Ego State and Patterns of Interaction in a Language Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

This study applied Transactional Analysis (TA) to classroom discourse in a Philippine setting, focusing on the identification of dominant ego states and interaction patterns between teachers and learners. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered through classroom observations, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews to capture authentic verbal exchanges and behavioral cues. The analysis revealed that the Adult ego state was most dominant among both teachers and learners, reflecting rational, objective, and data-driven communication. Complementary transactions emerged as the most frequent interaction pattern, indicating balanced exchanges where messages were appropriately received and responded to, thereby fostering effective communication. These findings suggest that maintaining an Adult ego state and encouraging complementary transactions contribute to a harmonious and productive classroom environment. To strengthen these dynamics, the study recommends communication-awareness interventions such as training sessions, reflective activities, and workshops that help teachers and students recognize their ego states, manage emotional responses, and promote healthier exchanges. By fostering awareness of interaction patterns, schools can enhance classroom relationships, reduce miscommunication, and create supportive learning environments. Beyond its practical implications, the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of psychological dynamics in classroom discourse, offering insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers interested in improving teaching and learning processes through Transactional Analysis.

Keywords: *Transactional Analysis, Classroom Discourse, Ego States, Teacher-Learner Interaction, Adult Ego State, Complementary Transactions, Communication Awareness, Philippine Education, Teaching and Learning Dynamics, Educational Psychology*

INTRODUCTION

Classroom communication goes beyond information exchange, shaping authority, relationships, and student engagement. To understand both the surface and psychological dimensions of teacher–student interaction, this study adopts Transactional Analysis (TA), a framework developed by Eric Berne that explains communication through ego states (Parent, Adult, Child) and transaction types (complementary, crossed, and ulterior). While TA has been widely applied in psychotherapy, counseling, and organizational settings, its systematic use in analyzing natural classroom discourse remains limited.

Most educational research focuses on structural and linguistic aspects of classroom talk (e.g., IRF patterns, speech acts), often neglecting emotional, relational, and psychological dynamics. Existing international TA studies in education tend to rely on training contexts or self-reports rather than authentic classroom interactions, and they rarely map ego states directly onto transaction patterns. In the Philippine context, classroom communication research has similarly emphasized structural frameworks, with no study yet applying the full TA framework to real classroom discourse, despite the country's distinct cultural values such as respect for authority and relational sensitivity.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating Transactional Analysis and Discourse Analysis to examine recorded and transcribed classroom interactions in the Philippines. It identifies teachers' and students' ego states, classifies transactions as complementary, crossed, or ulterior, and analyzes how these patterns influence communication flow, engagement, power relations, and classroom relationships. By shifting TA from clinical settings to authentic educational discourse, the study provides a new empirical foundation for understanding and improving teacher–student communication. It also contributes to practical strategies for fostering healthier and more inclusive classrooms and supports SDG 4: Quality Education by promoting emotionally supportive and effective learning environments.

Recent studies further strengthen the rationale for applying Transactional Analysis (TA) to classroom discourse and support the theoretical and methodological direction of this study. Alef (2025), in a descriptive-analytic study on *absent strokes* in Transactional Analysis, highlights how the lack of recognition and acknowledgment in institutional interactions negatively affects motivation and emotional well-being. This finding is particularly relevant to classroom settings, where teacher–student exchanges serve as primary sources of positive or negative strokes that influence engagement and participation. Alef's work underscores the importance of examining not only verbal exchanges but also the relational and emotional dimensions embedded in classroom communication.

Several studies emphasize the relevance of ego states in professional and educational contexts. Alipieva (2017) demonstrates that teachers' dominant ego states significantly influence their professional choices and interaction styles, suggesting that communication patterns in classrooms are shaped by deeper psychological positioning. Similar findings are echoed by Altun and Aydın (2016) and Bekir and Tair (2023), whose studies on nurses and adolescents respectively show that Parent, Adult, and Child ego states directly affect behavior patterns and social interaction. Although these studies are not classroom-based, they provide strong empirical support for the applicability of ego-state analysis in understanding professional and educational communication.

