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Research on Discourse Modes and Interactional features in High School English Teachers' Reading and Writing Classes—Lesson Study Based on the SETT Framework

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Abstract: *Based on SETT framework, this study takes three reading and writing classes from the National High School English Teachers' Basic Skills Competition as the research objects. Using classroom observation and content analysis methods, it explores the distribution patterns of teachers' discourse modes and interactional features in reading and writing classes. The research shows that at the discourse modes level, the skills and systems modes dominate, while the classroom context modes account for the least; at the interactional features level, display questions and teacher echo are the most prominent, while the reference questions and other deep negotiation behaviors account for a low proportion. Based on this, suggestions are proposed: at the discourse modes level, optimize the four patterns and appropriately enhance the classroom situation pattern; at the interactional features level, optimize the interaction characteristics and build a two-way dynamic classroom. It aims to improve the quality of teachers' discourse and enhance the effectiveness of classroom interaction.*

Keywords: *Classroom discourse, Interactional features, SETT Framework, High School English, Reading and Writing Classes*

1. Introduction

Teacher discourse is not only the carrier of classroom teaching but also the medium for achieving teacher and student interaction. English language teaching is a process in which teachers use discourse to achieve communicative interaction with students, provide emotional support, establish meaning connections, and convey values, so as to achieve concept deconstruction and cognitive reconstruction.[1]In terms of classroom practice, classroom teaching cannot be separated from teacher discourse, and effective classroom teaching cannot do without classroom interaction. Teachers' classroom activities reflect their own ability to facilitate interaction .They are combined with dynamic teaching goals.[2]Foreign language teachers, in the process of lesson preparation, teaching, and interaction with students, will closely focus on the content of the lesson. This influence will cause students' discourse to be closely related to the teacher's discourse.[3]

However, there are still problems in the teacher and student discourse interaction in high school English reading and writing classes at present. For instance, as research has pointed out that teachers do not base their discourse on teaching content and students' situations, and the organized interaction fails to achieve the expected effect. Moreover, the classroom interaction appears active on the surface, but the interaction output is difficult to serve the reading and writing learning goals. [4]Some research has also found that teachers' thinking focus is on how to teach, and they pay insufficient attention to how to learn. They don't provide sufficient interaction support for students, resulting in inefficient writing instruction.[5]

In view of this, this paper adopts Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) to explore the characteristics of teacher discourse in high school English reading and writing classes, revealing the connection between the modes and interactional features of teacher discourse and teaching effects.It can provide suggestions for teachers to optimize reading and writing teaching practices and improve students' comprehensive language application abilities.

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2. SETT framework

The SETT framework was proposed by British scholar Walsh in 2006. By clearly categorizing modes and interactional features, this framework provides teachers with a perspective for critically reflecting on their own discourse practices, ultimately leading to improvements in the quality of classroom interaction and teaching effectiveness. This model is defined as a microsituation in a second-language classroom with explicit teaching objectives and distinctive interactional features, determined primarily by the teacher's language use.[6]

Table1: Four classroom modes

Mode	Pedagogic goals	Interactional features
Managerial	To transmit information To organise the physical learning environment To refer learners to materials To introduce or conclude an activity To change from one mode of learning to another	A single,extended teacher turn that uses explanation and/or instructions The use of transitional makers The use of confirmation checks An absence of learner contributions
Materials	To provide language practice around a piece of material To elicit responses in relation to the material, To check and display answers To clarify when necessary, To evaluate contributions	Predominance of IRF pattern Extensive use of display questions Form-focused feedback Corrective repair The use of scaffolding
Skills and systems	To enable learners to produce correct forms To enable learners to manipulate the target language To provide corrective feedback To provide learners with practice in sub-skills To display correct answers	The use of direct repair The use of scaffolding Extended teacher turns Display questions Teacher echo Clarification requests Form-focused feedback
Classroom context	To enable learners to express themselves clearly To establish a context To promote oral fluency	Extended learner turns Short teacher turns Minimal repair Content feedback Referential questions Scaffolding, Clarification requests

The SETT framework categorizes classroom teacher discourse into four core modes: the managerial mode, materials mode, skills and systems mode, and classroom context mode.[7]The managerial mode is most commonly found at the beginning of a lesson, but it may also occur at the end of an activity or serve as a transition between two phases of the lesson. The materials mode is primarily determined by the instructional materials and derives from specific resources such as texts and audio recordings, with a focus on text interpretation and information extraction. The skills and systems mode focuses primarily on training students' language skills and linguistic knowledge. The classroom context mode is determined by the classroom situations created to guide students in expressing their views. These four modes are shown in Table 1.

