Exploring Power Dynamics: An Analysis of Power Bases in University Classroom Settings

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Classroom interaction is crucial for student engagement and learning (Uijl et al., 2017). Power dynamics significantly influence these interactions, potentially fostering or hindering them. This study analyses the existence and manifestation of French and Raven's (1959) five power bases within university classrooms in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through 25 hours of classroom observation and interviews with three instructors and twelve students (N=15). The data were analysed using conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis. The findings revealed the presence of all five power bases. Reward, legitimate, referent, and expert power were associated with positive interaction, while coercive power had a negative impact. The study concludes that an awareness of these power dynamics can inform pedagogical practices to enhance student engagement and create a more equitable learning environment in Saudi university contexts. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of these dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction is a cornerstone of effective pedagogy, serving as a crucial bridge between teacher expertise and student comprehension (Richmond, 1990). While subject matter knowledge is essential, communicating effectively and facilitating understanding is paramount for effective teaching (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978, as cited in Richmond, 1990). Effective classroom interaction fosters student coherence and involvement (Uijl et al., 2017), encourages content discussion and peer explanation, increases engagement and motivation, and positively affects future job performance (Bergmark & Westman, 2018). It also gives students a sense of competence (Morita, 2004).

In the context of Saudi Arabian universities, classroom interactions are influenced by a distinct set of socio-cultural factors. Unlike many Western educational settings, where

student participation and critical thinking are often encouraged from an early age, traditional Saudi classrooms typically exhibit a more hierarchical structure. Lecturers are accorded significant respect and authority, reflecting broader societal values that emphasize deference to elders and authority figures (Alshahrani et al., 2016). This hierarchical structure can impact communication patterns, participation, and engagement within the classroom.

Moreover, the cultural emphasis on respect for authority figures in Saudi society can affect how students perceive and interact with their instructors. For instance, students may be less likely to question or challenge instructors due to cultural norms around authority and respect. Additionally, the increasing adoption of communicative language teaching methods in Saudi EFL classrooms presents a unique challenge, as these methods require active student participation and dialogue, which may conflict with traditional classroom norms (Mahmood, 2011).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing pedagogical practices that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of Saudi students. By acknowledging and addressing these cultural nuances, educators can create learning environments that foster engagement while respecting the cultural context.

Power, defined as the ability to influence others (French & Raven, 1959), is an undeniable factor in classroom interaction. It can promote or hinder communication, impacting student engagement and learning outcomes. French and Raven (1959) classified power into five bases: reward (perception that the agent can provide rewards), coercive (perception that the agent can punish), referent (identification with an influential person or group), legitimate (internalized belief that the agent has the right to control behaviour), and expert (perception that the agent has superior knowledge).

While previous research has explored power dynamics in Saudi classrooms using different conceptualizations of power (Almenia & Alharbi, 2020; Alshahrani et al., 2016), a focused examination of French and Raven's (1959) typology is lacking within the Saudi context. The existing literature on the effects of power bases on student interaction has been extensively explored in university classrooms worldwide (Rachmawati, 2022). However, the number of studies in this area within Saudi Arabia is limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how teachers' five bases of power affect students' interaction in a Saudi university. This research is needed to gain a more nuanced understanding of these power dynamics in the Saudi context and inform pedagogical practices promoting more engaging and equitable learning environments. Given the importance of classroom interaction in communicative language teaching and the potential impact of power dynamics on student engagement, this study seeks to:

• Identify the power bases projected in Saudi university classrooms.
• Analyse the extent to which, if any, power bases affect student-instructor interaction.

Understanding these dynamics can inform pedagogical practices and create more engaging and equitable learning environments for Saudi university students. Investigating student-lecturer relationships is significant because it can unlock insights that can improve teaching methodologies, foster better student engagement, and ultimately enhance the quality of education in Saudi universities.

Literature Review

Classroom interaction is crucial in higher education, promoting student involvement and coherence (Uijl et al., 2017), motivation, engagement, and future job performance (Bergmark & Westman, 2018). Power dynamics significantly shape classroom interactions, potentially fostering or hindering them (Richmond, 1990). This literature review examines previous studies on the five power bases and their effects on classroom interaction, highlighting the gaps this study seeks to address.

