

Educational Empowerment through Teacher Speech Acts in *The Ron Clark Story*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how educational empowerment is represented through teacher speech acts in the film *The Ron Clark Story*. The study is significant because teacher language functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a pedagogical resource that can support students' psychological, academic, and social development. Using a qualitative descriptive design and a pragmatic approach, this study analyzed 13 teacher utterances selected from classroom interaction scenes in the film. The data were analyzed using speech act theory, teacher talk concepts, and an educational empowerment framework. The findings reveal that educational empowerment is represented through representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative speech acts. These speech acts function pedagogically to provide emotional support, encourage learning engagement, promote self-reflection, and foster social belonging within the classroom community. The findings further indicate that different speech acts contribute to different dimensions of empowerment depending on the communicative goals of the teacher and the needs of learners. This study contributes to educational pragmatics by demonstrating that teacher speech acts function not only as linguistic actions but also as pedagogical resources that support educational empowerment in classroom interactions represented in film narratives.

Keywords : Educational Empowerment, Educational Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Teacher Talk, *The Ron Clark Story*

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in the interaction process, especially in the field of learning. In a pragmatic context, language is not only a tool for conveying information but also a social action that has a particular impact and communication purpose for the hearer (Levinson, 1983; Sari et al., 2025). Austin (1962) explained that every speech contains actions, while J. R. Searle (1979) classifies speech acts into five categories: representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. In the educational environment, the teacher's speech is very important in the learning process, because through language, the teacher can direct, motivate, control, and build an emotional relationship with students. Walsh (2013) emphasized that teacher talk is the primary medium through which classroom interaction is shaped and the quality of student involvement is determined. Consequently, teacher language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a pedagogical resource that influences students' learning experiences, participation, and development. Understanding the function of

language in learning is important because the quality of teachers' verbal interaction can determine the creation of a supportive and participatory learning environment. Thus, the study of teachers' speech acts becomes relevant to understand how language is used as a tool of empowerment in education.

The use of speech acts is closely related to the concept of *teacher talk* because all pedagogical actions of teachers are realized through the language used during learning. Mercer & Howe (2012) explain that verbal interaction between teachers and students has a great influence on students' cognitive and social development because the learning process occurs through dialogue and negotiation of meaning. In addition, Hattie (2009) emphasized that supportive teacher verbal communication can increase students' motivation, participation, and academic achievement. This suggests that teacher language possesses significant pragmatic potential to influence students' psychological, academic, and social development simultaneously. Therefore, speech analysis in the context of education is important to understand how teachers use language as a pedagogical strategy that is able to build student involvement in learning (Shabani et al., 2010).

The relationship between teacher speech and educational empowerment has become increasingly important within contemporary educational paradigms that position students as active participants in the learning process (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Educational empowerment refers to a process through which learners develop the confidence, agency, and capacity to actively engage in their educational experiences (Zimmerman, 2000). In this study, empowerment is examined through three interrelated dimensions: psychological, academic, and social empowerment. Psychological empowerment relates to students' self-confidence, sense of competence, and belief in their ability to overcome challenges. Academic empowerment refers to students' active engagement in learning, critical thinking, and confidence in achieving academic goals. Social empowerment concerns students' sense of belonging, participation, and interpersonal relationships within the classroom community (Pen & Singh, 2025; Quin, 2017). These dimensions were selected because they collectively represent the major developmental outcomes that can be influenced through teacher-student interaction. Therefore, they provide an appropriate conceptual framework for examining how teacher speech functions as a pedagogical resource in educational settings.

Freire (2018) argues that empowering education should be grounded in dialogue and non-oppressive relationships between teachers and students. From this perspective, teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators who support students' intellectual, emotional, and social development. Empowerment is often realized through supportive, reflective, and dialogic language that encourages participation, values students' contributions, and fosters positive classroom relationships (Evalin Manalu & Bahari, 2024). Consequently, examining teacher speech acts can provide valuable insights into how language operates as a means of educational empowerment.