Besides, SETT framework includes fourteen typical interactional features: scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, referential questions, seeking clarification, extended learner turn, teacher echo, teacher interruptions, extended teacher turn, turn completion, display questions, form-focused feedback, and confirmation checks. Walsh summarized these fourteen typical interactional features, which exhibit different patterns of distribution across the SETT framework, as shown in the Table2 below. For example, content feedback frequently appears in the classroom context mode, whereas direct correction is a typical feature of the skills and systems modes and therefore occurs less frequently in the classroom context mode. Classroom modes with distinctive interactive markers: display questions are typical of the materials mode, while extended teacher turn is a hallmark interactive behavior of the managerial mode.

ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 8, Issue 11: 8-14, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2026.081102

Table 2: Fourteen interactional features

Feature of teacher talk	Description
A.Scaffolding	1.Reformulation(rephrasing a learner's contribution);2.Extension(extending a learner's contribution);3.Modeling(providing an example for learners
B.Direct repair	Correcting an error quickly and directly.
C.Content feedback	Giving feedback to the message rather than the words used.
D.Extended wait-time	Allowing sufficient time(several seconds)for students to respond or formulate a response.
E.Referential questions	Genuine questions to which the teacher does not know the answer.
F.Seeking clarification	1.Teacher asks a student to clarify something the student has said2.Student asks teacher to clarify something the teacher has said.
G.Extended learner turn	Learner turn of more than one utterance.
H.Teacher echo	1.Teacher repeats teacher's previous utterance2.Teacher repeats a learner's contribution.
I.Teacher interruptions	Interrupting a learner's contribution.
J.Extended teacher turn	Teacher turn of more than one utterance
K.Turn completion	Completing a learner's contribution for the learner
L.Display questions	Asking questions to which teacher knows the answer
M.Form-focused feedback	Giving feedback on the words used,not the message
N.Confirmation checks	Confirming understanding of a student's or teacher's contribution

3. Research Design

This research is based on the SETT framework proposed by Walsh. The case studies selected are three high-quality reading and writing classes from the 18th National High School English Teachers' Basic Skills Competition. The research adopts classroom observation and content analysis methods to analyze the classroom discourse patterns and interaction characteristics of high school English reading and writing classes. The research mainly focuses on two major questions: Firstly, what are the distribution characteristics of the four major modes of SETT framework in these three high school English reading and writing classes? Secondly, what are the distribution characteristics of interactional features in teachers' discourse in three lessons?

The teachers who taught the three high-quality reading and writing classes in this research were Teacher J from Henan Province, Teacher T from Jiangxi Province, and Teacher M from Chongqing. This competition is a professional development project hosted by an authoritative institution in the national basic education field and is highly recognized by the industry. The three competing lessons cover different regions, mainstream high school English textbooks, including typical reading and writing teaching materials such as traditional culture narratives, environmental issues, and interpersonal communication expressions.

The research uses classroom observation and content analysis methods. Firstly, by repeatedly reviewing the complete teaching videos, various key classroom information such as the switching of teachers' discourse patterns and the organization of teacher and student interactions is recorded. Then, based on the four modes in SETT framework and its fourteen detailed interactional features, the transcribed texts are systematically coded to categorize and statistically analyze the frequency and distribution of each mode and interactional feature. Finally, typical teaching segments are analyzed to reveal the classroom interaction characteristics of teachers and students under different interaction patterns.

4. Research Results and Discussion

In terms of discourse modes, the distribution of the four modes is uneven. The skills and systems mode were dominant in all three lessons, followed by the classroom management mode. The materials mode was in the middle in terms of distribution, while the classroom context mode was at the lowest level overall. From the fourteen types of interactional features, the frequency distribution is clearly stratified. The display questions, teacher echo, scaffolding, content feedback, and extended learner turn are high-frequency interactional features. Form focused feedback, extended wait-time, extended teacher, and confirmation checks are medium-frequency interaction features. The low-frequency interactional

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features are referential questions, direct repair, seeking clarification, teacher interruptions, and turn completion.

