

# FACILITATING THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE COLLECTIVELY THROUGH DIALOGIC DISCOURSE: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Sheila Adelina Ramasamy<sup>a</sup>, Azlin Zaiti Zainal<sup>b</sup>  
(<sup>a</sup>sheila.rama@eltc.edu.my; <sup>b</sup>azlinzainal@um.edu.my)

*Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya  
Jalan Universiti, 50603, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

**Abstract:** Dialogic discourse is said to aid the social and cognitive aspects of language learning and acquisition and students' success in second language learning is therefore largely dependent on the interactional opportunities available. Recognising the potential impact of dialogic discourse in enhancing second language acquisition amongst Malaysian students, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) provided a large-scale training on dialogic discourse to a group of lower secondary English language teachers. This study explores the perceptions of English as a second language (ESL) teachers on the role of dialogic discourse in affording students' opportunities for the construction of knowledge and investigates their practices in affording students with the opportunities to construct knowledge collectively through the discourse structure. To understand the role of dialogic discourse in affording students to construct knowledge collectively, five ESL teachers' dialogic discourse strategies were examined. A qualitative approach was employed, which comprised semi-structured interviews and classroom observations for the data collection. Two of the teachers' lessons were also examined to illustrate how dialogic discourse created opportunities for the construction of knowledge collectively which supported ESL learning through close discourse analysis of the lesson transcripts. The findings have shown that ESL teachers' use of dialogic discourse strategies facilitates the construction of knowledge collectively among the students. This study expands our current understanding of how ESL learning occurs through classroom discourse.

**Keywords:** ESL, dialogic discourse, construction of knowledge, teacher questioning, second language learning

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v34i1/79-96>

Spoken interaction manifested through collaborative classroom dialogue is an important factor in the process of second language acquisition and is seen as an important tool for thinking and constructing knowledge collectively (Swain & Watanabe, 2012) in which dialogic discourse becomes one of the examples of such a discourse. It refers to collective effort and places emphasis on authentic exchanges between teachers and students (Alexander, 2018; Boyd, 2015; Muhonen et al., 2018). These authentic exchanges are formed through series of questions and responses which encourage students to talk (Boyd, 2015; Böheim et al., 2021; Hardman, 2019; Muhonen et al., 2018). Based on Vygotskian theory, spoken interaction and mediated learning

are vital in guiding learners to acquire knowledge voluntarily (Alexander, 2018; Muhonen et al., 2018; Sedlacek & Sedova, 2017) in which knowledge is constructed collectively through the interactions which are established among the students and with the teacher (Chisholm & Godley, 2011; Dass 2012).

A recent initiative by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) sets the scene for the current study. Acknowledging the need to develop students into constructors of knowledge, the MOE implemented an English language programme known as Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools (OPS-English) which focuses on dialogic discourse as a form of classroom discourse with the aim to enhance opportunities for the second language learning by constructing knowledge on ESL collectively. Under this programme, a group of lower secondary English language teachers received professional development on the implementation of dialogic discourse in the teaching of English (ELTC, 2013). The training was aimed at developing teachers' knowledge and skills in promoting students' active involvement in the process of constructing knowledge collectively and communicating ideas. Previous studies indicate that dialogic teaching was predominantly utilised in the Mathematics (Bakker et al., 2015), Science (Gillies, 2020; Mercer, 2007; Morton, 2012) and Language Arts (Sulzer, 2015; Sosa & Sullivan, 2013) classrooms but not in the second language classrooms, including ESL. This study aims to see how dialogic teaching is interpreted and translated into the classroom by ESL teachers to understand how it contributes to learners' knowledge construction in the context of ESL learning. It aims to examine the role of classroom interactions in affording students the opportunities to construct knowledge on ESL collectively.

### **Dialogic Discourse and Knowledge Construction**

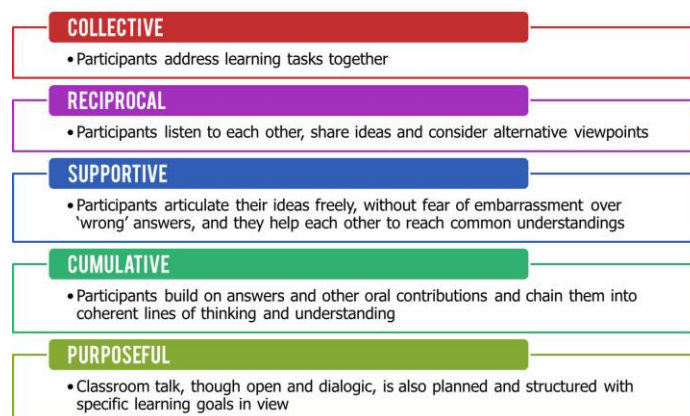
It is stated that language and learning are acquired through social interaction and that the social and cultural context influences cognitive development (Alexander, 2018; Böheim et al., 2021; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Teo, 2019; Vygotsky 1978). Knowledge is constructed socially and then utilised. Based on Vygotsky's theory, thinking is believed to develop through social interactions as they become fossilised among interlocutors as individual cognition (Sedova et al., 2016). Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism complements Vygotsky's in which he proposes that language occurs as a dialogue and language learning takes place through dialogues where knowledge is built collectively through authentic exchanges. In dialogism, negotiating, arguing and explaining is common as the open-ended questions posed reflect one's view rather than the universal truth (Boyd, 2015). Central to both theories is the concept of dialogic discourse which has the capacity to develop students' knowledge and create a culture of shared meaning or knowledge in the classroom (Chow et al., 2021; García-Carrión et al., 2020; Sybing, 2019).

