous instructions, thereby freeing up students' working memory to focus on the educational content itself. The teacher's awareness of the immediate situation allows them to formulate instructions that are immediately comprehensible.

The words at the heart of the classroom confusion ('that', 'this') are known in linguistics as deictic expressions. Their meaning is entirely dependent on the context of the utterance. Stephen C. Levinson, a foundational figure in pragmatics, established that deixis is a primary way language is anchored to the real world. More recent studies in classroom discourse, such as the work by Gafarova (2020), explore how teachers use these expressions. Gafarova's research on teacher-student interaction highlights that effective teachers are masters of managing the "joint attentional frame." When a teacher says, "Look at this picture," they almost instinctively accompany the words with a gesture (pointing) or a specific description ("the picture of the water cycle on page 23"). This act of anchoring deictic terms to the physical or textual environment is not trivial; it is a key pedagogical skill that ensures the channel of communication remains clear and directed.

The ability to use language appropriately in a given social context is known as pragmatic competence. Mr. Yusuf is essentially teaching his students, who are future teachers, about the importance of their own pragmatic competence. The students' initial confusion is a result of a momentary pragmatic failure.

Eslami (2018), a prominent researcher in interlanguage pragmatics, has extensively studied the importance of pragmatic instruction for both language learners and teachers. Her findings indicate that teachers who are more pragmatically aware are better equipped to prevent communication breakdowns and can more effectively model appropriate language use. They understand that a simple request is more than its grammatical structure; it is an action performed in a specific situation. Therefore, an instruction like, "Amina, please close the window next to

the fan," is pragmatically effective because it accounts for the listener, the environment, and the specific goal of the speaker, leaving no room for misinterpretation.

Implications for Pragmatics in Education

This research adds to the increasing amount of studies that highlight the necessity of contextualizing pragmatic instruction in the classroom (Youn & Bae, 2022; Curle, 2020). Teachers must take into account the ecological aspect of communication, where meaning is constantly negotiated depending on social hierarchies, spatial arrangements, and educational objectives, rather than regarding pragmatics as a static collection of speech functions. According to the findings, one of the most important aspects of communicative skills in teacher preparation programs should be situational context awareness. Furthermore, encouraging adaptable classroom settings in terms of both physical layout and interaction might improve students' pragmatic awareness and engagement in class discussions.

Interpretation of Findings

This section analyzes the study's results using the chosen theoretical framework, which includes situational context theory, pertinent empirical research, and the Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and van Dijk's (2008) Sociocognitive Context Model. It examines the ways in which situational context shapes classroom language and talks about the ramifications for comprehending pragmatic competency in learning environments.

Situational Context and the Shaping of Discourse

The investigation demonstrates that one of the main factors influencing discourse patterns in classroom interactions is situational context. According to van Dijk (2008), participants—teachers and students—build mental models according to how they understand the current circumstances, which include role relationships, institutional norms, and physical layout. Their pragmatic judgments and language choices are influenced by these frameworks. Speech actions were given and understood differently depending on the classroom's physical layout, the teacher's movement, and the visibility of the teaching materials. For instance, the teacher's use of deictic terms (such as "this part," "here") was more pragmatically successful in a classroom with flexible spatial arrangements because of shared visual access. This supports Levinson's (1983) assertion that context anchors deixis and referential meaning. Furthermore, student contributions were more elaborate in informal spatial arrangements, echoing findings by Walsh (2011) and Curle (2020), who argue that interactional space fosters communicative competence by reducing power asymmetries and enabling learner agency.

Speech Act Theory and Institutional Role-Play

The findings support Searle's (1969) assertion that speech acts acquire meaning not just through linguistic form but through context and institutional norms. Teachers predominantly used assertives (informing), directives (instructing), and expressives (evaluating), shaped by their institutional authority. These speech acts were generally accepted as felicitous, as they matched the expected behavior of a teacher in a classroom setting (Searle, 1979).

Students, on the other hand, were limited by their position as information recipients and mainly created response or confirmatory activities. Power dynamics and institutional expectations are reflected in the asymmetry (Youn & Bae, 2022). The social limitations of pragmatic competence were reinforced when students broke these rules by interrupting or starting conversations. Their contributions were frequently disregarded or subtly discouraged.

