DO I TALK TOO MUCH IN CLASS? A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ESL CLASSROOM INTERACTION

Kaukab Abid Azhar[1]

[1]*(Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, Barrett Hodgson University, Karachi, Pakistan/ Kaukab.abid@bhu.edu.pk)*

Nayab Iqbal[2]

[2]*(Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, Barrett Hodgson University, Karachi, Pakistan/ Nayab.iqbal@bhu.edu.pk)*

Mahvish Sohaib Khan[3]

[3]*(Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, Barrett Hodgson University, Karachi, Pakistan/ Mahvish.khan@bhu.edu.pk)*

Abstract

Teacher-learner interaction in the classroom is dictated by how well the teacher manages classroom talk-time which has a direct influence on learner achievement in an ESL Classroom. Teachers often perceive that they allocate enough time for student talk time; however, the past literature suggests that teacher talk-time takes around 70-75% of overall time in the class. The purpose of this study is to analyze the TTT (Teacher Talk-Time) in the context of ESL classroom in Pakistan. Convenience based sampling was used to assess the Teacher Talk-Time through observational method. Findings of 12 sessions (30-hours) showed that average Teacher Talk-Time was 65% of the total classroom time. The study highlights that ESL teachers need to improve the Learner Talk-Time (LTT) as the analysis showed that on average each student only gets 22 seconds of talk-time in an ESL class. A blended learning model can help ESL teachers to eliminate some of the talk-time and engage learners with meaningful activities that encourage classroom interaction in the target language.

Keywords:
Classroom Interaction; ESL; Language Teaching; Teacher Talk-Time

A. Introduction

The development of modern teaching methodologies, along with the rise of Communicative Language Teaching, has led to a greater emphasis on finding the right mix of talking time in the class. The learning process improves, if there is adequate time for learners to talk with teachers and are involved in different peer activities which encourage them to talk more. Teachers' excessive talking time limits the learners' opportunity to practice speaking; whereas, too little talking time may lead to a weak understanding of the lesson.

The whole concept of a learner-centered ESL classroom is aimed at learners producing, in the target

language, real-time conversations. To produce the best results many scholars have propagated a classroom environment of two-way communication through an interactive class in which there is some balance between Teachers' Talk Time (TTT) and Learner Talk Time (LTT).[1] Finding the right balance between the two is an entirely different domain and has its own complexities.

In Pakistan, there is a tradition of "chalk and talk" which is changing with the passage of time; however, the traditional approach towards teaching has a direct influence on the talking time of the teacher. No such research has been conducted in Pakistan, to the best knowledge of the researcher, on finding out teachers' talking time in an ESL classroom.

A teacher can decide to improve the balance once he/she is aware of the current TTT. The study can be further utilized in comparing the performances of different teachers in relation to the level of interaction of students in the classroom.

Let's take a look closer to the keywords we discussed here. First is *classroom interaction,* it is the exchange of ideas, feelings, and thoughts between teachers and students in a classroom setting. The importance of classroom interaction increases in an ESL class because of the intended learning objectives that require a certain proficiency in the target language.[2] *Second* is *teacher talk*, it is the main instrument of classroom interaction is through classroom "Talk". Teacher talk is the language used by the teacher for instructions and interaction with the students.[3] The third is *Learner Talk,* all the classroom interaction that takes place beside the teacher talk is classified as learner talk. Learner talk is classified into two broad categories: a) initiation b) response.[4]

[1] Abdul Rahman Awadh Al Asmari, "Communicative Language Teaching in EFL University Context: Challenges for Teachers," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 6, no. 5 (September 4, 2015): 976–84, https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0605.09; Siaw-Fong Chung, "A Communicative Approach to Teaching Grammar: Theory and Practice," *The English Teacher* 34 (2015): 33–50.; Muhammad U. Farooq, "Creating a Communicative Language Teaching Environment for Improving Students' Communicative Competence at EFL/EAP University Level," *International Education Studies* 8, no. 4 (2015): 179–91; Aya Matsuda and Patricia Friedrich, "English as an International Language: A Curriculum Blueprint," *World Englishes* 30, no. 3 (2011): 332–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2011.01717.x; Jack C. Richards, "Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central, and Backward Design," *RELC Journal* 44, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 5–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212473293.

[2] Agneta M.-L. Svalberg, "Researching Language Engagement; Current Trends and Future Directions," *Language Awareness* 27, no. 1–2 (April 3, 2018): 21–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2017.1406490.
[3] Richard Cullen, "Teacher Talk and the Classroom Context," *ELT Journal* 52, no. 3 (July 1, 1998): 179–87, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.3.179.
[4] Judith Blanchette, "Characteristics of Teacher Talk and Learner Talk in the Online Learning Environment," *Language and Education* 23, no. 5 (August 18, 2009): 391–407, https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780802691736.