4.1 Characteristics of Discourse Modes in High School English Reading and Writing Classes

In high school English teachers' reading and writing classes, all four discourse modes under the SETT framework are present, but the core interactive mode is mainly the skills and systems pattern, focusing on language output training such as paragraph structure and writing techniques. The managerial mode comes second, the materials mode ranks third, and the classroom context mode has the lowest overall proportion, with a small amount of context-based communication set up in the introduction. In terms of writing tasks, the duration is relatively compressed.

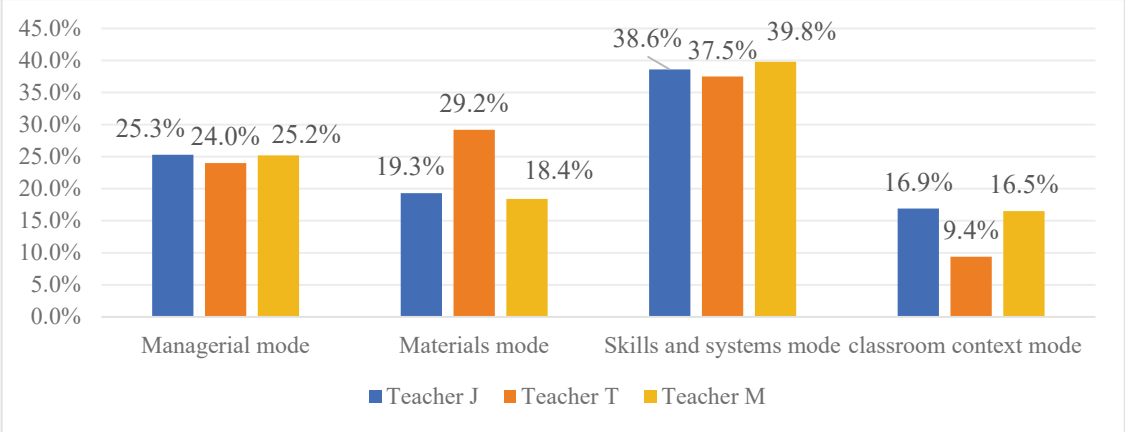

Fig.1: Comparing the Distribution of Discourse Modes in Reading and Writing Classes

As shown in the Fig.1, among the four types of modes, the skills and system modes were the primary modes common to all three reading and writing classes. They were used most frequently and accounted for the highest proportion in each lesson, at 38.6%, 37.5%, and 39.8%, respectively. The managerial mode ranked second in overall usage, at 25.3%, 25.2%, and 24%, respectively. The data on managerial mode showed little variation among the three teachers, indicating that classroom organization and management practices maintained relatively consistent requirements across the reading and writing classes. Regarding the material-based pattern dimension, the usage percentages in the three teachers' reading and writing classes were 29.2%, 19.3%, and 18.4%, with the average usage of this pattern ranking third. The classroom context mode had the lowest overall usage rates across the three teachers' classes, at 16.9%, 16.5%, and 9.4%, representing the lowest values in the entire data.

Based on the above data, it can be observed that skills and systems mode plays a significant role in the three reading and writing classes. In high school English reading and writing classes, language knowledge and reading skills training are the core focus of classroom interaction. Teachers devote a substantial portion of their speaking turns to analyzing text structure, explaining sentence patterns, and organizing writing practice exercises. Furthermore, the proportion of managerial mode was similar across the three teachers, reflecting that in these high-quality lessons, all three placed equal emphasis on classroom discipline and the arrangement of learning tasks. Consequently, management-related discourse became an indispensable component of all reading and writing classes, resulting in no significant fluctuations in its proportion. The classroom context mode accounted for the lowest proportion of interaction types across all three lesson categories. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the three transcripts, authentic, real-life communication was confined solely to the five-minute introductory segment at the beginning of each lesson. The middle and latter parts of the class were primarily devoted to text analysis and writing practice, limiting the space for students' free expression and unrestricted extended turns. The materials mode served as a supplementary interaction mode across all three lesson types with a moderate proportion. These characteristics align with Walsh's observation that teachers' language use may be pattern-consistent. The instructional goals should align with language use, thereby promoting learning opportunities. However, the inconsistent mode hinders learning opportunities. In this study, the skills and systems modes dominate, precisely reflecting the influence of instructional goal in reading and writing classes on classroom discourse modes.

