

## A discourse analysis of blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) model of classroom discourse



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### ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's revised classroom discourse (CD) structure of Teacher's Initiation, Students' Response and Teacher's Feedback (IRF). The study suggests the Initiation<sup>(2)</sup>, Response<sup>(2)</sup> and Feedback<sup>(2)</sup> (IIRFFF) pattern which may be suitable for today's CD. This pattern permits equal contributions by classroom participants. The study adopts a quantitative method for data collection; a qualitative-descriptive research design and Information Processing Theory (IPT). Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to English lecturers and students from three tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The results show a high percentage of participants who confirmed that Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model has blind spots; 86% of the respondents agreed that the model may lead to a limited understanding of what is taught; 80% agreed that dual initiations and feedback are rejected in this model, and 70% strongly agreed that the model should be expanded to accommodate other fields of language learning. The study recommends that CD should be categorized into two major types: the teacher's utterances and the students' utterances. The IIRFFF pattern that allows teachers and students to have equal slots in every CD should be implemented. This will encourage students' full participation and interaction.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the field of CD by introducing the IIRFFF structure; thereby filling a lacuna in CD. Teachers and students now have equal rights to initiate, respond and give feedback. Teacher's dominance in CD will be minimized, and CD will be interactive, productive and student-centered.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom discourse (CD) is an ongoing subject of interest for many notable scholars and researchers (such as John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Halliday, Erving Goffman, Courtney Cazden, Paul Gee, and Douglas Barnes) from linguistics, education, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and other fields of human endeavors. As an interdisciplinary field, scholars draw their inspiration from their own areas of interest. In explaining the interdisciplinary nature of CD, Hjelm (2021) observes that every "analytical study needs to be designed individually" because there are limitless analytical tools available for all analysts. What then is CD? According to Jocuns (2012) CD is all forms of talk within classroom or other educational settings. It includes the language that teachers use with their students, students with students, language itself, thinking, academic achievement, questioning and discourse patterns, cultural and sociolinguistics aspects, feedback and assessment, technology, and classroom language of all kinds. Al-Buraiki (2024) observes that "teacher language plays a vital role in the classroom." CD is the nucleus of all

academic activities in all educational institutions globally. The continuity of any academic activity depends solely on it. CD is also the verbal and non-verbal language carried out during teaching and learning of any sort, even after teaching and learning have been completed. It is indispensable in all educational activities, especially in classrooms.

Although the importance of CD cannot be overemphasized, there are some grey areas or limited aspects of classroom strategies, patterns, methods, principles, theory, etc. that impede teaching and learning generally. [Kasneji et al. \(2023\)](#) suggest the limitations that need to be addressed. One classroom model that has blind spots that should be addressed is Sinclair and Coulthard's model of CD, hence; the need for this study.

What is a blind spot? It is a relative term with different interpretations based on its contexts (of use). Blind spots are limitations or obstacles of varying types and degrees. According to [Esseveld \(2014\)](#) they are the obscuration of visual fields. They are applied and implied limitations on aspects of life, on written, spoken; and sign language, or ideas that are unclear or ambiguous. They are loopholes that need to be restructured, amended, or worked upon. There are various kinds of blind spots, such as intrapersonal, personal, interpersonal, physical, psychological, physiological, metaphorical, automotive, cultural, organizational (systemic, symmetrical, or asymmetrical), political, religious, and linguistic.

There are few linguistic or other theories that do not have limitations. According to [Espinilla, Liu, and Martinez \(2011\)](#) different approaches present different limitations regarding either the accuracy of the computational model or linguistic framework (510). Where these limitations outnumber the advantages and uses, there are urgent clarion calls for their revisitation, reconstruction, and amendment. Therefore, the response to close a negative gap in Sinclair and Coulthard's model informs this research on the blind spot in the [Sinclair and Coulthard \(1992\)](#) revised models.

Sinclair and Coulthard's model of classroom discourse was developed in the 1970s to analyze and describe conversations between teachers and students in classroom settings. Many scholars, such as [Böheim, Schindler, and Seidel \(2022\)](#); [Purnawati \(2021\)](#) and [Walsh \(2021\)](#) have also observed this statement. According to Sinclair and Coulthard, the most encounters in teaching take the same pattern: the teacher would initiate the conversation, there would be a response from the student, and the teacher would then provide feedback.