The case of teacher talk time and learner talk time has been studied by several researchers. The first significant work in the field of analyzing teachers' talk time using the communicative approach was conducted.

Action research conducted by teachers showed that the increase in awareness of improving teacher talk time can result in improved classroom practices. Similarly, Cullen[5] researched the questions that teachers ask and student responses. Cullen focused on authentic communication between the students and the teachers. Most of the research conducted during the late 90s concentrated on the characteristics of communicative language teaching in relation to the student-teacher interaction.[6]

Walsh studied the extent to which teacher talk can enhance the quality of learners.[7] Findings showed that the use of teacher language is as important as the teaching methodology. The study also highlighted a few tools that can facilitate teacher talk and improve the overall effectiveness of lessons. Mercer highlighted the need to study classroom interaction through different methods.[8] Mercer conducted a temporal analysis which indicated that teachers can improve the overall class experience by enhancing the level of interaction with the learners. Similarly, Lei emphasized on how genuine communication between the teacher and learners can help in achieving the actual course objectives in a language classroom.[9]

Setiawati conducted a descriptive study on teacher talk.[10] Setiawati argued that too much talking by the teacher can be counterproductive and can lead to demotivation of students. The date was obtained through direct observations of the classroom. The findings revealed that constructive teacher talk led to dynamic interaction in the classroom leading to the attainment of learning objectives.

[5] Cullen, "Teacher Talk and the Classroom Context."

[6] Lynne Cameron, Jayne Moon, and Martin Bygate, "Language Development of Bilingual Pupils in the Mainstream : How Do Pupils and Teachers Use Language?," *Language and Education* 10, no. 4 (November 1, 1996): 221–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789608666710; Geoff Thompson, "Some Misconceptions about Communicative Language Teaching," *ELT Journal* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 9–15, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/50.1.9; Scott Thornbury, "Teachers Research Teacher Talk," *ELT Journal* 50, no. 4 (October 1, 1996): 279–89, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/50.4.279; Jill Cadorath and Simon Harris, "Unplanned Classroom Language and Teacher Training," *ELT Journal* 52, no. 3 (July 1, 1998): 188–96, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.3.188.

[7] Steve Walsh, "Construction or Obstruction: Teacher Talk and Learner Involvement in the EFL Classroom," *Language Teaching Research* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 3–23, https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168802lr095oa.

[8] Neil Mercer, "The Seeds of Time: Why Classroom Dialogue Needs a Temporal Analysis," *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 17, no. 1 (February 15, 2008): 33–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/10508400701793182.

[9] Xuelian Lei, "Communicative Teacher Talk in the English Classroom," *English Language Teaching* 2, no. 1 (March 2009): 75–79.

[10] Liani Setiawati, "A Descriptive Study on The Teacher Talk at EYL Classroom," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1, no. 2 (January 5, 2012): 33–48, https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v1i2.83.

Nisa studied teacher talk time by studying the classroom interaction in the context of Indonesian Language Classroom.[11] Data was gathered through document analysis and naturalistic observations. Finding revealed that a major part of classroom interaction time is conducted in classroom activities which help in developing the language skills. Similarly, Aisyah focused on discovering the talk categories in an EFL classroom.[12] Aisyah applied FIAC Model. The categories were formed after collecting data from a 10th-grade class. The study also validated the categories identified in the previous research.

Nurpahmi explained the different types of teacher talk with the help of a case study method.[13] Nurpahmi also used an observation method to gain data. The main types identified from the study were related to greetings, review of the previous class, course material, motivating, and closing. Jing & Jing explored teacher-talk through a qualitative study by analyzing classroom interaction through video recordings.[14]

The study was conducted in a low language proficiency level due to which a lot of interaction was made in the first language (Chinese).

The literature review section has included some of the significant studies related to teacher talk time in a language classroom. Most of the researchers, in the late 90s and early 2000s, focused on highlighting the importance of classroom interaction, strategies to improve teacher-talk, and finding its impact on learners' overall performance. Researchers started to realize the importance of finding the right mix of teacher talk time in various contexts. Although there was some early work that catered to quantifying the teacher talk time, more structured studies were conducted in the last decade.[15] The gaps identified from the previous researchers are incorporated in this research which is conducted specifically in the context of Pakistan's higher education.

Based on the discussion above, the main objective of the research is to find out the average talking time in an ESL classroom.