The film *The Ron Clark Story* is a relevant object to examine the relationship between speech and educational empowerment because this film shows intense interactions between teachers and students in the context of learning. The film, based on a true story, depicts Ron Clark's struggles in teaching students who have complex social and academic backgrounds in Harlem, New York. In the learning process, Ron Clark not only uses language to provide instruction but also to build motivation, change student behavior, and create positive emotional connections (Haines, 2006). Ron Clark's utterances demonstrate how language can function as a pedagogical act that influences students' psychological, academic, and social development. In addition, the film shows that the success of learning is not only determined by teaching methods, but also by the quality of communication between teachers and students (Laia et al., 2025). The use of supportive and empathetic language is one of the key factors that help students thrive and increase their engagement in learning. Therefore,

this film provides rich data to analyze how teachers' speech actions realize the function of empowerment in the context of education (Tan & Koh, 2018).

Several previous studies have examined teacher speech acts in educational contexts and films. Mufidah (2023), for instance, focused primarily on directive speech acts in *The Ron Clark Story*, while Wailissa (2023) analyzed teacher-student interactions in educational cinema from a speech act perspective. Similarly, Annida et al. (2023) investigated speech acts in *The English Teacher* and identified various speech act categories used in classroom interactions. Although these studies contribute to the understanding of teacher language, they mainly emphasize the classification of speech acts and their linguistic functions.

However, previous studies have not sufficiently explained how teacher speech acts function pedagogically to construct students' psychological confidence, academic engagement, and social belonging. As a result, the relationship between teacher speech acts and educational empowerment remains underexplored, particularly from an educational pragmatics perspective. Most existing studies describe what types of speech acts are used by teachers, but they provide limited explanation regarding how such speech acts contribute to empowering students within educational interactions.

To address this gap, the present study examines teacher speech acts as representations of educational empowerment in *The Ron Clark Story*. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of Searle's speech act theory, Walsh's concept of teacher talk, and Zimmerman's educational empowerment framework within a single analytical perspective. Rather than merely classifying speech acts, this study investigates how teacher language functions pedagogically to represent psychological, academic, and social empowerment throughout the narrative of the film.

Based on the background and research gap outlined above, this study addresses the following research question: How is educational empowerment represented through teacher speech acts in *The Ron Clark Story*?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a pragmatic approach to examine how educational empowerment is represented through teacher speech acts in *The Ron Clark Story*. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting the meanings, functions, and contextual use of teacher utterances in educational interactions. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), qualitative research is suitable for exploring and understanding social phenomena through detailed interpretation of textual data. In this study, a pragmatic perspective was adopted to analyze teacher speech not only as linguistic expressions but also as pedagogical actions that represent psychological, academic, and social empowerment.

