Role of Discussion teaching technique in improving English language speaking skills of ESL learners

1. **Dr. Naeem Fatima**, Assistant Professor, Air University Islamabad. Email: fatimabeena1@gmail.com

2. **Farah Zahid**, M. Phil English Linguistics, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur

3. **Ikram Ullah**, M. Phil Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Email: ikonsoft057@gmail.com

(Corresponding Author)

Abstract

This study investigates the role of discussion teaching techniques in enhancing English language speaking skills among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Twenty-three school teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, providing insights into their perspectives on the perceived benefits and challenges associated with discussion-based instruction. Thematic analysis revealed several key findings. Teachers overwhelmingly acknowledged the positive impact of discussions on ESL learners, noting improvements in speaking fluency, confidence, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking skills. However, they also identified challenges related to language proficiency disparities, classroom management difficulties, and time constraints. The findings highlight the transformative potential of discussion teaching techniques in promoting language acquisition and communicative competence among ESL learners, while also underscoring the need for targeted support and strategic interventions to address associated challenges. Recommendations for teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers are provided to optimize the effectiveness of discussion-based instruction in ESL classrooms. Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations are acknowledged, including sample size constraints, self-reporting bias, contextual factors, lack of student perspectives, time constraints, reliance on a single method approach, and participant homogeneity. Future research endeavors should aim to address these limitations and further explore the complexities of implementing discussion teaching techniques in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: ESL learners, discussion teaching techniques, speaking skills, language proficiency, classroom management, time constraints.

Introduction

Communication has always held significant importance in fostering human connections, and in today's interconnected world, the English language serves as a unifying force that transcends cultural boundaries (Akram et al., 2020). According to Huang and Flores (2018), its significance extends beyond mere linguistic utility, permeating various aspects of life including education, career opportunities, cultural exchanges, and technological advancements. Abdelrady and Akram (2023) assert that English is widely recognized as the predominant language in academic, scientific, and technical domains within the education sector. Proficiency in spoken English is often essential for accessing a wide range of information such as research papers and educational materials, enabling individuals to stay abreast of the latest developments in their respective fields. Akram and Yang (2021) as well as Akram (2020) highlight the broader implications of educational practices and policies within the context of Pakistan's educational landscape, emphasizing the adoption of technology-driven learning (Akram et al., 2021a & 2021b), promotion of inclusive practices, and integration of English proficiency across various subject areas.

English holds the status of an official language in Pakistan and is deeply ingrained in the formal education system, spanning from primary school to university level, including classroom instruction. As per the Pakistan Ministry of Education (2018), it not only serves as a subject of study but also serves as the primary medium of instruction, except at the foundational level where the local language takes precedence. The linguistic journey for learners commences at a young age, often presenting challenges that hinder the attainment of oral proficiency, even for those exposed to English from an early age, with some considering it their first language (Akram et al., 2020).

In response to the evolving needs of ESL learners, educators and researchers alike have continuously explored innovative pedagogical approaches aimed at enhancing language acquisition and communication skills (Pangket, 2019). One such approach that has gained significant attention is the utilization of discussion teaching techniques (Arung & Jumardin, 2016). Discussion-based learning transcends traditional rote memorization and passive learning by fostering active engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative exchange of ideas among learners (Susanti et al., 2021). Through structured discussions, debates, and group activities, ESL

learners are provided with opportunities to engage authentically in English language discourse, thereby honing their speaking abilities in a supportive and interactive environment (Antoni, 2014).

Despite the intuitive appeal of discussion teaching techniques, empirical research examining its specific impact on improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners remains relatively sparse. Therefore, this research seeks to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation into the role of discussion-based instruction in enhancing speaking proficiency among ESL learners.

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in promoting various dimensions of English speaking skills, including vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, intonation, and overall communicative fluency. Through a deeper understanding of the role of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills, this research endeavors to inform pedagogical practices and curriculum development strategies aimed at optimizing language learning outcomes for ESL learners. By identifying effective instructional strategies and best practices for facilitating meaningful language exchange and communication, educators can tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs and preferences of ESL learners, ultimately empowering them to become confident, articulate, and proficient speakers of English.

1. How do school teachers perceive the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners?
2. What insights can ESL teachers share regarding the challenges in implementing discussion teaching techniques for building English language speaking in ESL students?

Literature Review

The role of discussion teaching techniques in enhancing English language speaking skills among ESL learners has been a subject of interest among researchers and educators. Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the effectiveness of discussion-based instruction and its impact on language acquisition and communicative competence.

