



From Monologue to Dialogue: How Classroom Talk Shapes Communicative Learning in ELT

Sadia Sultana^{1*}, Ummay Habiba Usha¹

¹Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh

sadiaabon@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of classroom discourse in shaping communicative learning in Bangladeshi English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Grounded in sociocultural and interactionist perspectives, the study adopts a mixed-methods design to explore both discourse patterns and participants' perceptions. Data were collected from five secondary and tertiary classrooms involving approximately 150 students and 30 teachers through classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews, and pre- and post-task assessments. The findings reveal that classroom interaction remains predominantly monologic, with Teacher Talking Time significantly exceeding Student Talking Time. Despite this, both students and teachers demonstrate a strong preference for dialogic interaction. Quantitative results indicate that students feel more confident and engaged during pair and group activities, while qualitative data highlight persistent barriers such as fear of making mistakes, large class sizes, and exam-oriented instruction. Teachers acknowledge the importance of communicative competence but report challenges in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) due to contextual constraints, including limited time and institutional expectations. The study identifies a clear gap between communicative pedagogical ideals and classroom realities, resulting in a hybrid instructional environment where Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) practices coexist with CLT principles. These findings suggest that enhancing dialogic classroom talk is essential for fostering learners' communicative competence. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting classroom discourse as a critical mechanism of learning rather than a peripheral feature of instruction. It also underscores the need for pedagogical and structural reforms to support sustainable dialogic practices in ELT contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

In English Language Teaching (ELT), communication is not only the intended learning outcome but also the primary medium through which learning is constructed. Classroom talk is therefore central because it shapes the quality of interaction, the opportunities for negotiation of meaning, and the extent to which learners can participate in authentic language use. Research on dialogic teaching shows that classroom discourse is consequential for learning outcomes, and that teacher questioning and learner responses can either expand or restrict students' participation in meaning-making (Boyd, 2015; Boyd & Markarian, 2011).

Within this perspective, the shift from monologic to dialogic pedagogy has become an important theme in applied linguistics and language education. Monologic classroom discourse is typically characterized by teacher dominance, tightly controlled questioning, and limited learner initiative, whereas dialogic classroom discourse supports extended turns, contingent questioning, learner contribution, and collaborative construction of knowledge (Lyle, 2008). Studies in language and education further suggest that dialogic classroom talk can strengthen oral communicative competence and create more productive opportunities for learning through interaction (van der Wilt et al., 2022; Yang & Wang, 2022).

This argument is closely aligned with interactionist views of second language learning, which hold that negotiation of meaning during classroom interaction facilitates acquisition by making input more comprehensible and pushing learners to modify output. In classroom settings, interaction is therefore not a peripheral feature of instruction but a mechanism through which learners develop communicative competence (Palma, 2014). When teachers sustain dialogic exchange, students are more likely to elaborate ideas, clarify meaning, and engage in language use that supports both fluency and accuracy (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015).

The Bangladeshi ELT context illustrates the tension between communicative policy and classroom reality. Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to improve communicative competence, research on English education in Bangladesh has repeatedly shown that implementation remains uneven and that traditional grammar-focused practices continue to shape classroom instruction (Hamid & Honan, 2012). Existing studies describe a persistent policy-practice gap, where exam orientation, limited classroom time, and entrenched teaching habits constrain the development of communicative classroom talk (Hamid & Honan, 2012; Islam et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, classroom talk in Bangladesh should be viewed not simply as a teaching technique but as a pedagogical site where competing instructional traditions are enacted. If ELT in Bangladesh is to support genuine communicative learning, classroom interaction must move beyond transmissive, teacher-fronted patterns toward more dialogic practices that promote learner engagement, responsive questioning, and meaning-focused exchange. This study

therefore examines how classroom talk shapes communicative learning in Bangladeshi ELT contexts. Specifically, it explores:

1. What patterns of classroom discourse (monologic versus dialogic) are evident in Bangladeshi ELT classrooms?
2. How do these patterns influence learners' communicative competence?
3. How do teachers and students perceive the role of classroom discourse in supporting communicative learning?

