

## Exploring the Hurdles of Teacher Discourse in ESL Learning Environments

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### Abstract

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of ESL classrooms in primary schools in KPK and Baluchistan, uncovering a tapestry of challenges and opportunities. Through keen observation, it reveals a spectrum of language proficiency among students, encompassing advanced skills to basic comprehension struggles, impacting both verbal interactions and written tasks. The dominance of teacher talk within the classroom, albeit essential for information dissemination, inadvertently restricts students' language practice and self-expression. This participation imbalance, where some students actively engage while others remain passive, underscores the need for a more inclusive environment. The study draws connections to previous research, highlighting the relevance of multicultural education principles, differentiated instruction strategies, and culturally responsive teaching approaches. It also accentuates the significance of balanced discourse dynamics for fostering active participation. Overall, this study provides insights that inform ESL teaching practices, advocating for tailored instruction, cultural integration, equitable participation, and interactive classroom environments to enhance language development and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** ESL learning, Teacher Discourse, challenges.

### Introduction

Teacher discourse in ESL (English as a Second Language) learning settings is a topic that opens up a Pandora's box of complexities, challenges, and opportunities. At the core of any learning environment is communication (Norton, 2013). It is through the exchange of ideas, correction of mistakes, and engagement with curriculum material that learning transpires (Aslam et al., 2021).

However, when it comes to ESL settings, where students are trying to learn English, usually in a non-native context, the regular challenges of teaching and learning are magnified exponentially (Akram et al., 2020). In these settings, teacher discourse does not only serve to impart knowledge but also becomes a critical tool for establishing cultural rapport, navigating linguistic barriers, and managing classroom dynamics that are often diverse and multilayered (Al-Harbi & Ahmad, 2022).

One of the most glaring challenges is the issue of language proficiency itself, both in teachers and students. Unlike other subjects where the language of instruction is already known to the students, ESL students are in the process of learning the very medium through which they are supposed to understand other subjects (Tursunovich, 2022). This unique landscape often places ESL teachers in a paradoxical role. They must simplify their language to ensure comprehension, but they must also introduce complexity to advance learning. Striking the right balance between the two is no small feat and necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both the language and effective pedagogical strategies (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022).

Another layer of complexity is added by cultural diversity. In many ESL classrooms, especially in countries where English is not the primary language, the student body can be remarkably diverse. Students may come from different linguistic backgrounds, making the teacher's role even more challenging in reconciling various learning styles, cultural norms, and expectations (Gyamfi & Sukseemuang, 2018). At times, teachers may unconsciously resort to cultural references or idioms that are entirely lost on their students, further widening the gap between teaching objectives and learning outcomes.

Closely related to cultural diversity is the challenge of maintaining an inclusive environment. Given the diversity of linguistic skills, some students might dominate the conversation, while others might retreat into their shells, intimidated by their lack of proficiency or cultural understanding. In extreme cases, students may even resist the new linguistic and cultural norms that learning English might entail. Teachers thus have to act as moderators, ensuring that the classroom environment is supportive and engaging for everyone, regardless of their starting point (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023).

In mixed ability classrooms, the differentiation of instruction also poses significant challenges. Some students might have advanced skills and a broader vocabulary, demanding more challenging activities and conversations. In contrast, beginners may struggle with even basic phrases and understanding (Khasawneh, 2021). Catering to these diverse needs within a single discourse framework is one of the toughest challenges that ESL teachers face. Furthermore, there is the issue of assessment. How do teachers accurately gauge comprehension and learning when the medium of instruction is what's being learned? Traditional forms of assessment might not always apply in ESL settings, requiring teachers to adopt innovative approaches to understand student progress and areas of difficulty (Khodjayevev, 2021).