A study by Wahyuni and Yusnarti (2020) investigated the effects of structured discussion activities on junior high school ESL learners' speaking proficiency. The researchers found that incorporating structured discussions into the curriculum significantly improved learners' ability to express themselves fluently and accurately in spoken English. The study highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for authentic language practice through guided discussions, debates, and collaborative tasks.

Similarly, Hidayati (2019) conducted a longitudinal study examining the long-term effects of discussion-based instruction on ESL learners' speaking skills. The researchers observed sustained improvements in learners' vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and overall communicative fluency following regular exposure to discussion activities over the course of a semester. The study emphasized the role of consistent practice and engagement in discussion-based learning environments for fostering language development among ESL learners.

Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Alsowat (2020) synthesized findings from multiple studies examining the efficacy of discussion teaching techniques in ESL contexts. The meta-analysis revealed a positive correlation between participation in discussion activities and gains in speaking proficiency among ESL learners. The researchers identified key factors contributing to the effectiveness of discussion-based instruction, including learner motivation, task authenticity, and teacher facilitation. Ramzan et al. (2023) have confirmed there are not any significant statistical differences among ESL motivational gender levels. Chen and Ramzan (2024) have further stated that Facebook posts about learning English as a second language (L2) provide primary motivation for learners and promote their performance.

In addition to empirical research, theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) and Krashen's input hypothesis (1981) have provided theoretical foundations for understanding the mechanisms underlying language acquisition and development within discussion-based learning environments. According to Vygotsky, language learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making, making discussion activities particularly conducive to language acquisition among ESL learners. Krashen's input hypothesis posits that exposure to comprehensible input, such as that provided through

meaningful discussions, facilitates language acquisition by promoting linguistic input and negotiation of meaning (Krashen, 1982).

Despite the growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners, several challenges and limitations remain. These include variations in learner proficiency levels, classroom dynamics, and instructional contexts, which may impact the implementation and outcomes of discussion-based instruction. Future research endeavors should aim to address these challenges through rigorous methodological approaches, longitudinal investigations, and cross-cultural comparisons to further elucidate the role of discussion teaching techniques in promoting language learning and communicative competence among ESL learners.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative research design by recruiting twenty-three school teachers from various educational institutions across Punjab participated in this study. The participants were selected based on their experience and expertise in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to learners of diverse proficiency levels. The sample included teachers from both public and private schools, representing a range of teaching backgrounds, instructional contexts, and geographical locations.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participating teachers to gather their perspectives and insights on the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners. The interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, depending on the preferences and availability of the participants. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was designed to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and practices related to discussion-based instruction in ESL classrooms. The interview questions were open-

ended and designed to elicit detailed responses from the participants. Topics covered in the interviews included:

1. Teachers' experiences with incorporating discussion teaching techniques into their ESL instruction.
2. Perceived benefits and challenges associated with using discussion activities to improve English language speaking skills among ESL learners.
3. Observations of ESL learners' progress and development in speaking proficiency as a result of participation in discussion activities.
4. Suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in ESL classrooms.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim to facilitate data analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories within the interview data. The analysis process involved multiple stages, including familiarization with the data, coding, theme identification, and interpretation. Themes and sub-themes were identified based on the frequency of occurrence, relevance to the research questions, and richness of the data.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were employed. These included member checking (Harvey, 2015), whereby participants were given the opportunity to review and validate the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Additionally, peer debriefing and reflexivity were utilized to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Collins et al., 2013) by soliciting feedback from colleagues and engaging in critical self-reflection throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study, and measures were taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data

collected. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards outlined by relevant institutional review boards and professional organizations.

Results

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed a consensus among teachers regarding the perceived benefits of discussion teaching techniques in enhancing English language speaking skills among ESL learners. The following subsections detail these perceived benefits:

1. Enhanced Speaking Fluency

Teachers unanimously recognized that participation in discussion activities significantly contributed to the development of speaking fluency among ESL learners. By engaging in structured discussions, learners were afforded valuable opportunities to practice expressing themselves in English in a supportive and interactive environment. Through regular practice and interaction with peers, learners gradually gained confidence in their speaking abilities and demonstrated noticeable improvements in their fluency levels over time. Teachers observed that the dynamic nature of discussions encouraged learners to think on their feet, articulate their thoughts coherently, and respond spontaneously, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. One of the teachers stated:

> I've noticed a remarkable difference in my students' fluency levels since we started incorporating discussions into our lessons. They're much more confident and spontaneous in expressing themselves now. For example, during our last discussion on environmental issues, I saw even the shyest students actively participating and contributing to the conversation. It's truly inspiring to witness their growth in fluency.