In contrast, Huang found that in reading and writing follow-up activities, the materials mode was the dominant pattern for the lesson.[8]From the initial video introduction to the students' analysis of the

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material after reading the story, classroom discourse featured a large amount of material-based patterns. In contrast, the skills and systems patterns appeared less frequently, occurring only when students shared their group findings. The dominance of the materials mode in post-reading writing classes stems primarily from the fact that students' understanding and exploration of the material itself serve as both the prerequisite for writing and the source of content. Therefore, teachers should organically integrate these four instructional modes, fully leverage their strengths, and enhance teaching effectiveness.

4.2 Characteristics of Discourse Interaction in Reading and Writing Classes

Among the types of interactions, display questions and teacher echo accounted for a high proportion and served as the teachers' primary means of interaction. These were followed by scaffolding, content feedback, and confirmation checks. This indicates that in reading and writing classes, teachers prioritize affirming students' comprehension by providing effective scaffolding and guiding them to understand the text content, laying the groundwork for writing. In contrast, interactive behaviors that promote negotiation, such as referential questions, seeking clarification, and extending wait-time accounted for an extremely low proportion.

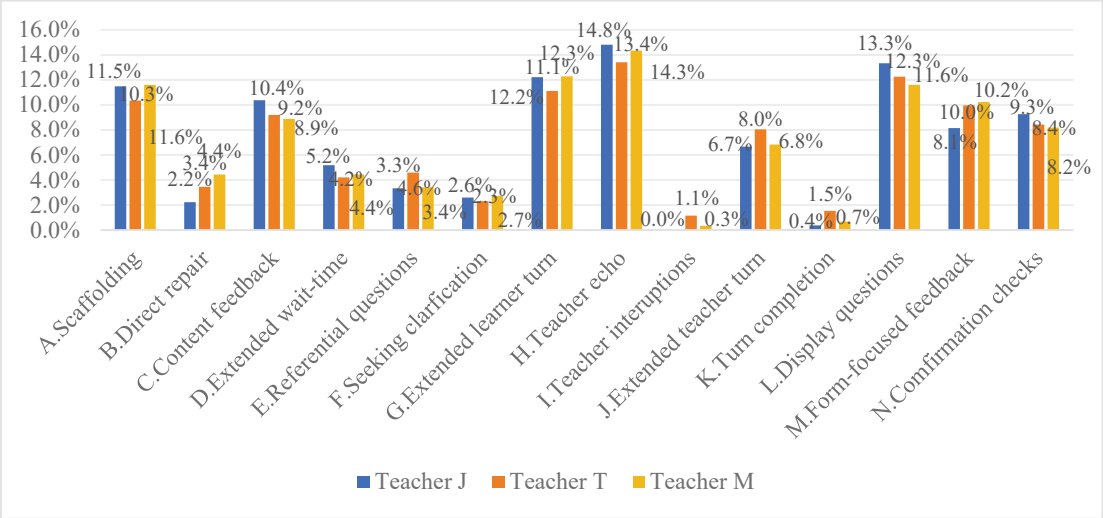

Fig.2 Comparing the Characteristics of Discourse Interaction in Reading and Writing Classes

As shown in Fig.2, the distribution of the 14 types of classroom interactional features in the reading and writing classes taught by the three teachers exhibits both commonalities and distinct individual differences. Among all interaction types, display questions ranked first in the classroom discourse of all three teachers, serving as the most central interactive strategy, accounting for 13.3%, 12.3%, and 11.6%, respectively. Second only to display questions, teacher echo was also a prominent feature with a very high proportion in all three teachers' classrooms, at 14.8%, 13.4%, and 14.3%, respectively. The proportions of scaffolding, content feedback, and confirmation checks were also generally high, representing high-frequency forms of interaction in classes.

The data indicate that display questions and teacher echo are the most frequently used interactional features in teachers' classrooms. This is consistent with the tendency for teachers to ask questions directly related to target language points within a limited time frame in order to achieve instructional objectives. For example, see Table 3 below.