Moreover, given the trend technology integration has become essential in students learning (Akram et al., 2021a), it also has emerged as both a boon and a bane in ESL instruction (Thongsri et al., 2019). While it has provided numerous tools to aid language learning, from language apps to virtual classrooms, it has also led to new forms of discourse that may not always align with academic or formal English (Akram et al., 2021b). Teachers have to navigate this digital landscape carefully to ensure that while students are engaged, the quality of learning is not compromised. In summary, the discourse challenges faced by teachers in ESL learning settings are multifaceted and intricately woven into the fabric of language, culture, pedagogy, and technology. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of both the complexities of the English language and the specific dynamics of teaching in a linguistically and culturally diverse setting.

## **Review of Literature**

Research on teacher discourse in ESL learning settings at the international level has been extensive and diverse (Muzaki, 2017). Linguists and educational experts have concentrated on various themes including language proficiency, instructional methodology, classroom interactions, and technology's role in learning (Sert, 2019). A seminal work in this field is Krashen's 'Input Hypothesis,' which underscores the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition. This has profound implications for how teachers construct their discourse, balancing complexity with understandability (Koşar, 2021). Moreover, researchers like Jim Cummins (2003), distinguish between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This distinction helps teachers understand the need for differentiated discourse strategies depending on students' proficiency levels and the academic complexity of the topic being discussed.

Within Pakistan, students studying English as a second language exhibit all four internal motivational structures, namely, learning situation, intrinsic interest, immediate achievement, and personal development, as components of their motivation (Ramzan et al., 2023). On the technological front, a growing body of literature focuses on blended learning environments and online ESL courses. Engaging with social media has a positive impact on both academic motivation and achievement (Ramzan et al., 2023). Research conducted by Oyama and Kang (2022) highlights the necessity for teacher discourse to adapt to digital formats, including forums, chatrooms, and educational platforms like Moodle.

The issue of cultural diversity is another cornerstone. Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Brown's 'Principles of Language Learning and Teaching' offer deep insights into how cultural norms and values can impact classroom discourse (Kanwal Shahzadi & Bhatti, 2022). Teachers are advised to use multicultural pedagogies to ensure inclusiveness. Critics have often pointed out the lack of standardized evaluation metrics for assessing discourse efficacy. The use of traditional examination methods has been questioned, suggesting the need for more formative assessments and real-world language applications to judge a student's proficiency (Ojanola, 2022). Emotions have a substantial impact on language proficiency (Javaid et al., 2023). ESL learners typically encounter a moderate degree of satisfaction within their educational settings (Ramzan et al., 2023).

At the Pakistani level, the situation brings unique challenges and perspectives to the international research paradigms. Several studies emphasize the urban-rural divide, where the quality of ESL teaching and the level of discourse differ drastically. In most rural settings, teachers themselves are not proficient in English, which impacts the quality of discourse and by extension, learning outcomes (Manan, 2019). The mindfulness of teachers is impacted by job-related stress (Javaid et al., 2023).

In a nation where English is often seen as the language of upward social mobility, classroom discourse also takes on socio-economic dimensions. Teachers frequently use rote

learning methods, focusing on traditional exams as per studies conducted by Ahmed et al. (2017) and others. This approach has been criticized for failing to develop critical language skills essential for real-world application.

A unique challenge in the Pakistani context is the tension between local languages and English. Research by Fareed et al. (2021) highlights the 'linguistic schizophrenia' that students experience when learning in English while using their native languages for daily life. This duality poses significant implications for teacher discourse, as ignoring the local language and culture can hinder learning. Psychological elements influence the learning capacity of ESL students (Ikramullah et al., 2023). The presence of psychological discursiveness influences perception (Ramzan et al., 2023). Studies have also highlighted gender dynamics in Pakistani ESL classrooms. Researchers like Sheikh and Mahmood (2014) have explored how the conservative societal norms often restrict female participation in discourse, affecting their learning process. In summary, while international research on ESL teacher discourse provides valuable frameworks and insights, the specific challenges and cultural nuances in Pakistan demand specialized approaches and localized studies. The presence of resilience diminishes psychological distress (Riaz et al., 2021). The provision of social support and successful social adjustment enhances the academic performance of students (Maqbool et al., 2021). The literature indicates an urgent need for policy changes and educational reforms in Pakistan to address these unique challenges effectively.