In educational discourse research, several scholars have focused on teacher talk and interactional roles but through non-transactional frameworks. Alvarez-Alvarez et al. (2022) and Chin et al. (2022) analyze teachers' discourse strategies in digital and online classrooms, revealing how authority, facilitation, and responsiveness are constructed through language. Similarly, Balaobao et al. (2024) employ Flanders' Interaction Analysis to explore English-medium classroom talk in the Philippine context. While these studies offer valuable insights into interaction patterns, they primarily describe *what* teachers do linguistically, rather than *why* these patterns emerge from particular psychological or relational positions, an analytical gap that Transactional Analysis can address.

Methodologically, Alejandro and Zhao (2023) provide a strong foundation for integrating discourse analysis with other qualitative frameworks through a multi-method qualitative text and discourse analysis approach. Their framework supports the current study's integration of Transactional Analysis and Discourse Analysis, ensuring systematic coding of naturally occurring classroom interactions. Complementing this, Kemble (2020) and Dong et al. (2024) demonstrate how discourse patterns and transactional affordances shape meaning-making in instructional settings, reinforcing the need to examine interaction beyond surface linguistic structures.

Several studies also caution against the limitations of using Transactional Analysis in isolation. Booth (2020) highlights the risk of overlooking power relations when TA is applied without contextual grounding, while Del Co et al. (2023) compare TA with other interpretive frameworks, noting the importance of methodological rigor. These critiques directly inform the present study's design, which situates Transactional Analysis within authentic classroom discourse and a culturally specific Philippine context. Karakoulaki and Løvhaug (2024) further emphasize that staff communication significantly affects classroom climate and peer relationships, aligning with this study's focus on how transaction types influence relational dynamics and engagement.

Within the Philippine research landscape, studies on discourse, translanguaging, and multimodal communication (Esnara, 2022; Hou et al., 2025; Falcon & León, 2024) demonstrate growing interest in authentic classroom interaction analysis using advanced and mixed methods. However, none of these studies explicitly apply Transactional Analysis to classify ego states and transaction types in real-time classroom exchanges. This absence reinforces the research gap identified in the introduction.

Collectively, these studies validate the relevance of Transactional Analysis as a robust framework for examining communication, while simultaneously revealing a lack of empirical work that applies TA systematically to natural classroom discourse, particularly in the Philippine context. By integrating TA with discourse-analytic methods, the present study builds on and extends existing literature, offering a more holistic understanding of teacher–student communication that accounts for linguistic structure, psychological positioning, emotional recognition, and cultural context.

Taken together, the reviewed studies clearly demonstrate the growing recognition of communication as a psychologically grounded and relational process across professional, clinical, and educational settings. Research on ego states and Transactional Analysis has consistently shown its value in explaining behavior patterns, emotional recognition, and interactional outcomes (Alipieva, 2017; Altun &

Aydın, 2016; Bekir & Tair, 2023). At the same time, classroom discourse studies both international and Philippine-based have provided detailed descriptions of teacher talk, interaction structures, and participation patterns using linguistic and functional frameworks (Balaobao et al., 2024; Chin et al., 2022; Alvarez-Alvarez et al., 2022). However, these two bodies of research remain largely disconnected.

Despite strong theoretical support for Transactional Analysis, there remains a notable lack of empirical studies that apply its full framework, particularly ego states and transaction types, to naturally occurring classroom discourse. Existing studies often rely on self-reports, controlled interventions, or professional training contexts, which limit their ability to capture the complexity of real-time teacher–student interactions (Alef, 2025; Booth, 2020). Moreover, while methodological advancements in discourse and multimodal analysis continue to expand (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023; Hou et al., 2025), Transactional Analysis remains underutilized as an analytical lens for interpreting the psychological and relational dimensions of classroom communication.

This gap is especially evident in the Philippine educational context. Local studies have primarily employed structural, pragmatic, and interactional models such as Flanders' Interaction Analysis, discourse strategy analysis, and translanguaging frameworks (Balaobao et al., 2024; Esnara, 2022). While these approaches effectively explain participation patterns and language use, they do not sufficiently account for the psychological positioning, emotional exchanges, and implicit power relations embedded in teacher–student interactions. Given the cultural emphasis on respect for authority, indirect communication, and relational harmony in Filipino classrooms, the absence of Transactional Analysis-based research represents a significant limitation in understanding how classroom communication actually functions.

