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# REPRODUCING POWER THROUGH CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TEACHER–CHILD INTERACTION IN NON-FORMAL PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates teacher–child interaction in non-formal preschool education for children aged 0–4 years using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It addresses a research gap in classroom discourse research, which has predominantly focused on formal education, while non-formal early childhood settings remain underexplored. The study aims to examine how teachers' language organizes interaction, regulates children's participation, and reproduces classroom power relations. A qualitative design was employed in a non-formal playgroup in Kecamatan Suwawa, Indonesia. Data were collected from eight classroom observation sessions conducted over four weeks, involving one teacher and fifteen children aged 0–4 years. Each session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Classroom interactions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework. The findings show that teacher talk is dominated by imperative speech acts (75%), followed by interrogatives (20%) and declaratives (5%). Display questions (70%) are used more frequently than referential questions (30%), indicating that interaction remains largely teacher-directed. From a critical perspective, these patterns normalize teacher authority and limit children's dialogic participation. The study highlights the persistence of hierarchical interactional structures in non-formal preschool settings and provides insights for promoting more participatory classroom communication.

Keywords: Classroom Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Education, Non-Formal Preschool

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, increasing attention has been given to the role of language in shaping educational processes, particularly in how teaching and learning are socially organized. Language is not only a medium for transmitting instructional content but also a key resource through which norms, expectations, and institutional ideologies are constructed and maintained. In classroom contexts, everyday interaction between teachers and students plays a central role in shaping how knowledge is produced, how authority is exercised, and how learners position themselves within educational settings (Abdullah et al., 2025; Sakdiah & Matsum, 2025; Ubaidillah & Maryati, 2025). Educational linguistics scholars emphasize that classroom discourse is deeply embedded in broader social structures,

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making it a critical site for examining the relationship between language, power, and pedagogy (Arafah & Marhum, 2026; Zein et al., 2020).

In early childhood education, interaction becomes even more crucial because young learners rely heavily on adult mediation in their learning processes (Asbi et al., 2026; Syarif, 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2025). Teachers' language including instructions, questions, feedback, and evaluative talk—functions not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a mechanism for regulating participation and defining acceptable learning behavior (Clifton, 2023). At this stage, interaction strongly influences the development of children's cognitive, social, and communicative competencies, and therefore shapes their emerging sense of agency in educational settings (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Nevertheless, despite the widespread promotion of child-centered pedagogy in early childhood education, empirical evidence suggests that classroom interaction frequently remains teacher-directed, indicating a persistent gap between pedagogical ideals and actual classroom practices.

Research in classroom discourse consistently demonstrates that interaction is not a neutral exchange of information but a socially situated practice in which meanings, roles, and identities are continuously constructed (Azzahro, 2025; Fairclough, 2015). Even in contexts that promote participatory learning, teacher talk often dominates classroom interaction, limiting opportunities for learner initiation and dialogic engagement (Sanchez & Athanases, 2023).

Studies in early childhood classrooms further reveal that directive speech and closed questioning remain prevalent, even when pedagogical approaches claim to support exploratory and child-led learning (Chen et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2019). However, most of these studies are conducted in formal institutional settings, where hierarchical structures are more explicit and regulated. As a result, less attention has been given to how interaction unfolds in alternative educational environments where institutional structures are assumed to be more flexible.

In non-formal education settings, such as tutoring centers and community-based early learning programs, classroom interaction is often assumed to be more flexible, personalized, and less hierarchical compared to formal schooling. This assumption is supported by structural features such as smaller class sizes and less rigid curricula (Damayanti, 2025). However, empirical studies increasingly challenge this assumption by showing that institutional informality does not necessarily eliminate power asymmetry. Instead, control may be exercised through subtle discursive practices embedded in everyday classroom routines, making inequality less visible but still operational in interaction (Abidah & Hamzah, 2024; Dwika Herdiawan et al., 2023). Despite these insights, existing research rarely provides detailed analysis of how such power dynamics are enacted at the micro-level of teacher–child interaction, particularly in early childhood non-formal learning environments.