Data Source

The primary data source of this study was *The Ron Clark Story* (2006), directed by Randa Haines. The researcher first identified and transcribed all teacher utterances produced by Ron Clark throughout the film. These utterances were verified through repeated viewing of the film to ensure contextual accuracy. From the complete set of teacher utterances, those that explicitly reflected educational empowerment were purposively sampled for analysis. The selection was based on Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment framework, which includes psychological, academic, and social empowerment. As a result, 13 teacher utterances were identified as the most representative data for this study. The unit of analysis consisted of individual teacher utterances occurring in classroom and educational interaction scenes that demonstrated empowerment-oriented pedagogical functions.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher repeatedly watched the film and examined the script to identify all teacher utterances produced by Ron Clark throughout the narrative. Second, all identified utterances were documented and reviewed in relation to their communicative context. Third, purposive sampling was employed to select utterances that explicitly reflected educational empowerment. The selection criteria included utterances that encouraged students' confidence, self-belief, or emotional resilience; promoted academic engagement, critical thinking, or learning participation; and fostered social belonging, mutual respect, or interpersonal relationships. Utterances that functioned solely as routine classroom management, procedural instructions, or disciplinary control without clear empowerment indicators were excluded from the analysis. These criteria were derived from Zimmerman's (2000) dimensions of psychological, academic, and social empowerment. Finally, the selected utterances were categorized according to Zimmerman's (2000) dimensions of psychological empowerment, academic empowerment, and social empowerment.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis involved four systematic stages. First, the selected utterances were identified and coded according to Searle's (1969) categories of speech acts, namely representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. Second, each utterance was categorized according to Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment dimensions. Utterances were classified as psychological empowerment when they encouraged students' confidence, self-belief, motivation, or emotional resilience. Utterances were categorized as academic empowerment when they promoted learning engagement, academic participation, critical thinking, or achievement. Meanwhile, utterances were classified as social empowerment when they fostered cooperation, mutual respect, interpersonal relationships, or a sense of belonging within the classroom community. Third, the researcher analyzed the contextual meaning of each utterance by considering the communicative situation, teacher intention, and student responses presented in the film narrative. Finally, the findings were interpreted using Walsh's (2013) concept of teacher talk and Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment framework to explain how teacher speech acts function pedagogically within the film.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, theoretical triangulation was employed by integrating three complementary frameworks: Searle's speech act theory, Walsh's concept of teacher talk, and Zimmerman's educational empowerment theory. In addition, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the selected data, coding procedures, and interpretations to ensure consistency between speech act classifications, empowerment dimensions, and contextual meanings represented in the film. The coding process was also cross-checked against Searle's speech act categories and Zimmerman's empowerment framework to minimize subjective interpretation and improve analytical reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

1. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment in *The Ron Clark Story* is realized through speech actions that aim to build students' confidence, emotional support, courage, and motivation. Zimmerman (2000) explains that psychological empowerment is related to the development of an individual's sense of competence, self-control, and confidence in his or her ability to face challenges. In the context of learning, psychological empowerment arises when teachers use language that is supportive, reflective, and encourages students to believe in their own potential. Based on the results of the research, Ron Clark realized psychological empowerment through commissive, expressive, and representative speech actions in various learning interactions.

a. Data 1 (Scene of 01.02.40 - 01.03.12)

"This is not a test. This is my phone number. I want you guys to call me if you have any questions about homework, need any advice, or you are in trouble. That's 24/7."

This scene takes place in the classroom when Mr. Clark explains that the exam will be held in eight weeks. After handing out the paper to the students, he explained that the paper was not a test, but his personal phone number that could be contacted at any time by the students. Classroom situations that were initially disciplined turned into more supportive when teachers showed their concern for students, even outside of school hours.

Pragmatically, such speech is considered a **commissive** speech act because it shows the speaker's commitment to future actions (J. R. Searle, 1979). Through the sayings of *"call me"* and *"that's 24/7"*, Mr. Clark shows his willingness to continue to support students whenever they need academic and personal help. The speech not only serves as information but also as a form of emotional support that builds students' sense of psychological security. According to Pianta et al. (2012), a supportive interpersonal relationship between teachers and students can increase students' emotional involvement in the learning process. In this context, Mr. Clark uses teacher talk to build trust and show that students do not face their difficulties alone. Therefore, this saying realizes psychological empowerment because students feel cared for, supported, and have a figure they can rely on.

b. Data 2 (Scene of 00.28.43 - 00.29.00)

"I'm proud of you."

This scene occurs after Mr. Clark reminds the students of the class rules about not jumping in line. After the students successfully remember the rules, the situation changes from an atmosphere of discipline to appreciation for the students' efforts. Mr. Clark then allowed them to return to eating while giving compliments in person.

