

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2024, Vol. 5, No. 7, 2769 – 2776

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.07.30>

## Research Article

### Dialogic Discussion as a Platform for Building Speaking and Vocabulary Skills

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#### Article history:

Submission 28 May 2024

Revised 07 July 2024

Accepted 23 July 2024

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#### ABSTRACT

The study explored (1) the most common speaking and vocabulary problems of 12 senior high students; (2) the implementation of 3 ESL teachers of dialogic discussion to address the identified students' problems; (3) the improvement of students; and (4) the insights and implications of the intervention. Using a qualitative mosaic approach, the study used field notes and conversations with students and teachers. During preliminary data collection, it was found that the students' speaking and vocabulary problems comprised fluency and accuracy issues, language function deficiencies, negative affective state, and poor classroom atmosphere. To address these problems, the three teachers implemented five dialogic discussion sessions. The implementation characterizes structure, scaffolding, and socialization. For students, the sessions helped them increase their confidence and speaking skills. These findings suggest that dialogic discussion may function as a platform engendering processes such as agency, exploration, and enhancement. The study recommends actions for teachers and future researchers.

**Keywords:** *Dialogic discussion, Speaking, Vocabulary, Second language learning*

#### Introduction

Speaking and vocabulary skills are crucial to learning English as a second language (L2). However, learning these skills is problematic. These challenges include a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, mispronunciation, and distractions (Delima, 2023, Tabog et al., 2023). To address these, drama activities were incorporated into the classroom (Balgos, 2023), while others used multimodal strategies (Bastida et

al., 2024), contrastive form-focused instruction (Reyes, 2023), and Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) talks (Flores et al., 2023). Although these solutions addressed speaking and vocabulary problems, they lacked an essential element in L2 learning: meaningful dialogue (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021).

A teaching method that incorporates this meaningful dialogue is called dialogic discussion. It improves children's lexical and

#### How to cite:

Ramos, A. P. S. (2024). Dialogic Discussion as a Platform for Building Speaking and Vocabulary Skills. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 5(7), 2769 – 2776. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.05.07.30

phonological awareness (Chow et al., 2021; Jocuns, 2021), promotes cultural and linguistic inclusivity (Santiago-Gabrieta et al., 2021), bolsters argumentative writing skills (Chmarkh, 2021), enriches teachers' interactional talk (Shea, 2019), and helps learners' thinking process (Merkel, 2020). While these works integrated meaningful dialogue, their applications were limited. First, L2 speaking and vocabulary skills were not addressed since the dialogic discussion was applied to literacy teaching contexts. Second, even though applied in an L2 context, the foci were writing, thinking, and teacher talk (Chmarkh, 2021; Chow et al., 2021; Merkel, 2020; Shea, 2019). Third, while L2 vocabulary was addressed (i.e., Chow et al., 2021), the sample was limited to children, and students' experiences were overlooked. Fourth, although cultural and linguistic inclusivity were promoted (i.e., Santiago-Gabrieta et al., 2021), students' choices were not emphasized.

Therefore, there is a need to explore dialogic discussion in L2 speaking and vocabulary contexts while considering older students, valuing their learning experiences, and giving them more choices. The primary purpose of this research was to explore how dialogic discussion can address the speaking and vocabulary skills of the learners. Specifically, it sought to explore answers to the following problems: (1) What are learners' commonest speaking and vocabulary problems in the language classroom? (2) How do the language teachers conduct dialogic discussions to address the commonest speaking and vocabulary problems? (3) How may dialogic discussion help learners improve their speaking and vocabulary? (4) What insights and implications can be drawn from the findings?

## Methods

The researcher used a qualitative mosaic approach (Rouvali & Riga, 2022), employing different data sources with intervention. Using purposive sampling, the researcher engaged a total of 12 twelfth-grade students and 3 ESL teachers teaching Oral Communication. To capture the experiences of the participants, field notes (Hadley, 2019) and one-on-one conversations were used. During 5 sessions (10 hours) of intervention, the 3 teachers

employed dialogic discussion strategies including (1) Creating an environment conducive to discussion; (2) Defining expectations and creating buy-in; (3) Creating successful early experiences with discussion; and (4) Getting students talking, listening, and feeling successful. The researcher collected data before, during, and after the intervention. To analyze these data, the researcher utilized the six-phased thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which involved familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing, refining, and writing the analyses.