Although non-formal education has been increasingly recognized as an essential component of lifelong learning systems (Lukum et al., 2024), research on classroom discourse in these contexts remains limited. Most Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies in education focus on formal schooling, where institutional hierarchies are more explicit and standardized. Consequently, non-formal early childhood education—particularly for

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children aged 0–4 years—remains underexplored, even though this developmental stage plays a critical role in shaping foundational communication patterns and interactional behaviors.

Based on the reviewed literature, three key research gaps can be clearly identified. First, while classroom discourse has been widely investigated, existing studies predominantly focus on formal schooling environments, leaving non-formal preschool settings comparatively underexamined despite their growing educational relevance. Second, research on early childhood interaction tends to emphasize instructional effectiveness and developmental outcomes rather than critically examining how power relations are constructed, maintained, and normalized through everyday language practices. Third, although Critical Discourse Analysis has been widely applied in formal education contexts, limited attention has been given to how micro-level interactional patterns in non-formal early learning environments reproduce or potentially challenge asymmetrical teacher–child relationships.

To address these gaps, this study applies Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine teacher–child interaction in non-formal preschool education for children aged 0–4 years. Fairclough conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that is dialectically related to social structures, making it particularly suitable for analyzing how language, power, and ideology intersect in educational settings (Fairclough, 2015). CDA has been widely recognized as a powerful lens for examining how language reflects and constructs institutional power and ideological positions in classroom contexts (Rogers et al., 2005). In addition, previous studies suggest that linguistic choices in classroom interaction influence children's participation and agency, as discourse may both enable and constrain learner engagement depending on how interaction is organized (Kasmiati, 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze teachers' speech act patterns in organizing classroom interaction; (2) examine how questioning strategies shape children's participation and agency; and (3) explore how classroom discourse reproduces power relations in non-formal preschool settings. By doing so, this research contributes to critical educational discourse studies by extending CDA analysis into underexplored early childhood non-formal contexts and by offering insights for developing more dialogic and participatory pedagogical practices.

## METHODS

### *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its main analytical framework. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable an in-depth examination of classroom interaction as a socially situated practice, particularly focusing on how language use reflects power relations between teachers and young learners in a non-formal preschool setting.

### *Analytical Framework*

The analysis was guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, developed by Norman Fairclough, which examines discourse at three interrelated

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levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, the study analyzed linguistic features of teacher talk, including sentence structures, types of speech acts, and question forms used during classroom interaction. At the level of discursive practice, attention was given to patterns of interaction such as turn-taking, participation structures, and the ways teachers managed communication with children. At the level of social practice, the findings were interpreted in relation to broader pedagogical ideologies and power relations within non-formal early childhood education settings. This framework allowed the researcher to connect micro-level language use with broader social and educational meanings.

### *Research Site and Participants*

The research was conducted in a Kelompok Bermain (playgroup) located in Kecamatan Suwawa, Desa Tingkohubu Timur, Indonesia. The institution is a non-formal early childhood education setting that provides early learning experiences for children aged 0–4 years. The participants in this study consisted of one teacher and 15 children aged between 0 and 4 years who were enrolled in the playgroup. The focus of analysis was placed on teacher discourse because teachers play a central role in directing classroom interaction and facilitating children's learning at this developmental stage. The children were included as interactional partners whose responses provided evidence of participation patterns within the classroom.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and audio recordings of teacher–student interactions during regular learning activities. The observations were conducted over a period of approximately four weeks, with two observation sessions per week, resulting in a total of eight classroom observation sessions. Each session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes, covering routine learning activities such as morning greetings, instructional activities, play sessions, and classroom management interactions. Audio recordings were used to capture naturally occurring classroom discourse, including teacher instructions, questions, feedback, and interactional responses from children. Field notes were also taken during each observation to document contextual information. All recorded interactions were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The data analysis followed systematic and transparent procedures to ensure methodological rigor. First, all teacher utterances in the transcribed classroom data were identified and coded based on the classification of speech acts proposed by O'Keeffe et al. (2019) namely imperative, interrogative, and declarative forms. The frequency and percentage of each speech act type were calculated to identify dominant patterns of teacher discourse, addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1). Second, teacher questions were analyzed using Ellis (1994), classification, which distinguishes between display and referential questions. The frequency of each question type was calculated and compared to examine