## **Methodology**

This study employs an observational research design to investigate teacher discourse challenges in ESL learning settings within primary schools in KPK and Baluchistan, Pakistan. Observational research is a valuable approach as it allows for the direct observation of classroom interactions and discourse patterns, providing insights into the real-time dynamics of ESL teaching (Morgan et al., 20117). In addition, the study adopts a qualitative research approach to delve deeply into the nuances of teacher discourse challenges. Qualitative methods are well-suited to capturing the complex and contextual nature of classroom interactions (Hennink et al., 2020).

## **Data Collection**

Classroom observations are the primary method of data collection. Researchers visited the selected primary schools in KPK and Baluchistan to observe ESL classes. The focus was on understanding how teachers manage discourse, address linguistic barriers, and engage with students in a multilingual and multicultural context.

### **Participant Selection**

The study involved observing ESL teachers and their interactions with students in primary school classrooms. The participants included ESL teachers and students. A purposive sampling technique was used to select primary schools known for their diverse student populations and varying ESL teaching methods. This sampling approach allows for the selection of schools that can provide rich insights into the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Researchers conducted in-person observations of ESL classes. These observations were non-participatory, with researchers positioned discreetly within the classroom to minimize any disruptions. Detailed field notes were taken during and after each observation, capturing teacher discourse, student interactions, and any notable incidents.

With the consent of the participants, select observations may be audio-visually recorded. This approach ensures accurate documentation of discourse patterns and enables thorough analysis during the data interpretation phase.

### **Data Analysis**

Firstly, the transcriptions of relevant segments were generated by the help of audio-visual recordings and notes. Transcriptions provide a textual representation of spoken discourse, facilitating in-depth analysis.

Afterward, data analysis was followed by a thematic approach. The transcribed text and field notes were analyzed to identify recurring themes related to teacher discourse challenges, linguistic barriers, cultural dynamics, and classroom management. Themes emerged through careful coding and categorization of data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conducting observations and recordings, informed consent was obtained from participating teachers, students, and school administrators. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time. They were also informed that all collected data would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Participant names and school identities will be anonymized to ensure privacy.

## **Findings**

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics associated with teacher discourse in ESL learning settings within primary schools in KPK and Baluchistan, Pakistan. The study's observations and analyses revealed the following detailed insights:

### **1. Language Proficiency Variability**

The ESL classrooms under observation provided a fascinating glimpse into the extensive spectrum of language proficiency exhibited by the students. This spectrum encompassed a broad range, stretching from those showcasing remarkable fluency and linguistic prowess, to others grappling with fundamental comprehension and expressive abilities. This diversification in language skills manifested not solely within oral exchanges but also resonated through written assignments and the manner in which students participated in classroom discussions.

In the face of this notable diversity, educators strategically harnessed a myriad of pedagogical methodologies, all aimed at effectively tackling the intricate challenges that stemmed from this array of language proficiency. Among these strategies, a subset of teachers opted for an approach that hinged upon simplification. This method entailed the use of straightforward sentence structures and language devoid of unnecessary complexities, thus ensuring that the content was accessible and digestible for all strata of learners. Conversely, another cohort of instructors undertook a more nuanced route, progressively acquainting students with intricate linguistic forms, fostering an environment conducive to the gradual evolution of their language skills.

Yet, within this well-intentioned simplification, an underlying peril of oversimplification emerged. While the intention at the core of this approach was to facilitate comprehension, an

inadvertent outcome was the conceivable limitation it imposed. In specific scenarios, the relentless pursuit of simplicity inadvertently curtailed exposure to the realm of higher-level language usage. This potential consequence, if not diligently managed, posed the risk of impeding students' potential for linguistic maturation and, consequently, stifling their overall linguistic growth.

## **2. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

The classrooms subjected to observation unfolded as a captivating canvas embellished with the vivid threads of cultural and linguistic diversity. Within these academic sanctuaries, students, each adorned with their distinct ethnic and linguistic tapestries, congregated, contributing the intricate patterns of their individual experiences and viewpoints to the collective learning milieu. This medley of diversity painted an unmistakable portrait, not solely limited to the realm of classroom interactions, but also woven intricately into the very fabric of the students' written expressions and academic endeavors.

