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Teachers' Professional Development and Pedagogical Shift towards Dialogic Teaching in Malaysian Lower Secondary ESL Classrooms

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Abstract. This study reports on teachers' pedagogical changes upon attending a professional development programme. In supporting learners of a second language (L2), dialogic teaching was emphasised as an intervention programme in Malaysian lower secondary ESL classrooms. Dialogic teaching is a pedagogical approach that focuses on the importance of classroom talk in constructing knowledge collectively (Alexander, 2018). This study explored the perceptions of four rural L2 teachers who were participants in a professional development on dialogic teaching and investigated their classroom practices using the approach. The study was qualitative in nature which comprised four individual semi-structured interviews and nine classroom observations for the data collection. The case study method was employed to boost the reliability of the interview findings in which three of the teachers' classes were observed, video-taped, transcribed, and analysed to identify the dialogic features prevalent in the teachers' discourse pattern. The findings of this study indicated that the teachers perceived dialogic teaching as a meaningful interactive discourse structure that facilitated L2 learning and, to an extent, demonstrated a pedagogical shift that took advantage of the dialogic teaching principles and talk repertoire introduced during the professional development. Dialogic teaching strategies such as whole class and small group discussions increased the participation and engagement of students which led to better student outcomes. The teachers had acquired the skills of questioning to facilitate talk amongst the students. Nevertheless, the teachers were challenged with issues of students' proficiency that obstructed their effective intervention process. The findings have key pedagogical implications in terms of teacher discourse patterns and for further investigation on the enactment of dialogic teaching in facilitating second language.

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1. Introduction

Classroom talk refers to the use of oral language to engage students in thinking and learning (Chang & Chang 2017; Díez-Palomar et al., 2021). Jocuns (2021) states that classroom talk provides a wider language practice which increases student proficiency. Hence, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' talk and promoting L2 learning (Alexander, 2018; Hardman, 2019; Loewen & Sato, 2018). Understanding the manner by which teachers support and mediate second language learning is crucial to L2 communities. One-way teachers afford spoken interaction opportunities to students is through their choice of discourse (Doley, 2019; Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). This form of classroom discourse is known as dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2018).

Dialogic teaching has begun to receive attention in the educational arena (Alexander, 2018; Cui & Teo, 2021; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). As a pedagogical approach, it harnesses the power of talk between teacher and students and among students (Alexander, 2018). Through this approach, teachers facilitate talk among students in the classroom, developing students' thinking, understanding and learning. In adopting this approach, teachers are expected to strategically employ different kind of discourse practices to address specific instructional goals for their students (Wilkinson et al., 2017).

Grounded in social constructivism, dialogic teaching is a collective effort that promotes a genuine sequence of utterances encouraging student talk. The teacher is instrumental in managing the interaction and is responsible for the organisation of the discursive flow of interactions in the L2 classroom (Sedova, 2017) so as to mediate learning and enhance student talk (Boyd, 2016). These discursive patterns develop students' communicative and academic competencies (Boyd, 2016). Teachers facilitate the discursiveness through elicitation techniques. This form of classroom discourse is said to assist students to participate in elaborate talks (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014; Boyd, 2016) such that it encourages them to expand their ability to contribute further to the classroom discussion. This practice is expected to enhance language learning. The respective students' output and contribution of ideas would then be used to further develop the talk. Hence, the talk becomes the focus of the learning process. The approach encourages students to become engaged to attain higher reasoning, and construct knowledge collectively as well as better spoken proficiency (Alexander, 2018; Sedlacek & Sedova, 2017).

From a sociocultural perspective, spoken interaction manifested through classroom discourses and in particular collaborative dialogues are crucial in facilitating second language learning. It is seen as a vital tool for reasoning, collectively constructing knowledge and learning (Hennessy et al., 2016; Swain & Watanabe, 2012). For learners who have limited opportunities for L2 learning, the

classroom functions as an important source and plays a key role in providing the language experience (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014).