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how questioning strategies influenced children's participation in classroom interaction. This step addressed Research Question 2 (RQ2). Finally, the quantitative findings were interpreted qualitatively using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine how patterns of teacher language reflected interactional routines and social practices, particularly in relation to the construction of teacher authority and children's participation. This step addressed Research Question 3 (RQ3).

### *Trustworthiness of the Study*

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were implemented throughout the research process. Data triangulation was applied by collecting interactional data from multiple classroom sessions, allowing the researcher to compare patterns of teacher–child interaction across different observations and confirm the consistency of the findings. In addition, peer checking was conducted through discussions with an academic supervisor or colleague to review coding procedures and interpretations of classroom discourse. All stages of data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis were systematically documented to maintain transparency and reliability (Creswell, 2022).

## RESULTS

### *Types of Teachers' Speech Acts in Classroom Interaction*

RQ1 aims to identify and analyze the types of speech acts used by teachers in classroom interaction in non-formal preschool education for children aged 0–4 years. The analysis of speech acts refers to O'Keeffe et al. (2019) classification, which includes imperative, interrogative, and declarative speech acts.

*Table 1. Types of Teachers' Speech Acts in Classroom Interaction*

| Type of Speech Act | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Imperative | 120 | 75% |
| Interrogative | 32 | 20% |
| Declarative | 8 | 5% |
| Total | 160 | 100% |

Based on Table 1, imperative speech acts constitute the predominant form of teacher talk in classroom interaction. Imperative utterances primarily function to direct children's activities, regulate behavior, and maintain classroom order. The high frequency of imperative speech acts reflects the practical need to manage children's attention, safety, and immediate responses in early childhood classroom settings.

To provide qualitative evidence supporting these findings, several excerpts from classroom interaction are presented below.

*Imperative Speech Acts: Directive Control and Classroom Management*

Excerpt 1: Directive Instruction during Learning Activity
Teacher : *"Sit down, please."*

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Teacher : *"Look at the board."*
Child : *(sits quietly and looks forward)*

This excerpt illustrates how imperative speech acts are used to organize children's physical behavior and attention during classroom activities. The teacher's utterances function as direct instructions that require immediate compliance. The child's response is primarily behavioral rather than verbal, indicating that participation in this context is often realized through action rather than spoken interaction.

Excerpt 2: Behavioral Regulation during Play Session
Teacher : *"Put the toys back in the box."*
Teacher : *"Don't throw the blocks."*
Child : *(stops throwing and places blocks in the box)*

In this interaction, imperative speech acts serve as mechanisms for regulating behavior and maintaining classroom discipline. The repeated use of short commands reflects the teacher's responsibility to ensure order and safety, particularly in a classroom with very young children. The language used is concise and directive, emphasizing efficiency and immediate response.

Excerpt 3: Routine Management during Transition Activity
Teacher : *"Line up, please."*
Teacher : *"Wash your hands."*
Children : *(form a line and move toward the sink)*

This excerpt demonstrates how imperative speech acts structure classroom routines and transitions between activities. Such instructions are repeated regularly and gradually become established classroom practices. Over time, children learn to anticipate these commands and respond automatically, indicating the routinization of interaction patterns.

*Interrogative Speech Acts: Response Elicitation in Classroom Interaction*

Interrogative speech acts appear less frequently and are generally realized as simple questions intended to elicit children's responses. These questions often require short answers and are closely related to instructional activities.