Therefore, there is a clear and compelling need to examine classroom discourse through the lens of Transactional Analysis systematically. By identifying ego states, classifying transaction types as complementary, crossed, or ulterior, and situating these within authentic classroom interactions, this study responds directly to the gaps identified in both international and local literature. Integrating Transactional Analysis with discourse analytic methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of not only how classroom communication is structured, but how it is psychologically experienced and relationally negotiated.

Ultimately, studying classroom discourse through Transactional Analysis is not merely an academic exercise. It is a necessary step toward understanding how communication shapes engagement, authority, emotional safety, and learning outcomes. By grounding the analysis in real classroom data and a culturally specific Philippine context, this research contributes original empirical evidence to the field and offers practical insights for improving teacher–student relationships and classroom climate. As such, this study is both timely and essential in advancing educational discourse research and in promoting more meaningful, inclusive, and emotionally responsive classroom communication.

Second Level

Grounded in the preceding discussion on the limited application of Transactional Analysis (TA) to authentic classroom discourse, this study addresses the need to examine how psychological and relational

dimensions of communication operate in real educational settings. Daily classroom observations suggest that ego states and transaction patterns are consistently present in teacher–student and student–student interactions, yet these features remain largely unexplored in systematic discourse analysis.

Specifically, this study seeks to identify the ego states manifested during classroom interactions, determine the dominant transaction types, complementary, crossed, and ulterior, exhibited by students, examine how these transactions influence teaching and learning processes in the language classroom, and propose communication strategies grounded in Transactional Analysis to promote healthier classroom interactions.

This study uses Transactional Analysis (TA) as the primary analytical framework to examine teacher–student classroom interactions. Specifically, the study focuses on two core components of TA: ego states (Parent, Adult, Child) and transaction types (complementary, crossed, and ulterior). Classroom conversations are recorded and transcribed, and each interaction is systematically coded to identify the ego state from which the speaker is operating and the type of transaction that occurs between participants. This allows the researcher to analyze how psychological positioning influences communication flow, student engagement, and interaction outcomes in the language classroom.

To support systematic analysis of naturally occurring discourse, the study is also informed by principles of discourse analysis, particularly corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington et al., 2013). Linguistic patterns such as directive language, evaluative statements, and emotional expressions are examined and interpreted through the lens of Transactional Analysis to determine their corresponding ego states and transaction types. By integrating Transactional Analysis with discourse analysis, the framework enables a contextualized and psychologically grounded interpretation of classroom communication, ensuring that both linguistic features and relational dynamics are captured in the analysis.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to multiple stakeholders. For teachers, the findings may inform more intentional communication practices that foster positive relationships, emotional support, and effective learning. For students, the study promotes greater awareness of communication styles, encouraging active participation, collaboration, and mutual respect. For school administrators, the results highlight the value of integrating Transactional Analysis into classroom practices and professional development to enhance the overall learning environment. Finally, by applying Transactional Analysis to naturally occurring classroom discourse within a Philippine context, this study contributes to the literature by addressing a clear research gap and advancing understanding of the psychological and relational foundations of classroom communication.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore naturally occurring communication patterns between teachers and Grade 8 learners in a language classroom. Guided by Sandelowski's (2000) view of qualitative description, the study aimed to provide a faithful and comprehensive account of ego states and transaction patterns as they unfolded in real classroom interactions, without imposing heavy theoretical interpretation. The research was conducted at Ilocos Sur

Polytechnic State College – Laboratory High School, involving approximately 30–40 Grade 8 students and their language teachers, who were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in classroom communication.