Dialogic approaches to teaching and learning have gained importance in the education arena (Alexander, 2018; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Vrikki et al., 2019) where the focus of instruction is student-centered. Through dialogic approaches, students become active participants of learning processes where they co-construct meaning from the social interactions. Hence, dialogues become an integral part of learning and language becomes an instrumental tool for thinking and learning instead of just a medium to convey information (Chang, 2017; Jocuns, 2021; Nystrand et al., 1997; Reznitskaya, 2012). Dialogues become essential as students are

given the opportunity to assume greater control over their own learning by initiating ideas and responses and contributing to the shaping of the verbal agenda (Díez-Palomar et al., 2021; Morton, 2012).

Dialogic discourse has been of research interest in the last few years and many studies show that it has great cognitive as well as linguistic potential for students (Alexander, 2018; García-Carrión et al., 2020; Gillies, 2015). Alexander (2018), Hajhosseiny (2012) and Mello (2012) claim that mind and cognition develop through dialogic discourses with knowledge developing through an inquiry manner authentically within a community of practice. In the context of classroom setting, the interactive structure enables students to introduce new information, support and justify themselves and listen to one another with the aim of attaining mutual understanding (Vrikki et al., 2019). The dialogic interactions also enhance students' critical and creative thinking. In other words, the discourse stimulates and extends students' thinking process and advances their learning (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013). When ESL learners work collaboratively, there is an expectation that they will talk to one another about the language that they are using to complete the task. This interaction has been conceptualised as collaborative dialogue. Hence, classroom dialogues are crucial in collective knowledge construction (Chang, 2017; Hennessy et al., 2021; Muhonen et al., 2018).

Acknowledging that classroom dialogue is crucial in the construction of knowledge by students, identifying and establishing the most effective types of dialogues as part of the discourse structure is an important feature. Four dialogic models are associated with the types of dialogues that promote the construction of knowledge collectively (Cui & Teo, 2021), namely: (1) Nystrand's (1997) Dialogically Organized Instruction; (2) Mercer's (2004) Thinking Together; (3) Michaels et al.'s (2008) Accountable Talk; and (4) Alexander's Dialogic Teaching Principles (2018). Each of the models emphasises the importance of talk in facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively. For the purpose of this study, Alexander's (2018) Dialogic Teaching Principles were used to examine teacher and learner interaction in the English language classroom. More specifically, the principles were used to analyse how knowledge was constructed collectively based on the different categories of talk. Each of Alexander's principles as illustrated in Figure 1 supports the construction of knowledge collectively.



**Figure 1. Dialogic Teaching Principles (Alexander, 2018)**

As shown in Figure 1, collective talk is attained as participants address learning tasks which, in this context, refer to the dialogues that students are engaged in. As they discuss, knowledge is constructed collectively. Reciprocal talk encourages the construction of knowledge collectively as students listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints. Throughout the process, knowledge is constructed at an individual level, and consequently collectively. As the students articulate their ideas freely and build on the responses, supportive and cumulative talk takes place in which knowledge is constructed collectively as these students support each other to reach common understanding. These types of talk, which occur in classroom dialogues, allow students' diverse voices to be expressed, explored, challenged, and finally collectively constructed (Littleton & Mercer, 2013).

Opportunities for the construction of knowledge collectively are further created through the dialogues which are intertwined with the curriculum content (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Zhang & Zhang, 2020). Thus, dialogic discourse functions as a mediational tool for the construction of curriculum content knowledge in which learners actively develop (Cui & Teo, 2021; Haneda & Wells, 2008; Teo, 2016). The dialogic interactions must be contextualized and related to the subject matter from the students' perspectives (Alexander, 2018; Gillies, 2015) to facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively (Alexander, 2018).

The assumption that knowledge is socially constructed places the dialogues in a privileged position in the learning process. The discourse becomes a form of inquiry embedded through the classroom activities which enables students to take ownership of knowledge (Noor, 2014). Teachers create the opportunities through their discourse strategies for the construction of knowledge by students (Böheim et al., 2021; Cui & Teo, 2021; Omland & Rødnes, 2020).

### **The Role of the Teacher in Facilitating Knowledge Construction**

Teachers play a significant role in facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively through dialogic discourse by creating space and diversity for student talk (Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Chow et al., 2021; Gordon, 2018; Sosa & Sullivan, 2013), which are realized through different talk types (Alexander, 2018). The capacity of students to construct knowledge collectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) is expanded by the teacher through framing and facilitating dialogues which provide students the opportunity and ability to inter-think throughout the learning process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). By teachers' promoting and infusing the different types of talk (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) that increase students' high-level comprehension (Alexander, 2018; Mercer et al., 2019), students learn to listen to other views, consider alternative perspectives, discuss each other's ideas critically and construct knowledge collectively. The teachers' initiation of reciprocal dialogues extends students' thinking which leads to meaning making and construction of knowledge collectively (Compernelle & Williams, 2012).

Teachers grant students the freedom to discuss their individual experiences and background which results in discourses with broader and richer perspectives. This would allow them to develop constructive and critical pathways based on the ideas shared and contributed by others which leads to more knowledge gained collectively (Alexander, 2018).