Yet, against this backdrop of rich diversity, the instructors themselves emerged as a spectrum of cultural awareness and sensitivity. Like adept weavers of the educational narrative, some educators seamlessly interwove culturally pertinent examples into their discourses. This artful integration functioned as a bridge, connecting the often abstract terrains of the curriculum with the tangible and lived realities of the students. By doing so, they facilitated a harmonious fusion of academic content with the diverse cultural landscapes inhabited by their pupils.

However, even amidst this laudable endeavor, challenges emerged, akin to knots that needed careful unraveling. These complexities materialized when cultural references, despite their best intentions, fell upon ears not entirely attuned to their significance. The underlying cause was the divergent cultural contexts from which both educators and learners hailed. This divergence occasionally obscured the full comprehension of these cultural references, transforming what could have been enlightening illustrations into enigmatic puzzles, resulting in an unintended disconnection between the educator's intent and the students' comprehension. In essence, these classrooms stood as a testament to the intricate interplay between cultural diversity and educational dynamics. They revealed that while the threads of diversity enriched



the very essence of learning, they also demanded a delicately attuned pedagogical approach—one that harmonized the beauty of varied perspectives with the need for inclusive understanding.

### **3. Participation Imbalance**

The study's findings brought to light a conspicuous asymmetry in student participation within the classroom. This participation dichotomy was stark: on one hand, certain students exhibited an eagerness to immerse themselves in classroom dialogues, readily embracing opportunities to respond to queries and collaborate in group undertakings. On the other hand, a contrasting group of individuals assumed a more reticent stance, often stemming from a gnawing lack of confidence in their linguistic proficiencies or the pervasive influence of assertive peers.

This divergence in participation was not merely a surface-level observation but carried significant ramifications for the broader landscape of learning outcomes. The students who proactively engaged in classroom interactions secured a distinct advantage—a virtual terrain teeming with avenues for language practice and development. Through their active involvement, they traversed a trajectory abounding in opportunities to refine their linguistic competencies, whether it was through articulation during discussions, articulating responses, or even collaborating with peers to fulfill shared objectives.

In contrast, the passive contingent faced a different scenario, one shadowed by limited opportunities for linguistic augmentation. Their reserved demeanor inadvertently restricted their exposure to the dynamic arena of language practice. Consequently, the growth of their linguistic prowess often unfolded at a markedly subdued pace, as the absence of active engagement curtailed the practical application of language skills. This lopsided participation equilibrium thus stood as a fundamental influencer, subtly shaping the trajectory of learning outcomes. It underscored that active participation, while fostering comprehensive language development, also bore the potential to inadvertently exclude those who were either hesitant to step forward or eclipsed by more dominant peers. Addressing this imbalance, therefore, assumes a pivotal role in cultivating an inclusive and equitable learning environment that equally nourishes the linguistic potential of every student.

### **4. Teacher Talk Dominance**

A prominent phenomenon that emerged under scrutiny was the pervasive dominance of teacher discourse within the classroom setting. This was evident in the prevalent practice of educators assuming a predominant role in the exchange of ideas and information. Across various scenarios, be it elucidating concepts, imparting instructions, or steering discussions, teachers maintained a firm grip on the conversational reins. While this orchestration of teacher-led conversations serves as a vital conduit for effective knowledge transmission, an unintended consequence unfolded: the overabundance of teacher talk inadvertently curtailed the opportunities for students to exercise their voices and cultivate their English language skills.

The preeminence of teacher monologue wielded considerable influence over the landscape of student engagement, imparting it with an uneven tilt. The tendency for educators to retain the verbal spotlight inadvertently cast a shadow over the students' inclination to initiate discussions or express their thoughts freely. This dynamic gave rise to an atmosphere where some students adopted a passive stance, enveloped in the role of mere recipients of information rather than active participants in the process of learning.

