An Exploratory Investigation into Classroom Discourse in a Bruneian University

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Abstract

The paper inquired into the discourse practices in classroom teaching in a State university in Brunei Darussalam. Respondents comprised four (4), local Bruneian lecturers, from two (2) academic streams: STEM-driven and entrepreneurship programmes. Subjected to data saturation, teaching observations of each respondent were shadowed over several weeks. Data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the Classroom Discourse Observation Protocol (CDOP) to determine the types and frequencies of teacher-student utterances. Findings showed that the students were provided insufficient opportunities to interact meaningfully and that the lecturers who were leaning toward conventional teaching did minimal attempts to engage the students, failing to utilise appropriate prompts and basic questioning techniques believed to facilitate critical thinking and deep learning. Classroom discourse was propelled by a corresponding approach in teaching; hence continuous readiness in classroom teaching needs to be sustained, should students' quality of learning be improved.

Keywords: Brunei, classroom communication, classroom discourse, teaching and learning

With globalisation and technological advancements, higher education institutions have seen an increase in teaching approaches that prioritise student engagement and reciprocal interaction with the lecturers. Cao and colleagues (2019) determined that teaching approaches can be defined as the methods used in the delivery of the module content or how the lecturer fosters their students' conceptual development of the subject matter via their linguistic intention and strategies within the class. An element of these approaches is the use of classroom discourse to engage students and strengthen learning. Classroom discourse refers to the specific language used within the constructs of the classroom and can include delivery, feedback, instructional language, or even basic conversational utterances (Tsui, 2008). It is recognised as being instrumental in the construction of meaningful learning and so an awareness of a lecturer's discourse in the classroom can lead to not only an enhancement of students' knowledge but also their ability to comprehend and critically evaluate information (Howe & Abedin, 2013).

In higher education institutions, universities generally adhere to using mass teaching methodologies such as lectures to deliver content to the students. A methodology where lecturers tend to monologue extensively with very little active construction of the meaning of the delivered content. An insight into the discourse used by the lecturers can aid in minimising or addressing the routinely one-sided interaction as well as the notable disengagement of students reported in higher education lectures (Trigwell & Prosser, 2020; Wang & Wang, 2021). The creation of a more collaborative and interactive classroom by way of activities that incorporates the subject matter can aid in knowledge retention long past the classroom (Shan et al., 2014). In addition, this inclusion of interactional communication in the classroom has been shown to have a positive impact on student learning outcomes and by association, help develop and nurture students' soft skills such as critical thinking and learner autonomy (Hardman, 2016).

In Brunei, classroom communication is heavily influenced by the national philosophy *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) or Malay Islamic Monarchy which by large has formed the Bruneian Malay identity (Hj Othman, 2012). The MIB philosophy is entrenched in all aspects of life in Brunei and the Malay culture is seen to impact behaviour, beliefs, and values which are simultaneously aligned with Islamic religious beliefs resulting in a level of reverence and obedience afforded to lecturers and teachers alike (Othman, 2014) creating a significant communicative and social gap. Cultural studies have placed Brunei in the same group as other Malay dominant countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, portraying Malay culture as polite and self-effacing (Blunt, 1988; Mulder, 1996) as well as highly collectivist, hierarchical with high power distance as per Hofstede's cultural dimension theories (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, due to prior exposure and continuous immersion in rote-based or traditional teaching methods, Bruneian students are accustomed to the view of lecturers as a figure of authority and so conform to the behavioural construct of only speaking when spoken to (Salbrina & Deterding, 2018).

Therefore, it stands to reason that in this case, the onus for a collaborative and interactive classroom will fall on the lecturer. This study will indicate the importance of a two-way collaboration in higher education between both lecturers and students during the teaching and learning process. Identifying the lecturers' discourse moves made in the classroom can help with the advancement of teaching skills.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the following problems:

1. The emerging typologies of lecturer discourse practices in a higher education institution in Brunei Darussalam;
2. Any differences in teaching approaches between lecturers from different programmes.