This utterance can be interpreted as an **expressive** speech act because it shows the emotional attitude of the speaker towards the opponent (J. Searle, 1969). The saying *"I'm proud of you"* serves as a form of verbal appreciation that teachers give to students for their positive behavior. Dweck (2016) explained that positive affirmations from teachers can increase students' *growth mindset* and confidence because they feel that their efforts and development are appreciated. In this scene, Mr. Clark not only emphasizes the rules of the class but also provides emotional reinforcement to students through verbal appreciation. Teacher talk is used as a strategy to build motivation and positive emotional relationships in the classroom. Thus, the speech realizes psychological empowerment because it helps students develop confidence and appreciation for their own abilities.

c. Data 3 (Scene of 00.45.58 - 00.47.07)

"I know you're scared. But I want you to do it. I want you to jump. I want you guys to feel what it's like to fly."

This scene takes place in a dim classroom with a warm and reflective atmosphere. All the students wore birthday hats and watched Mr. Clark's personal story of the cliff-climbing experience. Through the story, Mr. Clark compares the learning process of students to the experience of facing fear when having to jump off a cliff.

This utterance is categorized as a **directive** speech act because Mr. Clark encourages students to take action and confront their fears. Through the expressions "I want you to do it" and "I want you to jump," he directs students to move beyond their comfort zones and face challenges that may initially seem intimidating. Although the utterance is delivered through a metaphorical narrative, its primary function is not merely to express a belief but to motivate students to act courageously. The metaphors "jump" and "fly" symbolize taking risks and embracing personal growth. According to Zimmerman (2000), psychological empowerment develops when individuals gain confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles and exert control over their own lives. In this context, Mr. Clark uses teacher talk as a motivational strategy that encourages students to challenge their perceived limitations. Therefore, this utterance represents psychological empowerment by fostering students' confidence, courage, and willingness to face academic and social challenges.

d. Data 4 (Scene of 00.32.23 – 00.33.56)

"Because I would miss your glowing personality... Just give yourself another chance."

This scene occurs after a conflict between students when Tayshawn tries to leave the classroom. Mr. Clark chases after and persuades her to return before she is expelled from school. The situation took place in a tense atmosphere, but Mr. Clark approached the students personally and supportively.

Mr. Clark's response reflects an **expressive** speech act because they show the teacher's emotional attention and appreciation for students. Through the phrase "I would miss your glowing personality", Mr. Clark showed that he values the existence and character of students as individuals. In addition, the saying "give yourself another chance" shows the teacher's efforts to rebuild students' expectations and confidence in themselves. According to Alzain (2025), emotional support from teachers can help students develop better psychological resilience and motivation to learn. In this scene, teacher talk is used as a form of interpersonal approach that helps students feel valued and accepted. Therefore, the speech realizes psychological empowerment because it helps students develop confidence and confidence that they still can develop.

2. Academic Empowerment

Academic empowerment in *The Ron Clark Story* is realized through speech actions that encourage students to actively learn, think critically, and develop their academic potential. Zimmerman (2000) explains that academic empowerment is related to the ability of students to be involved in the learning process and have confidence that they can achieve academic success. In the context of learning, teacher talk is an important means of building learning engagement, academic motivation, and students' awareness of their abilities. Based on the results of the research, Ron Clark realized academic empowerment through representative, directive, expressive, and commissive speech.

a. Data 5 (Scene of 00.25.14 - 00.25.46)

"I want you all to start a journal about your dreams and aspirations."

This scene takes place in the classroom as Mr. Clark explains Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech on justice and freedom. To help students understand the abstract concept, he used a simple analogy of water from a hydrant flowing rapidly on a hot day. After explaining the material, Mr. Clark asked students to write a journal about their dreams and aspirations.