According to van Dijk's (2008) thesis, communicative behavior is adapted to institutional settings where power is unequally distributed, and context models are socio-cognitively managed.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings corroborate the literature on classroom pragmatics, particularly studies emphasizing the ecological and interactional nature of meaning construction. For instance, Youn and Bae (2022) argue that pragmatic competence is contextually bound and emergent, shaped by social roles, interactional goals, and institutional culture. Similarly, Curle (2020) found that English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms often constrain student pragmatic engagement due to rigid institutional norms and teacher-dominated discourse structures. This study extends these findings by showing that physical and institutional contexts interact to shape not only who speaks, but how and why speech acts are performed. In contrast to traditional models that isolate pragmatic forms (e.g., request strategies, politeness formulas), this study supports a more contextualized and usage-based understanding of pragmatics, aligning with the perspectives of Kasper and Rose (2002), who advocate for examining pragmatics as a socially situated practice.

Implications for Understanding Pragmatic Competence

The results have important ramifications for how pragmatic competency is conceptualized in educational discourse. First, they propose that pragmatic competence should be understood as the capacity to modify language use in response to situational needs rather than as a fixed set of rules or speech formulae (Taguchi, 2011). This entails understanding the limitations of institutional discourse, reading the intention of the teacher, and modifying one's speech acts appropriately. Second, contextual awareness plays a crucial role. More contextually appropriate and pragmatically effective utterances were produced by students who were able to use context-sensitive cues, such as gaze, teacher movement, or prior turns. As stressed by Ishihara and Cohen (2010), teaching pragmatic competence should therefore involve developing students' capacity to recognize and react to contextual affordances. Lastly, teacher discourse shapes not only the flow of classroom interaction but also the development of student pragmatic skills. Teachers who model varied speech acts, reduce power distance, and create space for student-initiated discourse foster ecological conditions conducive to pragmatic growth (Walsh, 2011; Leech, 2014).

Conclusion

This study has used pragmatic theory, namely Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and van Dijk's (2008) Sociocognitive Model of Context, to analyze the crucial role that situational context plays in forming classroom speech. The results of a pragmatic study of teacher-student interactions highlight the fact that classroom communication is a dynamic, context-sensitive activity influenced by participants' mental models, institutional norms, and the physical environment rather than just linguistic structure or function.

Contributions to Pragmatic and Discourse Studies

The study contributes to the fields of pragmatics and classroom discourse analysis by:

- Expanding the application of pragmatic theory to real-time, institutional interactions.
- Demonstrating the value of contextualized and ecological approaches to understanding language use in classrooms.
- Bridging the gap between theoretical pragmatics and educational practice by showing how speech acts are embedded in institutional frameworks.

It reinforces van Dijk's (2008) argument that pragmatic meaning is cognitively mediated and contextually constructed, and it supports more dynamic models of discourse over form-based or purely structural approaches.

Pedagogical Implications

Several significant ramifications of the findings for language instruction and teacher preparation include:

- Training in pragmatic awareness should be a part of teacher education, with a focus on how classroom norms, institutional roles, and physical space impact speech patterns.
- The layout of classrooms should encourage student participation and communication so that students can gain pragmatic competence that is sensitive to context.
- The emphasis of language training should shift from decontextualized speech act practice to real-world, context-rich communication situations.

Classroom communication can become more equal and efficient by promoting student-initiated discussion and offering chances for practical experimentation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Even though this study has yielded insightful information, more investigation is advised to expand on our comprehension of pragmatic dynamics in educational environments:

- To monitor how students' pragmatic competence evolves over time in response to shifting classroom circumstances, future research could use a longitudinal design.
- Comparative research conducted in various cultural contexts or educational levels may show how institutional norms and expectations influence discourse in various ways.

- Research could also explore multimodal aspects of classroom pragmatics, examining how gestures, gaze, and other non-verbal cues contribute to contextually appropriate communication.

These kinds of studies will help to clarify the intricate, context-dependent character of classroom conversation and provide insights for instructional practice and theory.

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