Research on dialogic teaching in content-based classrooms demonstrated its successful application (Lee, 2016; Mercer et al., 2009; Teo, 2013). Dialogic teaching has also been shown to facilitate learners' cognitive and linguistic development (Alexander, 2018). Nevertheless, the enactment of dialogic teaching is not without problems and has raised a challenge for teachers (Asterhan et al., 2020; Sedova, 2017; Sedova et al., 2014; van de Pol et al., 2017). There are tensions noted within the literature on concepts of dialogic teaching that can cause confusion and vague understanding, which affects the enactment of it (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). This implies that there is a need for more research to understand how dialogic teaching is perceived by teachers and how it is implemented in teaching and learning of different subjects. Given the scarcity of research on dialogic teaching in L2 classrooms, this study attempts to fill the gap by exploring how teachers develop professionally by attending a teacher professional development on dialogic teaching.

Study Objectives

This study explores the perceptions and practices of four L2 teachers on dialogic teaching in facilitating L2 learning. The study attempts to address a gap in the literature by exploring dialogic teaching in second language learning as most of the past studies focused on content subjects such as Mathematics and Science. In this context, language is not only the medium for talk but the outcome of talk. The introduction of dialogic teaching as a pedagogic discourse to Malaysian L2 teachers was through a professional development programme known as Oral Proficiency in English (OPS-English). The programme was aimed at supporting a group of Malaysian L2 lower secondary teachers to adopt dialogic teaching in an effort to help students to attain better outcomes in the English language and specifically to enhance students' oral communication skills.

1.1 Teachers' Professional Development in Dialogic Teaching

Research shows that professional development (PD) approaches support teachers in adopting dialogic teaching (Ruthven et al., 2017; Sedova, 2017; Sedova et al., 2017; Böheim et al., 2021; Hennessy et al., 2021). According to Osborne et al. (2019), changing teachers' discourse practice towards a dialogic approach is an arduous task that involves a carefully considered teacher professional development programme. Acknowledging this, a professional development was designed that focused on dialogic teaching as a classroom discourse in lower secondary English language classrooms (English Language Teaching Centre, 2013). Alexander's (2018) dialogic teaching model was selected and adapted for professional development as it was considered a holistic model which embodied the linguistic and paralinguistic features of classroom talk that integrated the pedagogical, curricular and cultural dimensions which shaped policies and classroom practices (Alexander, 2018; Cui & Teo, 2021). Nystrand's (1997) dialogically organised instruction model was also utilised as the guiding framework with the emphasis on teacher questioning. Nystrand's dialogically organised instruction model was specifically selected based on its close

resemblance to Alexander's principles; indeed Alexander's model was largely conceptualised based on Nystrand's. Both models focus on the reciprocal element of teacher and students. The view of dialogic teaching as a pedagogical discourse pattern was developed from the combination of both models above. Nystrand's (1997) authentic questions, uptake, and high-level evaluation questions influence and shape students 'thinking' (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). Although Alexander's framework was comprehensive in suggesting the principles, repertoires and indicators for talk, the focus on authentic questions and uptake was emphasised by Nystrand. Thus, the PD adopted both frameworks to upskill the teachers in enacting dialogic teaching in English lessons to provide students with opportunities for second language learning.

The training for the teachers involved both theory and practice. The training was provided by the in-service teacher training institute in Malaysia known as English language Teaching Centre. The training was structured in a manner that teachers were given exposure to the fundamentals of dialogic teaching. The teachers were then guided in the application of the pedagogical discourse in the teaching of spoken English by focusing on the principles, the talk repertoires and indicators as proposed by Alexander (2018). A specific module was developed for the teachers which was aligned with the curriculum and mapped to the syllabus of Form One and Two English.

The teachers' module known as the 'Teacher Companion' (MoE, 2012) focused on the application of the five dialogic principles by Alexander (2018) and the talk repertoire into the English lessons to facilitate student talk. The teachers were introduced to the concept of talk manifested through interactive discourse patterns involving discussions and dialogues and the application of the talk types in the English language lessons as proposed by Alexander (2018).