Reward Power: Teachers commonly use rewards, such as praise, grades, or tangible incentives to influence student behavior (Pangesti et al., 2022; Tolero et al., 2021). Research suggests that rewards can positively impact student performance, increasing motivation, engagement, and team spirit (George, 2021; Sidin, 2021; Javed & Mohammed, 2021). However, other studies caution that rewards can negatively affect students' autonomy, encourage dependence, and cause anxiety (Kowalski & Froiland, 2020). A survey by Hattie (2008) found that while rewards can be effective, their impact is maximized when they are specific, timely, and contingent on effort.

Coercive Power: Coercion, involving punishments or threats, is often investigated alongside reward power (Indrawati et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2015; Sidin, 2021). While some studies suggest that reward and coercion can positively influence learning behaviour and discipline (Indrawati et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2015), others emphasize the importance of wise implementation to avoid negative consequences such as defiance (Way, 2011). Coercion has also been associated with student misbehavior (Orejudo et al., 2020), a distraction from schoolwork (Lewis, 2001), and weakened student-instructor relationships (Mainhard et al., 2011; Richmond, 1990). Research by Baumrind (1991) suggests that authoritative parenting, which balances warmth and control, is more effective than authoritarian parenting, which relies heavily on coercion.

Referent Power: The student-teacher relationship, a key aspect of referent power, significantly influences students' experiences in the educational setting (Leraas et al., 2018; Richmond, 1990; Voynova, 2017). A positive relationship motivates students to learn and allows referent and expert power to operate effectively (Richmond, 1990; Kahu & Picton, 2019). Supportive relationships enhance students' perceptions of learning and school, increasing their likelihood of pursuing their studies (Voynova, 2017). Positive classroom relationships can also improve academic achievement, increase interest and satisfaction, reduce destructive behavior, foster self-esteem, and enhance classroom interaction (Jafari & Asgari, 2020). Studies by Pianta (1999) have emphasized the importance of early teacher-child relationships in predicting later academic and social success.

Legitimate Power: Research on the direct impact of teachers' legitimate power on student interaction is limited (Anagaw & Mossu, 2019). Some studies suggest that legitimate power, when combined with other power bases, can negatively affect student interaction (Anagaw & Mossu, 2019). However, other research indicates that legitimate power can positively impact student interaction by fostering trust, cooperation, and a positive service climate (Hofmann et al., 2017). Conversely, excessive use of legitimate power may demotivate students and hinder cognitive and affective learning (Goodboy

et al., 2011; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). Weber's (1947) theory of bureaucracy highlights the importance of legitimate authority in maintaining social order but also cautions against its potential for abuse.

Expert Power: Despite the increasing accessibility of knowledge through the internet (Alshahrani & Ward, 2013), expert power remains relevant in classrooms (Rachmawati, 2022). Teachers' expert power is strongly associated with student understanding and outcomes, influencing their activities and thoughts (Rachmawati, 2022). Expert power can also decrease students' use of behavioral alternative techniques, as they perceive their teacher as a role model (Goodboy et al., 2011). Research by Hidi and Renninger (2006) suggests that teachers who can spark students' interest in a topic can foster deeper learning and engagement.

Effects of Power on Interaction: The use of power bases has a considerable impact on student interaction, with the potential to either promote or diminish communication and affect students' overall experience. Rewards can increase motivation and performance (Tolero et al., 2021), encourage learning, create a social atmosphere, increase utterances, and enhance understanding (Akashi, 2012; Chylinski, 2010; Kharel, 2012). Coercion, on the other hand, is often associated with minimizing classroom interaction, leading to silence as a protest strategy (Elmabruk & Etarhuni, 2021). Positive teacher-student relationships, facilitated by referent power, promote classroom interaction (Leraas et al., 2018) and create a climate of trust and support (Thornberg et al., 2022). Legitimate power can indirectly affect student interaction, with some studies suggesting a positive impact on classroom climate and regulated activities (Hofmann et al., 2017; Rachmawati, 2022), while others indicate that excessive use can demotivate students (Goodboy et al., 2011; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). Expert power can motivate and inspire students (Lyngstad, 2017), maximize overall talking time, and encourage communication (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). However, it can also dominate classroom interaction and limit student participation (Anagaw & Mossu, 2019).

