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RESEARCH PAPER

Using Dialogic Pedagogy with Young Learners in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify practical strategies for integrating dialogic pedagogy into SL instruction tailored to the unique needs of young learners. It examines the implications of dialogic pedagogy for language proficiency and communication skills of young ESL students. Dialogic pedagogy emphasizes the effective use of talk to foster English language teaching and learning. This Action Research is conducted in a government school in context of Sindh. The participants of the study are elementary level students and teachers. The data is collected through classroom observations and interviews and analyzed by thematic analysis. Findings demonstrate the positive outcomes of dialogic pedagogy for language proficiency, communication skills and students' engagement. Through effective use of dialogue, teacher could facilitate dynamic learning environment, active participation and critical thinking. The study suggests potential avenues for future research, including broader context replication, extended timeframe analysis and exploration of dialogic pedagogy in large classes.

KEYWORDS: Action Research, Dialogic Pedagogy, English Language Classroom, Young Learners **Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in English is often associated with improved employability, access to higher education, and participation in the global economy(Kausar, 2020). This is particularly significant for English as Second Language (ESL) learners, who may come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly in Pakistan, English proficiency remains a key determinant of socio-economic opportunities (Bhurgri, Gopang, Bhurgri & Zehri, 2020). Pakistan, a linguistically diverse country, recognizes English as one of its official languages alongside Urdu (Manan, Dumanig& David, 2017). While Urdu remains the primary medium of instruction in most public schools, English is introduced at various levels as a subject and sometimes as a medium of instruction in certain subjects.

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Pakistan faces challenges stemming from its diverse educational system and teacher-centered pedagogy (Bhurgri et al., 2020). Many public schools yield learners with inadequate language skills and a lack of critical thinking abilities (Shah, 2019). The traditional methods of teaching English, which often rely on rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, might not effectively cater to the dynamic needs of these young ESL learners (Kausar, 2020).

This study is conducted on a Government Girls High School situated in a remote corner of district Tando Muhammad Khan, Sindh. The researcher, herself an elementary school teacher, noticed disengagement among eighth-grade students during English lessons. Given the prevalence of narrative teaching in public schools (Shah, 2019), the teacher-researcher initially employed the same approach. However, after a few sessions,

she observed a lack of students' involvement. Drawing on her background in Applied Linguistics and interest in modern pedagogies, she connected this observation to linguistic research. The researcher aims to improve learners' learning outcomes by using dialogic pedagogy in English language classroom, also improves her own teaching practice through Action Research.

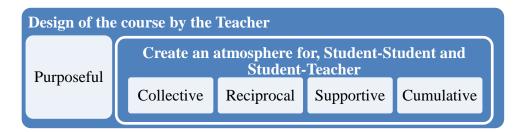
Drawing inspiration from Bakhtin's Dialogism, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Freirean Pedagogy, and Alexander's Dialogic Teaching framework, the approach of Dialogical instruction departs from conventional narrative teaching methods, striving to achieve advancements in pedagogy (Iqbal, Aurangzeb & Shah, 2021). At the core of Dialogic pedagogy lays the concept of dialogue, which draws inspiration from the Socratic teaching method, involving the use of questions to stimulate learning and critical thinking (Teo, 2019). Educators and theorists worldwide recognize the significance of the Dialogic instruction in English language instruction due to its potential to provide instructors and students with a strategic perspective that enables them to adapt and optimize learning strategies based on their specific contexts (Uddin, 2019).

Dialogic pedagogy, rooted in the philosophy of active dialogue and collaborative learning, holds particular significance when applied to the context of government schools in Sindh. These schools often grapple with challenges related to resource constraints, diverse student populations, and outdated teaching methods (Asghar, Shahzad&Mahesar,2021). Dialogic pedagogy offers a transformative approach that addresses these challenges while aligning with the unique needs and realities of government schools in the region.