Alexander's (2018) five dialogic principles and talk repertoires were depicted through the discussions held in the classroom. The dialogic teaching principle of collectiveness was reflected as the teacher initiated the whole class discussion by posing an open-ended question where students addressed the learning task together. Teachers were introduced to open-ended questions and the importance of them during the training. Teachers were guided to pose open-ended questions spontaneously during the training. They were introduced to Repertoire 4-teaching talk and were instructed to focus on discussions and dialogues as talk strategy for students to be engaged in talk. Simultaneously, Repertoire 3-learning talk, was also introduced to expose teachers to the talk types expected of students. Students have to respond by narrating, explaining, exploring and justifying (Alexander, 2018). The principle of collective was further emphasised during the small group discussions. The students once again applied talk types from Repertoire 3 such as narrating, explain and justifying in addressing the task together.

Second, the principle of reciprocity is seen where both teacher and students through the whole class and group discussions, would listen attentively to one another, share their views, and consider alternative viewpoints. Repertoire 3

(learning talk) and Repertoire 4 (teaching talk) based on the dialogic teaching model by Alexander (2018), were emphasised and demonstrated to teachers.

In the application of principle two – reciprocal, particular learners' talk type such as analysing, evaluating, questioning, arguing and justifying were modelled. The framing and facilitating of talk through open-ended questions posed by teacher and students would enable the second principle – reciprocal to take place.

Third, the principle of supportiveness, where students articulate ideas freely and support one another in attaining a common understanding is seen during the whole class and group discussions. Fourth, is the principle of cumulativeness, where students build on answers, and chain them into coherent lines of thinking. Finally, the principle of purposefulness meant the lesson was planned and structured according to the demands of the curriculum. The teacher's role is to model the language and to engage students in talk through dialogues and open-ended questions.

The teacher's module also consists of suggested strategies and activities to be carried out in the language classroom to ensure that opportunities are created for L2 learning by using English as the medium. Procedural guidelines and suggested questions that teachers can use to initiate talk on the topic of the lesson were also provided. A module known as the 'Student's Handbook' was also developed for students. The handbook consists of pictures that serve as a guide for students to talk.

Nystrand's importance of authentic questions such as open-ended questions was discussed and modelled during the training. There were also hands-on sessions with the teachers to demonstrate the use of open-ended questions. This was aimed at equipping the teachers with practical applications for their classrooms. The teachers were also exposed to the Socratic style of questioning so that this could be used to help their students become more engaged in the learning process. The aim was to encourage the students to express their views and to justify them. The questioning approach was purposefully emphasised during the professional development course.

Hence, this programme equipped the L2 teachers with the ability to use dialogic features and assist them to operationalise the five principles of dialogic teaching through oral discourses made up of discussions and dialogues to enhance student engagement and learning. Upon receiving their professional development in dialogic teaching, the teachers then implemented the pedagogical discourse in their classrooms, based on their understanding developed through the training. From the onset, their practices were designed to facilitate second language use to enhance the oral skills of the students. It is on this basis that the current study was conceptualised, which is to identify and examine the teachers' perspectives, and their manner of implementing the discourse structures.

Study Questions:

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Malaysian L2 lower secondary teachers perceive dialogic teaching as a classroom discourse in facilitating L2 learning?
2. How is dialogic teaching conceptualised in real classroom practices of Malaysian L2 lower secondary teachers following the professional development?

2. Methodology

A comprehensive two-week training on dialogic teaching was given to the teachers to enable them to support and enhance students' L2 learning. A qualitative approach was employed to explore the teachers' perceptions of dialogic teaching in facilitating second language learning and to investigate teachers' practices of the approach in the ESL classrooms upon receiving the professional development. The teachers' use of dialogic teaching principles and talk repertoires in facilitating L2 learning were examined.

