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Fostering Cross-Cultural Competence through Discourse-Based Language Teaching: English Teachers' Narratives

Gopal Prasad Pandey¹

¹ Reader, Department of English Education, University Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1671-0501. Email: gpandeytu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the integration of discourse in English language teaching to enhance communicative competence, focusing on teachers' perspectives regarding its role, implementation strategies and related challenges. Grounded in the recognition of discourse as pivotal to fostering real-world communication skills, the study examines how teachers conceptualize and apply discourse strategies to develop students' adaptability and cross-cultural competence. Utilizing a narrative inquiry methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five experienced university teachers, offering insights into the practical and theoretical aspects of discourse-based teaching. The findings reveal that teachers employ strategies such as role-playing, video analysis and group discussions to simulate authentic communicative contexts, which promote critical thinking and pragmatic awareness among learners. However, challenges including limited resources, time constraints, and varying levels of student engagement hinder the full implementation of discourse-rich pedagogy. The study contributes significantly to the field by highlighting how discourse bridges linguistic knowledge with practical communication skills, aligning with theories of communicative competence and sociocultural learning. This study not only informs teaching practices but also provides a foundation for further studies to explore its long-term impact across diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Pragmatic Awareness, Cross-cultural Competence, English Language Teaching (ELT), Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

The role of discourse in language teaching has garnered significant attention as educators recognize its centrality in fostering communicative competence among language learners. Discourse, encompassing both the spoken and written language, addresses the dynamic nature of communication, extending beyond mere grammatical and lexical accuracy to the nuanced understanding of context, purpose, and interactional strategies. As Crystal (2003) explains, discourse refers to “a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than sentence than a sentence- but within this broad notion, several applications may be found.” (p. 141). Cook (2010) further elaborates on discourse as “stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive (p.156)” emphasizing how discourse is shaped by and responsive to its situational framework.

Trask (2004) complements this view describing discourse as “any connected piece of speech or writing. A discourse may be produced by a single speaker or writer by two or more people engaging in a conversation (or rarely) in a written exchange” (p. 78). In a similar vein, McCarthy (2010) describes discourse analysis as “the

study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used” (p. 5), highlighting the importance of examining how meaning is constructed in interaction with social and situational factors. Flowerdew (2016) further clarifies that discourse studies involve the “study of language in its contexts of use and above the level of the sentence” (p. 1). Together, these perspectives emphasize that discourse not only involves extended stretches of language but also reflects coherence and continuity in communication. In language teaching, this highlights the importance of preparing learners to interpret and produce connected language, equipping them with the skills necessary to understand and contribute to meaningful communicative exchanges that go beyond isolated sentences. Discourse analysis as elaborated by Cook (2010),

examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological context become meaningful and unified for their user. It is rapidly expanding field, providing insights into the problems and processes of language use and language learning, and is therefore of great importance to language teachers. Traditionally language teaching has concentrated on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and while these remain the basis of foreign language knowledge, discourse analysis can draw attention to the skills needed to put this knowledge into action and to achieve successful communication. (p. ix)

Schiffrin (1994) further broadens this perspective, defining discourse as “language above the sentence level” and focusing on the structures that organize language use in extended communication (p. 5). This viewpoint highlights the role of discourse in understanding cohesive structures and interpretive mechanisms beyond isolated sentences, making it essential for learners to master discourse for effective communication. Gee (1999, p. 205) defines discourse “as any instance of language-in- use or any stretch of spoken or written language” (often called a ‘text’ in the expanded sense where texts can be oral or written). Gee (1999) complements this by asserting that discourse includes ways of speaking, behaving, and valuing that are characteristic of particular social identities, which aligns language learning with the development of social identity and cultural understanding.

In addition to defining discourse, the concept of communicative competence, a fundamental outcome of discourse-oriented teaching, is foundational to understanding language acquisition. Hymes (1972) initially introduced communicative competence, describing it as the knowledge of what is grammatically possible and what is contextually appropriate. Canale and Swain (1980) extended Hymes’ concept by identifying four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, underscoring the importance of discourse in achieving communicative proficiency (p. 30). Together, these perspectives frame discourse as essential in helping learners interpret and produce language in ways that reflect authentic communication.