Despite the extensive research on the effects of power bases on classroom interaction, there remains a notable gap in understanding these dynamics within specific cultural contexts, particularly in Saudi Arabian universities. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the general impact of power bases, the unique socio-cultural factors present in Saudi classrooms—such as the emphasis on respect for authority and traditional teaching methods—have not been adequately explored. This study aims to address this gap by examining how the five power bases are manifested in Saudi university classrooms and how they affect student-instructor interaction. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of power in the classroom and inform pedagogical practices that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of Saudi students.

METHOD

Participants

This study employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select participants who could provide in-depth insights into classroom interactions in the English Language Department at Majmaah University. The inclusion criteria focused on male Bachelor's

degree students from levels 2 to 9 who had significant experience with classroom dynamics and were willing to share their perspectives. Additionally, three professors were selected based on their diverse teaching roles (lingistics and literature, grammar, and translation) to ensure a comprehensive understanding of instructor perspectives.

To refine the selection criteria further, the study could have considered additional factors such as students' academic performance, years of study, or specific experiences with different teaching methods. However, given the cultural and social constraints that limited access to female students, the study focused on male-only classrooms to provide valuable insights into these dynamics.

Instruments

Classroom Observation: A total of 25 hours of classroom observation were conducted over two weeks. Observations focused on language use between the instructors and students. Courses selected to be observed according to their availability. The courses included language skills courses (Reading and Vocabulary Building, Listening and Speaking, Grammar, and Writing 2), literature courses (Introduction to literature, British Novel and Play, and Literary Criticism), linguistics courses (Practical Phonetics, English Language History, Culture and Society, Syntax, and Ecological Linguistics), and a translation course (Computer-Assisted Translation). During the observations, detailed field notes were taken, focusing on specific instances of power dynamics, including verbal and non-verbal cues, the frequency and nature of student-instructor interactions, and the overall classroom atmosphere. The field notes included descriptive accounts of classroom activities, examples of teacher language, and observations of student behavior. To ensure consistency and reliability, a structured observation protocol was used, guiding the researcher's attention to specific aspects of classroom interaction relevant to the five power bases. The observation protocol included categories for noting instances of reward, coercion, referent, legitimate, and expert power, with space for detailed descriptions and contextual information.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 students and 3 professors via Zoom. Student interviews lasted 10 to 15 minutes, while professor interviews lasted 25 to 30 minutes. The interviews were in Arabic to ensure that all participants expressed themselves clearly and that language was not an obstacle. In addition, the interviews were conducted in everyday spoken Arabic (informal Arabic) to create a more welcoming and relaxing atmosphere, which helped authenticate the data. The interviews were divided into two sections: in the first section, participants were asked general questions about professor-student interaction, the role of each one of them in the class, and some hypothetical questions. In the second section, participants were asked about what had been observed in classrooms. The interview questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions and experiences related to power dynamics in the classroom. Examples of student interview questions include: "Can you describe a typical day at the university?", "What's the role of the instructor?", "What's the role of the students?", "Do you prefer interactive sessions or one-sided sessions? And Why?", "If an instructor stated a point that you disagree with, would you show your disagreement and discuss the point or let it go? Why?", and "Are there instructors that you prefer to participate during their sessions more than others? If yes, why?".

Examples of professor interview questions include: "What's the role of the instructor?", "What's the role of the students?", "What would you do if a student refuses to follow your instructions?", and "What factors do you think affect classroom interactions?". Probing questions, such as "what do you mean by this," "can you explain more," and "can you clarify this," were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses and provide more detailed information.

Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative data analysis approach to examine the manifestation of power dynamics in Saudi university classrooms. The analysis integrated data from both classroom observations and interviews, using a combination of thematic analysis, conversation analysis, and critical discourse analysis. The qualitative data from both observations and interviews were coded using a framework based on French and Raven's (1959) five power bases: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert. Initial codes were generated deductively from the theoretical framework, while inductive codes emerged from the data itself, allowing for the identification of unexpected themes and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Examples of codes included "praise" and "positive feedback" for reward power, "grade threat" and "intimidation" for coercive power, "instructor authority" for legitimate power, "student rapport" for referent power, and "expert knowledge" for expert power.