Study Sample

The participants for the study were purposefully sampled. The teachers involved are four Lower Secondary English language teachers from rural schools in the state of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Johor which had low-achieving English language results. They were specifically selected as they were the participants of the professional development and based on their willingness to participate in the study. They attended the Professional Development Programme on dialogic teaching with the aim of enhancing students' second language learning. The teachers taught English to form 1 and 2 (Lower Secondary level in Malaysia) students and conducted the intervention for a year. The four female teachers had a range of teaching experience, from 13 to 30 years. The teachers held a C1 proficiency level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). To ensure their anonymity, the teachers were given identifiers such as T (teacher) followed by numbers.

Study Instrument

The instruments for the study involved interviews and classroom observations. A semi-structured interview was selected as it serves as an effective tool for interpretive research to gain in depth data on participants experiences (Balushi, 2016, Creswell, 2013). Thus, the semi-structured interviews were used to gain rich, intensive, and holistic input of dialogic teaching based on the teachers' experiences and challenges with the approach. The questions were developed and adapted based on the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPR) by Castillo-Montoya, (2016). The IPR framework was specifically selected so as to strengthen the reliability of the questions. The interviews were held individually with all four teachers to investigate their perceptions of dialogic teaching as a pedagogical approach and classroom discourse in facilitating second language learning. Each interview lasted for about 90 minutes. Their perceived understanding of dialogic teaching, experiences and challenges of employing dialogic teaching in facilitating L2 learning were derived from the interview data. Being a semi-structured interview, the researchers were afforded the flexibility to modify the questions when necessary. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed, and subsequently categorised according to key themes.

In the next stage of the study, classroom observations were conducted on the teachers' discourse pattern and their classroom practices to gain an in-depth analysis of the approach. The classroom observations would provide a real-life scenario of the teaching process (Flick, 2013). Both the interview and classroom observations data strengthen the findings of the study that the teachers did adopt dialogic teaching in their lessons which facilitated second language learning. The observations took place in four English language lessons (two from each level) and were 80 minutes in length per lesson for each teacher. The video recordings of real classroom practices allowed the researchers to analyse teachers' enactment of dialogic teaching. To ensure the objectivity of the review and analysis, an observation checklist adapted from Alexander's Dialogic Teaching Principles (2010) and Nystrand's Dialogically Organised Instruction Model (1997) was developed and utilised to analyse teachers' usage of the dialogic features in the lessons to unearth the role of dialogic teaching in facilitating L2 learning.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) supported by the qualitative software ATLAS.ti8. The analysis of data was driven by the research questions which were informed largely by Alexander's Dialogic Teaching Framework (2018) and Nystrand's Dialogically Organised Instruction Framework (1997). A coding framework was also established based on Braun and Clark (2006) where Alexander's dialogic teaching principles, talk repertoire and indicators as well as Nystrand's authentic questions, uptake and high-level thinking questions informed the coding process. This enabled the researchers to focus on specific characteristics of the data, identify important sections from the transcripts and attach labels to index them as they related to a theme. A set of codes was derived from the data as below:

- C1: The teacher poses open-ended questions to initiate and extend the talk.
- C2: Teacher facilitates talk through scaffolding of open-ended questions.
- C3: The teacher creates a non-threatening environment for talk-through discussions.
- C4: Teacher frames and facilitates talk-through discussions.
- C5: Discussions generate talk and facilitate the construction of knowledge collectively.
- C6: The emergence of new topics and knowledge through discussions
- C7: Teacher uses different talk types to facilitate talk
- C8: Students' responses contribute to the construction of knowledge collectively.

Among the eight codes that guided the analysis, code 1 had the greatest number of counts followed by codes 2, 4, 5 and code 7. To ensure trustworthiness, the coding framework was peer reviewed and reflexive writing was conducted throughout the process.

3. Findings

The analysis revealed three broad themes, which answered the two research questions 1) How do Malaysian L2 lower secondary teachers perceive dialogic teaching as a classroom discourse in facilitating L2 learning and 2) how is dialogic teaching conceptualised in real classroom practices of Malaysian L2 teachers following the professional development?