Theoretical Framework

Dialogic pedagogy is an educational approach that emphasizes dialogue, collaboration and shared meaning-making between teachers and students (Alexender, 2019). This theoretical framework aims to guide an action research study focused on implementing dialogic pedagogy in teaching young English as a Second Language (ESL) learner in government schools in Sindh, Pakistan. The framework is based on the principles of Alexander, namely, Collectiveness, Reciprocity, Supportiveness, Cumulativeness, and Purposefulness. (See Figure given below)

- 1. Collective: studying and learning together.
- 2. Reciprocal: listening to the peers and trying to understand new viewpoints.
- 3. Supportive: creating an environment that students take part in free and help each other to get a new understanding.
- 4. Cumulative: sharing the ideas of all students is important to develop their own ideas or reach new ideas.
- 5. Purposeful: teacher's role is to create dialogic atmosphere and plan learners' talks to reach a goal (Alexander, 2004).



Theoretical framework for the Study Based on Alexander's Principles of Dialogic Teaching

Literature Review

In the early 2000s, Robin Alexander introduced the term "dialogic teaching." Before he started his research, another influential thinker named Vygotsky was focused on the importance of language in learning. Vygotsky believed that learning is a social process, meaning that children learn best when they interact with others who know more than they do (Vrikki, Wheatley, Howe, Hennessy & Mercer, 2018). Interestingly, the idea of using dialogue for teaching and learning goes back even further. It can be traced back to Socrates, an ancient Greek philosopher. He believed that education should be built on conversations and discussions. Socrates thought that asking questions could lead to new ways of thinking and understanding, rather than just looking for fixed answers (Jocuns, 2020). So, the concept of using dialogue in education has deep historical roots, and both Vygotsky and Socrates recognized the importance of talking and interacting with others in the learning process.

Dialogic pedagogy has emerged as a powerful educational approach that counters traditional Monologic discourse prevalent in many classrooms. This approach challenges authoritarian teaching methods and embraces an environment of active dialogue and collaboration between teachers and students. Jocuns (2021) emphasizes the contrast between Monologic discourse and dialogic instruction -highlighting its potential to stimulate critical thinking and learning. Alexander (2020) distinguishes dialogic teaching from conventional teaching methods, asserting that it involves more than simple question-answer routines or casual conversations. Instead, it engages students in collective thinking, encouraging them to share ideas, consider alternative viewpoints, and build coherent lines of thinking and inquiry. Chow, Hui, Li and Dong (2020) states just giving students tasks to discuss in small groups isn't enough to help them learn as much as they can. If teachers understand how talking and general discussions can really help students learn, then talking can be more effective for many children. To use dialogic teaching, teachers need to change how the classroom works. They become like guides, creating a space where classroom discussions are helpful and where students can learn a lot (Wegriff et al., 2022). Teachers should also encourage students to talk and think. Students need practice and should take their time before doing more challenging tasks like giving presentations (Barnes, 2008).

Foundational thinkers in dialogic inquiry emphasize that individual existence is intertwined with the attention received from others. Individuals find definition within their social context, and their words gain significance through responsive interactions (Alexander, 2008). Gilles (2020) points out the transferability of deep thinking and effective communication skills developed through language arts to other subject areas. Yet, many classrooms lack emphasis on fostering talk that supports various cognitive processes like narration, explanation, speculation, evaluation, argumentation, and justification. Research underscores the continued prevalence of teacher domination in classrooms, highlighting the need for professional development in the concept of uptake (Elliott-Johns, Booth, Rowsell, Puig & Paterson, 2021).

Recent research has illuminated the remarkable potential of speech and classroom discourse as dynamic tools that foster the creation of innovative ideas (Smagorinsky, 2013). This emerging body of evidence underscores the pivotal role of language interaction in nurturing creativity and intellectual growth within educational settings. This teaching approach has gained increased prominence in educational research (Alexander, 2020). Educators are increasingly adopting a pedagogical strategy that emphasizes dialogue as a vehicle for engagement and learning. This approach recognizes that meaningful discourse not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures critical thinking, active participation, and collaborative idea development (Garcia Carrion, Aguileta, Padros & Salas, 2020).