The coding process involved refining these codes and organizing them into overarching themes. For instance, instances of instructors praising students or providing positive feedback were categorized under the theme of "reward power," while instances of instructors using threats or intimidation were categorized under "coercive power." Similarly, students' expressions of appreciation for instructors who provided positive feedback were also coded under "reward power." In contrast, their descriptions of feeling intimidated by instructors who used threats were coded under "coercive power." The analysis involved multiple readings of both the observation field notes and interview transcripts, with each reading focusing on a different aspect of the data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how power dynamics manifested in the classroom.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by providing participants with summaries of the findings to confirm the interpretations and ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences. Peer debriefing involved discussions with other researchers to review and critique the findings, enhancing the validity of the interpretations. The coding process was conducted independently by two researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus to ensure inter-coder reliability. Additionally, triangulation was achieved by comparing and contrasting the findings from the classroom observations and the interviews. This multi-method approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of power dynamics by offering multiple perspectives on the same phenomena. By integrating the analysis of both observation and interview data, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how power dynamics influence classroom interactions in Saudi universities.

FINDINGS

The study found that all five bases of power described by French and Raven (1959) were present in Majmaah University classrooms. The following sections will show how every base of power was exercised and how it affects students' interaction and participation either positively or negatively. The effect will be compared to previous studies' findings from the literature.

Table 1
Themes related to power dynamics

Power Base	Themes	Example from Observation Data	Example from Interview Data
Reward	raise, grades, motivating language, symbolic rewards (knowledge, status)	Instructor says, "Excellent point! That's exactly what I was looking for." (Field Note, Literature Class)	S1 mentioned, "I like to participate because of the grades …"
Coercive	Threats of deducting grades, intolerance of mistakes, disinterest in student input, strictness	Instructor says, "If you don't submit the assignment on time, I will deduct points." (Field Note, Grammar Class)	S10 stated that sometimes classroom interaction was minimized because the instructor did not allow them to make mistakes. Therefore, they prefer not participating to providing an incorrect answer: "If the instructor is strict, we cannot deal with him or interact in his classes because we will be afraid to make a mistake, and if we do so, he will make you feel shy and hate the course".
Legitimate	Instructor-led discussions, limited student input, control over turn-taking, emphasis on respect for the instructor, language use restrictions	Instructor directs the discussion, calling on specific students and limiting open discussion. (Field Note, Linguistics Class)	S5 believed that classroom interaction is based on instructors' method of teaching: "It is up to the instructor himself ……….
Referent	Positive relationships (inside and outside the classroom), tolerance for mistakes, showing interest in student contributions, kindness	Instructor jokes with students, creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. (Field Note, Translation Class)	S4 commented on his preference to participate in some classes more than others; he said, "Because some instructors are tolerant with making mistakes. As well as they give us the space to express ourselves and they show interest in what we say, unlike other instructors who ask just because it is part of their jobs".
Expert	Valuing instructor's knowledge, reliance on instructor for explanations, decreased student-student interaction	Students primarily direct questions to the instructor, with limited peer-to-peer interaction. (Field Note, All Classes)	S3 mentioned that "….. some students ask their mates if they cannot understand the lesson". He believes that it is not the best practice in class. For him, "It is better to ask the instructor because he will explain it to you in a better way."

Reward Power

Reward power stems from the perception that behaving in a certain manner will give the chance to gain rewards. Therefore, people may change their actions or thoughts to meet the requirements of that reward. In the educational setting, rewards can be physical objects such as toys or school supplies, symbolic like writing the students' names on bulletin boards, or even praise is a way of rewarding.

The present study found that praise and symbolic reward existed in Majmaah University classrooms. Praise was reported by P1, P2 and S2, while symbolic rewards were reported by P1, P2, S1, S3, and S12. Symbolic rewards were present in various forms in this study, such as gaining knowledge, status, or grades.