Data were gathered through non-participant classroom observations, audio recordings of teacher–student interactions, and semi-structured interviews, allowing for data triangulation and a deeper understanding of both observable discourse and participant perspectives. Audio recordings of classroom sessions served as the primary data source, capturing authentic communication over one month. These recordings were transcribed verbatim and systematically coded using Transactional Analysis, focusing on ego states (Parent, Adult, Child) and transaction types (complementary, crossed, and ulterior). A researcher-made observation checklist supported the identification of verbal and non-verbal interaction patterns, while interviews with selected teachers and students enriched the analysis by providing contextual insights into their communication experiences.

The data collection followed a structured procedure that included securing ethical clearance and institutional permissions, conducting participant orientation and informed consent, and implementing a rapport-building phase prior to formal data gathering. Classroom observations and recordings were carried out over three weeks to ensure the natural flow of interaction. Data credibility was strengthened through member checking, allowing participants to verify the accuracy of transcriptions and interpretations.

For data analysis, the study integrated corpus-assisted discourse analysis. The transcribed classroom interactions formed a corpus that was systematically examined to identify recurring linguistic patterns associated with specific ego states and transaction types. Thematic analysis was then applied to interpret the emotional, relational, and contextual meanings underlying these patterns. This combined analytical approach, grounded in Transactional Analysis, enabled a comprehensive examination of both the structure and meaning of classroom communication.

Throughout the research process, strict ethical standards were observed. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and all data were securely stored. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage, and the study ensured minimal risk while promoting transparency and respect. Overall, this integrated methodology provided a rigorous and context-sensitive framework for examining teacher–student communication through the lens of Transactional Analysis in a natural classroom setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that classroom interaction is characterized by the dynamic interplay of the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, each serving a distinct communicative function. Consistent with Stewart (2020) and Vos and van Rijn (2021), the Adult ego state emerged as the most dominant, facilitating rational instruction, task-focused dialogue, and shared understanding. However, the Parent ego state played a vital role in maintaining classroom structure, behavioral regulation, and instructional authority, while the Child ego state enabled emotional expression, creativity, and spontaneous

participation. This coexistence of ego states supports Trudi's (2025) argument that effective educational communication requires relational flexibility rather than dependence on a single interactional mode.

In terms of transaction patterns, students predominantly engaged in complementary transactions, indicating their ability to respond appropriately to teacher-initiated communication when expectations and instructional goals were clear. This aligns with findings from Vos and Rijn (2018) and Wei (2021), which emphasize that aligned interactions promote engagement and instructional coherence. The occurrence of crossed and ulterior transactions reflects the context-sensitive nature of classroom communication, shaped by emotional states, task demands, and classroom management strategies. Rather than signaling communication breakdown, these transactions echo Tay's (2017) and Tseliou's (2020) observations that interactional misalignments often function as moments of negotiation and adjustment within social learning environments.

The study further demonstrates that transaction patterns significantly influence teaching effectiveness and learning engagement. Complementary transactions support clarity of instruction, sustain meaningful participation, and foster a positive learning climate, corroborating the work of Xie and Derakhshan (2021) and Wang and Esch (2023) on the importance of positive teacher–student interaction. When promptly addressed, crossed transactions served as corrective opportunities that restored alignment and focus, while deliberate use of ulterior transactions added interpersonal depth, motivation, and relational nuance, consistent with White's (2021) and Spilt et al.'s (2021) findings on emotionally attuned instructional practices.

Finally, the findings suggest that healthier classroom communication can be promoted through intentional application of Transactional Analysis–based strategies. Strengthening Adult-to-Adult interactions through dialogic teaching, respectful feedback, and shared decision-making enhances engagement and learner autonomy, supporting evidence from Wei (2021) and Xie and Derakhshan (2021). The strategic use of the functional Parent ego state allows teachers to maintain discipline without inducing fear or resistance, while providing space for positive Child ego state expression encourages creativity, emotional involvement, and active participation. These results reinforce the conclusions of Vos and van Rijn (2022) and Williams and Glarino (2023) regarding the effectiveness of Transactional Analysis in fostering balanced, responsive, and psychologically supportive interactional environments.

Overall, the study affirms that classroom communication is not merely instructional but relational and psychological in nature. By systematically examining ego states and transaction types within authentic classroom discourse, the findings contribute empirical support to Transactional Analysis as a viable and meaningful framework for understanding and improving language teaching and learning interactions.