Literature Review

The use of lectures as a teaching approach in universities has persevered over the years and remained the main teaching method as it enables the mass delivery of knowledge over a short period of time. Despite its popularity, academicians are well-aware of its shortcomings with regards to the lack of student engagement, its one-sided communication and of course its inability to stimulate higher-order thinking (Charlton, 2006). To ensure the quality of teaching, a lecturer must be committed to developing a "constructional alignment of the course instructional design", to maintain an element of curiosity among the students thus peaking their interests long enough to be inquisitive and alter their learning style accordingly (Teaiwa, 2011). It is therefore important for the lecturer to determine the kinds of teaching approaches suitable which can mean the difference between a quiet and monologic class and a dynamic classroom experience (Tienken et al., 2019).

A dynamic class can also be achieved by encouraging students' participation in lectures by implementing a few strategies such as providing ample thinking time, conducting discussions in smaller groups, encouraging knowledge sharing and implementing activities related to the subject matter (Abdul et al., 2020). This was supported by Balwant and Doon (2021) in their research on teaching effectiveness, where it was determined that making modifications to the teaching approach and strategies by implementing summative and collaborative activities can lead to more understanding and increase communication among the students in their attempt to explore their learning. Further to this, it is pertinent for lecturers to be aware of the instructional strategies or teaching approaches used as it is shown to have strong links to students' learning experiences which can lead to an increase in comprehension and understanding among the students (Lak et al., 2017).

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) theorised that in any classroom there is principally a three-part sequence that happens between any educator and student known as the IRF exchange structure. This would consist of the I -initiation part, which would usually be in the form of a closed or a recall question, R- response from the student followed by the F- feedback statement or remark from the educator in form of an acknowledgement of the response. Research has indicated that in the third part of the sequence, Feedback can be used in a number of ways. More commonly, it is used either as a closing statement in order to move on to the next planned lesson or activity or as an opportunity for further learning thus extending the interaction. Classrooms which have followed this basic pattern of interaction have been noted to be limited in their ability to encourage participation (Mehan & Cazden, 2015). Essentially, lecturers would need to employ a more comprehensive style of questioning.

The act of questioning by the lecturer can greatly increase the student's learning as well as open up new avenues of knowledge. There is also a number of research conducted on the types of questions, their uses and expectations, as well as others on the analysis of feedback given, its purpose and effectiveness in responding to the question (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2020).

Therefore, a lecturer must be aware of their communication and feedback so that they will be able to easily adjust their teaching and their content to address the gaps in students' knowledge and understanding. This however requires flexibility not just in the lesson plan but also in the lecturer's delivery and explanation of the content (Howe et al., 2019). One way of achieving this would be looking toward improving the lecturer's communicative discourse in the overall delivery of the content as well as interaction with the students.

Kranzfelder and colleagues (2020) developed the Classroom Discourse Observation Protocol (CDOP), a tool to evaluate classroom discourse, specifically focusing on those made by the lecturers – teacher discourse moves (TDM). This allowed the identification of different discourse moves used by the different lecturers using similar teaching approaches. By quantifying and analysing the TDMs uttered, the data can then be used to pinpoint areas of weakness and strengths within the lecturers' discourse and how they can impact students' learning experiences.

Methodology

The observations were conducted in February and March 2021, prior to the second wave of COVID-19 infections in Brunei Darussalam. Thus, all observations were of physical face-to-face classrooms. As the main point of the study is to look at the lecturer-student interaction as well as any guided instructions by the lecturer, the utterances were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants

Purposive convenience sampling (Creswell, 2014) was used, and the participants were local lecturers from two different faculties in the university, the Engineering and School of Business. Participation was voluntary and all participants consented to be observed and recorded during their classes for the purpose of this study. All the lecturers have undertaken a nine-month teaching training diploma at another local university. The full information on the lecturers can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Information on Lecturers

	Engineering		School of Business	
Lecturer	AS	BD	CG	DZ
Number of years teaching in higher education	7	12	18	15
Received formal teaching training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Level of students taught	2	2	4	3
Number of students	44	32	9	11
Number of times observed	4	3	4	4

Instrument

The transcriptions were then analysed using the Classroom Discourse Observation Protocol (CDOP) as developed by Kranzfelder and colleagues (2019). The instrument was used to identify the lecturers' utterances and categorise them into specific lecturer-centred and student-centred utterances to find out the most commonly used type of interaction. The CDOP coding system differentiates between lecturer-centred utterances and student-centred utterances to determine how each classroom is taught. The intention was to gain a reflection on the dynamics of teaching and learning in the lectures within the four classrooms as well as gain an insight into any differences that can be seen between the two faculties.