By positioning classroom talk as a central pedagogical mechanism, this study argues that communicative competence emerges through interactional practice rather than through language explanation alone. In this sense, strengthening dialogic classroom talk is essential for realizing the communicative goals of ELT in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom Discourse and Language Learning

Classroom discourse is widely regarded as a core site of language learning because it mediates participation, negotiation of meaning, and access to learning opportunities (Thoms, 2012). In foreign language classrooms, talk is not merely a vehicle for delivering content; it is the interactional space in which learners receive input, produce output, and co-construct understanding (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013). Reviews of classroom discourse in foreign language education show that the organization of teacher questions, learner responses, and feedback strongly shapes students' opportunities to use the target language meaningfully (van Compernelle & Williams, 2012). From a sociocultural perspective, classroom talk also functions as a form of mediation that supports development within the Zone of Proximal Development, where teacher-student interaction can scaffold learners' emerging communicative competence.

Recent scholarship further suggests that dialogic interaction is especially important in language education because it creates space for elaboration, justification, and collaborative meaning-making (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013). In this sense, classroom discourse should be understood not as a neutral delivery system but as a pedagogical resource that shapes both the quantity and quality of learner participation.

Monologic and Dialogic Pedagogies

The distinction between monologic and dialogic pedagogy has become central in contemporary educational research. Monologic teaching is typically associated with teacher-dominated talk, closed questioning, and highly controlled interactional sequences, whereas dialogic pedagogy emphasizes open-ended questions, contingent responses, learner initiative, and the co-construction of knowledge (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). Conceptual work in this area argues that dialogic teaching is not simply "more

discussion,” but a pedagogical orientation in which talk is used to deepen thinking, learning, and problem-solving.

Empirical studies provide evidence that dialogic discourse is linked to stronger student outcomes. For example, changes in teachers’ dialogic discourse practice have been associated with higher student activation, motivation, and cognitive engagement, while dialogic teacher talk has also been shown to support students’ writing performance (Böheim et al., 2021). In early language-development contexts, dialogic classroom talk has been found to improve oral communicative competence (Al-Adeimi & O’Connor, 2021). Therefore, these studies suggest that dialogic pedagogy creates richer opportunities for language learning than teacher-fronted, monologic discourse.

Communicative Language Teaching and the Bangladeshi Context

In Bangladesh, English occupies a strategic position in education and employment, yet ELT remains shaped by a persistent gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. National reviews show that although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in the mid-1990s to replace Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)-based instruction, implementation has remained uneven because of exam washback, teacher-centred classroom traditions, limited professional development, and mismatches between curriculum goals and assessment practices (Rahman et al., 2019). Bangladesh-specific studies further report that teacher-centred classroom discourse remains common and that learners’ willingness to communicate is often low in such settings (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hamid & Honan, 2012).

Research from Bangladeshi contexts also indicates that the communicative aims of ELT are constrained when classroom interaction remains dominated by explanation, repetition, and short responses rather than sustained dialogue (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). At the same time, studies of learners’ communication in English classes suggest that opportunities for meaningful interaction are closely tied to students’ confidence and willingness to speak (Islam et al., 2021). This makes classroom discourse a critical site for examining whether CLT is being realized in practice or merely reproduced as policy language.

Research Gap and Rationale

Overall, the literature indicates that classroom talk is a central mechanism through which communicative competence develops, and that dialogic pedagogy is more conducive to learner participation than monologic instruction. However, despite the growing international evidence base, there is still limited context-specific research on how monologic and dialogic discourse are enacted in Bangladeshi ELT classrooms and how teachers and students interpret these discourse patterns (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rahman et al., 2019; Thoms, 2012). This gap justifies

closer empirical attention to classroom talk as a lived pedagogical practice rather than as a purely methodological ideal

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how classroom talk shapes communicative learning in Bangladeshi ELT classrooms. A mixed-methods approach was appropriate because it allows the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence when investigating complex educational phenomena, particularly when the goal is to connect observable classroom interaction with participants' perceptions and learning outcomes. Mixed-methods studies are especially valuable when different forms of data are combined to strengthen interpretation and support methodological triangulation.

The study also drew on discourse-analytic principles in examining classroom interaction. Classroom discourse research in foreign language education has shown that classroom talk is central to language learning because it structures participation, interactional opportunities, and access to meaningful language use (Thoms, 2012). For that reason, the present study treated classroom recordings not as background data, but as a primary site for analyzing how teaching and learning were enacted through talk.