3.1 A Pedagogical Shift towards Dialogic Teaching

The analysis attained from the interview and classroom observation data indicated that the teachers (T1, T2, T3, and T4) perceived dialogic teaching as a new pedagogical approach which focused on the kind of teacher talk that promotes student talk in the learning process and proposed this approach to be adopted. Both T1 and T2 affirmed the need for a shift towards this pedagogical approach as stated below:

Excerpt 1

T1:

“Um...before we were introduced to the OPS-English programme, class lessons were teacher centered. I started to focus on listening and speaking when we were introduced. Through OPS-English, all students had the opportunity to share their ideas. That's where we found that students could speak. It's not only the teacher's talk. So this method...ah... dialogic teaching had to be emphasised because I felt that more opportunities, two-way communication and learning took place in a not stressed environment”.

Excerpt 2

T2:

“For me, the concept of dialogic teaching is more than talk because it involves teachers and learners building on each other's ideas, you know...posing questions, asking questions, you know constructing interpretations of what is trying to be conveyed. I would say that we should have this kind of discourse right from the beginning. It's where I see that those who are good can add more and those who are weak, through this discourse, can speak and gain some knowledge even though it's a little”.

T3 also stated that dialogic teaching leverages on talk in facilitating learning:

Excerpt 3:

T3:

“We need a positive environment to learn. I want them to feel happy to learn English. Dialogic teaching gives a chance for the students to talk. They will share their ideas and they are very relaxed. I can see they learn from the interactions”.

T3 noticed that the chain of open-ended questions and responses during the classroom discussions allowed for the co-construction of knowledge. Students

learn better through talking with others – “I realise during the discussions they have a lot of ideas to share”. However, she acknowledged that there were language difficulties amongst some of the students that hampered their talk. –“It’s just the language barrier” There seemed to be some interactions where there was a display of their ability to think and respond critically, “So I feel like...you know...it creates a platform for them to talk...So I find practically everyone is engaged and somehow or rather, even their friends will help the other friends.”

T4 summarised her perceptions regarding the usage of dialogic teaching as:

T4:

“Um... for me, we teachers need to throw our egos away if we want to employ dialogic teaching. We are no longer the traditional teacher like our own teachers. The teacher needs to change first so that we can give the opportunity to talk to our students. We have to give students the opportunity to discuss their ideas in class, to share their opinions and to be like our friends. If they are comfortable with us and are able to give their opinions, then that itself can open up to a lot of learning. I think the most important thing is the teacher”.

The teachers perceived that they changed in their pedagogical approach upon implementing dialogic teaching during the intervention phase. This was evident in the classroom observations where teachers applied the principles, repertoires and indicators of dialogic teaching with the aim of enhancing student talk to facilitate L2 learning as in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 5:

T3: What do you think about living in a village?

S7: In a village, you have fresh air and a lot of friends to play together.

S8: We can have strong friendship with neighbours

T3: That’s very good... yes, nowadays we hardly know our neighbours. What else?

S9: Village is better because not so many cars ...no pollution.

T3: Okay, good, where would you like to live?

The teacher’s application of the dialogic teaching principles, talk repertoires and indicators indicated her adoption of the pedagogical approach. She demonstrated her role as a facilitator in framing and facilitating talk through teacher questioning. Her talk type was limited to questioning which exhibited Alexander’s Repertoire 4 – teaching talk.

Based on the excerpts above, it could be gleaned that the teachers viewed dialogic teaching as a pedagogical approach which afforded students learning opportunities through talk. Nevertheless, in the context of L2 users, the enactment of dialogic teaching in facilitating L2 learning was a difficult task because English was not only the medium of instruction but the objective of learning. The teachers

found that the students' low proficiency of English hindered the discursiveness of the approach.