The CDOP features 15 codes, five of which are lecturer-centred: sharing, real-worlding, evaluating, linking, and forecasting. Whereas the remaining 10 codes were more student-centred: generative, checking in, clarifying, connecting, contextualising, representing, explaining, constructing, requesting, and challenging. With CDOP, the quantifying of the teacher's discourse markers (TDM) was conducted every 2 mins within the length of the class. For this research, the TDMs were transcribed verbatim and coded throughout to ensure all utterances were accounted for and categorised accordingly. This was done so to allow for the data to give a true account of the communication happening in the lectures.

Results

The results show that the classes were predominantly using lecturer-centred discourse markers with three of the lecturers' classroom communication (BD, CG and DZ) recorded as containing more than 50% of lecturer-centred TDMs. On the other hand, lecturer AS's classroom communication although containing mainly student-centred TDM also featured a high percentage of lecturer-centred TDM (46.9%) albeit significantly lower than the other lecturers. This can be seen in Figure 1 which illustrates the overall division of utterances between the lecturer-centred and student-centred utterances during the classes observed. Looking at the data overall, there do not seem to be any significant differences or similarities between the lecturers' classroom dialogue based on any of the variables mentioned in Table 1.

Figure 1

Usage Comparison of Lecturer-Centred Versus Students-Centred TDMs

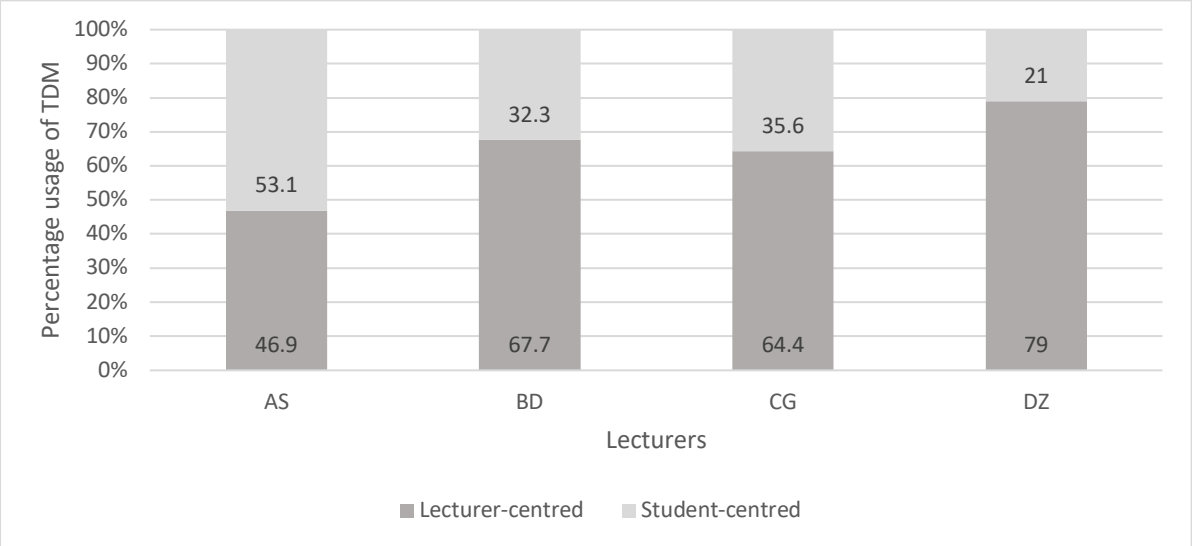


Table 2 shows the percentage value of each TDM used by the lecturers. The data shows that not all the TDMs were used by the lecturers, in particular the student-centred TDMs. Most notable are the TDMs representing, explaining, constructing, requesting, and challenging, all of which invite or encourage the students to present, participate, justify or evaluate their reasonings or their classmates' reasonings. This significant absence of the student-centred TDM revealed the extent to which the classroom communication was very lecturer-centred across the two disciplines.