Through this statement, Mr. Clark **directs** students to engage in a reflective learning activity. Through the expression "I want you all to start a journal about your dreams and aspirations," Mr. Clark encourages students to actively participate in learning by connecting classroom content with their personal goals and future ambitions. The utterance functions not only as an instruction but also as an invitation to self-reflection and critical thinking. (Freire & Macedo, 2014) argue that empowering education should encourage learners to develop critical awareness of themselves and their social realities. In this context, teacher talk serves as a pedagogical tool that promotes meaningful learning experiences and learner autonomy. By encouraging students to reflect on their aspirations, Mr. Clark positions them as active participants in their own learning process. Therefore, this utterance represents academic empowerment by fostering critical thinking, self-reflection, and active engagement in learning.

b. Data 6 (Scene of 00.12.35 – 00.13.15)

"You can help out by working with Julio every night on his homework... Together, we can get him excited about learning."

This scene occurs when Mr. Clark visits Julio's home to understand his students' backgrounds and involve the family in the educational process. In the conversation, Mr. Clark spoke with Julio's mother about the importance of family support for a child's academic development.

Through this statement, the utterance is a **directive** speech act because the teacher asks for certain actions from the opponent, namely helping Julio study every night. However, this act of speech is not authoritarian, but collaborative and supportive. The use of the phrase "together, we can" shows that Mr. Clark builds cooperation between teachers and parents for the sake of students' academic development. Family involvement in education has a great influence on students' motivation and academic achievement. In this context, teacher talk is used to build ongoing learning support outside the classroom. In addition, the saying "I just want Julio to achieve his full potential" shows the teacher's confidence in the student's academic ability. Therefore, this speech realizes academic empowerment because it encourages the creation of a learning environment that supports the development of students' potential to the maximum.

c. Data 7 (Scene of 00.50.55 - 00.51.10)

"Good job!"

This scene takes place when Mr. Clark shares the results of the trial exam with the students. Students who get good grades get candy as a form of reward. The classroom situation turns out to be more positive as students begin to feel proud of their academic achievements.

This utterance is categorized as an **expressive** speech act because it conveys the teacher's appreciation and positive evaluation of students' academic achievement. The expression "Good job!" functions as verbal reinforcement that acknowledges students' effort and success in learning. According to Dweck (2016), positive feedback from teachers can strengthen students' motivation and encourage the development of a growth mindset. In this context, teacher talk serves as an academic reinforcement strategy that validates students' accomplishments and encourages them to continue striving for improvement. Unlike general expressions of praise, this utterance is directly connected to

students' academic performance and learning outcomes. Therefore, this utterance represents academic empowerment by strengthening students' confidence in their academic abilities and motivating them to remain actively engaged in the learning process.

d. Data 8 (Scene of 00.48.04 – 00.48.33)

"This year, we're going to learn all 42 presidents of the United States, in order."

This scene takes place in class when Mr. Clark introduces a new method of studying American history. When students show a dubious reaction to the amount of material to be studied, Mr. Clark assures them that the method will help them understand history more easily.

This utterance is a **commissive** speech act because it shows the teacher's commitment to the learning process that will be carried out with students. The use of the phrase "we're going to learn" suggests that the teacher places themselves as part of the learning process, not just as an instructor. According to Mercer & Howe (2012), collaborative learning interactions can improve students' engagement and academic development. In this context, teacher talk is used to build students' confidence that academic challenges can be faced together through the right learning strategies. In addition, Mr. Clark's explanation that the method will "make learning easier" shows the teacher's efforts in reducing students' academic anxiety. Therefore, this speech realizes academic empowerment because it helps students feel more confident and involved in the learning process.

3. Social Empowerment

Social empowerment in *The Ron Clark Story* is realized through speech acts that foster togetherness, solidarity, mutual respect, and positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Zimmerman (2000) explains that social empowerment is related to individuals' ability to feel accepted, connected, and to actively participate in their social environment. In the context of education, teacher talk plays an important role in building an inclusive and supportive learning community. Based on the research results, Ron Clark realized social empowerment through declarative, expressive, representative, and directive speech acts.

a. Data 9 (Scene of 00.17.39 – 00.17.50)

"This year, we are going to be a family."