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in five ELT classrooms across Bangladesh, covering both secondary and tertiary levels. To reflect variation in institutional context, participants were drawn from urban and semi-urban settings. Approximately 150 students aged 14–21 participated, with class sizes ranging from 30 to 40 learners. In addition, five English language teachers participated in the study, including two secondary-level and three tertiary-level teachers, each with at least three years of teaching experience.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling in order to ensure that the study captured information-rich cases representing a range of teaching practices within the Bangladeshi ELT context. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative and mixed-methods research when the objective is to select cases that are most relevant to the research question rather than to achieve statistical representativeness (Campbell et al., 2020).

Data Collection Instruments

Classroom observations formed the core of the data set. Lessons were audio- and video-recorded across multiple sessions, allowing the researcher to examine interactional patterns, turn-taking, questioning practices, and learner participation in detail. The observation checklist focused on teacher talk time versus student talk time,

the distribution of closed and open-ended questions, interaction patterns such as teacher initiation and student initiation, and the extent to which scaffolding, negotiation of meaning, and repair occurred during classroom interaction. Such an approach is consistent with classroom discourse research in language education, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing spoken interaction as a site of learning.

To complement the observational data, a structured student questionnaire using five-point Likert-scale items was administered to capture learners' perceptions of how classroom talk influenced their learning. The questionnaire focused on perceived opportunities for speaking, confidence development, fluency improvement, and overall communicative competence. This quantitative component was intended to complement the discourse data by showing how students experienced classroom interaction from their own perspective.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participating teachers and with a sample of 20 students. This format was used to explore their experiences of classroom talk, the challenges they faced in implementing dialogic interaction, and their views on the differences between monologic and dialogic pedagogies. The interview data were analyzed thematically, as thematic analysis is well suited for identifying patterned meanings across qualitative datasets while remaining flexible enough to accommodate multiple perspectives.

To assess communicative outcomes, short oral tasks such as role plays and discussions were administered before and after a series of observed lessons. These tasks were scored using a rubric that emphasized fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence. This pre- and post-task component was included to provide a quantitative indication of whether changes in classroom discourse were associated with measurable changes in learners' spoken performance.

Data Analysis

The classroom recordings were transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis in order to identify patterns of teacher–student interaction, the distribution of turns, the nature of questioning, and instances of negotiation of meaning. In classroom discourse research, this type of analysis is commonly used to reveal how interactional practices create, constrain, or extend learning opportunities in foreign language classrooms (Thoms, 2012).

The questionnaire data and oral-task scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean scores, to identify learner perceptions and any measurable changes in communicative competence. The qualitative interview data were coded inductively and then grouped into themes related to classroom talk, barriers to dialogue, and perceived benefits of communicative interaction. Combining these strands of evidence allowed the study to integrate discourse patterns, learner perceptions, and performance outcomes within one coherent mixed-methods framework.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical procedures for research involving human participants. Institutional approval was obtained before data collection, and consent was secured from teachers and from students prior to participation. For minors, parental or guardian consent was also obtained. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and by removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. These procedures are consistent with widely accepted informed-consent standards in human-subject research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The student questionnaire indicated a clear preference for dialogic classroom practices. Out of 120 students, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that classroom discussions helped them learn English more effectively than lecture-based instruction, while only 18% preferred grammar-focused teaching alone. In addition, 68% reported greater confidence when using English in pair or group work than in teacher-led explanation sessions. This pattern is consistent with earlier research showing that dialogic classroom talk can strengthen oral communicative competence and support more active participation in language learning, while classroom environment strongly shapes students' willingness to communicate (Campbell et al., 2020; van der Veen et al., 2021).

Table 1. Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Aspect	Findings	Key Insights	Link to Previous Research
Student Preference	72% preferred discussion; 18% grammar-only	Dialogic learning preferred	Supports dialogic interaction research
Student Confidence	68% confident in group work; 21% teacher-led	Interaction increases confidence	Linked to WTC studies
Participation Constraints	56% large class limits; 61% hesitant	Barriers affect participation	Consistent with anxiety studies
Teacher Beliefs	83% support communicative competence	Positive perception of CLT	Aligned with CLT theory
Teacher Practice	74% dominate talk	Belief-practice gap	IRF dominance noted in literature
Implementation Challenges	65% struggle with CLT; 70% cite constraints	Contextual limitations	Matches Bangladesh ELT studies
Student Themes	Fear of mistakes; prefer discussion	Affective factors matter	WTC influenced by anxiety