Initiation includes teachers' lesson plans, instructional goals, curriculum materials, teaching styles, methods of teaching, and spontaneous interactions with students. The advantages of teachers' interactions with students are numerous. According to [Wilson & Stacey \(2004\)](#), as cited in [Nguyen, Tran, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Nguyen \(2022\)](#) teachers interactions, among other advantages, are to engage students, advise on problems, and assess their learning. Responses are students' answers, replies, understanding, confidence, cultural background, language proficiency, and learning styles. According to [Ramesh et al.](#), we need to evaluate all students' responses with different explanations. By so doing, they will be able to understand teachers' lessons.

Feedback is based on teachers' evaluations, assessment criteria, pedagogical knowledge, and instructional strategies to ensure the effectiveness of their teaching by confirming the correctness or otherwise of the students' responses, elaborating on the answers, asking follow-up questions, or providing additional information. The merits of feedback cannot be overemphasized. [Wang and Zhang \(2020\)](#) maintain that the crucial goal of feedback is to improve students' active participation in learning.

Scholars have investigated and identified blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's model of CD before this present study. [McCarthy \(1992\)](#) observes that the model is only "very useful where talk is relatively tightly structured." [Malouf \(1995\)](#), as cited in [Atkins and Brown \(2001\)](#) explains that the model is applied to two-party discourse and seems to fall short of the full range of linguistic communication. [Atkins and Brown \(2001\)](#) maintain that the model should be suitable for the one-on-one classroom setting. Also, [McCarthy and Slade \(2007\)](#) observe that the teacher exerts the maximum amount of control over the structure of the discourse when applying this model.

Having observed these limitations, many scholars, such as [Brazil and Coulthard \(1992\)](#), [Coulthard \(1992\)](#), [Farooq \(1999a\)](#), [Francis and Hunston \(1992\)](#), and [Tsui \(1992\)](#), as cited in [Atkins and Brown \(2001\)](#) have attempted to restructure the model; however, there is still a knowledge gap which this work attempts to fill. This model possibly

interrupts students' easy comprehension and is completely teacher-centered; it has been modified and it may not be useful in today's technological world. This research is contrary to the submission of many researchers who maintain that the IRF pattern is "the optimal interaction pattern" (Ginting & Dewi, 2023) in classrooms. This research has shown that rather than being the optimal pattern, it has some blind spots which are disadvantageous in many classroom contexts. It suggests a modification of this model to enable students to participate fully in classroom discourse, hence the I<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>F<sup>2</sup> pattern, in an attempt to fill the gap left by existing research, to the best of the author's knowledge.

The suggested pattern here means that the initiation should not always be done by the teacher, the students can co-initiate. Students should not only be the ones to respond; teachers can co-respond and should not be the only ones to give feedback, as students should co-feedback. If this pattern is applied, the classroom pattern will be student-centered thereby allowing students to participate fully and understand classroom discourse. Considering the effectiveness of a student-centered classroom, Bature (2020) maintains that such a setting helps students take responsibility, create their pedagogies, and increase their knowledge, confidence and participation.

The study of teacher–student interaction is of great value to the educational sector and the world at large. If teachers do not understand and use teaching models effectively, it will be difficult for students to understand what is being taught. This study therefore serves as a resource for teachers, students and educational stakeholders.

This study answers the following research questions:

- i. Identify the blind spots in the Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) model of classroom discourse.
- ii. Suggest a classroom pattern that is suitable for all classroom interactions.

This study investigates blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's model of classroom discourse to explicate the model, identify the blind spots in the model, and suggest classroom patterns that may be suitable in today's classroom.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) is concerned with analyzing the relationships between languages in certain contexts. According to Aydın-Düzgıt and Rumelili (2019) DA is a much-favored textual analysis method among constructivists and critically minded scholars who are interested in identity meaning and discourse. It focuses on the analytical process in a relatively explicit way (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). Hjelm (2021) offers many summaries of DA—that DA deals with how to do things with words (cf. Austin (1975)); analyses identities, relationships, beliefs, and knowledge systems, and relates to language use; it is said to combine social theory and textual interpretations with linguistic analysis, and analyses data both at micro and macro levels.

### 2.2. Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse is the language that participants use in classroom interactions. It refers to communication that takes place in the classroom and especially involves the language that teachers and students use. CD can be verbal and non-verbal. This is in conformity with Jocuns (2012) who stated that CD should not be narrowed down to verbal utterances but also includes non-verbal actions. The verbal aspect includes the use of language, while the non-verbal aspect includes actions and paralinguistic cues such as voice, speed, rate, pauses, enunciation, articulation, and pronunciation. Today's classroom, whether digital or not, should be well structured, well organized and well managed.