This scene takes place on Ron Clark's first day teaching the sixth-grade class. At the beginning of the lesson, he introduces his vision for the classroom by emphasizing unity and togetherness among students. Through this statement, Mr. Clark seeks to create a supportive learning environment where students view themselves as members of a collective community rather than as isolated individuals.

Rather than establishing a new institutional status, this utterance expresses Ron Clark's belief about the type of classroom culture he intends to build. In Searle's framework, such utterances are categorized as **representative** speech acts because they communicate the speaker's view or understanding of a situation. By describing the class as a "family," Mr. Clark presents an ideal of cooperation, trust, and mutual support among students. Within the framework of educational empowerment, this interaction reflects social empowerment because it encourages students to develop a sense of belonging and strengthen their interpersonal relationships. The family metaphor also reinforces collective identity and shared responsibility within the classroom community. As a result, students are encouraged to perceive themselves as valued members of a supportive learning environment.

b. Data 10 (Scene of 01.25.08 - 01.26.38)

“Oh! Thank you.”

This scene occurs when Julio and Tayshawn present a painting of Mr. Clark as a token of appreciation for his dedication and support throughout the school year. The gift symbolizes the students’ gratitude for the academic and personal growth they achieved under his guidance. The moment reflects a positive emotional interaction between the teacher and the students, highlighting their shared accomplishments and strong interpersonal connection.

Mr. Clark’s response can be interpreted as an **expressive** speech act because it conveys his feelings of gratitude and appreciation toward the students’ gesture. According to Searle, expressive speech acts are used to express the speaker’s psychological state in response to a particular situation. Through the utterance *“Oh! Thank you,”* Mr. Clark acknowledges the students’ appreciation and reciprocates their positive feelings. Within the framework of educational empowerment, this interaction reflects social empowerment because it demonstrates mutual recognition and emotional connectedness between teacher and students. The exchange of gratitude strengthens students’ sense of belonging and reinforces the supportive relationships that have been developed throughout the learning process.

c. Data 11 (Scene of 00.47.17 – 00.47.50)

“When you light a candle, it symbolizes that we are joined together.”

This scene takes place in a classroom with an emotional atmosphere as student’s light candles on the cake in turn. This activity is a symbol of togetherness and mutual commitment towards the end of the semester. Mr. Clark then explained the symbolic meaning of the activity to the students.

This utterance can be interpreted as a **representative** speech act because the teacher explains the symbolic meaning of the candle-lighting activity and expresses his belief regarding unity within the classroom community. Through the statement *“we are joined together,”* Mr. Clark presents a shared understanding of togetherness and collective commitment among students. The utterance functions not merely as an explanation of the activity but also as a symbolic affirmation of social connectedness. Freire & Macedo (2014) emphasize that empowering education is built upon dialogue, mutual respect, and a strong sense of community. In this context, teacher talk serves to reinforce social bonds and foster a collective classroom identity. By framing learning as a shared journey rather than an individual endeavor, the utterance encourages students to perceive themselves as members of a supportive community. Therefore, this utterance represents social empowerment by strengthening students’ sense of belonging, unity, and social solidarity.

d. Data 12 (Scene of 00.27.45 - 00.28.52)

“This is a family, and families treat each other with respect.”

This scene occurs in the canteen queue when Julio and Shameika break the rules by sneaking in the queue. Mr. Clark then rebuked their behavior and reminded them of the importance of respect in the classroom community. The situation also involves a response from other students who begin to show awareness of the common rules.

From the utterance, the type of speech act is a **directive** because the teacher directs students to improve their behavior and obey the class rules. However, this act of speech not only serves as disciplinary instruction but also as an effort to build students' social awareness of the importance of respecting others. According to Walsh (2013), teacher talk can be used to build social norms and

interpersonal relationships in the classroom. In this context, the use of the word "family" again suggests that Mr. Clark is building a collective social identity among students. In addition, the involvement of other students in the situation shows a growing sense of social responsibility within the group. Therefore, the speech realizes social empowerment because it helps students understand the importance of respect, responsibility, and solidarity in the learning community.

e. Data 13 (Scene of 00.26.00 - 00.26.13)

"But because we are all a family, if one of us doesn't get in line for the lunchroom, then none of us gets lunch."