Teacher Themes	Exam orientation; grammar focus	System shapes pedagogy	Exam-driven teaching issues
Observation Data	TTT 68%; STT 32%	Monologic dominance	Consistent with discourse studies
Dialogic Episodes	During group/open questions	Improves engagement	Dialogic teaching benefits
Overall Pattern	Hybrid GTM + CLT	Incomplete transition	Policy-practice gap

At the same time, the findings also reveal important constraints on participation. More than half of the students (56%) reported that large class sizes reduced their opportunities to speak, and 61% said they hesitated to contribute unless directly invited by the teacher. This aligns with prior work showing that learner reluctance and anxiety can suppress spoken participation, and that willingness to communicate is closely tied to confidence, classroom atmosphere, and low-anxiety interactional settings (Li et al., 2025; Zabihi et al., 2024). Bangladeshi learners in previous studies similarly reported that grammar-based English learning and limited classroom support hindered oral communication (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hasan & Akhand, 2014; Islam et al., 2021).

The teacher questionnaire supports the same overall pattern, but also exposes the tension between pedagogical belief and classroom practice. Among the 30 teachers surveyed, 83% agreed that classroom talk supports communicative competence, yet 74% admitted that they spent more time talking than their students. Many attributed this imbalance to syllabus pressure and examination demands. This is consistent with classroom discourse research showing that IRF-style interaction and teacher-fronted explanation commonly maximize teacher talk and restrict student talk, even when teachers value communicative learning in principle (Thoms, 2012).

Interview data deepen this picture. Students repeatedly described fear of making mistakes and social embarrassment, but they also emphasized that group work and dialogue felt closer to real communication. Teachers, meanwhile, pointed to exam orientation and parental expectations as barriers to communicative teaching. These themes mirror earlier findings from Bangladesh, where students reported that grammar-centered learning obstructs oral communication and where classroom environment plays a decisive role in shaping willingness to communicate (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hasan & Akhand, 2014; Islam et al., 2021). Similar patterns have also been observed in broader L2 research, which links classroom environment, emotions, and WTC in systematic ways.

The observation data further confirmed the dominance of monologic discourse. In the observed classes, Teacher Talking Time averaged 68%, while Student Talking Time was only 32%. Teacher explanation of grammar rules and controlled questioning dominated the lessons, although brief dialogic episodes emerged during group tasks and open-ended questions. Previous intervention studies have shown that when classroom talk becomes more dialogic, learners' oral

communicative competence improves, and teacher dialogic moves can also predict stronger student engagement and communicative performance (Al-Adeimi & O'Connor, 2021). The present findings therefore reinforce earlier evidence that dialogic interaction is more conducive to communicative development than teacher-steered recitation.

Overall, the findings suggest that Bangladeshi ELT classrooms remain predominantly monologic, but they also show a clear demand for more dialogic interaction from both teachers and students. This hybrid pattern is consistent with previous research showing that WTC is positively associated with communicative fluency and discursive engagement, while classroom environment and teacher communication practices shape whether learners speak or remain silent (Al-Adeimi & O'Connor, 2021; van der Veen et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2026; Zabihi et al., 2024). In that sense, the present study extends the literature by showing how communicative ambition and examination-driven teaching coexist in the same classroom space

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that classroom talk plays a decisive role in shaping communicative learning in Bangladeshi ELT classrooms. The results demonstrate a clear preference among students for dialogic interaction, as evidenced by higher levels of confidence and engagement during group and pair activities compared to teacher-led instruction. However, despite teachers' recognition of the importance of classroom talk for developing communicative competence, monologic discourse remains dominant, with Teacher Talking Time significantly outweighing Student Talking Time. This imbalance reflects a persistent gap between communicative teaching principles and actual classroom practices. The coexistence of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) creates a hybrid instructional environment in which grammar-focused instruction continues to shape classroom discourse, while students increasingly seek opportunities for meaningful communication.

These findings carry important pedagogical implications. Promoting dialogic classroom talk requires not only methodological shifts but also structural changes, including reducing class sizes, aligning assessment systems with communicative goals, and providing teacher training focused on interactional strategies. At the same time, this study is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and limited number of observed classrooms may restrict the generalizability of the findings, and the study primarily relies on short-term observations rather than longitudinal data. Future research should therefore expand the scope by including more diverse educational settings, employing longitudinal designs, and examining intervention-based approaches to enhance dialogic interaction. Further studies may

also explore how digital tools or blended learning environments can support more interactive and communicative classroom discourse.

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