Grades were the most motivating reward for students to participate. S1 mentioned, "I like to participate because of the grades …" while S3 believed that participation is a part of students' role, and that part assists them to gain many benefits. One of these benefits was getting extra marks: "The role of the students is to interact with the instructor to get some marks". S12 also insisted on the necessity of discussion with instructors in case of disagreement because "being silent may lead to failing the course …".

The status is also of high value for some students. It motivates them to participate, interact, and to be active learners in the classroom. S1 stated that "I like to participate because of the grades and the status I will have with the instructor".

Students, as adults and mature men, not only care about grades or status but also to gain knowledge that enlightens their minds and helps them in their future careers. S3 highlighted the importance of students' interaction as it helps them understand the subject matter: "The role of the students is to interact with the instructor to get some marks and to understand the topic, ...". In addition, S12 stated that gaining knowledge was one of the benefits of discussion with instructors: "Students must ask the instructors when they face any problem or any case of disagreement because being silent may lead to failing the course or not being fully benefiting from the lectures or education".

Praise, as mentioned earlier, was found in this study. It was motivating, too, like symbolic rewards, for the students to participate. S2, commenting on why he prefers to participate in some courses more than others, said he was encouraged by motivating language. Moreover, he likes to hear motivating language even though he did not give the right answer: "There are some instructors who encourage you when you give a wrong answer. On the other hand, some discourage you for making a mistake."

On the other hand, the university instructors used rewards as a strategy to enhance their students' performance and keep them motivated and involved during the lecture. P1 stated that he uses praise and incentives to deal with students' disinterest and to foster their interaction. For example, in an observation of a literature class, the instructor was observed praising a student who provided a particularly insightful interpretation of a poem. The instructor said, "Excellent point! That's exactly what I was looking for." (Field Note, Literature Class).

P1: I have learned because of my long experience in teaching this topic, in this thing, just feedback. Uh, I have learned how to deal with this, how to deal with the students disinterest in this hard topic, and to make them more and more interested in it. Uh, maybe also because they are. I give them some incentives, uh, uh, to try and, um, and, and get out and draw the trees and so on. I usually, sometimes I praise them. Um, sometimes I also talk about grades, but I don't very much, very often talk about grades.

The same strategies were mentioned when P2 was asked a hypothetical question: "What would you do if a student refuses to follow your instructions?". He replied

P2: Well, sometimes you can motivate him by using a kinda, uh, you know, motivating language by encouraging the students and by, uh, give them some incentive. Uh, as you know that students are highly motivated, I will give you a kind of mark.

In addition to that, some instructors, as reported by S6, use both reward and coercion at the same time. S6 stated, "There is an instructor who writes what he explains on the board, like the grammar and so on, and tells us to write that in your notebook. I will give those who write extra marks, and I will deduct from those who don't".

Coercive Power

Coercive power is derived from someone's perception that behaving in a certain manner may lead to being punished. Thus, people may change their systems to avoid that punishment. In the educational setting, there are many types of punishment, such as marks deduction, loss of privileges, or suspension.

There were some cases of coercion reported in this study, such as threatening to deduct grades, not being tolerant of making mistakes, or not being very welcome to discuss topics with students. These cases were reported by S2, S7, S10, S11. For example, during an observation of a grammar class, the instructor was observed saying, "If you don't submit the assignment on time, I will deduct points." (Field Note, Grammar Class)

Regarding not being tolerant of making mistakes, S10 stated that sometimes classroom interaction was minimized because the instructor did not allow them to make mistakes. Therefore, they prefer not participating to providing an incorrect answer: "If the instructor is strict, we cannot deal with him or interact in his classes because we will be afraid to make a mistake, and if we do so, he will make you feel shy and hate the course". Moreover, students' participation was affected negatively if they felt uncomfortable. S12 said that "interaction is limited in (X) and (Y) courses," which were taught by the same instructor, because S12 thinks that the instructor does not "make them feel comfortable.".

Another issue that hinders students' interaction is not welcoming discussion or not showing interest. S1 said he became discouraged from participating if the instructor was not welcoming. "Some instructors discourage us because if we ask, they will mess everything up". S5 also shared the same thoughts as he reported that his participation "depends on the instructor. If he encourages participation, [the student] would participate. If not, [the student] would not".