The findings indicated that all four teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4) perceived dialogic teaching as an interactive and meaningful classroom discourse. The teachers viewed discussions and dialogues as important interactive features of dialogic teaching which allowed for greater engagement and participation of students in the lessons. The teachers noticed that the students were engaged in the learning process through dialogic teaching. There was also an increase in the participation of students in the discussions held. The whole class and group discussions encouraged sharing of views, and students were said to be interested in talk. For instance, T1 states "Most of my lessons, I will have discussions... "70% of my lesson is discussion. When we have discussions, so they'll share and sometimes question each other, "why did you say that?" T1 states that the whole class discussions created space for students to share their views.

This was echoed by T2 in which she viewed discussions as means for increasing engagement and participation in class - "So this dialogic teaching is more interactive, and I feel that the information and knowledge obtained by the students are more interesting and learning happens at the same time" The teachers also viewed discussions as their main pedagogical strategy. Students' L2 learning developed through the whole class and group discussions. Whole class or group discussions remained as a consistent feature throughout the lessons observed.

The use of authentic questions such as open-ended questions during the discussions sustained and extended the interactions and encouraged meaningful responses. The teachers perceived open-ended questions as another core feature of dialogic teaching which facilitated student talk and functioned as a discourse strategy to extend talk amongst the students. The teachers employed open-ended questions as a dominant communicative strategy to initiate talk and broaden the scope of talk. The coding on all four semi-structured interview transcripts indicated that open-ended questions were constantly used as a discourse strategy to engage students in talk. This was also seen in the classroom observations where open-ended questions were constantly used throughout the discussions. (T1) stated that she found that open-ended questions had the capacity to generate talk when she said "I would just pose an open-ended question just like... "How was your weekend?" or "how did you spend your holidays?" where they'll be sharing ideas and collecting information". She noticed that the questions posed during the whole class discussions received meaningful responses, in particular on topics that were familiar to the students, and created a chain of responses and further questions. This discursive pattern encouraged talk. Thus, the individual semi structured interviews with the teachers and the classroom observations provided insights to the intervention process. This provided an understanding of the teachers' ability to enact dialogic teaching in their language classrooms and to identify if it was a challenging task.

T4 stated that dialogic teaching involved asking open-ended questions as those questions were authentic and related to students' prior knowledge about the

topic. She asserted that she posed “a lot of questions, WH questions, open-ended questions to get the students to talk.” For example, “questions as prompters because that’s how they start their discussion. “So most of the questions are open-ended questions because we need to share thoughts and through our sharing, learning happens”. For her, open-ended questions are “the most effective to encourage students to talk because students have the ideas to share”. This was also evident in her lessons. The following extract demonstrated how she facilitated talk through open-ended questions which led to second language learning:

Excerpt 4:

T4: Look at this sign. What is this sign about? What can you tell me about this sign?

S1: OKU (Orang Kurang Upaya)

S2: OKU

S3: Handicapped

S4: Disable

S5: Disable People

T4: Okay good. Where can you find this sign?

S6: At the mall

S7: At the parking lot

T4: Good. Where else?

S8: At the roadside, teacher

The excerpt above is evidence of how dialogic teaching is interactive and meaningful as a discourse structure. Both the teacher and students kept the interactions going through the teacher questions and responses which exhibited Alexander’s dialogic principle of collective where students address the learning task together. Students are seen listening and responding to the questions by sharing their views which demonstrate Alexander’s reciprocal principle. Students were attempting to respond despite language issues- such as OKU - the Malay word for a disabled person. This showed students were comfortable and not embarrassed to respond, which was another principle of dialogic teaching-supportive. The interactions allowed for vocabulary to be acquired. In other words, the talk facilitated the acquisition of vocabulary. The teacher did not evaluate the response as right or wrong but instead attempted to extend the dialogue by posing further questions in an effort to afford more student talk which facilitated L2 learning. In this context, the open-ended question functioned as a scaffolding tool that promoted second language learning.