2. Improved Confidence

A recurring theme in teachers' responses was the positive impact of discussion-based instruction on learners' confidence levels. Many teachers noted a noticeable increase in learners' confidence in using English orally, attributing this to their active participation in discussions. As learners became more accustomed to expressing their ideas and opinions in English within a supportive classroom environment, they gradually overcame inhibitions and fears of making

mistakes. This newfound confidence not only bolstered learners' willingness to engage in conversation but also empowered them to take risks and experiment with language use, ultimately fostering greater self-assurance and communicative competence. For instance, a teacher shared:

> Discussions have been a game-changer in terms of boosting my students' confidence. Take, for instance, one of my quieter students who used to hesitate to speak up in class. After a few weeks of participating in discussions, I noticed a visible shift in her demeanor. She started speaking up more, expressing her opinions with conviction. It's incredible to see how discussions have empowered her to find her voice.

3. Expanded Vocabulary

Teachers emphasized the role of discussions in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and enrichment among ESL learners. Through exposure to a wide range of topics, themes, and language structures during discussions, learners encountered new words and expressions in context. Teachers observed that discussions provided a natural and authentic context for learners to learn and internalize vocabulary, as they actively engaged with the language in meaningful communication. Furthermore, learners were encouraged to use newly acquired vocabulary in their spoken interactions, reinforcing retention and deepening their understanding of word meanings and usage patterns. One of the teachers stated:

> I remember a discussion we had about technology and its impact on society. As students shared their opinions and experiences, they naturally used a variety of technical terms and jargon related to the topic. Some students even looked up unfamiliar words on their phones during the discussion and asked for clarification. It was a fantastic opportunity for them to learn and internalize new vocabulary in a meaningful context.

4. Critical Thinking Skills

Another prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the positive impact of discussions on the development of critical thinking and analytical skills among ESL learners. Teachers noted that discussions fostered an environment conducive to intellectual inquiry, debate, and reasoned argumentation. As learners engaged in discussions on a variety of topics

and issues, they were encouraged to think critically, analyze information, evaluate perspectives, and formulate well-reasoned arguments. Teachers observed that discussions prompted learners to question assumptions, consider multiple viewpoints, and defend their opinions with evidence, thereby cultivating higher-order thinking skills essential for academic success and effective communication. For instance, a teacher shared:

> Discussions encourage learners to think beyond surface-level responses and engage in deeper analysis. For instance, during a debate about the pros and cons of social media, students had to critically evaluate evidence, consider different perspectives, and construct persuasive arguments. This process of reasoned debate not only sharpened their critical thinking skills but also encouraged them to approach complex issues with intellectual curiosity and skepticism.

Overall, the perceived benefits of discussion teaching techniques outlined by the teachers underscored the transformative potential of discussion-based instruction in promoting language acquisition, communicative competence, and cognitive development among ESL learners. By providing opportunities for authentic language practice, fostering confidence and fluency, enriching vocabulary, and nurturing critical thinking skills, discussions emerged as a valuable pedagogical tool for empowering ESL learners to become confident, articulate, and proficient speakers of English.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the perceived benefits, teachers also identified several challenges and limitations associated with the implementation of discussion teaching techniques:

1. Language Proficiency

Several teachers in this study highlighted the challenge of accommodating ESL learners with varying proficiency levels in discussions. Respondents expressed concerns that learners with lower proficiency levels may struggle to fully participate in discussions, resulting in uneven participation and limited engagement. Responses with respondents shed light on this challenge:

> It can be challenging, especially when you have learners at different proficiency levels in the same class. I try to scaffold the discussions by providing support and guidance to help

struggling learners participate. For example, I may pair them with more proficient peers or provide simplified prompts to facilitate comprehension and participation.

It's important to create a supportive environment where all learners feel comfortable expressing themselves. I often use strategies like small group discussions or think-pair-share activities to provide opportunities for less confident learners to engage in meaningful dialogue without feeling overwhelmed.