During familiarization, the researcher immersed himself in the data by listening to recordings and reading transcripts. At times, as a language teacher, he felt guilty hearing students' feelings about speaking in class, realizing how strictness could make them feel 'terrorized.' During his systematic coding phase, he observed strong emotions regarding classroom culture and speaking errors, realizing the importance of capturing both affective and technical elements of responses. Codes were assigned at the latent level for enhanced representation (Braun & Clarke, 2021), and then categorized based on similarities. While coding during and post-intervention data, he remained mindful of emerging patterns, prioritizing coding before searching for themes. Though pleased with students' responses indicating satisfaction with their freedom to communicate, he felt sessions could have been longer. Nonetheless, he continued coding with an open mind to other possibilities.

In developing themes from pre-/during/post-intervention data, the researcher aimed for sensitivity and reflexivity, drawing on his five years of experience as an ESL teacher to interpret students' responses. Reflecting on initial memos, he found alignment between participant responses and his understanding of speaking issues, which clarified code interpretation. To bolster the credibility of codes and themes, the researcher sought a fresh perspective, consulting with his adviser on analysis and themes' relevance to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. After revising theme names, he sought advice from an English Language Education expert to review coding. The researcher remained mindful of the dynamic

nature of qualitative analysis, as emphasized by Braun and Clarke. Another method of theme review involved confirming themes with participants and presenting a two-page summary with simplified explanations. Feedback from students and teachers affirmed the representation of codes and themes in capturing their feelings and experiences. While one teacher sought clarification on the inclusion of 'mental block' as an affective factor, the researcher clarified its connection to language apprehension, maintaining agreement on initial themes.

## Result and Discussion

Sections 1.1 - 1.4 answers question 1; sections 2.1 - 2.3 answers question 2; section 3 answers question 3; and section 4 answers question 4.

### 1.1. Fluency and Accuracy Issues

This study, akin to Delima (2023) and Tabog et al. (2023), identified students' speaking and vocabulary difficulties, including limited vocabulary and pronunciation issues. Classroom observations and dialogues with students and teachers indicated that these challenges stem from their linguistic competence, particularly affecting spontaneous verbal expression and precise vocabulary usage. The students faced hurdles in expressing ideas due to their inability to speak spontaneously. Inaccuracies in pronunciation and word usage were apparent in their experiences. This underscores the significance of fluency and accuracy, themes prevalent in the study's findings. While the study did not directly measure fluency and accuracy, the students' responses align with existing literature, contributing to a deeper comprehension of L2 speaking challenges.

### 1.2. Language Function Deficiencies

Further analysis of the data showed that students' primary speaking difficulties stemmed from challenges in executing essential language functions such as explanation, illustration, elaboration, and logical reasoning. The researcher observed a significant reliance on their native language (L1) when attempting these functions during discussions. Merkel

(2020) addressed difficulties in L2 construction through dialogic interactions, supporting participants in clarifying their thoughts. Similarly, this study applied the same principle for speaking enhancement with a different group of participants. It was also found that dialogic discussions increased students' L2 thinking capability, leading to improved language functions such as argumentation (Chmarkh, 2021), reasoning, and evaluation. Additionally, Wotring et al. (2024) observed that students' talk repertoire improved after dialogic teaching interventions, suggesting that their intervention, akin to this study, may furnish participants with necessary language function skills.

### 1.3. Negative Affective State

While the students' speaking difficulties may appear linguistically rooted, there was a notable emotional dimension to these challenges. Their limited participation in the second language classroom could be linked to feelings of shyness, nervousness, fear of making errors, and concerns about peer judgment. This emotional aspect significantly impacted their speaking performance in class. Even when possessing the requisite knowledge to respond to teachers' questions, students often hesitate to express their thoughts. A lack of confidence was a prominent barrier preventing active participation in class discussions. This finding resonates with Delima (2023) and Tabog et al. (2023), who noted that lack of confidence and anxiety are prevailing sentiments among SHS students. They also highlighted negative experiences such as inferiority complex, apprehension, classroom distractions, difficulty in expressing thoughts, and teacher reproaches as significant aspects of students' speaking difficulties in L2 classes. The current study's findings contribute to understanding students' disposition towards speaking in ESL classrooms, identifying shyness, nervousness, fear of making errors, and apprehension. In Krashen's theory of affective filters, the more anxious students feel about speaking and the L2 environment, the less they improve in L2 performance. The issues found in learners' affective states align with this theory. Krashen emphasized that these factors are not solely inherent to

learners; teachers and learning environments also play a role.