Excerpt 4: Interrogative Speech Act during Learning Activity
Teacher : *"What color is this?"*
Child : *"Blue."*
Teacher : *"Yes, blue."*

This interaction shows that interrogative speech acts are typically used to check understanding or confirm previously taught information. The child's response is brief and focused on correctness, indicating that the interaction is structured around evaluation rather than extended dialogue.

*Declarative Speech Acts: Information Delivery and Classroom Regulation*

Declarative speech acts are the least frequently used and function primarily to provide information or reinforce classroom rules.

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Excerpt 5: Declarative Speech Act during Classroom Routine
Teacher : *"Today we will sing a song."*
Teacher : *"We clean up after playing."*
Children : *(listen and prepare for the next activity)*

Declarative speech acts in this context serve an informative and regulatory function, providing guidance about classroom expectations and upcoming activities. Although less frequent, these utterances contribute to the establishment of classroom norms and routines.

Overall, the pattern of speech act distribution indicates that classroom communication in this non-formal preschool setting is strongly oriented toward directive interaction. Teacher language is primarily used to organize behavior, manage routines, and maintain order during classroom activities.

### *Types of Teachers' Questions and Children's Participation Patterns*

RQ2 focuses on analyzing the types of questions used by teachers and their implications for children's participation patterns in classroom interaction. The classification of question types follows Ellis (1994).

*Table 2. Types of Teachers' Questions in Classroom Interaction*

| Type of Question | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Display Questions | 45 | 70% |
| Referential Questions | 19 | 30% |
| Total | 64 | 100% |

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that display questions are used more frequently than referential questions in classroom interaction. Display questions typically require answers that are already known by the teacher and are often closed in nature, such as naming colors, identifying objects, or confirming previously given instructions. In contrast, referential questions allow children to express personal experiences, opinions, or individual responses and tend to produce longer verbal interaction.

*Display Questions and Restricted Participation Patterns*

Display questions appear most frequently in classroom interaction and are commonly associated with routine instructional activities. These questions generally require brief responses and are often used to check understanding or confirm compliance with classroom instructions.

Excerpt 1: Display Question during Learning Activity
Teacher : *"What color is this?"*
Child : *"Red."*
Teacher : *"Yes, red."*

This interaction illustrates a typical display question in which the teacher already knows the correct answer. The child's response is brief and limited to a single word. The

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interaction follows a predictable sequence in which the teacher initiates the question, the child responds, and the teacher evaluates the answer.

Excerpt 2: Display Question for Instruction Confirmation
Teacher : *"Did you wash your hands?"*
Child : *"Yes."*
Teacher : *"Good."*

In this excerpt, the display question functions as a monitoring tool to confirm compliance with classroom routines. The child's response is minimal and does not require elaboration, indicating that participation is structured around confirmation rather than extended communication.

A closer examination of these interactions shows that display questions are frequently associated with routine classroom activities, such as identifying objects, confirming instructions, and checking understanding. These questions tend to produce short responses and limited verbal interaction, indicating that children's participation is often reactive rather than proactive.

*Referential Questions and Expanded Participation Opportunities*

Although referential questions occur less frequently, they demonstrate a different interactional pattern that allows for more extended communication and greater child participation. These questions invite children to share experiences, express opinions, and provide explanations.

Excerpt 3: Referential Question about Personal Experience
Teacher : *"What did you play at home yesterday?"*
Child : *"I played with my toy car."*
Teacher : "*Oh, you played with your car. Who did you play with?"*
Child *: "With my brother."*

This interaction illustrates how referential questions encourage children to produce longer responses and share personal experiences. The teacher does not know the answer in advance, and the conversation develops through follow-up questions, resulting in more sustained interaction.

Excerpt 4: Referential Question during Storytelling Activity
Teacher : *"Why do you like this picture?"*
Child : *"Because the cat is funny."*
Teacher : *"What makes the cat funny?"*
Child : *"It jumps."*

In this example, the referential question invites the child to express an opinion and explain reasoning. The interaction involves multiple conversational turns, indicating a higher level of engagement and verbal participation. These excerpts demonstrate that referential questions create opportunities for children to participate more actively in classroom interaction by producing longer utterances and engaging in extended dialogue.