Table 2
Percentage of TDM Contained in the Lecturers' Classroom Communication

		Lecturer percentage of total utterances (%)			
		AS	BD	CG	DZ
Lecturer-centred	Evaluating	1	1.8	7.7	2.4
	Forecasting	0	4.4	0	2.3
	Linking	0	3.2	0	7.4
	Real - worlding	0	2.2	16.3	14.3
	Sharing	45.9	56.1	40.4	52.6
Student-centred	Generative	40.6	26.2	15.9	20.2
	Clarifying	1.1	0	2.9	0.8
	Checking -in	10.4	4.9	2.9	0
	Connecting	1	1.2	1.4	0
	Contextualising	0	1	12.5	0
	Representing	0	0	0	0
	Explaining	0	0	0	0
	Constructing	0	0	0	0
	Requesting	0	0	0	0
	Challenging	0	0	0	0

Lecturer-Centred TDM

Figure 2 shows the graphical representation of the lecturer-centred TDM in the lecturers' classroom communication. The results revealed that the highest percentage of TDM contained in all four lecturers' classroom communication was sharing, averaging 49%. This TDM is the lecturer sharing information related to the subject matter and providing a solution or answers to any questions posed. The second TDM that featured in all the lecturers' recorded communication was evaluation albeit at different degrees with lecturer CG having the highest usage at 7.7% in comparison to the others who used the marker on average two per cent over the observation period. This code is categorised as a lecturer-centred TDM as it is in response to students' utterances as elicited by the lecturers. Real-worlding where the lecturer related ideas to current knowledge or personal experiences were only seen in three of the lecturers (averaging 8.2%). Similarly, the other TDMs such as forecasting and linking were uttered by only two of the lecturers, DZ (2.3% & 7.4%) and BD (4.4% & 3.2%).

Figure 2
The Division of Lecturer-Centred TDMs Used by the Participants

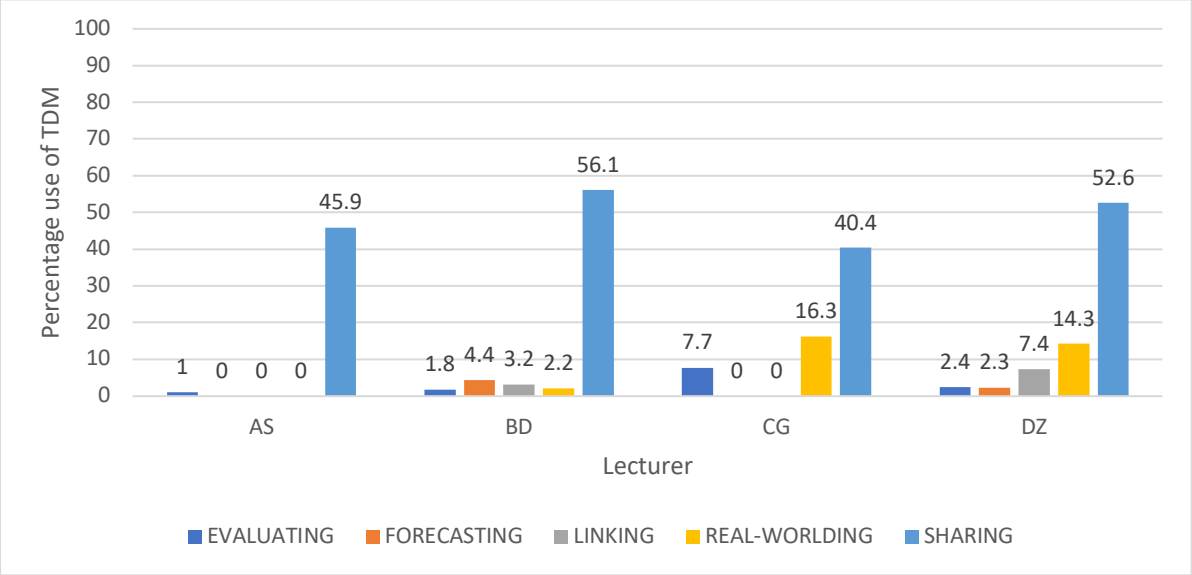


Table 3 shows excerpts of lecturers' discourse to illustrate the CDOP codes as identified from the recorded classroom communication.