The integration of discourse in language teaching has gained increasing focus, as it equips students for real-world communication that extends beyond isolated sentences. Discourse analysis provides essential insights into the nature of communication, moving beyond grammar and vocabulary to encompass elements like context, speaker intent, and audience reception. Discourse analysis, which examines how language functions within social and contextual frameworks, traces back to foundational work by Harris (1952), who was among the first to highlight the importance of analyzing “language beyond the sentence.” Harris’s work introduced a shift in linguistics, prompting studies that view language as part of a broader communicative structure shaped by context. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) developed a model of discourse specifically for classroom settings, showing how discourse shapes social interactions, roles, and intentions. This model has impacted language teaching by underscoring discourse as vital for developing communicative competence.

Consequently, discourse integration in English language teaching has become essential for fostering communicative competence. Fairclough (2003) argues that discourse analysis promotes critical thinking and self-reflection, enabling students to understand how language is both shaped by and shapes social structures. This aligns with the objectives of communicative language teaching, which prioritizes the development of practical language skills that prepare students to engage in meaningful interactions in varied settings.

This research article aims to investigate teachers’ perspectives on the role of discourse in English language teaching, exploring how discourse integration is perceived as a tool for enhancing communicative competence.

Through this study, the goal is to understand how teachers view and employ discourse strategies to prepare students for effective, context-sensitive communication, illuminating the practices that lead to successful language teaching.

1.1 The Emergence of Discourse Analysis in Language Education

In recent years, discourse and discourse analysis have gained prominence in language teaching, reflecting a shift from viewing language as a set of rules to understanding it as a dynamic tool shaped by social interaction and context. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) work in classroom discourse highlighted how language choices depend on situational factors, participant roles, and communicative intent, forming the foundation for integrating discourse analysis into language education. This approach equips students with the skills to interpret and respond effectively to real-life language use. Additionally, Gee (1999) emphasized that "discourse encompasses both linguistic elements and the social practices that give them meaning, fostering sociocultural awareness and "social and cultural competence" (p. 37). By embedding discourse analysis into teaching, educators promote critical thinking and holistic communicative competence, enabling learners to adapt and navigate the linguistic and cultural demands of real-world interactions.

1.2. Teaching Discourse and Discourse Analysis in Language Education

Teaching discourse and discourse analysis in language classes enables students to comprehend and use language as a dynamic tool for communication, grounded in social and contextual relevance. Discourse analysis moves beyond the isolated study of sentences to focus on language in interaction, providing students with a holistic understanding of how language operates in real-life communication. According to Gee (1999), discourse "encompasses both the linguistic forms used and the social practices that give them meaning, thus enabling students to understand language as a means of participating in broader social and cultural contexts" (p. 34). When students learn to analyze discourse, they acquire skills in interpreting language as it is used within various social settings, preparing them to communicate appropriately and effectively in the target language. This contextualized approach to language learning aligns with communicative competence, as it trains students to navigate language functions in social situations, adapting to the nuances of communication beyond mere grammatical correctness.

Discourse analysis also encourages critical thinking and a deeper understanding of language functions, which are essential for communicative competence. van Dijk (1997) highlights that discourse is inherently tied to social power structures, cultural norms, and individual identities, underscoring that language use is shaped by and shapes these social elements (p. 5). By engaging students in discourse analysis, language teaching moves beyond vocabulary and structure, fostering what Gee (1999) calls "social and cultural competence" (p. 37). Through discourse analysis, students become adept at analyzing interactions, recognizing implicit meanings, and responding to communicative cues—skills that are invaluable for effective communication in both academic and social contexts. Integrating discourse analysis into language classes, therefore, provides students with tools to not only understand language in use but also to critically examine how it reflects and influences social dynamics, making them more capable, culturally aware language users.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Communicative Competence and Discourse Analysis

The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Hymes (1972), serves as a foundational theory in integrating discourse analysis within ELT. Hymes argued that effective language use requires more than grammatical accuracy; it involves knowledge of social norms, the ability to modify language for various contexts, and the capacity to convey meaning appropriately. This framework supports the view that discourse analysis is essential for teaching language as a social practice, where learners not only form accurate sentences but also engage meaningfully across diverse discourse communities.