Teachers advocating dialogic discourse support and guide students towards constructing knowledge collectively through teacher questioning. The open-ended questions posed and the scaffolding questions during the discussions allow for the construction of knowledge collectively by students from the challenge of addressing the questions posed by either teacher or student. The questions are structured in a way that thoughtful responses are obtained which provoke further new questions (Sedova et al., 2016). Open-ended questions inspire meaningful inquiry. In teachers' questioning practices, the multiplicity and reciprocity between voices are emphasised to afford collaborative knowledge construction and negotiation between teachers and students (Alexander, 2018).

Teachers' questioning practices have been found to promote student thinking (Tan, 2017) and increase student output (Boyd, 2015). The use of higher order thinking questions (Alexander, 2018) enables students to express their views, justify their reasons and deepen their understandings which leads towards the co-construction of knowledge (Murphy et al., 2018; Boyd, 2015). The varied responses by students simultaneously creates awareness on how their peers think and make meaning by responding to the comments of their peers (Díez-Palomar et al., 2021; Hajhosseiny, 2012). This process leads towards the construction of knowledge collectively. The awareness of the content of one's and others' thinking and the ability to monitor and regulate thinking processes in ways that support and improve performance is facilitated through teacher questioning. Teachers engage their students in the reflection on the inquiry process used to arrive at these conclusions. The dialogic interactions enable students to explore the language in varied ways in the process of constructing knowledge which eventually lead to better learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers are instrumental in guiding students to ask and answer questions to engage them in the co-construction of knowledge during discussions (Gillies, 2015).

ESL teachers have a vital role in framing and facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively through the dialogic features. Lefstein and Snell (2013) indicate that students learn best through active participation in a rich and stimulating discourse in which knowledge is constructed via the interactions during classroom talk. Students are more likely to engage in productive classroom discourse when teachers encourage and empower them (Sedlacek & Sedova, 2017).

This qualitative study was therefore carried out with Malaysian ESL teachers to explore the potential impact of dialogic discourse in affording students to construct knowledge collectively through dialogic practices. Knowledge here may refer to not only knowledge about the English language but also on general topics related to the curriculum. At present, however, little is known on the role of dialogic discourse in ESL classrooms and it is unclear what forms of knowledge is constructed in the ESL classrooms. More particularly, the extent to which teachers play a significant role in establishing dialogic discourse practices in ESL settings remains a question. Accordingly, the study was aimed to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do ESL teachers perceive the role of dialogic discourse in terms of affording students with collective knowledge construction?
2. How do ESL teachers facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively by students through dialogic discourse?

## METHOD

This study adopts the qualitative approach and employs the descriptive case study design with the primary aims to 1) explore ESL teachers' perceptions on the role of dialogic discourse in supporting students' collective knowledge construction, and 2) to investigate the ESL teachers' practices in using dialogic discourse strategies to promote students' collective knowledge construction. The data analysis on teacher interviews and classroom observations was guided by Bakhtin's (1986) notion of Dialogism and Alexander's (2018) Dialogic Teaching Principles. The analysis on classroom interactions provides insights into how students engage in classroom talk and construct knowledge collectively.

### Participants

Five Lower Secondary ESL teachers from five rural secondary schools in Malaysia were sourced for their permission to participate in this study. The teachers were specifically selected because they were the participants of a Professional Development Program on Dialogic Teaching. The programme introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia to enhance the aural and oral skills of Malaysian students employs Alexander's (2010) Dialogic Teaching Model and Bakhtinian's Dialogic Discourse (1981) to afford students the ability to construct knowledge collectively through talks. The OPS-English programme was first introduced in 2012 as a pilot project in twenty secondary schools in Malaysia and was eventually extended to 12,600 schools by 2015. The programme is a part of the existing English Language Syllabus for Secondary Schools (ELTC, 2013). The three-week professional development course introduced teachers to the fundamentals of dialogic discourse in affording students with the ability to construct knowledge collectively as stipulated in the standard based curriculum document (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2017). Therefore, the sampling for this study was attained from the first cohort of teachers from the 2000 teachers that underwent the training.

The teachers taught Form 1 and 2 English language classes. This was to ensure they were experienced with dialogic discourse as they would have attended the professional development programme. They were also sought due to their willingness to participate in the study to ensure they are inclined to share their experiences. Additionally, they are qualified English language teachers with a C1 proficiency level based on Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to eliminate any issues of teacher proficiency. The selected teachers have a teaching experience of above 20 years and between 10 to 20 years where this would allow multiple perspectives of the discourse used. They also have good content and pedagogical knowledge to avoid issues of teaching and learning as these teachers were Master trainers at their district levels. Table 1 below presents the main profile of the teachers.

**Table 1. Main Profile of Teachers**

Teachers	Gender	Experience	CEFR
T1	Female	30 years	C1
T2	Female	28 years	C1
T3	Female	20 years	C1

Teachers	Gender	Experience	CEFR
T4	Female	13 years	C1
T5	Female	23 years	C1

The students they taught were 13 years of age at the time of the study. The average class size was 28 students and comprised an equal mix of males and females. From among the interviewees, two teachers (T4 and T5) were selected as a case study based on the location and their better understanding of dialogic discourse as compared to the three other teachers. The teachers were informed of the research steps and the main foci of the study.