Table 3
Excerpts of the Different Lecturer-Centred TDMs Uttered by the Lecturers

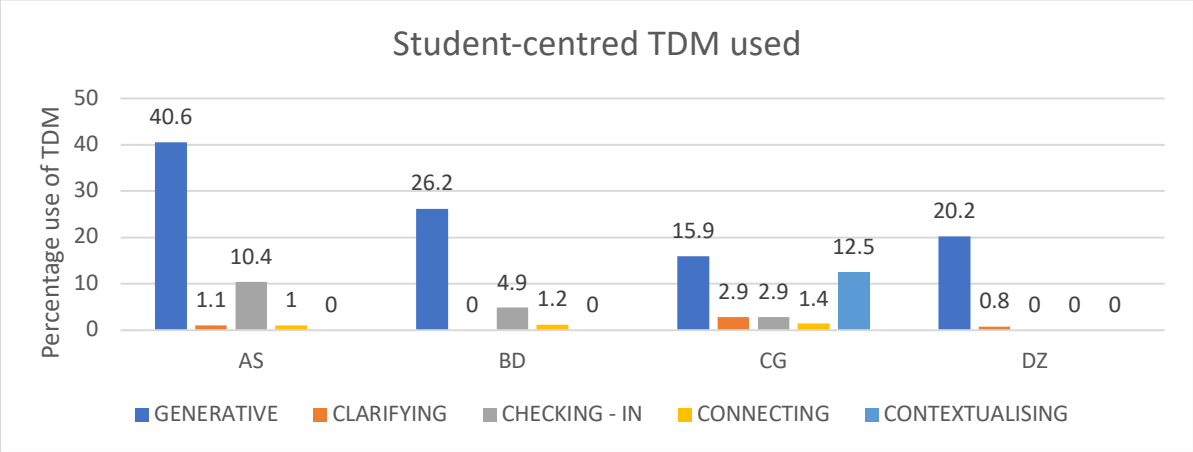
Lecturer-centred TDM	Lecturer	Utterances
Sharing	AS	So instead of using X and Y to define the position of a particle, we can use the. The polar coordinate system, which is basically instead of having X&Y we are going to define it using the radius of a curvature radius of a circle.
Real-worlding	CG	Ok, so you remember Sony Ericsson, before it was just Sony and it was just Ericsson. Then they combined they were one of the top (sic) after Samsung.
Evaluating	BD	L: So, which side is strongest? S: Side B? L: Yes exactly!
Linking	DZ	Ok, this brings me back to what we learnt in our micro-econ section to do with special and different services…copy tax, payroll tax…remember? This is a continuation
Forecasting	DZ	So, now we focus more on the local level of business and in a few weeks we will move on to more on a federal level and the country level and we can look at the differences, and you can determine.

Student-Centred Utterances

Student-centred TDMs comprise 10 codes which reflect utterances by the students in response to initiation from a lecturer. However as mentioned, only a small number of these TDM codes were used collectively by the lecturers during the observations (generative, clarifying,

checking-in, connecting, and contextualising). Figure 3 shows the graphical representation of the TDMs in the lecturers' classroom communication. As can be seen in Figure 3, the most used TDM code is generative, (averaging 26%) where the students recall basic facts, concepts, or related information as asked by the lecturer (Kranzfelder et al., 2019).

Figure 3
The Division of Student-Centred TDMs Used by the Participants



It should also be noted that within the student-centred TDM codes the generative code is in fact the most featured TDM for all the lecturers but second (AS: 40.6%, BD: 26.2%, and DZ: 20.2%) third overall (CG: 15.9%) during their classes. With regards to the other TDM codes, however, not all five were present in the lecturers' utterances. Lecturer CG and BD were missing the TDM codes contextualising and clarifying respectively from their classroom communication, whereas lecturer DZ did not have TDM codes checking in and connecting in their classroom communication. The lack of student-centred TDM codes in their communication supports the notion that the classes are very much lecturer-centred.

Table 4
Excerpts of the Different Student-Centred TDMs Uttered by the Lecturers

Student-centred TDM	Lecturer	Utterances
Generative	AS	Ok, this is your UΘ. So, what would we do next?
Clarifying	DZ	S: Tax L: Ok, but you need to be specific, what kind of tax?
Checking in	BD	So far are we good?
Connecting	CG	Remember Sony? Ok so, what about that is applicable here?
Contextualising	CG	Ok, lets focus on Brunei first and look at franchises, how many do we have in Brunei?