2.2. Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development

Discourse analysis in language teaching is further grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky posited that learning occurs most effectively within social interactions, where students are supported in tasks that challenge them just beyond their current abilities. Through discourse-based activities, students engage in authentic communication that promotes both language development and social learning, aligning with the ZPD's emphasis on collaborative, contextualized language use.

2.3. Discourse as Social Practice: Gee's Perspective

Gee's (1999) theory views discourse as a means to understand language's "social and cultural functions," underscoring that language is intricately tied to the social practices it represents (p. 34). In this view, discourse encompasses both the linguistic choices made by individuals and the social frameworks that give those choices meaning. By teaching discourse analysis, educators help students gain insight into language as a tool for navigating diverse social and cultural contexts, enhancing their communicative and social competence.

2.4. Power, Social Role and Discourse Structures

Van Dijk's (1997) theory highlights that discourse carries embedded power dynamics, social roles, and cultural norms that shape communication. In language teaching, discourse analysis provides students with tools to recognize and interpret these underlying elements, equipping them to understand language's social implications. This approach encourages students to move beyond surface-level comprehension, fostering critical awareness of language as a reflection of social structure and power relations.

2.5. Critical Discourse Analysis and Reflexivity

Fairclough (2003) supports the integration of discourse analysis as a means to develop students' critical thinking skills and self-reflection. By examining language in varied social contexts, students build the capacity to analyze language critically, understand implicit meanings, and assess the impact of language choices in real-life interactions. This critical discourse approach aligns with the objectives of ELT, where students develop the ability to navigate complex communicative situations with both linguistic precision and cultural insight.

3. Research Questions

The integration of discourse analysis in English language teaching has gained importance as teachers recognize its role in fostering students' communicative competence. Discourse analysis, which focuses on understanding language within social and contextual frameworks, equips students to interpret and participate effectively in real-world interactions. However, despite its value, incorporating discourse analysis into language curricula poses challenges, such as limited resources and the need for pedagogical strategies that reflect authentic communication practices. To explore these issues, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do English language teachers conceptualize and integrate discourse into their teaching practices, and what obstacles do they encounter?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of discourse analysis on students' communicative competence and ability to interpret language in diverse social contexts?

4. Methodology

This study utilizes a narrative inquiry methodology, a qualitative research design that examines the lived experiences of individuals through their personal narratives. Narrative inquiry is well-suited for comprehending

the intricacies of teaching practices and beliefs, since it enables participants to reflect on and express their experiences in a way that encapsulates the depth and subtleties of their professional life. Pandey (2022) asserted that "one of the goals of narrative research in English Language Teaching (ELT) is to increase understanding of central issues related to teaching and learning through the telling and retelling of teachers' stories" (p. 25). "the study of how different humans experience the world around them; it involves a methodology that allows people to tell the stories of their 'storied lives'" (p. 13). Gay, Mills, and Airasian define narrative research as "the study of how various individuals perceive their surroundings; it employs a methodology that enables individuals to articulate the narratives of their 'storied lives'" (p. 13). Clandinin and Connelly (2000, as cited in Pandey 2022, p. 26) assert that "narrative inquiry encapsulates the personal and human aspects of experience over time, while considering the interplay between individual experience and cultural context."

4.1 Participants

This study involves five university teachers, each with at least 10 years of experience in teaching Linguistics. They were chosen for their extensive expertise, which offers valuable insights into incorporating discourse into the English language teaching curriculum. Their long-standing engagement with linguistics makes them essential informants, capable of providing meaningful perspectives on the challenges and successes of teaching discourse.

4.2 Data Collection

The data collection involved in-depth interviews, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of each participant's narrative. The interviews were semi-structured, offering a discussion framework while permitting participants the freedom to express their experiences and viewpoints. This methodology is particularly advantageous for narrative inquiry, as it prompts participants to contemplate and convey their experiences in their own terms, resulting in profound insights into their conceptualizations and practices.