Table 3 Teaching Excerpt1

T	Now let's come to the structure, skim the whole passage and complete the paragraph summaries.All right, time is up.Paragraph 1?
S1	Paragraph one is introducing the topic. And how about paragraph two? Any idea?Please.
S2	Describing the problem.
T	Well done, describing the causes we can see. And how about paragraph three, presenting some and yeah, you please .
S3	Present some solutions.
T	Yeah solutions,good.And paragraph4,the further.
S4	Solution.

When the teacher asks, "Paragraph two?""Paragraph three?" "Paragraph four?"these questions may

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appear to be classroom interactions, but they are actually display questions with clear, focusing on the structure of texts in terms of problems, causes, and solutions. Students need only state the function of each paragraph, and the teacher immediately confirms it. This questioning method is highly efficient and allows for a quick analysis, but it leaves limited room for students to express themselves independently.

Furthermore, the classroom lacks teacher discourse that fosters two-way interaction. In terms of teacher-student interaction, one-way interaction dominates the classroom, while two-way interaction is relatively rare. For example, see Table 4 below.

Table 4: Teaching Excerpt2

T	What do you do really during the spring? You can just give me some key words.
S1	Get together...
T	Very good, get together with families, anything else?
S2	Family reunion.
T	Family reunion, I like this word. So,louder,please.
S3	Eat a big dinner.
T	Eat a big dinner,right? And I will show you some pictures about the activities during the spring festival. The first one...
Ss	Go shopping.
T	Go shopping,good and next one. This one is.
S4	Couplet.
T	Couplet, very good. And we should paste the couplets, paste what's the meaning?And next one...
Ss	Clean.

As can be seen in Teaching Excerpt 2, teachers tend to rely on predetermined questions rather than posing follow-up questions based on students' responses. In such situations, even though students may have a solid grasp of the target language, their actual language proficiency is unlikely to improve significantly. For example, in the following excerpt, the teacher repeatedly asks predetermined questions: "What about this one?" "And what about the next one?" After the students respond, the teacher immediately provides the standard expression and moves on to the next picture. The entire interaction is a teacher-led, one-way chain of questions and answers. Therefore, although the classroom is lively, the interaction is essentially dominated by one-way communication.

Based on the two teaching excerpts above, it is evident that in high school English reading and writing classes, teachers frequently use display questions and tend to pose questions related to instructional objectives to facilitate the completion of teaching tasks. At the same time, while teachers respond to interactions, they rarely follow up with students' questions to spark their curiosity and encourage critical thinking, limiting students' independent expression.

5. Conclusion and implications

Based on observations of three teachers' lessons, this study attempts to offer the following teaching recommendations for high school English teachers on how to effectively conduct reading and writing classes, focusing on two dimensions: discourse modes and interactional features.

In terms of discourse modes, teachers need to optimize the distribution of discourse modes and appropriately increase the proportion of classroom situational patterns. In high school English reading and writing classes, teachers should not only use materials modes to guide students in analyzing texts during the reading phase, but also create authentic communicative contexts during the writing output phase, appropriately incorporating classroom situational patterns into writing tasks. It can let students apply the language knowledge they have learned in real-life expression. At the same time, in managerial modes, teachers' prolonged and exclusive use of direct, directive language objectively reduces the turn-taking space for teacher and student interaction. In high-quality classrooms, teachers use indirect language more frequently, which effectively guides students' thinking and encourages their active participation.[9]

In terms of interactional features, teachers need to optimize these features to build a two-way and dynamic classroom. This study found that display questions dominate the classroom, but overuse of them can limit classroom interaction to a superficial cognitive level. Therefore, teachers must possess keen analytical skills to quickly identify issues in student responses during real-time interactions and

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flexibly adjust their follow-up questioning strategies.[10]Besides, by reducing the teacher's turn-taking time, teachers can allow students to occupy more discourse space, provide students with sufficient response time, and build a dynamic, two-way interactive classroom environment.

In conclusion, by introducing the SETT framework into these reading and writing classes, it expands the scope of application of this framework in secondary school English instruction. At the same time, it catalogs four discourse patterns and fourteen interactional features, providing classroom-based evidence for teachers' discourse research. This will help teachers make targeted improvements to their classroom instruction and enhance the teaching efficiency and quality of classroom interaction in reading and writing classes.

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