Discussion

Lecturer-Centred

Given that the classes observed were lectures, it would come as no surprise as sharing information or "story-telling" is seen to be the most successful method of teaching large groups large amounts of information (Schmidt et al., 2015). This was supported by Kranzfelder and colleagues (2020), who in their research on STEM lecturers' classroom discourse found code sharing to have been more frequently used at an average of 75%. However, Rakhimov and colleagues (2020) stated that lectures should be modernised to include discussions and general interactive communication among all parties involved.

Indeed, the mass sharing of information as a method of teaching in has long been considered a safe and more reliable way of disseminating knowledge consistently, especially to larger classes. In this study though, only the engineering classes had a large number of students (N=44 and 32), whereas the classes in the School of Business had a comparatively smaller number of students (N=9 and 11). This negates research conducted by Trigwell and Prosser (2014) which concluded that the size of a class should not determine the teaching approach, nor should it affect the ability of the lecturer to offer more of a varied and interactive approach (Trigwell & Prosser, 2014). Implementing such an approach can result in a more dynamic lesson, leading to an increase in knowledge retention and academic achievement.

In addition to this, the presence of the TDM evaluation in all the lecturers' vernacular is an indication of the lecturers' attempts to create a dialogue in the class. So, it does seem to be indicative of interaction between the lecturer and the students, however, the lower values illustrate the lack of feedback or responses the students are giving the lecturers in return. An example of this can be seen in the exchange in table 3 which showcases one of the instances of the TDM evaluating being used where lecturer BD initiated the class with a question (generative), the students responded accordingly, and their response was then accepted by the lecturer (evaluate). As seen from the exchange, although there is initiation made by the lecturer, the type of question asked does not encourage a comprehensive reply. Similarly, with the engineering lecturers, the questions asked were of basic types that do not require much analysis or critical thinking.

This clearly shows the importance of lecturer-centred training in areas of classroom communication and the development of skills related to the promotion of exploratory talk or dialogic strategies which would then pave the way for university lecturers to be more than just methods of disseminating large volumes of theory or information (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2020). This corresponds with Hardman (2016) who determined that instructional classroom interactions coupled with ineffective questioning techniques can reduce the need for any direct engagement between the lecture and the students. Further noting that educators need to move beyond known-information questions or recitation questions and use more information-seeking questions or referential questions which can elicit "genuine communication" which in turn can lead to the core goal of the class – learning.

When the two disciplines are further compared, it can be seen that the business lecturers' classroom communication contained a higher percentage of the TDM real-worlding (14.3% and 16.3%) unlike the engineering lecturers where only one lecturer's communication contained real-worlding and a much smaller percentage (2.2%). In the case of lecturer CG, real-worlding code is the second most frequently used code during the classes. Real-worlding

requires the lecturer to refer to shared public knowledge along with the lecturers' and the students' personal experiences (Kranzfelder et al., 2019), likely as a way to create linkages between students' current knowledge and the taught material. Schmidt et al., (2015) believed that using pre-conceived ideas or current known ideas and linking them to the subject matter stimulate the knowledge formation of the brain. This was supported by Pimentel and McNeill (2013) who discovered that the use of correct elicitation methods and allowing the students to respond accordingly can be one of the ways to break the monotony of lecturer-centred discourse.

The very minimal use of the TDM real-worlding in engineering classes can be explained due to the nature of the subject. The engineering modules observed were mathematics and physics related and in addition to this, the students were in level two of their studies. This meant the lecturers would have some difficulty in providing a reference to the module as it was a highly theoretical module featuring calculations and measurements. Whereas the business modules were more relatable to real-life situations as it incorporates real business corporations and situational events within the module. This can nonetheless be modified by the lecturer having a pre-conceived strategic plan to incorporate activities that encourages classroom participation through collaborative or interactive means (Balwant & Doon, 2021).

Student-Centred

The generative code refers to the lecturers' elicitation of the students on basic facts, concepts, or related information (Kranzfelder et al., 2019) and serves to kickstart the discussion in the classroom. However, given that the percentage use of the TDM code does reveal that the lecturers' attempts were not fully utilised. This can be further illustrated in Table 5 which shows the full extended generative utterance by lecturer AS initially detailed in Table 4. In Table 5, lecturer AS repeatedly questioned the class since there was no discernible response each time.