The excerpt below demonstrated how the interactive discourse afforded second language learning of vocabulary and grammar. T1 had indirectly introduced collective nouns to students during the whole class discussion. A student responded as scissors, and she reiterated by saying “Ah yes... A pair of scissors”. Similarly, she also facilitated the learning of a new vocabulary when one student responded as saying cream while another was precise in saying antiseptic cream. Hence, the word antiseptic was learnt. The particular student might know the word antiseptic but perhaps not the other student. Once again, the construction of knowledge collectively on the vocabulary took place which demonstrated meaningful learning.

Excerpt 5:

S3: *Scissors.*

T1: *Ah yes... A pair of scissors. Okay, what else did you put in your first aid kit?*

S4: *Cream*

S6: *Antiseptic cream*

T1: *Antiseptic cream...good!*

3.4 Dialogic Teaching in Practice

The classroom observations demonstrated the application of the dialogic features—the principles, repertoires, indicators in facilitating L2 learning and acquisition. They were observed to have framed and facilitated talk through discussions, in particular whole class and group discussions. Teachers were seen to pose open-ended questions to initiate discussions to facilitate talk. The four classroom observations showed teachers initiating talk through **whole class** discussions by posing an open-ended question. However, the uptake was largely influenced by students' language proficiency. Students did display their engagement, but their responses were rather limited to words and phrases and simple sentences. It was also short in length due to their inability to construct complex sentences to clearly express themselves in L2. Teachers facilitated the construction of knowledge collectively through scaffolding of questions. They deliberately used open-ended questions to scaffold the discussion that was taking place in the classroom. The classroom excerpts above demonstrate that teachers use discussions to create the talk environment and the open-ended questions as a scaffolding tool to extend student talk.

4. Discussion

This study demonstrated a group of Malaysian L2 lower secondary teachers' ability to employ dialogic teaching following a professional development programme to facilitate second language learning. The implementation of dialogic teaching based on the professional development programme functioned as an intervention programme to enhance students' oral communication skills and second language learning. This finding supports the findings of (Ruthven et al., 2017; Sedova, 2017; Sedova et al., 2017; Böheim et al., 2021; Hennessy et al., 2021) that professional development enabled teachers to adopt a more dialogical practice in their classrooms which also indicated pedagogical shifts.

In terms of the teachers' professional development, the findings suggest that the teachers had put into practice dialogic teaching as introduced. The perceptions of the teachers on dialogic teaching as a new pedagogical approach focusing on talk was largely based on the PD and in conducting the intervention. Their experiences of the teaching process and their reflections of the approach throughout the intervention informed their perceptions. The classroom observations demonstrated that Alexander's dialogic principles (2018) were applied in the teaching process. The findings showed that the teachers involved utilised the five dialogic principles of Alexander in their lessons but to a lesser degree. Focusing on Alexander's dialogic teaching principle of collectivity, the teachers involved

organised the learning tasks in whole class and group discussions to enable the students to address the task together. The principle of reciprocity (Alexander, 2018) was also reflected in the teachers and students' interactions. Through the open-ended questions, students listened to each other attentively and then shared their ideas by considering alternative viewpoints. This principle appeared to be well comprehended by the teachers as it was applied adequately. The findings concur with the study by Sedlacek & Sedova, (2017) where the open-ended questions demonstrated higher engagement amongst students through discussions which led to better reasoning. Nevertheless, in the context of this study, observations, indicated that there were less argumentative responses stimulated by alternative viewpoints. Instead, the responses comprised responses that supported previous responses.

Findings also illustrated that the supportive principle (Alexander, 2018) was applied through the use of authentic questions (Nsytrand, 1997). The teachers posed open-ended questions to the class to encourage students to articulate their ideas freely without risk of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers and help them reach a common understanding. However, it was limited as the students involved were constrained by language proficiency. Consequently, they were less fluent in articulating their ideas freely. The cumulative principle was also reflected in which students built on the responses provided by others. These responses were then clustered and built into coherent lines of thought and understanding. By integrating open-ended questions in the existing lower secondary Form One English syllabus, the teachers' tasks became purposeful. The teachers had demonstrated Alexander's principle of purposeful. The professional development programme provided the teachers with the ability to adopt dialogic teaching in the L2 classroom.