Hardman (2019) investigated a dialogic teaching intervention designed to help primary school teachers improve the quality of classroom talk and boost learning outcomes in English, mathematics, and science. The study found that teachers in the intervention schools made significantly greater use of discussion and dialogue compared to teachers in the control schools, and student contributions were more extended and expansive in content and reasoning.

Iqbal et al., (2021) found that the use of dialogic teaching by teachers has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts include creativity, thinking ability, confidence building, and other social impacts. However, there are also some challenges for teachers in terms of behavior problems and control of talks.

Tanveer et al., (2021) explored the positive impact of interaction through dialogue among classmates, particularly in enhancing speaking skills among foreign learners at the higher secondary level. The study emphasized the effectiveness of dialogue as a means of improving language proficiency and communication skills.

Examining younger learners, Wilt, Boiwer and Veen (2022) investigated the influence of dialogic classroom talk on children's language skills and social competence. The study revealed that an 8-week intervention employing dialogic teaching significantly enhanced children's oral communicative competence. However, no significant effects were found on their receptive vocabulary knowledge, theory of mind, or social acceptance.

Action Research

The researcher has opted for a qualitative action research design for this study. Action research is defined as "a systematic approach to investigation that empowers individuals to discover effective solutions to challenges they encounter in their daily lives" (Stringer, 2014). Action research is a suitable choice for research endeavors that seek to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. It is acknowledged as a research methodology undertaken by practitioners, holding significant importance in the fields of education and social work (Burns, 2019). This type of research yields valuable insights and improvements for the subject under scrutiny through a process of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation, drawing upon both research capabilities and practical expertise (McTaggart, 2021).

Action Research model proposed by Kemmis, McTaggart, and Retallick (2004) offers a structured cyclical framework with four phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

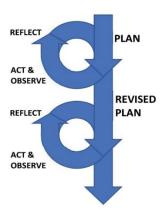
Planning: Collaborate with stakeholders to define an issue, set goals, and devise a detailed research plan.

Acting: Implement interventions to address the issue, such as changes in teaching methods.

Observing: Collect diverse data to assess the impact of interventions.

Reflecting: Analyze findings, compare expected and actual outcomes, and refine strategies.

This iterative cycle continues, informing successive cycles for continuous improvements and adaptation. As shown in Figure below.



Action Research methodology derived from the framework proposed by Kemmis, McTaggart, and Retallick (2004)

This model encourages collaboration, engagement with stakeholders, and a focus on practical solutions. It empowers educators and practitioners to address real-world challenges in a systematic and structured manner. In the context of using dialogic pedagogy to transform teacher-centered classrooms in government schools in Sindh, this model can guide the researchers in designing, implementing, and refining their interventions to achieve meaningful and sustainable changes.

Discussion

The aim of this Action Research is to explore the applicability and implications of dialogic pedagogy in ESL classrooms. Considering the methodological framework for the study, the researcher collects data in two phases. The data collected through classroom observations and interviews in the first phase helped the researcher to identify the problem and examine the feasibility of using dialogic pedagogy to English in government school setting. Following are the main findings of the study.

Using Dialogic Interaction for Meaning Making and Conceptual Understanding

Meaning making is the process of constructing meaning from texts, experiences, or interactions by using prior knowledge, personal perspectives, and contextual clues (Parreño, 2022). Meaning making can be facilitated by dialogue, as dialogue allows learners to share their interpretations, clarify their understanding, negotiate different viewpoints, and co-construct new knowledge (Jocuns, 2021). The findings of the study suggest the teacher talks to the students frequently and encourage them to engage in discussions, give responses, ask questions, and share their opinions. The observation data show that the teacher doesn't just transfer the knowledge, actually involve students to learn the text and grammar. Teacher B notices that the teacher used various prompts to explain the concepts to the students: "This word means..." "This sentence means..." "This concept means..." students' interviews data also consist of quotes related to this theme, "the teacher explain with good examples and explain each word and sentence. She also asks us to share examples. Sometimes I share sometimes I don't, but teacher explain in interesting way".