5. The Results

Teachers perceive discourse as integral to language learning, viewing it as a means to prepare students for authentic, context-sensitive communication. This perspective aligns with Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence. The findings of the study present the integral role of discourse analysis in language teaching, highlighting its impact on both the educators' methodologies and students' communicative competencies. Firstly, it explores the perceived importance of discourse in language learning, highlighting its role in developing students' communicative competence. Secondly, it examines the strategies employed by educators to integrate discourse analysis into their teaching practices. Thirdly, it discusses how discourse serves as a tool for fostering cross-cultural competence. Additionally, the section addresses the integration of discourse with other language skills to enhance overall proficiency. Furthermore, it includes teachers' reflections on student outcomes and growth resulting from discourse-focused instruction. Lastly, it identifies the challenges teachers face when implementing discourse-based instruction.

5.1. Conceptualizing Discourse Analysis

The concept of discourse in language teaching has evolved to emphasize the role of language as a social tool for interaction, shaped by context, intention, and adaptability, rather than being limited to grammar and vocabulary. Participant 1 echoed this sentiment, describing discourse as "language in action, how we use words and phrases to actually communicate ideas, emotions, or instructions, going beyond mere sentence structures or vocabulary lists." For this teacher, discourse helps students "see language as more than just vocabulary or grammar" by emphasizing that "language has a purpose, depending on who you're talking to and what you want to achieve in that conversation." This perspective aligns with the communicative competence approach, where language is taught not only as a structural system but as a functional tool for achieving specific social and communicative goals. Hymes's (1972) theory of communicative competence further supports this understanding, asserting that

effective language use requires not just linguistic accuracy but also an understanding of social norms, context, and the ability to adapt language purposefully to varied situations.

In addition, discourse analysis supports a sociocultural approach to language learning, where language is seen as socially constructed and context-sensitive. Participant 2 highlighted this, viewing discourse as “the way language connects with the context it’s used in.” This teacher believes that discourse instruction “teaches students to become more aware of the choices they make in language use-like adjusting their tone or formality,” helping them understand that “language is flexible, shaped by the setting and people involved.” Gee (1999) further supports this perspective, explaining that discourse encompasses not only linguistic elements but also the “social and cultural functions” of language, enabling students to engage authentically in diverse communicative contexts (p. 34). This approach reflects the need for pragmatic competence, where students learn to adapt language to fit different social and cultural contexts, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate meaningfully and appropriately.

Finally, Participant 3 highlighted how discourse involves “turn-taking, managing conversations, and even the underlying meanings in what we say.” For this teacher, discourse skills equip students to “know what is appropriate in different situations and to respond accordingly,” underscoring discourse’s role in developing students’ interactional competence. This view aligns with van Dijk’s (1997) theory on the structure of discourse, which emphasizes the role of social conventions and communicative functions in shaping effective communication. Through discourse analysis, students gain the ability to navigate varied social settings by interpreting conversational cues and adjusting their responses accordingly, skills essential for achieving communicative fluency.

The perspectives of these teachers illustrate that they view discourse as an essential component of language learning, fostering students’ ability to use language adaptively and contextually. By integrating discourse analysis, educators enable students to approach language as a socially responsive, context-driven tool, preparing them for effective, real-world communication. This aligns with the goals of communicative language teaching, equipping students with not only linguistic skills but also the cultural insights necessary to communicate successfully across diverse social situations.

5.2. Perceived Importance of Discourse in Language Learning

Discourse has emerged as a crucial aspect of language learning, recognized for its role in preparing students to use language as a context-sensitive, practical tool for real-world communication. Unlike traditional approaches focused solely on grammar and vocabulary, discourse analysis emphasizes how language functions in specific contexts, enabling students to adapt their language use for meaningful interactions. Three teacher participants shared their perspectives on the importance of discourse in language learning, illustrating its value in developing practical and adaptive communicative skills.

Participant 1 described discourse “critical in language learning because it teaches students how to use language in real situations, not just to pass exams or complete exercises, enabling them to know what to say and how to say it in a way that fits the moment.” This view aligns with Hymes’s (1972) concept of communicative competence, which emphasizes the need for adaptable and contextually appropriate language use rather than mere linguistic accuracy. By focusing on discourse as a means to prepare students for authentic, purpose-driven interactions, Participant 1 highlights its role in fostering flexible, real-world communication.