### **Instrument**

This study involved interviews and classroom observations via recordings. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main source of data collection to explore and understand how dialogic discourse affords students with the ability to construct knowledge collectively as perceived and experienced by the five teachers. The semi structured interview was used due to the flexibility afforded to the researcher to modify the questions. The Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPR) by Castillo-Montoya (2016) was adapted and utilized in forming the semi-structured interview questions. The interview was conducted individually with the five respondents and each interview was approximately 90 minutes. Through the semi-structured interview comprising seven questions, the teachers' perceptions of dialogic discourse on affording students with the ability to construct knowledge collectively was derived. These perceptions were further validated through observations of real classroom practices.

Video recordings of two teachers' classroom practices were conducted in six Form One English language classes looking at how the teachers used the dialogic strategies to afford opportunities for their students to construct knowledge collectively. The observations involved recording whole class episodes for six lessons that lasted 80 minutes per lesson (three for each observed teacher: six episodes in total). An observation protocol based on Alexander's (2010) Dialogic Teaching Model was developed to identify the teachers' discourse strategies in affording students to construct knowledge collectively.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis of the data was driven by the research questions and informed largely by Bakhtin's (1981) and Alexander's (2010) Dialogic Teaching Framework. The data was analyzed using ATLAS through the deductive approach by looking at the existing concepts that emerged from the data and consequently through the inductive approach by looking at recurring themes and patterns that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Data on individual teachers' perceptions obtained from the semi-structured interviews were triangulated with classroom observations to develop an understanding of how their discourse pattern contributes towards the construction of knowledge collectively.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The findings were derived from the analysis of the interview responses and classroom observations on the role of dialogic discourse in affording students the ability to construct knowledge collectively. The findings answer the research questions on 1) how do the ESL teachers perceive the role of dialogic discourse in terms of affording students with collective knowledge construction? and 2) how do the ESL teachers facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively by students through dialogic discourse?

### ***Teacher Perceptions on the Role of Dialogic Discourse towards Collective Knowledge Construction***

All five ESL teachers perceived dialogic discourse as a discourse structure that supports students to construct knowledge collectively. The teachers found that discussions and open-ended questions afforded students the capacity to construct knowledge collectively. Discussion was mentioned as a core feature of dialogic discourse and functioned as their main pedagogical approach in which teachers facilitated the construction of knowledge collectively. Discussions were initiated either as a whole class or group discussions which helped students to construct knowledge collectively through the sharing of similar ideas with peers, or by adding more meaning to their peers' responses, or reinterpreting their peers' ideas and adding nuanced meaning to them (Chang, 2017).

T1 mentioned how she had facilitated the construction of knowledge collectively through sharing of ideas about types of food. She got different groups to review the types of food and collectively they constructed knowledge on food and the concept of review. Similarly, T2, noticed that students were constructing knowledge collectively through the responses that occurred during the discussions (see Excerpt 1).

#### ***Excerpt 1***

I want them to be participative in class, I don't want them to be passive learners, just wait for teacher to spoon-feed but I want them to think! I want them to use their brains to actually process what their friends are talking. The knowledge that comes from them is actually through the sharing or through the responses of the questions that they had posed to each other.

T4 also perceived discussions as a means for students to construct knowledge collectively by stating "while they discuss, each one in the group will share his/her thoughts. They will gain more knowledge". This indicates that the exchanges allowed for knowledge to be constructed collectively. T4 also realised that the discursive nature of the discourse indirectly persuades students to share as part of the talk community which affords them the ability to construct knowledge collectively on ESL. She states that vocabulary was acquired by students collectively through the discussions.

T5 acknowledged that knowledge was constructed collectively through group discussions when she said "Now, in every topic that we teach, you know we have a group discussion. So,



we asked students to share in their groups about the topic and they gained more knowledge”. She also affirmed that knowledge on language was developed through the responses. She stated that vocabulary was acquired by students collectively through the discussions. More specifically, she stated that “Vocabulary is learnt...from there, we went on to sentences, right...okay then during the group discussions, I could see they use the language. They knew how to use the word”.

All the teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5) also found their use of open-ended questions facilitated the construction of knowledge collectively. When asked on their use of open-ended questions and the types of questions, four of the teachers (T1, T2, T4 and T5) consistently mentioned that they had used open-ended questions to create opportunities for students to share and construct knowledge collectively. For instance, T1 stated that she consistently used questions to facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively “I’ll usually ask WH questions. So, it’s open-ended questions”. She then shared on how learning is facilitated through the responses attained from the question posed when she says, “Through open-ended questions, we learn, we exchange ideas. Not only the students, me myself. From the student’s responses, sometimes, I gain knowledge myself”. Knowledge is constructed collectively which includes herself being opened to meaning making.

T2 perceived open-ended questions as an important feature in affording students the ability to construct knowledge collectively by stating “the thing is that why I pose open-ended questions is because I want them to be actively involved in the teaching and learning process”. She further elaborated that the open-ended questions provoked critical thinking and higher order thinking skills (HOTS) of her students which eventually led to the construction of knowledge collectively. She had intentionally posed open-ended questions to raise their thinking ability and to facilitate students’ collective construction of knowledge (see Excerpt 2).