Classroom discourse also refers to the interactive exchange of spoken and written communication that transpires among educators and students within an educational setting. It encompasses a diverse range of interactions, including conversations, debates, questioning, and collaborative discussions. Classroom discourse serves as a fundamental conduit for teaching and learning. It enables the construction of knowledge, fosters critical thinking, and facilitates social interaction (Cazden, 2020). It refers to the interactive verbal and nonverbal communication among teachers

and students within an educational environment. It encompasses dialogues, discussions, questioning, and collaborative exchanges that contribute to knowledge construction, learning, and the development of critical thinking skills (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). It is a cooperative event in which the teacher and students cooperate and negotiate with each other to achieve certain instructional goals in the classroom (Yu, 2009). It is the language used by teachers and students to communicate with each other in social surroundings or the classroom (Derakhshan, Zeinali, & Sharbati, 2015).

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2013) describe classroom discourse as dynamic verbal and nonverbal communication that takes place between teachers and students in a learning environment. It includes all types of conversation, debate, interaction, and questioning that take place during educational events. Discussion in the classroom is essential for sharing knowledge, fostering group learning, and developing critical thinking abilities. It also encourages a participatory learning environment (Meijer, Verloop, Beijaard, & Korthagen, 2013).

Discourse in the classroom is a crucial element of successful teaching and learning. In an educational setting, it includes both verbal and nonverbal exchanges between teachers and pupils. These interactions include conversations, probing, discussions, and cooperative exchanges that advance critical thinking, knowledge production, and communication abilities. Students actively engage with the materials, discuss ideas, and learn from one another through meaningful conversations in the classroom (Mercer & Howe, 2012).

The verbal and nonverbal interactions that take place between teachers and students during instructional activities are referred to as classroom discourse and are essential parts of educational interactions. CD also refers to the communication and interactions that take place among teachers and students within an educational setting. It plays a pivotal role in developing transferable skills for the 21st century (classroom participants) and emphasizes the role of communication and collaboration in education (The National Research Council, 2012).

Through effective communication, teachers and students actively engage in discussions on the materials being taught in the classroom through discourse. To encourage students to think critically, express their ideas clearly, and lead them toward a better understanding, teachers employ a variety of questioning strategies. These techniques are important in classrooms (Shanmugavelu, Ariffin, Vadivelu, Mahayudin, & Sundaram, 2020). In applying these strategies, ideally teachers should allow students to take turns, contribute their thoughts, ask questions, and participate in discussions that will aid in their exploration of ideas, points of view, and problem solving. Furthermore, students learn subject-specific information and crucial communication skills through classroom conversation, including how to articulate ideas clearly, listen intently, and build well-supported arguments. Additionally, it encourages a welcoming learning environment where different viewpoints are respected, which improves cognitive engagement and knowledge creation.

Also, in a classroom context, teachers use discourse to engage students in meaningful conversations about the subject matter (Zwiers & Crawford, 2023). They employ various questioning strategies to elicit responses, encourage deeper thinking, and guide students' understanding. Students, in turn, actively participate by responding to questions, sharing their viewpoints, and engaging in discussions with peers. Through these interactions, students do not only acquire content knowledge, but they also refine their communication skills and learn to articulate their thoughts effectively. In addition, CD promotes an inclusive and participatory learning environment where students feel empowered to express their opinions, challenge ideas, and collaboratively construct knowledge. It supports the development of higher-order thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information, fostering intellectual growth and independent learning (Mercer & Howe, 2012). Also, Atkins and Brown (2001) observe that classroom language is formally structured and controlled by the teacher.

### 2.3. Blind Spots in Classroom Discourse

Blind spots are the limitations, impediments, restrictions, and disadvantages that are embedded in teaching and learning by classroom participants. They are also expressed through the teachers themselves, their methods, models,

theories, and other aspects of classroom discourse both directly and indirectly. In the course of interactions between classroom participants, there are observable blind spots (implicit and explicit biases (Tyson & Bales, 2022) that are related to teachers, students, lack of linguistic awareness, theories, patterns, methods, teaching strategies employed, inconsistency in language policy and planning, gaps in the curriculum, teachers' prejudices, cultural barriers, assessment biases, differing beliefs about language proficiency levels, limited exposure to teaching and learning of English language by teachers and students, and socioeconomic disparities among students and teachers. These can also cause inequalities in language learning opportunities among students.

Empirical reviews reveal scholars who have created works on Sinclair and Coulthard's model and blind spots. Paterson (2008) analyzes classroom discourse using Sinclair and Coulthard's model by employing an extract recorded and transcribed from an English language lesson and concentrates on the search for evidence of the said structure. His aim was to determine whether or not a model meant for classroom lessons could be relevant in adult classrooms three decades later.