According to Sudwan (2022)Dialogue is effective way to explain concepts, as dialogue enables learners to ask questions, receive feedback, elaborate their explanations, and compare their explanations with others'. Dialogue is a form of communication that involves two or more participants exchanging ideas, opinions, information, or experiences through spoken or written language (Alexander, 2019). In this study the teacher uses talk effectively to make students understand the gist of the text and deduce the meaning of new words. Referring to classroom observation teacher A says, "the teacher use

brainstorming technique before reading the text and explaining grammar' one the students says, the teacher don't translate the text she explains the meaning and ask us to make meaning". Another student says "I enjoy class because I can't memorize the line by line meaning. But teacher is good she ask me to guess meaning".

According to Chow et al. (2020) Dialogue can be used for various purposes in the English language classroom, such as developing language skills, enhancing comprehension, fostering critical thinking, and promoting collaboration.

Addressing Passive Participation through Dialogic Engagement

Passive participation is a form of classroom behavior that involves minimal or no verbal interaction with the teacher or peers, such as listening, observing, or following instructions (Garcia Carrion et al., 2020). It can be influenced by various factors, such as students' motivation, interest, confidence, anxiety, cultural background, learning style, and prior knowledge (Hofmann, Vrikki, Evagorou, 2021). Dialogic engagement is a form of classroom interaction that involves meaningful and collaborative dialogue among teachers and students, where multiple voices and perspectives are valued and respected (Alexander, 2019). The findings of this study show, the teacher uses prompts such as, "what do you think is the meaning of this sentence", "have you heard this word before", "I am sure you can guess the meaning of this word" to initiate the dialogue. The codes related to this theme are found in students interviews as well. For example, one student said: "The teacher talks to us like we are friends. She asks us to guess the meaning and listens to our answers. This quote shows how the teacher fosters a friendly and respectful relationship with the students, and how she models critical thinking through dialogic communication. Dialogic engagement can enhance students' active participation, cognitive development, language skills, social skills, and academic achievement (Chow et al., 2021; Garcia Carrion et al., 2020).

Using talk moves to elicit, probe, challenge, and extend students' thinking and reasoning. Providing feedback and guidance that is timely, specific, and constructive. Using group and pair activities to provide chances of equal participation and peer support (Maine and Čermáková, 2021). The researcher uses some of these strategies to address passive participation through dialogic engagement in her English language classroom. The data reveals that teacher creates space for dialogic interaction among students Teacher A observed, "The teacher was asking to discuss the text with the person sitting next, and she also makes groups of the students and asks them to solve exercise with the help of peers". From the students' interviews it is concluded that students find this strategies interesting. Student F says: "The teacher makes us talk to each other too. She divides us in groups or pairs and gives us questions to discuss. Sometimes she joins our group and asks us more questions." This quote shows how the teacher promotes student-student interaction and collaborative learning through dialogic communication.

Tailoring Dialogue to Student Levels

Tailoring dialogue to students' level of competency means adjusting the language, content, and complexity of the dialogue according to the students' abilities, needs, and interests (Khan, 2020). In the first classes the teacher wasn't able to engage all the learners in dialogue. First, the students were not used to such teaching methodology. Second, students level of language proficiency wasn't up to mark, teacher has to tailor the lesson according to the level of students, Teacher A remarks, students don't know the basic rules and were never exposed to language practice, they just read the lesson, memorize question answers for exams, it was really challenging for the teacher to teach eight grade concepts to them without having prior knowledge. Teacher has to teach everything from the sketch, by the end of the action plan I observed that students understood everything and even taking part in the class. The teacher B say, the teacher

has changed the plan so many times in the first week, she applied different strategies to get learners on the board, gradually she was successful, and the latter lessons went smoothly. Students' responses also highlight the problem one of the students say, "I tried to speak English with my partner, but it was hard. I didn't know how to say what I wanted to say. Another student says it was difficult to understand teachers method because we were never taught English language before, in previous class teacher just used to read lesson with meaning."