#### *Excerpt 2*

So I feel that... you know... once I ask them this type of questions, it can actually reflect their mental state, how their thinking is... For example, I asked them on food...so what’s the problem with rice? You know Kedah is the Paddy Bowl of Malaysia but nowadays, we are having less rice and why do we import rice from Thailand? Do we have enough farmers? Why? (T2)

T4 asserted that open-ended questions is an important feature of the discourse that creates an environment of shared inquiry. She further stated that the questions that a teacher posed can trigger students’ thinking as they will provide divergent responses which leads to the construction of knowledge collectively. She also explained that she will “ask a few questions on how to keep the environment clean and students will share ideas about it. From these questions, together they will gain knowledge”. The analysis indicates that the teachers in this study believed in the use of dialogic discourse not only in promoting student talk but also in students’ collective co-construction of knowledge.

#### *Teachers’ Facilitation of Students’ Collective Construction of Knowledge*

The analysis of the classroom observations helped to answer the second research question. Based on the observations in T4 and T5's classes, it was found that the teachers were constantly facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively by applying the dialogic principles of collective, reciprocal, cumulative, supportive and purposeful talk through their initiation of discussions and questioning behaviour. T4 and T5 were seen to have utilised discussions and open-ended questions to facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively. For instance, T4 had initiated a whole class discussion on the topic of safety kit and posed open-ended questions to engage students in talk which led to the construction of knowledge collectively.

*Excerpt 4*

T4: what would you put in your first aid kit?  
S1: Bandage  
S2: Plaster  
T4: Okay, bandage, plaster... Okay what else?  
S3: Insect repellent  
S4: Iodine  
S5: Aspirin  
T4: Okay, what else would you put in your first aid kit?  
S6: cream  
T4: Antiseptic cream...good!

The teacher used open-ended questions to get the whole class to collectively think about words related to first aid kit. Their understanding was further developed on why these items are important and how each item functions during the group discussions that take place after the whole class discussion. Hence, the open-ended questions posed by the teacher to the whole class served to facilitate students' co-construction of knowledge of vocabulary as she prepared her students to explore the list of words together. For example, some of the students did not know the word 'antiseptic' as a type of cream and acquired this new vocabulary through the whole class discussion and group discussion.

T4 continued to leverage on open-ended questions to afford students to construct knowledge collectively as evident in Excerpt 5 below:

*Excerpt 5*

T4: Do you think students would like to study using handphone? Do you think students can learn better using handphone?  
S2: Yes  
T4: Why?  
S3: You can use handphone to do our homework. When we are free, we can do homework. So, we should use handphone to do our homework and we can save our paper.  
S5: Because nowadays student huh...like their handphone and then they cannot put their handphone aside. So maybe using the mobile phone, download the textbook on the mobile phone, is a good way to let the students...ah...concentrate with study.  
T4: Now do you think students use hand phone to download texts?  
S6: No

- T4: Why not?  
S6: Maybe for games.  
T4: Amira, what kind of games can they play?  
S6: Online games like Minecraft.

T4 wanted her students to construct knowledge on the uses of a handphone and she intentionally posed an open-ended question, *Now do you think you would use handphone to download texts?* She also wanted students to build on the different perspectives they had on the matter. T4 invited one of the students to extend the discussion, which was taking place by posing another question, *Amira, what kind of games can you play?*, with the aim of facilitating the co-construction of knowledge on the types of games amongst the students. The open-ended questions she posed were meant to get students to think more deeply and provide responses which demonstrate students' perspectives. This eventually leads to construction of knowledge.

Similarly, T5 also utilised open-ended questions to generate talk in an effort to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge amongst her students.. Excerpt 6 below demonstrates how T5 afforded students with the ability to construct knowledge collectively through her questions.

*Excerpt 6: Context – The teacher introduces the topic for discussion which is on living in a city and requests for whole class discussion.*

- T5: What crosses your mind when you see the word 'city'?  
S1: pollution  
T5: Okay, yes, anymore?  
S2: Buildings  
S3: Skyscrapers  
T5: what else?  
S4: shopping malls  
T5: Oh, good! What else?  
S5: Technology  
T5: Ok, ...you see technology in the city?  
S6: Facilities  
T5: facilities such as?  
S6: Railway Station, police station, hospital,  
T5: ok, great...anything else?  
S7: Infrastructure  
T5: Have you heard the word 'infrastructure'?  
S8: Yes  
T5: good. Can someone tell us about it?  
T5: Okay, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city? I would like you to get into your groups and discuss.

T5 for instance, raised the topic on living in a city and would like to know the students' perspectives of it. She creates the environment for the co-construction of knowledge on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city when she poses a question, *What crosses your mind when you see the word 'city'?* to lead students into a discussion on their perspectives of living in a city. Excerpt 6 shows students responding to the task collectively. We note that there

is evidence of collective talk as the students attempted to provide responses on their perspectives of living in a city. The students continued to allow for students' opportunities to build on their knowledge by interweaving questions to scaffold their thoughts and construct knowledge collectively. This demonstrates cumulative talk where the responses establish a coherent line of thinking. Each question posed opens for further deliberation which enhances the thinking capacity of students and enables the co-construction of knowledge. Excerpt 6 illustrates that Alexander's Dialogic principles of collective, reciprocal, and cumulative talk appeared through the discussions and open-ended questions which led to the construction of knowledge collectively by students.

In Excerpt 7, T5 continued to pose an open-ended question to initiate group discussions which facilitates the construction of knowledge.