Skeen (2015) in his article "Blind spots to Developing a School Culture of Leadership", suggests three areas where one can check for blind spots in their goal of developing a school culture of leadership. The three areas are adoption, capacity and commitment. Adoption, according to Skeen, is instilling principles, rules and values in people. For a person to show a leadership attitude, it must have been integrated in one way or another in that person. The adoption process is used to check for blind spots in the development of leadership culture.

The second area, according to Skeen (2015) is capacity. This is a person's ability to do something. Here, it refers to one's time; spending time on things that will develop a person's leadership ability. In developing a leadership culture, one is to groom his or herself leadership-wise in attitude, character, values, principles, and many other aspects of life. Blind spots are also evident where there is no capacity building.

The third aspect is commitment. This refers to loyalty, sticking to something and the reason for doing so. It is also the purpose behind something. Teachers are committed to teaching leadership skills to students as well as helping them discover who they are, and students are committed to learning. Blind spots are equally obvious through lack of commitment.

Identifying blind spots can help one understand the things that were once struggled for. If one can find a problem, a solution may be imminent. This research focuses on blind spots in classroom communication between major classroom participants (teachers and their students), whereas Skeen's article focuses on the blind spots that work to develop principles of leadership in schools.

In an article titled "The Dangers of Student-Centered Learning – A Caution about Blind spots in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," McKenna (2013) focuses on students within an understanding of the socially constructed nature of disciplines in universities. This paper raises two concerns about the approaches employed in teaching. The first is that student-centered approaches rarely consider the actual knowledge that was taught and learned, and there is little consideration for how disciplinary knowledge is constructed and what norms and values govern the construction of knowledge. McKenna also maintains that student-centered approaches are often undertaken within the dominant autonomous discourse where students' successes or failures result from their characteristics.

#### *2.4. Sinclair and Coulthard (1992)'s Revised Classroom Model*

Sinclair and Coulthard are prominent scholars who have significantly influenced spoken discourse for a long time. Their classroom discourse model is based on Halliday (1961)'s rank scale description of grammar (Atkins & Brown, 2001). According to Malouf (1995), as cited by Atkins and Brown (2001), Sinclair and Coulthard (1992)'s model is the strongest, well-grounded and descriptive theory meant to implement Halliday (1961)'s ideas of grammar. This model is not efficient because it is solely concentrated on the interactions between teachers and their students and is fixed and not dynamic.

What is a rank scale? The rank scale is a system of hierarchical structure in which linguistically discernible discourse elements join to make larger elements, which are then combined to form larger elements, and so forth, until no larger element of discourse can be discerned linguistically (Raine, 2010). This concept was developed for the analysis of spoken language in secondary classrooms (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). According to Atkins and Brown (2001), Sinclair and Coulthard devised the model for the analysis of classroom discourse in Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) and revised it in Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) to assist teachers in junior levels of teaching.

Sinclair & Coulthard (1975)'s model was created in a book titled "Towards an Analysis of Discourse." This model has a three-tier sequence known as the IR (Initiation and Response), IRF (Initiation, Response and Feedback), or EFR (Exchange, Function and Rank) pattern. The "I" refers to an initiation where a teacher opens an interaction by asking a question and students are expected to respond. The "R" stands for response. Initiation and response are the main exchanges in the classroom. After the response, the teacher gives feedback ("F"). This model is said to be fundamental in classroom discourse. Sinclair and Coulthard believe that a teacher can rephrase students' feedback by giving elaborate responses.

The Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) model consists of five interrelated ranks or discourse units (namely lesson, transaction, exchange, move and act). These ranks are hierarchical, and the lesson is placed at the top as the highest and largest unit, while the act is placed as the lowest unit (McAleese, 2011). In between the lesson and the act are the medial units (transaction, exchange and move).

See the diagram of Sinclair and Coulthard's hierarchical ranks below.

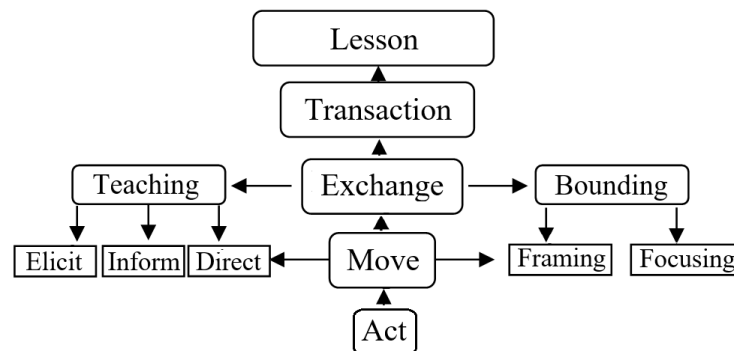


Figure 1. Sinclair and Coulthard's modified structure.

Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical placement of ranks in ascending order. This typifies the Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) devised model and the Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) revised model. The revised model focuses on the pattern of classroom discourse; the main elements of this rank scale are exchange, turn and activity.

#### 2.4.1. Lesson

Lesson is the highest and the largest rank scale that is built up by transactions. It is made up of "an unordered series of transactions" (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). It is no longer included in the 1992 revised version. Sinclair and Coulthard maintain that there is no other rank beyond this level, except the one in the memory of the teacher or the students.

#### 2.4.2. Transaction

Next in the hierarchy is transaction, which is made up of two or more exchanges. Sinclair and Coulthard (1997), as cited in Paterson (2008) observe that words such as "well", "right", "now" and "good" serve as boundaries of transactions. Frames are used by the teacher to mark the beginning and the end of the transaction. Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) identify three types of transaction, namely informing, directing and eliciting. A single transaction can consist of all three major exchange types.

### 2.4.3. Exchange

Next in the hierarchy is exchange, and its combinations form transactions. Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) define it as “the basic unit of interaction” that consists of a minimum of two participants. There are also two major types of exchanges (boundary exchanges and teaching). The exchanges are made up of framing and focusing moves, which are combined to form boundary exchanges. Boundary exchanges, according to Sinclair and Coulthard, are what teachers use to get students’ attention during teaching. The IRF structure is applicable to the teaching exchange unit. Teaching exchange is used by teachers to inform, direct and check students’ responses. This is where the structure and functions of classroom discourse are applied.

### 2.4.4. Move

The move is the immediate rank above the act. It is “a single minimal contribution of a participant in a conversation at once.” It is the smallest free unit that has a structure in terms of act (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). It is made up of one or more acts. It can be simple or complex depending on its construction. A move is said to be simple when it contains only one act; and complex when it contains more than one act. Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) propose five classes of move, namely, framing, focusing, opening, answering and following up.

### 2.4.5. Act

The act is the smallest indivisible unit equivalent to a clause or short sentence. For example, “There is insecurity in Nigeria” is an example of an act. According to Adams (2020) these acts are not on sentences as a whole, but on their host. Sinclair and Coulthard identify many classes of acts (informative, elicitation, directives, prompts, acknowledgements, nominations, clues, bids, cues, evaluations, asides, loops, meta statements, silent stresses, accepts, replies, comments, reacts, markers and starters). There are three major acts in the classroom—informative, interrogative and directive.

## 2.5. Information Processing Theory

Information Processing Theory (IPT) originates from psychologists such as Miller (1956) and Simon (1957). IPT compares the human mind to a computer in terms of thinking and problem solving and focuses on how information is perceived, processed, stored and retrieved by the human mind. In other words, it has both input and output devices. Miller’s principles (Miller, 1956) originate from his famous paper, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Process Information” (Cowan, 2001; Saaty & Ozdemir, 2003).

Some of the key concepts of the theory are: (i) Sensory input (seeing, touching and hearing), which is used to perceive information from the environment; (ii) Sensory memory (an initial stage of the information process where information is shortly held in its raw form), which involves memories for both visual and auditory stimuli; (iii) Attention, another information process, which deals with the act of accepting some information and rejecting others by the human mind based on what the receiver wants to do with what he/she receives; (iv) Short-term memory (STM), where information is kept for a short period and later processed to long-term memory (LTM); (v) Rehearsal, which is the stage where information is transferred from STM to LTM; (vi) LTM, which stores properly rehearsed and preceding information permanently; (vii) Output, where information is retrieved and used to guide one’s behaviours, solve problems, and generally assist in performance.

## 2.6. Blind Spots or Limitations in Sinclair and Coulthard’s Model

Although this model is useful for classroom discourse and has been of great importance to teaching and learning, especially at the lower level of education, some scholars have observed that it contains blind spots. According to Al-Smadi and Ab Rashid (2017) there are several disagreements about this model. Some of these blind spots are: (i) the model is said to be limited to only the linguistic aspects of language learning at the expense of multimodal dimensions;

(ii) there are structural restrictions; (iii) neglect of power relations; (iv) contextual overpopulation; (v) lack of emphasis on socio-cultural perspectives; (vi) simplification of language functions; (vii) static representation; and (viii) limited visitations of variations.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This is a qualitative study that adopts a descriptive research design. According to [Galletta \(2013\)](#) a qualitative study focuses on the “collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest” (7). Also, [Ugwu and Eze \(2023\)](#) state that qualitative research focuses on “feeling, idea and experience; and that it is the study of the nature of phenomena, which includes their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived” (20). This type of research deals with quality rather than quantity.