#### **1.4. Poor Classroom Atmosphere**

The poor classroom atmosphere significantly impacted the students' speaking challenges. While it may seem that a negative classroom atmosphere leads to learners' negative emotional states, affecting their linguistic performance, it's important to recognize that the classroom atmosphere is a constructed environment—shaped either by the teacher alone or in collaboration with students. Factors contributing to a poor atmosphere included the 'strictness of the teacher,' 'lack of encouragement,' or 'fear of being laughed at' (Anna, 16 years old). Thus, speaking problems extend beyond students' skills or emotions alone; they also involve the classroom atmosphere. In a study by Hui et al. (2021), they investigated the effects of social climate on students' willingness to communicate, finding that willingness to communicate was influenced by factors such as anxiety and boredom. This aligns with the theme of classroom atmosphere characterized by students' negative feelings about the learning environment. The actions and values of both teachers and students may thus explain mediating variables such as anxiety and boredom.

#### **2.1. Dialogic Discussion as a Structured Platform**

The session utilized dialogic discussion strategies, emphasizing interactive communication and open dialogue among participants, ensuring conversations were encouraged, meaningful, and engaging for the students. A structured setup created a positive learning environment, fostering active engagement and participation (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2023). The teachers organized the lesson physically, psychologically, and instructionally to optimize learning outcomes. Physically, the classroom arrangement facilitated face-to-face interaction among students, enhancing engagement as noted by one student. Teachers created a psychologically safe space, enabling students to interact comfortably. Inclusive classroom settings encouraged students to share their opin-

ions (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2023). As students became gradually comfortable and confident with the sessions, they engaged more actively (Playsted, 2021). Finally, clear instructions facilitated learning, ensuring comprehension (Playsted, 2021). Teachers' actions and values influence the classroom outcome, creating engagement, a positive psychological environment, and instructional clarity (Shea, 2019). Overall, dialogic sessions structured the classroom environment for engagement and supported students' learning needs.

#### **2.2. Dialogic Discussion as a Scaffolded Platform**

The implementation of sentence starters and questioning guides served as scaffolds, providing support to learners as they participated in the discussions. These tools likely assisted students in initiating and structuring their responses effectively. This is related to the remarks of one teacher who said, "Students can organize their ideas and expressions with the help of scaffolding materials such as sentence starters and questioning guides" (Teacher Rina). With this grounding, teachers could support the students' communication processing. The teachers' assistance when students had questions also aided the sessions. Similarly, Boyd (2023) explored how dialogic interactions could develop students' speaking skills, highlighting how dialogic teaching can provide scaffolding for the learners. Heron et al., (2021) emphasized that supportive language classrooms in terms of dialogic teaching positively impact students' language production.

#### **2.3. Dialogic Discussion as a Social Learning Platform**

The processes of socialization and learning were at play in the sessions. The students themselves conveyed the significant role these sessions play in activating interaction among peers and facilitating collective learning experiences (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). Regarding socialization, dialogic discussions serve as a platform for students to communicate and collaborate. These sessions encouraged social interaction, enabling students to share ideas, perspec-

tives, and insights. Thus, a positive and inclusive learning environment was created. This socialization aspect of the sessions created a learning space characterized by ownership of the topics, engendering freedom for the student. This is what Jocuns (2021) also found where students enhanced their speaking and vocabulary by doing. Another essential aspect of teacher implementation is management. It is then emphasized that a teacher's proper instruction management facilitates learning. Socialization in the classroom is also crucial to promoting inclusivity and interculturality. Douidi (2021) maintained that teachers have vital roles in promoting interculturality in the class. In Santiago-Garabietta et al's (2023) mind, dialogic teaching encourages inclusivity in the class.

### **3. Dialogic Discussion as a Nurturing Space for Confidence and Speaking**

Using dialogic discussion strategies, the sessions bolstered students' self-confidence (Iqbal et al., 2021), particularly in speaking and vocabulary use. Students expressed increased confidence and noted improvements in their speaking skills. The sessions also addressed students' feelings about mistakes and language apprehension, fostering a positive attitude towards speaking L2 and errors. Additionally, students reported overall enhancement in their speaking skills, demonstrating the sessions' effectiveness in addressing speaking and vocabulary issues broadly. Dialogic discussion engaged students in speaking practice and served as a platform for skill development. For example, one student, Mark, 17 years old, remarked, "It was great; I noticed that my speaking skills improved, and I became a better speaker." This highlights a clear relationship between confidence-building and speaking skills improvement. The findings align with previous research on the positive impact of dialogic teaching on speaking skills (Wotring et al., 2024), supporting Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. While existing literature addresses the use of dialogic teaching in enhancing speaking skills, this research goes further by exploring insights and implications for classroom practice, bridging the gap between theory and application in the L2 context.