In order to get effective results of the in the first week the teacher used mother tongue to engage learners in a dialogue. Once learners' thinking skills develop and they get familiarize with the new method. The teacher gradually used English to engage in discussions, give responses, ask questions, and share their opinions. As Yildrim and Uzm (2021) suggest, tailoring dialogue can help teachers to provide appropriate input, feedback, and scaffolding to students, as well as to challenge them to produce meaningful output and engage in interaction.

Improvement in Language Learning process and outcomes

According to Chow et al. (2020) Dialogic pedagogy can boost confidence and motivation in English language classrooms by providing students with opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, and perspectives; to interact with their peers and teachers; to co-construct knowledge and understanding; and to develop their language skills and critical thinking. It is evident from the data that students in the first weeks were passive and shy and afraid to share their opinion and problems. But gradually, they started enjoying the lessons. Teacher's encouragement and dialogic interaction boost their confident. In the starting week they were hesitant to perform dialogue and afraid of being bullied but by the last action cycle they seemed confident and motivated.

The observation and interview data reveals that the use of dialogic pedagogy facilitates language learning process and has potential to improve vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, and other skills of the learners. Teacher A observes, "The students solved the reading comprehension exercises. They share examples of the different grammatical concepts". Regarding vocabulary building and other language skills teacher B says, the vocabulary and language skills of the students improved gradually in subsequent action cycles. In the first two weeks students were not competent enough but gradually in the fourth and fifth week they could understand and speak well. Likewise, student A says "Learned many new words from reading and discussing with the teacher. She helped me understand what they mean and how to use them. I also learned how to write better sentences using these words." For instance, Vrikki *et al.* (2019) found that students who participated in more dialogic interactions with their teachers showed higher gains in reading comprehension than those who participated in less dialogic interactions.

Balancing Dialogue and Lesson Objectives

Alexander (2019) argues that dialogic teaching requires more time than traditional teaching methods, as it involves engaging students in meaningful and sustained conversations that explore multiple perspectives and deepen understanding. The findings of this study indicate the researcher faced problem in balancing the talk and lesson objective initially. However, through analysis of each cycle the researcher made improvement in her teaching. The teacher face problem in managing time effectively and achieving lesson objectives. Gradually she learnt to manage talk and time effectively for better learning- teaching outcome. Laird-Gentle et al. (2023) suggest that time management was one of the key skills for teachers who want to use dialogic pedagogy effectively.

Conclusion

The concept of "Dialogic Pedagogy in ESL" revolves around the strategic use of dialogue and discourse to facilitate effective English language teaching to young ESL (English as a Second Language) students. This approach emphasizes interactive communication, where learners engage in conversations, discussions, and exchanges with their peers and instructors to construct meaning, deepen understanding, and develop language skills. In the given context, the action research thesis delves into the application of dialogic pedagogy for teaching English to ESL students in government schools in Sindh. The study's methodological framework includes data collection through classroom observations and interviews, conducted in two phases. This approach aids in identifying the challenges and potential benefits of employing dialogic pedagogy within government school settings.

The findings of this study unequivocally demonstrate the positive impact of dialogic pedagogy on the language proficiency, communication skills, and overall engagement of young ESL learners. The learner-centered approach fostered a dynamic learning environment, where students actively participated in discussions, debates, and collaborative projects. As a result, language acquisition became a meaningful and interactive process, enabling students to not only develop their English skills but also engage critically with the content and think independently. Moreover, the teacher-student relationship underwent a transformation. Teachers shifted from being knowledge transmitters to facilitators of learning, fostering a more open and trusting rapport with students. This change in the teacher-student dynamic encouraged students to express their ideas freely, ask questions without hesitation and share their cultural perspectives.

Recommendations

Building on the insights gained from the study, there are several avenues for future research that could further contribute to the understanding of using dialogic pedagogy to teach English to young ESL students. First, there is potential value in replicating this study across different contexts which might offer a holistic comprehension of its efficacy. Second, an investigation spanning an extended timeframe might offer the opportunity to assess the enduring impact of dialogic pedagogy over the long term. Third, investigating how dialogic pedagogy influences the level of engagement and active participation of students in large classes would be pivotal.

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