

The Impact of Dialogic Teaching on Alleviating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Among High-School Students

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Abstract

Providing training for EFL learners to boost their communicative skills is a requirement in the 21st century. Instructors need to be actively engaged in adopting interactive teaching approaches instead of relying solely on the lecturing-based approach. Adopting a dialogic-based approach has demonstrated enhancement in students' communication skills. This paper aims to investigate the impact of dialogic teaching on EFL learners' levels of anxiety. To achieve this purpose, a quantitative research approach was adopted. A questionnaire was developed based on the readings of the literature and administered to 150 high school students in Morocco. Based on the results, the dialogic teaching approach proved to be successful in enhancing students' communicative skills. Furthermore, the majority of the participants expressed their anxiety-free while making mistakes, enjoying their language class, and low anxiety when they spoke to natives. Additionally, the relationship between students and the students-teacher relationship boosted their freedom of expression. Through this approach, students' non-linguistic skills, including self-confidence, teamwork, and stress management, were developed. This research paper implies that the effectiveness of this approach may vary among learners, possibly due to individual differences, such as their mindsets.

Keywords: communication skills, dialogic teaching, EFL learners, speaking anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1956, when Morocco gained independence, discussions on how to improve education have been ongoing. There has been a mismatch between the content and how to teach it, as well as questions about the requirements of the labor market. The later

emphasize the need for graduates who possess both hard skills and soft skills, too. Allah and Azmi (2023) claim that EFL fresh graduates' lack of soft skills is owed to the poor quality of the education system, which fails to enhance students' 21st century skills. Hassan and Maharoff (2014) suggest that though there is a need to increase students' soft skills, there is a gap in how to effectively incorporate them into the educational system (p. 84). Bouherar and Ghafsi (2021) also emphasize that continuous professional development is often neglected in the Moroccan EFL context, which keeps teachers prepared to deliver high-quality teaching (Faizuddin et al., 2022). That is, instructors need training on how to effectively develop students' soft skills while teaching them the content.

The constraining nature of language classes and the discouragement of active participation in classrooms with authoritative teaching styles hinder students' development of soft skills such as self-confidence, autonomy, and communication. Chafi et al. (2016) noted that learning is more effective in environments where students enjoy supportive relationships, have a sense of control and responsibility over their learning process, and can collaborate with peers in a secure and trusting atmosphere. In contrast, Shirkhani and Jamalinesari (2015) suggest that a monologic approach, one that promotes a single, uniform interpretation while overlooking individual differences, tends to dominate contemporary educational settings. Although learner-centered methods are often highlighted in official rhetoric, classroom observations indicate that these approaches have not been effectively integrated. The use of a dialogic approach in teaching and learning has been suggested as a means to enhance students' soft skills. To address the issues discussed and bridge the existing research gap, this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the role of dialogues in improving the soft skills of Moroccan high school students, including self-confidence, autonomy, and communication. To achieve this objective, the study addresses two primary questions:

- 1) To what extent is the dialogic approach more effective than alternative teaching approaches?
- 2) To what extent can the dialogic approach enhance students' self-confidence, autonomy, and communication, and alleviate anxiety among Moroccan high school students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The expression of low self-confidence and persistent high anxiety, particularly when required to speak in a foreign language, can be attributed to the presence of two types of classroom interaction: monologic and dialogic (Kathard et al., 2015). O'Connor and Michaels (2007) describe monologic discourse as typically involving the one-way transmission of unchanging ideas and perpetuating status inequalities. Similarly, Hays (2008) characterizes monology as a single voice, reflecting a teacher-centric approach that constrains students' freedom, disregards individual learner differences, and presents a singular perspective while inhibiting dialogues and their potential. As a result, students may experience disengagement, difficulty in making sense of learned information, a strained rapport between teacher and students due to a lack of mutual interaction, and limited opportunities to receive feedback for correcting misconceptions.