This scene occurs when students are lining up for lunch, but Shameika refuses to follow the classroom rules. In response to her behavior, Mr. Clark introduces a collective consequence by stating that if one student does not get in line, the entire class will lose the opportunity to have lunch. This moment marks an important turning point in establishing discipline and shared responsibility within the classroom community.

By introducing a new classroom consequence, this utterance functions as a declarative speech act. Searle explains that declarative speech acts bring about changes in social or institutional realities through the authority of the speaker. In this situation, Mr. Clark establishes a new classroom rule that immediately affects all students, transforming the consequences of individual behavior into a matter of collective responsibility. Within the framework of educational empowerment, this interaction reflects social empowerment because it encourages students to recognize their interdependence as members of a classroom community. The newly established rule promotes accountability, cooperation, and shared responsibility, helping students understand that their actions have consequences not only for themselves but also for others.

Discussion

The findings indicate that educational empowerment in *The Ron Clark Story* is represented not by a single communicative approach, but rather by the dynamic use of several speech acts that fulfil students' psychological, academic, and social needs. This suggests that teacher language is more than just a medium of instruction; it is a pedagogical resource that influences students' learning experiences, involvement, and development. Educational empowerment therefore emerges through the strategic use of language that supports students both as learners and as members of a classroom community.

In terms of psychological empowerment, the data show that teacher speech acts provide emotional support, encouragement, and comfort to students. Rather than simply transferring information, teacher language helps students develop confidence and resilience when faced with academic and emotional problems. This implies that empowerment is not just acquired through educational accomplishment, but also through the emotional climate fostered by teacher-student interaction. In this aspect, language serves as a relational resource, allowing pupils to see themselves as capable and valuable learners. This study backs Zimmerman's (2000) theory that psychological empowerment emerges from a sense of competence and self-belief. It also corresponds to Dweck's (2016) growth mindset theory, which emphasizes the value of positive feedback in promoting motivation and perseverance. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Alzain's (2025) discovery that supportive teacher-student connections boost learners' confidence and desire to participate in difficult learning tasks. Similarly, Quin (2017) contends that positive teacher relationships improve kids' feelings of belonging and emotional well-being. As a result, teacher talk enhances not just classroom

communication but also students' emotional growth and positive self-perceptions (Suryani et al., 2023; Wirawan et al., 2022).

The findings further indicate that academic empowerment is closely associated with speech acts that encourage participation, reflection, and engagement in learning activities. This suggests that empowering teacher talk extends beyond instructional delivery and serves as a pedagogical strategy for promoting active learning. The findings imply that academic empowerment emerges when students are positioned as active contributors to the learning process rather than merely responding to teacher instruction. Consequently, teacher language becomes a means of promoting learner agency and ownership of learning. Consistent with Freire et al. (2014), educational empowerment develops when students are encouraged to become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Similarly, Mercer and Howe (2012) argue that meaningful interaction between teachers and learners facilitates cognitive development and academic engagement. The findings also resonate with Shabani et al. (2010), who emphasize that scaffolded interaction enables learners to develop higher levels of cognitive engagement and independent learning. While previous studies have largely focused on interactional processes and classroom dialogue, the present study specifically demonstrates how speech acts contribute to the realization of academic empowerment by encouraging participation, reflection, and learner agency. Thus, teacher language plays an important role in supporting students' academic agency and achievement.