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Overall, the analysis indicates that the type of question used by teachers plays an important role in shaping children's participation patterns in classroom interaction. Display questions tend to produce brief and controlled responses, whereas referential questions encourage longer responses and more sustained interaction. These patterns suggest that variations in questioning strategies are associated with differences in the level of children's verbal participation during classroom activities.

***Power Relations and the Positioning of Children in Classroom Interaction***

This finding aims to analyze how teachers' language use represents and reproduces power relations in non-formal preschool classroom interaction by integrating the findings from RQ1 and RQ2 within the three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework developed by Fairclough. The analysis examines how patterns of speech acts and questioning strategies shape participation structures within classroom interaction.

Textual Level: Directive Language and Limited Response Options

At the textual level, the dominance of imperative speech acts and the frequent use of display questions indicate a tendency toward directive language that constrains the range of possible child responses. Teacher talk is commonly structured through short commands and closed questions that require immediate compliance or brief answers.

Excerpt 1: Directive Instruction during Classroom Activity
Teacher: *"Sit down."*
Teacher: *"Be quiet."*
Child: *(sits quietly and looks at the teacher)*

This interaction demonstrates how imperative speech acts function as direct commands that regulate children's behavior. The child's role in the interaction is primarily to comply rather than to communicate verbally.

These linguistic patterns reveal that directive language limits opportunities for extended verbal participation.

***Discursive Practice Level: Routinization of Interaction Patterns***

At the level of discursive practice, recurring interactional patterns in which teachers issue instructions and children respond briefly become routinized classroom practices. These routines shape expectations about how communication should occur in the classroom.

Excerpt 2: Routine Interaction during Classroom Transition
Teacher : *"Line up."*
Children : *(form a line)*
Teacher : *"Hands behind."*
Children : *(place hands behind their backs)*

This excerpt illustrates how repeated instructions create predictable interactional routines. Over time, children learn to anticipate these commands and respond automatically.

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***Social Practice Level: Construction of Teacher Authority and Child Compliance***

At the level of social practice, these interactional patterns reflect institutional expectations regarding discipline, safety, and classroom management in early childhood education. Teachers are positioned as organizers of classroom activities, while children are expected to follow instructions and maintain orderly behavior.

Excerpt 3: Authority Reinforced through Instruction
Teacher : *"Clean up your toys now."*
Child : *(continues playing)*
Teacher : *"I said clean up."*
Child : *(starts cleaning up)*

This interaction illustrates how teacher authority is reinforced through repetition of directives. The structure of the interaction emphasizes compliance as an expected form of participation.

Overall, the analysis indicates that power relations in classroom interaction are reflected in routine language practices that organize participation, regulate behavior, and structure communication between teachers and children.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that teacher–child interaction in non-formal preschool education for children aged 0–4 years is predominantly shaped by directive communication patterns embedded in everyday classroom routines. Rather than functioning solely as instructional tools, teachers' speech acts and questioning strategies serve as mechanisms that organize participation, regulate behavior, and structure interactional roles within the classroom. This pattern suggests that language use in early childhood settings is closely tied to institutional expectations related to safety, discipline, and efficiency. In line with the perspective of O'Keeffe et al. (2019), speech acts in classroom interaction are not merely linguistic forms but social actions that perform regulatory and organizational functions. In the present study, directive language appears to be normalized as a practical necessity for managing very young children, yet it simultaneously shapes the distribution of communicative authority between teachers and children.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the predominance of imperative speech acts reflects teachers' responsibility to ensure order and immediate compliance in classrooms involving children aged 0–4 years. Such directive communication is widely recognized as essential in early childhood education, particularly in situations requiring quick behavioral responses and attention management. However, the findings of this study indicate that the routine use of commands may unintentionally reinforce teacher-centered interaction patterns. As highlighted by Nursehag & Amalia (2024), the repeated use of directive utterances tends to position learners as passive participants, reducing opportunities for them to initiate communication or contribute ideas. The present findings extend this argument by showing that directive language becomes embedded in institutional routines and gradually accepted as a normal feature of classroom interaction. Through repeated use, these linguistic practices

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undergo a process of normalization, reinforcing the perception that compliance and responsiveness are primary indicators of successful participation.