Grades, as mentioned earlier, hold great significance for students. Hence, some instructors make use of this point to control their students. S11 stated that some instructors threaten students to deduct marks if they negotiate grades with them. P1, who believes that "this is not a good approach" and it is "academic terrorism," justified that by stating that students are subjective in this matter, and they are only "bargaining for more grades". Therefore, some instructors use this strategy "to minimize complaining about grades as much as possible because it is very common.".

Legitimate Power

Legitimate power comes from someone's belief that someone else has the right to prescribe or decide what to do for him/her. As a result, people may stop discussing or

asking "why", even though influential people do not make use of their power just because they believe that other people have a claim to do so. Some cases were reported in this study that showed legitimate power at play. For example, during an observation of a linguistics class, the instructor was observed directing the discussion, calling on specific students, and limiting open discussion. (Field Note, Linguistics Class)

S5 believed that classroom interaction is based on instructors' method of teaching. He stated, "It is up to the instructor himself ………. The instructor (X)'s method is based on interaction. For instance, sometimes he asks us to write individually and sometimes in groups of three, like writing a story. On the contrary, some instructors prefer one-sided teaching". S12 also reported almost the same thing as he thinks that student-to-student interaction should happen "when the instructor asks [them] to do so".

In addition to that, S10 believed that discussion with instructors in cases of disagreement is inappropriate behaviour because it "diminishes [es] the significance of the instructor." For him, a student can say his opinion without discussing it and going into detail "because the instructor should be respected in front of his students," he added.

S11 also reported that some instructors say, "I am the one who assigns grades" when students try to negotiate their grades with them. The use of legitimate power in this context can be another strategy to minimize students' complaining about grades because, as P1 stated, students were not objective when talking about marks.

Another factor that affected students' participation was the instructors' selection of the students who answered their questions. S6 reported

S6: Sometimes, the instructor does not allow you to participate. R: How? Can you explain more? S6: By deciding the one who answers the question.

The selection was not derived from the intention of exercising power but from other academic justifications. When P3 was asked in the interview about the reason for choosing the student who answers his questions, he replied: "I am sure some students know the answers. They can talk in English, but they're very shy. They are afraid of committing or making mistakes". Thus, this type of power existed to broaden students' engagement and to split the turns among them.

In addition, P2 did not allow his students to speak their first language in class. He forced them to speak in English. When he was asked about that, he answered:

P2: I try my best to help my students improve their speaking ability through their discussion in the classroom. Cause one of my objectives that learning, uh, should be done in the classroom, uh, the student can gain a lot of information. He can go home and study, but to gain confidence that help him to speak fluently in English....

To summarize, legitimate power affected students' participation on two sides. For some students, especially those who participate frequently, it affected their participation negatively since they would not get the same opportunities as before implementing this type of power. On the other hand, its effects on other students were positive, especially those who feel shy or afraid to make mistakes, since legitimate power helped them to be more active and engaged during class time.

Referent Power

Referent power stems from the desire to be identified or affiliated with certain groups or the desire to be similar to someone whom the subject loves or admires. Referent power operates because of many interpersonal qualities, such as charisma, attractiveness, or charm. One of the things that referent power includes is the relationship between people and how it affects each other's systems. The relationship between instructors and students is the focus of this section in the current study. Other factors of referent power are out of scope.

Our relationships with others play an important role in interaction. The relationship between interlocutors can either extend the turn-taking system and make the conversation last longer or reduce it to the least. The instructor-student relationship is intertwined with this. Therefore, their relationship with each other – inside and outside the classroom - affects classroom interaction. The relationship between instructors and students was investigated in relation to its effects on student interaction. For example, during an observation of a translation class, the instructor was observed joking with students, creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. (Field Note, Translation Class)

S4 commented on his preference to participate in some classes more than others; he said, "Because some instructors are tolerant with making mistakes. As well as they give us the space to express ourselves and they show interest in what we say, unlike other instructors who ask just because it is part of their jobs". S10 also mentioned that "there are some instructors whom I feel shy if I miss their requirements because they make me like the course and not to be afraid of them but love them". Thus, behaving kindly in class helps students to be more diligent and dedicated to their studies and fosters their classroom interaction.