Building on this, Participant 2 explained that discourse instruction helps students shift from viewing language as a set of rules to seeing it as “a tool for expressing themselves in meaningful ways. This enables them to become more aware of their language choices, such as adjusting tone or formality.” They noted that discourse enables students to “become more aware of the choices they make in language use-like adjusting their tone or formality.” This perspective aligns with Gee’s (1999) argument that discourse involves navigating the social and cultural functions of language. By fostering pragmatic competence, discourse equips students to adapt their communication to suit different audiences and contexts, enabling meaningful and effective interactions.

Participant 3 emphasized the interactional dimension of discourse, highlighting how it trains students to “manage conversations, deal with misunderstandings, and even understand unspoken meanings.” This teacher described discourse as “making language learning practical,” a view that resonates with van Dijk’s (1997) theory of discourse as encompassing implicit social norms that guide interaction. By developing interactional competence, students learn to interpret conversational cues, navigate misunderstandings, and respond to unspoken signals, thereby enhancing their ability to engage in nuanced, real-life communication.

Together, these responses demonstrate that teachers view discourse as a foundational element of language learning, enabling students to see language as an adaptable tool for effective communication across diverse contexts. By integrating discourse analysis, educators foster an approach that is both practical and context-sensitive, aligning with the goals of communicative language teaching. Through discourse, students are prepared not only for linguistic accuracy but also for authentic, responsive engagement in various social settings.

5.3. Strategies for Teaching Discourse in the Classroom

Teaching discourse in the language classroom involves strategies that extend beyond traditional grammar and vocabulary instruction, focusing on real-life, interactive language use that integrates both verbal and non-verbal communication. This approach is rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and authentic experiences. Teachers aim to provide students with hands-on practice in conversational dynamics, context awareness, and social cues, equipping them with essential discourse skills for effective real-world communication.

Participant 1 described using “role-play activities where students act out real-life scenarios” as a way to make discourse learning “more authentic.” Through role-play, students practice key conversational strategies, such as “asking follow-up questions” and “using expressions to show they’re listening.” This method enables students to experience discourse as “language in action,” immersing them in realistic communication that builds confidence and adaptability. This perspective aligns with the sociocultural focus on learning through active engagement and context-driven interactions.

In addition to role-play, Participant 2 highlighted strategies that emphasize both verbal and non-verbal elements of communication. They explained how they “use video clips of natural conversations” to demonstrate how discourse extends beyond words, incorporating “body language, tone, and word choice.” This approach aligns with Gee’s (1999) discourse analysis framework, which underscores the importance of non-verbal cues in creating a holistic communicative event. By analyzing videos, students observe how language delivery varies with context, learning that “discourse is more than words; it’s about how those words are delivered.” This method fosters students’ ability to interpret pragmatic elements of language, enhancing their adaptability to social dynamics in communication.

Participant 3 added that they employ “group discussions on different topics” as a means of practicing discourse skills, particularly in managing interactions. During these discussions, students practice “turn-taking, responding to each other’s points, and keeping a conversation going,” engaging in real-time conversational dynamics. This strategy aligns with van Dijk’s (1997) theory of discourse as structured social practices, which include managing conversational flow and respecting participant contributions. By providing guiding questions but allowing students to “direct the conversation,” this approach fosters autonomy and interactional competence, enabling students to navigate spontaneous, unscripted discussions effectively.

Collectively, these strategies reflect a commitment to immersive, context-rich methods for teaching discourse, equipping students with practical skills to navigate language in diverse social contexts. By integrating role-play, video analysis, and group discussions, teachers create opportunities for students to experience discourse as a dynamic, interactive process. This approach aligns with Vygotsky’s emphasis on learning through interaction, Gee’s focus on the interplay of verbal and non-verbal communication, and van Dijk’s view of discourse as structured social practices. Together, these methods prepare students for meaningful, adaptable language use that

fosters both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, supporting the principles of communicative language teaching.