2. Classroom Management

Effective classroom management emerged as a critical factor influencing the success of discussion-based instruction, particularly in large class settings. Respondents emphasized the importance of establishing clear expectations, fostering a positive learning environment, and implementing strategies to maintain focus and control during discussions. Few of the teachers stated:

Classroom management is key, especially when facilitating discussions with a large group of students. I establish ground rules at the outset and reinforce them consistently throughout the discussion. I also use techniques like wait time and cold calling to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

I find it helpful to set clear objectives for each discussion and provide a structured framework to guide the conversation. I also monitor student engagement closely and intervene as needed to redirect off-topic discussions or address disruptive behavior.

3. Time Constraints

Respondents in this study identified time constraints as a significant challenge to implementing discussion activities effectively within the constraints of the curriculum and class schedule. Limited instructional time may restrict the frequency and duration of discussions, potentially compromising their effectiveness as a language learning tool. Responses with respondents illustrate this challenge:

It's definitely a balancing act. I try to integrate discussions into the curriculum wherever possible, but sometimes it's challenging to find time, especially with content-heavy

courses. I often have to prioritize certain topics or streamline discussions to fit within the allotted class time.

I make sure to plan discussions strategically, focusing on key learning objectives and prioritizing topics that lend themselves well to discussion. I also use time-saving techniques like setting time limits for each discussion segment and providing clear instructions to maximize efficiency.

Overall, the challenges and limitations identified by teachers underscore the need for thoughtful planning, flexibility, and innovative strategies to overcome obstacles and maximize the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in ESL classrooms. By addressing these challenges proactively and implementing targeted interventions, educators can create more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments for ESL learners.

Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with previous research on the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners. The thematic analysis revealed several key themes, including the perceived benefits of discussion-based instruction, challenges and limitations, strategies and best practices. These findings resonate with existing literature and contribute to our understanding of the role of discussions in language learning and skill development.

Perceived benefits

The perceived benefits of discussion teaching techniques highlighted by teachers in this study resonate with findings from previous research on the efficacy of discussion-based instruction in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners. The observed enhancements in speaking fluency, confidence, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking skills align with existing literature documenting the positive impact of discussions on language learning and skill development (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022).

Teachers in this study reported that discussions provided valuable opportunities for ESL learners to practice and refine their speaking skills in a supportive and interactive environment. These findings corroborate research indicating that participation in discussions fosters speaking

fluency by encouraging learners to engage in authentic communication and express their ideas orally (Abdullah, 2016). Moreover, the observed increase in learners' confidence in using English orally is consistent with prior studies demonstrating the confidence-building effects of discussion activities on language learners (Dewi, 2023).

Furthermore, teachers noted that discussions facilitated vocabulary acquisition and retention among ESL learners, supporting the findings of previous research highlighting the role of discussions in expanding learners' lexicon through exposure to new words in context (Tan et al., 2020). Additionally, the observed development of critical thinking skills among ESL learners during discussions echoes research demonstrating the cognitive benefits of engaging in reasoned discourse, debate, and analysis (Wahyuni & Yusnarti, 2020). Overall, the findings of this study align with existing literature on the perceived benefits of discussion teaching techniques in ESL contexts, underscoring the importance of discussions as a pedagogical tool for promoting language acquisition, communicative competence, and cognitive development among ESL learners.

Challenges

The challenges and limitations identified by teachers in this study mirror common concerns expressed in previous research on the implementation of discussion-based instruction in ESL classrooms. Issues such as language proficiency disparities among learners, classroom management difficulties, and time constraints are consistent challenges faced by educators when integrating discussion activities into their teaching practice (La'biran, 2017).

Teachers highlighted the challenge of accommodating ESL learners with varying proficiency levels in discussions, noting that learners with lower proficiency levels may struggle to fully participate, leading to uneven engagement. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that language proficiency disparities among learners can hinder the effectiveness of discussion-based instruction (Solihah, 2023).

Furthermore, effective classroom management emerged as a critical factor influencing the success of discussion-based instruction, particularly in large class settings. Teachers emphasized the importance of establishing clear expectations, fostering a positive learning environment, and implementing strategies to maintain focus and control during discussions.

These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the significance of classroom management in facilitating productive and inclusive discussions (Possú, 2021).

Moreover, respondents identified time constraints as a significant challenge to implementing discussion activities effectively within the constraints of the curriculum and class schedule. Limited instructional time may restrict the frequency and duration of discussions, potentially compromising their effectiveness as a language learning tool. This finding aligns with prior research highlighting the tension between curricular demands and the integration of student-centered pedagogies such as discussions (Dewi, 2023).