Dominant transaction patterns significantly influence teaching and learning in the classroom. Complementary transactions, where teacher and student responses align, promote clarity, engagement, and active participation, supporting effective instruction and deeper learning (Vos & van Rijn, 2021; Wei, 2021). In contrast, crossed or misaligned transactions can disrupt communication, reduce student participation, and create confusion, signaling moments that require corrective or relational adjustment (Tseliou, 2020; Tay, 2017). Overall, the pattern of interactions shapes the classroom climate, affecting both cognitive

engagement and emotional well-being, highlighting the importance of fostering complementary exchanges while managing crossed or ulterior transactions to optimize learning outcomes (Spilt et al., 2021; Wang & Esch, 2023).

Strategies using Transactional Analysis can enhance classroom interactions and learning outcomes by guiding both teacher and student behavior. Teachers can encourage Adult-to-Adult interactions by modeling respectful dialogue, rational problem-solving, and constructive responses, while applying the functional Parent ego state to maintain rules and structure without being authoritarian (Spilt et al., 2021; Vos & van Rijn, 2021). Allowing space for the positive Child ego state supports creativity, emotional expression, and spontaneous participation, increasing student engagement (Wei, 2021). Students can also be taught to recognize their own ego states and adjust responses to peers, reducing crossed and ulterior transactions. Using dialogic teaching methods such as open-ended questions and collaborative activities strengthens complementary interactions, while providing constructive feedback from an adult perspective guides learning without resistance. Promoting peer-to-peer complementary interactions and monitoring misaligned or crossed transactions allows teachers to restore communication alignment, maintain focus, and optimize participation, creating a classroom environment that supports both relational and instructional effectiveness.

The application of Transactional Analysis in the classroom highlights the significant role of ego states and transaction patterns in shaping teaching and learning. Complementary transactions facilitate engagement, clarity, and meaningful participation, while crossed and ulterior transactions signal moments that require adjustment. By implementing strategies such as fostering Adult-to-Adult interactions, applying the functional Parent ego state, allowing positive Child expression, teaching students to recognize their own ego states, and promoting peer-to-peer complementary communication, teachers can optimize interaction flow and learning outcomes. These approaches not only improve instructional effectiveness but also support the development of positive relational dynamics, creating a classroom environment where students are actively involved, motivated, and emotionally supported. Overall, integrating Transactional Analysis provides a practical framework for enhancing both the psychological and communicative aspects of classroom discourse, ensuring more effective and harmonious learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Classroom interaction involves the dynamic presence of the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, each serving a distinct communicative function. While the Adult ego state predominates, the Parent ego state plays a crucial role in maintaining structure and behavioral regulation, and the Child ego state enables emotional expression and spontaneous participation. The coexistence of these ego states suggests that effective language teaching requires adaptive communication rather than reliance on a single interactional mode.

Students predominantly engage in complementary transactions, reflecting their capacity to respond appropriately to teacher-initiated communication when expectations are clear. The presence of crossed and ulterior transactions indicates that student interaction is context-sensitive, shaped by task demands, emotional states, and classroom management practices. These non-complementary transactions do not

necessarily signal communication failure but rather highlight moments requiring instructional or relational adjustment.

Transaction patterns significantly influence teaching effectiveness and learning engagement. Complementary transactions support clarity of instruction, encourage student participation, and sustain meaningful interaction. Crossed transactions, when promptly addressed, serve as corrective moments that restore alignment and focus. Ulterior transactions, when used deliberately, add interpersonal depth and motivation. Together, these transaction types shape the classroom as a social learning environment where communication directly affects comprehension, engagement, and behavior.

To promote healthier classroom communication, teachers may intentionally strengthen adult ego state interactions through dialogic teaching, respectful feedback, and shared decision-making. The strategic use of the functional Parent ego state can maintain discipline without fostering fear or resistance. Additionally, allowing space for positive Child ego state expression supports creativity and emotional involvement. Applying these Transactional Analysis–based strategies can enhance communicative balance, reduce misalignment, and improve overall language learning outcomes.

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