### **4. Agency, Exploration, and Enhancement**

Upon reflecting on the data collected, the researcher developed three significant themes or macro processes: agency, exploration, and enhancement. These macro processes are anchored to various theories of learning and language learning. First, the affective filter hypothesis states that learners learn more by providing an anxious-free environment. Second, Vygotsky and Cole's concept of the scaffolding of a more knowledgeable one is evident in the teachers' implementation of dialogic discussion. Third, constructivism supports students' gaining knowledge and skills rather than passively receiving information. The order in which the macro processes may be implemented (1. Agency; 2. Exploration; 3. Enhancement) is informed by the theories enumerated. First, agency, as evident in the students' responses, may be developed by lowering the affective filter. Then, since students become ready for interaction, exploration may transpire among them. The teacher and other students may take the role of more knowledgeable ones, and students build knowledge and skills on top of each other's contribution to the discussion. Finally, enhancement may be evident as the byproduct of exploration since constructivism posits that learners co-create knowledge and skills actively.

### **Conclusion**

Four major speaking and vocabulary difficulties were identified among the participants, focusing on 12th graders. The study revealed that vocabulary and word use intertwined with significant speaking challenges, including fluency, accuracy, and language functions. While the research prioritized communication initiation over correctness, language functions like explaining and reasoning deserved more attention. The researcher suggests that while dialogic discussion fosters a conducive speaking environment, explicit instruction on production accuracy may be necessary. However, meaningful interactions among learners could naturally lead to improved accuracy, aligning with the macro processes of agency, exploration, and enhancement.

Further, this research illuminated Filipino ESL classrooms' perspective on English,

viewing it more as a subject than a tool for communication. In schools, the emphasis often lies on completing curriculum content and achieving high scores, leading teachers to prioritize teaching knowledge about language rather than language itself. Students, driven by the desire to perform well, may become anxious about speaking correctly. A classroom environment that values expression over rigid correctness tends to foster increased student engagement and participation.

After participating in dialogic discussions, students exhibited improved speaking skills and confidence, indicating the efficacy of this teaching method. The approach facilitated agency, exploration, and enhancement among learners, providing them with a platform to express themselves freely. The researcher emphasizes the need for language teachers to adopt a skillful, reflective, and learner-centered approach, foregrounding the concepts of agency, exploration, and enhancement. These concepts prioritize students' mental and affective domains, ultimately enhancing language proficiency from an 'inside-out' perspective. The qualitative approach offered a holistic view of students' and teachers' experiences, though the study's limited sample size necessitates caution in generalizing the findings. Readers are urged to consider their context and consult other experts before applying the research's implications. Therefore this research recommends the following:

1. Speaking and vocabulary problems encompass both linguistic challenges (fluency, accuracy, function) and learners' affective states influenced by classroom atmosphere. This holistic approach acknowledges learners as individuals who require motivation and nurturing.
2. Incorporating dialogic discussion strategies in teaching speaking empowers students by allowing them to choose topics and pacing, fostering meaningful engagement and skill improvement.
3. Developing speaking confidence precedes prioritizing accuracy and fluency. Processes like agency, exploration, and enhancement can gradually build confidence and enhance speaking skills.

4. Operating within the ESL classroom, agency, exploration, and enhancement processes, supported by dialogic strategies, offer flexible guidelines for teachers to achieve positive outcomes.
5. Future studies could broaden participant diversity to include various proficiency levels, age groups, cultural backgrounds, or educational settings. This broader range of participants would enable a more nuanced analysis of dialogic discussion's effectiveness across diverse contexts.
6. While qualitative methods (e.g., mosaic approach) were employed in the current research, future studies could integrate quantitative approaches for statistical validation and more robust analysis. Quantitative data collection methods, like surveys or standardized assessments, can offer numerical insights into the impact of dialogic discussion on language proficiency.
7. Future research should explore diverse assessment methods within the context of dialogic discussions. Investigating the use of different evaluation tools, rubrics, or criteria to measure the effectiveness of dialogic discussion in enhancing language skills can contribute to standardized assessment practices for dialogic language learning.

## Acknowledgement

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for its commitment to advancing scholarly inquiry and enhancing the higher education system through purposeful initiatives.

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