On the other hand, the dialogic approach develops social connections, willingness to engage, and critical thinking (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007). It fosters communication of meaningful topics, attentiveness to interlocutors' perspectives, and collaboration among

peers. Therefore, the dialogic discourse addresses the unequal roles reinforced by the monologic approach.

The dialogic approach is rooted in Vygotsky's (1986) Theory of Human Development, which asserts that learning is a social process. For him, the interaction between the individual and society is reciprocal. Besides, in his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, he emphasized guidance and support in helping a child acquire skills. Additionally, he stressed the relationship between thinking and language learning. Bruner (2009), in this regard, argued that learning requires collaboration and shared experiences. He shifted the focus toward what children can achieve when they are supported, and that making sense of life can be reached only through socialization. Bruner's perspective highlighted that human life and mind are shaped by culture rather than biology.

In a similar vein, Bakhtin (2010) suggested that language is a social activity. His notion of meaning-making through dialogues enables learners to shape their understanding through meaningful dialogues. Within the framework of dialogic learning, teachers share their authority with students and develop a positive atmosphere that makes students' voices heard. In such an environment, students participate in conversations and use their critical thinking skills during group discussions without feeling the urge for competition. The teacher assumes the role of a facilitator rather than an authority figure.

The Socratic method (rooted in the philosophy of Socrates) stressed the need to discontinue with conventional teaching methods. In this Socratic method, the teacher serves as an observer, helper, and guider rather than a source of knowledge. The method is based on shared dialogues between students and teachers, where the teacher is "the guide on the side" rather than "the sage on the stage." This contrasts with the traditional teaching methods that rely on lectures and memorization. Socrates believed that lifelong learning is a way to achieve self-fulfillment (Demirci, 2012). In this regard, Seedhouse (2004) compares a monolithic classroom to a courtroom set. That is to say, the teacher holds a position of authority; they direct, regulate interactions within the class, and act as one participant in the conversation, while the learners represent the other participant. In a monologic approach, the teacher uses authority and control, treating learners as passive entities rather than active contributors to the dialogue. Chafi et al. (2014) assert that monologic teaching is still prevalent in educational settings.

Studies conducted in second language learning emphasize that successful learning takes place when students actively participate in meaningful tasks rather than being receivers of conventional teaching (Ross-Feldman, 2003). This implies that creating interactive and participatory classroom environments, where learners actively contribute to the learning process, is essential for maximizing language acquisition and students' speaking achievements.

2.1. Emotions in Foreign Language Learning

Learning a foreign language is a complex mental activity that includes a variety of emotional experiences. According to Yu (2022), the significance of emotions in foreign language learning has been largely overlooked for a considerable period. In the last fifty years, anxiety and enjoyment, which are the most common emotions in foreign language

learning, have been the primary focus of research (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014; Li et al., 2018). Positive psychology's recent growth in the field of second language acquisition has helped shift attention from predominantly studying negative emotions, such as anxiety, to the emotional experiences of foreign language learners. Scholars are now turning their focus to the positive emotions experienced in foreign language learning (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2020).

2.2. Positive Emotions

The rise of positive psychology in the 21st century, coupled with its application to second language learning by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), has shifted research attention towards exploring the emotional states of foreign language learners. Research on the psychology of learners has witnessed a change; there has been more focus on positive emotions than on negative emotions to foster students' achievements, boost their self-confidence, and encourage their personal growth (Jiang and Li, 2017).

Among the positive feelings associated with EFL, such as happiness, enthusiasm, encouragement, fulfillment, empathy, and awareness (MacIntyre et al., 2019), the notion of Foreign Language Enjoyment has generated more interest (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021). That is, learners with richer experiences in native countries exhibit lower levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (Coleman, 1997).

A study by Jin et al. (2021) employed positive psychology to explore whether previous experiences with language accomplishments could reduce learners' anxiety in EFL classrooms. The data indicated a marked decline in both specific and general anxiety levels within the experimental group after a month of treatment.