This interplay of teacher talk dominance and student engagement imbalance underscores the multifaceted effects of instructional dynamics on the overall educational environment. While teacher-led discourse is indispensable for effective content dissemination, an excessive dosage of such discourse can stifle students' opportunities to cultivate their expressive capabilities and flex their linguistic muscles. As a consequence, the learning space, despite being teeming with potential, risks devolving into a realm of restrained interactions and passive absorption.

In light of these insights, recalibrating the equilibrium between teacher talk and student engagement emerges as an imperative undertaking. Striking a balance that affords students greater agency in contributing to discussions, articulating their viewpoints, and experimenting with language fosters an environment that not only enriches linguistic development but also nurtures a sense of active participation and ownership in the learning journey.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study align with and contribute to the existing body of literature on ESL education, highlighting the intricate interplay between language proficiency variability, cultural diversity, participation imbalances, and teacher talk dominance in primary school settings. The

discussion contextualizes these findings within the broader landscape of ESL teaching and draws insights from previous studies to deepen our understanding of their implications.

The observed fluctuations in student language proficiency levels, a key facet unearthed by this investigation, find resonance within the broader landscape of ESL classroom research. These fluctuations, emblematic of the diverse linguistic capacities students bring to the educational arena, have been acknowledged and explored in previous studies as well. One notable contribution is Cummins' (2003) seminal work, wherein he laid the foundation for the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) distinction. This dichotomy elucidates the dual dimensions of language acquisition, highlighting the distinctive language demands experienced within diverse classroom contexts.

Koşar, (2021) insights further bolster this perspective. He expounded on the essential balance educators must strike between presenting comprehensible input while simultaneously challenging students to ascend the ladder of linguistic competence. This delicate equilibrium is pivotal for fostering an environment that nurtures language growth without overwhelming learners or perpetuating stagnation. In the same vein, the conclusions derived from the present study echo the resounding call for differentiated instructional strategies. Such strategies, which cater to the array of learners—ranging from those grappling with language acquisition to those with a heightened command—harmonize with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's theory, proposed in 1978, underscores the notion that optimal learning transpires when educators tailor their guidance to align with the learner's current skill level while incrementally nudging them towards greater proficiency. This approach ensures that every student, regardless of their linguistic starting point, is enveloped within a learning trajectory tailored to their needs.

The captivating tapestry of cultural and linguistic diversity uncovered in this study resonates harmoniously with the sentiments echoed by esteemed scholars. A notable example is Schissel et al. (2021), whose advocacy for multicultural education reverberates through the corridors of academia. His impassioned call underscores the significance of an educational paradigm that not only recognizes but also seamlessly integrates the kaleidoscope of diverse

cultural perspectives into the curriculum. The vibrant spectrum of backgrounds represented in this study stands as a living testament to the imperative of nurturing such an inclusive and enriched educational environment.

Within this symphony of diversity, a challenge of utmost importance emerges—crafting a curriculum that remains sensitive to cultural nuances while skillfully sidestepping the potential pitfalls of cultural misinterpretations. This challenge bears an uncanny resemblance to the guiding principles of culturally responsive teaching, as advocated by Ojanola (2022). The very essence of this pedagogical approach revolves around the art of interweaving cultural authenticity into the fabric of education. This entails not merely acknowledging cultural diversity but actively integrating it into instructional methodologies to cultivate an environment where all students, irrespective of their cultural origins, feel acknowledged and empowered. Social support improves quality of life and keeps away from health risks (Adeeb et al., 2017).

The findings of this study, serving as a clarion call, accentuate the pivotal role that teacher training assumes in this pursuit. The pedagogical landscape is transformed when educators are armed not only with the tools to facilitate learning but also with the knowledge and awareness necessary to navigate the diverse cultural terrains that students traverse. Cultural sensitivity, a cornerstone of effective teaching, is honed through deliberate training, allowing educators to gracefully embrace the complexities of multicultural classrooms. Equipped with strategies that transcend mere inclusion, these educators are positioned to seamlessly weave the vibrant threads of cultural diversity into the very essence of classroom discourse.