The analysis of questioning strategies further reveals that the structure of teacher questions plays a significant role in shaping children's participation patterns. The frequent use of display questions indicates that classroom communication is often oriented toward confirming knowledge and monitoring behavior rather than encouraging exploration of ideas. While display questions are effective for assessing comprehension and ensuring that instructions are followed correctly, they tend to produce brief responses that limit opportunities for extended dialogue. Previous research in early childhood education suggests that closed questions are useful for reinforcing basic concepts but provide limited space for children to express personal experiences or develop communicative confidence (Chen et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2019). The findings of this study support this view by demonstrating that participation in such interactions is largely reactive, with children responding to teacher prompts rather than initiating conversation independently.

In contrast, the presence of referential questions in the classroom interaction, although less frequent, highlights the potential for more dialogic communication in early childhood settings. When teachers invite children to share personal experiences, opinions, or reasoning, the interaction becomes more conversational and collaborative. Children produce longer utterances, demonstrate greater engagement, and participate more actively in meaning-making processes. This observation is consistent with Ellis (1994), who distinguishes referential questions as those that promote authentic communication and support language development. The findings suggest that even small shifts in questioning strategies can create more opportunities for children to develop communicative competence and social interaction skills.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, particularly within the framework proposed by Fairclough (2015), the interactional patterns observed in this study illustrate how power relations are enacted through everyday language practices rather than through explicit rules or formal authority. Teachers' repeated use of commands and closed questions structures interaction in ways that position teachers as the primary decision-makers and children as responders to instruction. These patterns demonstrate that power in classroom interaction operates indirectly through routine communication practices that shape expectations about appropriate behavior and participation. As noted by Al Zidjaly (2017) and Rogers et al. (2005), institutional discourse often reproduces hierarchical relationships through seemingly ordinary linguistic structures. The present study contributes to this body of research by providing empirical evidence from a non-formal preschool context, showing that power relations are sustained not only in formal schooling environments but also in settings commonly perceived as flexible and child-centered.

An important implication of these findings is that interactional inequality in early childhood classrooms may remain unnoticed because it is embedded in routine practices that appear natural and necessary. Teachers may rely on directive language not as a deliberate strategy to control children, but as a habitual response shaped by professional norms and institutional expectations. Morton (2018) explains that teachers are often unaware of how their everyday classroom talk constructs interactional roles and

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participation structures. The findings of this study support this argument by showing that teacher talk tends to follow established patterns rather than reflective choices. This suggests that increasing teachers' awareness of language use is a critical step toward creating more inclusive and participatory learning environments.

The findings also challenge the widely held assumption that non-formal education environments are inherently more egalitarian than formal schooling contexts. Although non-formal settings are often characterized by flexible routines and child-friendly atmospheres, the interactional data in this study indicate that hierarchical communication patterns may still persist. Research by Tsui (2023) and Luk & Lin (2017) demonstrates that institutional informality does not automatically eliminate power imbalances, as authority can be exercised through subtle and implicit language practices. In the present context, the relaxed classroom environment does not necessarily translate into equal participation opportunities, as communication remains structured around teacher directives and predetermined responses. This finding highlights the importance of examining classroom interaction not only in terms of organizational structure but also in terms of everyday language use.

More broadly, this study contributes to the understanding of early childhood classroom interaction by emphasizing the dual function of teacher language. On one hand, directive communication is necessary to ensure safety, maintain order, and support efficient classroom management, particularly in groups of very young children. On the other hand, excessive reliance on directive language may limit children's opportunities to develop communicative agency and participate actively in dialogue. This dual function underscores the need for a balanced approach to teacher communication that integrates both guidance and responsiveness. In this sense, the findings extend previous research in educational discourse by demonstrating that effective classroom interaction requires not only control and organization but also opportunities for children to express ideas and engage in meaningful communication.