The relationship between university boys and their instructors is not only inside the classroom. Their relationship outside the classroom is as important as the relationship inside it. S2 reported that "one of the instructors replies to me even though my English is not very good, but it is understandable. He always smiles at me when I meet him outside the classroom. In addition, he knows I am diligent and committed to my studies. That encourages me to participate and talk more in his courses". Hence, a good relationship with students outside the classroom positively affects students' interaction inside the class.

On the other hand, not being open to discussion or being too strict affects students' interaction negatively. S11 mentioned that "the strict instructors mostly do not allow students to negotiate grades of the exams with them ……… that broadens the gap between the student and subject matter and the instructor himself".

Expert Power

Expert power is derived from the belief that the other person has more knowledge and expertise than the influenced. Furthermore, the influenced should believe that the influencer is telling the truth in order to make that influence happen. In the present study, expert power did not appear as much as other bases of power. It was discussed in the S3 interview. For example, in all observed classes, students primarily directed

questions to the instructor, with limited peer-to-peer interaction. (Field Note, All Classes)

S3 mentioned that "….. some students ask their mates if they cannot understand the lesson". He believes that it is not the best practice in class. For him, "It is better to ask the instructor because he will explain it to you in a better way." Therefore, expert power affects classroom interaction in both ways as it increases student-instructor interaction and decreases student-student interaction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have significant implications for understanding the role of power dynamics in shaping classroom interactions in Saudi university settings. The presence of all five power bases—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert—highlights the complex nature of power in educational contexts. The positive impact of reward power on student interaction underscores the importance of motivational strategies in fostering engagement. Conversely, the negative effects of coercive power suggest that instructors should avoid punitive measures, as they can discourage participation.

The dual impact of legitimate power—both facilitating engagement among less active students and limiting proactive ones—indicates that instructors must balance authority with flexibility to promote inclusive interaction. The positive influence of referent power on student interaction emphasizes the value of building strong teacher-student relationships. Finally, the mixed effects of expert power—enhancing student-instructor interaction but potentially limiting student-student interaction—suggest that instructors should balance their expertise with opportunities for peer engagement.

These findings have practical implications for pedagogical practices in Saudi universities. Administrators could benefit from providing workshops and seminars that focus on effective communication strategies, relationship-building, and balanced use of power bases to enhance classroom interaction. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring how power dynamics vary across different genders, courses, majors, and proficiency levels, offering a more nuanced understanding of educational contexts in Saudi Arabia.

LIMITATIONS

There are some human and spatial limitations in the study. In regard to human limitations, the study was limited to exploring the impact of power bases on student interaction for Majmaah University male students majoring in English, whereas including students from other majors or other universities may boost the generalizability of the study. Another threat to the generalizability was excluding females, while including them may provide useful insights and another lens to examine the issue. The study also did not take into consideration students' level of proficiency, which can be a real barrier to classroom interaction.

In addition, the number of instructors being interviewed was limited. Future research may need to interview more instructors to have diversity in opinions that contribute to undertaking a more detailed analysis. Moreover, future research may use quantitative or

mixed approaches, as this study used only qualitative measures. All of these points can be addressed in future research.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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APPENDIX

Students' interview questions:

i. Can you describe a typical day at the university?
ii. What's the role of the instructor?
iii. What's the role of the students?
iv. Do you prefer interactive sessions or one-sided sessions? And Why?
v. If an instructor stated a point that you disagree with, would you show your disagreement and discuss the point or let it go? Why?
vi. Are there instructors that you prefer to participate during their sessions more than others? If yes, why?
vii. Probing questions such as: what do you mean by this, can you explain more, can you clarify this, etc.

Professors' interview questions:

i. What's the role of the instructor?
ii. What's the role of the students?
iii. What would you do if a student refuses to follow your instructions?
iv. What factors do you think affect classroom interactions?
v. Probing questions such as: what do you mean by this, can you explain more, can you clarify this, etc.