*Excerpt 7: Context – The class has been assigned into groups to discuss the topic of online games.*

- T5: What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of playing online games? In your groups, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online games.
- S1: Through video games, you can actually release stress and make friends. I can meet people online. Many people play at the same time so we can make new friends.
- S2: Ya, ya...you can say make friends ...but sometimes don't know if the friend is good or bad. And when you play, most of the games require you to fight in a team or groups such as Mobile legends and Rocket league. So, when you lose, they call you stupid or idiot...And also always want to kill people.
- S3: You will get addicted to online games and even if you want to stop you cannot. The others will force you and you will need to find money to buy internet line or go to cybercafe. Otherwise, they will send horrible messages to your sms.
- S4: Sometimes the online friends will hack your profile and FB and maybe our family and friend will be in danger.
- S2: Yes...This is bullying. Bullying happens on social media. Cyberbullying happens during online games.

Excerpt 7 above illustrates that reciprocal and cumulative talk appeared through the discussions which led to the construction of knowledge collectively by students. More specifically, T5 demonstrated how the concept of bullying and cyberbullying was also constructed by students collectively through the discussion. The teacher's question, *What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of playing online games?* prompted the students to consider different viewpoints. The talk type is more of reciprocal where students challenge the views of other peers as evident by S2's response to S1's statement. S2 disagreed with his peers and provided his justification of his disagreement. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development is applied when students using their prior knowledge on bullying extended to construct new understanding of cyberbullying. Knowledge on cyberbullying was continuously created and shared in the ongoing turns as the students focused on the disadvantages of playing online video games.

Overall, the discussions and the teacher questioning gave the students confidence to speak and served as a dialogic space through which students' views were valued in the meaning-

making process. The open-ended questions that were posed during the discussions served to regulate and direct the scope of classroom talk providing avenue for students' contributions and to support students' understanding. Therefore, the extracts above are a clear indication that the teachers were aware of the importance of allowing students to construct knowledge through open-ended questions and discussions. As a result of using discussions and open-ended questions as dialogic discourse strategies, opportunities were created for others to construct knowledge collectively. Hence, the teachers' practices facilitated the students' construction of knowledge collectively.

## **Discussion**

This small-scale study demonstrates the ability of Malaysian lower secondary ESL teachers to afford and support students in the construction of knowledge collectively through dialogic discourse. The dialogic strategies such as open-ended questions allowed students to become autonomous learners and be engaged in meaning making. This finding affirms the findings of Alexander (2018) and Böheim et al., (2021). The ESL teachers were aware of the role of dialogic discourse in facilitating learners' construction of knowledge. However, they also faced some difficulties in implementing dialogic teaching due to learners' proficiency levels. Some of the students were unable to optimize the opportunities for reasons of language hindrance. The students found it difficult to use ESL for communications. The responses were merely at word and phrase levels. There were also evidences of L1 interference during talk as seen in the extracts and these may have influenced the meaning making process. This indicates that for the construction of knowledge through talk, a certain level of proficiency in the target language is expected from students to ensure the discursiveness of talk. However, the discursive structure supported through the use of open-ended questions did change students from passive learners into active learners where they had begun to self-elect or nominate their peers (Hardman, 2020; García-Carrión et al., 2020) to provide responses and build on the responses (Chow et al., 2021; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019).

The findings demonstrate that dialogic discourse cultivates an environment which afforded students with opportunities for talk. The teachers were able to value the contributions made by the culturally and linguistically diverse group of students in the class during the meaning-making process which led to the construction of knowledge collectively. However, there were instances during the observations in which the teacher could have further facilitated the construction of knowledge on ESL learning such as vocabulary and grammatical elements but did not do so. An implication is that the teachers require more professional development training on facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively on ESL.

This current study strengthens the understanding on teachers' role in the use of dialogues as educational talk and function as agents of change in transforming classroom talk. This concurs with the findings of Alexander (2018) and Teo (2019). Pedagogically, teachers have experienced the value of talk in the construction of knowledge collectively and have changed their teaching approach towards a conversational mode to facilitate the process. Apart from affording opportunities for the construction of knowledge, the discourse had also allowed for the use of English amongst students. Acknowledging the fact that English is a second language or perhaps

foreign language amongst these students, dialogic discourse enabled students to improve on the use of English language by consistently using it during the discussions and conversations (Chow et al., 2021; Elhassan & Adam, 2017).

The culture of inquiry-based learning has begun in these classrooms. Through the teachers' questioning behaviour, teachers have provided students with a platform to enhance their thinking and expand their cognitive ability as they co-construct knowledge. Students have become contributors of knowledge and are no longer passive receivers of knowledge. The interactions that took place as observed in the classrooms created opportunities for ESL learning.