2.3. Negative Emotions

Unfavorable feelings like worry, strain, humiliation, fatigue, irritation, and disinterest, as reported by various scholars (Horwitz et al., 1986; Teimouri, 2018; Kruk, 2022; Li, 2020), can greatly affect the ideal learning capacity of foreign language students. These negative emotions can hinder the EFL learning of students. Among the negative emotions associated with foreign language learning, Foreign Language Anxiety has received the greatest focus (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014). The study of anxiety in an EFL context has been a topic of interest since the 1970s.

Anxiety, from a psychological perspective, is described as an uncomfortable feeling, such as nervousness, fear, and apprehension (Spielberger, 1972). The introduction of the Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale highlighted that anxiety is associated with the process of learning a new language (MacIntyre, 1995). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety creates a complex relationship between one's self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors drawn from students' experience with foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) characterized Foreign Language Anxiety as a state of stress and worry when individuals are required to use a foreign language. Aida (1994) argued that it is particularly tied to the process of learning a new language and includes feelings of fear and unease. Students with negative EFL learning attitudes are more prone to experiencing elevated levels of anxiety (Trylong, 1987; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Wang and Zhang (2021) investigated the mental stress experienced by university students learning an English course online. Results recommended various approaches to alleviate this stress. These strategies promote peer collaboration and group learning, employing different assessment techniques and implementing extracurricular activities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants of the Study

In this study, the sample population comprises 150 Moroccan high school students from Morocco, consisting of 58 males and 92 females. Among them, 39 were in the third year, and 111 were in their second year. The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 18 years. The participants in this study were students majoring in science and physics.

3.2. Procedures

The study aimed to incorporate a dialogic approach into the teaching of EFL for high school learners through different classroom activities, including Jigsaw, role-playing, and small group work.

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether the implementation of a dialogic approach to learning could enhance students' soft skills and reduce their anxiety levels when speaking a foreign language in the classroom. This research utilized a quantitative approach, employing a questionnaire adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. The questionnaire adopted only items 2, 3, 5, 12, 13, 14, 18, and 19 from the scale. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Data were collected through in-person questionnaires administered by the teacher to students, with explanations provided for questionnaire statements when needed. After data collection, the information was entered into Excel, coded, and then transferred to the SPSS software for analysis.

4. RESULTS

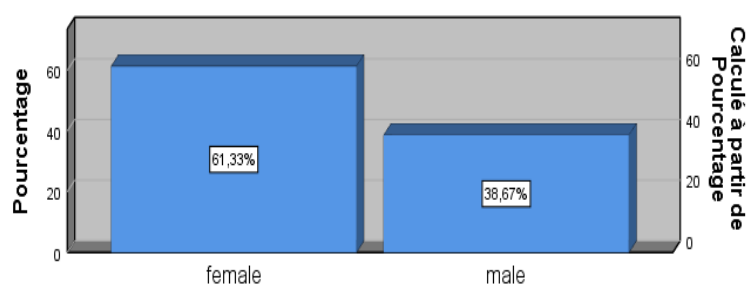


Figure 1. Gender

According to Figure 1, the participants in this study consisted of 61.33% females and 38.67% males.

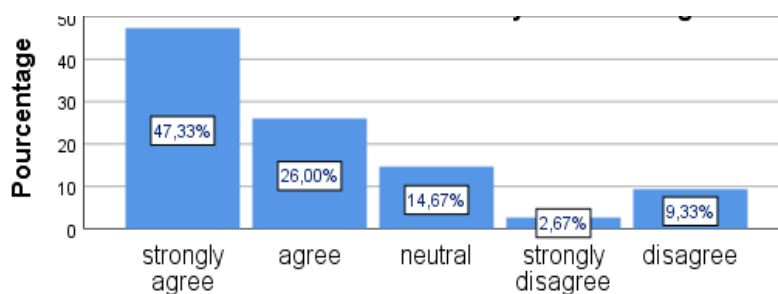


Figure 2. I don't worry about making mistakes

As per Figure 2, 47.33% of the participants strongly agreed that they do not worry about making mistakes, 26% agreed, 14.67% were neutral, 2.67% strongly disagreed, and 9.33% disagreed.