The findings also reveal that social empowerment is realized through speech acts that foster belonging, cooperation, and collective responsibility within the classroom community. Rather than functioning solely as interpersonal communication, teacher talk serves as a means of constructing a shared social identity among students. The prominence of social empowerment in the findings reflects Mr. Clark's consistent effort to transform a fragmented group of students into a cohesive learning community. This suggests that empowering teacher talk is not limited to academic instruction but also involves cultivating relationships, trust, and collective responsibility among learners. This finding supports Walsh's (2013) argument that teacher language plays a central role in establishing inclusive classroom environments and shaping social relationships. It also resonates with Freire's (2018) perspective that empowering education should be grounded in dialogue, mutual respect, and recognition of learners as active members of a community. Likewise, Pianta et al. (2012) argue that positive teacher-student relationships foster stronger social engagement and classroom participation, while Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) emphasize the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in empowering educational environments. In contrast to these studies, which primarily focus on relational and environmental factors, the present study highlights teacher speech acts as a practical mechanism through which social empowerment is constructed and maintained in classroom interaction. Consequently, teacher talk contributes to the development of social connectedness and positive classroom relationships that support student participation and engagement.

The findings of this study extend previous research on teacher speech acts in educational contexts. For example, Mufidah (2023) focused primarily on identifying directive speech acts in *The Ron Clark Story*, while Wailissa (2023) examined speech act categories in teacher-student interactions. Similarly, Annida et al. (2023) investigated speech acts in *The English Teacher* and emphasized their linguistic functions within classroom discourse. Although these studies provide valuable insights into speech act classification, they offer limited discussion regarding the broader pedagogical implications of teacher language. In contrast, the present study examines speech acts not merely as linguistic phenomena but as pedagogical resources that contribute to students' psychological, academic, and

social empowerment. This perspective highlights teacher language not only as a communicative tool but also as a pedagogical resource that supports educational empowerment.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to educational pragmatics by integrating Searle's (1979) speech act theory, Walsh's (2013) concept of teacher talk, and Zimmerman's (2000) educational empowerment framework within a single analytical perspective. Whereas previous studies primarily focused on identifying speech act categories, the present study demonstrates that speech acts can also be understood as pedagogical resources that contribute to student empowerment. Consequently, this study provides a new perspective on how language functions as a mechanism for educational empowerment within educational interactions represented in film narratives. By linking speech act theory with educational empowerment, the study highlights the pedagogical significance of teacher language in shaping students' learning experiences and classroom participation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how educational empowerment is represented through teacher speech acts in *The Ron Clark Story*. The findings demonstrate that educational empowerment is realized through the strategic use of directive, expressive, commissive, representative, and declarative speech acts in classroom interactions. These speech acts function not only as communicative tools for instruction but also as pedagogical resources that support students' psychological, academic, and social development.

Overall, the study suggests that teacher language plays a significant role in creating empowering learning experiences. Through different speech act strategies, teachers can foster students' confidence, encourage academic engagement, and strengthen social relationships within the classroom community. The findings further indicate that different speech acts serve different empowerment functions depending on the communicative goals of the teacher and the needs of learners.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to educational pragmatics by integrating Searle's (1979) speech act theory, Walsh's (2013) concept of teacher talk, and Zimmerman's (2000) educational empowerment framework within a single analytical perspective. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on identifying speech act categories, this study demonstrates how speech acts function as pedagogical resources that contribute to educational empowerment. Therefore, the study provides a broader understanding of teacher language as a mechanism for supporting students' psychological, academic, and social growth.

However, this study is limited to a film narrative and selected classroom interaction scenes rather than authentic classroom discourse. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as representations of educational empowerment rather than evidence of actual classroom impact. In addition, the analysis was limited to 13 teacher utterances identified as reflecting educational empowerment within the film.

Future studies are encouraged to investigate teacher speech acts and educational empowerment in authentic classroom settings to examine whether similar patterns emerge in real educational interactions. Further research may also explore the relationship between teacher talk and student engagement, classroom interaction, emotional support, or empowerment across different educational levels and cultural contexts. Practically, teachers may consider employing supportive, reflective, and dialogic teacher talk to encourage students' confidence, participation, and engagement in the learning process.

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