Table 5
Extended Extract of Utterance by Lecturer AS

Line	Lecturer	Utterance
85	AS	Ok, this is your UΘ. So, what would we do next?
86	AS	We have to prove the unit vector, right? (2s)
87	AS	Ok let's group them together here, so we have the r value here.
88	AS	What about this here? (2s)
89	AS	Ok, this is your UΘ. So, if we add the two values what will we get? It's going to be your acceleration. am I right? (3s)
90	AS	Alright, so we now have your acceleration, So, we add this value here and what do you notice? (1s)
91	AS	not your acceleration, but your? (2s) radial acceleration.

This passivity from the students is theorised to be a learned response cultivated by repeated experience of having their responses or feedback dismissed in lecturer-centred classrooms (Lak et al., 2017). This is generally a long-term effect and something students have adopted over a period of years based on their own classroom experience growing up. Abdul and colleagues (2020) confirmed that students will tend to simulate their lecturers' teaching approaches and classroom behaviour. Therefore, passive students exist because the lecturer allows them to exist without any attempt at breaking the educational mould that the students are used to.

On the surface, the data indicated that there is a degree of elicitation from the lecturer, denoting that classroom participation is present although to a very small degree. From the results, the TDM checking-in is seen to be used more by the engineering lecturers than the business lecturers. The TDM code checking-in was also used by all lecturers involved though at different frequencies, with it being the second most used TDM by lecturer AS at 25.9% compared to the others who all checked in at less than 5% of their overall observed lessons. This exchange between the lecturer and students is characterized by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as IRF (Initiation-Response-feedback) and is commonly recognised as a lecturer-centred approach, but as argued by others, the "feedback" part of the interaction can be used as a pedagogical tool to promote discussion and expand the dialogue between the lecturer and students. In this study, the TDM checking-in is designated a student-centred TDM as it is utterances where the lecturer asks the students if they have any questions or require clarification, (Kranzfelder et al., 2019), in these classrooms the opportunity is not always seized by the students who instead remain silent or nods in response to signal agreement or understanding. Using strategic evaluative feedback or effective follow-up questioning techniques that encourage an elaborative response can increase not only the opportunities for discussion but also open up new opportunities for learning (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2020; Howe et al., 2019). The results do certainly pinpoint the notion that the lecturers observed are not fully applying ideal techniques relating to these teaching approaches and so having more awareness of this can help towards achieving meaningful participation in the classrooms.

Recommendations

The research has highlighted a number of items where further exploration would be beneficial. This paper lacks a comprehensive investigation into the lecturers' full communication with the students. In particular, there was no observational insight into the communicative patterns of the lecturers during the class, specifically regarding their opening remarks, delivery and conclusive statements in the class. Insight into the lecturers' full communication patterns can help determine the weaknesses in the communicative teaching approach. Willemsen et al., (2018) theorised that applying a more open and welcoming discourse from the start of the class and continuing by maintaining such strategies throughout the class to encourage participation. Therefore, future research may want to include these elements in the analysis and look for any commonalities in the lecturers' speech patterns when teaching and how it encourages feedback from the students.

Another area for exploration can be the addition of analysis into the non-verbal communication utilised by the lecturers. Non-verbal communication and behaviour can play an important role in the overall teaching and instructional communicative process. Sztejnberg and Jasiński (2019) found that the use of eye contact and facial expression was deemed significant by students in reinforcing any classroom communication. Thus, adding this particular aspect may provide more depth into the reasons behind the lecturers' utterances and their relationship to learning.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to investigate the types of discourse used by lecturers along with any differences that may be observed between those teaching different programmes in the university. From the study, it was clear that all the lecturers were observed to use very teacher-centric approaches unlike those envisioned by the university. While there were certainly attempts by the lecturers to use student-centred TDMs, the ensuing responses from the students

were minimal and passive. It became apparent here that the lecturers were not using effective questioning techniques which would have allowed for the IRF-like exchange structure to evolve into more of a dialogical discussion. This further suggests that lecturers need to be aware of how language use can affect classroom dynamics. Thus, the continued use of CDOP as a tool to explore and investigate TDMs across the university can be beneficial for the development of a framework to improve classroom communication and encourage a more dynamic and dialogical-based teaching and learning environment.

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