Dialogic discourse also creates a social change of the learning environment in the classrooms. The implementation of dialogic discourse in the classrooms involves awareness of how sociocultural meanings are linked to sociocultural identities (Musa et al., 2012; Sybing, 2019). The students observed in the classrooms are of multi ethnicities and English is not their L1. Although the cultural norm of the students is to comply with the request or instruction of the teacher as an authoritative figure and not to negate or rebut one's point in the presence of their teacher (Tee et al., 2018), the students were able to share their thoughts and justify their stand in the presence of the teacher with their minimal proficiency of English. This was evident in the classroom observations in which students were seen to share their opinions and disagree with the points mentioned by peers. It contributes to a new paradigm that approaches dialogues and discussions as communicative practices linked to the construction of knowledge. Nevertheless, despite the potential of dialogic discourse in facilitating the construction of knowledge collectively, it was found that there were instances of students refraining from participating in the dialogues due to language issues. The students' proficiency affected the discursive structure of the classroom discourse and teachers' awareness of this issue is important in their efforts to implement dialogic discourse in their teaching.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, this study contributes to the body of research on the role of dialogic discourse in affording students' construction of knowledge collectively. The study specifically investigates the dialogic teaching practices of a small number of Malaysian ESL lower secondary teachers in recognising their perspectives and practices in scaffolding students' collective knowledge construction. The findings demonstrate that teachers' use of questions led to opportunities for students' co-construction of knowledge. The study provides initial evidence that dialogic discourse supports students' development of higher cognitive ability such as critical-analytical thinking when the teachers attempted to extend the dialogic discourse. Nevertheless, we note that opportunities provided by the teachers for learners to contribute to the dialogic discourse may not necessarily be taken up by all learners. Some of the responses also came in the form of single words and short phrases. Given the important role that teachers' dialogic questions play in promoting ESL learning, more studies are needed to explore the factors that contribute to students' uptake to teachers' questions. This can help to provide a better understanding of the link between teachers' input and students' output in the context of dialogic teaching.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, R. (2010). *Dialogic teaching essentials*. National Institute of Education, Singapore. <https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/event-document/final-dialogic-teaching-essentials>
- Alexander, R. (2018). Developing dialogic teaching: genesis, process, trial. *Research Papers in Education*, 33(5), 561–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1481140>
- Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum. [Curriculum Development Division]. (2017). *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Sekolah Menengah: Bahasa Inggris Tingkatan 1* [Form 1 Curriculum Standards Document]. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *1986 speech genres and other late essays* (V. W. McGee, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Bakker, A., Smit, J., & Wegerif, R. (2015). Scaffolding and dialogic teaching in mathematics education: Introduction and review. *ZDM*, 47(7), 1047–1065. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-015-0738-8>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Boyd, M. P., & Markarian, W. C. (2011). Dialogic teaching: Talk in service of a dialogic stance. *Language and Education*, 25(6), 515–534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2011.597861>
- Boyd, M. P. (2015). Relations between teacher questioning and student talk in one elementary ELL classroom. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47(3), 370–404. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X16632451>
- Böheim, R., Schnitzler, K., Gröschner, A., Weil, M., Knogler, M., Schindler, A.-K., Alles, M., & Seidel, T. (2021). How changes in teachers' dialogic discourse practice relate to changes in students' activation, motivation and cognitive engagement. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 28, 100450. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2020.100450>
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 811–831. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2337>
- Chang, B. (2017). Dialogues in promoting knowledge construction. *Adult Education Research Conference – 2017 Conference Proceedings*. New Prairie Press, Kansas State University Libraries. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2017/papers/29>
- Chisholm, J. S., & Godley, A. J. (2011). Learning about language through inquiry-based discussion: Three bidialectal high school students' talk about dialect variation, identity, and power. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 43(4), 430–468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X11424200>
- Chow, B. W. Y., Hui, A. N. N., Li, Z., & Dong, Y. (2021). Dialogic teaching in English-as-a-second-language classroom: Its effects on first graders with different levels of vocabulary knowledge. *Language Teaching Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820981399>
- Compernelle, R. A. Van, & Williams, L. (2012). Promoting sociolinguistic competence in the classroom zone of proximal development. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168811423340>

- Cui, R., & Teo, P. (2021). Dialogic education for classroom teaching: A critical review. *Language and Education*, 35(3), 187–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2020.1837859>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>
- Dass, L. C. (2012). Interaction in a constructivist classroom in a Malaysian Undergraduate ESL setting. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 8(2), 50–57.
- Díez-Palomar, J., Chan, M. C. E., Clarke, D., & Padrós, M. (2021). How does dialogical talk promote student learning during small group work? An exploratory study. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 30(April), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2021.100540>
- Elhassan, I., & Adam, M. (2017). The impact of dialogic teaching on English language learners' speaking and thinking skills. *Arab World English Journal*, 8(4), 49–67. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no4.4>
- English Language Teaching Centre (2013). *Oral proficiency in English for secondary schools (OPS-ENGLISH) Trainer's Guide*. Tinta Press Sdn. Bhd.
- García-Carrión, R., López de Aguilera, G., Padrós, M., & Ramis-Salas, M. (2020). Implications for social impact of dialogic teaching and learning. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(February), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00140>
- Gillies, R. M. (2015). Dialogic interactions in the cooperative classroom. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 76, 178–189. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.02.009>
- Gillies, R. M. (2020). Dialogic teaching during cooperative inquiry-based science: a case study of a year 6 classroom. *Education Sciences*, 10(11), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10110328>
- Gordon, C. (2018). *The role of dialogic teaching in fostering critical literacy in an urban high school English classroom* [Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University]. <https://doi.org/10.57709/11261437>
- Haneda, M., & Wells, G. (2008). Learning an additional language through dialogic inquiry. *Language and Education*, 22(2), 114–136. <https://doi.org/10.2167/le730.0>
- Hajhosseiny, M. (2012). The effect of dialogic teaching on students' critical thinking disposition. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 69(April), 1358–1368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.073>
- Hardman, J. (2019). Developing and supporting implementation of a dialogic pedagogy in primary schools in England. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102908>
- Hardman, J. (2020). Developing the repertoire of teacher and student talk in whole-class primary English teaching: Lessons from England. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 43(1), 68–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03652044>
- Hennessy, S., Kershner, R., Calcagni, E., & Ahmed, F. (2021). Supporting practitioner-led inquiry into classroom dialogue with a research-informed professional learning resource: A design-based approach. *Review of Education*, 9(3), 1-48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3269>
- Jocuns, K. F. (2021). Dialogic teaching as a way to promote students' English language use in EFL classroom. *PASAA*, 62, 173–203. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1335002>