In summary, the challenges and limitations identified by teachers in this study are consistent with previous research on the implementation of discussion teaching techniques in ESL contexts, highlighting the need for targeted support, professional development, and innovative strategies to address these challenges and maximize the effectiveness of discussions in promoting language learning and communicative competence among ESL learners.

Conclusions

The findings of this study shed light on the perceived benefits and challenges associated with discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners. Teachers overwhelmingly acknowledged the positive impact of discussions on speaking fluency, confidence, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking skills among ESL learners. However, they also identified challenges related to language proficiency disparities, classroom management, and time constraints.

Suggestions

To address the challenges associated with English language learning and promote oral proficiency among learners, several recommendations can be considered.

To address the challenges associated with English language learning and promote oral proficiency among learners, several recommendations can be considered. First, enhance language instruction by implementing comprehensive programs that prioritize oral proficiency development from an early age. Integrate communicative language teaching approaches that emphasize real-life communication and interaction to foster speaking skills effectively.

Second, provide continuous training and professional development opportunities for language teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills in teaching spoken English (Li & Akram, 2023; Akram et al., 2022). Training programs should focus on effective instructional strategies, language assessment techniques, and classroom management strategies tailored to promote oral proficiency. Third, harness the power of technology to supplement language instruction and provide immersive learning experiences for learners. Incorporate interactive language learning platforms, multimedia resources, and online communication tools to facilitate authentic language practice and engagement outside the classroom.

Fourth, advocate for inclusive language policies that recognize the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners and promote multilingualism as a valuable asset. Encourage the use of translanguaging strategies that leverage students' proficiency in their native languages to support English language learning and academic success. Fifth, create supportive learning environments that foster a culture of language learning and risk-taking. Encourage active participation and collaboration among learners through group activities, peer interaction, and cooperative learning projects to promote oral language development in authentic contexts. Sixth, foster partnerships with community organizations, cultural institutions, and local businesses to provide opportunities for language immersion and real-world communication outside the classroom. Organize language exchange programs, cultural events, and community service projects that encourage learners to use English in meaningful and purposeful ways.

Seventh, engage parents, guardians, and stakeholders in supporting English language learning initiatives and promoting language-rich environments at home and in the community. Provide resources, workshops, and informational sessions to empower parents to actively participate in their children's language development journey. By implementing these suggestions, educational stakeholders can work collaboratively to create supportive and inclusive learning environments that foster oral proficiency development and equip learners with the language skills necessary for academic success and global citizenship.

Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of discussion teaching techniques in improving English language speaking skills among ESL learners, several limitations should be

considered. Firstly, the sample size of 23 school teachers may restrict the generalizability of the findings. With a larger and more diverse sample, encompassing teachers from various educational settings and geographical locations, a broader range of perspectives could have been captured, enhancing the applicability of the results.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews introduces the potential for self-reporting bias. Participants may have provided responses influenced by social desirability or personal biases, impacting the accuracy and reliability of the findings. To mitigate this limitation, future research could incorporate multiple data sources and triangulation methods to validate and corroborate the reported experiences and perspectives. Thirdly, the contextual factors specific to the study setting, such as institutional practices and instructional approaches, may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Variations in cultural norms, institutional structures, and pedagogical philosophies could influence the implementation and effectiveness of discussion-based instruction in different settings, warranting caution in generalizing the findings.

Additionally, the study's focus solely on teachers' perspectives neglects the viewpoints of ESL learners themselves. Incorporating student perspectives through surveys, focus groups, or classroom observations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of discussion teaching techniques on language learning outcomes and learner experiences.

Furthermore, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may have constrained the depth and scope of data collection and analysis. A longer study duration could have allowed for more extensive exploration of teachers' experiences and practices related to discussion-based instruction, providing richer insights into the nuances of implementation and outcomes.

Moreover, the study primarily utilized semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. While interviews offer valuable insights into teachers' perspectives, the use of additional data collection methods, such as classroom observations or document analysis, could have provided richer contextual information and triangulated the findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study.

Finally, the participant homogeneity, consisting primarily of school teachers, may limit the diversity of perspectives represented in the study. Including a more diverse range of participants, such as ESL specialists, educational policymakers, and community stakeholders, could have captured a broader array of viewpoints and enriched the depth of analysis. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for interpreting the findings of the study accurately and informing future research endeavors aimed at addressing gaps in knowledge and understanding within the field of ESL education and language pedagogy.

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