

Abstract

Despite the adoption of the Communicative Approach in the Palestinian syllabus for the purpose of building the learners' communicative competence, most English teachers notice that Palestinian English learners hesitate to take part in classroom interaction probably due to their lack of proficiency in language use. This serious phenomenon could be due to several factors including the dense curriculum which, in turn, constitutes a heavy burden for students and teachers, the low proficiency of some teachers as well as the neglect of some teaching strategies (e.g. failing to vary question types or to provide enough wait-time, confining students to a passive role and using vague or complex language, etc).

Many researchers and writers such as Chaudron (1990) and Celce-Murcia (2001) have provided a thorough literature review of all issues and factors tackled in classroom research and in other types of related research. The researcher has drawn on the wealth of research evidence provided by these authors, hence deciding to shed more light on issues related to the Palestinian classroom such as the Variables: Question types and Wait-time.

The researcher believes that these two variables are decisive in determining the quantity and quality of the classroom interaction that takes place in the Palestinian context. In turn, this resulting interaction is essential in providing the input necessary for building the students' communicative competence through the processes of hypothesis formation and testing, the very goal of the communicative approach. For this purpose, a qualitative classroom research study was conducted to explore the extent to which teachers maintain a proper duration of wait-time and raise appropriate

question types in two secondary schools in the area of Se'ir (one for girls and one for boys).

The sample of the study may be divided into two categories: the first category includes ten high school English teachers who were interviewed. The second category, includes 263 eleventh Grade students- 101 boys and 162 girls- who were enrolled in eight separate sections both in the literary and scientific streams divided randomly as 3 scientific sections and 5 literary sections- enrolled in the academic year 2008-2009 in two schools in the town of Se'ir.

This study aims at finding answers for a set of questions pertaining to both stages of the research, i.e., the observation and the intervention stages; as well as for the follow up interviews.

Research Questions

Observation stage:

- How long do teachers of the Eleventh Grade Scientific stream (Girls' and Boys' school teachers) usually wait after asking a question?
- How long do teachers of the Eleventh Grade Literary stream (Girls' and Boys' school teachers) usually wait after asking a question?
- What types of questions prevail in the Eleventh Grade Scientific stream (Girls and Boys), referential or display?
- What types of questions prevail in the Eleventh Grade Literary stream (Girls and Boys), referential or display?

Intervention stage:

- What influence does extending the wait-time have on the quantity and quality of interaction among students in the eleventh grade scientific stream (Girls and Boys)?

- What influence does extending the wait-time have on the quantity and quality of interaction among students in the eleventh grade literary stream (Girls and Boys)?
- How does varying the types of questions influence students' interaction (scientific and literary in both schools)?

Research questions based on the interviews:

- Do high school English teachers think they allow proper wait-time after asking a question?
- Are high school English teachers aware of the different types of questions? Do they think they ask enough Referential Questions?
- Are high school English teachers willing to use / extend wait-time and vary question types between Display Questions and Referential Questions?
- What influence do they expect these two variables would have on the quantity and quality of interaction?

The study consisted of three major stages for collecting data. The first stage - involved the observation of the natural treatment of the two variables by teachers. The second stage – intervention- consisted of two phases. In phase one the researcher extended the wait-time to 6 seconds, while in phase two she increased the number of referential questions to exceed the number of display questions while maintaining the extended wait time. During these phases the researcher tried to highlight the difference in interaction before and after extending the wait-time and varying the question types. The third stage involved conducting ten interviews that consisted of seven questions addressed to the high school English teachers (involved in stage one) who were asked about their treatment of the two variables and whether

they wish to change any of the patterns they are currently involved in. The whole interaction was audiotaped and relevant data were transcribed and analyzed by means of a researcher's developed observation sheet. Results of this qualitative analysis were as follows:

1. 60% of the English language teachers participating in this study normally allowed less than a second of wait-time after asking a question, but 20% of them maintained short wait-time (1-2 seconds). The students' participation is noticed to be 24.9 % in the literary stream and 37.1 % in the scientific stream in this stage.
2. Extending of wait-time invites more participation in both the scientific and literary streams and greater participation was noticed. For example, in the literary stream the students' participation increased to 28.2% of the total number of students in the literary stream in phase 1 of stage 2 and the scientific stream students' participation increased to 62.3% of the total number of students in the scientific stream who participated in the study.
3. In phase 2 of stage 2, through which the number of referential questions was consciously managed to be increased to exceed the number of display questions while maintaining the extended wait time to six seconds, the researcher found that the quantity of participation increased noticeably in both streams to become 80.35% of the total number of the scientific classroom, and 50.30% of the total number of students in the literary classroom. This result sheds light on the effect of introducing changes in these two variables on students' participation and the big difference that occurred in this phase when contrasting these percentages with those of

stage one when the scientific stream's participation was 37.13% out of the total number of students in the classes of the scientific stream, and the literary stream's participation was 24.9% of the total number of students in these classes of the literary stream who participated in the study.

4. An important finding was that the male students' participation was greater than that of the females'. The percentage of boys' participation was 38.7% of the total number of students involved in the study, but the girls' was 27.2% of the total number of students involved in the study. In the literary stream, boys were 34.9% but girls 20%. In the scientific stream boys' participation was 42.5%, while girls' participation was 34.5%. Boys participated more than girls in the same stream. In stage2 phase1, however, results changed, when girls' participation increased to 49.7%-(scientific 69.1% and literary 29.6%) of the total number of girls involved in the study, but boys' to 37.8%-, (scientific 48.7% and literary 26.8%) of the total number of boys involved in this study. In phase2 of stage2, girls' participation generally increased to 65.2% (scientific 84.8%, literary 45.6%) of the total number of girls participating in this study while boys' participation increased to 65.5% (scientific 75.9% and literary 55%) of the total number of boys who participated in this study.
5. The interviews revealed that 60% of the teachers, who were interviewed, do not realize the importance of wait-time, and more drastically, they do not have any idea about "Referential Questions". But they indicated an interest in trying to treat these variables more effectively.

The researcher recommends further future research on other influencing variables like teacher talk, motivation, feedback,