5.4. Discourse as a Tool for Cross-cultural Competence

In the context of language teaching, discourse is a vital tool for developing cross-cultural competence, enabling students to navigate the nuances of communication across diverse cultural settings. As Gee (1999) explains, discourse includes both linguistic and social norms that define effective communication within a cultural context. Teaching discourse with a cross-cultural focus helps students recognize how cultural backgrounds influence language use, fostering the skills needed to interpret and respond appropriately in multicultural interactions. Participant 1 emphasized this, stating, “When we teach discourse, we’re teaching students how language varies across cultures-like how politeness might look different, or how directness isn’t always appropriate.” This approach encourages students to understand that communication styles and language forms are shaped by cultural expectations, providing valuable insights into verbal expression and social interaction across cultures.

To cultivate cross-cultural awareness, teachers employ strategies that immerse students in cultural contexts. Participant 2 shared that they “use examples of conversations from different cultural backgrounds” to illustrate varying discourse patterns. Through these examples, students observe how cultural contexts shape language use, noting differences in elements such as “personal space, gestures, and even levels of formality.” This method aligns with van Dijk’s (1997) view of discourse as a reflection of social and cultural structures, equipping students to understand the cultural frameworks underlying communication. By analyzing cross-cultural discourse, students develop the ability to recognize culturally specific language cues, enhancing their capacity to navigate intercultural conversations with sensitivity and awareness.

Participant 3 highlighted the importance of teaching discourse as a way to foster adaptability, noting that students “need to be able to read the room and adjust their language based on who they’re speaking to and where they are.” This approach focuses on helping students understand how cultural expectations shape communication, aligning with Hymes’s (1972) theory of communicative competence, which emphasizes that language must be adaptable to social and cultural contexts. By learning to “read the room,” students practice recognizing context-dependent cues, such as when to use formal or informal language, how to interpret non-verbal signals, and how to manage turn-taking across cultures. This prepares students to adjust their language based on cultural norms, a critical skill for effective cross-cultural communication.

Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that teachers view discourse as a cornerstone of cross-cultural competence, emphasizing that effective communication extends beyond grammar and vocabulary to include cultural understanding. By integrating culturally diverse examples and context-sensitive teaching strategies, educators equip students with the skills necessary to interpret and respond to language variations in multicultural settings. This approach aligns with the frameworks of Gee, van Dijk, and Hymes, combining insights into the social, cultural, and adaptive dimensions of discourse. Together, these strategies prepare students for effective, respectful communication across cultural boundaries, enhancing their overall communicative competence in a globalized world.

5.5. Integration of Discourse with Other Language Skills

Integrating discourse with other language skills is essential for fostering holistic communicative competence in students. In this approach, discourse analysis is combined with reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities, enabling students to understand how language functions as a connected, context-driven process. By blending discourse with these skills, teachers provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of language use, preparing them for authentic communication in real-world settings. Participant 1 noted the importance of connecting discourse with listening skills, stating, “I often encourage students to listen for tone and implied meanings during conversations, not just the words themselves.” This approach aligns with Gee’s (1999) view

that discourse involves interpreting subtle cues that add depth to communication. By integrating discourse with listening exercises, students learn to interpret context, understand speaker intent, and recognize underlying meanings, which are critical for effective interpersonal communication.

Additionally, teachers connect discourse with reading and writing skills to deepen students' understanding of language as a social practice. Participant 2 explained, "I integrate discourse analysis with reading activities, where students look for the author's intent and the way language choices affect the message." This strategy mirrors van Dijk's (1997) perspective on discourse as a tool for understanding how language is structured by social norms and communicative purposes. Through reading exercises that incorporate discourse analysis, students gain insight into how word choice, structure, and tone shape meaning. This method teaches students to critically analyze texts, fostering their ability to interpret nuanced messages and understand language's impact on readers, a skill essential for both reading comprehension and effective writing.

Participant 3 highlighted the connection between discourse and speaking practice, using it to build conversational competence. The teacher shared that they "use speaking activities that focus on how to manage conversations, such as when to pause, ask questions, or redirect the discussion." This practical approach aligns with Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence, where language learning includes the ability to adapt language for various social interactions. By combining discourse analysis with speaking practice, students develop skills like turn-taking, conversational management, and appropriate responses, preparing them to engage more effectively in diverse communicative contexts.