This research employs content analysis as its research method. According to [Purveen and Showkat \(2017\)](#) the interpretation of what is contained in a message is called content analysis (1). It worth noting that content analysis has both advantages and disadvantages. [Purveen and Showkat \(2017\)](#) further explain that it is economical, unobtrusive, and can be applied both in qualitative and quantitative research. Also, they state that it is a time-consuming process.

#### 3.2. Data Source

Data were collected from English lecturers and students from four randomly selected public and private Nigerian universities (Mountain Top University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Anchor University (Lagos), and University of Agriculture, Abeokuta).

#### 3.3. Data Instrument

The instrument used for data collection is a self-structured questionnaire. According to [Roopa and Rani \(2012\)](#) a questionnaire is a series of questions asked to individuals to obtain statistically useful information about a given topic. A 20-item self-developed questionnaire was distributed to 100 respondents and was later recovered and analyzed. The questionnaire items in [Table 1](#) are based on the main information about the blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard’s model, while the questionnaire items in [Table 2](#) contain six suggestions on how this model could be improved.

#### 3.4. Data Collection Process

The process for data collection is as follows:

- (i) The objectives of this research were first defined.
- (ii) The questionnaire was designed based on the research objectives.
- (iii) The questionnaire was given to an expert to ascertain its content and word validity.
- (iv) The random sampling technique was used to select participants from the four universities.
- (v) Approval was obtained from Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- (vi) The questionnaires were distributed.
- (vii) The questionnaires were collected and recollected until complete enough.
- (viii) Collation and analysis were carried out.



## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Findings of the Study

Some of the findings of this research are: (i) the Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) IRF patterns of classroom discourse has obvious blind spots; (ii) the structure is very strict and does not allow complete students' participation; (iii) it is not possible to use it in complex classroom; (iv) it allows classroom discourse to be teacher-centred. (v) it discourages its application in various cultural contexts; (vi) its rank scales are interlocking.

**Table 1.** Blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's models.

| SN | Statement  | A   | SA  | D   | SD  |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | Sinclair and Coulthard's model of classroom discourse cannot be used in complex classrooms.                        | 31% | 21% | 26% | 22% |
| 2  | The model is very static.  | 29% | 21% | 30% | 20% |
| 3  | The model permits teachers to dominate classroom discourse.  | 58% | 37% | 2%  | 3%  |
| 4  | Teacher's dominance encourages monotonous teaching.  | 60% | 30% | 6%  | 4%  |
| 5  | A teacher's dominance may lead to a student's false response.  | 25% | 65% | 0%  | 10% |
| 6  | The model may lead to a limited understanding of what is taught.   | 86% | 4%  | 5%  | 5%  |
| 7  | The model rejects dual initiation and feedback.  | 10% | 80% | 5%  | 5%  |
| 8  | Teachers are restricted to only verbal language.   | 65% | 8%  | 2%  | 25% |
| 9  | The model is very simple.  | 30% | 25% | 30% | 15% |
| 10 | The model does not allow students to evaluate teachers' talk.  | 30% | 15% | 25% | 30% |
| 11 | The model relies mainly on question-and-answer patterns.   | 85% | 6%  | 3%  | 6%  |
| 12 | The model does not account for differences in cultural contexts.   | 80% | 5%  | 7%  | 8%  |
| 13 | Only verbal feedback is used for the assessment of students' level of understanding at all levels of interactions. | 40% | 40% | 5%  | 15% |
| 14 | There are no distinct separations between the five rank scales.  | 80% | 8%  | 10% | 2%  |

### 4.2. Presentation and Analysis

Table 1 presents a list of blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's models. A total of 31% of the respondents agreed that the model cannot be used in complex classroom discourse, 21% strongly disagreed, 26% disagreed, and 22% strongly disagreed. The high percentage (31%) indicates the model cannot be used in complex classrooms.

Also, 29% of the respondents agreed that the model is very static, 21% strongly agreed, 30% disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. Based on the high percentage of those who disagreed and strongly disagreed, the model is not static.