The distinct patterns of participation discerned among students in this study reverberate harmoniously with the findings and insights gleaned from a broader spectrum of research endeavors delving into student engagement dynamics within ESL classrooms. Notably, luminaries such as Malikovna et al. (2022) have cast a spotlight on the quintessential requirement of cultivating an environment that transcends differential participation. Their clarion call underscores the imperative of inclusivity, where each and every student is not merely invited but genuinely encouraged to embrace the role of an active participant. This aligns seamlessly with the ethos underlying the study's observations, illuminating the complex interplay between participation patterns and the broader learning landscape.

Moreover, the distinctive aura of teacher talk dominance that permeates the classroom, as unveiled by this study, finds resonance within the rich tapestry of educational research. Scholars such as Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Popovikj (2019) have meticulously explored the contours of instructional discourse and underscored the prevalent prevalence of teacher-centered communication patterns. The symbiotic relationship between teacher monologue and student engagement, as evidenced through this study, aligns intrinsically with their observations, highlighting an entrenched reality within the pedagogical ecosystem. However, the narrative is far from monolithic. The mosaic of research endeavors in the field weaves a diverse fabric of insights that enrich the understanding of effective teaching practices. Baghoussi (2021) seminal work , focused on dialogic teaching, emerges as a potent counterpoint. Mercer's exploration champions the transformative potential of interactive and collaborative discourse between educators and students. This pedagogical approach, often regarded as dialogic teaching, serves as a beacon that illuminates the pathway towards fostering active student engagement. It advocates for an equilibrium between teacher-led instruction and student-initiated discourse, thus breathing life into the classrooms through dynamic interactions that nurture a sense of ownership and participation.

## **Conclusion**

The study's exploration of ESL classrooms reveals the significance of addressing language proficiency diversity, balancing student engagement, and redefining instructional dynamics. The observed variability in language skills underscores the necessity for a comprehensive pedagogical approach that caters to both advanced and struggling learners. The participation imbalance among students highlights the importance of fostering an inclusive environment that encourages active involvement from all. Moreover, the prevalence of teacher talk dominance underscores the need for a shift towards interactive and collaborative discourse, in line with modern pedagogical trends. Collectively, these insights implore educators to create a learning environment that values diversity, promotes engagement, and aligns with evolving teaching paradigms.

## Implications and Future Directions

The implications derived from these findings carry far-reaching significance for the realm of ESL teaching practices within primary schools in KPK and Baluchistan. Firstly, the pronounced variability in language proficiency levels necessitates a paradigm shift towards a differentiated instruction approach. This entails a tailored pedagogical strategy that accounts for the diverse spectrum of language skills, enabling teachers to effectively address the needs of both advanced learners and those grappling with fundamental comprehension.

Secondly, the imperative of cultural integration emerges as a pivotal consideration. By seamlessly weaving culturally relevant examples and activities into the curriculum, educators can cultivate an environment that not only respects the diverse cultural backgrounds of students but also fosters an inclusive and culturally sensitive ambiance. This approach resonates with the broader discourse on multicultural education, advocating for an education that resonates with student's personal experiences and heritage.

Thirdly, the pertinence of balancing participation among students unveils itself as an actionable step towards optimizing classroom dynamics. The encouragement of active engagement from all students, coupled with a deliberate focus on empowering those who might be less confident, can be transformative. By providing a platform for students to voice their thoughts and opinions, educators not only enhance their engagement levels but also foster an environment conducive to language development. Lastly, the study's revelation of teacher talk dominance signals the need to recalibrate discourse dynamics. Shifting away from an educator-centered monologue towards a more student-centric dialogue can invigorate the learning environment. By fostering interactive discussions and reducing teacher talk dominance, educators lay the foundation for a classroom that thrives on collective exploration and active participation.

In conclusion, these implications underscore the need for a holistic reevaluation of ESL teaching practices. Acknowledging the nuances of language proficiency, embracing cultural sensitivity, nurturing active participation, and transitioning towards interactive discourse all contribute to a pedagogical landscape that not only enriches language acquisition but also fosters an environment of inclusivity, engagement, and vibrant learning.

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