These strategies reflect an understanding that discourse is not an isolated skill but a foundational component that supports all areas of language learning. By integrating discourse with listening, reading, and speaking, teachers create a cohesive approach that equips students with the skills to interpret, produce, and respond to language authentically. This holistic integration aligns with communicative language teaching principles, providing students with a comprehensive skill set for meaningful, contextually aware communication.

5.6. Teachers' Reflections on Student Outcomes and Growth

Teachers implementing discourse-focused strategies in the classroom often observe significant development in their students' communicative abilities, adaptability, and confidence. Reflecting on these outcomes, teachers perceive discourse as a valuable tool for fostering authentic language use that prepares students for real-world interaction. This approach aligns with the goals of communicative language teaching, where the objective is not merely linguistic accuracy but the capacity to use language meaningfully in diverse contexts. Participant 1 shared that students become "more confident in expressing their thoughts" and gain the skills to "respond appropriately in different situations," a shift that reflects growth in pragmatic competence. By engaging in discourse-rich activities, students learn to view language as an interactive tool, shaping both the way they communicate and their comfort in various social settings.

Teachers also noted improvements in students' ability to interpret and adapt to social cues, a key aspect of communicative competence. Participant 2 observed that students are "better able to pick up on non-verbal signals, like body language or tone, and adjust their responses," which they view as essential for meaningful interaction. This aligns with Gee's (1999) theory, which emphasizes that discourse competence includes interpreting non-verbal elements and context to communicate effectively. Participant 2 added that these skills enhance students' capacity to handle "unscripted interactions where they have to think on their feet," demonstrating growth in their ability to respond flexibly to spontaneous communication.

Participant 3 highlighted that discourse-based activities encourage students to "engage in deeper conversations and ask follow-up questions," reflecting growth in conversational skills and critical thinking. They noted that students become "more inquisitive and willing to explore topics beyond surface-level responses," demonstrating a deeper engagement with language and content. This outcome supports van Dijk's (1997) view that discourse involves both linguistic structures and the ability to manage interactional exchanges, where students gain the

skills to carry conversations and sustain engagement. By learning how to navigate discourse in complex interactions, students build critical competencies that extend beyond the classroom, preparing them to communicate effectively in various social and professional contexts.

Collectively, these reflections underscore teachers' perspectives on the positive outcomes of discourse-focused instruction. They observe that students' communicative competence, social awareness, and critical thinking skills are strengthened through activities that simulate real-world language use. By incorporating discourse-based teaching methods, teachers create a learning environment that fosters student growth in both language proficiency and social adaptability, equipping them with essential skills for navigating diverse communication scenarios.

5.7. Challenges of Implementing Discourse-Based Instruction

Implementing discourse-based instruction in the language classroom comes with various challenges, as teachers must navigate limitations related to time, resources, and student engagement. Discourse-based instruction emphasizes language as a tool for social interaction, requiring authentic contexts and interactive practices that can be difficult to facilitate within conventional classroom constraints. Participant 1 expressed frustration with "limited class time to go beyond grammar and vocabulary," explaining that the demands of curriculum coverage often prevent in-depth focus on discourse skills. This perspective highlights a common challenge in language teaching: balancing required syllabus content with the more flexible, interactive methods necessary for discourse-based instruction. This issue aligns with van Lier's (1996) observation that the structure of traditional language classes often limits opportunities for authentic communicative practices, making it challenging for teachers to fully integrate discourse into the curriculum.

Another challenge lies in finding appropriate resources to support discourse-based instruction. Participant 2 noted that "access to authentic materials like videos or interactive tools is limited," which hinders their ability to provide students with real-life language examples. This difficulty underscores the importance of resources in discourse-based instruction, as authentic materials help students observe and analyze language in context. According to Ellis (2003), discourse learning is most effective when students can engage with authentic, context-rich materials that mirror real-world interactions. Without such resources, teachers are limited in their ability to demonstrate discourse components, such as tone, body language, and conversational flow, which are essential for developing communicative competence.