- Kim, M. Y., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (2019). What is dialogic teaching? Constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing a pedagogy of classroom talk. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 21*, 70–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.02.003>
- Lefstein, A., & Snell, J. (2013). *Better than best practice: Developing teaching and learning through dialogue*. Routledge.
- Littleton, K., & Mercer, N. (2013). *Interthinking: Putting talk to work*. Routledge.
- Mello, R. R. de. (2012). From constructivism to dialogism in the classroom: Theory and learning environments. *International Journal of Educational Psychology, 1*(2), 127–152. <https://doi.org/10.4471/ijep.2012.08>
- Mercer, N. (2007). Dialogic teaching and the development of understanding in science classrooms: Full Research Report. ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-0939.
- Mercer, N., Hennessy, S., & Warwick, P. (2019). Dialogue, thinking together and digital technology in the classroom: Some educational implications of a continuing line of inquiry. *International Journal of Educational Research, 97*, 187–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.08.007>
- Michaels, S., O'Connor, C., & Resnick, L.B. (2008). Deliberative discourse idealized and realized: Accountable talk in the classroom and in civic life. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 27*, 283–297. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-007-9071-1>
- Morton, T. (2012). Classroom talk, conceptual change and teacher reflection in bilingual science teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(1), 101–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.07.006>
- Muhonen, H., Pakarinen, E., Poikkeus, A. M., Lerkkanen, M. K., & Rasku-Puttonen, H. (2018). Quality of educational dialogue and association with students' academic performance. *Learning and Instruction, 55*, 67–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2017.09.007>
- Murphy, P. K., Greene, J. A., Firetto, C. M., Hendrick, B. D., Li, M., Montalbano, C., & Wei, L. (2018). Quality talk: Developing students' discourse to promote high-level comprehension. *American Educational Research Journal, 55*(5), 1113–1160. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218771303>
- Musa, N. C., Lie, K. Y., & Azman, H. (2012). Exploring English language learning and teaching in Malaysia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies, 12*(1), 35–51. <http://journalarticle.ukm.my/3262/>
- Noor, M. (2014). *Dialogue, new media and children's intellectual development: Re-thinking Malaysian teaching and learning approaches* [A portfolio submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of PhD, University of Hertfordshire]. <https://doi.org/10.18745/th.14953>
- Nystrand, M., Gamoran, A., Kachur, R., & Prendergast, C. (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. Teachers College Press.
- Omland, M., & Rødnes, K. A. (2020). Building agency through technology-aided dialogic teaching. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 26*, 100406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2020.100406>
- Reznitskaya, A. (2012). Dialogic teaching: Rethinking language use during literature discussions. *Reading Teacher, 65*(7), 446–456. <https://doi.org/10.1002/TRTR.01066>

- Rojas-drummond, S., Torreblanca, O., Pedraza, H., Vélez, M., & Guzmán, K. (2013). Learning, culture and social interaction 'dialogic scaffolding': Enhancing learning and understanding in collaborative contexts. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 2, 11–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2012.12.003>
- Swain, M., & Watanabe, Y. (2012). Languaging: Collaborative dialogue as a source of second language learning. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0664>
- Sedlacek, M., & Sedova, K. (2017). How many are talking? The role of collectivity in dialogic teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 85, 99–108. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.07.001>
- Sedova, K., Sedlacek, M., & Svaricek, R. (2016). Teacher professional development as a means of transforming student classroom talk. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 57, 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.005>
- Sosa, T., & Sullivan, M. P. (2013). The creation and support of dialogic discourse in a language arts classroom. *Journal of Research in Education*, 23(1), 2–19. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1098436>.
- Sulzer, M. A. (2015). *Exploring dialogic teaching with middle and secondary English language arts teachers: a reflexive phenomenology* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa]. <https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.hw0afd4q>
- Sybing, R. (2019). Making connections: Student-teacher rapport in higher education classrooms. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(5), 18–35. <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v19i5.26578>
- Tan, S. Y. (2017). *Teachers' questioning practices in Malaysian secondary English language classrooms/Tan Shin Yen* (PhD thesis, University of Malaya). <http://studentsrepo.um.edu.my/7732/>
- Tee, M. Y., Tan, S. Y., & Symaco, L. P. (2018). Socio-historical transformation and classroom discourse in Malaysia. *Espacio, Tiempo y Educacion*, 5(2), 123–142. <https://doi.org/10.14516/ete.212>
- Teo, P. (2019). Teaching for the 21st century: A case for dialogic pedagogy. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 21, 170–178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.03.009>
- van Compernelle, R. A., & Williams, L. (2012). Promoting sociolinguistic competence in the classroom zone of proximal development. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168811423340>
- Vrikki, M., Wheatley, L., Howe, C., Hennessy, S., & Mercer, N. (2019). Dialogic practices in primary school classrooms. *Language and Education*, 33(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2018.1509988>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.
- Zhang, L. J., & Zhang, D. (2020). Dialogic discussion as a platform for constructing knowledge: student-teachers' interaction patterns and strategies in learning to teach English. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 5(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-020-00101-2>