B. Method

The research is quantitative in design. The aim of the research is to explore the teacher talk time in an ESL classroom. The study aims to address practical concerns; therefore,

[11] Sinta Hoerun Nisa, "Classroom Interaction Analysis in Indonesian EFL Speaking Class," *English Review: Journal of English Education* 2, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 124–32.
[12] Nurul Aisyah, "An Analysis of Teachers' Talk in an EFL Classroom," *Journal of English and Education* 4, no. 2 (December 31, 2016): 63–79.
[13] Sitti Nurpahmi, "Teacher Talk in Classroom Interaction," *ETERNAL (English, Teaching, Learning, and Research Journal)* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 34–43, https://doi.org/10.24252/Eternal.V31.2017.A4.
[14] Nana Jing and Junrui Jing, "Teacher Talk in an EFL Classroom: A Pilot Study," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 8, no. 3

(March 1, 2018): 320–24, https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0803.07.
[15] Craig Chaudron, *Second Language Classrooms: Research on Teaching and Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

educational action research is conducted. The study involves the recording of 30 hours of three ESL courses conducted by three language teachers. Convenience based sampling technique is used to select the courses for study. The sessions were carefully selected after evaluating the course outlines. All the lessons were from the course of Functional English which was a mandatory course in the first semester.

1. Participants

The three teachers were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. There were two females and one male teacher. All three teachers were aged between 25-30 years old.

2. Data Collection

For a period of two weeks, 12 classes of 80 minutes were recorded. Consent was taken from the teachers before recording the classes. The audio recordings of the classes were carried with the help of a mobile recorder. The recordings were then transferred on a laptop and were transcribed with the help of nVivo.

C. Results

The analysis section is based on the recordings and observations. The observational method of recording was selected after analyzing the literature review section.

The recordings of the classroom conversation (as illustrated in Table 1) show that teacher talk time ranges from 59% to 72%, learner talk time ranges from 21% to 31%, and classroom activities range from 5% to 15%. The average time assigned to teacher talk was 65%, learner talk 24%, and 11% was spent on other activities.

Table 1
Percentage of Teacher talk, learner talk, and other activities.

Session	Teacher	Teacher Talk (by percent)	Learner Talk (by percent)	Other Activities (By Percent)
I	A	66%	22%	12%
II	B	67%	24%	9%
III	C	72%	23%	5%
IV	A	67%	27%	6%
V	B	59%	26%	15%
VI	C	68%	21%	11%
VII	A	62%	31%	7%
VIIII	B	64%	21%	15%
IX	C	71%	21%	8%
X	A	61%	24%	15%
XI	B	61%	26%	13%
XII	C	63%	24%	13%

Table 2
Teacher's Wise Class Talk Time Summary.

Teacher	Teacher Talk (by percent)	Learner Talk (by percent)	Other Activities (By Percent)
A	64%	26%	10%
B	62%	24%	13%
C	68%	22%	9%

Table 2 shows the summary of recordings teacher-wise. The teacher talk-time for each teacher ranges from 62% to 68%, learner talk time for each teacher ranges from 22% to 26% and class activities consumed a range of 9% to 13% of the overall time in the class.

The analysis of the recordings shows us that more than half of the class time is spent on teacher talk. Considering that the classes under review were large classrooms with over 50 students registered in each class, an average of 24% time to learner talk is an alarmingly low percentage. Many students did not even contribute a single word in a session. In an 80-minute session if a teacher talks 65% (52 minutes) of the time and class activities take up to 11% (9 minutes) of the time; it leaves only 19 minutes for the learners. Talk time per learner in a session is 23 seconds if there are 50 students present in the class. It can be argued that the 11% of the time spent on other activities allows learners to interact among themselves but that still cannot be categorized as learner talk time because often learners communicate in the first language and not every learner is involved in the process.

Most of the teachers perceive that they talk less[16]; however, there is little evidence to support that claim. If the teachers are dominating more than 60% of the class, then it can lead to student disengagement. The literature review has highlighted that there is no ideal teacher talk time as it varies from course to course and the level of class.

D. Conclusion

The average of Teacher talk time in an ESL Classroom interaction is more than half of the class time, ranging from (62% - 72%) compared to student talk time (21% - 27%). Majority of the teacher talk time was spent on instructional activities which can be cut down with the help of a blended classroom model. A change in teaching pedagogy would help the teachers to introduce new materials and instructions in the form of readings, videos, and screencasts, allowing the classroom to be more focused on language communication through discussions, activities, presentations and team exercises.

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[16] Tony Woodall, Alex Hiller, and Sheilagh Resnick, "Making Sense of Higher Education: Students as Consumers and the Value of the University Experience," *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 48–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.648373.

Limitations and Future Direction

The study focuses on the quantitative aspect of the teachers' talking time and completely neglects the qualitative part. Mixed methodology can help in gaining insights different from the present study. The requirements of talk time vary for different level of education. This study is carried at higher education level and the results may not be applicable for junior classes. Due to the shortage of resources, small sample size was selected on the basis of convenience. Future researchers can include a large sample size to validate the findings of the study. The study is conducted in Pakistan; the results cannot be generalized all across the globe due to the impact of cultural differences in the classroom. A comparative study can be initiated to contrast the differences in teacher talk time across different timeframes, or subjects, or education levels, or teachers.

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