The practical implications of this study are particularly relevant for teacher professional development in early childhood education. Training programs may benefit from incorporating reflective practices that encourage teachers to examine how their language choices influence participation patterns and interactional dynamics. Strategies such as using open-ended prompts, providing follow-up questions, and allowing children time to elaborate responses can support more dialogic communication without compromising classroom management. Previous research suggests that responsive communication practices can enhance children's engagement and promote the development of language and social skills (Kurnia et al., 2022; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Therefore, raising awareness of teacher talk as a pedagogical tool may help educators create learning environments that are both structured and participatory.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the application of Critical Discourse Analysis in early childhood education by demonstrating how power relations are constructed through routine interactional practices in non-formal preschool settings. While many CDA studies have focused on formal educational institutions, the present findings show that similar discursive mechanisms operate in community-based or non-formal

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environments. By examining speech acts and questioning strategies within a three-dimensional analytical framework, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how language shapes social relations and participation structures in early childhood classrooms. This contribution expands the scope of discourse analysis research and highlights the importance of considering everyday communication practices as key elements in the formation of educational experiences.

Overall, the discussion underscores the central role of language in shaping children's learning experiences and social participation from an early age. Teachers' language not only conveys instructions and information but also defines the boundaries of interaction, establishes expectations for behavior, and constructs children's roles within the classroom community.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined teachers' language use in classroom interaction within non-formal preschool education for children aged 0–4 years by applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The findings demonstrate that classroom interaction is predominantly shaped by teachers' speech acts and questioning practices, with imperative utterances and display questions occurring most frequently. These linguistic patterns indicate that teachers play a central role in directing interaction, regulating children's behavior, and determining the structure of classroom communication.

From a critical perspective, the dominance of directive speech and closed questioning does not only serve pedagogical and managerial purposes but also contributes to the reproduction of asymmetric power relations between teachers and children. Through repeated and routinized language practices, authority and control become naturalized as normal features of early childhood classroom interaction. As a result, children's participation is largely limited to responding to teacher-initiated talk, while opportunities for initiating interaction, expressing personal meanings, or negotiating understanding remain constrained.

By focusing on a non-formal preschool context, this study extends existing research on classroom discourse, which has predominantly centered on formal educational institutions. The findings demonstrate that institutional informality and child-centered pedagogical claims do not automatically result in egalitarian or dialogic interaction. Instead, power relations may continue to be enacted in subtle and implicit ways through everyday language use. In this way, the study contributes to the broader body of knowledge in Critical Discourse Analysis by highlighting how power operates at the micro-level of interaction in early childhood education settings that are often assumed to be flexible and supportive.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The data were drawn from a limited number of classroom interactions within a specific non-formal preschool context, which restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other settings. In addition, the analysis focused primarily on teachers' language use and did not extensively explore children's multimodal responses, such as gestures, facial expressions, or peer interaction, which are important aspects of communication in early childhood classrooms.

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***Suggestions and Recommendations***

Based on these findings, future research is recommended to examine classroom interaction across a wider range of non-formal educational contexts in order to capture greater variation in pedagogical practices and institutional cultures. Further studies could also integrate multimodal discourse analysis to explore how children express agency not only through verbal responses but also through bodily actions and visual resources. In addition, longitudinal research may provide deeper insights into how repeated interactional patterns shape children's communicative development over time.

Pedagogically, this study suggests the importance of raising teachers' awareness of how everyday language choices influence children's participation and agency. Encouraging the use of more open-ended questions and interactional strategies that invite children to initiate talk may help create more dialogic and participatory learning environments, even within the practical constraints of early childhood education. Such efforts may support the development of children's communicative confidence and agency while still maintaining necessary structure and safety in the classroom.

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