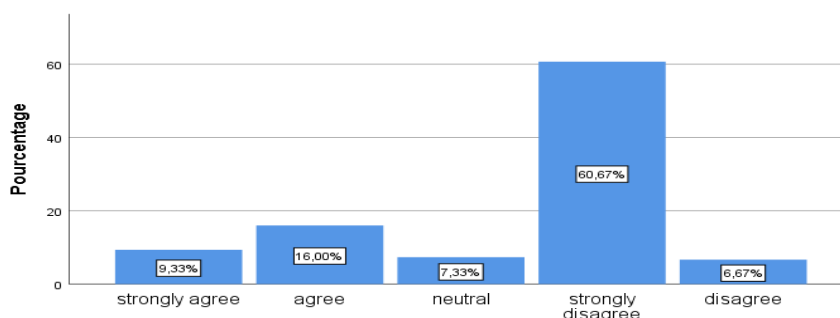


Figure 3. I tremble when I know I'm going to be called on

Figure 3 illustrates the respondents' reactions when they anticipate being called on. Specifically, 9.33% strongly agreed, 16% agreed, 7.33% remained neutral, 60.67% strongly disagreed, and 6.67% disagreed.

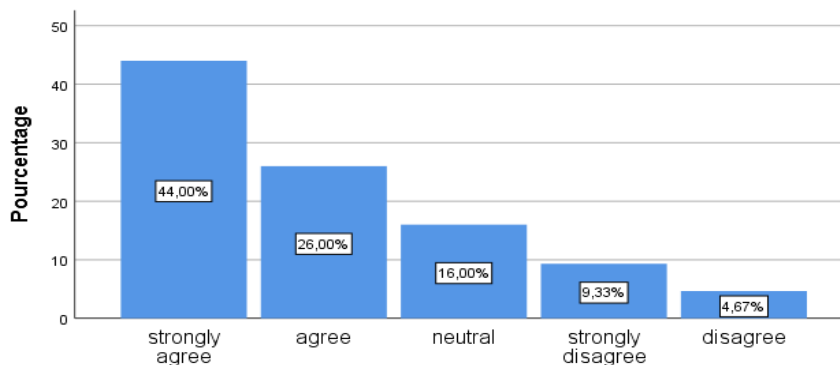


Figure 4. I want to take more foreign language classes

Figure 4 indicates that 44% of the participants strongly agreed that they wanted to take more foreign language classes, 16% were neutral, while 9.33% strongly disagreed with the statement, and an additional 4.67% disagreed.

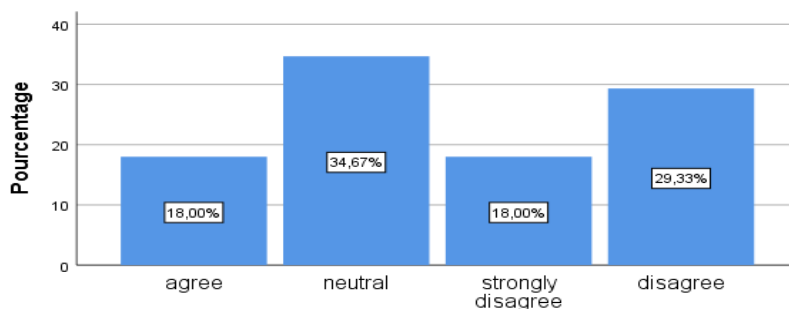


Figure 5. I forget things when I am nervous

Figure 5 shows that none of the participants strongly agreed that they forget things when they feel nervous. However, 18% agreed, 34.67% expressed neutrality, 18% strongly disagreed, and 29.33% disagreed.