Of the respondents, 58% agreed that the model allows teachers to dominate classroom discourse, 37% strongly agreed, 2% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The overwhelming percentage of those who agreed indicates that the model is structured to naturally permit teachers to dominate classroom discourse.

In addition, 60% of the respondents agreed that teachers' dominance encourages monotonous teaching which may lead to lack of understanding by students, 30% strongly agreed, 6% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. The high percentage of those who strongly agreed with this statement indicates that teachers' dominance encourages monotonous teaching and lack of understanding among students.

Also, 25% of the respondents agreed that teachers' dominance may lead to false responses from students and quick termination of lessons, 65% strongly agreed, 0% disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. The high percentage of those who strongly agreed shows that teachers' dominance may lead to students' false responses and quick termination of lessons.

Table 1 also shows that 86% of the respondents agreed that the model may lead to a limited understanding of what is taught, 4% strongly agreed, 5% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. As evident from the high percentage of those who agreed, the model may lead to a limited understanding of teachers' lessons. It equally reveals that 10% of the respondents agreed that the model rejects dual initiations and feedback, 80% strongly agreed, 5% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. This shows that dual initiations and feedback are rejected in this model.

The results also indicate that teachers are restricted to only verbal language (at the expense of non-verbal cues) and written language, 65% agreed, 8% strongly agreed, 2% disagreed, and 25% strongly disagreed. The high percentage of respondents who agreed confirms that teachers are restricted to verbal language usage only.

Table 1 presents that 30% of the respondents agreed that the model is very simple and linear, therefore making the model seem unrealistic, 25% strongly agreed, 30% disagreed, and 15% strongly disagreed. As 30% agreed and 30% disagreed, this indicates mixed feelings among the respondents. It shows that while the model is simple for some, it is difficult for others. It was also established that 30% of the respondents agreed that the model does not allow students to evaluate teachers' talk 15%, 15% strongly agreed, 25% disagreed, and 30% strongly disagreed. Again, 30% strongly agreed and 30% strongly disagreed. With these results, some believe that students can evaluate teacher's talk while others maintain that it is impossible for students to assess the teacher's lessons.

The results also show that 85% of the respondents agreed that the model relies mainly on question-and-answer patterns, 6% strongly agreed, 3% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. The overwhelming percentage of those who agreed with this statement confirms that the model is based on the question-and-answer pattern.

In addition, 80% of the respondents agreed that the model does not account for differences in contexts and cultures, 5% strongly agreed, 7% disagreed, and 8% strongly disagreed. This shows that the model cannot account for differences in contexts and cultures. Table 1 also presents that 40% of the respondents agreed that only verbal feedback is used for the assessment of students' level of understanding at all levels of interactions, 40% strongly agreed, 5% disagreed, and 15% strongly disagreed. This shows that the model depends only on verbal feedback for students' assessments of understanding and interactions. Finally, 80% of the respondents agreed that there is no distinct separation between the five rank scales of the model, 8% strongly agree, 10% disagree, and 2% strongly disagree, indicating that there are no clear demarcations between the rank scales.

From the analysis above, the majority of the respondents agreed that there are blind spots in Sinclair and Coulthard's models, some strongly agreed, a few disagreed, while a minority strongly disagreed.

Table 2. Suggestions for the modification of the Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) model.

| SN | Statement  | A   | SA  | D  | SD |
|----|--|-----|-----|----|----|
| 1  | The flexibility of this model is necessary to allow students' full participation.  | 55% | 45% | 0% | 0% |
| 2  | The cultural context should be considered in classroom discussions.  | 25% | 75% | 0% | 0% |
| 3  | Classroom discourse should be student-centered.  | 55% | 35% | 8% | 2% |
| 4  | Other forms of assessment, such as students' non-linguistic skills, should be used for assessments.  | 20% | 70% | 7% | 3% |
| 5  | Students should also give feedback. Feedback should not only come from the teacher. Hence IRRFF initiation, response, and multiple feedback are based on classroom contexts. | 70% | 25% | 0% | 5% |
| 6  | The model should be expanded to accommodate other fields of language.  | 25% | 70% | 5% | 0% |