From a pedagogical perspective, the implementation of dialogic teaching in the L2 classrooms reflected through the classroom observations indicated that the teachers had changed their practices. Findings from the observations appear to support the perceptions of the teachers that they had changed their practice towards dialogic teaching. The emphasis of dialogic teaching is on the discourse functions rather than the discourse structure which implies that it serves as a functional construct instead of a structural construct. In this manner, the discussions contributed to the learning of L2. The consistent use of discussions and open-ended questions indicated a shift in the teachers' pedagogical approach. The open-ended questions were purposefully used because teachers were convinced that it would provide every student with the opportunity to practise and acquire the target language competencies such as grammar, vocabulary and phonological awareness similar to the findings of (Chow et al., 2021). The teachers' questions enabled the students to acquire vocabulary, pronunciation, and correct grammatical structures.

The findings of this study also showed that the teachers' adoption of dialogic teaching demonstrated their appreciation of the approach as a discourse pattern in which students were able to speak in English besides assuming more active roles as students. The findings concur with the study by Snell and Lefstein (2018)

which showed how students who were considered as having lower ability managed to be engaged in the learning process. The use of discussions and dialogues created a collaborative culture in the learning process. Nevertheless, dialogic teaching was far above and beyond just spoken language practices. This outcome could mean that the teachers' application of Alexander's dialogic model (2018) in this study might vary from the actual dialogic model. The two-week-long professional development on dialogic pedagogy focused on both the theoretical as well as the practical aspect which meant that teachers had to link broad theoretical ideas about dialogic teaching into classroom practices. Thus, it might be insufficient for the teachers to have digested the underpinning of this new discourse approach to be translated into their classroom practices. Despite the positive findings derived from the study, the sampling was small and thus cannot be generalised to the wider group of Malaysian L2 teachers. This study was also limited to teacher discourse pattern specifically teacher questioning and did not investigate their other aspects in the enactment of dialogic teaching.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study was aimed at exploring and investigating a group of Malaysian L2 teachers' perceptions and experiences of dialogic teaching in facilitating second language learning. It demonstrates the possibility of teachers to adopt dialogic teaching in the teaching of English (ESL) with the aim of supporting students to attain better outcomes in the English language and specifically to enhance students' oral communication skills. This study contributes to the body of research on dialogic teaching and specifically on professional development programmes aimed at enacting dialogic teaching in classroom settings. This study implies that the specific training on the infusion of dialogic discourse given to teachers through teacher professional development enabled the adoption of dialogic teaching in the L2 classrooms. The implementation of dialogic teaching created a shift in the teachers' pedagogical practices influenced by the need to address the issues of student's oral proficiency. The findings demonstrated that teachers' use of dialogic strategies created opportunities for language use which led to oral proficiency in the English language. The ability of teachers to adopt dialogic pedagogy demonstrated that their pedagogic intentions had shifted which influenced the changes in curricula, in the teacher's role and the underpinning theories of education. Theoretically, dialogic teaching is underpinned by the sociocultural theory which demonstrates a move from a behaviourist theory of second language learning which is teacher centred to a more learner centred approach. Hence, the study adds to the literature in that dialogic teaching is a 'new pedagogical approach' in the context of Malaysian ESL classrooms with the aim of changing teachers' current pedagogical practices. Future professional development for L2 teachers would require an in-depth understanding of the dialogic models and skills to develop competence to frame classroom talk amongst L2 learners. Teachers may require more training on the application of the dialogical approach in the context of L2 learners. Opportunities to apply the dialogical approach in the context of L2 learners should be provided during future professional development to allow teachers some practice and to obtain feedback from trainers on their teaching. Activities involving teacher

reflection on their implementation of dialogical approach should also be incorporated in future training to support teachers' professional development.

6. References

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