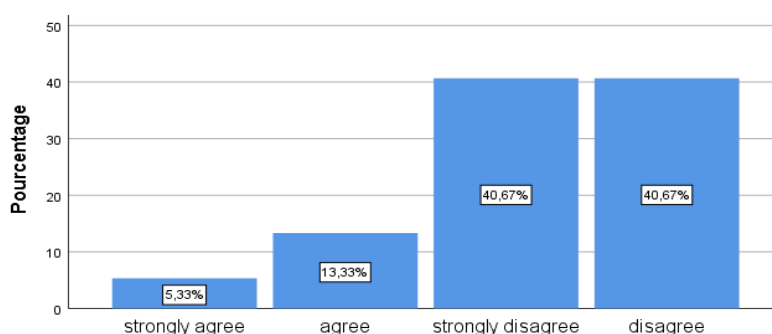


Figure 6. I feel embarrassed to volunteer

Based on Figure 6, 5.33% of the participants strongly acknowledged feeling embarrassed to volunteer, with an additional 13.33% agreeing. Besides, none was neutral. In contrast, 40.67% strongly disagreed, and another 40.67% disagreed.

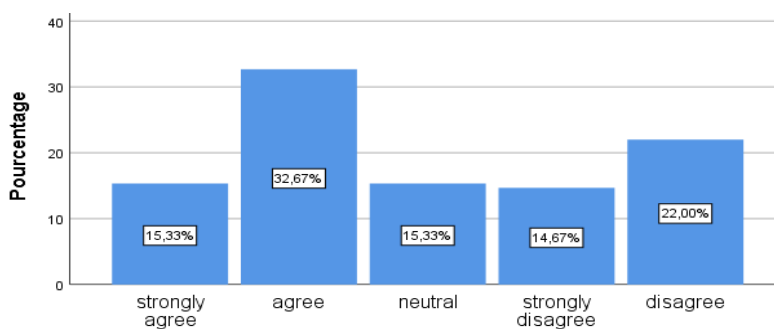


Figure 7. I would not be nervous speaking with native speakers

Figure 7 shows that 15.33% strongly agreed that they would not be nervous when speaking with native speakers, additionally 32.67% agreed. Furthermore, 15.33% were neutral, while 14.67% strongly disagreed, and 22% disagreed.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper is to develop knowledge on how the dialogic approach to teaching affects high school learners' learning experiences in Morocco. Put differently, the dialogic approach is compared with alternative methods such as the monologic approach. Additionally, this research investigates the extent to which the dialogic

approach improves students' self-confidence, autonomy, and communication skills, while reducing the targeted group's anxiety.

The study's findings proved that the use of a dialogic approach was successful in developing students' soft skills. A significant majority of participants did not report any concern about making mistakes; instead, they considered mistakes as a learning opportunity rather than a source of anxiety. The students expressed confidence in expressing their views and engaging in new activities without being overly preoccupied with their mistakes. Moreover, most participants reported the absence of physical symptoms of anxiety, such as trembling, even when confronted with unprepared questions or tasks.

Numerous scholars, including Mohammed Elhassan and Adam (2017), Niknezhad Naeijabad et al. (2020), and Liubashenko & Kornieva (2019), suggest that dialogic teaching contributes to the improvement of speaking abilities, critical thinking skills, and communicative skills. Similarly, Barjesteh and Niknezhad (2020) found that dialogic teaching can enhance students' thinking skills, improve their writing style from descriptive to a more critical and creative writing.

Research conducted by Edwards-Groves and Davidson (2020), Huang (2020), and Ozcelik et al. (2019) demonstrates that dialogic teaching is effective in enhancing listening skills by promoting interaction for meaning-making. Alamdari and Bozorgian's (2022) studies suggest improvements in listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness as outcomes of dialogic teaching. Thus, students not only improve productive skills but also receptive ones, such as listening.