The results in Table 2 show that 55% of the respondents agreed that the flexibility of this model is necessary to allow students to participate fully in classroom discourse, 45% strongly agreed, 0% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This shows that flexibility is needed in this model. A quarter of the respondents agreed that cultural contexts should be considered in classroom talk, 75% strongly agreed, 0% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This affirms that cultural contexts are essential in classroom talk. It also indicates that 55% of the respondents who agreed that classroom discourse should be student-centred. 35% strongly agreed, 8% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. This result indicates that classroom discourse should be student-focused. Table 2 also shows that 20% of the respondents agreed that other forms of assessment, such as students' non-linguistics skills, should be used as forms of classroom assessment, 70% strongly agreed, 7% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The high percentage of respondents who strongly agreed indicates that other forms of assessments should be applied during classroom

discourse. In addition, Table 2 shows that 70% of the respondents agreed that students should give feedback and that feedback should not only come from the teacher. Hence, IIRFFF, either by the teacher or the students depending on the nature of the discourse, initiation, response and double feedback based on classroom contexts should be implemented, 25% strongly agreed, 0% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. The high percentage of those who agreed indicates that students should also be allowed to give feedback. Finally, 25% of the respondents agreed that the model should be expanded to accommodate other fields of language and not just language learning, 70% strongly agreed, 5% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. The overwhelming percentage of those who strongly agreed indicates that the model should be expanded to accommodate other fields of learning.

Based on these results, some respondents agreed that Sinclair and Coulthard's model should be modified, the majority strongly agreed, very few disagreed, and no respondent strongly disagreed.

#### 4.3. Discussion

Based on the results of this study, the majority of the respondents agreed that Sinclair and Coulthard's model of classroom discourse have blind spots, such as its inability to be used in complex classrooms, the teacher's dominance, monotonous teaching, limited understanding by students, rejection of duality in initiation and feedback, restriction to verbal language usage only, and lack of accountability for different cultural contexts. This result is in line with some researchers' findings (Jenkins et al., 2023; Križan, 2008; Nicholson, 2014). Some strongly agreed, a few disagreed, and a minority strongly disagreed. These results align with previous studies, such as White (2003) who observes that a less rigid discussion-oriented setting would create difficulties in applying this model. It also confirms the observation by Inamalsam (2013) that this triadic structure has decreasing relevance due to changes made to forms of education and technology, and using the structure in today's classrooms is becoming harder as schools are switching to more inquiry-based learning where students ask more questions and take more active roles (Poon, Tan, & Tan, 2009). It equally agrees with the submission by Inamalsam (2013) that the structure does not provide insight into written discourse and text comprehension. Also, Francis and Hunston (1992), cited in Atkins and Brown (2001) observe that the model does not recognize paralinguistic features. Table 2 reveals that few respondents agreed that the flexibility of the model, the inclusion of cultural contexts in classroom talks, student-centeredness, students' non-linguistic skills, IIRFFF (i.e., I<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>F<sup>2</sup>), and its expansion to accommodate written and non-verbal discourse are essential. These factors will enhance its structure for possible use in complex classrooms; and allow all classroom participants to contribute maximally. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed, a minority disagreed, and no respondent strongly disagreed that Sinclair and Coulthard's model should be modified. These submissions are in line with Križan (2008) who observes that certain modifications and adaptations of the model are necessary.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) IRF model of classroom discourse has been applied by many teachers in their classrooms. According to Jocuns (2012) there have been several interpretations and criticisms of the IRF structure. Also, this study (as one of the criticisms) identifies limitations of the IRF structure and suggests the I<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>F<sup>2</sup> pattern, which the author believes, if implemented, will be very useful to all classroom participants and types of discourse.

The findings of this work confirm that the Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) revised structure of classroom discourse has blind spots. These limitations include its inability to be applied in complex classrooms, its static triadic structure, teacher dominance, application that results in monotonous teaching, rejection of the dual application of IRF, its inability to account for different cultural contexts, and the lack of clear demarcations of rank scales.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is relevant to teachers, students and researchers. One of the major implications of this study is that a flexible student-inclusive classroom pattern (the I<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>F<sup>2</sup>) will encourage students' full participation and quick and easy

understanding of classroom discourse. By investigating classroom interactions, Suratno (2019) confirmed that students' interaction is a noticeable phenomenon that may characterise active learning (503). For these models to be ideal for use in both simple and complex classrooms, the flexibility of the model, consideration of diverse cultural contexts, assessments of students' non-linguistic skills, and expansion of the model to permit other language skills should be implemented. The suggested non-rigid I<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>F<sup>2</sup> pattern will enable classroom discourse to be cooperative, interactive and inclusive for all participants. This structure incorporates both teachers' and students' equal participation in initiating, responding and following up in classroom discourse. The teacher, as the director of classroom discourse, is not expected to be the sole director but allocates slots for students to participate fully. Students should also be allowed to initiate, respond and give feedback as teachers do. The researcher believes that if this is done, this model will be worth using in all classes, and students will benefit maximally from classroom discourse.

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