Student engagement also poses a significant challenge, especially in encouraging active participation in discourse activities. Participant 3 highlighted this by explaining that "students are often hesitant to participate in open-ended discussions," noting that many are accustomed to more structured, guided tasks. This reluctance reflects a broader issue in language classrooms, where students may feel uncomfortable with unscripted or spontaneous communication. This aligns with Swain's (2000) findings on learner interaction, where structured settings often lead to less anxiety, but they also limit opportunities for natural discourse. For teachers, encouraging students to engage fully in discourse-based activities requires building a classroom environment that supports risk-taking, where students feel comfortable participating in less structured communication.

Collectively, these challenges reveal the complexities of implementing discourse-based instruction in ELT. Limited time, lack of resources, and student hesitancy all impede teachers' efforts to focus on discourse. Despite these obstacles, teachers strive to balance curriculum requirements with the need for authentic interaction, adapting their strategies to foster a discourse-rich learning environment. These challenges reflect the need for institutional support and curriculum flexibility to create spaces where discourse can be a central component of language learning, preparing students for real-world communication in a way that extends beyond grammar and vocabulary instruction.

6. Discussion

The importance of discourse in language learning has gained prominence in language pedagogy, emphasizing its role as a practical and adaptable tool for real-world communication. Rooted in Hymes's (1972) concept of

communicative competence, this approach highlights the need for language use that extends beyond grammatical accuracy, focusing on context-sensitive adaptation. Teachers increasingly view discourse as a means to prepare students for interactive and dynamic communication, equipping them to adjust language use based on their environment, audience, and purpose. Gee's (1999) perspective reinforces this, describing discourse as a social instrument that integrates verbal and non-verbal elements to navigate interactions effectively. Strategies like role-play, video analysis, and group discussions reflect Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, immersing students in realistic, context-rich activities that build confidence and adaptability. Through these methods, students learn to interpret social cues and manage conversational dynamics, aligning with van Dijk's (1997) theory of discourse as a structured social practice. The significance of discourse in language education is summed up in table 1 below:

Discourse also serves as a critical medium for fostering cross-cultural competence, helping students understand the cultural norms embedded in communication styles such as politeness, directness, and formality. Gee (1999) underscores the cultural dimension of discourse, while van Dijk (1997) highlights its connection to social and cultural structures. Teaching discourse with a cross-cultural focus enables students to navigate diverse interactions, enhancing their communicative competence through sensitivity and awareness of cultural differences. Despite its benefits, implementing discourse-based instruction poses challenges, including limited resources, restricted classroom time, and student hesitation in engaging with unscripted language use. However, by integrating discourse with other language skills and addressing these challenges, teachers provide students with a holistic approach to language learning that fosters linguistic proficiency, cultural adaptability, and critical thinking, preparing them for authentic and meaningful communication in diverse contexts.

7. Conclusions

Discourse in language studies enables learners to navigate language in authentic and contextually appropriate ways. This study explored teachers' perspectives on integrating discourse into English language teaching to enhance communicative competence. It aimed to understand how teachers conceptualize and implement discourse strategies, the perceived impact of these strategies on students' language proficiency, and the challenges encountered. Using a narrative inquiry approach, insights were drawn from in-depth interviews with experienced university teachers. The findings highlighted the importance of discourse in fostering context-sensitive communication, critical thinking, and cross-cultural competence. Teachers employed strategies such as role-playing, video analysis, and group discussions to create authentic communicative scenarios, enabling students to develop adaptability and pragmatic awareness. However, challenges such as limited resources, insufficient instructional time, and varying levels of student engagement were identified as obstacles to fully integrating discourse into teaching practices. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of communicative competence and sociocultural learning by illustrating how discourse-based teaching bridges linguistic knowledge and practical communication skills. It emphasizes the need to integrate discourse into language curricula to prepare learners for real-world communication. Practically, the findings call for greater institutional support, including resource allocation and teacher training, to address the challenges of implementing discourse-rich teaching methods. While the study is limited to a small sample of university educators, future research could explore the impact of discourse-based teaching across diverse educational levels and contexts.

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