In this study, only a small percentage (18%) of participants claimed to experience forgetfulness under nervous or stressed conditions, while a substantial portion contradicted this assertion. However, Parr et al.'s (2019) study found that teenagers who experience higher levels of positive emotions while learning mathematics tend to be more motivated, employ a greater number of cognitive strategies during the learning process, and achieve higher levels of academic success. Parr et al. (2019) highly recommend the dialogic approach to teaching, as it has the potential to increase enjoyment and pride while reducing feelings of anger and boredom.

Importantly, with the dialogic approach, nearly all participants expressed their confidence in volunteering because they believe that their mistakes will not be taken for granted. This emphasizes the role of the teacher who creates an inclusive learning environment where ideas can be freely expressed without fear. That is, the teacher's encouragement of creativity and open expression has a positive impact on students' motivation and willingness to participate in extracurricular activities.

However, it's important to note that some studies point out constraints to the implementation of dialogic teaching. These constraints include challenges such as being too demanding for teachers (Sedova, 2017), issues related to classroom noise (Yildirim & Uzun, 2021), overcrowded classrooms, curricular content with predetermined objectives assuming teachers as the authority and students as passive recipients (Leifstein, 2010), a gap between the theoretical concept of dialogic teaching (Mercer & Howe, 2012) and its practical application, not being suitable for everyday practice (Howe & Abedin, 2013; Mercer & Howe, 2012; Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013), the potential risk of practicing some

skills endangering others (Alexander, 2017), lack of guidance and knowledge on how to plan classroom dialogue (Sedova et al., 2014), and external pressures such as time constraints and standardized testing (Burbules, 1993).

Despite being beginners in the English language, participants express a readiness to engage with native speakers without feeling nervous or stressed; they consider these interactions as valuable opportunities to participate in authentic settings, test their skills, and gain new experiences. In a similar vein, Chow et al. (2023) examined how dialogic teaching influences English language learning. They found that the dialogic approach improved students' expressive vocabulary knowledge for both high and low achievers during a year of intervention. Overall, their study emphasised the pivotal role of the teacher in creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages students to express themselves creatively.

Similarly, Kang and Han (2019) assert that in a classroom using a dialogic approach, students transform into active individuals, engaging collaboratively within an open, democratic, and relaxed classroom environment. Despite the potential noise created by the dialogic approach, it is considered healthy, as it represents an implicit form of learning a foreign language through students' active engagement.

6. CONCLUSION

The study provided an insight into the participants' level of self-confidence and stress management when being involved in dialogues. The participants reported feeling at ease when they made mistakes, their readiness in taking more English classes, and their anxiety-free when they spoke to natives. They reported being free when they expressed themselves because of the teacher-student relationship and the familiarity among peers. The student's ability to participate freely and confidently while overcoming language-related difficulties suggests that students receive effective learning experiences. A classroom where there is an emphasis on cooperation, critical thinking, and respect creates an environment where students feel appreciated and comfortable sharing their opinions.

The study has three implications. First, for teachers, it highlights the importance of incorporating many activities that foster a sense of belonging and enhance the student-teacher relationship. Teachers should also focus on promoting students' growth mindset and integrating group activities that build students' confidence and critical thinking skills. Second, the study suggests that engaging in activities that encourage active participation and the development of speaking skills is crucial for students. Furthermore, emphasizing a growth mindset will help students improve their personal growth. Third, policymakers and curriculum designers need to develop more engaging and interactive curricula, providing teachers with the necessary training to effectively implement innovative teaching approaches, as well as designing syllabi that encourage students to actively practice speaking and interacting with their teachers.

The study has some limitations, though it reported meaningful results, conducted in only one high school; conducting the same study in more than one school, expanding the research to a larger group of students, and incorporating qualitative methods would have provided more meaningful results. Therefore, future research should aim to expand the sample size and conduct the study in more than one high school. This would ensure

that the findings are more generalizable and reflective of a wider student population. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or case studies is highly recommended. These approaches would provide richer insights into students' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Qualitative data, along with the quantitative findings, could complement one another, allowing researchers to deeply explore the issue under investigation.

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